COMMITMENTS AND VOWS FOR PEOPLE WHO HAVE TAKEN A HIGHEST YOGA TANTRA INITIATION
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COMMITMENTS & VOWS FOR PEOPLE WHO HAVE TAKEN A HIGHEST YOGA TANTRA INITIATION

VARIOUS TEACHINGS & PRACTICES BY LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE, LAMA THUBTEN YESHE, KIRTI TSENSHAB RINPOCHE, GESHE NGAWANG DHARGYEY, ALEXANDER BERZIN, AND OTHERS

Compiled by Ven. Robina Courtin
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COMMITMENTS AND VOWS

REFUGE COMMITMENTS
1. To know and keep the three sets of actions to adopt and avoid: SEE CHAPTERS 1, 2; also 3.

PRATIMOKSHA VOWS
2. To know and keep the pratimoksha, or individual liberation, vows, lay (or ordained, not here): SEE CHAPTER 1.

BODHISATTVA VOWS
3. To know and keep the 18 Root Bodhisattva Vows and the 46 Secondary Bodhisattva Vows: SEE CHAPTERS 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9.

4. To recite once in the morning and once at night “The Prayer for Purifying and Strengthening Bodhisattva Vows”: SEE CHAPTER 17.

TANTRIC VOWS & COMMITMENTS
5. To know and keep the Nineteen Commitments of the Five Buddha Families. Seventeen of these are accomplished by reciting Six-Session Guru Yoga six times a day and the remaining two by possessing a dorje and a bell: SEE CHAPTER 10, 25, 26, 36; also 15.

6. To know and keep the Fourteen Common Root Tantric Vows: SEE CHAPTER 11; also 15.

7. If you have taken a Kalachakra initiation, to know and keep the Fourteen Kalachakra Root Tantric Vows: SEE CHAPTER 12; also 15.
8. To know and keep the **Secondary Tantric Vows & Commitments**: SEE CHAPTER 13; also 15; including not contravening the instructions in *The Fifty Verses of Guru Devotion*: SEE CHAPTER 35.

9. If you have taken a Mother Tantra initiation, to know and keep the **Ten Vows & Commitments Related to Mother Tantra**: SEE CHAPTERS 14; also 15.

10. To recite once in the morning and once at night **The Nineteen Commitments Related to the Five Buddha Families**: this is accomplished by reciting the prayer for taking the tantric vows, “**The Prayer for Purifying and Strengthening Tantric Vows**”: SEE CHAPTER 17.

11. To recite once in the morning and once at night – accomplished during the recitation of the full-length **Six-Session Guru Yoga**: SEE CHAPTER 25 –
   a) The **Root Bodhisattva Vows**.
   b) The **Root Tantric Vows**.
   c) The **Secondary Tantric Vows & Commitments**.
   d) If you have taken a mother tantra initiation, the **Vows & Commitments Related to Mother Tantra**.

12. To recite three times in the morning and three time at night **Six-Session Guru Yoga**, unless instructed otherwise by the initiating lama: SEE CHAPTERS 25, 26; also 31, 32.

13. If you have taken a Mother Tantra initiation, to recite once a day “The Eight-Limb Praise.” This is accomplished during the recitation of the full-length **Six-Session Guru Yoga**: SEE CHAPTER 25.
14. If you have taken a Mother Tantra initiation, **to offer tsog** twice a month, in a gathering of men and women, on the 10th and 25th of the Tibetan month, unless instructed otherwise by the initiating lama: **SEE CHAPTERS 27, 28; also 33**

15. To purify broken vows and commitments and determine to keep them by doing **the Vajrasattva practice in the context of the Four Opponent Powers**. As Lama Zopa Rinpoche says, “We are insane not to do it every day.” **SEE CHAPTER 29.**

It is also recommended by Lama Zopa Rinpoche to do the practice of **Samayavajra**: **SEE CHAPTER 30.**

16. To carry with you at all times **a dorje and a bell**, two of the Nineteen Commitments of the Five Buddha Families, and various other tantric ornaments. This is accomplished by carrying a picture of them: **SEE CHAPTER 36.**

17. Recommended: to have in your possession a small container of **“inner offering”**: alcohol (if a layperson) or black tea (if ordained) mixed with an inner offering pill, which can be obtained from a lama or another practitioner.

18. To recite daily, if given as a commitment at the time of the initiation, **the sadhana, mantra, and/or complete the required retreat.**
PART ONE
REFUGE COMMITMENTS
AND THE LAY VOWS
1. REFUGE AND THE FIVE LAY VOWS
LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE

MOTIVATION FOR THE LIFE
The purpose of my life is to free all sentient beings from every suffering and to lead them to happiness, especially the sublime peerless happiness of full enlightenment.

Since the enjoyments in my every-day life – all the past, present and future happiness, including enlightenment – are dependent on other sentient beings, the numberless sentient beings’ happiness also depends on me.

Because if I generate loving kindness towards sentient beings, then all sentient beings receive no harm from me and they have peace, success. Therefore, I am responsible for all sentient beings’ happiness and peace.

I am a servant here to serve every sentient being without discrimination between those who harm and those who help, whatever they do.

For the success of this I must achieve full enlightenment. Therefore I am going to put all the actions of my body, speech and mind in virtue: may all these actions not cause the slightest harm and only be of the greatest benefit to all sentient beings so that they will achieve enlightenment as quickly as possible.

GENERAL ADVICE
In general, there are four points to the practice of Dharma.

1. One should rely upon holy beings, listen to the holy Dharma and after correctly comprehending, follow the Dharma and practice it.

2. One should not let one’s senses become excited [that is, control the senses when in danger of creating negative karma], and take as many vows as one is capable of keeping.

3. Have a compassionate attitude towards sentient beings.
4. Whenever you eat or drink, make effort to offer to the Rare Sublime Ones [The Triple Gem], and train well in the refuge precepts, including exerting oneself to make offerings to the Triple Gem.

REFUGE ADVICE

REFUGE AND BODHICITTA PRAYER
This prayer should be recited three times in the morning and three times at night.

  To the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha
  I go for refuge until I am enlightened.
  By the merits I create by listening to the Dharma
  May I reach Buddhahood so as to benefit all sentient beings!

WHAT IS TO BE AVOIDED
  1. Having taken refuge in the Buddha, one should not take refuge from the depths of one’s heart in worldly gods such as Brahma and so on, and one should not prostrate to such objects.
     One should not entrust oneself from the depths of one’s heart to non-virtuous friends or teachers of non-Buddhist teachings that have no supporting levels.
  2. Having taken refuge in the Dharma, one should avoid harming any being, either directly by oneself, or indirectly by making others do it for you.
  3. Having taken refuge in the Sangha, one should avoid entrusting oneself to and keeping company with negative friends and followers of hedonism.

WHAT IS TO BE PRACTICED
  1. Having taken refuge in the Buddha, with a mind of respect towards Those Gone to Bliss [the Buddhas], one should regard even statues as being actual Buddhas, prostrate and pay respect to them.
     One should avoid showing disrespect to them by, for example, placing them on the bare ground, judging them according to their
material value, or discriminating between them, saying that some are good and others bad.

2. Having taken refuge in the **Dharma**, one should pay homage and respect by generating the recognition of all scriptural texts or even just one syllable of the teachings as being the actual Rare Sublime Dharma.

   And one should avoid placing them on the bare ground, regarding them as material objects, using them as security for a loan, or carrying them together with one’s shoes.

3. Having taken refuge in the **Sangha**, one should regard even one member of the Sangha as being the actual Sangha.

   One should avoid discriminating within the Sangha community and have equal respect for all.

   One should train well in all the advice concerning what is it be practiced, such as not even stepping over pieces of robe or throwing them in dirty places but instead placing them in clean places.

**THE LAY VOWS**
The five branch vows to be kept by a full *upasika* [ge-nyen, “nearing virtue”] are to avoid

1. killing;
2. taking what has not be given;
3. sexual misconduct;
4. telling lies;
5. drinking alcohol.

Of these vows, killing, taking what has not been given and drinking alcohol are very easy to understand.

**LOSING THE VOWS FROM THE ROOT**
One would lose the vow from the root, and so should take it again, if one transgresses these vows by

1. killing a human being;
2. stealing an object that is valuable to another person;
3. engaging in sexual misconduct, that is, engaging in sexual activities with another’s husband or wife or partner.
4. telling a supreme lie, that is, pretending one has attained realizations of the Grounds and Paths even though one hasn’t.

RECEIVING A DOWNFALL

Otherwise, one would not lose the vow from the root but would receive a downfall, which must be confessed, if one transgresses the vows by

1. killing a non-human being such as an animal;
2. stealing an object of no value;
3. engaging in sexual conduct at a holy place, at a special time [for example, the day before full moon, the eighth day of the lunar calendar, Buddha’s special holy days. etc], or engaging in sexual activity whilst living in the one-day eight precepts [nyen-ne, “near abiding”];
4. telling ordinary lies;
5. drinking alcohol [or taking mind-altering drugs]

So, one should confess and abstain precisely, which is the method of purification.

One should protect well and tightly with the mind the six remaining non-virtuous actions, which are similar in part to the previous negative karmas [that is, close to those heavy negative karmas]: avoiding slander, harsh words, gossip, covetousness, harmful intention and wrong views.

BENEFITS OF PROTECTING THE VOWS

The benefits of protecting the vows like this are: you will not fall to the evil-gone realms [hells, animal and hungry ghost]; temporarily you will continuously achieve the body of a deva or human, and ultimately you will easily achieve the state of liberation. Furthermore, the virtue of protecting these five vows increases constantly, even while one is asleep or unconscious, intoxicated and so forth.

Also, in addition to these, the Founder [Guru Shakyamuni Buddha] always thinks of you; the gods [protectors beyond sorrow, worldly protectors, devas] praise and protect you; non-humans cannot harm you; your qualities increase limitlessly; and at the time of death you will die without regret. Again, by avoiding killing, you will have a long life in all future lifetimes.
By avoiding taking what has not been given, you will have great wealth [in future lives].

By avoiding sexual misconduct, you will meet with a perfect wife or husband and friends [harmonious exactly according to your wishes] [in future lives].

By avoiding telling lies, you will have a good memory and be conscientious [in future lives].

It is said in the Sutra The Lamp of the Moon:

If, with a mind of devotion, one makes offerings of umbrellas, fan-flags, rows of lights, food and drink to as many billions of Buddhas as there are grains of sand in the River Ganges and for that many tens of millions of aeons, the merit of this can in no way compare with that of a person who keeps one precept even for one day at the time when the holy Dharma, the teaching of the Gone to Bliss One, perishes.

DEDICATION PRAYERS
It is best, if possible, to always dedicate the merit of any virtuous action right after doing it. If not, at least dedicate the merit of each day before going to bed. Dedicate one’s own past, present and future merit and also that of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

As a result of the three-times’ merits of myself and others,
May bodhichitta – from which the happiness of all sentient beings comes –
Be generated in the minds of self and other sentient beings without delay, even for one second.
And that which has been generated, may it increase.

As a result of the three-times’ merits of myself and others,
May emptiness be generated in the minds of self and others sentient beings, without delay, even for one second.
And that which has been generated, may it increase.
As a result of the three-times’ merits of myself and others,
May I, who am empty form my own side,
Achieve Guru Shakyamuni Buddha’s enlightenment, which is empty from its own side.
And lead all sentient beings, who are empty from their own side,
To that enlightenment, which is empty from its own side,
As quickly as possible, by myself, alone.

Whatever dedication the Victorious Ones Gone to Bliss
Of the three times have admired as best,
I shall also perfectly dedicate in the same way all these roots of virtue
So that I may perform good works.

Because of the past, present, and future merit created by me and by the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and sentient beings,
May I, my family, students, and all sentient beings
Be able to actualize completely in this very lifetime
Lama Tsong Khapa’s path of unified sutra and tantra,
Which is pure like refined gold.
May this pure teaching of Lama Tsong Khapa
Spread in all directions and flourish forever.

**Prayer of St. Francis of Assissi**

Lord [Buddha], make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love.
Where there is injury, let me sow pardon.
Where there is discord, let me sow unity.
Where there is doubt, let me sow faith.
Where there is error, let me sow truth.
Where there is despair, let me sow hope.
Where there is sadness, let me sow joy.
Where there is darkness, let me sow light.
O Divine Master,
Grant that I may not so much seek [happiness for the ego];
To be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved as to love.
For: It is in giving that we receive.
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned.
It is in dying [having practised] that we are born to eternal life
   [from happiness to happiness up to full enlightenment].

*Translated by Lama Zopa Rinpoche*
2. ACTIONS TO ADOPT AND AVOID AFTER HAVING TAKEN REFUGE

ALEXANDER BERZIN

Taking refuge means formally putting the safe and positive direction in our life indicated by the Triple Gem – the Buddhas, Dharma and Sangha – and pledging to maintain this steady direction unwaveringly, until it brings us enlightenment.

When we formally orient our life with the safe and positive direction of refuge, we commit ourselves to three sets of actions helpful for maintaining this direction.

EIGHT ACTIONS TO ADOPT
The first set consists of eight actions that relate to general behavior.

*Parallel to taking refuge in the Buddhas:*

1. COMMITTING OURSELVES WHOLEHEARTEDLY TO A SPIRITUAL TEACHER

If we have not yet found a personal teacher to direct our practice, this commitment is to find one.

Taking formal refuge with a teacher in a separate ceremony that is not part of a tantric initiation does not imply necessarily committing ourselves to following this teacher as our personal spiritual guide. It is important, of course, always to maintain respect and gratitude toward this person as the one who opened the door to our safe direction in life.

Our refuge, however, is in the Triple Gem – represented by a Buddha statue or painting during the ceremony – and not in the specific person who conducts the ritual.

Furthermore, regardless of context, our refuge is in the Triple Gem in general, not a specific lineage or tradition of Buddhism. If the teacher conducting a refuge ceremony is of a particular lineage,
receiving safe direction or empowerment from him or her does not necessarily render us a follower of the same lineage.

*To maintain a Dharma direction in life:*

2. **STUDYING THE BUDDHIST TEACHINGS**

and

3. **APPLYING THEM TO OVERCOME OUR DISTURBING EMOTIONS AND ATTITUDES.**

*To take direction from the Sangha community of highly realized practitioners:*

4. **FOLLOWING THEIR EXAMPLE.**
To do so does not mean necessarily becoming a monastic, but rather making sincere efforts to realize straightforwardly and nonconceptually the four noble truths. These are that life is difficult; our difficulties come from a cause, namely confusion about reality; we can end our problems; and to do so we need the understanding of voidness as a pathway mind.

5. **WORKING ON OURSELVES AS THE PRIMARY TASK IN OUR LIFE.**
This means rather than constantly complaining or criticizing others, devoting our time and energies to overcoming our shortcomings and realizing our talents and potentials.

6. **ADOPTING THE ETHICAL STANDARDS THE BUDDHAS HAVE SET**
This ethic is based on clearly discriminating between what is helpful and what is harmful to a positive direction in life. Therefore, following the Buddhist ethic means to refrain from certain modes of conduct because they are destructive and hamper our ability to benefit
ourselves or others, and to embrace other modes because they are constructive and help us to grow.

7. TRYING TO BE AS SYMPATHETIC AND COMPASSIONATE TO OTHERS AS POSSIBLE.
Even if our spiritual goal is limited to gaining liberation from our personal problems, this is never at the expense of others.

Finally, to maintain our connection with the Triple Gem:

8. MAKING SPECIAL OFFERINGS OF FRUIT, FLOWERS AND SO FORTH ON BUDDHIST HOLY DAYS, SUCH AS THE ANNIVERSARY OF BUDDHA’S ENLIGHTENMENT
Observing religious holidays with traditional ritual helps us feel part of a larger community.

SIX ACTIONS TO AVOID AND WAYS TO SHOW RESPECT
The second set of refuge commitments is to avoid certain actions and to maintain others, in connection with each of the Three Precious Gems.

The actions avoided lead to a contrary direction in life, while those adopted foster mindfulness of the goal.

In spite of taking refuge in the Buddhas:
1. TAKING PARAMOUNT REFUGE IN OTHERS
The most important thing in life is no longer accumulating as many material objects and entertaining experiences as possible, but as many good qualities as we can – such as love, patience, concentration and wisdom – in order to be of more benefit to others. This is not a vow of poverty and abstinence, but rather an affirmation of having a deeper direction in life.

More specifically, this commitment means not taking ultimate refuge in gods or spirits. Buddhism, particularly in its Tibetan form, often contains ritual ceremonies, or pujas, directed toward various Buddha-figures or fierce protectors in order to help dispel obstacles and accomplish constructive purposes. Performing these ceremonies
provides conducive circumstances for negative potentials to ripen in trivial rather than major obstacles, and positive potentials to ripen sooner rather than later. If we have built up overwhelmingly negative potentials, however, these ceremonies are ineffective in averting difficulties. Therefore, propitiating gods, spirits, protectors or even Buddhas is never a substitute for attending to our karma – avoiding destructive conduct and acting in a constructive manner. Buddhism is not a spiritual path of protector-worship, or even Buddha-worship. The safe direction of the Buddhist path is working to become a Buddha ourselves.

_In spite of taking refuge in the Dharma:_
2. **CAUSING HARM OR MISCHIEF TO HUMANS OR ANIMALS.**
One of the main guidelines Buddha taught is to help others as much as possible, and if we cannot be of help, at least not to cause any harm.

_And, in spite of taking refuge in the Sangha:_
3. **ASSOCIATING CLOSELY WITH NEGATIVE PEOPLE**
Shunning such contact helps us avoid being easily swayed from our positive goals when we are still weak in our direction in life. It does not mean having to live in a Buddhist community, but rather exercising care about the company we keep and taking whatever measures are appropriate and necessary to avoid detrimental influences.

_The three actions to adopt as a sign of respect are honoring:_

4. **HONORING ALL STATUES, PAINTINGS AND OTHER ARTISTIC DEPICTIONS OF BUDDHAS**

5. **HONORING ALL BOOKS, ESPECIALLY CONCERNING THE DHARMA**
6. HONORING ALL PERSONS WITH BUDDHIST MONASTIC VOWS, AND EVEN THEIR ROBES.
Traditionally, signs of disrespect are stepping on or over such objects, sitting or standing on them, and placing them directly on the floor or ground without at least providing a piece of cloth beneath them. Although these objects are not the actual sources of refuge, they represent and help keep us mindful of enlightened beings, their supreme attainments and the highly realized practitioners well-advanced toward that goal.

SIX GENERAL REFUGE COMMITMENTS
The third set of commitments from refuge is to engage in six trainings that relate to the Three Precious Gems as a whole.

1. REAFFIRMING OUR REFUGE BY CONTINUALLY REMINDING OURSELVES OF THE QUALITIES OF THE THREE JEWELS OF REFUGE, AND THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THEM AND OTHER POSSIBLE DIRECTIONS IN LIFE.

2. IN GRATITUDE FOR THEIR KINDNESS AND SPIRITUAL SUSTENANCE, OFFERING THE FIRST PORTION OF OUR HOT DRINKS AND MEALS EACH DAY TO THE TRIPLE GEM.
This is usually done in the imagination, although we may also place a small portion of our first hot drink of the day before a Buddha statue or painting, and then later drink it ourselves. It is not necessary, when making offerings of food or drink, to recite a verse in a foreign tongue we do not know, unless we find its mystery inspiring. Simply thinking, “Please, Buddhas, enjoy this,” is sufficient.

If the people with whom we are eating are not Buddhists, it is best to make this offering in a discreet manner so that no one knows what we are doing. Making a show of our practice only invites others’ discomfort or ridicule.
3. MINDFUL OF THE COMPASSION OF THE TRIPLE GEM, INDIRECTLY ENCOURAGING OTHERS TO GO IN THEIR DIRECTION.
The intent of this commitment is not that we become missionaries and try to convert anyone. However, people receptive to us who are lost in life, with either no direction or a negative one, often find it helpful if we explain to them the importance and benefit we ourselves derive from having a safe and positive direction. Whether or not others become Buddhists is not the point. Our own example may encourage them to do something constructive with their lives by working on themselves to grow and improve.

4. REMEMBERING THE BENEFITS OF HAVING TAKEN REFUGE, FORMALLY REAFFIRMING IT THREE TIMES EACH DAY AND THREE TIMES EACH NIGHT
This affirmation is normally made by repeating, “I take refuge in the Buddhas, the Dharma and the Sangha,” usually in the morning shortly after waking up and in the evening just before going to sleep.

5. WHATEVER HAPPENS, RELYING ON OUR REFUGE
In times of crisis, the Three Jewels are the best refuge because it deals with adversity by seeking to eliminate its cause. Friends may give us sympathy, but unless they are enlightened beings, they inevitably let us down. They have problems of their own and are limited in what they can do. Always working to overcome shortcomings and difficulties in a sober and realistic manner, however, never fails in our hour of need. This leads to the final commitment,

6. NEVER GIVING UP THIS REFUGE IN LIFE, NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS

TAKING REFUGE AND FOLLOWING OTHER RELIGIONS OR SPIRITUAL PATHS
Some people ask if taking refuge vows means converting to Buddhism and leaving forever their native religion. This is not the case, unless we
wish to do so. There is no term in Tibetan literally equivalent to a “Buddhist.” The word used for a practitioner means “someone who lives within,” namely within the boundaries of taking a safe and positive direction in life. To live that type of life does not require wearing a red protection string around our neck and never setting foot inside a church, synagogue, Hindu temple or Confucian shrine. Rather, it means working on ourselves to overcome our shortcomings and realize our potentials – in other words, to actualize the Dharma – as the Buddhas have done and highly realized practitioners, the Sangha, are doing. We put our primary efforts in this direction. As many Buddhist masters have said, including my own late teacher, Tsenzhab Serkong Rinpoche, if we look at the teachings of charity and love in other religions such as Christianity, we must conclude that following them is not counter to the direction taught in Buddhism. The humanitarian message in all religions is the same.

From berzinarchives.com
3. THE TEN NON-VIRTUES AND THEIR RESULTS

1. HOW WE CREATE A COMPLETE NON-VIRTUOUS ACTION

Each of the ten non-virtuous actions – three of the body, four of the speech, three of the mind – has four components or factors. For the action to be complete, that is, to bring the full karmic result or lower realm rebirth, all four components must be present.

The Basis or Object of the Action

The Intention

a. recognition
b. intention
c. motivation

The Action

The Completion of the Action

KILLING

BASIS A living being other than yourself.

INTENTION

a. recognition: You recognize unmistakably the person or being you intend to kill.

b. intention: You intend to kill.

c. motivation: You are motivated to kill out of anger, attachment, or ignorance.

For example, out of anger, killing an enemy or a being that annoys you; out of attachment, killing an animal for its meat or skin; out of ignorance, killing animals with the belief that they were placed on this earth to be used by humans for food, etc., or killing an animal as a sacrifice to a worldly god, believing this to be virtuous.

ACTION You carry out the killing by some means, e.g., a weapon, poison, black magic, etc., either directly by yourself or indirectly by
ordering someone else to kill.

**COMPLETION** The other person or being dies before you do.
(Suicide is a negative action that will bring suffering in the future but is not a complete act because factors 1 and 4 are missing.)

**STEALING (TAKING THE UNGIVEN)**

**BASIS** Something of value belonging to another.

**INTENTION**

a. **recognition**: You recognize unmistakenly the object to be stolen.
b. **intention**: You intend to steal.
c. **motivation**: One of the three poisons.
   For example, out of anger, stealing something from someone you wish to hurt; out of attachment, stealing something you wish to possess; out of ignorance, stealing or cheating, thinking that it’s not wrong.

**ACTION** Whatever means you use to steal, e.g., taking the object secretly, not paying taxes or fees you owe, misusing donations, etc.; or getting someone to steal for you.

**COMPLETION** You think that the object now belongs to you.

**SEXUAL MISCONDUCT**

**BASIS** For lay people, improper time, improper place, or improper partner; for ordained people, any kind of sexual activity is sexual misconduct. (Some lam-rim books say that the basis is the person with whom you engage in sexual misconduct.)

**INTENTION**

a. **recognition**: You must be in no doubt that the act is sexual misconduct. (Other lam-rim books: You must have unmistakable recognition of the object of your misconduct.)
b. **intention**: You intend to engage in an improper sexual act.
c. **motivation**: One of the three poisons.
   For example, out of anger one might rape the wife of an enemy; out of attachment, engaging in sexual misconduct with someone other than one’s spouse or with someone who’s already married; out of ignorance,
committing adultery thinking that it’s cool, or engaging in sexual misconduct thinking that it leads to enlightenment.

**ACTION** The two organs come into contact.

**COMPLETION** [The two organs come into contact.]

**LYING**
There are many objects of lying, but most are included in the following eight: denying something you have seen, heard, experienced with your other senses, or known; or falsely claiming to have seen, heard, experienced with your other senses, or known something which you have not.

**BASIS** Another person who can understand you, and who can speak.

**INTENTION**

a. **recognition**: You must know that what you are saying is untrue.
b. **intention**: You intend to lie and deceive someone.
c. **motivation**: One of the three poisons. For example, out of anger, lying to hurt someone or destroy their reputation; out of attachment, lying to get something you want; out of ignorance, not thinking there’s anything wrong with lying.

**ACTION** Conveying the lie by some means, e.g., speaking, writing, making a gesture with your hand or eyes, facial expression, remaining silent, etc.

**COMPLETION** The other person understands and believes your lie.

**DIVISIVE SPEECH**

**BASIS** Two or more people, who have a good or bad relationship.

**INTENTION**

a. **recognition**: You must have unmistaken recognition of the parties involved and their relationship/feelings for each other.
b. **intention**: You intend to cause division or disunity.
c. **motivation**: One of the three poisons. For example, out of anger, creating disharmony among people you dislike; out of attachment, speaking in a harsh or rude way to be accepted by a gang, or insulting
the husband out of desire for the wife; out of ignorance, causing disharmony, believing that it’s healthy, or causing disunity among followers of a religion you disagree with, believing this to be positive.

**ACTION** You undertake either to cause disunity among friends, or to prevent reconciliation among enemies, by saying something which is either true or false.

**COMPLETION** The other people understand and believe what you say, and, as a consequence, become hostile towards each other.

**ABUSIVE SPEECH**

**BASIS** Another person whose feelings could be hurt. (We can express insulting words to a non–human being or to an inanimate object, but the action is complete only when there’s a being who understands and is hurt by our words).

**INTENTION**

a. **recognition:** You must correctly identify the person you intend to insult.

b. **intention:** You intend to speak insulting words.

c. **motivation:** One of the three poisons. For example, out of anger, insulting someone you dislike; out of attachment, speaking in a harsh or rude way to be accepted by a gang, or insulting the husband out of desire for his wife; out of ignorance, using abusive or rude language thinking that it’s cool to do so, or not realizing the hurtful effect of your words, or thinking there’s nothing wrong with hurting others’ feelings.

**ACTION** With a negative motivation, you speak words pointing out faults, etc. in the other person, whether true or not, in a hurtful manner; or you get someone else to speak such words on your behalf.

**COMPLETION** The other person understands and is hurt.

**IDLE GOSSIP**

**BASIS** Something meaningless or insignificant, which you treat as important. (It’s not necessary that another being hears our words.)

**INTENTION**

a. **recognition:** You believe that what you wish to say is important.
or meaningful, although it is not.

b. intention: You intend to express such words.

c. motivation: One of the three poisons. For example, out of anger, chattering idly in order to disturb someone you dislike who is trying to meditate or do something virtuous; out of attachment, indulging in gossip or frivolous talk about things you are attached to, or to spend time with someone you’re attached to; out of ignorance, thinking there’s nothing wrong with spending time idly gossiping.

DEED Speaking without purpose, or getting someone else to do it for you.

COMPLETION Actually expressing the words.

COVETOUSNESS

BASIS Another person’s property, possessions (includes merchandise in a shop), qualities, children, etc.

INTENTION

a. recognition: You identify correctly the object you covet.

b. intention: You wish to make the object your own.

c. motivation: One of the three poisons. For example, out of anger, wanting to buy something before someone you dislike has a chance to buy it, or wanting to deprive your enemy of his cherished possessions; out of attachment, wanting to possess many things, thinking that they will bring happiness; out of ignorance, wanting to buy many things thinking that it’s good for oneself or for the economy, or as a habit or obsession.

ACTION The wish to possess the object becomes stronger.

COMPLETION Deciding to find a way to make the object your own. The motive, deed, and final step are all part of one train of thought.

MALICE, ILL WILL

BASIS Another being who would be hurt if you acted out your harmful thoughts.

INTENTION

a. recognition: You correctly identify the being you wish to harm.
b. intention: You wish to give harm to this being.

c. motivation: One of the three poisons.

For example, out of anger, wishing to harm someone who has harmed you or who you dislike; out of attachment, wanting to kill your father to get your inheritance, or to harm someone to get his possessions; out of ignorance, wishing to harm others because of thinking that violence is good, or that you can do whatever you like.

**ACTION** Putting more effort into the wish to give harm, so that it grows stronger.

**COMPLETION** You decide to act out your wish and do something harmful.

**WRONG VIEWS**

**BASIS** Something that exists or is true, e.g., the law of cause and effect, the four noble truths, etc.

**INTENTION**

a. recognition: You believe that your denial of the object is correct (that is, you do not recognize that what you are denying is in fact true).

b. intention: You wish to deny something that exists.

c. motivation: One of the three poisons.

For example, out of anger, because of hating someone who holds a correct view, you deny what they say and assert the opposite; out of attachment, asserting some wrong view in order to get something you desire, or to impress or gain favour from someone in a powerful position; out of ignorance, not understanding what is true and correct.

**DEED** Thinking about carrying out the repudiation of the object by, for example, telling others what you think.

**COMPLETION** Definitely deciding to deny the object.
2. RESULTS OF A COMPLETE NON-VIRTUOUS ACTION

There are four different results of a complete karma (that is, an action that has been committed with all four components/factors present):

FULLY RIPENED RESULT
The future rebirth state you will experience as a result of having created a complete karma

EXPERIENCES SIMILAR TO THE CAUSE
Once your karma to be born in the lower realms has been exhausted and you take rebirth in an upper realm, you will have experiences similar to your original actions.

ACTIONS SIMILAR TO THE CAUSE
Once your karma to be born in the lower realms has been exhausted and you take rebirth in an upper realm, you will have the instinctive tendency to commit the original action again and again.

ENVIRONMENTAL RESULTS
When born in the human realm, you will experience results of your actions in the form of environmental conditions.

KILLING
   Fully Ripened Result Rebirth in one of the three lower realms.
   Experiences Similar To The Cause Later, in a human rebirth, you will have a short life or get killed, have ill-health, many troubles, no success in your activities.
   Actions Similar To The Cause You will have the habitual desire to kill and harm others.
   Environmental Result Food, drink, medicine, and crops are scarce, always inferior and low in nutrition or potency; they are hard to digest and cause disease; most beings around you die before reaching the full life span.
STEALING (TAKING THE UNGIVEN)

**Fully Ripened Result** Rebirth in one of the three lower realms.

**Experiences Similar To The Cause** Lack of wealth, possessions and resources; you can never make ends meet; your things will be stolen or lost. What you do have is all just common property with others.

**Actions Similar To The Cause** You will have an instinctive tendency to steal.

**Environmental Results** You will take birth in a barren place, where crops do not grow or are destroyed or have no power to remove hunger, and there are shortages of food, and bitter frosts, hail, dry spells stay on too long; it rains too much; crops dry up or die off; and business ventures fail.

SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

**Fully Ripened Result** Rebirth in a lower realm.

**Experiences Similar To The Cause** The people who work around you are unreliable; you find yourself having a lot of competition for your partner. Your relationships, all kinds, don’t last.

**Actions Similar To The Cause** Having the tendency to be unfaithful.

**Environmental Result** You live in a place where there is urine and feces all round, and mud, dirt, filth; everything stinks, and everywhere seems unpleasant and distasteful.

LYING

**Fully Ripened Result** Rebirth in a lower realm.

**Experiences Similar To The Cause** Others do not believe you, even when you tell the truth. People are always deceiving you.

**Actions Similar To The Cause** You will have the tendency to lie and deceive others.

**Environmental Results** Your work in cooperation with others fails to prosper and people don’t work well together, everyone generally is cheating one another and is afraid, and there are many things to be afraid of.
DIVISIVE SPEECH
  Fully Ripened Result Rebirth in a lower realm.
  Experiences Similar To The Cause You will be lonely; you will easily lose friends; people around you are always fighting one another; people around you have an undesirable character.
  Actions Similar To The Cause You will have the tendency to cause disunity.
  Environmental Results The ground where you live is covered with obstacles like fallen tree trunks, thorns, stones, sharp broken glass; it is rough, dreary, and there are no streams or lakes or water springs; the earth is parched and poisoned, burning hot, useless, threatening; a place where there are many things to fear.

ABUSIVE SPEECH
  Fully Ripened Result You will be born in a lower realm
  Experiences Similar To The Cause You will always hear distressing words. Others will abuse you, and even when you speak pleasantly, they will interpret it negatively.
  Actions Similar To The Cause Having the tendency to be critical and hurtful.
  Environmental Results You will live in a place where there are many tree stumps, brambles, nettles, sharp rocks, and thorns.
  [According to Lama Zopa Rinpoche]: You will be live in a desert environment.

IDLE GOSSIP
  Fully Ripened Result Rebirth in a lower realm
  Experiences Similar To The Cause Others will not take your speech seriously or listen to what you have to say.
  Actions Similar To The Cause Having the tendency to talk continuously and fill any quiet moment with the sound of your voice.
  Environmental Results Fruits don’t grow, or grow at the wrong times, seem ripe when they are not, have frail roots; no leisure places like parks, glades, pools of cool water; and many things to make you afraid.
COVETOUSNESS

**Fully Ripened Result** Rebirth in a lower realm.

**Experiences Similar To The Cause** You will be unable to achieve your aims and get what you want; you will never be satisfied with what you have.

**Actions Similar To The Cause** Your personality will be dominated by desire, and your attachment increases.

**Environmental Results** You will live in a place where the crops are poor and material resources are easily destroyed or lost. Every good thing you manage to find starts to get worse, decreases as seasons, months, days pass.

MALICE, ILL WILL

**Fully Ripened Result** Rebirth in a lower realm.

**Experiences Similar To The Cause** You will be a person who easily becomes frightened and panicky. You always find yourself without help, or never find the help you need; or always being hurt by others.

**Actions Similar To The Cause** Having the tendency to hurt others. Your personality is dominated by anger, and your anger and hatred increase.

**Environmental Results** You live in a world of chaos, diseases spread, evil is everywhere; there is plague, conflict, and you have fear of your country’s or others’ external military; there are dangerous animals, and you are surrounded by harmful spirits, thieves or muggers, and the like.

WRONG VIEWS

**Fully Ripened Result** Rebirth in a lower realm

**Experiences Similar To The Cause** Being ignorant of correct views, and finding it difficult to develop realizations and correct understanding.

**Actions Similar To The Cause** Having the tendency to draw wrong conclusions again and again. Your personality will be dominated by stupidity, and your ignorance will increase.

**Environmental Results** Having to live in a place where there are
shortages of water and other resources such as food, and there are no precious things such as treasures, works of art, scriptures, or spiritual guides.

You live in a world where the single highest source of happiness is steadily disappearing from the earth, where people think that unclean and suffering things are actually nice and happy; where there is no place to go, no one to help, nothing to protect you.

COLOPHON

*The Ten Non–Virtuous Actions and Their Results* is based on a version by Ven. Sangye Khadro, with many additions from Lama Zopa Rinpoche’s teachings.

The original version was compiled from various lam–rim books, including *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, by Pabongka Rinpoche, Wisdom Publications; *An Anthology of Well–Spoken Advice*, by Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey, Library of Tibetan Works and Archives; and *The Path to Enlightenment in Tibetan Buddhism*, by Geshe Loden, printed in Australia.

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PART TWO
BODHISATTVA VOWS
4. THE EIGHTEEN ROOT BODHISATTVA VOWS
ALEXANDER BERZIN

BACKGROUND

A vow (sdom-pa) is a subtle invisible form on a mental continuum, which shapes behavior. Specifically, it is a restraint from an “uncommendable action” (kha-na ma-tho-ba), either one that is naturally destructive (rang-bzhin-gyi kha-na ma-thoba) or one that Buddha prohibited (bcas-pa’i kha-na ma-tho-ba) for specific individuals who are training to reach specific goals. An example of the former is taking the life of another; an example of the later is eating after noon, which monastics need to avoid for their minds to be clearer for meditating at night and the next morning. Of the two stages of developing bodhichitta, aspiring (smon-pa’i sems-bskyed) and engaged (’jug-pa’i sems-bskyed), only with the latter do we take the bodhisattva vows.

Taking bodhisattva vows (byang-sems sdom-pa) entails promising to restrain from two sets of negative acts that Buddha prohibited for those training as bodhisattvas to reach enlightenment and to be of as much benefit to others as is possible:

• eighteen actions that, if committed, constitute a root downfall (byang-sems-kyi tsa-ltung),
• forty-six types of faulty behavior (nyes-byas).

A root downfall means a loss of the entire set of bodhisattva vows. It is a “downfall” in the sense that it leads to a decline in spiritual development and hinders the growth of positive qualities. The word root signifies it is a root to be eliminated. For ease of expression, these two sets are usually called root and secondary bodhisattva vows. They offer excellent guidelines for the types of behavior to avoid if we wish to benefit others in as pure and full a way as is possible.
The late tenth-century Indian master Atisha received this particular version of the bodhisattva vows from his Sumatran teacher Dharmakirti (Dharmapala) of Suvarnadvipa, which he later transmitted to Tibet. This version derives from the Sutra of Akashagarbha (Nam-mkha’i snying-po mdo, Skt. Akashagarbhasutra), as cited in Compendium of Trainings (bSlabs-btus, Skt. Shikshasamuccaya), compiled in India by Shantideva in the eighth century. All Tibetan traditions currently follow it, while the Buddhist traditions deriving from China observe variant versions of the bodhisattva vows.

The promise to keep bodhisattva vows applies not only to this life, but also to each subsequent lifetime until enlightenment. Thus, as subtle forms, these vows continue on our mental continuums into future lives. If we have taken the vows in a previous lifetime, we do not lose them by unknowingly committing a full transgression now, unless we have taken them freshly during our current life.

Retaking the vows for the first time in this life strengthens the momentum of our efforts toward enlightenment that has been growing ever since our first taking of them. Therefore, Mahayana masters emphasize the importance of dying with the bodhisattva vows intact and strong. Their abiding presence on our mental continuums continues building up positive force (merit) in future lives, even before we revitalize them by taking them again.

Following the Gelug founder, Tsongkhapa’s fifteenth-century commentary on the bodhisattva vows, An Explanation of Bodhisattvas’ Ethical Discipline: The Main Path to Enlightenment (Byang-chub sms-dpa’i tshul-khrims-kyi rnam-bshad byangchub gzhung-lam), let us examine the eighteen negative actions that constitute a root downfall. Each has several stipulations we need to know.

The following root vows are included for recitation in verse B6 in Six-Session Guru Yoga (page 120).

1. PRAISING OURSELVES AND/OR BELITTLING OTHERS
This downfall refers to speaking such words to someone in an inferior position. The motivation must contain either desire for profit, praise,
love, respect, and so on from the person addressed, or jealousy of the person belittled. It makes no difference whether what we say is true or false. Professionals who advertise that they are Buddhists need to take care about committing this downfall.

2. NOT SHARING DHARMA TEACHINGS OR WEALTH
Here, the motivation must be specifically attachment and miserliness. This negative action includes not only being possessive of our notes or tape recorder, but also being stingy with our time and refusing to help if needed.

3. NOT LISTENING TO OTHERS’ APOLOGIES OR STRIKING OTHERS
The motivation for either of these must be anger. The first refers to an actual occasion when yelling at or beating someone and either that person pleads for forgiveness, or someone else begs us to stop and we refuse. The latter is simply hitting someone. Sometimes, it may be necessary to give rambunctious children or pets a smack to stop them from running into the road if they will not listen, but it is never appropriate or helpful to discipline out of anger.

4. DISCARDING THE MAHAYANA TEACHINGS AND PROPOUNDING MADE-UP ONES
This means to reject the correct teachings about some topic concerning bodhisattvas, such as their ethical behavior, and to make up in their stead a plausible yet misleading instruction on the same subject, claim it to be authentic, and then teach it to others in order to gain their following. An example of this downfall is when teachers who are eager not to scare away prospective students condone liberal moral behavior and explain that any type of action is acceptable so long as it does not harm others. We need not be a teacher to commit this downfall. We can commit it even in casual conversation with others.
5. TAKING OFFERINGS INTENDED FOR THE TRIPLE GEM
This downfall is to steal or embezzle, either personally or through deputing someone else, anything offered or belonging to the Buddhas, Dharma, or Sangha, and then to consider it as ours. The Sangha, in this context, refers to any group of four or more monastics. Examples include embezzling funds donated for building a Buddhist monument, for printing Dharma books, or for feeding a group of monks or nuns.

6. FORSAKING THE HOLY DHARMA
Here the downfall is to repudiate or, by voicing our opinions, cause others to repudiate that the scriptural teachings of the shravaka (nyan-thos), pratyekabuddha (rang-rgyal), or bodhisattva vehicles are the Buddha’s words. Shravakas are those who listen to a Buddha’s teachings while they are still extant, while pratyekabuddhas are self-evolving practitioners who live primarily during dark ages when the Dharma is no longer directly available.

To make spiritual progress, they rely on intuitive understanding gained from study and practice conducted during previous lives. The teachings for both of them collectively constitute the Hinayana, or “modest vehicle” for gaining personal liberation from samsara.

The Mahayana vehicle emphasizes methods for attaining full enlightenment. Denying that all or just certain scriptures of either vehicle derive from the Buddha is a root downfall.

Maintaining this vow does not mean forsaking a historical perspective. Buddha’s teachings were transmitted orally for centuries before being committed to writing, and thus corruptions and forgeries undoubtedly occurred. The great masters who compiled the Tibetan Buddhist canon certainly rejected texts they considered inauthentic. However, instead of basing their decisions on prejudice, they used the seventh-century Indian master Dharmakirti’s criterion for assessing the validity of any material - the ability of its practice to bring about the Buddhist goals of better rebirth, liberation, or enlightenment. Stylistic differences among Buddhist scriptures, and even within a specific text, often indicate differences in time when various portions of the teachings were written down or translated into different languages.
Therefore, studying the scriptures through methods of modern textual analysis can often be fruitful and does not conflict with this vow.

7. DISROBING MONASTICS OR COMMITTING SUCH ACTS AS STEALING THEIR ROBES
This downfall refers specifically to doing something damaging to one, two, or three Buddhist monks or nuns, regardless of their moral status or level of study or practice. Such actions need to be motivated by ill will or malice, and include beating or verbally abusing them, confiscating their goods, or expelling them from their monasteries. Expelling monastics, however, is not a downfall if they have broken one of their four major vows: not to kill, especially another human being; not to steal, particularly something belonging to the monastic community; not to lie, specifically about spiritual attainments; and to maintain complete celibacy.

8. COMMITTING ANY OF THE FIVE HEINOUS CRIMES
The five heinous crimes (mtshams-med lnga) are
   (a) killing our fathers,
   (b) mothers, or
   (c) an arhat (a liberated being),
   (d) with bad intentions drawing blood from a Buddha, or
   (e) causing a split in the monastic community.
   The latter heinous crime refers to repudiating the Buddha’s teachings and monastic institution, drawing monastics away from them, and enlisting them in one’s own newly founded religion and monastic tradition. It does not refer to leaving a Dharma center or organization - especially because of corruption in the organization or its spiritual teachers - and founding another center that still follows Buddha’s teachings.
   Moreover, the term sangha in this heinous crime refers specifically to the monastic community. It does not refer to “sangha” in the nontraditional usage of the term coined by Western Buddhists as an equivalent of the congregation of a Dharma center or organization.
9. HOLDING A DISTORTED, ANTAGONISTIC OUTLOOK
This means to deny what is true and of value - such as the laws of behavioral cause and effect, refuge, rebirth, and liberation from suffering - and to be antagonistic toward such ideas and those who hold them.

10. DESTROYING PLACES SUCH AS TOWNS
This downfall includes intentionally demolishing, bombing, or degrading the environment of a town, city, district, or countryside area, and rendering it unfit, harmful, or difficult for humans or animals to live in.

11. TEACHING VOIDNESS TO THOSE WHOSE MINDS ARE UNTRAINED
The primary objects of this downfall are persons with the bodhichitta motivation who are not yet ready to understand voidness. Such persons would become confused or frightened by this teaching and consequently abandon the bodhisattva path for the path of personal liberation.

This can happen as a result of thinking that if all phenomena are devoid of inherent, findable existence, then no one exists, so why bother working to benefit anyone else?

This action also includes teaching voidness to anyone who would misunderstand it and therefore forsake the Dharma completely, for example by thinking that Buddhism teaches that nothing exists and is therefore sheer nonsense.

Without extrasensory perception, it is difficult to know whether others’ minds are sufficiently trained so that they will not misconstrue the teachings on the voidness of all phenomena. Therefore, it is important to lead others to these teachings through explanations of graduated levels of complexity, and periodically to check their understanding.
12. TURNING OTHERS AWAY FROM FULL ENLIGHTENMENT
The objects for this action are people who have already developed a bodhichitta motivation and are striving toward enlightenment. The downfall is to tell them they are incapable of acting all the time with generosity, patience, and so on - to say that they cannot possibly become a Buddha and so it would be far better for them to strive merely for their own liberation. Unless they actually turn their aim away from enlightenment, however, this root downfall is incomplete.

13. TURNING OTHERS AWAY FROM THEIR PRATIMOKSHA VOWS
Pratimoksha, or individual liberation vows (so-thar sdom-pa), include those for laymen, laywomen, probationary nuns, novice monks, novice nuns, full monks, and full nuns. The objects here are persons who are keeping one of these sets of pratimoksha vows.

The downfall is to tell them as a bodhisattva there is no use in keeping pratimoksha, because for bodhisattvas all actions are pure. For this downfall to be complete, they must actually give up their vows.

14. BELITTILING THE SHRAVAKA VEHICLE
The sixth root downfall is to repudiate that the texts of the shravaka or pratyekabuddha vehicles are the authentic words of the Buddha. Here, we accept that they are, but deny the effectiveness of their teachings and maintain that it is impossible to become rid of disturbing emotions and attitudes by means of their instructions, for example those concerning vipassana (insight meditation).

15. PROCLAIMING A FALSE REALIZATION OF VOIDNESS
We commit this downfall if we have not fully realized voidness, yet teach or write about it pretending that we have, because of jealousy of the great masters. It makes no difference whether any students or readers are fooled by our pretense.

Nonetheless, they must understand what we explain. If they do not comprehend our discussion, the downfall is incomplete.
Although this vow refers to proclaiming false realizations specifically of voidness, it is clear that we need to avoid the same also when teaching bodhichitta or other points of Dharma. There is no fault in teaching voidness before fully realizing it, however, so long as we openly acknowledge this fact and that we are explaining merely from our present levels of provisional understanding.

16. ACCEPTING WHAT HAS BEEN STOLEN FROM THE TRIPLE GEM
This downfall is to accept as a gift, offering, salary, reward, fine, or bribe anything someone else has stolen or embezzled, either personally or through deputing someone else, from the Buddhas, Dharma, or Sangha, including if it belonged only to one, two, or three monks or nuns.

17. ESTABLISHING UNFAIR POLICIES
This means to be biased against serious practitioners, because of anger or hostility toward them, and to favor those with lesser attainments, or none at all, because of attachment to them.

An example of this downfall is to give most of our time as teachers to casual private students who can pay high fees and to neglect serious students who can pay us nothing.

18. GIVING UP BODHICHITTA
This is abandoning the wish to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all. Of the two levels of bodhichitta, aspiring and involved, this refers specifically to discarding the former. In doing so, we give up the latter as well. Occasionally, a nineteenth root downfall is specified:

19. BELITTILING OTHERS WITH SARCASTIC VERSES OR WORDS
This may be included, however, in the first bodhisattva root downfall.

Excerpted from berzinarchives.com
5. THE FORTY-SIX SECONDARY BODHISATTVA VOWS
ALEXANDER BERZIN

The secondary bodhisattva vows are to restrain from forty-six faulty actions (*nyes-byas*). These faulty actions are divided into seven groups detrimental, one each, to our training in the six perfections or far-reaching attitudes (*pha-rol-tu phyin-pa, Skt. paramita*) and to our benefiting others.

The six perfections are
- generosity
- ethical self-discipline
- patient tolerance (patience)
- joyful perseverance (positive enthusiasm)
- mental stability (concentration)
- discriminating awareness (wisdom).

Although the faulty actions are contrary to and hamper our progress toward enlightenment, committing them, even with the four binding factors (*kun-dkris bzhi*) complete, does not constitute a loss of our bodhisattva vows.

The less complete these factors are, however, the less damage we do to our spiritual development along the bodhisattva path. If we happen to commit any of these faulty actions, we acknowledge our mistake and apply the opponent powers, as in the case of the root bodhisattva vows.

There are many details to learn about these forty-six, with many exceptions when there is no fault in committing them. In general, however, the damage to our development of the perfections and to the benefit we can give others depends on the motivation behind our faulty acts.

If that motivation is a disturbed state of mind, such as attachment, anger, spite, or pride, the damage is much greater than if it is an
undisturbed, though detrimental one, such as indifference, laziness, or forgetfulness.

With indifference, we lack adequate faith or respect in the training to be bothered engaging in it.

With laziness, we ignore our practice because we find it more pleasant and easier to do nothing.

When we lack mindfulness, we completely forget about our commitments to help others.

For many of the forty-six, we are not at fault if we have the intention eventually to eliminate them from our behavior, but our disturbing emotions and attitudes are still too strong to exercise sufficient self-control.

The presentation here follows that given by the fifteenth-century Gelug master Tsongkhapa in An Explanation of Bodhisattvas’ Ethical Discipline: The Main Path to Enlightenment (Byang-chub sems-dpa’i tshul-khrims-kyi rnam-bshad byang-chub gzhung-lam).

SEVEN FAULTY ACTIONS DETRIMENTAL TO TRAINING IN GENEROSITY

Generosity is defined as the attitude of being willing to give. It includes willingness to give material objects, protection from fearful situations, and teachings.

Of the seven faulty actions that negatively affect our development of generosity, two harm our willingness to give others material objects, two our willingness to give others protection from fearful situations, two involve not providing the circumstances for others to cultivate and practice generosity, and one harms our development of the generosity of giving teachings.

Two Faulty Actions Detrimental to Developing the Willingness to Give Others Material Objects

1. NOT MAKING OFFERINGS TO THE TRIPLE GEM THROUGH THE THREE GATEWAYS OF OUR BODIES, SPEECH, AND MINDS
Because of being in a bad mood, like being annoyed about something, or because of laziness, indifference, or we simply forget, failing to offer to the Buddhas, Dharma and Sangha, three times each day and three times each night, at least prostration with our bodies, words of praise with our speech, and remembrance of their good qualities with our minds and hearts.

If we cannot at least be generous enough to offer these happily each day and night to the Three Jewels of Refuge, how shall we ever perfect our willingness to give everything to everyone?

2. FOLLOWING OUT OUR DESIROUS MINDS
Because of great desire, attachment, or lack of contentment, indulging in any of the five types of desirable sensory objects - sights, sounds, fragrances, tastes, or tactile sensations.

For example, because of attachment to delicious tastes, we nibble at the cake in the refrigerator even when we are not hungry. This is detrimental to our fight against miserliness. We soon find ourselves hoarding the cake, and even hiding it on the back of the shelf, so that we do not have to share it with anyone else. If we fully intend to overcome this bad habit but cannot yet control it because our attachment to food is so strong, we are not at fault in taking a piece of cake. Nevertheless, we try to increase our self-control by taking smaller pieces and not so often.

Two Faulty Actions Detrimental to Developing the Willingness to Give Others Protection from Fearful Situations

3. NOT SHOWING RESPECT TO OUR ELDERS
The objects of this action include our parents, teachers, those with excellent qualities and, in general, any persons with seniority or simply older than ourselves. When we fail to give them our seats on the bus, meet them at the airport, help carry their bags, and so on, because of pride, anger, spite, laziness, indifference, or forgetfulness, we leave them in a fearful and worrisome situation difficult to cope with.
4. NOT ANSWERING THOSE WHO ASK US QUESTIONS

Because of pride, anger, spite, laziness, indifference, or forgetfulness, not happily answering others’ sincere questions. In ignoring them, we leave them in a quandary with no one to turn to - also a fearful and insecure position.

As illustration of the type of detail found in Tsongkhapa’s commentary to these vows, let us look at the exceptions when there is no fault in remaining silent or postponing our response. In terms of ourselves as the basis for this action, we need not answer if we are too sick or the person asking the question has purposely woken us in the middle of the night.

Unless there is an emergency, there is no fault in telling the person to wait until we are feeling better or until the morning. There are exceptions according to the occasion, for example when someone interrupts us with a question while we are teaching others, delivering a lecture, conducting a ceremony, speaking words of comfort to someone else, receiving a lesson, or listening to a discourse. We tell them politely to hold their questions until later.

Certain situations, by necessity, require silence or postponing the answer. For example, if we were to respond in depth to a question about hells during a public lecture in the West on Buddhism, we might turn many people off, causing a hindrance to their involvement with the Dharma. Silence is preferable if in answering someone’s question, for example a bigot’s inquiry about our ethnic backgrounds, we would cause that person to dislike us and therefore be unreceptive to our help.

Silence is also better if it would cause others to stop acting destructively and lead them to a more constructive mode of behavior - for example, when people psychologically dependent on us ask us to answer every question in their lives and we wish to teach them to make decisions and figure things out for themselves.

Furthermore, if we are at a meditation retreat with a rule of silence and someone asks us a question, there is no need to talk.

Finally, it is best to conclude a question and answer session at the end of a lecture if, by continuing when the audience is tired and it is very late, we will cause resentment and anger toward us.
Two Faulty Actions of Not Providing the Circumstances for Others to Cultivate and Practice Generosity

5. NOT ACCEPTING WHEN INVITED AS A GUEST
If we refuse to go for a visit or a meal because of pride, anger, spite, laziness, or indifference, we deprive the other person of an opportunity for building up merit from offering hospitality. Unless there are good reasons to decline, we accept no matter how humble the home might be.

6. NOT ACCEPTING MATERIAL GIFTS
For the same reasons as in the previous case.

One Faulty Action Detrimental to Developing the Generosity of Giving Teachings

7. NOT GIVING THE DHARMA TO THOSE WHO WISH TO LEARN
Here the motivation for refusing to teach about Buddhism, loan others our Dharma books, share our notes, and so on, is anger, spite, jealousy that the other person will eventually outstrip us, laziness, or indifference. In the case of the second root bodhisattva vow, we decline because of attachment and miserliness.

Nine Faulty Actions Detrimental to Training in Ethical Self-Discipline
Ethical self-discipline (tshul-khrims, Skt. shila) is the attitude to restrain from negative actions. It also includes the discipline to engage in positive actions and to help others. Of the nine faulty actions that hamper our development of ethical self-discipline, four concern situations in which our main consideration is others, three concern our own situation, and two concern both ourselves and others.
Four Faulty Actions That Concern Situations in Which Our Main Consideration Is Others

8. IGNORING THOSE WITH SHATTERED ETHICS
If, because of anger, spite, laziness, indifference, or forgetfulness, we ignore, neglect, or put down those who have broken their vows or even committed heinous crimes, we weaken our ethical self-discipline to engage in positive acts and to help others. Such persons are in special need of our concern and attention since they have built up the causes for present and future suffering and unhappiness. Without self-righteousness or moral indignation, we try to help them, for instance by teaching meditation to interested prisoners in jail.

9. NOT UPHOLDING MORAL TRAINING FOR THE SAKE OF OTHERS’ FAITH
Buddha has prohibited many actions that, although not naturally destructive, are detrimental to our spiritual progress - for example, laypersons and monastics drinking alcohol, or monastics sharing a room with a member of the opposite sex.

Refraining from such behavior is training shared in common by Hinayana practitioners and bodhisattvas alike. If, as budding bodhisattvas, we ignore these proscriptions because of lack of respect or belief in Buddha’s ethical teachings, or because of laziness to exercise self-control, we cause others seeing our behavior to lose faith and admiration for Buddhists and Buddhism. Therefore, with concern for the impression our conduct makes on others, we refrain, for example, from taking recreational drugs.

10. BEING PETTY WHEN IT CONCERNS THE WELFARE OF OTHERS
Buddha gave many minor rules for monastics to train their behavior, for instance always to have our three sets of robes where we sleep. Sometimes, however, the needs of others overrides the necessity to follow this minor training, for example if someone falls sick and we need to stay overnight to take care of the person.
If, because of anger or spite toward the person, or simply laziness to stay up all night, we decline on the grounds that we do not have our three sets of robes with us, we commit this faulty action. Being a rigid fanatic with rules hampers our balanced development of ethical self-discipline.

11. NOT COMMITTING A DESTRUCTIVE ACTION WHEN LOVE AND COMPASSION CALL FOR IT
Occasionally, certain extreme situations arise in which the welfare of others is seriously jeopardized and there is no alternative left to prevent a tragedy other than committing one of the seven destructive physical or verbal actions.

These seven are taking a life, taking what has not been given to us, indulging in inappropriate sexual behavior, lying, speaking divisively, using harsh and cruel language, or chattering meaninglessly.

If we commit such an action without any disturbing emotion at the time, such as anger, desire, or naivety about cause and effect, but are motivated only by the wish to prevent others’ suffering - being totally willing to accept on ourselves whatever negative consequences may come, even hellish pain - we do not damage our far-reaching ethical self-discipline. In fact, we build up a tremendous amount of merit that speeds us on our spiritual paths.

Refusing to commit these destructive actions when necessity demands is at fault, however, only if we have taken and keep purely bodhisattva vows. Our reticence to exchange our happiness for the welfare of others hampers our perfection of the ethical self-discipline to help others always.

There is no fault if we have only superficial compassion and do not keep bodhisattva vows or train in the conduct outlined by them. We realize that since our compassion is weak and unstable, the resulting suffering we would experience from our destructive actions might easily cause us to begrudge bodhisattva conduct. We might even give up the path of working to help others.

Like the injunction that bodhisattvas on lower stages of development only damage themselves and their abilities to help others...
if they attempt practices of bodhisattvas on higher stages - such as feeding their flesh to a hungry tigress - it is better for us to remain cautious and hold back.

Since there may be confusion about what circumstances call for such bodhisattva action, let us look at examples taken from the commentary literature. Please keep in mind that these are last resort actions when all other means fail to alleviate or prevent others’ suffering.

As a budding bodhisattva:
• We are willing to take the life of someone about to commit a mass murder.
• We have no hesitation in confiscating medicines intended for relief efforts in a war-torn country that someone has taken to sell on the black market, or taking away a charity’s funds from an administrator who is squandering or mismanaging them.
• We are willing, if male, to have sex with another’s wife - or with an unmarried woman whose parents forbid it, or with any other inappropriate partner - when the woman has the strong wish to develop bodhichitta but is overwhelmed with desire for sex with us and who, if she were to die not having had sex with us, would carry the grudge as an instinct into future lives. As a result, she would be extremely hostile toward bodhisattvas and the bodhisattva path.

Bodhisattvas’ willingness to engage in inappropriate sexual acts when all else fails to help prevent someone from developing an extremely negative attitude toward the spiritual path of altruism raises an important point for married couples on the bodhisattva path to consider. Sometimes a couple becomes involved in Dharma and one of them, for instance the woman, wishing to be celibate, stops sexual relations with her husband when he is not of the same mind. He still has attachment to sex and takes her decision as a personal rejection. Sometimes the wife’s fanaticism and lack of sensitivity drives her husband to blame his frustration and unhappiness on the Dharma. He leaves the marriage and turns his back on Buddhism with bitter resentment. If there is no other way to avoid his hostile reaction toward the spiritual path and the woman is keeping bodhisattva vows, she
would do well to evaluate her compassion to determine if it is strong enough to allow her to have occasional sex with her husband without serious harm to her ability to help others. This is very relevant in terms of the tantric vows concerning chaste behavior.

• As budding bodhisattvas, we are willing to lie when it saves others’ lives or prevents others from being tortured and maimed.
• We have no hesitation to speak divisively to separate our children from a wrong crowd of friends - or disciples from misleading teachers - who are exerting negative influences on them and encouraging harmful attitudes and behavior.
• We do not refrain from using harsh language to rouse our children from negative ways, like not doing their homework, when they will not listen to reason. And when others, interested in Buddhism, are totally addicted to chattering, drinking, partying, singing, dancing, or telling off-color jokes or stories of violence, we are willing to join in if refusal would make these persons feel that bodhisattvas, and Buddhists in general, never have fun and that the spiritual path is not for them.

**Three Faulty Actions Concerning Our Own Situation**

**12. EARNING OUR LIVING THROUGH A WRONG LIVELIHOOD**

Such livelihoods are through dishonest or devious means, primarily of five major types:

(a) pretense or hypocrisy,
(b) flattery or using smooth words to fool others,
(c) blackmail, extortion, or playing on people’s guilt,
(d) demanding bribes or exacting fines for imaginary offenses, and
(e) giving bribes to gain something larger in return. We resort to such means because of total lack of a sense of moral self-dignity or reserve.
13. BECOMING EXCITED AND FLYING OFF TO SOME FRIVOLOUS ACTIVITY
Because of being discontent, restless, bored, or hyperactive, and desirous for some excitement, running off to some frivolous distraction - like wandering in a shopping mall, flipping through the stations on the television, playing computer games and so on. We become completely engrossed and out of control.

If we engage in such activities with others in order to calm down their anger or lift their depression, to help them if they are addicted to such things, to gain their trust if we suspect they are hostile toward us, or to strengthen old friendships, we do not harm our ethical training to discipline ourselves to act positively and to help others.

However, if we run off to these activities feeling we have nothing better to do, we are deceiving ourselves. There is always something better to do. Sometimes, however, we need a break to help renew our enthusiasm and energy when we become tired or depressed. There is no fault in that, so long as we set reasonable limits.

14. INTENDING ONLY TO WANDER IN SAMASARA
Many sutras explain that bodhisattvas prefer to stay in samsara rather than achieve liberation themselves. It is a fault to take this literally to mean we do not work to overcome our disturbing emotions and attitudes and achieve liberation, but just keep our delusions and work with them to help others.

This is different from the eighteenth root bodhisattva vow of giving up bodhicitta, with which we fully decide to stop working for liberation and enlightenment. Here, we just consider it unimportant and unnecessary to free ourselves from disturbing emotions, which seriously weakens our ethical self-discipline.

Although on the bodhisattva path, especially when it entails anuttarayoga tantra, we transform and use the energies of desire to enhance our spiritual progress, this does not mean we give free reign to our desires and do not work to rid ourselves of them.
Two Faulty Actions Concerning Both Ourselves and Others

15. NOT RIDDING OURSELVES OF BEHAVIOR THAT CAUSES US TO FALL TO ILL-REPUTE
Suppose we like eating meat. If we are among vegetarian Buddhists and we insist on eating a steak, we invite their criticism and disrespect. They will not take our words about Dharma seriously and will spread stories about us, making others unreceptive to our help as well. As budding bodhisattvas, if we do not rid ourselves of such behavior, it is a great fault.

16. NOT REDRESSING THOSE WHO ACT WITH DISTURBING EMOTIONS AND ATTITUDES
If we are in a position of authority in an office, school, monastery, or household and, because of attachment to certain members or the wish to be liked, we fail to scold or punish those with disturbing emotions and attitudes who are acting disruptively, we damage the discipline and morale of the entire group.

FOUR FAULTY ACTIONS DETRIMENTAL TO TRAINING IN PATIENT TOLERANCE
Patient tolerance (bzod-pa, Skt. kshanti) is the willingness to deal, without anger, with those doing harm, with the hardships involved in practicing Dharma, and with our own sufferings.

17. DISCARDING THE FOUR POSITIVE TRAININGS
These trainings are not to retaliate when
(a) verbally abused or criticized
(b) made the target of others’ anger
(c) beaten, or
(d) humiliated.

Since training ourselves not to retaliate in these four trying situations acts as a cause for our patience to grow, if we put this aside we damage our development of this positive trait.
18. IGNORING THOSE WHO ARE ANGRY WITH US
If others are annoyed with us and holding a grudge, if we do nothing about it and do not try to assuage their anger, because of pride, spite, jealousy, laziness, indifference, or not caring, we hamper our perfection of patience because we allow the opposite of patience, namely anger, to continue unabated.

To avoid this fault, we apologize whether or not we have offended or done anything wrong.

19. REFUSING OTHERS’ APOLOGIES
The third root bodhisattva downfall is not listening to others’ apologies when they plead for forgiveness at the moment when we are angry with them. Here, we do not accept their apologies after the occasion, when we are holding a grudge.

20. DWELLING ON ANGER
Once we become angry in any situation, we act contrary to our development of patient tolerance if we dwell on it, holding a grudge, without applying opponent forces to counter it.

If we apply these forces, such as meditating on love for the objects of our annoyance, but are unsuccessful, we are not at fault. Because we are at least trying, we do not weaken our cultivation of patience.

THREE FAULTY ACTIONS DETRIMENTAL TO TRAINING IN JOYFUL PERSEVERANCE
Joyful perseverance (brtson-grus, Skt. virya, positive enthusiasm) is taking joy in doing what is constructive.

21. GATHERING A CIRCLE OF FOLLOWERS BECAUSE OF DESIRING VENERATION AND RESPECT
When we gather a circle of friends, admirers or pupils, or decide to marry or live with someone, if our motive is the wish for others to show us respect, give us love and affection, shower us with gifts, serve us, massage our backs, and do our everyday tasks, we lose enthusiasm for doing anything positive ourselves, such as helping others. We are
attracted to an inferior mode of operation, namely telling others what to do for us.

22. NOT DOING ANYTHING, OUT OF LAZINESS, AND SO ON
If we give in to laziness, indifference, apathy, moods of not feeling like doing anything, or not being interested in anything at all, or addiction to sleeping long hours, lying in bed all day, taking naps, or lounging around doing nothing, we become addicted to this and lose all enthusiasm for helping others.

Of course, we take rest if we are sick or exhausted, but it is a great fault to spoil ourselves by being too soft.

23. RESORTING TO PASSING TIME WITH STORIES, OUT OF ATTACHMENT
The third obstacle hindering the growth of enthusiasm for helping others is wasting time in a meaningless fashion. This refers to telling, listening to, reading, watching on television or in the movies, or surfing the Internet for stories about sex, violence, celebrities, political intrigues, and so on.

THREE FAULTY ACTIONS DETRIMENTAL TO TRAINING IN MENTAL STABILITY
Mental stability (bsam-gtan, Skt. dhyana, concentration) is the state of mind that does not lose its equilibrium or focus because of disturbing emotions, flightiness of mind, or mental dullness.

24. NOT SEEKING THE MEANS FOR GAINING ABSORBED CONCENTRATION
If, because of pride, spite, laziness, or indifference, we do not attend teachings on how to settle our minds in absorbed concentration (ting-nge-'dzin, Skt. samadhi) when a lama is giving them, how can we ever cultivate or enhance our stability of mind?

If we are sick, suspect that the instructions are incorrect, or have already achieved perfect concentration, we need not go.
25. NOT RIDDING OURSELVES OF THE OBSTACLES PREVENTING MENTAL STABILITY
When practicing meditation to achieve absorbed concentration, we encounter five major obstacles. If we give in and do not try to eliminate them, we damage our development of mental stability. If we are trying to remove them, but are not yet successful, we are not at fault.

The five obstacles are
(a) intentions to pursue any of the five types of desirable sensory objects,
(b) thoughts of spite,
(c) foggymindedness and drowsiness,
(d) flightiness of mind and regrets, and
(e) indecisive wavering or doubts.

26. REGARDING THE TASTE OF BLISS FROM GAINING MENTAL STABILITY AS ITS MAIN ADVANTAGE
Normally, we tie up a great deal of our energies in nervousness, worry, indecision, thoughts of longing or resentment, and so on, or weigh them down with dullness and sleepiness. As we concentrate and absorb our minds ever deeper, we release ever greater amounts of this energy. We experience this as a feeling of physical and mental bliss. The stronger that bliss, the further it draws us into absorption.

For this reason, in anuttarayoga tantra, we generate and use even more intense blissful states of mind than those gained merely from perfect concentration, in order to reach subtlest clear light mental activity and absorb it in the understanding of voidness. If we become attached to the taste of bliss we gain at any stage of developing mental stability, whether or not in conjunction with tantra practice, and we regard enjoying the pleasure we gain from that bliss as the main goal of our practice, we seriously hinder our development of farreaching stability of mind.
EIGHT FAULTY ACTIONS DETRIMENTAL TO TRAINING IN DISCRIMINATING AWARENESS, OR WISDOM

Discriminating awareness (shes-rab, Skt. prajna, wisdom) is the mental factor that decisively discriminates between what is correct and incorrect, appropriate and inappropriate, helpful and harmful, and so on.

27. FORSAKING THE SHRAVAKA (LISTENER) VEHICLE

The sixth root bodhisattva downfall is to claim that the textual teachings of the shravaka vehicle are not Buddha’s words, while the fourteenth is to say that the instructions in them are ineffective for eliminating attachment and so forth.

The thirteenth is to tell bodhisattvas holding lay or monastic pratimoksha (individual liberation) vows - part of the teachings of the shravaka vehicle - that there is no need for them, as bodhisattvas, to safeguard these vows.

For this root downfall to be complete, the bodhisattvas hearing our words must actually give up their pratimoksha vows. Here, the faulty action is simply to think or tell others that bodhisattvas have no need to listen to teachings from the shravaka vehicle - specifically concerning the rules of discipline of the pratimoksha vows - or to uphold or train themselves with them. No one need actually give up his or her vows.

In studying and keeping vowed rules of discipline, we increase our ability to discriminate between which types of behavior are to be adopted or abandoned. By denying the need to train ourselves with pratimoksha vows, we weaken our development of discriminating awareness. We also incorrectly discriminate the shravaka teachings as being essential for only shravakas, and worthless for bodhisattvas.

28. EXERTING EFFORT IN THEM WHILE HAVING OUR OWN METHODS

If we exert all our efforts on studying and upholding merely our pratimoksha vows, to the neglect of studying and training in the vast bodhisattva teachings concerning compassion and wisdom, we also
weaken our discriminating awareness. When we exert effort in the teachings of the shravaka vehicle, we simultaneously work on the bodhisattva ones as well.

29. EXERTING EFFORT IN STUDYING NON-BUDDHIST TEXTS WHEN IT IS NOT TO BE DONE
According to the commentaries, non-Buddhist texts refer to works on logic and grammar. We can undoubtedly also include books for learning foreign languages or any topic from the modern educational curriculum, such as mathematics, science, psychology, or philosophy.

The fault here is putting all our efforts into studying these subjects and neglecting our Mahayana studies and practice so that eventually we forget all about them. If we are extremely intelligent, able to learn things quickly, have a sound and stable understanding of the Mahayana teachings based on logic and reason, and are able to retain those teachings in our memories for a long time, there is no fault in studying non-Buddhist texts if each day we also maintain our Mahayana studies and practice.

Non-Tibetan students of Buddhism who wish to study the Tibetan language would do well to keep this guideline in mind. If they are able to learn languages quickly and easily, already have a strong foundation in Buddhism, and enough time to study both language and Dharma, they gain much benefit from learning Tibetan. They can use it as a tool for deeper studies. However, if they find the language difficult, have only limited time and energy available, and do not yet have a good understanding of Buddhism or a stable daily meditation practice, they damage and hamper their spiritual development by studying Tibetan. It is important to discriminate our priorities.

30. EVEN IF ABLE TO EXERT EFFORT ON THEM, BECOMING INFATUATED
If we have the ability to study non-Buddhist material, such as Tibetan language, with all the stipulations as above, if we become infatuated with the subject matter, we may give up our spiritual practice and concentrate totally on this less vital topic. Mastering Tibetan or
mathematics does not bring us liberation from our disturbing emotions and attitudes, nor the problems and suffering they engender. It does not give us the ability to help others as fully as is possible. Only perfecting bodhichitta and the perfections, especially discriminating awareness of voidness, can lead us to this goal.

Therefore, to guard against infatuation with non-Buddhist topics - which may certainly be helpful to learn, but are not the main things upon which to focus - we study them soberly, keeping a proper perspective. In this way, we discriminate correctly what is essential and safeguard ourselves from becoming carried away with less vital matters.

31. FORSAKING THE MAHAYANA VEHICLE
The sixth root bodhisattva downfall is claiming that the Mahayana texts are not Buddha’s words. Here, we accept that, in general, they are authentic, but we criticize certain aspects of them, specifically texts concerning bodhisattvas’ unimaginably extensive deeds and the inconceivably profound teachings of voidness. The former include accounts of Buddhas multiplying themselves into countless forms simultaneously helping numberless beings in myriad worlds, while the latter include collections of terse and pithy verses extremely difficult to fathom. We degenerate our discriminating awareness by repudiating them in any of four ways, that
(a) their content is inferior - they speak sheer nonsense,
(b) their manner of expression is inferior - they are bad writing that makes no sense,
(c) their author is inferior - they are not the words of an enlightened Buddha, or
(d) their use is inferior - they are of no benefit to anyone. By discriminating falsely like this, in a closed-minded and hotheaded manner, we damage our ability to discriminate anything correctly.

When faced with teachings or texts we do not understand, we remain openminded. We think that even though we cannot appreciate or fathom them now, the Buddhas and highly realized bodhisattvas
understand their words and, through realization of their meaning, benefit others in infinite ways. In this way, we develop firm resolve (mos-pa) to try to grasp them in the future.

There is no fault if we lack this firm resolve, so long as we do not belittle and denigrate the teachings. We at least maintain equanimity, acknowledging that we do not understand them.

32. PRAISING OURSELVES AND/OR BELITTLING OTHERS
The first root bodhisattva downfall is doing this motivated by desire for gain or jealousy. Here the motivation is pride, conceit, haughtiness, or anger. Such motivations arise when we falsely discriminate ourselves as better than others are.

33. NOT GOING FOR THE SAKE OF DHARMA
The second root bodhisattva downfall is not giving the Dharma because of attachment and miserliness. Here, the fault is not going to teach, perform Buddhist rituals, attend Buddhist ceremonies, or listen to discourses because of pride, anger, spite, laziness, or indifference.

With such motivation, we do not discriminate correctly what is worthwhile. There is no fault, however, if we do not go because of feeling we are not a teacher or being too sick, or because we suspect the teachings we would hear or impart would be incorrect, or we know that the audience has heard them repeatedly and knows them already, or we have received them in full and comprehended and mastered them completely so that we have no need to listen further, or we are already focused and absorbed on the teachings so need no reminder about them, or they are over our heads and we would only become confused by listening.

Further, if our teachers would be displeased if we went - such as if he or she told us to do something else - we certainly do not go.

34. RELYING ON LANGUAGE TO DERIDE A TEACHER
We weaken our abilities to discriminate correctly when we judge spiritual teachers by their language. We ridicule and reject those who speak with a heavy accent, making many grammatical mistakes, even
though what they explain is correct, and run after those who speak
elegantly, but total nonsense.

TWELVE FAULTY ACTIONS THAT CONTRADICT WORKING
TO BENEFIT OTHERS

35. NOT GOING TO HELP THOSE IN NEED
Because of anger, spite, laziness, or indifference, not going to the
assistance of any of eight types of persons needing help:
   (a) in making a decision about something positive, for example at a
       meeting,
   (b) in traveling,
   (c) in learning a foreign language we know,
   (d) in carrying out some task that has no moral fault,
   (e) in keeping watch over a house, temple, or their possessions,
   (f) in stopping a fight or argument,
   (g) in celebrating an occasion, like a wedding, or
   (h) in doing charity work.

Declining to go, however, does not damage our efforts to help others
if we are sick, have already promised our assistance elsewhere, send
someone else who is capable of the job, are engaged in some positive
task that is more urgent, or are incompetent to help.

There is also no fault if the task is harmful to others, contradictory
to the Dharma or unreasonable, or if the persons requesting our
assistance are capable of finding help elsewhere or have someone
reliable to find it for them.

36. NEGLECTING TO SERVE THE SICK
Because of anger, spite, laziness, or indifference.

37. NOT ALLEVIATING SUFFERING
Also because of the same reasons. Seven types of persons afflicted with
difficulties require special care:
   (a) the blind,
(b) the deaf,
(c) amputees and cripples,
(d) tired travelers,
(e) those suffering from any of the five obstacles preventing mental stability,
(f) those with ill will and strong prejudices, and
(g) those who have fallen from positions of high status.

38. NOT TEACHING THE RECKLESS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THEIR CHARACTER
Reckless (bag-med) persons refer to those who do not care about the laws of behavioral cause and effect and, consequently, whose behavior will bring them unhappiness and problems in this and future lives. We cannot help such people if we are self-righteously indignant and disapproving. To reach them, we need to be skillful and modify our approach to suit their specific situations.

For example, if our neighbor is an avid hunter, we do not preach to him with outrage that he will burn in hell. The person will probably never have anything to do with us again. Rather, we befriend our neighbor by telling him what a kind service he provides for making game meat available for his family and friends.

Once he is receptive to our advice, we slowly suggest better ways to relax and make others happy without taking lives.

39. Not paying back help received
Not wanting to help others in return for the help they have given us, or not remembering or even thinking to pay anything back. There is no fault, however, if while trying to be of help in return, such as when they are repairing their cars, we lack the knowledge and ability, or are too weak.

Moreover, if those who have helped us wish nothing in return, we do not force them to accept our offer.
40. NOT ALLEVIATING THE MENTAL GRIEF OF OTHERS
Because of spite, laziness, or indifference, if we fail to try comforting those who have lost a loved one, money, or prized possessions, we are at fault. Those who are upset or depressed require our sincere affection, sympathy, and understanding, but certainly not pity.

41. NOT GIVING TO THOSE IN NEED OF CHARITY
Because of anger, spite, laziness, or indifference. If because of miserliness, it is a root downfall.

42. NOT TAKING CARE OF THE NEEDS OF OUR CIRCLE
It is a great fault to neglect, out of spite, laziness, or indifference, our circle of relatives, friends, co-workers, employees, disciples, and so on, especially when engaged in social work helping others. We need to provide for their physical needs and look after their spiritual welfare. How can we pretend to be helping all sentient beings if we ignore the needs of those closest to us?

43. NOT GOING ALONG WITH THE PREFERENCES OF OTHERS
So long as what others wish us to do or what they like is not harmful to them or to others, it is a fault not to agree. Everyone does things differently or has individual tastes. If we do not honor this, because of spite, laziness, or indifference, we start petty arguments about things like where to eat, or we are insensitive to their preferences and arouse their discomfort or resentment when ordering the menu.

44. NOT SPEAKING IN PRAISE OF OTHERS’ TALENTS OR GOOD QUALITIES
If we fail to commend others when they have done something well or concur with someone else’s acclaim of them, because of anger, spite, indifference, or laziness, we weaken our interest and enthusiasm for them to continue to grow. If others are embarrassed to be lauded, either privately or in public, or would become proud or vain if praised to their faces, we hold back our words.
45. NOT ENFORCING PUNISHMENT IN ACCORDANCE WITH CIRCUMSTANCES
To help others, it is important to discipline them if they act in an unruly manner. If we fail to do so, because of emotional problems with it, or laziness, indifference, or not caring, we damage our ability to be effective guides.

46. NOT USING SUCH THINGS AS EXTRAPHYSICAL POWERS OR THE ABILITY TO CAST SPELLS
Certain situations call for special methods to help others, such as using extraphysical powers (rdzu-'phrul). If we possess these means, but do no use them when they would be appropriate and effective, we damage our ability to be of help. We try to use whatever talents, abilities, and attainments we have to benefit others.

Excerpted from berzinarchives.com
6. THE FACTORS INVOLVED IN TRANSGRESSING BODHISATTVA VOWS
ALEXANDER BERZIN

MAINTAINING VOWS
When people learn of vows such as these, they sometimes feel they are difficult to keep and are afraid to take them. We avoid this kind of intimidation, however, by knowing clearly what vows are.

There are two ways to explain them.

The first is that vows are an attitude we adopt toward life to restrain ourselves from certain modes of negative conduct.

The other is that they are a subtle shape or form we give to our lives.

In either case, maintaining vows involves mindfulness (dran-pa), alertness (shes-bzhin), and self-control. With mindfulness, we keep our vows in mind throughout each day. With alertness, we maintain watch on our behavior to check if it accords with the vows. If we discover we are transgressing, or about to transgress them, we exercise self-control.

In this way, we define and maintain an ethical shape to our lives. Keeping vows and maintaining mindfulness of them are not so alien or difficult to do.

If we drive a car, we agree to follow certain rules in order to minimize accidents and maximize safety. These rules shape our driving - we avoid speeding and keep to our sides of the road - and outline the most practical and realistic way to reach a destination.

After some experience, following the rules becomes so natural that being mindful of them is effortless and never a burden. The same thing happens when maintaining bodhisattva or any other ethical vows.

THE FOUR BINDING FACTORS FOR LOSING VOWS
We lose our vows when we totally drop their shape from our lives, or stop trying to maintain it. This is called a root downfall. When it occurs, the only way to regain this ethical shape is to reform our
attitudes, undertake a purification procedure such as meditation on love and compassion, and retake the vows.

From among the eighteen root bodhisattva downfalls, as soon as we develop the state of mind of the ninth or eighteenth - holding a distorted, antagonistic attitude or giving up bodhichitta - we lose, by the very fact of our change of mind, the ethical shape to our lives fashioned by bodhisattva vows, and thus we stop all efforts to maintain it. Consequently, we immediately lose all our bodhisattva vows, not just the one we have specifically discarded.

Transgressing the other sixteen bodhisattva vows does not constitute a root downfall unless the attitude accompanying the act contains four binding factors (kun-dkris bzhi).

These factors must be held and maintained from the moment immediately after developing the motivation to break the vow, up until the moment right after completing the act of transgression.

1. Not regarding the negative action as detrimental, seeing only advantages to it, and undertaking the action with no regrets.
2. Having been in the habit of committing the transgression before, having no wish or intention to refrain now or in the future from repeating it.
3. Delighting in the negative action and undertaking it with joy.
4. Having no moral self-dignity (ngo-tsha med-pa, no sense of honor) and no care for how our actions reflect on others (khrel-med, no sense of face), such as our teachers and parents, and thus having no intention of repairing the damage we are doing to ourselves.

If all four attitudes do not accompany a transgression of any of the sixteen vows, the bodhisattva shape to our lives is still there, as is the effort to maintain it, but they have both become weak. With the sixteen vows, there is a great difference between merely breaking and losing them.

For example, suppose we do not lend somebody one of our books because of attachment to it and miserliness. We see nothing wrong with this - after all, this person might spill coffee on it or not give it
back. We have never lent it before and have no intention to change this policy now or in the future.

Moreover, when we refuse, we are happy in our decision. Lacking moral self-dignity, we are shameless about saying no. We do not care how our refusal reflects on ourselves, despite the fact that as someone supposedly wishing to bring everyone to enlightenment, how could we not be willing to share any source of knowledge we have?

Unabashed, we do not care how our refusal reflects on our spiritual teachers or on Buddhism in general.

And we have no intention of doing anything to counterbalance our selfish act.

If we have all these attitudes when refusing to lend our book, we have definitely lost the bodhisattva shape to our lives. We have totally fallen down in our Mahayana training and lost all our bodhisattva vows.

On the other hand, if we lack some of these attitudes and do not loan our book, we have merely slackened our efforts to maintain a bodhisattva shape to our lives. We still have the vows, but in a weakened form.

**WEAKENING VOWS**

Transgressing one of the sixteen vows with none of the four binding factors present does not actually weaken our bodhisattva vows. For example, we do not lend our book to someone who asks, but we know it is basically wrong. We do not intend to do this as a policy, we are unhappy about saying no, and we are concerned about how our refusal reflects on ourselves and on our teachers.

We have a valid reason to refuse lending it, such as a pressing need for the book ourselves or we have already promised it to someone else. Our motivation is not attachment to the book or miserliness. We apologize for not being able to lend it now and explain why, assuring the person we shall lend it as soon as possible. To make up the loss, we offer to share our notes. In this way, we fully maintain the bodhisattva form of our lives.
We progressively begin to weaken that form and loosen our hold on our vows as we come increasingly under the influence of attachment and miserliness.

Please note that maintaining the vow to refrain from not sharing Dharma teachings or any other sources of knowledge does not rid us of attachment or miserliness with our books. It merely keeps us from acting under their influence. We may lend our book or, because of an urgent need, not lend it now, but still be attached to it and basically a miser.

Vows, however, help in the struggle to exterminate these disturbing emotions and gain liberation from the problems and the suffering they bring. The stronger these troublemakers are, however, the more difficult it is to exercise self-control not to let them dictate our behavior.

We are progressively more dominated by attachment and miserliness - and our vows are progressively weaker - when, in not lending our book, we know it is wrong to do so, but we hold any one, two, or all three of the other binding factors. These constitute the minor, intermediate, and major levels of minor corruption (zag-pa chung-ba) of our vows.

For example, we know it is wrong not to lend our book, but that is our policy and we make no exceptions. If we feel badly about that and are ashamed about how our refusal reflects on us and our teachers, the bodhisattva shape we are trying to put in our lives is still not too weak.

But if, in addition, we feel happy about our policy and then, in addition, we no longer care what others think about us or our teachers, we are falling more and more prey to our attachment and miserliness.

An even weaker level of maintaining this shape in our lives begins when we do not acknowledge anything wrong in refusing to lend the book. This is the minor level of intermediate corruption (zag-pa ’bring). As we add one or two of the other binding factors, we weaken this shape even further, with major intermediate corruption and major corruption (zag-pa chen-po) respectively.

When all four binding factors are present, we commit a root downfall and completely lose our bodhisattva vows. We are now fully
under the sway of attachment and miserliness, which means we are not engaged any more in overcoming them or realizing our potentials so that we can benefit others. In forsaking the involved stage of bodhichitta, we lose our bodhisattva vows, which structure that level.

**STRENGTHENING WEAKENED VOWS**

The first step to repairing our bodhisattva vows, if we have weakened or lost them, is to admit that our transgression was a mistake. We may do this with an expiation ritual (*phyir-'chos, phyir-bcos*). Such a ritual does not entail confessing our mistakes to some other person or seeking forgiveness from the Buddhas. We need to be honest with ourselves and with our commitment. If we already felt it was wrong when we actually broke a specific vow, we re-acknowledge our mistake. We then generate four factors that act as opponent forces (*gnyen-po bzhi*).

1. **Feeling regret about our action.**
   
   Regret (*'gyod-pa*), whether at the time of transgressing a vow or afterwards, is not the same as guilt. Regret is the wish that we did not have to commit the act we are doing or one we have done. It is the opposite of taking pleasure or later rejoicing in our action.

   Guilt, on the other hand, is a strong feeling that our action is or was really bad and that we are therefore a truly bad person. Regarding these identities as inherent and eternal, we dwell morbidly on them and do not let go. Guilt, however, is never an appropriate or helpful response to our errors. For instance, if we eat some food that makes us sick, we regret our action - it was a mistake.

   The fact that we ate that food, however, does not make us inherently bad. We are responsible for our actions and their consequences, but not guilty for them in a condemning sense that deprives us of any feeling of self-worth or dignity.

2. **Promising to try our best not to repeat the mistake.**
   
   Even if we had such an intention when transgressing the vow, we consciously reaffirm our resolve.

3. **Going back to our basis.**
This means to reaffirm the safe and positive direction in our lives and rededicate our hearts to achieving enlightenment for the benefit of all - in other words, revitalizing and fortifying our refuge and aspiring level of bodhichitta.

4. Undertaking remedial measures to counterbalance our transgression.

Such measures include meditating on love and generosity, apologizing for our unkind behavior, and engaging in other positive deeds.

Since acting constructively requires a sense of moral self-dignity and care for how our actions reflect on those we respect, it counters the lack of these that might have accompanied our negative act. Even if we felt ashamed and embarrassed at the time of the transgression, these positive steps strengthen our self-respect and regard for how others might think of our teachers.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

We can see, then, that the bodhisattva vows are in fact quite difficult to lose completely. So long as we sincerely respect and try to keep them as guidelines, we never actually lose them. This is because the four binding factors are never complete even if our disturbing emotions cause us to break a vow.

And even in the case of holding a distorted, antagonistic attitude or giving up bodhichitta, if we admit our mistake, muster the opponent forces of regret and so on, and retake the vows, we can recover and resume our path.

Therefore, when trying to decide whether or not to take the vows, it is more reasonable to base the decision on an assessment of our abilities to sustain continuing effort in trying to keep them as guidelines, rather than our abilities to keep them perfectly. It is best, however, never to weaken or lose our vows. Although we are able to walk again after breaking a leg, we may be left with a limp.

Excerpted from berzinarchives.com
PART THREE
BODHISATTVA VOWS
KIRTI TSENSHAB RINPOCHE
7. THE EIGHTEEN ROOT BODHISATTVA VOWS

KIRTI TSENSHAB RINPOCHE; WITH COMMENTS FROM LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE AND OTHER LAMAS

A commentary on the bodhisattva precepts given privately by Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche to two Western sangha members in Dharamsala, India December 24, 1988 until January 2, 1989, supplemented with comments from other lamas.

Edited and partly retranslated by Gelong Thubten Lodroe (Hermes Brandt)

KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

In the following comments by other teachers are added when they seem to be saying different things than Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche (KTR).

TT Tara Tulku (source: notes taken by Hermes Brandt during a private teaching, Bodh Gaya, 1990)

LZR Lama Zopa Rinpoche (source: old Kopan stencil)

GND Geshe Ngawang Dargye (source: old Dharamsala stencil)

YG Yonten Gyatso, paraphrasing LTK’s Lamrim Chenmo in Le Grand Livre de la Progression vers l’Eveil (Jujurieux: Editions du Dharma, 1990))

LTK Lama Tsong Khapa, as quoted in the above text.

MT Mark Tatz in his translation with commentary of Candragomin’s Twenty Stanzas on the Bodhisattva Vow, which has appeared in: Difficult Beginnings, Three Works on the Bodhisattva Path, by Chandragomin; translated and commented by Mark Tatz (Boston & London: Shambhala Publications, 1985)
EDITOR’S PREFACE
These teachings by Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche on the three sets of vows, which were orally translated by different translators, were taped and transcribed by the two sangha members who requested and attended the teachings. The transcript was subsequently edited by Gelong Thubten Lodroe, who also checked the translation to some extent.

As Rinpoche’s voice was not well recorded, this was difficult. Whenever the transcribed translation seemed to be inaccurate, while the recording was unclear, he asked Geshe Tashi Pelbar to listen to the recording. Geshe Tashi was most often able to understand the recording. Although the biggest inaccuracies have been removed from the translation, some minor ones may remain and others may have been introduced by the editor, who sometimes made minor changes while understanding most but not all of the recording; such changes, however, were always consistent with teachings given by other lamas. All major changes were checked with Geshe Tashi.

The titles of the bodhisattva downfalls were added by the editor. They do not always correspond exactly to Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche’s teaching. The editor followed mainly the oldest available source, Chandragomin’s Twenty Verses, and for the downfalls not mentioned by that text, Lama Tzong Khapa’s commentary, as rendered by Geshe Yonten Gyatso (see below). The commentary by other lamas was added whenever they seemed to shed more or a different light on the subject.

SCRIPTURAL SOURCES
The eighteen root downfalls and forty-six secondary downfalls are not mentioned together in one single Indian text. You will not find any ancient Indian text that explains all these downfalls together. When you look through the Indian texts, you will find some of them in one text and some of them in other texts. Some of the bodhisattva precepts and the actions which are to be abandoned by bodhisattvas were mentioned by Shantideva in his Bodhisattvacaryavatara. But he did not mention all of the precepts or practices of a bodhisattva because some had already been explained in texts by other Indian masters such as Asanga. Asanga, in his text Bodhisattvabhumī, has mentioned a few of
the Bodhisattva precepts or downfalls, but not all of them. So the precepts that were mentioned in the Bodhisattvabhumī were not mentioned in Shantideva’s text. Only those that were not mentioned there are mentioned in Shantideva’s text. And similarly, Shantideva explained some of the bodhisattva precepts in another text which is called Shikshasamuccaya or Compendium of Training. In that text he mentions many of the bodhisattva precepts which were not mentioned in the Bodhisattvacaryavatara or in texts composed by other Indian masters.

The Indian scholar Chandragomin composed a text called Twenty Stanzas on the Bodhisattva Vow, in which he mentions the 46 secondary downfalls, but not all of the root downfalls because these were already mentioned in other texts by earlier masters. So there was no need for him to mention those and he mentioned only four root downfalls.

In the same way, in the sutras taught by the Buddha himself, he did not mention all the bodhisattva downfalls together in one single teaching. He taught some of the bodhisattva precepts at one place and another set of precepts at another place during another teaching. So you cannot find the precepts of the bodhisattvas all together in one single sutra. You have to gather them by looking through all the sutras. This is why you cannot find all the 18 root downfalls and all the 46 secondary downfalls mentioned together in one single text, only some of them.

So you should not have the wrong conception that the 18 root downfalls and the 46 secondary downfalls are only elaborations made by Tibetan masters. What the Tibetan masters did was to collect together all the bodhisattva precepts which they could find in the different Indian texts. They put them all together in one single text so that future readers and practitioners would have no difficulty practicing them.

[There are different ways of enumerating the bodhisattva root downfalls. The present commentary follows the way they are listed (as 18) in the text of the Six-Session Guru Yoga (SSGY#1-18).]
SSGY#1-4 have as source Asanga’s Bodhisattvabhumī (B#1-4). (MT:) “Each of [the first four downfalls] has two elements, which has led some...commentators to list them as eight.”

SSGY#5-17 have as source Shantideva’s Shikṣaśamuccaya, in which the author lists 14 root downfalls (S#1-14), one of which (S#11) has the same title as B#1, viz. “Praising one self and belittling others.” Some commentators consider B#1 and S#11 as identical and, consequently, do not count them separately. According to Shantideva himself, S#11 has the same meaning as B#1.

Other commentators consider B#1 and S#11 as slightly different and list them separately. Among them Lama Tzong Khapa, who lists 19 root downfalls. According to Sakya Dragpa Gyaltsen in his commentary on Chandragomin’s Twenty Stanzas, downfall B#1 is dominated by attachment, while S#11 is dominated by anger.

Geshe Ngawang Dargye, who counts 18 root downfalls, appears to list S#11 as separate from B#1, as #15 in his The Bodhicitta Vows and Lamrim Puja (Dharamsala: LTWA, 1974), in the following way:

“Practicing, supporting or teaching the Dharma for financial profit and fame while saying that your motives are pure and that only others are pursuing Dharma for such base aims.”

However, in the text of the Six-Session Guru Yoga, B#1 and S#11 are combined into SSGY#1.

SSGY#18 has as source the Sutra of Skilful Means (Upayakaushalyasutra) (U#1) and is mentioned by LTK as a 19th root downfall.

The 46 secondary downfalls all have as source Chandragomin’s Twenty Verses on the Bodhisattva Vow. Ed.]

THREE KINDS OF MORALITY, OR ETHICS

1. Abstaining from negative actions
2. Collecting virtuous actions
3. Benefiting sentient beings
THREE SETS OF VOWS
1. Pratimoksha
2. Bodhisattva
3. Tantra

Generally speaking, the texts that deal with morality such as the Vinaya texts of the Pratimoksha vehicle explain mostly the opposites of morality. They explain explicitly the actions which are to be abandoned, such as the root downfalls. The principal reason why it is explained in such a way is that if we are to do good, for example if we are to practice non-killing, then we first have to know what is the nature of the action of killing, what are the different aspects, what are the undesirable consequences. Only then will we be able to understand the practice of non-killing and its benefits.

For this reason, the precepts are often explained through their opposites, the negative actions; from these, the positive side can be easily inferred. For this reason the bodhisattva vow is explained through the enumeration of the eighteen root downfalls and the forty-six secondary downfalls.

The Pratimoksha Vow is included in first kind of morality: Abstaining from Negative Actions
Within the first vow, the Pratimoksha Vow, there are eight different kinds of precepts, eight subdivisions, and they are all included in the first of these three kinds of morality, abstaining from negative actions.

They are the eight types of vow held by, respectively, the

1. one-day vow holder (nyen-ne, upavasin – “one who fasts as a religious duty”)
2. layman (genyenpa, upasaka – “male devotee”)
3. laywoman (genyenma, upasika – “female devotee”)
4. novice monk (getsulpa, shramanera)
5. novice nun (getsulma / dge tshul ma! shramanerika)
6. fully ordained monk (gelongpa, bhikshu)
7. fully ordained nun (gelongma, bhikshuni)
8. probationary nun (*gelobma, sikshamana*); this vow can only be taken by women. It is not the bhikshuni vow; it is a separate vow.

The first three sets of vows, the one-day vows and those of the male and female upasikas, are taken by lay people; to take these vows you don’t need to become a monk or nun. It is said in a text composed by Je Rinpoche that the first three sets of precepts can be taken by persons who are lay and the other, the next five sets of precepts are to be taken by ordained persons, that means by monks or nuns. Becoming ordained, taking one of the five other vows, means to change your clothing to the monk’s robes, the red robes.

Within the novice vows there are said to be in total thirty-six precepts. There are also some other precepts which are not included in these thirty-six, but these are secondary. When presented concisely, the thirty-six precepts can be condensed into ten, four main precepts or roots and six branches or branch precepts.

For example, the first of the eight sets of pratimoksha precepts is the one-day vow. If you take the one-day vow and stick by the precepts for that one day, it will prevent you from doing non-virtuous actions for that one day. In this way, it helps you to avoid wrong actions.

Taking the other seven pratimoksha vows help you in the same way to abstain from engaging in non-virtuous actions.

**The Ten Non-virtuous Actions are not included in the Pratimoksha Vows**

There are negative actions that are not included in the eight sets of pratimoksha precepts, such as the ten non-virtuous actions. These ten non-virtuous actions should be avoided by all persons who have taken refuge in the Triple Gem. So, taking refuge in the Triple Gem helps us to abstain from such non-virtuous actions as the ten non-virtuous actions. See chapter xx.
The Ten Virtuous Actions are included in the second kind of morality: Collecting Virtuous Actions

The ten virtuous actions, which are the opposites of the ten non-virtuous actions, are included in the second type of morality. In order to practice this, you first have to know the various non-virtuous actions and their consequences (see chapter xx).

The Bodhisattva Vows are included in the first kind of morality: Abstaining From Negative Actions

The first type of morality also includes abstaining from the eighteen root and forty-six secondary downfalls. So a bodhisattva has to abstain from the root downfalls, which are the main transgressions of the bodhisattva vow, and then from the secondary downfalls, which are lighter than the root downfalls, but still are transgressions of the bodhisattva vow.

THE EIGHTEEN ROOT DOWNFALLS

So first mentioned are the eighteen root downfalls of a bodhisattva, called tsa-tung in Tibetan. “Tsa” means root and “tung” means downfall, something that has to be abandoned. In the text, all precepts are expressed in the negative, from the opposite side. They express what is to be avoided. What is to be practiced is the opposite of what is mentioned. For example, it says, “not giving material help.” You should understand that this is what you must abandon once you have taken the bodhisattva vow. What you should practice instead is giving.

1. PRAISING ONESELF AND BELITTLING OTHERS

The first one is the abandonment of praising oneself and belittling others; praising oneself, like saying “I am knowledgeable, I am greatly learned, I am a scholar” and then belittling and abusing others for not being learned.

The ultimate aspiration or the ultimate aim of the precepts of the bodhisattva is to help other sentient beings and not to work only for oneself. The most important thing in abiding by the bodhisattva vow is the motivation, what kind of motivation you have generated before
doing an action. When it is explained in the text that you have to practice the abandonment of belittling others and praising oneself, it does not mean that in the case, for example, that some people are indulging in bad actions, you are not allowed to insult or abuse them. In such cases, if you belittle somebody for engaging in non-virtuous actions, your words might help him from indulging in such actions later on; it might also stop others doing such things. So in such a case, belittling others or saying bad words to others is not against your precepts; rather, it is consistent with your practice. You have to apply the same principle to praising yourself.

For example, in some cases, if you praise yourself for a specific reason, it might encourage other people. In such cases you are allowed to praise yourself. But you are not allowed to praise yourself or insult others for your own immediate and temporal gain.

The main purpose of these precepts of abandoning praising yourself and belittling others is stopping you from praising yourself with the thought that it will benefit you and from belittling or abusing another person with the thought it will help you and harm the other. If you praise yourself and belittle others with such a kind of motivation, it is a bad thing, a negative action.

The purpose of the precept is to stop those kinds of actions. You can apply this same principle to the remaining 17 precepts.

[With this and with all the other downfalls, KTR mentioned, “for someone who has taken the bodhisattva vow”. As I think it is clear that these downfalls can only be incurred by someone who has taken the bodhisattva vow, I have left out this qualification most of the time. Ed.]

LZR “(a) Praising yourself and (b) belittling others, out of desire for offerings, praise, respect, etc.”

2. NOT GIVING MATERIAL OR SPIRITUAL AID
The second root downfall is not giving spiritual teachings or material objects such as food to those who request you for such things. Not giving the Dharma means, if you are a very learned scholar of Buddhadharma and somebody comes to you and asks the meaning of a specific line in a text, not helping him by explaining that meaning. You
have to practice the opposite, the giving of Dharma; that means you have to explain and teach it.

LZR “(a) Not giving material aid or (b) not teaching Dharma to those who have great suffering and are without a protector if you have the ability, because of miserliness or wanting to amass knowledge just for yourself.”

3. REFUSING ANOTHER’S APOLOGY AND STRIKING HIM OUT OF ANGER

If a person has harmed you and wants to apologize to you for that, you have to accept the apology. For example, if you have taught someone and if, with a good motivation, you sincerely try to give advice to a bad person, and that man gets angry and instead of being grateful to you, he fights with you, insults you in a very bad way, but later on he calms down and regrets what he did or said and wants to apologize to you, then you have to accept the apology without bearing any grudge. If you do not, you incur a root downfall.

CG “Heedless of another’s confession, striking him out of anger.”

LZR “(a) Not forgiving, (b) harboring a grudge and retaliating when others apologize.”

YG “(a) Under the influence of anger, hitting someone with your hand or with an object; (b) out of dislike, not accepting a sincere apology from someone who has harmed us and not forgiving him.”

4. ABANDONING THE MAHAYANA; GIVING INCORRECT DHARMA TEACHINGS

The fourth root downfall of a bodhisattva is abandoning the Mahayana teachings. That is, after a practitioner without the right capacity has come into contact with the bodhisattva teachings, the Mahayana teachings and has taken the bodhisattva vow, he might think that the bodhisattva teachings and paths are unsuitable, not realistic. The bodhisattva practices being very vast, he might think that their practice is not realistic, that the six perfections cannot really be practiced and that, therefore, they cannot have been taught by the Buddha.
If you think like that and tell it to another person, you commit a root downfall. The downfall is complete if the other person gives up that particular teaching because of your words.

The text specifically mentions the Mahayana teachings, but implied is also that it is incorrect to say that the Hinayana teachings were not taught by the Buddha.

Asanga in Bodhisattvabhumī: “Abandoning the Mahayana in general – the vast and the profound – and taking delight in giving wrong Dharma teachings.”

YG “Condemning Mahayana scriptures dealing with method or wisdom.”

LZR “(a) Saying that [any Mahayana scripture] is not Buddha’s teaching. (b) Preaching your own fabricated or perverted doctrine to others.”

5. STEALING PROPERTY OF THE TRIPLE GEM
The fifth transgression of the bodhisattva vow is taking by stealing objects, food, wealth or anything belonging to a monastery or that have been offered to a temple or a monastery or to the sangha. If you take and enjoy such things, then you commit the fifth of the eighteen transgressions.

LZR “Taking back, robbing, embezzling material offered to any of the Three Jewels; using material dedicated to the Sangha for self-purposes.”

YG “‘Buddha’ means the Enlightened One himself or an image representing him; ‘Dharma’ refers to scriptures or realizations; ‘Sangha,’ in the case of ordinary people, minimally four monks, or, in the case of Arya beings, any person. The various factors constituting this downfall are the same as mentioned during the explanation of theft in the context of the teachings [on cause and effect]: motivation, preparation, method and completion.”

6. ABANDONING DHARMA
If you say to another person that any teaching that was in fact taught by the Buddha was not taught by him, you commit the sixth root downfall.
The downfall is complete if the other person gives up that particular practice.

The difference with the fourth root downfall is that the sixth refers to any Hinayana or Mahayana teaching, whereas the fourth specifically refers to Mahayana teachings.

**LZR** “Criticizing scriptures or practices of any of the three vehicles.”

**YG** “‘Abandoning’ means saying that [any Hinayana or Mahayana teaching] is not the words of the Enlightened One and criticizing a path one does not feel inclined towards.”

### 7. DISROBING ORDAINED PERSONS

If an ordained person, such as a novice monk, by some accident or misfortune transgresses any of the four root precepts of a monk, then his ordination ceases and he is no longer allowed to wear the monk’s robes. But if he continues to wear the robes, if a person who has the bodhisattva vow forces him to change his clothes and wear layman’s clothes then that is wrong – is the seventh root downfall. Instead, the bodhisattva has to advise him skillfully and has to make him change his clothing in a peaceful manner.

**GND** “Beating or robbing ordained people or causing them to take off their robes or break their vows, irrespective of their keeping pure or impure morality.”

**YG** “With a bad motivation, cause a monk to give up his ordination, steal his robes, wound, imprison or kill him, whether or not his conduct is in harmony with his ordination or his teacher’s words.”

### 8. COMMITTING ONE OF THE FIVE ACTS WITH IMMEDIATE RETRIBUTION

The eighth Bodhisattva root downfall is to commit one of the five acts with immediate retribution, which are considered as very heavy non-virtues, heavy sins. They are:

- killing your own mother;
- killing your own father;
- killing an arhat;
- causing disunity within the Sangha;
with harmful intent, causing blood to flow from a Buddha.

9. HOLDING WRONG VIEWS
The ninth root downfall is holding wrong views. Generally speaking, there are many different kinds of wrong view, but the specific ones meant here are, for example, thinking that there is no past or future life; thinking there is no law of cause and effect, no Triple Gem. If a person who has the bodhisattva vow has such views, he commits the ninth downfall.

10. DESTROYING TOWNS AND SO FORTH
The tenth downfall is the destruction of towns and so forth, by setting them on fire. The words “and so forth” include the intentional setting on fire of a forest or a meadow, because such actions harm a lot of sentient beings; they kill many insects and animals that live there.

GND “Completely destroying cities or towns by bombs, fire or black magic.”

YG “Because of being controlled by delusions, destroying villages, cities, regions or provinces with weapons, fire, black magic or any other means.”

11. TEACHING EMPTINESS TO UNQUALIFIED PERSONS
The eleventh downfall is teaching emptiness to those who are likely to misunderstand those teachings. Instead of getting the correct understanding of emptiness they might develop misconceptions. They might think that, if everything is empty by nature, there is no point in practicing Dharma or doing anything virtuous. Therefore, teaching emptiness to such students, such disciples, can be very disastrous and therefore very sinful. So that’s why this is a downfall.

A teacher must always try and be careful when teaching on emptiness. He should teach it only to those disciples who have the right mental capacity. Before teaching on emptiness, he has to check the intelligence and the mental powers of the students. He has to test them by asking questions. He has to make sure the student is really interested in learning about emptiness and that he has the right
intelligence. After some time, one can understand roughly whether the student is the right person to be taught emptiness or not.

12. CAUSING OTHERS TO ABANDON THE MAHAYANA
If you practice the Mahayana and try to develop bodhicitta, the mind which wants to attain complete enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, but seeing the great amount of hardship you will have to undergo in order to attain enlightenment, you get discouraged, think that you might never be able to attain it, and give it up because it is too difficult, then you commit a root downfall.

Q: Here it says something different: “Turning someone away from working from full enlightenment.”
A: There are two ways of obstructing bodhicitta. One is by feeling that you are not able to attain enlightenment because it is too difficult for you. The other is discouraging someone else from striving for highest enlightenment – acting as an unqualified teacher by giving wrong advice like, “It is impossible for you to attain enlightenment because you would have to accumulate merits for three aeons and you cannot do that.” In this way you discourage another person who is committed to attaining enlightenment and follows the path of the Mahayana. Both if you generate this disinterest by yourself and if you cause someone else to give up the Mahayana, you incur the 12th root downfall.”

LZR, YG, GND “Diverting someone from working to attain the highest enlightenment and encouraging him to work for his own Nirvana alone.”

13. CAUSING OTHERS TO ABANDON THEIR PRATIMOKSHA VOWS
The thirteenth root downfall is causing another person who has taken any of the eight types of Pratimoksha vow to stop abiding by their vow. If you say to someone who has taken a Pratimoksha vow and abides by it, “You cannot attain total freedom from delusions by following the Pratimoksha Sutras. You should follow the Mahayana path, which does
lead to that freedom,” and that person gives up their Pratimoksha vow, you incur the 13th downfall.

LZR “Causing others to give up their Pratimoksha vow.”

GND “Discouraging others from keeping their precepts of individual liberation by saying that it is not necessary to keep these perfectly when [practicing Mahayana].”

14. BELITTLING THE HINAYANA
The 14th root downfall is belittling the Hinayana tradition, either the path of the listeners (shravaka) or the path of the individual buddhas (pratyekabuddha). If you tell another person that the Hinayana tradition is inferior and should therefore not be practiced, and that the Mahayana path is superior and should therefore be practiced, you incur the 14th downfall.

LZR “Causing others to have incorrect views you might hold about Hinayana, e.g. saying that by practicing Hinayana one can never give up attachment, or be released from suffering and delusions. If the other person believes it, it is a transgression.”

TT “Making someone else believe that the shravaka and pratyekabuddha vehicles don’t get rid of attachment and so forth. If the other person doesn’t believe it, the downfall does not occur. Saying one cannot achieve liberation by relying on the Hinayana tenets (as opposed to the Hinayana methods) does not constitute a downfall.”

15. FALSELY PROCLAIMING REALIZATIONS OF EMPTINESS
The fifteenth root downfall is called “lying about the profound.” In general, there are many kinds of lies but the lie that is meant here concerns your realization of emptiness. For example, if you have not correctly understood the meaning of emptiness but give teachings on emptiness to others and pretend to have realized emptiness directly, you incur the 15th root downfall.

LZR “The downfall occurs when the other person believes you have understood emptiness.”
GND “The downfall occurs when the other person hears your words.”

16. SEIZING PROPERTY OF THE TRIPLE GEM
The sixteenth root downfall is taking wealth and objects that belong to monasteries and temples. This downfall can happen to the person who has the bodhisattva vow and who has some control over a monastery or a temple. As it is not considered proper in the eyes of the people to take something directly, he won’t go and take the object straight from the monastery. As he has some power, he will take these objects indirectly, through a second person, and then give them again to a third person. The person who gave the orders and who made the plans will be the one to incur this downfall.

Also if you have a position of authority, for example if you are a government minister and, backed by the authority of your king or president, you force monks living in a monastery or temple to give you their precious objects such as golden statues or other religious articles and you take these away and use them for your own purpose, you incur the 16th downfall.

We have already talked about taking objects which belong to a monastery or a community. The difference between these two downfalls is that downfall 5 concerns taking objects from a monastery or from the sangha by stealing, by taking them secretly without getting permission.

Downfall 16 concerns openly taking wealth or objects from a monastery or from the sangha by using some kind of force, in the face of the monks who own the articles. Here the person who takes the monastic wealth should be somebody who has some kind of power to do that, who has some control over the monastery. He does not grab anything directly, but says something like, “A monastery should not keep precious objects such as golden vases. They should be given to the government. The monks are not allowed to keep them.” So he explains such things to a subordinate, lets him take the object from the monastery and either keeps it or gives it to somebody else.
**LZR** “Accepting material that you know has been robbed or embezzled from the Triple Gem or a bikkhu.”

**TT** “Accepting something that someone else has stolen from the Triple Gem. If you don’t know that, the fault is less. If a king takes a possession from a monk and offers it to a bodhisattva, the latter incurs this downfall.”

**GND** “Accepting materials which have been confiscated by the government from the Sangha, a monastery or a bhikshu. Demarcation of the transgression: the thought ‘Now I have received it.’”

**YG** “This downfall is incurred both by the person who confiscates the object from the monastic community and by the person who receives it.”

### 17. MAKING BAD RULES

The seventeenth root downfall of a bodhisattva is making harmful rules in a monastic community or in a society. There are many different kinds of disciplinary codes and rules. Some of them are beneficial for human beings, not only in this life but also in future lives. But others, instead of benefiting, are harmful. The Vinaya rules laid down by the Buddha in the sutras are the kind of rules which not only help in this life, but also ensure happiness in the future lives.

But if someone who is in charge of discipline makes a rule like “all monks must go and watch a movie once a week” then that rule is not helpful, but harmful for the monks. So if you have taken the bodhisattva vow and make such harmful disciplinary rules, then you commit the 17th downfall.

**LZR** “Taking materials from one who is meditating on shamatha and giving it to someone who is merely reciting texts.”

**GND** “Due to a personal disliking, taking food from those who practice development of single-pointed concentration and giving it to those who recite and study texts. Demarcation of the transgression: when it has harmed the practitioner.”

**YG** “Taking possessions away from pure practitioners with a hostile intent, taking possessions away from monks or nuns who are engaged in an attempt to abandon suffering and giving them to persons who
18. GIVING UP BODHICITTA
The eighteenth root downfall concerns the degeneration of bodhicitta which you have already developed in your continuum through the blessing of your teacher. When you take the bodhisattva vow, you promise to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings equaling space, not singling anybody out. But you might sometimes feel an aversion for someone and think that you want to attain enlightenment for all sentient beings except for that one. In such a case, you cannot generate bodhicitta. If you have already generated bodhicitta, it will degenerate and you commit the 18th downfall.

GND “...out of discouragement or aversion.”

Geshe Konchog Lhundrub “Giving up aspiring bodhicitta.”
Next we are going to talk about the forty-six types of misbehavior that are also transgressions of the bodhisattva vow but less heavy than the eighteen root downfalls. In the text of the Six-Session Guru Yoga, the forty-six secondary downfalls are not enumerated.

In order to explain them one by one, I will use a commentary composed by Gungthang Tenpai Dronme which was published by the Tibetan Printing Press in Dharamsala.

These forty-six secondary downfalls can be divided into seven groups. Six of these are related to the delusions that are eliminated by the practice of the Six Perfections. The seventh group corresponds to the third kind of morality: Benefiting Sentient Beings.

The first thirty-four downfalls, the first six groups, are opposites of the second kind of morality: Collecting Virtuous Actions, so you can divide these thirty-four into the practices of the Six Perfections.

The last twelve of the forty-six secondary downfalls, the seventh group, are opposed to the third kind of morality: Benefiting Sentient Beings.

**DOWNFALLS 1–7: THE PERFECTION OF GIVING**

The first seven downfalls are the opposite of the practice of giving and are counteracted by the practice of giving.

In order to practice the perfection of giving, we have to understand what obstructs it, namely attachment and miserliness. We are attached to food, clothing, belongings, money and such kinds of worldly things. These attachments are obstacles for the practice of giving. Practicing giving will lessen attachment to one’s belongings – the main benefit. If someone has much attachment, practicing giving will make it less. If someone has very little attachment, the practice of giving will help to
eliminate it completely. By itself, the perfection of giving cannot eliminate attachment completely; for that, we need to meditate on emptiness. Only the realization of emptiness can uproot attachment completely.

1. NOT MAKING DAILY OFFERINGS WITH BODY, SPEECH AND MIND TO THE TRIPLE GEM
The first secondary downfall is not making offerings to the Triple Gem. Generally speaking, we can distinguish two kinds of giving: making offerings to the Triple Gem and our teachers, and giving alms to the poor. In our daily life in our societies, we can see some wealthy people who have all the facilities to practice giving, but are so miserly and so attached to their wealth they are not able to make offerings to the Triple Gem, nor are they able to give alms to the poor. As we have taken the bodhisattva vow, we have to make sure that we make offerings to the Triple Gem every day with body, speech and mind.

LZR, TT: “Not daily making physical (offerings, prostrations), verbal (praises) and mental (reflecting on the good qualities of the Triple Gem) offerings to the Triple Gem.”

2. FOLLOWING THOUGHTS OF DESIRE
Being attached to your belongings and considering them as very precious. Actually, attachment to your belongings makes you miserly.

LZR “Wanting to accumulate things out of greed.”

TT “Following and acting out thoughts of desire; e.g. immediately, without further thinking, following an impulse to go to the best restaurant.”

3. DISRESPECTING ELDERS
Being disrespectful to your elders. “Elder” can mean many different things. Some people are your elders through knowledge. Others are elder by age, again others through their position. You might fear losing your position or dignity if you respect and are obedient to your elders. If you think in this way and do not behave respectfully towards them, then you commit the third downfall.
TT, TY “Elders = those who have taken the bodhisattva vow before you.”
GND “Elders = those who have received the bodhisattva or a pratimoksha ordination before you.”

4. NOT ANSWERING QUESTIONS
Not being honest and sincere in giving answers to another person who asks you questions on spiritual or educational matters or any kind of question, because you are afraid to lose your reputation. Such things happen in our societies. If you teach something to someone else, then that person will know it and later on there might less demand for your teachings. If out of such concerns you do not answer a question sincerely and honestly, you commit this fourth downfall.

TT, LZR “Not answering a question or not answering it correctly out of hatred or laziness.”
GND “Not answering a sincerity asked question about Dharma or not answering it properly.”

5. NOT ACCEPTING INVITATIONS
If you receive the visit of your lama or some rich or important person, you should be hospitable and make offerings to them without miserliness. Not doing so out of miserliness constitutes the fifth downfall.

TT, LZR “Not accepting invitations out of hatred, pride or jealousy.”
YG “Valid reasons for not accepting are: you have something more important to do; you are ill; the journey would be dangerous; the host has a bad attitude towards you; your presence would cause discord.”

6. REFUSING GIFTS
[Recording unclear. Translation #6 largely unchecked.]
If someone gives you gold, silver or other precious substances and, with a motivation to use the gold and the silver for the sake of other people, you take great care of the gold, clean it regularly, and inspect if from time to time, then that is not incorrect. But if you want to use it for
your own purpose, are greatly attached to it and regularly clean, polish, inspect and fondle it, you commit this downfall. The difference lies in the motivation.

**TT, LZR** “Not accepting gifts of money, gold and so forth out of hatred, pride or jealousy.”

**YG** “Valid reasons for not accepting are: the gift increases your desires and attachment; the giver needs the object and gives it with regret; the giver is very poor; it seems the object belongs to the Sangha; the object is offered by mistake or has been stolen; the giver would be subject to legal difficulties or dangers.”

7. **NOT GIVING DHARMA TEACHINGS TO THOSE WHO REQUEST IT**

Not giving Dharma teachings although you know the subject, fearing that others gain the same knowledge as you.

**TT** “Not teaching the Dharma to those who desire teachings.”

**LZR** “Not giving teachings to those who are interested and sincerely approach you for Dharma, out of hatred, laziness, jealousy, miserliness, a grudge or negligence.”

**YG** “The difference between this downfall and the second root downfall lies in the mental attitude: the present downfall involves jealousy and pride, the second downfall involves miserliness.”

**DOWNFALLS 8–16: THE PERFECTION OF MORALITY**

The next nine are related to the Perfection of Morality or ethics. You have learned that killing is bad, a non-virtuous action that will have unpleasant results. You might sometimes not remember the consequences and kill another being but then regret it and not be happy about your action. But if you meet a bad teacher who tells you that killing is not bad at all, that on the contrary it is good and that there are no bad consequences, giving you false reasons and you believe him, your ethics start to degenerate. This is the opposite of morality. The main function of the practice of morality is to abstain from non-virtuous actions such as the next nine downfalls.
8. ABANDONING VOW BREAKERS
The eighth downfall is rejecting a person who lacks in ethics. For example, if a monk commits a root downfall and you do not want to have anything to do with him because of that, saying, “You have no ethics, you have lost your ordination,” if you refuse to accept him as your friend, then you commit this downfall. So if such a person comes to you, instead of rejecting him, you have to advise him to confess his defeat. You have to be kind to him; you have to accept and help him.

LZR “Excluding from your compassion, belittling, not forgiving, not helping those who cultivate the ten immoralities, break a pratimoksha vow, commit the five crimes of immediate retribution or commit root bodhisattva downfalls. Instead of being hateful or disdainful, generate compassion.”

9. NOT ACTING SO AS TO INSPIRE FAITH IN OTHERS
Once you have taken the bodhisattva vow and meet people, you first have to see and understand their nature, their mental disposition. And then, with an understanding of their nature, you should talk to them in the most suitable way. The most important thing here is to know whether the other person has faith in the Dharma, in their lama or in the Triple Gem. You have to talk in such a way as to strengthen their faith in the Triple Gem and take care so you do not weaken their faith.

LZR “If someone desires a Hinayana teaching, it should be given so they develop faith in that path. If you abstain from giving a desired teaching to them because it is not your own personal practice or interest, this downfall occurs.”

TT: “… e.g. by dressing improperly or by slamming doors.”

YG “Not applying yourself to follow the Pratimoksha instructions on ethics with a view to protect other beings; e.g. for a monk, to consume alcohol or to eat after noon. If a Bodhisattva who has taken the monk’s vow does not follow these rules, the lay people will not develop faith in him.”
10. DOING LITTLE TO BENEFIT OTHERS
The tenth downfall is having very little regard for other people’s needs and purposes and considering your own purposes and needs as more important.

A bodhisattva should always consider others as more important than himself and their purposes as more important than his own. Even if you think that the other person’s work is much less important than yours, since you have the bodhisattva vow, you have to consider the other person’s purpose as more important than your own.

LTK “Applying yourself to following the rules of the Small Vehicle without giving priority to following the rules of the Great Vehicle.”

TT “This downfall involves proscribed non-virtues: not transgressing minor vows if such would benefit others. E.g. a monk should not refuse to save a drowning woman on the grounds that he is not allowed to touch women. Or a monk should not turn down an invitation for an evening meal, saying he is not allowed to eat in the evening. He should allow the other person to collect merits.”

YG “If a bodhisattva monk is led to engaging in a sexual relationship, he first has to give back his monk’s vow.”

11. NOT COMMITTING NON-VIRTUE OUT OF COMPASSION
If you only generate compassion for your relatives and friends when they have problems and not for rich and important people when they have problems, saying to yourself they can’t have problems because they are so well off, you commit this downfall. Also the rich and powerful can suffer greatly from delusions. They are also objects of your compassion and you should try to help those people too.

TT “This downfall involves natural non-virtues: not committing any of the seven non-virtues of body and speech with compassion and love. The Buddha has allowed us to kill a person if that can prevent him from killing many others. It would save him from accumulating much negative karma and prevent much suffering by the many others. We are also allowed to steal and engage in sexual misconduct if the happiness of other beings is served by it.”
LZR “One must be very careful, however because, without having actualized bodhicitta, it is difficult to transform the seven non-virtues of body and speech into virtue.”

12. ACQUIRING THINGS BY WRONG LIVELIHOOD
The twelfth downfall is living on an improper livelihood. There are many types of improper livelihood. The examples mentioned here are: living by selling alcohol; living by working as a prostitute; by selling for profit statues of Buddhas and deities, sacred relics and these kinds of things; by keeping pigs or other animals, killing them and selling their meat. All these ways of making a living are regarded as improper.

TT “Acquiring things by wrong livelihood. E.g. pretending to be a better practitioner than you are when sponsors are around.”

Nagarjuna describes five wrong livelihoods in The Precious Garland: “Hypocrisy is to control the senses for the sake of goods and respect; flattery is to speak pleasant phrases for the sake of goods and respect; indirect acquisition is to praise the wealth of others so as to win it; artful acquisition is to deride others in order to acquire their goods; desiring to add profit to profit is to praise previous acquisitions. If somebody gives you something he has acquired through a wrong livelihood, you do not incur this downfall.”

LZR describes the five wrong livelihoods as follows: “(1) Flattering or praising others to gain something for yourself; (2) hinting: e.g. saying, ‘What you gave me before was so nice,’ thereby implying you want more; (3) bribery: giving a smaller thing to get a larger one; (4) force or abuse of authority: pressuring someone so that he has no choice; (5) hypocrisy: changing one’s usual actions to make a good impression so the other will give you something.”

13. INDULGING IN FRIVOLITY
Talking badly about yourself, saying things like, “Oh, I am so useless,” or complaining a lot about your perceived physical imperfections. Especially if you are a tantric practitioner, committed to maintain divine pride, it becomes putting down the deity.

Of course, it does not mean you should be very proud and boastful.
TT “Making others (and yourself) agitated by frivolous activities. Distracting them with gossip, music, etc.”

YG “If you cause distraction in others, you commit a secondary downfall.”

GND “Being mainly interested in frivolous activities such as entertainment, sports, drinking, being silly and so forth, causing your mind to wander and you to waste your time limitlessly which you could be using more constructively for the practice of Dharma.”

14. THINKING TO REMAIN IN SAMSARA
The fourteenth downfall is wanting to attain liberation for one’s own sake alone and not for all sentient beings. Such a mind is generated by both types of Hinayanists, the pratyekabuddhas and the hearers and allows them to liberate themselves from cyclic existence. In itself, this mind is virtuous, but it compares very poorly with the Mahayana mind, bodhicitta, in how it benefits all sentient beings. Therefore a bodhisattva is not allowed to generate such a mind. If he does, it is the 14th downfall.

LZR “Bodhisattvas remain in samsara to benefit sentient beings. Mistaking this and thinking they do not try to abandon delusions and achieve nirvana; thinking they are not afraid of delusions as they stay three countless aeons in samsara. By holding this wrong-conception, one may not cultivate opponents to delusions or tell others to do the same.”

MT “…the danger of misinterpreting the stance of the bodhisattva vis-a-vis nirvana and samsara. The bodhisattva does indeed forego the entry into nirvana and instead remains in samsara to assist other beings. But this is not to say that he does not strive to eliminate the defilements that stand between him and nirvana, or that he somehow ‘enjoys’ the state of samsara.”

TT, GND “Having the motivation of wishing to escape from samsara by yourself alone.”
15. NOT AVOIDING A BAD REPUTATION
This downfall has to do with one’s reputation, which can be good or bad. For example, if you are a great discoverer, a scientist or a knowledgeable scholar or you are a very good practitioner and have attained high paths, if you are famous for such things, then you have a good reputation. But if you are widely known to have killed many people or to be very short-tempered, then you have a bad reputation. A bodhisattva has to try not to have a bad reputation and if he has got one, he has to try to get rid of it. If he is known for his short temper, then he should eliminate his short temper.

TT “A good reputation helps to be more effective while working for sentient beings.”

LZR “One does this in order to benefit others; otherwise, caring for one’s reputation is part of the eight worldly dharmas.”

16. NOT HELPING OTHERS TO AVOID NEGATIVITY
This downfall occurs when a bodhisattva sees others around him make many mistakes and does not bother about it, but just keeps quiet, shuts his eyes and lives by himself alone. It is his duty to always use skillful means to help them to eliminate their shortcomings. If he does not do that, he commits the 16th downfall.

TT “If another person behaves badly, it is good to point out his mistakes to him. However, if he is unreceptive, you don’t need to say anything.”

YG “Not using violence or methods that are unpleasant to someone else although you know it would be beneficial for them, for fear it might offend them.”

LZR “Not eliminating delusions of others, when one is capable of doing so; not telling someone of a bad trait of body or speech; not punishing a non-virtuous person in order to eliminate the non-virtue when wrathfulness would be beneficial because you think it would hurt his feelings or from fear of his anger.”
DOWNFALLS 17–20: THE PERFECTION OF PATIENCE
These are the opposites of the practice of patience, which has as its main purpose to lessen and eliminate anger.

17. ANGRILY RETALIATING
One bodhisattva precept is not to retaliate. If, for example, your teacher scolds you for some reason, you have to endure it; you are not allowed to talk back or retaliate for the scolding he gave you. In the same way, if a friend criticizes you for some reason, you have to endure it and you are not allowed to retaliate. Similarly, if somebody hits you, you are not allowed to retaliate and hit back. And if somebody is angry with you, you are not allowed to get angry in return. If you do these things, if you hit back, if you reply back and so forth, you commit this 17th downfall.

LZR “Angrily retaliating if someone (a) insults or blames you, (b) is angry with you, (c) beats you or (d) reveals your shortcomings to others.”

18. IGNORING THOSE WHO ARE ANGRY
If another person thinks that you have wronged him while you have not and he is very angry and quarrels with you, you have to see whether it is possible to clarify the situation to him either at that very moment or later. If you think that you can give some clarification to the other person right away, then you have to explain to him that you have done nothing wrong to him. If the other person is reasonable, he will see the reason and will cool down. But if you think the other person will not cool down and instead become more angry if you try to clarify, then you should leave it for the time being and just keep quiet for some time. And then, later on, when he has cooled down, you should go to him and try to explain you were not at fault. Then he will stop being angry with you and will once again become your friend.

If a person who has the bodhisattva vow does not do this and does not give any explanations to someone who quarrels with him for no reason, he commits the eighteenth downfall.

TT “Not appeasing someone who is angry with you, even if you are not to blame.”
LZR “Ignoring angry people by not trying to relieve the effect of your actions that caused their anger, explaining why you did it, appeasing them or apologizing to them, because of harmful intent, anger or laziness.”

YG “…because of pride, harmful intent or jealousy.”

19. REJECTING ANOTHER’S EXCUSES
If you get angry with another person because of some wrong action the other has done or you do not actually get angry but pretend to be angry and later on the person approaches you and apologizes, you have to accept the apology and once again become friendly with the person. You should say something like, “It is good that you have come to repent your mistake,” and advise him not to repeat the same mistake in the future.

If you do not do that, but remain angry and refuse the apology, then you commit the nineteenth downfall.

The difference between this secondary downfall and the third root downfall is that, if you do not accept an apology from someone and that refusal is combined with the four aggravating factors, then the action becomes a root downfall. If the action is combined with less than four of these factors or none at all, it becomes a secondary downfall.

YG “Out of ill will and an extremely strong desire to harm, not accepting an apology following a dispute. The action is said to be undefiled if the refusal is motivated by sheer indifference. There is one case in which it is not incorrect to refuse an apology: if it is a means to discipline someone’s mind. The difference between this secondary downfall and the third root downfall is the presence (in the third) and the absence (here) of resentment.”

TT “Refusing to accept someone’s confession. The difference between this downfall and the third root downfall is as follows: The third root downfall involves not accepting an apology from someone who has harmed you. This secondary downfall involves not accepting the apology of someone who has harmed another person but regrets it and confesses it to you. E.g. someone has killed many people, then comes to you in order to confess it because you are a monk or a
bodhisattva. If you do not accept the confession, you commit this downfall.”

**LZR** “Not accepting a sincere apology out of anger or laziness. This is different from the root downfall in that, here, the four aggravating factors are not needed.”

### 20. FOLLOWING THOUGHTS OF ANGER

If you get angry with somebody, what you should do is try to stop the anger, try to stop it becoming stronger. If instead, you just let it increase and become very strong, then you might want to hit the other person, you might like to kill him or do all kinds of bad things to him. This is all due to the anger that you have generated in your mind.

If a bodhisattva follows his angry thoughts, he commits the 20th downfall.

**MT** “Harboring resentment.”

**YG** “Not eliminating but nurturing thoughts of anger. Harboring anger without seeing it as wrong and without applying antidotes constitutes a fault. However, if in spite of our efforts we do not succeed in eliminating or lessening the anger, we cannot speak of a fault.”

**TT** “Thinking over and over about some harm you received from another person increases your anger and will cause you to act out of anger.”

### 21. ATTRACTING FOLLOWERS OUT OF DESIRE FOR HONOR

If you try to attract followers and students with the motivation of getting offerings, fame, popularity and respect, you commit the twenty-first downfall. You are allowed to gather disciples if you have the pure wish to help other beings without being contaminated by a desire for offerings, popularity and fame.

**LZR** “Giving teachings, attracting disciples, building monasteries, or gathering people in order to obtain offerings or a good reputation.”

**TT** “Gathering an entourage out of desire for respect and offerings. E.g. a lama having a large staff of servants in order to get more respect.”
22. NOT DISPELLING LAZINESS
Not making an effort to overcome laziness. There are many different kinds of laziness. For example, during daytime, wasting your time with meaningless chatter, going here and there for no specific important reason. Also, it is described in the text that a practitioner is allowed to sleep during the first and second parts of the night. During the third part of the night, i.e. around dawn, he has to be awake and engage in practices – he is not allowed to sleep at that time.

If he does sleep during that time and if he does not try to overcome or counteract the laziness which naturally comes in our mind and just follows his laziness, then he commits the twenty-second downfall. A bodhisattva should overcome laziness.

LZR “Not eliminating laziness, procrastination, delusions of incapability and sleep, which are detrimental to your practice; wasting time and energy on trivial matters of samsara. You should avoid sleeping late or irregularly.”

23. GOSSIPING OUT OF ATTACHMENT
Wasting your time by gossiping, engaging in meaningless conversations. Some people like to hear war stories; others like to hear love stories; different people have different likings for different stories, depending on their different mental dispositions.

If you spend your time with such meaningless talk, then you commit the twenty-third downfall. Actually a bodhisattva should plan his time well and make a regular timetable for his practices during the day. He has to follow his timetable strictly and should not spend the day not knowing what to do next.

LZR “Frivolously talking about objects of attachment.”
TT “Out of attachment, gossiping about trivial matters.”
MT “...the indolence of gossiping and social intercourse.”
DOWNFALLS 24–26: THE PERFECTION OF MEDITATIVE CONCENTRATION

The main purpose of developing concentration is to counteract distraction. By eliminating these three downfalls, the bodhisattva subdues distractedness and develops meditative concentration.

24. NOT TRAINING IN CONCENTRATION

Not training in concentration, not counteracting the distractions that hinder your concentration; not making an effort to develop your concentration gradually from poor to perfect. If you do not do this, you commit this downfall.

"Taking it easy by not seeking teachings on developing concentration and not trying to develop it."

"Not making an effort to study the means of attaining samadhi by requesting the guru for teachings. If you desire to meditate on this, you must approach your guru for instruction. Transgression is not doing this out of laziness, evil intent or arrogance or meditating on samadhi without having received teachings on it."

25. NOT ELIMINATING OBSTACLES TO CONCENTRATION

In general, there are five different kinds of obstacles to the development of meditative concentration and you should know them; you should know their different aspects and their disadvantages, their consequences. Meditating on their faults, you should eliminate these five obstacles so that when you actually try to develop meditative concentration, these five obstacles cannot cause a big problem.

If you do not try to understand these five obstacles or, if you understand them, if you do not try to eliminate them, you commit the twenty-fifth downfall.

In Nagarjuna’s Letter to a Friend, the five obstacles to the development of meditative concentration are compared to robbers who rob you of the wealth you intend to use for giving alms to beggars. The five obstacles rob you of your meditative concentration.

[From here onwards up to downfall 35, the recording is unintelligible. The translation could not be checked. Ed.]
The Five Obstacles to Concentration

1. The first of the five obstacles is attachment to the objects of the senses, desiring the objects of the five senses – forms, sounds, odors, tastes and touchables. Being attached and being distracted by the objects of the five senses leads to the generation of hatred, attachment and ignorance. So first of all, you have to understand and meditate on the many faults of the sense desires.

2. The second obstacle is the wish to harm a rival or an opponent. For example, thinking, “What can I say to hurt him?” The mind which wants to harm an opponent in any way, by any means, is hatred. It leads to many distractions and also to other root delusions.

3. The third obstacle is sleep and drowsiness. It is related to ignorance. Being asleep stops you from doing virtuous actions, it wastes your time. You need to take a short nap during the night, but during the rest of the time you are not allowed to sleep, except for the sake of health, because sleep itself is an affliction, a habit that stops you from doing virtuous actions. When you fall asleep, all your senses also go to sleep, they stop working and your mind becomes very unclear, so you don’t stay in meditation. When you meditate concentratedly and then all of a sudden sleep comes, it really harms you because it causes drowsiness. Drowsiness is an aspect of ignorance; it comes and hinders the meditation because, for meditation, you have to have a very clear mind which focuses on the object. So when drowsiness comes in your mind, your mind becomes unclear, it affects your meditation.

4. The fourth obstacle is excitement. Excitement is an aspect of attachment or, rather, desire. It disturbs you and makes it difficult for you to grasp the object of meditation firmly. Like a child that is naughty and always runs around and never stays quiet for long; when it comes, it disturbs the meditation and distracts from the object. For example, when our mind is focused on an object and something happens outside, our mind leaps up from the object of our concentration and goes to put its energy in the other object. Feeling self-important disturbs one’s meditation whereas regret and lacking in self-confidence also hinder meditation. One has to keep a balance between these by understanding the faults, keeping continuously on
guard. If one does not, then, like thieves, they will rob one of one’s concentration.

[5. Doubt was not mentioned in the transcript. Ed.]

LTK and MT define the five obstacles as: “(1) excitedness and regret, (2) ill will, (3) drowsiness and languor, (4) sense-desire, (5) doubt.”

LZR “Attachment to the five sense objects; harmful intent; sleep and foggy-mindedness; regret and agitation; doubt.”

TT “(1) Trying to meditate, then being distracted by thoughts of good food and losing the object of meditation; regretting that one meditates on concentration and wanting to go study texts instead; (2) Being distracted by thoughts of anger towards others; (3) Falling asleep during meditation; meditating with very heavy body and heavy mind; (4) Being distracted by thoughts of the five sense objects; (5) If doubts come up during meditation, immediately consult a text or ask advice, for doubts harm one’s concentration.”

26. SEEKING THE BLISS OF MEDITATIVE ABSORPTION
Having gained firm meditative concentration due to guarding the mind well, one might get attached to the resulting good feelings, stop trying to develop further and not do the far more important work of developing the wisdom of emptiness and developing bodhicitta. Meditative absorption is not an end in itself but a means for further development.

DOWNFALLS 27–34: THE PERFECTION OF WISDOM
Wisdom is a mind that understands a perfect meaning, which helps a person to do good things; e.g. understanding emptiness, impermanence, etc. Negative knowledge is improper wisdom. Wisdom is a secondary mental factor and has as purpose to defeat improper wisdom. There are eight antidotes.

27. ABANDONING THE HINAYANA
A bodhisattva has to understand all the teachings, including Hinayana, in order to be able to lead the followers of Hinayana as well. By saying a
bodhisattva does not need to study Hinayana, one commits this downfall.

TT “Saying a bodhisattva does not need the Hinayana teachings. A bodhisattva needs to study the shravaka and pratyekabuddha vehicles too.”

YG “Thinking it is not necessary for yourself to study and practice the teachings of the Small Vehicle and spreading this opinion to others.”

28. FAVORING HINAYANA STUDY AND PRACTICE OVER MAHAYANA
Considering Hinayana scriptures as more important than Mahayana scriptures.

TT “If you are first engaged in Mahayana practices, switching to Hinayana texts. This is different from root downfall #18 where you give up the mind of enlightenment by saying, ‘There are too many sentient beings. I cannot help them all. I will work for my own liberation.’”

YG “A bodhisattva has to actualize the Hinayana teachings, but should do it by integrating them into the Mahayana practices.”

MT “Studying the auditor’s vehicle to the exclusion of the bodhisattva collection of sutras.”

29. BEING DILIGENT ONLY IN NON-BUDDHIST TREATISES
A bodhisattva has to lead followers of other religions as well, but if he takes other paths as more important, he incurs this downfall.

LZR “Making unnecessary study of non-Buddhist scriptures, thus neglecting studying Buddha’s teachings. Although it is permitted and advantageous for understanding and helping others, you should not use excessive time and energy in studying non-Buddhist tenets.”

MT “Studying non-Buddhist arts and sciences to the exclusion of Buddhist.

30. TAKING DELIGHT IN THAT DILIGENCE
If you study other religions often and with great enthusiasm in place of your own Mahayana path, you commit this downfall.
LZR “Favoring, becoming attached to or cultivating interest in non-Buddhist teachings when you have to study them. You are allowed to study non-Buddhist scriptures so that you can refute the wrong views, but instead of doing this, you become fond of these scriptures.”

MT “Overly enjoying what diligence in them is appropriate.”

31. ABANDONING THE MAHAYANA
When studying Mahayana scriptures on emptiness, if you get the misconception that everything is non-existent and you get discouraged and give up the Mahayana practices, you commit this downfall. This is the same as the root vow, but it differs in that it is not combined with all the aggravating factors.

LZR “Casting aspersion on Mahayana teachings, the guru, or the subject, e.g. saying a scripture is poor in subject matter, composition, power to help sentient beings or that the subject is boring.”

TT “When studying Mahayana scriptures, rejecting them, saying they are not well-composed, etc. The difference with root downfall #4 is that in #4, one says, ‘such and such Mahayana teaching was not taught by the Buddha.’ With the present downfall, one is not saying that.”

YG “The difference with root downfall #6 (abandoning Dharma) is that, here, one abandons the profound, whereas in the [fourth] root downfall (abandoning the Mahayana), one abandons the whole Mahayana.”

32. PRAISING ONESELF AND BEILTTLING OTHERS
The action is the same as in the first root downfall, but without the aggravating factors.

LZR “Praising oneself and belittling others, out of anger or arrogance.”

TT “In the first root downfall, one does it out of desire for gifts and respect, whereas here out of hatred or arrogance.”

33. AVOIDING DHARMA ACTIVITIES
If there are many people going to a particular lama’s teachings, but, due to arrogance, one does not attend, one commits this downfall.
Q: Is not going to teachings out of laziness included in this downfall?

A: It is not mentioned in this text. We have to be careful with these many precepts. Another text by Lama Tsong Khapa, *The Main Path to Enlightenment (Jang chub Zhu nam *) (?), also gives explanations. All the different texts relate to the original explanation by Candragomin in his *Twenty Stanzas*. There it is explained that the forty-six downfalls arise out of arrogance, pride, and so forth. If one does not attend a teaching due to sickness, it is not a transgression, as the Buddha in his lifetime gave many exemptions to people who were ill.

But Lama Tsong Khapa says that if a healthy student does not attend teachings, knowing that the teacher is qualified, he commits a downfall."

**LZR** “Not going to Dharma discourses, debates, discussions, pujas or ceremonies, due to arrogance, laziness, anger.”

**GND, TT** “Out of pride or laziness, not bothering to go to teachings, pujas, ceremonies, etc.”

**34. DEPRECATING YOUR TEACHER AND RELYING ON HIS WORDS ONLY**

Out of arrogance not going to a particular lama’s teaching and then adding insult by saying that his teachings are not profound.

**TT** “Not relying on the meaning of your teacher’s words but only on his words. This, e.g. in the case the lama does not express himself well.”

**LZR** “Not respecting but abusing the guru who gives teachings and shows the Path, seeking only his words without contemplating their meaning.”

**YG** “Despising your teacher; not considering him as a master: refusing to think that he is the Enlightened One; not showing respect to him by making prostrations; having an arrogant attitude towards him; speaking to him impolitely; attaching much importance to the way he expresses himself and preferring the beauty of his language to the meaning of his words. In short, refusing to take heed of poorly expressed words with correct meaning and rather paying attention to nicely phrased but incorrect words.”
Downfalls 35–46 are the opposites of the third type of morality, Benefiting Sentient Being. Generally speaking, bodhisattvas have to benefit all sentient beings in every way possible. Bodhisattvas help other beings in ways that cannot easily be understood.

35. NOT HELPING THOSE IN NEED
A bodhisattva has to give help to any person, low or high, that needs help. If he does not give it when the other person needs it, then he commits the thirty-five downfall.

Asanga in Bodhisattvabhumi “Establishing what beings require, being a traveling companion, providing employment, guarding property, reconciling differences and meritorious deeds.

LZR “Although being able to, not helping sentient beings in need of help. Eight examples are given: (1) not helping someone doing purposeful work, who asks for help and you make excuses or you are lazy; (2) not helping someone making a journey, who needs help carrying things or for protection, due to laziness; (3) not teaching language and Dharma, if asked; (4) not doing work which may not be Dharma, but which concerns Dharma, when asked; (5) not helping protect another’s possessions if you have the time and ability, when asked; (6) not unifying a couple, if asked; (7) not going to a meal, if you have the time and ability, if you are asked; (8) not going, if invited, to create merits, such as to a puja, if you have the time and ability.”

TT “E.g. helping to travel, helping to give protection from thieves, helping a stranger in your country who does not speak your language; advising someone who in his work has to kill many animals (fishermen, farmers) to do other work, e.g. in a factory, where he would not need to kill many beings.”

YG “There is no wrongdoing in the following cases: if one is sick or incapacitated; if one has promised to give help but has ordered someone else to do it; if one is engaged in more important virtuous actions; if one is not aware of the necessity to help or one is unable because of not knowing the Doctrine well enough. From the point of view of the action: when it would have a negative effect or be in conflict with the Dharma. From the point of view of the intention: if one wishes
to discipline someone by refusing help; if a significant number of persons would take offence; if sangha rules prohibit the action.”

Q: Do we have to give to all beggars?

TT “No, but if they are blind or missing limbs, it is good to give them something. But if you were to give all your money today, tomorrow they would be clamoring for more – they have much greed. If you don’t give because of miserliness, many faults arise. If you don’t give because giving would only increase their craving, there is no downfall.”

36. REFUSING TO SERVE THE SICK
If a bodhisattva does not help or rather does not serve a sick person in need of help, he commits the thirty-sixth downfall.

For example, the sick person might be needing financial help, food or clothing. In such cases, the bodhisattva has to offer help to the other person. Or the sick person might need other kinds of help, might need a nurse. Then too, the bodhisattva has to offer assistance. If out of anger, arrogance, pride of his knowledge or out of miserliness, he does not offer the help that is needed, the bodhisattva incurs this downfall. However, there are exceptions.

If the bodhisattva is sick himself and is therefore unable to help, if he does not have enough money, if it would disturb his practice, in such cases the bodhisattva gets exempted and does not commit a downfall. You should apply these exceptions to all twelve downfalls related to the morality of helping others.

37. NOT ACTING TO REMOVE SUFFERING
If a person has great difficulties and a bodhisattva sees this and he is in a position to help this person, but does not do it, then he incurs the thirty-seventh downfall. It is explained in the text that if the bodhisattva does not have the ability to alleviate the other person’s problem he does not incur the downfall by not helping.

LZR “Not working to alleviate the suffering of others out of anger, laziness or negligence. One sees their suffering but avoids finding ways to eliminate it. E.g. the blind, deaf, paralyzed or with limbs missing,
respiratory problems, travelers on a difficult journey, people having the five obstacles (cf. #25), the mentally distressed, paranoid, people who have lost their authority or position, who have been abused by others.”

38. NOT SHOWING THE RIGHT PATH TO THE CARELESS
The beings in cyclic existence have different mental dispositions. Many of these people – in fact all of us – live without concern for ourselves or for the future and we waste our time. We are always careless, so we commit a lot of negative actions whose result we have to suffer in the future. Seeing these problems, these faults of the sentient beings, a bodhisattva should use skillful means to put them on the right path, to stop them from engaging in wrong paths and doing non-virtuous actions.

But in doing that, the bodhisattva has to see what kind of method will suit the other person most. If the bodhisattva uses a method that is wrong for the other person, he also commits the 38th downfall. For example, if he uses wrathful ways in order to put a person on the right path, while wrathful methods are not suitable for that person, instead of helping him, it harms the other person, so that is the 38th downfall. The bodhisattva should only use wrathful ways if these are suitable for the other person. And if peaceful means are more suitable for the other person, you have to use peaceful means. You should always be very skillful.

LZR “Through anger or laziness, not exhorting, correcting or activating a lazy person or a person who does not know virtuous from non-virtuous actions. If you see a person engaging in frivolous activities, you should give timely advice in appropriate situations and under proper circumstances so that they eliminate those actions and engage in virtue.”

MT “Not correcting those upon a wrong course, for this is the cause of suffering.”

TT “This downfall is similar to 16. The difference is that downfall 16 concerns the beings’ inner world, their delusions, while 38 concerns their outer behavior.”
39. NOT REPAYING KINDNESS
In the world in general, people feel that if somebody helps them, they have to repay that kindness. This is same in the context of religion. A religious person should repay all those who have helped them out of kindness. For example, your spiritual teacher has shown you the greatest kindness of all by teaching you the Dharma. So you should try to repay his kindness.

A bodhisattva considers that all sentient beings equaling space have been his mother at one time or another, in this life or in a previous life. Therefore it is definite that all sentient beings have shown him great kindness and this kindness should be repaid.

With these reasons in mind, a bodhisattva should always make efforts to help other sentient beings in order to repay the kindness they have shown to him in the past. If he does not do that, he commits the 39th misconduct.

LZR “Through anger or laziness, not repaying the kindness of someone who has helped you materially or morally.”

TT “You don’t have to repay a person’s kindness immediately, although that is best. If you don’t repay a person’s kindness because you never meet the person again, there is no downfall.”

GND “Not repaying the kindness which others have shown to you because of harmful intent, laziness or non-conscientiousness.”

40. NOT CONSOLING DISTRESSED PERSONS
In our society, it is customary to console a friend when he has lost someone dear to him or if something bad has happened to him and he is greatly depressed. From a religious point of view, too, we should do that. Bodhisattvas, in particular, should console, encourage and inspire all beings, whether they are relatives or not, whether they are friends or not. They should console anybody who is depressed or unhappy and give inspiration to them. They should advise such persons by saying things like, “These problems will happen to all people in this world. Difficulties will come, but will also go away. And in the future, you will gradually get happy again; there is no point in worrying.”
If a bodhisattva does not console distressed persons, he commits the 40th downfall.

**LZR** “Through harmful intent or laziness, not consoling those who are grieving from separation from their dear ones or possessions.”

### 41. NOT GIVING TO THOSE WHO SEEK CHARITY

If a poor man approaches you asking for food, clothes, money or anything else, once you have taken the bodhisattva vow, it is your duty to satisfy him and give him what he is asking from you. There are exceptions, e.g. if you do not have the thing the person is asking for or if the other person has bad intentions. For example, he might ask for poison in order to commit suicide.

In such a case you should not give him what he asks for because instead of helping him it would harm him. In the same way, somebody might come and ask you for a knife or a gun in order to kill someone else. If you suspect something like that, you should check up before giving the requested object. Only if you are satisfied the requested object will be put to good use, you can give it to him.

**LZR** “Through harmful intent or sluggishness, not giving food, clothes and other necessities to the poor and needy if you are asked and you have spare.” **TT** “Root downfall 2 concerns destitute people who really need your help. This secondary downfall concerns those who are not necessarily poor. E.g. someone asks you for food. If he does not have any food and you do not give, you commit a root downfall. If the other has food, but just does not know how to prepare it and therefore asks you for food and you do not give, it is a secondary downfall.”

### 42. NOT WORKING FOR THE WELFARE OF FOLLOWERS

If you have many followers, disciples, who depend on you not only spiritually but also materially – for food, clothing and shelter – then it is your responsibility as a bodhisattva to help them, to look after them and give them food, clothing and religious teachings, whatever they want to get from you. If you do not do that, you commit the 42nd downfall. But, as we have explained before, if you do not have the resources to help them, you do not incur the downfall.
“Through hatred or laziness, not working for the welfare of your disciples and attendants by not giving them spiritual teachings or material help.”

43. NOT BEHAVING SOCIABLY
A bodhisattva should always try to behave in such a way that he does not make enemies and he does not make anybody unhappy or angry. He should always try to act in such a way as to please his friends and the people surrounding him. If he behaves badly and makes enemies or makes other people unhappy or angry, then he commits the 43rd downfall.

“Being self-assertive, not considering and acting according to others’ wishes and feelings. Within your capabilities, not acting according to their mental disposition. Capabilities depend on one’s level of mind and differ for each individual. If one has actualized bodhicitta, it is difficult not to transform negative actions of body and speech into virtue.

But one cannot do such actions if one’s own mind isn’t capable, even though others may wish one to. But we can do small actions according to others’ minds, e.g. minding our manners. We please them as a way to encourage them in the Dharma. Examples of transgressions are: if one is with Dharma practitioners and one lies down and has a comfortable life without being concerned with others; or if one is with worldly people, using manners that may cause them to be angry or lose devotion.”

“You should be agreeable, in harmony, with those who live with you.”

44. NOT PRAISING THE GOOD QUALITIES OF OTHERS
You should praise others for their good qualities, such as knowledge, great scholarship, architectural skills, skill in making Buddha statues and so forth. If the other person really has those qualities, then you should praise him in front of other people. This will please him and encourage him to accumulate merits. If you do not do that, you incur the 44th downfall.
“If there is a danger of the other person’s pride being inflated, it is okay not to say anything. If a virtuous person is slandered or unfairly abused in your presence and you do not say anything, you also commit this downfall.”

45. NOT TAKING WRATHFUL ACTION WHEN APPROPRIATE

Up to this point, the precepts are setting out various peaceful ways in which the bodhisattva strives to help other sentient beings. The last two precepts or downfalls concern violent or wrathful ways in which bodhisattvas may help other sentient beings.

There are sometimes problems in a society that cannot be solved by peaceful means. If such problems exist in the society where a bodhisattva is living and he has a position of power, for example he is the president of that country, then it is his responsibility to help the sentient beings by appropriate means.

If peaceful means would be useless, he has to take strong action against the person who causes the problem for the people of his country. This could mean denouncing him in public, imprisoning him for life or executing him. In short, he should take suitably rough actions so that the society is protected from those who would cause serious troubles.

If he does not use his power at the right time and does not take action against such persons, he commits the forty-fifth downfall.

LZR: “Not preventing those doing harmful actions from continuing their actions by whatever means are necessary according to the circumstances. The boastful may need to be looked down upon; the violent punished physically; those harmful to a society banished; abbots and disciplinarians should punish, expel, or reprimand a monk who is misbehaving. If you do not take such actions while you have the authority to do so, out of laziness, attachment to the harm-doer or because you do not care about him or the ones he is banning, you commit the forty-fifth downfall.”
46. IN WRATHFUL ACTIONS, NOT USING PSYCHIC POWERS
If a bodhisattva has attained high tantric powers, supernatural powers and is able, for example, to transfer a person directly to a pure land after having killed him, if he does not use his supernatural powers when they would be required to help other sentient beings, he incurs the 46th downfall. Rather, he should use his supernatural powers in wrathful ways, to help others.

LZR “If you possess psychic powers, not using them in a time of need, such as to frighten someone who is about to do non-virtue, so that he will stop, to enhance others’ faith or to subdue them.”

YG “Not using supernatural powers – if you possess them – to discipline beings who threaten the Doctrine and to instill a wholesome aspiration in them.”

So with this, we have finished with the eighteen root downfalls and the forty-six secondary downfalls of a bodhisattva.

Some texts also mention four white and four black actions or “dharmas.” However, as they are not extensively explained in all the texts, I will not explain them here and we will end here our discussion of the bodhisattva precepts.

TT “Pratimoksha vows cease at death, but if you keep the bodhisattva vow well, it carries into the next life. To remember the bodhisattva vow in your next life, you should avoid the four black dharmas and practice the four white dharmas.”

THE FOUR BLACK DHARMAS
1. TT “Lying to your guru and to your benefactors.”
   
   LZR “Knowingly confusing your abbot, guru, or other holy beings with lies. E.g. your guru tells you to do something and you change the subject or you do not tell him about a negative action you did, so that he does not feel badly about you.”
2. **TT** “Making others regret their virtuous actions, e.g. if they practice the lower vehicle, saying, ‘You have wasted your time, you should practice Mahayana.’ Or if someone spends much time reciting Mani, saying they waste their time, causing them to regret their actions.”

   **LZR** “Discouraging others from practicing virtuous actions or causing them to regret ones they did, e.g. someone is renouncing this life and you say, ‘That is good, but it is difficult to keep doing that practice.’ You cause him to have doubts about doing virtuous actions. Even if he does not regret his virtue, [what] you are encouraging him to [do] is a black dharma.”

3. **TT** “Becoming angry or speaking harshly to a bodhisattva.”

   **LZR** “Abusing bodhisattvas out of anger. Whether he possesses that trait or not, if your words are heard by others it is a transgression.”

4. **TT** “Dissimulation (hiding your shortcomings) and deceit (pretending to have qualities you don’t have).”

   **LZR** “Putting on an air of having a selfless thought, but having ulterior motives other than the pure wish to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings, e.g. you pretend to be a scholar or conceal your own shortcomings.”

**THE FOUR WHITE DHARMAS**

1. **TT** “Not telling lies to anyone, not even in jest.”

   **LZR** “Abandon consciously lying to all sentient beings, even at the cost of your life or for laughter’s sake.”

2. **TT:** “Not deceiving any sentient being.”

   **LZR** “Have an unbiased attitude to all sentient beings.”

3. **TT** “Recognizing all beings as bodhisattvas and buddhas.”

   **LZR** “Abandon criticizing bodhisattvas. Since we do not know who is a bodhisattva, it is best to treat all sentient beings as bodhisattvas and buddhas.”
**4. TT** “Encouraging other beings to follow only Mahayana. If you have influence over someone, advise them to follow Mahayana, develop bodhicitta.”

**LZR** “Take the responsibility yourself to establish all sentient beings in the Mahayana path by: a. enthusing them in Mahayana. Even if we are not successful, we must try to do this. b. never being jealous of someone trying to attain enlightenment, rather, rejoicing in their virtue. c. cultivating love and compassion in all actions.”

**TT** “White dharma 1 is the opponent of black dharma 1. White dharma 2 is the opponent of black dharma 4. White dharma 3 is the opponent of black dharma 3. White dharma 4 is the opponent of black dharma 2.”

**QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

**Q:** How about if strong regret arises not immediately following the action, but one day after having done it’?

**A:** That is too late because for the action to become the root downfall, all the four aggravating factors have already been assembled on the first day, when you killed the flea. So the action is already complete, it has already become one of the root downfalls. But regretting your action the day after having done it will make it a little bit lighter.

**Q:** Rinpoche explained that a bodhisattva is someone who has bodhicitta and bodhicitta is when you have the uninterrupted intense wish to gain enlightenment for the sake of others. But here it talks about a bodhisattva acting out of anger. That sounds contradictory.

**A:** That is a very good question. When somebody is a bodhisattva it is not necessary that he should have bodhicitta manifesting in him 24 hours a day. For example, when he is eating food, when he is sleeping or when he is engaged in meditative absorption on emptiness, he might not have bodhicitta manifested within him.

This is also explained in the practical texts like the Lam Rim. Before going into a retreat or into a meditation on, for example, emptiness or
calm abiding, you first have to develop the bodhicitta motivation. During the actual meditation on emptiness, you will not manifest bodhicitta. The mind which perceives emptiness during the meditation, although it does not arise simultaneously with bodhicitta, is sealed by the mind of bodhicitta because you have already meditated on bodhicitta beforehand. So this is an example where you have not maintained bodhicitta manifest, and what is manifest is the object of the meditation, emptiness. So a bodhisattva need not manifest bodhicitta 24 hours a day. Bodhicitta does develop in time but during the early stages it will manifest very seldom.

**Q:** So what defines him as a bodhisattva, what is the bottom line definition of a bodhisattva?

**A:** A bodhisattva is defined as a person who has generated the non-artificial bodhicitta in his mind, i.e. a genuine and strong wish to attain enlightenment for the benefit of others. At the earlier stages of generating bodhicitta, it is not spontaneous. But if you make an effort to get acquainted with this mind again and again, then after some time this mind becomes spontaneous. Bodhicitta is non-artificial when it arises spontaneously, without effort. When the person has generated this, he has become a bodhisattva; he has entered the Mahayana path; he has become a son of the Victors – all these terms are used for such a person.

But he will not always manifest this mind. Sometimes this mind will recede to the level of mental imprints or go to sleep. But the important thing is, the mind should not be allowed to degenerate. If, by certain bad circumstances, a bodhisattva completely degenerates his bodhicitta, then he becomes, once again, like ordinary people, without genuine love, without the desire to attain enlightenment for the benefit of others and he is no longer a bodhisattva. But if he develops the genuine wish to gain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, then he is a bodhisattva, even during the times when he does not manifest this mind.

Another example is the mind that takes refuge in the Triple Gem. When we actually concentrate on refuge, this mind is manifested in our
continuum. But when we think of something else, this mind will give way to the other mind. At that time, the mind which takes refuge in the Triple Gem has not been kicked out or eliminated; it is in a state of imprint and can reappear when you want to think of it, when you once again take refuge. It is similar with anger. We are sometimes angry but the anger will not stay in our mind all the time – sometimes it will subside while other minds appear, some virtuous, others non-virtuous. We always have anger, but sometimes anger is in the form of imprints in our continuum, sometimes it is in the manifest form. So in the same way, bodhicitta sometimes comes in a manifest form, sometimes it stays in the form of an imprint.
9. THE FACTORS INVOLVED IN BREAKING THE VOWS
KIRTI TSENSHAB RINPOCHE

THE FOUR AGGRAVATING FACTORS
The eighteen root downfalls are strongly related to the frame of mind which you have before and during these actions. If you have a certain frame of mind while doing the action then you commit a downfall.

But in some cases, even if you have done the action, but you have not generated the right kind of motivation, you do not incur the downfall. In order to clarify this, we will discuss the four aggravating factors (kun dkris bzhi; “the four complete entanglements”). The term “kun dkris bzhi” means the four things that bind completely, that entangle completely.

[You can also translate it more literally as the “four binding factors”. Ed.]

We know that the first of the eighteen root downfalls is praising oneself and belittling others. For this to become a downfall, you need to have all four aggravating factors accompanying the action. If the four aggravating factors do not all accompany the action, it does not become a root downfall.

1. The first of these four aggravating factors is **not being aware of the disadvantages of the action** which you are about to do or which you are doing.

   LZR “Knowing one is breaking a vow but not caring, because one lacks faith in karma and thinks doing a negative action does not matter. Also, due to ignorance, one may not think the action is negative and so acts contrary to the vow. Recognizing the action is negative makes the transgression incomplete.”
2. The second aggravating factor is not wanting to refrain from it. LZR “Wishing to act like this in the future. Even after doing a non-virtuous action, one desires to do it again. Thinking, ‘I should not do this again,’ makes the transgression incomplete.”

3. The third aggravating factor is to rejoice in the action. In the case of praising yourself, if you are not aware of the faults of praising yourself, you might get attached to it, you might enjoy it and want to do it again in the future. In this case, all first three aggravating factors are present: not seeing the action as faulty, not wanting to abandon the action in the future and rejoicing in it.

   When you are aware of it being a fault but still rejoice in it and want to praise yourself again, then the second and third factors are present, but not the first one.

   LZR “Being pleased or satisfied, or having admiration for having done that action. For example, one commits the first downfall and then thinks, ‘How good it was that I could show off my good qualities.’ Feeling upset or regretting that action makes the transgression incomplete.”

4. The fourth aggravating factor is having neither shame nor embarrassment. These two are quite similar. The difference is that shame is felt in regard to oneself, while embarrassment is felt in relation to others. For example, if you praise yourself and you don’t have any self-consciousness, then you have no shame; if you don’t care what others might think of you, then you have no consideration or embarrassment.

   [Jeffrey Hopkins in Meditation on Emptiness: “Non-shame (ahrikya; ngo tsha med pa) is a non-avoidance of faults from the viewpoint of one’s own disapproval or of religious prohibition. It can involve desire, hatred, and ignorance and has the function of assisting all root afflictions and secondary afflictions. For example, if a monk, when encountering an intoxicant, did not avoid drinking it, thinking, ‘This is something I should not do,’ he would have the mental factor of non-shame. Non-embarrassment (anapatrapya; khrel med pa) is non-]
avoidance of faults from the viewpoint of another’s disapproval. It can involve desire, hatred and ignorance and has the function of assisting all root afflicions and secondary afflictions. If one does not avoid faults thinking that the Teacher Buddha and clairvoyant gods would be disturbed and others would criticize oneself, one would have non-embarrassment. It and non-shame assist all afflicions and act as causes of all faults, for without a wish to avoid faults, one cannot keep from them. Thus, these two mental factors are said to accompany all non-virtuous minds.”

SIXTEEN OF THE EIGHTEEN NEED ALL FOUR FACTORS PRESENT
For sixteen of the eighteen root downfalls to occur, it is necessary to have all four aggravating factors present.

TWO DON’T REQUIRE THESE FACTORS IN ORDER TO BREAK THEM
However, for two of the downfalls it is not necessary: 9, having wrong views, and 18, giving up your bodhicitta. These two actions are so heavy in themselves that for them to become a root downfall, the presence of the four aggravating factors is not necessary.

If the four factors are present with these two downfalls, then the action becomes without doubt very heavy, but even without all four factors, these two actions are heavy in themselves, unlike the other 16 root downfalls.

If you praise yourself and don’t consider it as a wrong action, then that is the first aggravating factor. If you want to praise yourself again in the future, that is the second factor. If you rejoice in praising yourself, then you have the third aggravating factor; and if you are not ashamed of the action and don’t care what others might think of you because of it, then that is the fourth factor. If you have all four, then you have committed the first of the 18 root downfalls. But if one of the four factors is missing, then you have not committed the first root downfall.
The four aggravating factors help to make the downfall into a very heavy non-virtuous action. If one of these factors is missing, the downfall becomes a little less non-virtuous. It will still be a non-virtuous action close to root downfall, but not an actual root downfall because it is not combined with all four aggravating factors. If two are missing, it becomes still less non-virtuous. If there is only one aggravating factor, it becomes quite light. And if there is none of the four aggravating factors, then the action is not heavy at all.

If we explain it through yet another example, if a flea bites us and we are so provoked that we just kill it without thinking, without knowing the fault of killing the flea, then we have created the first of the four aggravating factors. And if we still want to kill other fleas that will bite us in the future, if we are prepared to do that, then we commit the second one. If we are happy to have killed the flea that disturbed us, then the third is also complete and if you have no shame and don’t care what others might think of you for having killed the flea, then the fourth condition is also fulfilled. In that case the action of killing a flea becomes very heavy and very negative.

If you are aware of the fault of killing the flea, but since you are so angry and so much provoked that you forget everything and you just kill the flea, as soon as you have killed it, you become self-conscious and you regret your action and you think, “I am not going to do it again in the future, I will be more tolerant and more patient,” then the negative action is much lighter.

If the action is combined with three or less of these factors or none at all, it becomes a secondary downfall. This applies to all 16 root downfalls that need the four aggravating factors – as soon as one of the factors is missing, they become secondary downfalls. It can be compared with rules of discipline in a school. Breaking the more important rules would cause one to be expelled from the school, whereas infraction of the lesser rules would be sanctioned by a small punishment. It is similar with the disciplinary rules of a bodhisattva.

This all shows the great skill of the Buddha in leading and helping sentient beings. Had he just made very difficult sets of disciplinary
rules, saying “You must not transgress any of these,” it would have been very difficult for all of the students to follow the rules. So he made many different levels of discipline, where some are easier to adhere to and some are more difficult to follow. If you go step by step, practicing what is easier first and what is more difficult later, then you will gradually get acquainted and, as you go on, even the more difficult disciplines become easier.
PART FOUR
TANTRIC VOWS AND COMMITMENTS
10. THE NINETEEN COMMITMENTS OF THE FIVE BUDDHA FAMILIES
LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE

Seventeen of these nineteen commitments are kept when we recite the Six-Session Guru Yoga practice; the commitments to have a dorje and a bell are kept by actually possessing them or at least by having the picture on page 210.

In the Rakshon, Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo says,

I prostrate to the lama Manjughosha. By prostrating with respect at the lotus feet of the glorious lama Vajradhara, I will explain here the eminent method of keeping the samaya vows pure according to the root tantra, the Lord Guru’s pure teaching.

The person who has received well the initiation into the great mandala of the two higher tantras, as long as they live with the vows in their mental continuum, must count the samaya of the root and branch vows and practice the samayas of the five buddha families six times each day.

According to Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche, the five types of buddhas are related to the five delusions, and the cessation of those delusions manifests as the deity. It can also be said that the five impure aggregates, having been purified, manifest as the deities.

But here, the particular thing is the delusions.

The purity of this mental continuum that is achieved by ceasing anger manifests as the deity Akshobhya.

The purity of this mental continuum achieved by the cessation of ignorance manifests as Vairochana.

The purity of this mental continuum achieved by ceasing pride and miserliness manifests as the deity Ratnasambhava.
The purity of this mental continuum achieved by ceasing jealousy manifests as the deity Amoghasiddhi.

And the purity of this mental continuum that is experienced by ceasing attachment manifests as Amitabha.

Each dhyani buddha sits on a different throne. The elephant signifies ignorance, and when ignorance has been completely purified, including the seed and the imprint, that cessation manifests as Vairochana. Therefore, Buddha Vairochana is seated on a throne supported by elephants.

The horse signifies jealousy, so to signify the cessation of jealousy in the mental continuum, Buddha Amoghasiddhi is seated on a throne supported by horses, and so forth.

If you don’t count the root and branch vows and especially the samaya of the five buddha families every day, you receive the bompo.

In the tantric text Tsemo, it says,

The bodhisattva who wishes to live life in the pure conduct of secret mantra should protect the samaya of reliance on the virtuous friend, keep the vajra and bell, the samaya of the mudra, the samaya of eating, and the samaya of protection as taught by Vajradhara.

THE SIX SAMAYAS OF VAIROCHANA

The first three samayas relate to practice of the three moralities:

1. THE MORALITY OF ABSTAINING FROM VICES.

2. THE MORALITY OF VIRTUE, OR PRACTICE OF THE SIX PARAMITAS.

There are ways to combine such practices as mandala offerings and prostrations with the six paramitas. This is one way to keep this samaya.

3. THE MORALITY OF WORKING FOR SENTIENT BEINGS.

In the lam-rim teachings, eleven different ways of working for
sentient beings are mentioned, including giving medicine to those who are sick, showing the way to those who are lost, and so forth.

Working in a Dharma center in accordance with your Guru’s wishes is guru yoga practice. If you combine this work with the six paramitas, by not being lazy and so forth, you are practicing the morality of virtue. And the work itself, which involves teaching Dharma or creating the conditions for other people to practice Dharma and accumulate merit, is the practice of the morality of working for sentient beings.

Whether you are working in a Dharma center or elsewhere, you can practice the Vairochana samaya by doing your work for others. Since someone is needed to do that particular work and you have taken the responsibility upon yourself, you are practicing the Vairochana samaya of working for other sentient beings.

Integrate your practice of the tantric samayas with your daily work by thinking, “I am doing my work for other sentient beings. I am practicing the Vairochana samaya.”

The next three Vairochana samayas relate to taking refuge:

4. TAKING REFUGE IN BUDDHA SIX TIMES EACH DAY.

5. TAKING REFUGE IN DHARMA SIX TIMES EACH DAY.

6. TAKING REFUGE IN SANGHA SIX TIMES EACH DAY.

You take refuge in the causal refuge that exists within others in order to achieve the resultant refuge within yourself.

THE FOUR SAMAYAS OF AKSHOBHYA

These include keeping purely the samayas of the vajra, bell, and mudra.

In order to remind yourself at all times of the inseparability of the method and wisdom within the holy mind of the deity that you practice, and in order to become oneness with that method and wisdom, you keep the symbolic vajra and bell.

Method, or great bliss, is signified by the vajra. Wisdom, or emptiness, is signified by the bell.
7. SAMAYA OF THE VAJRA

8. SAMAYA OF THE BELL
   In order to remember the holy mind of great bliss of the Guru-Deity, you keep the interpretive meaning vajra, which is the substantial vajra.
   In order to practice awareness of the wisdom of emptiness, you keep the interpretive meaning bell.
   Your own body and mind in the nature of method (great bliss) and wisdom (emptiness) is the definitive meaning of the vajra and bell.

9. SAMAYA OF THE MUDRA
   In order to develop the experience of the transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss and voidness, you visualize your body in the pure form of the deity, father-mother embraced, which is the samaya of the mudra.

10. SAMAYA OF THE VAJRA MASTER
    Correctly devoting to the virtuous friend, or vajra master, who is the root of all realizations is the fourth Akshobhya samaya. In Six-Session Guru Yoga, remembering the qualities and kindness of the Guru, and making mandala offerings and the other offerings to him are part of Akshobhya samaya.
    Also, after the Guru absorbs into you, your mind becomes bliss voidness and your body is generated in the pure form of the deity, either Vajrasattva father and mother or another deity. In this way, you practice the Akshobhya samaya of the mudra, the definitive meaning of the vajra and bell.

THE FOUR SAMAYAS OF RATNASAMBHAVA

Practicing the four types of charity six times every day is the samaya of Ratnasambhava. These four are material, or miscellaneous, charity; Dharma charity; charity of fearlessness, or protection; and charity of loving kindness.
11. MATERIAL CHARITY
   This involves giving material help to others; for example, giving money or other material aid to beggars. However, even giving food and water to tiny insects, such as ants, and to animals is material charity. Giving food to a dog or cat in your own home with the motivation of charity can also be included in this samaya. Since you are going to feed your animals anyway, if you do it with a good heart, your action becomes virtuous; and by recognizing that this giving is part of the tantric samaya of Ratnasambhava, you create good karma incidentally.
   His Holiness Serkong Rinpoche used to throw food to dogs in the streets, and he told me this was the samaya of offering material charity.

12. DHARMA CHARITY
   According to your own capacity, you give Dharma charity to those who are ripe, or suitable, to receive it.

13. CHARITY OF FEARLESSNESS
   This means protecting beings from danger. If someone is ill, giving them medicine or reciting mantras to aid their recovery is also the charity of fearlessness.
   His Holiness Serkong Rinpoche often rescued insects that had fallen into water, thus protecting them from danger. This is also the charity of fearlessness.
   Talking about thought transformation and the shortcomings of samsara in order to calm someone with a relationship problem is the charity of fearlessness as well as Dharma charity, which creates the most merit.
   Whenever you speak of Dharma to others, that Dharma charity itself is also the charity of fearlessness because Dharma is the best protection, protecting the mind from all obscurations. Teaching Dharma is the best charity of fearlessness.
   Other examples of the charity of fearlessness are bringing peace to someone’s mind through counseling them about their problems or through giving them material help; rescuing an insect that has fallen into water or is being attacked by another insect; protecting a mouse
from being killed by a cat.

14. CHARITY OF LOVING KINDNESS

This involves wishing all sentient beings to have happiness. Even though you may not be wealthy or have material aid to give, you should practice tonglen, giving everything (merits, possessions, body) to sentient beings six times a day. This is done with a particular offering verse in Six-Session Guru Yoga.

THE THREE SAMAYAS OF AMITABHA

15. EXTERNAL SAMAYA REFERS TO ACTION AND PERFORMANCE TANTRAS

16. INTERNAL, OR SECRET, SAMAYA REFERS TO YOGA TANTRA AND HIGHEST YOGA TANTRA

17. THE THIRD SAMAYA INVOLVES PRACTICING INDIVIDUALLY, WITHOUT CONFUSION, THE SUTRAYANA, PARAMITAYANA, AND TANTRAYANA

You pledge to practice now those paths that you have the capacity to practice; and generate the wish to practice later those you cannot practice now because you lack the capability. For example, certain completion stage practices of highest yoga tantra, instead of becoming the path to enlightenment, can be dangerous.

THE TWO SAMAYAS OF AMOGHASIDDHI

18. KEEPING PURELY ALL THE SAMAYAS OF THE OTHER BUDDHA FAMILIES.

19. MAKING THE FOUR TYPES OF OFFERINGS: OUTER, INNER, SECRET, AND ABSOLUTE.

Outer offerings are the physical offerings performed on the altar,
the two waters and so forth.

Offering the five meats and five nectars is the inner offering. After blessing, purifying, actualizing, and making them inexhaustible, you offer the five meats and five nectars as undefiled transcendental wisdom nectar.

You make the secret offering by clarifying yourself as the father and mother in union, blessing the white and red drops, and generating simultaneously born bliss, which you then offer.

The absolute offering is that bliss meditating on emptiness.

COLOPHON
Compiled from the teachings of Lama Zopa Rinpoche during Heruka initiation at Vajrapani Institute, USA, in October, 1988; Vajrayogini initiation at Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa, Italy, in September, 1989; and commentary to Six-Session Guru Yoga at Katoomba, Australia in September, 1991.

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THE FIVE BUDDHA-FAMILIES
Alexander Berzin

The five Buddha-families are talking about family traits or characteristics: the characteristics of everybody who can become a Buddha. It’s the five characteristics of the family of everybody who can become a Buddha. Right? It’s a family. We all belong to the family of people who can become Buddhas. Everybody can become a Buddha. So these characteristics, these five characteristics, are Buddha-nature. These are the aspects that allow us to become a Buddha. So all the discussion of Buddha-families, and so on, is a discussion about
Buddha-nature. That’s very important to realize, otherwise it just becomes a discussion of the classification of insects. We’re not talking about classification of insects or the classification of various Buddha-figures; we’re talking about Buddha-nature.

So we can speak of five aspects of Buddha-nature, and we can speak about these in various manifestations. So we can speak about five general aspects: body, speech, mind, good qualities, and enlightening influence (which is sometimes called activity). Enlightening influence: it enlightens others. But it’s not yet a Buddha’s activity because we are talking about Buddha-nature, what will bring that about. So we all have these five aspects. We have body, speech, mind, we have some good qualities, and we are able to influence others in certain ways – we can act in certain ways. Then another level of these five aspects of Buddha-nature are the five aggregates. And another level is the five types of deep awareness – sometimes called the five wisdoms, but that’s not a very good term because insects have it as well.

And when these five aspects of Buddha-nature become clouded with unawareness and grasping for solid existence, then we get the five types of disturbing emotions and attitudes. And there are certain bonding practices, certain practices that we can do that will help us to remove these obscurations from these five types of Buddha-nature. So that’s what this is all about. We’re talking about nineteen practices – a certain number for each of these five aspects of Buddha-nature – practices that will help us to remove the obscurations of the five aspects of Buddha-nature, to remove the disturbing emotions that they have come to manifest. So that’s what these nineteen practices are all about. With an empowerment, with an initiation, we activate Buddha-nature – these potentials. And now with these bonding practices, they help us to remove the obscurations from them. Well, we’ll do them in order. But they are naivety, attachment or longing desire, anger, pride, and jealousy.

So let’s look at each of these five families, these five aspects of Buddha-nature, one by one.
VAIROCHANA
First we have Vairochana. (Vairochana. Two short syllables, not “Vairochaana.” Vairochana. That’s when it gets into a wrong habit of how to pronounce.) So Vairochana is body – these five: body, speech, mind, etc. It’s body, the form aggregate, and mirror-like deep awareness.

Mirror-like awareness especially reflects – takes in the data of forms of physical phenomena, sensory objects – especially, but not exclusively; but especially that, not exclusively that. It takes the data in of everything, but the emphasis is on the sense objects. And so that’s the format of it. And so the mirror-like awareness is obscured – it becomes clouded – and so you get naivety, being closed, don’t know what is going on. So this becomes solidity, then; gets very solid. And this becomes the body again – form aggregate.

So there are six bonding practices [samayas, or commitments] to help us to loosen that up so that we can realize the full potentials of this family trait, this Buddha-nature, Vairochana Buddha-nature. So the first three are the three refuges. So taking safe direction in the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha. Safe direction: we put a direction in our life and then, when the direction is there in our life, everything is clear – clear what we are doing, where we are going, what we’re doing in life. So then the mind becomes clear, like a mirror, to be able to take in all the data of what’s going on.

And then the other three of the six are the three types of ethical self-discipline: to restrain from destructive actions, to engage in constructive actions – that’s referring specifically to listening, thinking, and meditating on the teachings – and then the discipline to benefit sentient beings. So this gives a form to our mental continuum, a form to our lives. That’s again using the body, the form aggregate; we are transforming it to the fullest thing, and we can deal with proper forms, like the mirror. If we have a certain form, a certain structure, then we can be open (like a mirror) to situations, without a doubt of what to do. So we can be more open because it’s clear – the basic form of what we are doing.
Then we have the Ratnasambhava family. (“bhava” – that ‘a’ has a long mark over it, so that’s why that bit’s the accent.) So Ratnasambhava is good qualities, **the feeling aggregate, and equalizing deep awareness.** Feeling aggregate is talking about feeling some level of happiness, unhappiness, or neutral; that’s all it’s talking about. And equalizing deep awareness is putting things together, considering them together.

So when we think of our own good qualities – our wealth, our intelligence, our good looks, etc. – then we compare them to what others have, that’s equalizing. When we have more than others, we feel happy about that. Less than others, we feel unhappy about that. Now if we talk about feeling happy when we have more, and then we add self-cherishing to this – so it becomes obscured – so then we don’t view ourselves as equal to others. So it makes a problem here with the equalizing awareness, and so we get stinginess (we don’t want to share with others) and we get pride and arrogance (we think we’re better). So the disturbing emotions here are twofold: on the one hand there is stinginess, and on the other hand there’s pride and arrogance. And when we are arrogant, then that makes a block in gaining any good qualities because we think we know everything, so nobody can teach us anything, so we can’t improve.

How do we overcome this? We’ve the four bonding practices of Ratnasambhava, which are the four types of giving. So, giving material things. Giving dharma, which is teaching, it’s advice, our positive forces or positive potentials to others – this is all giving dharma. And then giving love, which is the wish for others to be happy. And giving them freedom from fear. So, giving them freedom from fear could mean saving them from difficult situations, bringing them to enlightenment so they don’t have fear of anything, and it can also refer to equanimity – giving them equanimity – which also connects here with the equalizing awareness.

Equanimity means that I’m not going to cling to you with attachment, I’m not going to reject you with anger, and I’m not going to ignore or neglect you with being closed or naive. So, because of that,
you have nothing to be afraid of from me. You don’t have to be afraid that I am going to cling to you; you don’t have to be afraid that I’m going to reject you; you don’t have to be afraid that I’m going to ignore you. And also, if we give love to others by wishing them to be happy and not to be unhappy, that also connects with this awareness that we are all equal. The basis for it is that everybody wants to be happy, nobody wants to be unhappy; so we’re all equal in that. And that’s talking about our equality – we’re being equal in terms of the aggregate of feeling – isn’t it? In terms of feeling happy and not wanting to feel unhappy. And with equanimity we treat everybody equally. We’re trying to bring everybody happiness. And when we overcome pride, we can gain all good qualities.

So you see, like this, when we discuss a Buddha-family, all these various aspects fit together. Good qualities, the feeling aggregate, equalizing awareness, stinginess, pride and arrogance, the four types of giving. These aren’t just lists, like they’re a chart. The point is to put it together, different pieces of the puzzle – put them together. Often when we study tantra, we’ve got all these lists – the five this, and the five that, and so on – and it becomes rather overwhelming, but it doesn’t have to be. Like there’s the different pieces of a puzzle that fit together. And so that’s the work that we have to do; it’s to see how they fit together. So I’m giving some indications here of how they do fit. But you have to work further on it and think about it, because underlying it is indications of how to practice – what to do.

**AMITABHA**

Then the next Buddha family is Amitabha. And Amitabha is speech, the **aggregate of distinguishing** – it’s usually translated as “recognition” – and individualizing deep awareness.

“Distinguishing” means to distinguish something within a sense field: distinguish the shape and color of a face from the shape and colors of the wall and the curtain behind it. And then that forms the basis for categorizing things with individual words – it’s individualizing them – and that leads of course to speech, words for things. And when this becomes obscured then we not only distinguish one individual
thing, but we make it more special than everything else. Then we get attachment, desire and attachment. So that’s the disturbing emotion.

Desire and attachment: This is more special than anything else. This one. “This sheep is more special and more beautiful than all the other sheep. More beautiful than all the others. I’m in love with this sheep.”

Participant: This can also be with teachers.

Alex: With teachers. It can be anything. With ice cream...

Everything.

It’s just – All you’re doing is individualizing; you are distinguishing it in the sense field. Distinguishing it, individualizing it, maybe giving it a word – speech – grasping for true existence: “This is the special one!”

So there are three bonding practices to help us to overcome this. And these are upholding the various divisions of the teachings. The first is to uphold the teachings of the three sutra vehicles – that’s the teachings of the shravakas, pratyekabuddhas and bodhisattvas. And then the second is to uphold the teachings of the two outer classes of tantra – those are the first two classes: kriya and charya. And the third is upholding the teachings of the two secret or hidden classes of tantra – that’s yoga and anuttarayoga tantra. “Upholding” doesn’t mean necessarily to practice them all, but it means not to deny them, not to abandon them, not to say that this isn’t the teaching of the Buddha.

So you see how it works? What we’re doing is we’re distinguishing the individual aspects of Buddha’s teachings. By upholding all these individual aspects of the Buddha’s teachings, that helps us to practice in a very pure way this individualizing awareness, distinguishing, speech – teach them all – without attachment to any of them. You see how it works?

It’s the same in each of these Buddha-families. By practicing all the different types of giving, then that helps us to realize not to be stingy, not to be proud that I’m any better, because we’re giving to everybody. So we see everybody as equal. So that helps us to develop this equalizing awareness, particularly equalizing in terms of everybody wants to be happy not to be unhappy. Then we can develop all the good qualities – we’re generous, we’re giving.
AMOGHASIDDHI
So Amoghasiddhi, the fourth family, is enlightening influence – our activity – and the aggregate of affecting variables [compositional factors]. Among all the affecting variables, the one that’s usually emphasized the most is intention. That is also accomplishing deep awareness. The deep awareness of accomplishing – to do things, to relate, do something.

So with the intention to do something, or to relate to someone, we accomplish things, accomplish something. In this way, we act, we have an influence on others. I mean, it’s how those three things fit together. Now when this is obscured, we have envy and jealousy. So instead of doing something ourselves to accomplish a goal, we’re jealous that somebody else has accomplished it.

The two bonding practices to overcome this are to make offerings and to uphold all our vows. Not only our vows, but our commitments, the bonding practices – to uphold all of that. So that means to do everything. We keep the vows, we do the practices – we do something. Doing it, not just jealous of somebody else. We do it ourselves. It helps to break through that block.

And when we make offerings, we use what we have to benefit others. That’s an action. Actually make the offerings, rather than feeling jealous at what others are doing. In other words: whatever we have, we use it, rather than being jealous that we don’t have as much as somebody else, that they have more.

AKSHOBHYA
And then the fifth one is the Akshobhya family. That’s the mind, it’s the aggregate of consciousness, and the deep awareness of the sphere of reality (Skt. dharmadhatu).

So with reality awareness, we’re aware of the two truths of things. That’s what it’s referring to. What something is, and how it exists. And to cognize something for what it is. Well, that’s what primary consciousness does – the aggregate of consciousness – it cognizes something as a sight, or as a sound, or as a smell. Now, to cognize something for what it is, this involves discriminating awareness: an
object is this and not that. So when this is obscured, we reject something because it’s not that, right? So we have anger. “You didn’t act properly. Naughty child!” We’ll get angry. What’s underneath that is discriminating: you acted like this and not like that. You can see the connection here with anger?

So there’s four bonding practices to overcome this. This is keeping or upholding a vajra – a dorje (rdo-rje) in Tibetan – a bell, a mudra, and a healthy relation with a spiritual teacher.

So in the highest class of tantra, the vajra signifies a blissful awareness. And the bell means discriminating awareness of voidness. The mudra means keeping these two inseparable, and that is symbolized by the image of a couple in union. So visualizing ourselves in that form reminds us of blissful awareness and a blissful understanding of voidness. And “mudra” can also mean to keep this blissful awareness of voidness inseparable from our bodily appearance.

So we’re not talking just about keeping it in your pocket – these ritual instruments – we’re talking about keeping what they symbolize, what they represent. So when we maintain this blissful awareness of voidness – inseparable, like a mudra – then that’s the method for gaining this reality awareness, the reality deep awareness, the simultaneous awareness of the two truths. But also, by having our mind like this, that helps us to fulfill our own purposes. And that needs to be in conjunction with having a body to fulfill the purposes of others. That’s the other meaning of mudra – the mind and body inseparable. And the way to gain this blissful understanding of voidness is through the inspiration from the teacher. So the healthy relationship with a teacher.

CONCLUSION
So we can see that keeping these nineteen practices, these closely bonding practices, it’s not just: here are the rules and the laws that Buddha set down, and obey them and you’ll get enlightened – we’re not talking about that; not that kind of system – and if you don’t obey them, then you’re guilty.
So we can use these five types of Buddha-nature to their fullest capacity, whether we speak in terms of the five general aspects – body, speech, mind, qualities, and activity – or whether we specify this in terms of mind itself, the five types of deep awareness. Okay? So that’s the purpose of this practice. So when we try to be mindful of this practice as a way of working with Buddha-nature, that makes it far more meaningful. We know what we’re doing and why we’re doing it. And although we’re just doing a recitation and visualization with this practice, the point is to actually do these nineteen practices in our daily life; this is just to remind us.

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11. THE FOURTEEN COMMON ROOT TANTRIC VOWS
ALEXANDER BERZIN

OVERVIEW
As with bodhisattva vows, there are root and secondary tantric vows, which we promise to keep until reaching enlightenment and which continue on our mental continuums into future lives.

The Gelug, Kagyu, and Sakya traditions confer these vows with any empowerment (dbang, initiation), subsequent permission (rjes-snang, permission), or mantra-gathering (sngags-btus) for any practice from one of the two higher classes of tantra - yoga or anuttarayoga - according to their fourfold classification scheme.

The Nyingma tradition confers them with any of the above three rituals for any practice from one of the four higher tantra classes - yoga, mahayoga, anuyoga, or atiyoga (dzogchen) - according to its sixfold scheme.

Most details from the discussion of bodhisattva vows pertain to the tantric vows as well.

The root tantric vows are to refrain from fourteen actions, which, if committed with the four binding factors (kun-dkris bzhi), constitute a root downfall (sngagskyi rtsa-ltung) and precipitate a loss of the tantric vows.

Without these vows shaping our lives, we cannot gain attainments or realizations from tantric practice. This is because our practice will lack the necessary supporting context. Except for one of the tantric root downfall actions, giving up bodhichitta - the same as with the root bodhisattva vows - a transgression of any of the other thirteen, without the four binding factors being complete, merely weakens the tantric vows. It does not eliminate them from our mental continuums.
There are two variations of the root tantric vows, one specific to Kalachakra and one common to all yoga and anuttarayoga tantras, including Kalachakra.

Here, we shall follow the explanation of the common root tantric vows given in An Explanation of Secret Mantra Ethical Discipline: A Cluster of Fruit of Actual Attainments (gSang-sngags-kyi tshul-khrims-kyi rnam-bshad dngos-grub-kyi snye-ma) by the early fifteenth-century Gelug founder Tsongkhapa. We shall supplement it from A Lamp to Illuminate the Closely Bonding Practices (Dam-tshig gsal-ba’i sgron-me) by the late fifteenth-century Gelug master Kaydrub Norzang-gyatso.

The following root vows are included for recitation in verse B7 in Six-Session Guru Yoga (page 121).

1. SCORNING OR DERIDING OUR VAJRA MASTERS
The object is any teacher from whom we have received empowerment, subsequent permission, or mantra-gathering into any class of tantra, full or partial explanation of any of their texts, or oral guidelines for any of their practices. Scorning or deriding such masters means showing them contempt, faulting or ridiculing them, being disrespectful or impolite, or thinking or saying that their teachings or advice were useless.

Having formerly held them in high regard, with honor and respect, we complete this root downfall when we forsake that attitude, reject them as our teachers, and regard them with haughty disdain. Such scornful action, then, is quite different from following the advice in The Kalachakra Tantra to keep a respectful distance and no longer study or associate with a tantric master whom we decide is inappropriate for us, not properly qualified, or who acts in an improper manner.

Scorning or belittling our teachers of only topics that are not unique to tantra, such as compassion or voidness, or who confer upon us only safe direction (refuge), or either pratimoksha or bodhisattva vows, does not technically constitute this first tantric root downfall. Such actions, however, seriously hamper our spiritual progress.
2. TRANSGRESSING THE WORDS OF AN ENLIGHTENED ONE
The objects of this action are specifically the contents of an enlightened being’s teachings concerning pratimoksha, bodhisattva, or tantric vows - whether that person be the Buddha himself or a later great master.

Committing this downfall is not simply to transgress a particular vow from one of these sets, having taken it, but to do so with two additional factors present. These are fully acknowledging that the vow derives from someone who has removed all mental obscurations, and trivializing it by thinking or saying that violating it brings no negative consequences. Trivializing and transgressing either injunctions we know an enlightened being has imparted other than those in any of the three sets of vows we have taken, or advice we do not realize an enlightened being has offered, does not constitute a tantric root downfall. It creates obstacles, however, in our spiritual path.

3. BECAUSE OF ANGER, FAULTING OUR VAJRA BROTHERS OR SISTERS
Vajra brothers and sisters are those who hold tantric vows and have received an empowerment into any Buddha-figure system of any class of tantra from the same tantric master.

The empowerments do not need to be received at the same time, nor do they need to be into the same system or class of tantra.

This downfall occurs when, knowing full well that certain persons are our vajra brothers or sisters, we taunt or verbally abuse them to their face about faults, shortcomings, failings, mistakes, transgressions, and so on that they may or may not possess or have committed, and they understand what we say.

The motivation must be hostility, anger, or hatred.

Pointing out the weaknesses of such persons in a kind manner, with the wish to help them overcome them, is not a fault.

4. GIVING UP LOVE FOR SENTIENT BEINGS
Love is the wish for others to be happy and to have the causes for happiness.
The downfall is wishing the opposite for any being, even the worst serial murderer - namely, wishing someone to be divested of happiness and its causes. The causes for happiness are fully understanding reality and the karmic laws of behavioral cause and effect. We would at least wish a murderer to gain sufficient realization of these points so that he never repeats his atrocities in future lives, and so eventually experiences happiness.

Although it is not a tantric root downfall to ignore someone whom we are capable of helping, it is a downfall to think how wonderful it would be if a particular being were never happy.

5. GIVING UP BODHICHITTA
This is the same as the eighteenth bodhisattva root downfall, and amounts to giving up the aspiring state of bodhichitta by thinking we are incapable of attaining Buddhahood for the sake of all beings.

Even without the four binding factors present, such a thought voids us of both bodhisattva and tantric vows.

6. DERIDING OUR OWN OR OTHERS’ TENETS
This is the same as the sixth bodhisattva root downfall, forsaking the holy Dharma, and refers to proclaiming that any of the Buddhist textual teachings are not Buddha’s words. “Others’ tenets” refer to the sutras of the shravaka, pratyekabuddha, or bodhisattva (Mahayana) vehicles, while “our own” are the tantras, also within the Mahayana fold.

7. DISCLOSING CONFIDENTIAL TEACHINGS TO THOSE WHO ARE UNRIPE
Confidential (secret) teachings concern actual specific generation (bskyed-rim) or complete stage (rdzogs-rim) practices for realizing voidness that are not shared in common with less advanced levels of practice.

They include details of specific sadhanas and of techniques for actualizing a greatly blissful deep awareness of voidness with clear light mental activity.
Those unripe for them are people who have not received the appropriate level of empowerment, whether or not they would have faith in these practices if they knew them. Explaining any of these unshared, confidential procedures in sufficient detail to someone whom we know fully well is unripe so that he or she has enough information to attempt the practice, and this person understands the instructions, constitutes the root downfall.

The only exception is when there is a great need for explicit explanation, for example to help dispel misinformation and distorted, antagonistic views about tantra.

Explaining general tantra theory in a scholarly manner, not sufficient for practice, is likewise not a root downfall. Nevertheless, it weakens the effectiveness of our tantric practice.

There is no fault, however, in disclosing confidential teachings to interested observers during a tantric empowerment.

8. REVILING OR ABUSING OUR AGGREGATES

Five aggregates (Skt. skandha), or aggregate factors, constitute each moment of our experience.

(a) forms of physical phenomena such as sights or sounds,
(b) feelings of happiness or unhappiness,
(c) distinguishing one thing from another (recognition),
(d) other mental factors such as love or hatred, and
(e) types of consciousness such as visual or mental.

In brief, our aggregates include our bodies, minds, and emotions. Normally, these aggregate factors are associated with confusion (zag-bcas) - usually translated as their being “contaminated.”

With anuttarayoga tantra practice, we remove that confusion about reality and thus totally transform our aggregates. Instead of each moment of experience comprising five factors associated with confusion, each moment eventually becomes a composite of five types of deep awareness that are dissociated from confusion (zag-med ye-shes), and which are the underlying natures of the five aggregates. These are the deep awareness that is like a mirror, of the equality of things, of individuality, of how to accomplish purposes, and of the
sphere of reality (Skt. *dharmadhatu*). Each of the five is represented by a Buddha-figure (*yi-dam*): Vairochana, and so on, called in the West “the five dhyani-Buddhas.”

An anuttarayoga empowerment plants the seeds to accomplish this transformation. During generation stage practice, we cultivate these seeds by imagining our aggregates already to be in their purified forms through visualizing them as their corresponding Buddha-figures.

During complete stage practice, we bring these seeds to maturity by engaging our aggregates in special yoga methods to manifest clear light mental activity with which to realize the five types of deep awareness.

The eighth root downfall is either to despise our aggregates, thinking them unfit to undergo this transformation, or purposely to damage them because of hatred or contempt.

Practicing tantra does not call for a denial or rejection of the sutra view that regarding the body as clean and in the nature of happiness is a form of incorrect consideration (*tshul-min yid-byed*). It is quite clear that our bodies naturally get dirty and bring us suffering such as sickness and physical pain. Nevertheless, we recognize in tantra that the human body also has a deeper nature, rendering it fit to be used on many levels along the spiritual path to benefit others more fully.

When we are unaware of or do not acknowledge that deeper nature, we hate our bodies, think our minds are no good, and consider our emotions as evil. When we hold such attitudes of low self-esteem or, in addition, abuse our bodies or minds with masochistic behavior, unnecessarily dangerous or punishing life styles, or by polluting them with recreational or narcotic drugs, we commit this tantric root downfall.

9. REJECTING VOIDNESS

Voidness (emptiness) here refers either to the general teaching of The Sutras on Far-Reaching Discriminating Awareness (Skt. *Prajnaparamita Sutras*) that all phenomena, not only persons, are devoid of impossible modes of existence, or to the specifically Mahayana teachings of the Chittamatra or any of the Madhyamaka
schools concerning phenomena being devoid of a particular impossible way of existing.

To reject such teachings means to doubt, disbelieve, or spurn them. No matter which Mahayana tenet system we hold while practicing tantra, we need total confidence in its teachings on voidness. Otherwise, if we reject voidness during the course of our practice, or attempt any procedure outside of its context, we may believe, for example, that our visualizations are concretely real.

Such misconceptions only perpetuate the sufferings of samsara and may even lead to a mental imbalance. It may be necessary, along the way, to upgrade our tenet systems from Chittamatra to Madhyamaka - or, within Madhyamaka, from Svatantryka to Prasangika - and, in the process, refute the voidness teachings of our former tenet systems. Discarding a less sophisticated explanation, however, does not mean leaving ourselves without a correct view of the voidness of all phenomena that is appropriate to our levels of understanding.

10. BEING LOVING TOWARD MALEVOLENT PEOPLE
Malevolent people are those who despise our personal teachers, spiritual masters in general, or the Buddhas, Dharma, or the Sangha, or who, in addition, cause harm or damage to any of them.

Although it is inappropriate to forsake the wish for such persons to be happy and have the causes for happiness, we commit a root downfall by acting or speaking lovingly toward them. Such action includes being friendly with them, supporting them by buying goods they produce, books that they write, and so on.

If we are motivated purely by love and compassion, and possess the means to stop their destructive behavior and transfer them to a more positive state, we would certainly try to do so, even if it means resorting to forceful methods.

If we lack these qualifications, however, we incur no fault in simply boycotting such persons.
11. NOT MEDITATING ON VOIDNESS CONTINUALLY
As with the ninth tantric root downfall, voidness can be understood according to either the Chittamatra or Madhyamaka systems. Once we gain an understanding of such a view, it is a root downfall to let more than a day and night pass without meditating on it.

The usual custom is to meditate on voidness at least three times during the course of each day and three times each night. We need to continue such practice until we have rid ourselves of all obstacles preventing omniscience (shes-sgrib) - at which point we remain directly mindful of voidness at all times.

If we place a limit and think we have meditated enough on voidness before reaching this goal, we can never attain it.

12. DETERRING THOSE WITH FAITH
This refers to purposely discouraging people from a particular tantric practice in which they have faith and for which they are fit vessels, with proper empowerment and so forth.

If we cause their wish to engage in this practice to end, this root downfall is complete. If they are not yet ready for such practice, however, there is no fault in outlining in a realistic manner what they must master first, even if it might seem daunting.

Engaging others like this, taking them and their interests seriously rather than belittling them as incapable, actually boosts their self-confidence to forge ahead.

13. NOT RELYING PROPERLY ON THE SUBSTANCES THAT BOND US CLOSELY TO TANTRIC PRACTICE (DAMRDZAS)
The practice of anuttarayoga tantra includes participating in periodic offering ceremonies known as tsog pujas. They involve tasting specially consecrated alcohol and meat. These substances symbolize the aggregates, bodily elements and, in Kalachakra, the energy-winds - ordinarily disturbing factors that have a nature of being able to confer deep awareness when dissociated from confusion and used for the path.
The root downfall is to consider such substances nauseating, to refuse them on the grounds of being a teetotaler or a vegetarian, or alternatively, to take them in large quantities with gusto and attachment.

If we are ex-alcoholics and if there is the danger that tasting even a drop of alcohol might bring about a return to alcoholism, we may imagine merely tasting the alcohol when at a *tsog* with others. When doing so, we would merely go through the gestures of tasting the alcohol, but without actually tasting it.

14. DERIDING WOMEN

The aim of anuttarayoga tantra is to access and harness clear light mental activity to apprehend voidness so as to overcome as quickly as possible confusion and its instincts - the principal factors preventing liberation, omniscience, and the full ability to benefit others.

A blissful state of awareness is extremely conducive for reaching clear light mental activity since it draws us into ever deeper, more intense and refined levels of consciousness and energy. Moreover, when blissful awareness reaches the clear light level and focuses on voidness with full understanding, it becomes the most powerful tool for clearing away the instincts of confusion. During the process of gaining absorbed concentration, we experience increasingly blissful awareness as a result of ridding our minds of dullness and agitation.

The same thing happens as we gain ever deeper understanding and realization of voidness, as a result of ridding our minds of disturbing emotions and attitudes.

Combining the two, we experience increasingly intense and refined levels of bliss as we gain ever stronger concentration on ever deeper understandings of voidness.

In anuttarayoga tantra, men enhance the bliss of their concentrated awareness of voidness even further by relying on women. This practice involves relying on either actual women as a seal of behavior (*las-kyi phyag-rgya, Skt. karmamudra*) visualized as female Buddha-figures so as to avoid confusion, or, for those of more refined faculties, merely
visualized ones alone as a seal of deep awareness (ye-shes phyag-rgya, Skt. jnanamudra).

Women enhance their bliss through men in a similar fashion by relying on the fact of their being a woman.

Therefore, it is a tantric root downfall to belittle, deride, ridicule, or consider as inferior a specific woman, women in general, or a female Buddha-figure. When we voice low opinion and contempt directly to a woman, with the intention to deride womanhood, and she understands what we say, we complete this root downfall. Although it is improper to deride men, doing so is not a tantric root downfall.

Excerpted from berzinarchives.com
INTRODUCTION
In the Kalachakra Tantra, most of the fourteen root tantric vows are defined more specifically than in the other tantra systems. With Kalachakra empowerment (dbang, initiation), we promise to keep both the common and the specifically Kalachakra formulations of them.

This is relevant advice for practitioners of any of the higher tantra systems. As corroboration, Ngari Panchen, a sixteenth-century master of the Nyingma tradition, has explained in Ascertaining the Three Levels of Vowed Restraints That are Branches of the Natural Path of Dzogchen (Rang-bzhin rdzogs-pa chen-po’i lam-gyi cha-lag sdomgsum rnam-nges) that the root tantric vows taken at any dzogchen empowerment are a blend of the common and Kalachakra versions delineated separately in the other three Tibetan lineages.

To differentiate clearly the common from the Kalachakra root tantric vows, we shall follow here the explanation given in An Explanation of Secret Mantra Ethical Discipline: A Cluster of Fruit of Actual Attainments (gSang-sngags-kyi tshul-khrimskyi rnam-bshad dngos-grub-kyi snye-ma) by the early fifteenth-century Gelug founder Tsongkhapa.

We shall supplement it from A Lamp to Illuminate the Closely Bonding Practices (Dam-tshig gsal-ba’i sgronme) by the late fifteenth-century Gelug master Kaydrub Norzang-gyatso.

1. DISTURBING THE MINDS OF OUR VAJRA MASTERS
Rather than scorning or deriding our tantric masters, here the downfall is to cause a specific insult. Because of a disturbing emotion or attitude, and not for any altruistic purpose, we act or speak in a destructive
manner and do not even think to refrain from doing so at any point during our act.

When our teachers learn of our conduct and show displeasure in order to help tame us, this root downfall is complete.

2. TRANSGRESSING OUR TEACHERS’ INJUNCTIONS
This is more specific than trivializing and transgressing a vow taught by an enlightened being. Here the downfall is to commit in a hidden fashion one of the ten destructive actions or break one of our vows, after our vajra masters have specifically said not to do so. The motivation must be a disturbing emotion or attitude, not some altruistic aim.

As with the prior root downfall, we need to recognize our tantric masters as holy beings, know fully well that such behavior displeases them, and think nothing of engaging in it anyway.

Here it is not required that our teachers learn of our misdeeds or show displeasure.

3. BECAUSE OF ANGER, FAULTING VAJRA BROTHERS OR SISTERS
This is the same as in the list of common tantric root downfalls.

4. GIVING UP LOVE FOR SENTIENT BEINGS
This is also the same as the corresponding common downfall.

The commentary adds the stipulation that the downfall is only committed when love for a specific being, once lost, does not return for a day and a night.

Becoming exasperated and losing love for someone only for a shorter period is not a root downfall.

5. GIVING UP BODHICITTA
Corresponding to the common tantric root downfall of discarding the wish to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all, here we discard the subtle creative drops (thig-le) that allow us, through Kalachakra
complete stage (*rdzogs-rim*) practice, to actualize that enlightenment through an unchanging blissful awareness (*mi-'gyur-ba'i bde-ba*).

Such awareness is reached only upon manifesting clear light mental activity and generating it as a blissful awareness of voidness.

After this most powerful tool is gained, an ever more stable basis for it is built within the central energy-channel by stacking there, through yoga methods, 21,600 subtle drops - corresponding to the number of Kalachakra hours in a year and breaths in a day.

Once stacked, these invisible drops remain fixed in place until attaining enlightenment - which is why the supremely blissful awareness based on them is called “unchanging.” Such awareness empowers the understanding of voidness with clear light mental activity to dispel, in stages, all instincts of confusion and winds of karma in the most efficient manner possible. These drops only disappear upon becoming a Buddha, since at that stage we no longer have the type of physical bodies that have subtle drops or a central channel.

Whether male or female, whenever we experience the release of energy that accompanies sexual orgasm - regardless of the emission of gross fluids - we lose subtle creative drops, called “bodhichitta” or “jasmine flower drops (Skt. kunda).” These drops form the basis for achieving unchanging blissful awareness. Since such release discards the most efficient means for achieving enlightenment, it is called “giving up bodhichitta.”

For this root downfall to be complete, however, we need to understand the nature of unchanging blissful awareness, yet release these subtle drops anyway - when there is no special need to do so - through any means, with the wish to attain enlightenment through the bliss of ordinary orgasmic emission.

The four binding factors need not accompany this action.

Release of orgasmic energy or fluids in ordinary sexual acts does not constitute a tantric root downfall, so long as it is not regarded as something spiritual - specifically, as a means for attaining liberation or enlightenment.
However, any experience of orgasmic release, regardless of how we view it, weakens the form we are trying to give to our lives with Kalachakra root tantric vows. It counters the purpose of trying to achieve enlightenment as quickly as possible through the Kalachakra method of unchanging blissful awareness.

It is important to be realistic, not melodramatic about this matter. Taking this vow does not mean having to remain childless or never to have another baby. Nor does it condemn us to stop enjoying ordinary sex or to feel guilty about it. It does mean, however, seeing the bliss of orgasmic emission in the perspective of unchanging blissful awareness, and committing ourselves to revising our values.

In short, when we have no control over our orgasmic energies, we stress, with this vow, never to regard the bliss of orgasmic release from ordinary as a spiritual experience, as a way to solve all problems, or as a path to enlightenment.

6. HOLDING THE VIEW OF REALITY IN SUTRA TO BE INFERIOR TO THAT IN TANTRA
This is more specific than deriding our own or others’ tenets by proclaiming that any teaching from the sutra or tantra vehicles does not derive from Buddha’s words.

Here, the downfall is to disparage specifically the voidness explanations found in The Sutras on Far-Reaching Discriminating Awareness (Skt. Prajnaparamita Sutras) as inferior to those found in the tantras, although still accepting both as authentic teachings of the Buddha.

The motivation must be anger, such as due to sectarian views, and not simply ignorance.

7. DISCLOSING CONFIDENTIAL TEACHINGS TO THOSE WHO ARE UNRIPE
This is similar to the common downfall except that it refers specifically to teachings on greatly blissful awareness (bde-ba chen-po) - the most intense of four gradations of joy (dga’-bzhi) experienced within the central channel.
8. ABUSING OUR AGGREGATES
Whereas the common root downfall is either simply reviling or, in addition, abusing our aggregates, here the reference is specifically to the latter. We recognize our aggregates to be in the nature of Buddha-figures (yi-dam) and deep awareness (ye-shes), and realize that if we harm them we destroy our blissful awareness and impair our ability to generate more. Yet we still wish to inflict damage or pain on them, and not for the sake of benefiting someone else.

This downfall is complete when we actually commit a self-punishing act and experience, as a result, a diminution of whatever level of physical and mental blissful awareness we have attained.

9. NOT HAVING FAITH IN THE PURITY OF PHENOMENA
The common tantric root downfall that corresponds to this is rejecting voidness as taught in the Chittamatra or any of the Madhyamaka schools of tenets.

Here the downfall is not only to reject voidness, but also to adopt in its stead a fabricated view of reality of our own or someone else’s contriving. This does not include doing this for the sake of others, as when simplifying the voidness teachings to provide beginners with an initial idea.

10. HAVING DECEITFUL LOVE
While the common tantric root downfall is being loving toward malevolent people, the Kalachakra downfall is to speak loving words to others while harboring thoughts of malice toward them in our hearts.

By extension, we commit this downfall by being hypocritical in keeping close bonds (dam-tshig, Skt. samaya) with the tantric practices, for example by reciting a daily sadhana text or attending pujas without faith, pretending to be devout, yet hiddenly acting in destructive ways contrary to our pledges.
11. CONCEPTUALIZING ABOUT THE BLISSFUL AWARENESS THAT IS BEYOND WORDS
The corresponding common tantric root downfall is not meditating on voidness continually.

Here, more specifically, we do not accept unchanging blissful awareness when experiencing it in complete stage practice. When this awareness arises, it is a downfall to waver indecisively and not direct it toward continual meditation on voidness.

12. FAULTING PURE BEINGS
The common downfall corresponding to this is to destroy people’s faith in a particular tantric practice so that they turn from wishing to engage in it.

Here, the downfall is to direct discouraging words specifically at meditators accomplished in some tantric practice, faulting and deriding them to their faces out of jealousy. This downfall is complete when they understand these words and, as a result, become depressed.

13. REJECTING THE SUBSTANCES THAT BOND US CLOSELY TO TANTRIC PRACTICE

14. DERIDING WOMEN
These two are the same as in the list of common tantric root downfalls.

The emphasis in the latter, however, is on disparaging women in general.

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13. THE SECONDARY TANTRIC VOWS AND COMMITMENTS
ALEXANDER BERZIN

The following are included for recitation in verse B8 in Six-Session Guru Yoga (page 121).

NINE AUXILIARY [COMMITMENTS]

[In Six-Session Guru Yoga (page 118), these nine are listed as six:
1. I shall abandon the four basic non-virtues, as well as liquor and misbehavior;
2. Devote myself to a holy, protecting Guru;
3. Treat my Dharma friends with respect;
4. Cultivate the ten virtuous actions;
5. Never withdraw from the Mahayana;
6. Avoid walking over or showing disrespect (to a sacred object).]

1. RIDDING OURSELVES OF THE FOUR ROOTS
The four root destructive actions we remove from our behavior are
(a) taking the lives of others,
(b) taking what has not been given to us,
(c) indulging in inappropriate sexual conduct, and
(d) lying.

2. GIVING UP ALCOHOL
These first two auxiliary [commitments] are thus the five lay vows rephrased as bonding practices.

3. AVOIDING IMPROPER BEHAVIOR
This includes never abusing our aggregates – the eighth common root tantric vow. Also, as with the eighth secondary bodhisattva vow in
connection with ethical self-discipline, we rid ourselves of behavior that causes us to fall to ill-repute.

4. COMMITTING OURSELVES TO OUR SPIRITUAL MASTERS
Not only do we avoid scorning or deriding our spiritual masters – the first common root tantric vow – we commit ourselves properly to them. We do this, as with the third auxiliary secondary tantric vow, by not acting counter to the teachings of *Fifty Stanzas on the Guru*.

5. RESPECTING AND SERVING VAJRA FRIENDS
Not only do we avoid faulting our vajra brothers and sisters – the third common root tantric vow - we always treat them with honor and respect.

6. CULTIVATING THE TEN CONSTRUCTIVE ACTIONS
Not only do we avoid trivializing and transgressing any enlightened one’s words concerning the three sets of vows – the second common root tantric vow – we actively engage ourselves in the ten constructive actions of restraining from killing, stealing, and so on.

7. RIDDING OURSELVES OF THE CAUSES FOR TURNING FROM MAHAYANA
This includes never becoming discouraged and giving up love for sentient beings – the fourth common root tantric vow – as well as not being attached to the peaceful state of liberation.

8. AVOIDING SCORNING MAHAYANA
As with the sixth common root tantric vow, we avoid deriding our own or others’ tenets, specifically the teachings of the Mahayana sutras.

9. AVOIDING STEPPING ON OR OVER OBJECTS OF RESPECT
Not only do we avoid not relying properly on the substances to bond us closely to our tantric practice – the thirteenth common root tantric vow
- we avoid showing disrespect to them, such as by stepping on or over auspicious symbols drawn on the ground or offering flowers from tantric rituals tossed in the air and fallen to the floor.

All these (additional) pledges I shall honor.

The common root tantric vows and those specific to Kalachakra both entail a promise to refrain from eight thick actions (sbom-po, heavy actions) that weaken meditation practice and hamper progress along the anuttarayoga tantra path.

The damage we inflict is proportionate to the number and strength of the binding factors (kun-dkris) that accompany them.

As with the forty-six faulty actions that we promise to refrain from with the secondary bodhisattva vows, committing any of the eight, even with all four binding factors present, does not rid us of our tantric vows.

THE EIGHT ADDITIONAL SECONDARY TANTRIC VOWS

*The following vows are included in verse B9 in Six-Session Guru Yoga*

1. **APPROPRIATING DISCRIMINATING AWARENESS BY FORCE**

   Discriminating awareness (shes-rab, Skt. prajña, wisdom), here, is another name for women.

   By relying on the bliss and joy that come from union with one, without orgasmic release, a male enhances his blissful discriminating awareness of voidness.

   A female can accomplish the same while in union with a man, also without orgasmic release, by relying on the fact of her being a woman.

   This thick action is alternatively called “relying on an unqualified sealing partner (phyag-rgya, Skt. mudra).”

   Sealing partner and pure awareness partner (rig-ma, knowledge woman) are other names for women. They help in realizing mahamudra - the great seal of voidness comprehended with clear light
mental activity - or pure awareness (rig-pa), the equivalent of this in the Nyingma system of dzogchen.

As with the fifth Kalachakra root downfall, regarding ordinary sex and the bliss of orgasmic release as a path to liberation or enlightenment totally defeats tantric practice. This point provides the context for understanding this and the next thick action in both Kalachakra and other anuttarayoga systems.

Even if we are not at the stage of having some level of blissful awareness of voidness - which sexual union without orgasmic release can enhance - and even if we lack the ability, gained through mastery of our energy-winds through yoga methods, to avoid orgasm when in union; nevertheless, as someone with tantric vows, we would naturally admire and sincerely wish to reach these stages.

We need to regard our sexual lives within this perspective. For this resolve not to weaken, it is important that our sexual partner share our attitude toward sex.

An unqualified partner is someone who does not view sex from a tantric perspective. More specifically, our partner needs to have received empowerment, uphold tantric vows, and keep close bonds with the practices. Most importantly, she or he needs to safeguard purely the fifth Kalachakra root vow and not regard ordinary sex and the bliss of orgasmic release as something spiritual, or as a path to liberation or enlightenment.

When we view sex from a tantric perspective and our sexual partner simply wishes to share love and comfort, we do not need to feel that our two attitudes are mutually exclusive. Enhancing our blissful awareness of voidness through union with a partner is built on a foundation of sharing love and support with each other.

However, if our partner is merely obsessed with greed and attachment for carnal pleasure, or views achieving a healthy orgasm as the cure for all psychological disorder, we easily fall prey to such emotions or ideas, and lose our perspective. If we already have a sexual partner and become involved with tantra, while she or he does not, we certainly do not forsake that partner, or pursue extramarital relations with someone holding tantric vows.
Nor do we need to convert our partner to Buddhism and pressure her or him to take initiation. On the other hand, we do not exploit this person for our spiritual practice, being dishonest with our feelings, or begrudgingly have sex as our duty while harboring resentment.

We look to the bodhisattva vows and trainings for guidelines. Since our partner might understandably become totally repelled by tantra, Buddhism, and ourselves if we were haughtily to denounce her or him as unqualified and unworthy of sharing our bed, we continue having sex with the person motivated by love and compassion, at least to avoid this from happening.

As with the practices to enhance our pledged state of aspiring bodhicitta, we then avoid causing our partner to regret positive actions, such as showing us love and wishing to give us happiness. Instead, if receptive, we gently encourage her or him to overcome shortcomings and realize potentials through effective methods, not ordinary sex. In this way, we try to make our two attitudes toward sex, if not the same, at least more compatible.

Further, a potential partner must not have been coerced to enter sexual union - either by subtle psychological pressure or by force. An example of the former is flattering the person as spiritually advanced, saying that she or he is helping us, as great tantric bodhisattvas, advance on the path and help others more. Forcing may be by hitting, pushing the person down, or humiliating her or him. Even if a potential partner has received empowerment, keeps tantric vows, and shares our perspective on sex, we also incur this first heavy action if we force her or him to sit in union with us when circumstances are inappropriate. This might occur if the person were sick, married to someone else, under someone’s guardianship, keeping other vows that restrict such conduct, shy, or unwilling. All these guidelines likewise apply to our sexual behavior in general.

2. APPROPRIATING HER NECTAR BY FORCE
This thick action is alternatively called “sitting in union devoid of the three recognitions.” This means being in sexual union, even with
someone sharing our attitudes, without following the tantric procedures.

When using the bliss of union to enhance our blissful awareness of voidness - whether with an actual physical partner or merely a visualized one in our imaginations - we distinguish and regard our minds, speech, and bodies as being dissociated from confusion (zag-med, uncontaminated). We call this the three recognitions (’du-shes gsum). Without such an attitude, the bliss of union enhances only our desires and attachment, rather than our blissful awareness of voidness.

Firstly, our state of mind while in union is a blissful awareness of voidness, on whatever level we can maintain it. We do not harbor ordinary thoughts or worries, for instance about how our sexual performance ranks with that of other people.

Secondly, our speech labels phenomena as what they conventionally are when not apprehended by a confused mind, but by one that is a blissful awareness of voidness. We represent this by using one aspect of our minds, which on a deeper level is still blissfully aware of voidness, to visualize our own and our partner’s sexual organs dependently arising - from seed syllables - in the form of vajra and bell.

These two ritual objects, used extensively in tantra practice, symbolize blissful awareness and discriminating awareness of voidness. We imagine them marked by these syllables as a further indication of pure mental labeling. With confusion and its attendant attachment, we label sexual organs as desirable objects for gaining the fleeting bliss of orgasmic release. Free of confusion, we label them in a purer manner, as objects that can help us enhance our blissful discriminating awareness of voidness.

Thirdly, our bodies and those of our partners appear in the forms of Buddhafigures which our minds give rise to while simultaneously maintaining, on a deeper level, blissful awareness of voidness.

Since the mind that generates this appearance is not one of longing desire, this visualization is not at all the same as fantasizing ourselves and our partners as sexy movie stars.

Again, we must remember that even if we maintain this pure way of regarding our minds, speech, and bodies while in sexual union, if we
consider the bliss of orgasmic release experienced within this context as a means for achieving liberation or enlightenment, we incur a tantric root downfall.

This occurs whether we purposely cause that orgasmic release or experience it unintentionally.

Furthermore, even when we visualize our own and our partner’s bodies in pure forms as Buddha-figures, we do not lose sight of the conventional existence of ourselves as persons. Thus, we always remain sensitive to our own and our partner’s feelings and needs. This is pertinent whether our partner shares our attitude and visualization, or is not involved in tantric practice.

3. SHOWING CONFIDENTIAL OBJECTS TO IMPROPER VESSELS
With the seventh common root tantric downfall, we disclose confidential teachings to those without empowerment. Here, we show confidential objects to such persons, or to those with empowerment who lack respect for them. These objects include pictures, paintings, or statues of Buddha-figures, books containing explicit instructions for tantric practice, and our ceremonial vajra and bell.

Although we do not lose our tantric vows by leaving these objects on public display in our homes, we devastate our practice when people make rude and lascivious remarks to us about Buddha-figures depicted in union, mock us as being superstitious or mad, or use our ritual items as paperweights. It is best to cover such items, or keep them in a private room.

Tibetans, for example, hang a curtain in front of their paintings of Buddha-figures - especially those whose forms are open to misunderstanding by the uninitiated - and undrape them only when meditating or performing rituals.

4. ARGUING DURING AN OFFERING FEAST OF TSOG
During tsog pujas, we visualize ourselves as Buddha-figures, with a deeper level of our minds blissfully aware of voidness, and make special offerings with the wish for everyone to enjoy them purely and
be happy. We do this in order to build up positive force (merit) and deep awareness.

When we argue or fight during such ritual, we forget about our visualizations and appropriate states of mind. Consequently, our participation in the puja becomes ineffective for enhancing our spiritual paths.

5. INDICATING DISCREPANT TEACHINGS TO THOSE WITH BELIEF IN FACT (THOSE WITH FAITH)
This thick action is alternatively called “giving false answers to sincerely asked questions.” When someone who is a fit vessel, with proper empowerment, asks a sincere question about tantric practices, if we avoid the question by either changing the topic and speaking about something extraneous, or answering on a level different from that on which the person asked, we commit this thick action.

Such evasive behavior is karmically detrimental to our own future receipt of straightforward answers to our questions. Even if someone with faith in tantra but lacking empowerment sincerely asks us a question, we do not ignore it. We answer, however in such a way as not to disclose explicit instructions that are to be kept confidential.

6. STAYING MORE THAN SEVEN DAYS AMONG SHRAVAKAS
In this context, shravakas (listeners) do not refer to Theravada practitioners, but to anyone who trivializes or makes fun of tantra. Staying for a long time among such persons discourages us from our paths, especially if they are actively hostile toward our meditation practice. Further, if the people with whom we live are only concerned about their own welfare and continually tell us we are stupid to try to help others, their self-centered outlooks slowly infect us. There is no fault, however, if we have no choice about whom we live with, such as at a training camp or needing to stay in a hospital ward. It is crucial in such situations, however - and even simply when living in a non-supportive and unsympathetic society - to keep our tantric practices
and beliefs totally private. If we sit counting rosary beads and chanting mantras aloud in a crowded prison cell, we may be beaten to death!

7. FALSELY HOLDING THE PRIDE OF BEING A YOGI
This is alternatively called “boasting to be a yogi, without properly being one.” It is a thick action, detrimental to our progress, to imagine and boast that we are highly accomplished practitioners when we have merely recited a daily sadhana for some time or completed a meditation retreat during which we repeated a few mantras a hundred thousand times and gained no realization.

8. INDICATING THE HALLOWED DHARMA TO THOSE WHO WILL DISBELIEVE WHAT IS FACT
With the seventh common root tantric downfall, we disclose confidential teachings to those lacking empowerment. Here, we reveal them to those having empowerment, but lacking faith and respect in them. Some people take an empowerment in order to purify themselves from tantric root downfalls and to retake their vows, or to revitalize their vows if they have weakened them. If they do this at an empowerment into a tantric system in which they have no particular interest or belief, it is a thick action to teach them explicit practices specific to this system.

THE THREE ADDITIONAL SECONDARY TANTRIC VOWS

Some texts supplement the list of eight secondary tantric vows with three auxiliary thick actions that also hamper our tantric practice.

The twentieth-century Gelug master Pabongka, for example, included the three in the list of secondary tantric vows when he expanded the First Panchen Lama’s Extensive Six-Session Yoga (Thundrug rnal-'byor rgyas-pa) with the recitation of the lists of vows.
1. IMPROPRLY ENGAGING IN MANDALA-RITES, SUCH AS WITHOUT A RETREAT

   We may confer empowerment on others or perform the self-initiation (bdag-’jug) to restore our lost or weakened tantric vows only if we have completed the meditation retreat of the appropriate Buddha-figure, repeating the prescribed mantras hundreds of thousands of times, and offered the concluding fire-puja (sbyin-sreg).

2. TRANSGRESSING OUR PRATIMOKSHA OR BODHISATTVA VOWS WHEN THERE IS NO NEED

   Unless there is an urgent need to transgress them in order to benefit others, and there is no alternative, we safeguard our vows at all times.

3. ACTING COUNTER TO THE TEACHINGS OF FIFTY STANZAS ON THE GURU

   Fifty Stanzas on the Guru (Bla-ma Inga-bcu-pa, Skt. Gurupanchashika), by the tenth-century Indian master Ashvaghosha II, is the source of instructions for disciples’ behavior toward their tantric masters.

   When time permits, spiritual mentors teach this text before conferring empowerment.

   Excerpted from berzinarchives.com
14. THE TEN VOWS AND COMMITMENTS RELATED TO MOTHER TANTRA
ALEXANDER BERZIN

The following are included for recitation in verse B10 in Six-Session Guru Yoga (page 122).

1. NOT DERIDING LEFT-HANDED BEHAVIOR
In Indian culture, we use our right hands for eating and left for latrine purposes. We never touch anything clean or worthy of respect with our left hands. Since the understanding of voidness is contrary to everyone’s ordinary apprehension of the world, we remind ourselves of voidness by using our left hands in an unconventional manner, such as for accepting and bringing to our mouths a drop of specially consecrated alcohol during a tsog puja. We also begin various physical actions with our left side, such as when walking, starting with our left foot.

Not deriding such behavior is an extension, then, of the thirteenth common root tantric vow - avoiding not relying properly on the substances to bond us closely to our tantric practice.

2. MAKING OFFERINGS
As a further extension of the thirteenth common root tantric vow, we periodically perform offering pujas, in which we taste transformed alcohol and meat. We usually promise to do this on special days, twice every lunar month -- specifically, on the tenth and twenty-fifth of such months.

In the Gelug tradition, making this promise is part of taking only a Vajrayogini empowerment and not normally part of empowerments for other mother tantras, such as Kalachakra.

Tasting alcohol and meat symbolizes our transformation and use of not only these substances, but also our aggregates, bodily elements,
and energy-winds to enhance our blissful awareness of voidness once we have attained a certain level of that awareness and have control over our subtle energy-systems. In the Vajrayogini practice, we direct the offering puja to our tantric masters inseparable from Vajrayogini.

We also offer each day the eight-line praises to Chakrasamvara (Heruka) and Vajrayogini (Vajravarahi). Because of this closebonding practice, Pabongka included the recitation of these verses in the full-length *Six-Session Yoga*, and, because the Gelug tradition considers Kalachakra to be a mother tantra, it often includes these verses as part of the Kalachakra Six-Session Guru-Yoga as well.

Other practices included here are, when seeing women, praising them in our minds as representing the mother side of practice - namely, the side of the discriminating awareness of voidness - and visualize circumambulating them to the left, counterclockwise.

3. **AVOIDING ABSORPTION INTO SEXUAL UNION WITH AN UNQUALIFIED PERSON**
This is equivalent to the first secondary tantric vow – not to appropriate wisdom by force.

4. **NEVER PARTING OURSELVES FROM THE VIEW OF VOIDNESS WHILE IN UNION**
This is equivalent to the stipulation concerning our minds in the second secondary tantric vow - not to appropriate her nectar by force.

5. **TAKING UNCHANGING INTEREST IN USING DESIRE AS A PATH**
Using desire as a path refers to utilizing the bliss of union, without orgasmic release, as a pathway method for enhancing our blissful awareness of voidness. It never implies letting our sexual desires rage wildly and making no effort in the direction of voidness to tame and overcome them.

This point is reminiscent of the seventh secondary bodhisattva vow in connection with ethical self-discipline - giving up the intention only to wander in samsara. Therefore, we keep this bonding practice within
the context of the eleventh common root tantric vow - abandoning not meditating on voidness continually

6. NEVER FORSAKING THE TWO TYPES OF MUDRAS
The two mudras or seals are a seal of behavior, karmamudra (las-kyi phyag-rgya) and a seal of deep awareness, jnanamudra (ye-shes-kyi phyag-rgya). These refer to actual physical partners and visualized ones with whom we absorb ourselves in sexual union, without orgasmic release, to enhance our blissful awareness of voidness. We join in union with either a physical partner visualized as a Buddhafigure, or merely a visualized one.

This is equivalent to the stipulation concerning our bodies in the second secondary tantric vow - not to appropriate her nectar by force.

7. PRIMARILY EXERTING EFFORT ON THE EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL METHODS
For enhancing our blissful awareness of voidness, we primarily exert ourselves to absorb in sexual union externally - with all the previous stipulations - while internally maintaining our blissful awareness of voidness.

This is an extension of the eleventh common root tantric vow - abandoning not meditating on voidness continually.

8. NEVER RELEASING JASMINE FLOWER DROPS (SKT. KUNDA)
Referring to not emitting the subtle sparks of energy that accompany orgasm, this corresponds to the fifth Kalachakra root tantric vow – never giving up bodhichitta, particularly within the context of enhancing our blissful awareness of voidness.

9. Committing ourselves to chaste behavior
This too is another way of phrasing the fifth Kalachakra root tantric vow, but with the emphasis on not resorting to ordinary sexual behavior as a path to liberation or enlightenment.
10. ABANDONING NAUSEA WHEN TASTING BODHICHITTA

During empowerments, tsog pujas, and certain other tantric procedures, we taste bonding substances (dam-rdzas) to enhance our blissful awareness of voidness. Not feeling repulsion at this is an extension of the thirteenth common root tantric vow – avoiding not relying properly on the substances to bond us closely to our tantric practice.

Excerpted from berzinarchives.com
15. THE FACTORS INVOLVED IN TRANSGRESSING TANTRIC VOWS
ALEXANDER BERZIN

THE FOUR BINDING FACTORS
According to the Gelug master, Kaydrub Norzang-gyatso in A Lamp to Illuminate the Closely Bonding Practices (Dam-tshig gsal-ba’i sgron-me), except for the fifth root tantric vow, giving up aspiring bodhichitta, a downfall from the tantric vows, like a downfall from the root bodhisattva vows, requires transgressing one of the fourteen root vows with the four binding factors (kun-dkris bzhi) being complete.

These factors must be held and maintained from the moment immediately after developing the motivation to break the vow, up until the moment right after completing the act of transgression. In such cases, we lose our tantric vows; otherwise, we merely weaken them.

The four binding factors derive from the “Ethical Self-discipline” chapter (Tshulkhrims- gyi le’u) of Asanga’s Bodhisattva Stages of Mind (Byang-chub sems-dpa’i sa, Skt. Bodhisattvabhumi).

1. not regarding the negative action as detrimental, seeing only advantages to it, and undertaking the action with no regrets,
2. having been in the habit of committing the transgression before, having no wish or intention to refrain now or in the future from repeating it,
3. delighting in the negative action and undertaking it with joy,
4. having no moral self-dignity or care for how our actions reflect on others, and thus having no intention of repairing the damage we are doing to ourselves and to them.

There are three levels of being bound by the binding factors. Only in the first case do we lose our tantric vows:

• If all four binding factors are present when transgressing a root tantric vow, it is a great bind (kun-dkris chen-po).
• If not regarding the negative action as detrimental is present, but not all of the other three factors, it is an intermediate bind (kun-dkris 'bring).
• If not regarding the negative action as detrimental is not present – in others words, if one does regard the transgression as detrimental – but any or all of the other binding factors are present, it is a small bind (kun-dkris chungngu).

Even if the four binding factors are present when transgressing one of the eight thick actions (sbom-po, secondary tantric vows), it is not a downfall and we do not lose our tantric vows.

FACTORS NEEDED FOR THE KARMIC RESULTS TO BE THE FULLEST
In addition, as with the ten destructive actions and the bodhisattva vows, for the karmic results to be the fullest, there must be complete:
• a basis for the action, namely an object against whom or which the action is directed,
  • an action actually committed,
  • a finale that the action reaches. Elsewhere, added to these three as what must also be complete are:
• a person who commits the action, namely a holder of untransgressed tantric vows,
• a correct discernment, namely of the object against whom or which the action is directed,
• an attitude containing the four binding factors.

Several factors may cause us to transgress our vows. The Dakinivow Tantra (mKha’-’gro-ma’i sdom-pa’i rgyud, Skt. Dakinisamvara Tantra) lists:
• not knowing the vow,
• not caring and being careless,
• being overwhelmed by disturbing emotions, • lack of respect,
• forgetfulness,
• weak mindfulness.
PURIFICATION METHODS
The procedures for purifying ourselves of the negative force built up by a transgression and subsequent loss of our tantric vows are, in general, to apply the four opponent forces (stobs-bzhi), after openly admitting our transgression. These forces are also applied for strengthening our tantric vows if we have weakened them:

- sincere regret,
- the firm decision not to repeat the transgression,
- reaffirming our foundation, namely refuge and the bodhichitta aim,
- application of counteracting opponent forces, such as repetition of the hundred-syllable mantra of Vajrasattva or the mantra of Samayavajra (Damtshig rdo-rje).

If we have lost our tantric vows by having incurred a downfall, the counteracting opponent forces include:

- one hundred thousand repetitions of the hundred-syllable mantra of Vajrasattva and then retaking the tantric vows at another empowerment,
- retaking the vows as part of performing the self-initiation (bdag-jug) of the Buddha-form (yi-dam) of our practice.

We may only take the self-initiation if we have previously completed the serviceability retreat (las-rung) of that Buddha-form, during which we have repeated the relevant mantra at least a hundred thousand times and followed this by the appropriate fire-puja (sbying-sreg).

Excerpted from berzinarchives.com
PART FIVE
PRAYERS & PRACTICES
16. START THE DAY WITH WATER BOWL OFFERINGS

Set up an altar – a surface not lower than the waist, consisting of representations of the body, speech and mind of the Buddha: a statue or picture; a Dharma book; a stupa (or a picture of one). It should not be where one points one feet.

As a daily practice, it is excellent to start the day by making offerings to the Buddha, imagining that he is oneness with the mind of your lama. Thinking this way brings them into your presence, so have confidence that they are there. You want to make offerings to them as your special invited guests.

First make three prostrations while reciting the mantra OM NAMO MANJUSHRIYE, NAMO SUSHRIAY, NAMO UTTAMA SHRIYE SOHA.

Choose containers – bowls or glasses, for example – that are beautiful and of best quality, something you’d offer the guru if he came to visit.

If the bowls are full from yesterday, empty them nicely and get rid of the water in a clean place (not down the drain), making sure not to spill it or put it where people will walk – it’s blessed. Have a pitcher and cloths especially for this purpose.

Wipe each bowl very clean and put them in a stack, upwards, but then put a cloth over them – it’s inauspicious to have an empty bowl there, it’s like offering nothing.

Start from the Buddha’s right, our left. Pour some water into the first bowl, then pour nearly all of it into the next bowl until you’ve got them all lined up nicely with a little bit of water in each. Lay them out neatly in a row, not more than the width of a rice grain of space between each.

As you put the little bit of water into each, bless it with the three recitations of OM AH HUM.

Once the bowls are arranged nicely, pick up the pitcher and fill each
bowl. As you pour the first one, all the way to the top – be generous – you would say

    OM ARGHAM AH HUM, OM AH HUM, OM AH HUM,

until it’s full. (This one is nectar for drinking)

Continue reciting the mantra and visualizing each offering as you say, imagining the offering multiplying infinitely.

Then the rest:

    OM PADYAM AH HUM, OM AH HUM, OM AH HUM (water for washing)
    OM PUPAY AH HUM, OM AH HUM, OM AH HUM (flowers)
    OM DUPAY AH HUM, OM AH HUM, OM AH HUM (incense)
    OM ALOKAY AH HUM, OM AH HUM, OM AH HUM (light)
    OM GENDAY AH HUM, OM AH HUM, OM AH HUM (perfume)
    OM NIUDAY AH HUM, OM AH HUM, OM AH HUM (food)
    OM SHAPTA AH HUM, OM AH HUM, OM AH HUM (music)

Imagine each offering as huge and magnificent. And imagine that the Guru Budhda – your lama as the Buddha himself – happily receives them.

Remember to dedicate your virtue to the welfare of all beings with the wish that they be free of suffering and attain enlightenment.

Then multiply the offerings by reciting three times:

    OM NAMO BHAGAVATE BENDZAY SARWAPARMA DANA TATHAGATAYA
    ARHATE SAMYAKSAM BUDDHAYA TAYATA OM BENDZAY BENDZAY MAHA
    BENDZAY MAHA TAYDZA BENDZAY MAHA BIDYA BENDZAY MAHA
    BODHICITTA BENDZAY MAHA BODHI MENDO PASAM KRAMANA BENDZAY
    SARWA KARMA AWARANA BISHO DANA BENDZAY SOHA

And, finally, recite the Prayer of the Power of the Truth:

By the power of the truth of the Three Rare Sublime Ones,
The blessings of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas,
The great wealth of completed two collections,
And the sphere of phenomena being inconceivable and pure
May these piles of clouds of offerings, 
Arising through transforming through Arya Samantabadhra, 
   Manjushri and so forth – unimaginable, inexhaustible, equaling 
   the sky – arise, 
And in the eyes of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten 
   directions be received.

*Source: Robina Courtin; from instructions of her lamas.*
17. PRAYERS FOR PURIFYING AND STRENGTHENING BODHISATTVA VOWS AND TANTRIC VOWS

BODHISATTVA VOWS

MOTIVATION BY LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE
The purpose of my life is to free all my kind mother sentient beings from suffering and to lead them to enlightenment. To do this, I must receive enlightenment. Without the bodhisattva vows this is not possible. Therefore, I am going to take the bodhisattva vows for the benefit of all my kind mother sentient beings.

TAKING THE BODHISATTVA VOWS
I go for refuge to the Three Jewels;
I confess individually all my negativities.
I rejoice in the merit of migrating beings.
I take hold with my mind the perfect state of a buddha.
I go for refuge until I am enlightened
To the Buddha, the Dharma, and the supreme Sangha assembly,
And I do so to attain an enlightened mind.
In order to fulfill the aims of myself and others
I shall develop a supreme enlightened motive,
And toward all sentient beings, my invited guests,
I shall act with supreme enlightened conduct.
May I become a buddha to benefit all. (3x)

Think strongly that you have received the complete pure set of bodhisattva vows (those vows that were broken are now restored, and those that were kept have been increased).
TANTRIC VOWS

MOTIVATION BY LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE
That an infinite number of my kind mother sentient beings are suffering in samsara is so unbearable. I must free them from suffering and lead them to enlightenment as quickly as possible without even delaying one second. To do this, I must become enlightened. Without tantric vows this is not possible. Therefore, I am going to take the tantric vows for the benefit of all my kind mother sentient beings.

TAKING THE TANTRIC VOWS

All three recitations
All buddhas and bodhisattvas, please listen to me!
I (say your tantric name), from now until I reach the essence of buddhahood,
Shall generate the sacred, peerless bodhichitta,
Just as all buddhas of the three times have ensured themselves of awakening by generating it.

First recitation only
I pledge to uphold the vows of the Buddha family:
To rely on the peerless Triple Gem: Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha,
And the three disciplines of observing proper behavior, gathering virtuous Dharma, and benefitting sentient beings.
[Thus keeping the samayas of Vairochana.]

I pledge to uphold the vajra, bell, and mudra of the great Vajra family and to honor my teachers.
[Thus keeping the samayas of Akshobhya.]

I pledge to practice the four types of giving, six times each day, Keeping in mind the delightful commitments of the great Ratna family.
[Thus keeping the samayas of Ratnasambhava.]
For the great Padma family, I pledge to uphold individually the holy dharmas that arose from great enlightenment, Those of the outer, secret, and three vehicles. [Thus keeping the samayas of Amitabha.]

For the great, supreme Karma family, I pledge to uphold all vows well And to make as many offerings as possible. [Thus keeping the samayas of Amogasiddhi.]

I shall generate the vows of peerless bodhichitta For the sake of all and uphold all samayas without exception.

**Second and third repetitions only (but may be used for all three recitations)**
I shall uphold all the general and specific tantric vows and commitments Of the five lineages without exception.

**All recitations**
I shall deliver those not delivered, liberate those not liberated, Give breath to those unable to breathe, And place all beings in the state beyond sorrow.

*Think strongly that you have received the complete pure set of tantric vows (those vows that were broken are now restored, and those that were kept have been increased).*
18. BLESS YOUR SPEECH
LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE

REFUGE AND BODHICHITTA
KÖN-CHOG SUM-LA KYAB-SU-CHI
I take refuge in the Three Rare Sublime Ones.
DRO-LA PÂN-CHIR SANG-GYÄ SHOG (3x)
May I become a buddha to benefit transmigratory beings. (3x)

VISUALIZATION
First, purify the truly existent I into emptiness, as it is empty in reality. The wisdom seeing emptiness then experiences infinite bliss. You can also think the wisdom experiencing bliss is nondual with emptiness.

I arise as the deity [if you have received an empowerment to do so].

On my tongue, a syllable AAH transforms into a moon disc.

On top of it appears a white syllable OM encircled by the white Sanskrit vowels (ALI) standing clockwise, the red Sanskrit consonants (KALI) standing counterclockwise, and the blue Heart Mantra of Dependent Relation standing clockwise.

Light beams radiate from the syllable OM and the mantra garlands, hooking back the blessings and power of both mundane and supramundane speech in the form of the three mantras, the sublime seven precious royal symbols, and the eight auspicious signs.

This includes the power of speech beyond samsara of the buddhas, aryabodhisattvas, those living in the three pure bhumis, and arhats, as well as the power of speech (from not beyond samsara) of those who are engaged in the path, and also those sages who have achieved the power of words, who have actualized the words of truth, and who have great power in their speech. Due to the power of abiding in silence, of living in the morality of abstaining from the negative karma of speech, the words of those sages have so much power. Whatever they pray, it
brings success. All the blessing powers of the holy speech – from those who are beyond samsara and those who are not beyond – are hooked in the aspect of the three mantras, the seven precious objects of the kings’ reign, and the eight auspicious signs, and are then absorbed. Think that the whole sky is filled with these together with the mantras and they are absorbed into the mantras on your tongue.

SANSKRIT VOWELS (ALI)
As you recite the vowels, white nectar flows down from the mantra and fills your entire body, completely purifying all the negative karma collected with the body.

OM A AA I II U UU RI RII LI LII E EE O OO ANG AH SWAAHAA (3x)

SANSKRIT CONSONANTS (KALI)
As you recite the consonants, red nectar beams flow down from the mantra and fill your whole body, purifying all the negative karma collected with the speech from beginningless rebirths.

OM KA KHA GA GHA NGA / TSA TSHA DZA GYA NYA / TRA THRA DRA DHRA NRA / TA THA DA DHA NA / PA PHA BA BHA MA / YA RA LA VA / SHA KA SA HA KYA SWAAHAA (3X)

When saying TRA THRA DRA DHRA NRA the tip of the tongue should be bent back to touch the roof of the mouth. When saying TA THA DA DHA NA the tip of the tongue should touch the back of the teeth.

HEART MANTRA OF DEPENDENT RELATION
As you recite the mantra, blue nectar beams flow down from the mantra and fill your whole body, completely purifying all the negative karma collected with your mind.

OM YE DHARMAA HETU PRABHAWA HETUN TEKÄN TATHAAGATO HYAVADÄ TEKÄN TSA YO [TINY PAUSE] NIRODHA EWAM VAADDII MAHAA SHRAMANA YE SWAAHAA (3X)
Then the Heart Mantra of Dependent Relation absorbs into the consonants, the consonants into the vowels, the vowels into the syllable OM, and the OM into the moon cushion. That transforms into a syllable AAH. The AHH melts into pink nectar and absorbs into my tongue, which becomes of the nature of a vajra.

Your tongue becomes very heavy and strong, as if difficult to move, and as indestructible as a vajra. Nothing can harm, take away, or destroy the power of your mantras, including black foods.

Then generate very strong faith that all the power and blessings of the speech of all the buddhas, bodhisattvas, sages, yogis, and so on, have entered your speech and that your speech is perfected. Think: “I have perfected my speech.” The minute that sentient beings hear your speech, it pacifies their emotional and disturbing thoughts and whatever you say gets actualized; they do what you say.

If you think in this way, the power of your speech becomes marvelous and whatever you recite is multiplied by ten million times. The power of your speech will not be diminished by eating wrong foods.

More specifically, blessing the speech has four benefits: 1. Your speech becomes perfect. 2. Whatever you recite is multiplied ten million times. 3. All your speech, even gossiping, becomes the recitation of mantra. 4. The power of your speech will not be taken away by eating wrong foods. According to the lower tantras eating garlic takes away the power of the speech for seven days, onion for five days, radish for nine days, nettles for a year, and sheep tongue for one’s whole life.

DEDICATION PRAYER
May my tongue have all the courage of the ones gone to bliss.
By the power manifesting from these glorified words,
May all sentient beings be subdued,
Whatever words I say, may all these actions be accomplished instantly.
COLOPHON

Blessing the Speech (Ngag byin rhaps): Extracted from The Collection of Cherished Recitations Such as Lamäi Näljor and Sadhanas of Different Deities (Tibetan Cultural Printing Press, 1987). Translated by Geshe Thubten Sherab. Rearranged with additions according to advice from Lama Zopa Rinpoche.


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Mantras written to reflect the way Lama Zopa Rinpoche says they should be pronounced, rather than following the usual FPMT style guide for Sanskrit transliteration, by Joan Nicell, April 2015.


19. RECITE MANTRAS FOR CREATING MERIT
LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE

MANTRA FOR BLESSING THE MALA

OM RUCHIRA MANI PRAVARTAYA HUM (7X)

Recite seven times, then blow on the mala. This increases the power of the mantras you recite over one sextillion times (ten million times one billion). This is from The Sutra Unfathomable Celestial Mansion, Great Increasing Jewel.

MANTRA TO INCREASE VIRTUE
Reciting this mantra increases the merit of any virtuous action done with body, speech or mind of the day 100,000 times. This is according to The Sutra of the Wheel of Complete Dedication.

OM SAMBHARA SAMBHARA BIMANA SARA MAHA JAVA HUM /OM SMARA SMARA BIMANA SKARA MAHA JAVA HUM (7X)

ZUNG OF THE EXALTED COMPLETELY PURE STAINLESS LIGHT
Anyone who talks to a person who has recited this mantra, their five uninterrupted negative karmas are purified. Just hearing the voice of a person who has recited this mantra, being touched by their shadow, or touching that person’s body purifies negative karmas collected in past lives. If you recite this mantra, you won’t be harmed by spirit possession, poisons, or by the elements [fire, water, air, and earth]. All the buddhas will protect you and guide you and all the devas and those who are living in samaya will support you. You won’t be harmed by black magic mantras and rituals. If this mantra is put
inside a stupa then any being, including evil transmigratory beings who sees the stupa, hears of the stupa, touches the stupa, or who is touched by dust or wind that comes from this stupa, will be free from all negative karmas. They will be born in the realms of happy transmigratory beings and they won’t be reborn in the lower realms. For more on this mantra, please see fpmt.org/education/teachings/texts/mantras.

NAMA NAWA NAWA TEENE N TATHAAGATA GANGA NAM DIVA LUKAA NEN / KOTINI YUTA SHATA SAHA SRAA NEN / OM VOVORI / TSARI NI* TSARI / MORI GOLI TSALA WAARI SVABA (A FEW TIMES) *indicates a high tone.

MANTRA TAUGHT BY BUDDHA DRODEN GYÄLWA CHÖ
It is said by the Victorious One, the Buddha, Droden Gyälwa Chhö: “By having recited this mantra, if you make one stupa or tsa-tsa, you receive the merit of having made ten million stupas or tsa-tsas. By having recited this mantra, if you touch any of the four elements [earth, fire, water, air] those elements are blessed two times the power of a stupa, and anyone who sees you or touches you is purified of the five uninterrupted negative karmas, and they will be born in a higher caste. By having recited this mantra you will have long life, be purified of the five uninterrupted negative karmas, have wealth, and will remember past lives. You will be protected from all harm and become enlightened.” For more on this mantra, please see fpmt.org/education/teachings/texts/mantras

OM HRI YA DHE SARVA TATHAAGATA HRIDAYA GARBE / ZOLA DHARMA DHATU GARBE / SANG HARANA AUY SANGSHODHAYA / PAPAM SARVA TATHAAGATA SAMENDRA AUSHNI KHA VIMALE BISHUDHE SVABA (a few times)
Then recite the following name mantras.

MANTRA THAT FULFILLS WISHES
Anyone who recites the names of this tathagata and who memorizes the words of this mantra will have all their wishes fulfilled.

CHOM DÄN DE / DE ZHIN SHEG PA / DRA CHOM PA / YANG DAG PAR / DZOG PÄI SANG GYÄ / SA DZIN GYÄL PO LA / CHHAG TSHÄL LO (7x)

TADYATHA / OM DHARE DHARE / DHARANI BANDHE SVÄHA (7x)
20. DAILY MOTIVATION: THE METHOD TO TRANSFORM A SUFFERING LIFE INTO HAPPINESS (INCLUDING ENLIGHTENMENT)
LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE

GAMPOPA, MILAREPA’S HEART DISCIPLE, SAID
After waking from sleep and before you get out of bed, think: “Today I am going to use my body, speech, and mind in virtue [for sentient beings].”

It is so important to generate this precious thought of bodhichitta, the ultimate good heart. Whatever you do that day is then done with bodhichitta, so everything then becomes virtue and the cause of enlightenment. If your motivation is wrong, everything then becomes negative karma and a cause of the evil-gone realms.

When you then go to sleep at night, dedicate all your actions of body, speech, and mind for sentient beings. This is extremely important.

It is said that, without difficulties, this becomes the path to the dharma-kaya.

LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE:
At the beginning of each day, after you open your eyes, until enlightenment is achieved and until death, and especially today, so that all the activities of your body, speech, and mind – hearing, thinking, and meditating, as well as walking, singing, sleeping, doing your job, and so on – do not become causes of suffering and instead become causes of happiness, and especially that they become causes to achieve buddhahood, (that is, that you transform them into a method for accomplishing benefit and happiness for all sentient beings), here is a
method for transforming the mind into holy Dharma and especially into bodhichitta.

1. MEDITATE ON “A DIRECT MEDITATION ON THE GRADUATED PATH CONTAINING ALL THE IMPORTANT MEANINGS” BY DORJE CHANG LOSANG JINPA

CORRECTLY FOLLOW THE VIRTUOUS FRIEND, [THE ROOT OF THE PATH TO ENLIGHTENMENT]

Essence encompassing all the buddhas,
Originator of all the holy Dharma of scripture and realization,
Principal of all the aryas intending virtue:
In the glorious holy gurus, I take refuge.

Please, gurus, bless my mind to become Dharma,
Dharma to become the path,
And the path to be without obstacles.

Until I achieve buddhahood, please bless me
To be like Youthful Norsang and Bodhisattva Always Crying
In correctly following the virtuous friend with pure thought and action,
Seeing whatever is done as pure,
And accomplishing whatever is said and advised.

THE GRADUATED PATH OF THE LOWER CAPABLE BEING

Please bless me to see that this greatly meaningful body with freedoms and richnesses
Is difficult to find and easily perishes,
That action and result are so profound,
And that the sufferings of the evil-gone transmigratory beings are so difficult to bear.
Therefore, please bless me to take refuge from the depths of my heart in the Three Rare Sublime Ones,
To abandon negative karma, and to accomplish virtue according to Dharma.
THE GRADUATED PATH OF THE MIDDLE CAPABLE BEING
In dependence upon that,
Even if I achieve the mere higher rebirth of a deva or human,
I will still have to experience suffering endlessly in samsara
Because of not having abandoned, and being under the control of, the
disturbing thought obscurations.

Therefore, please bless me to reflect well upon the way of circling in
samsara
And to continuously follow, day and night,
The path of the three types of precious trainings –
The principal method for becoming free from samsara.

THE COMMON GRADUATED PATH OF THE GREAT
CAPABLE BEING
In dependence upon that, even if I achieve mere liberation,
Since there is no sentient being of the six types who has not been my
father and mother,
Please bless me to think, “I must fulfill their purpose,”
And turn away from the lower happiness of nirvana.

Then, please bless me to generate precious bodhichitta
By equalizing and exchanging myself with others,
And to follow the conduct of the conquerors’ sons,
the six paramitas and so forth.

THE GRADUATED PATH OF THE SECRET MANTRA VAJRA
VEHICLE OF THE GREATEST CAPABLE BEING
Having trained my mind in the common path in that way,
I will not be upset even if I have to experience the sufferings of samsara
for a long time.
However, please bless me to look at sentient beings with extraordinary
unbearable compassion,
And to enter the quick path of the Vajrayana teachings.
Then, please bless me to protect my vows and *samayas* more than my life, 
And to quickly accomplish the unified Vajradhara state 
In one brief lifetime of this degenerate time.

2. **MEDITATE ON THE GURU ENTERING YOUR HEART**

May I not rise to heresy for even a second 
In regard to the actions of the glorious guru. 
May I see whatever actions are done as pure. 
With this devotion, may I receive the guru’s blessings in my heart.

Magnificent and precious root guru, 
Please abide on the lotus seat at my heart, 
Guide me with your great kindness, 
And grant me the realizations of your holy body, speech, and mind.

3. **MEDITATE ON HOW TO LIVE YOUR LIFE FOR SENTIENT BEINGS**

*From Kadampa Geshe Langri Tangpa’s “Eight Verses of Thought Transformation”*

Determined to obtain the greatest possible benefit 
From all sentient beings, 
Who are more precious than a wish-fulfilling jewel, 
I shall hold them most dear at all times.

*From Aryasura’s “Prayer in Seventy Stanzas”*

May I become like a wish-granting jewel 
Fulfilling all the wishes, 
And like a wish-granting tree, 
Fulfilling all the hopes of transmigratory beings.

*From the Conquerors’ Son Shantideva’s “A Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life”*

The following translation of verses 11–22 from chapter 3 and verse 55 from chapter 10 of Shantideva’s text contains additional clarifying
words in italics from Lama Zopa Rinpoche, who has also added the comments that appear between the verses.

11. For the sake of accomplishing the two purposes of all sentient beings,
Without any sense of loss or concern
I give away my body and likewise my enjoyments, such as food and clothing,
And even all my virtues accumulated over the three times.

By abandoning attachment and giving everything away, I will attain the state beyond sorrow. Since sentient beings are the supreme field of generosity, I will give everything to them.

12. By abandoning attachment and giving everything away, I will pass beyond sorrow,
And my mind will achieve the non-abiding sorrowless state, the state of omniscience.
Since I will have to give up everything all at once when I die, It’s best for me to give it away to sentient beings, because buddhahood is attained in that way.

13. As I have already given this body, an impure aggregate,
To all beings to use for their pleasure,
Even if they always kill me, criticize me, beat me, and so forth, I will let them do whatever they like.
I will allow them to do whatever makes them happy
And give up being attached to my body and getting angry at others.

14. From now on, whether they play games with my body
Or make it an object of laughter by ridiculing and making fun of it to hurt me,
Since I have already given this body of mine to sentient beings,
Why would I resist by protecting it and so forth?
15a. I will also use it to do any virtuous action
That doesn’t harm and benefits others.

Praying for virtues to become causes that do not go to waste includes:
praying for yourself to become a cause of only benefit for others (v. 15b),
praying for others’ attitudes to become causes that do not go to waste (v. 16),
and praying for others’ actions to become causes that do not go to waste (v. 17).

15b. Whenever any sentient being encounters me,
May it never be meaningless for them and always be meaningful.

16. Whenever someone has an angry or devotional thought arise
Just by looking at me,
May that attitude alone become a cause that always Accomplishes all the temporary and ultimate purposes of that being.

17. Whenever others criticize me with their speech,
Harm me with their bodies,
Or likewise insult me behind my back,
May all of them have the fortune to achieve great enlightenment.

18. May I be a savior for those who lack a savior,
A guide for all the beings who enter a road,
A boat, a ship, and a bridge
For those who want to cross the water.

19. May I be an island for those who seek the safe shore of an island,
A light for those who want a light,
Bedding for those who wish for bedding,
And for all beings who desire a servant,
May I become a servant of them all.
20. May I be a wish-granting jewel and a wish-fulfilling vase
Giving rise to whatever is desired, such as food and clothing;
Powerful mantra accomplishing the actions of pacification, increase,
and so forth;
Great medicine curing every sickness;
A wish-fulfilling tree satisfying every need;
And a wish-granting cow for all beings.

21. Like the four great elements, the earth and so forth,
And like the sky, may I always be
A means of living in every way
For the innumerable sentient beings.

22. Likewise, may I be a means of living,
At all times and in all ways, for the realms of
Sentient beings equaling the extent of space,
Until they all attain the sorrowless state.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama often recites the following
words of the conquerors’ son Shantideva after taking the
bodhisattva vows

55. As long as space remains,
As long as transmigratory beings remain,
Until then may I too remain
To dispel the suffering of transmigratory beings.

COLOPHONS
ORIGINAL COLOPHON
I, the beggar monk Thubten Zopa, who am nothing both in
this and future lives, compiled The Method to Transform a
Suffering Life into Happiness (Including Enlightenment)
(literally, A Method for Cultivating the Motivation) for the
benefit of those of little intelligence similar to me. It includes
the motivation A Direct Meditation on the Graduated Path
(Lam rim shar sgom gnad don kun tshang) composed by Dorje Chang Losang Jinpa.

Alternatively, the motivation can be done more extensively with practices such as Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo’s Calling the Guru from Afar. Afterward, contemplate the great kindness of sentient beings with the first verse of Langri Thangpa’s Eight Verses of Thought Transformation, pray to be of great meaning and benefit to sentient beings with the verse composed by Aryasura, and recite the verses from the third chapter of A Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life and so forth.

PUBLISHER’S COLOPHON

21. REFUGE, SEVEN LIMBS, ETC.

REFUGE
LA-MA SANG-GYE LAM-MA-CHÖ
DE-ZHIN LA-MA GE-DÜN-TE
KÜN-GYI JE-PO LAM-MA-YIN
LA-MA NAM-LA KYAB-SU-CHI (X3)

The guru is Buddha; the guru is Dharma;
The guru is Sangha also.
The guru is the creator of all (happiness);
To all gurus I go for refuge. (x3)

GENERATING BODHICITTA
DAG-DANG ZHEN-DÖN DRUB-LE-DU
DAG-GYI JANG-CHUB SEM-KYE-DO (X3)

To accomplish my own and others aims,
I generate bodhicitta. (x3)

PURIFYING THE PLACE
TAM-CHÄ DU-NI SA-ZHI-DAG
SEG-MA LA-SOG ME-PA-DANG
LAG-TIL TAR-NYAM BÄI-DUR-YÄI
RANG-ZHIN JAM-POR NÄ-GYUR-CHIG

Everywhere may the ground be pure,
Free of the roughness of pebbles and so forth.
May it be in the nature of lapis lazuli
And as smooth as the palm of one’s hand.
INVITE THE BUDDHAS TO COME
MA-LÜ SEM-CHÄN KÜN-GYÖN-GYUR-CHING
DÜ-DE PUNG-CHÄ MI-ZÄ JOM-DZÄ-LHA
NGÖ-NAM MA-LÜ YANG-DAG KYEN-GYUR-PÄI
CHOM-DÄN KOR-CHÄ NÄ-DIR SHEG-SU-SÖL

Protector of all beings without exception;
Perfect knower of all things:
Divine destroyer of the intractable legions of Mara;
Bhagavan and retinue, please come here.

OFFERING PRAYER
LHA-DANG MI-YI CHÖ-PÄI-DZÄ
NGÖ-SU SHAM-DANG YI-KYI-TRŪL
KÜN-ZANG CHÖ-TRIN LA-NA-ME
NAM-KHÄI KHAM-KÜN KHYAB-GYUR-CHIG

May human and divine offerings,
Actually arranged and mentally created,
Clouds of finest Samantabhadra offerings,
Fill the entire space.

OFFERING CLOUD MANTRA
Multiply the offerings with:

OM NAMO BHAGAVATE VAJRA SARA PRAMARDANE / TATHAGATAYA / ARHATE
SAMYAKSAM BUDDHAYA / TADYATHA / OM VAJRE VAJRE / MAHA VAJRE /
MAHA TEJA VAJRE / MAHA VIDYA VAJRE / MAHA BODHICHITTA VAJRE / MAHA
BODHI MÄNDO PASAM KRAMANA VAJRE / SARVA KARMA AVARANA VISHO
DHANA VAJRE SVAHA (X3)

THE POWER OF TRUTH
By the power of truth of the Three Rare Sublime Ones,
The blessings of all the buddhas and bodhisattvas,
The great wealth of the completed two collections, and the sphere of phenomena being pure and inconceivable; May these piles of clouds of offerings arising through transformation by the bodhisattvas Arya Samantabhadra, Manjushri, and so forth – Unimaginable and inexhaustible, equaling the sky – arise and, in the eyes of the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions, be received.

SEVEN LIMBS
GO-SUM GÜ-PÄI GO-NÄ CHAG-TSÄL-LO
NGÖ-SHAM YI-TRÜL CHÖ-TRIN MA-LÜ-BÜL
TOG-ME NÄ-SAG DIG-TUNG TAM-CHÄ-SHAG
KYE-PAG GE-WA NAM-LA JE-YI-RANG
KOR-WA MA-TONG BAR-DU LEG-ZHUG-NÄ
DRO-LA CHÖ-KYI KOR-LO KOR-WA-DANG
DAG-ZHÄN GE-NAM JANG-CHUB CHEN-POR-NGO

Reverently, I prostrate with my body, speech, and mind; I present clouds of every type of offering, actual and imagined; I declare all my negative actions accumulated since beginningless time And rejoice in the merit of all holy and ordinary beings. Please, remain until the end of cyclic existence And turn the wheel of Dharma for living beings. I dedicate my own merits and those of all others to the great enlightenment.

MANDALA OFFERING
SA-ZHI PÖ-KYI JUG-SHING ME-TOG-TRAM
RI-RAB LING-ZHI NYI-DÄ GYÄN-PA-DI
SANG-GYÄ ZHING-DU MIG-TE ÜL-WA-YI
DRO-KÜN NAM-DAG ZHING-LA CHÖ-PAR-SHOG

This ground, anointed with perfume, strewn with flowers, Adorned with Mount Meru, four continents, the sun and the moon: I imagine this as a buddha-field and offer it.
May all living beings enjoy this pure land!

**INNER MANDALA OFFERING**

DAG-GI CHAG-DANG MONG-SUM KYE-WÄI-YÜL  
DRA-NYEN BAR-SUM LÜ-DANG LONG-CHÖ-CHÄ  
PANG-PA ME-PAR BUL-GYI LEG-ZHE-NÄ  
DUG-SUM RANG-SAR DRÖL-WAR JIN-GYI-LOB

The objects of my attachment, aversion and ignorance -  
Friends, enemies, strangers – and my body, wealth, and enjoyments;  
Without any sense of loss I offer this collection.  
Please accept it with pleasure and bless me with freedom from the  
three poisons.

**PRAYER OF THE THREE GREAT PURPOSES**

I prostrate and go for refuge to the Guru and the Three Precious Gems:  
Please bless my mind.  
I am requesting you to immediately pacify all the wrong conceptions,  
from incorrect devotion to the Guru up to the subtle dual view of the  
white, red, and dark visions, that exist in my mind and in the minds  
of all mother sentient beings.  
I am requesting you to immediately generate all the right realizations  
from guru devotion up to enlightenment in my mind and in the  
minds of all mother sentient beings.  
I am requesting you to immediately pacify all outer and inner obstacles  
to actualizing the entire graduated path to enlightenment in my  
mind and in the minds of all mother sentient beings. (x3)

IDAM GURU RATNA MANDALA KAM NIRMATAYAMI
Lama Zopa Rinpoche recommends these five dedication prayers.

As a result of the three-times’ merits of myself and others,
May bodhichitta – from which the happiness of all sentient beings comes –
Be generated in the minds of self and other sentient beings without delay, even for one second.
And that which has been generated, may it increase.

As a result of the three-times’ merits of myself and others,
May emptiness be generated in the minds of self and other sentient beings, without delay, even for one second.
And that which has been generated, may it increase.

As a result of the three-times’ merits of myself and others,
May I, who am empty form my own side,
Achieve Buddha Tara’s enlightenment, which is empty from its own side.
And lead all sentient beings, who are empty from their own side,
To that enlightenment, which is empty from its own side,
As quickly as possible, by myself, alone.

Whatever dedication the Victorious Ones Gone to Bliss
Of the three times have admired as best,
I shall also perfectly dedicate in the same way all these roots of virtue
So that I may perform good works.

Because of the past, present, and future merit created by me and by the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and sentient beings,
May I, my family, students, and all sentient beings
Be able to actualize completely in this very lifetime
Lama Tsong Khapa’s path of unified sutra and tantra,
Which is pure like refined gold.
May this pure teaching of Lama Tsong Khapa
Spread in all directions and flourish forever.

Due to all the past, present and future merits collected by me, buddhas,
bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings – which are totally non-existent from their own side –
May the I – which is also totally nonexistent from its own side –
Achieve Guru Shakyamuni Buddha’s enlightenment – which is also
totally non-existent from its own side –
And lead all sentient beings – who are also totally non-existent from their own side –
To that enlightenment – which is also totally non-existent from its own side –
By myself alone – which is also totally non-existent from its own side.
23. LONG-LIFE PRAYERS

HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA
GANG-RI RA-WĀ KOR-WĀI ZHING-KHAM-DIR
PĀN-DANG DE-WA MA-LŪ JUNG-WĀI-NĀ
CHĀN-RĀ ZIG-WANG TĀN-DZIN GYA-TSO-YI
ZHAB-PĀ SĪ-TĀI BAR-DU TĀN-GYUR-CHIG

In the land encircled by snow mountains
You are the source of all happiness and good;
All-powerful Chenrezig, Tenzin Gyatso,
Please remain until samsara ends.

Prayer That Spontaneously Fulfills All Wishes
Savior of the Snow Land teachings and transmigratory beings,
Who makes extremely clar the path that is unification of emptiness and compassion,
To the Lotus Holder, Tenzin Gyatso, I beseech –
May all your holy wishes be spontaneously fulfilled!

LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE
TUB-TSHŪL CHANG-ZHING JAM-GŌN GYĀL-WĀI-TĀN
DZIN-KYŌ PEL-WĀ KYN-ZO DOG-POR-DZĀ
CHŌG-SUM KUR-WĀI LEG-MŌN TU-DRUB-PA
DAG-SOG DŪL-JĀI GŌN-DU ZHAB-TĀN-SHŌG

You who uphold the Subduer’s moral way;
Who serve as the bountiful bearer of-all,
Sustaining, preserving, and spreading Manjunath’s victorious doctrine;
Who masterfully accomplish magnificent prayers honoring the Three Jewels,
Savior of myself and others, your disciples: please, please live long!
LAMA TENZIN OSEL RINPOCHE
Venerable One, to you whose kindness exceeds that of all the conquerors,
For those wanderers in far-off places, especially the West,
Mindful of your loving concern for us in intentionally descending again into a family of a far distant land,
We make this request:
Oh, Lama, please, please live long!

Also recite the long-life prayers of your other lamas.
24. BLESS YOUR FOOD AND OFFER IT TO THE THREE JEWELS

Having taking Refuge in the Three Jewels, you are committed to offering the first mouthful of your food and drink to them.

1. Think that the food is empty of existing from its own side; for example, think how it’s a dependent arising: it’s come into existence in dependence upon the animals who died for it, including the insects who died during the growing and picking of the vegetables; all the people involved in growing it, picking, driving it to the shops, selling it, etc. etc.

2. Then imagine it is in a huge container in the sky. You recite three times OM AH HUM and imagine it is now blessed with the energy of the body, speech, and mind of all the Buddhas.

3. Then offer it, the most important part, Lama Zopa Rinpoche says: imagine all the gurus, buddhas, bodhisattvas, holy beings, and all the sentient beings of the six realms, pervading space.

4. Then imagine all these beings turn into our guru in the form of the Buddha we feel close to: this is the most potent object of our merit.

5. Then, finally, imagine that they all experience the joy of receiving this ocean of nectar as you recite. As Lama Zopa Rinpoche says, imagining this is the very essence of the meaning of the word “offering” or “cho” or “puja”.

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To the supreme teacher, the precious Buddha,
To the supreme practice, the holy precious Dharma,
To the supreme guides, the precious Sangha,
To all the objects of refuge I make this offering.

You could offer your food in the manner of making the inner offering.

Source: Robina Courtin, based on the teachings of her lamas.
25. FULL-LENGTH SIX-SESSION GURU YOGA

THE PRELIMINARY PRACTICES

A1
REFUGE AND BODHICITTA
I go for refuge, until I am enlightened,
To the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Highest Assembly.
From the virtuous merit that I collect
By practicing giving and other perfections,
May I attain the state of a buddha
To be able to benefit all sentient beings.

A2
May all sentient beings be parted from aversion and clinging, feeling close to some and distant from others.
May they win the bliss that is specially sublime,
May they find release from the ocean of unbearable sorrow,
And may they never be parted from freedom’s true joy.
A3
From this moment on, until I am a buddha,  
May I never give up, though my life be at stake, the attitude wishing to  
gain full enlightenment  
In order to free from the fears of samsara  
And nirvana’s complacency all sentient beings.

A4
O buddhas, bodhisattvas, and gurus please listen  
To what I now say from the depths of my heart.  
Just as all buddhas of the past have developed  
The thought of enlightenment, true bodhichitta,  
Then practiced its stages of graded development  
Following the trainings for all buddhas’ children,  
So may I too, for the sake of all beings,  
Develop bodhichitta and follow the trainings  
Exactly as all bodhisattvas have done.

A5
At this moment my life has become truly fruitful,  
For having attained an endowed human body,  
Today I have developed the true buddha essence,  
Bodhichitta, and thus have become Buddha’s child.

A6
Applying now any skilled means whatsoever,  
May I always accord what I do with this essence  
(And follow the actions of all Buddha’s children).  
May I never confuse with this pure faultless essence  
(Any teachings that lack this enlightening thought).
SETTING UP THE MERIT FIELD
In the sky before me, on a breathtaking throne of jewels, 
On a mandala seat of a lotus, sun, and full moon, 
Sits my root Guru, all-pervading Vajradhara, 
With a blue-colored body, one face, and two arms. 
Holding vajra and bell and embracing his duplicate consort. 

[Lama Zopa Rinpoche mentions that, rather than “embracing his duplicate consort,” this phrase could be worded “embracing the mother who is similar to himself.”]

He shines resplendent with all the marks of a buddha, 
Adorned with many dazzling jeweled ornaments, 
Draped with fine garments of enchanting, heavenly scarves. 
Even the mere remembrance of him dispels all my torment.

With a nature encompassing every supreme refuge, 
He sits cross-legged in the vajra position, 
The three spots of his body marked with three letters.

INVITING THE WISDOM BEINGS
Light beams forth from the HUM (at his heart) 
And invokes Guru Vajradhara from his actual abode. 

JAH HUM BAM HO 
They (merge to) become non-dual.

[HUM is a transliteration from the Sanskrit. Most Tibetan lamas pronounce this syllable as HUNG.]

[JAH HUM BAM HO is a transliteration from the Sanskrit. Most Tibetan lamas pronounce these syllables DZA HUNG BAM HO, and they are written that way in the Tibetan script.]
**A8**

**PROSTRATIONS**

I bow at your lotus feet,  
O my jewel-like Guru Vajradhara,  
Your kindness heralds an instantaneous  
Dawn of great bliss.

---

**A9**

**THE EIGHT-LIMB PRAISE**

*Recite only if you have received a Mother Tantra initiation.*

OM I prostrate to the bhagavan lord of the brave ones HUM HUM PHAT  
* [PHAT is a transliteration from the Sanskrit. It is pronounced either PAYT or PAY depending on the lama.]*  
OM To you whose brilliance equals the fire that ends a great eon HUM HUM PHAT  
OM To you who have an inexhaustible crowning top knot HUM HUM PHAT  
OM To you with bared fangs and a wrathful face HUM HUM PHAT  
OM To you whose thousand arms blaze with light HUM HUM PHAT  
OM To you who hold an ax, an uplifted noose, a spear, and a skull staff HUM HUM PHAT  
OM To you who wear a tiger-skin cloth HUM HUM PHAT  
OM I bow to you whose great smoke-colored body ends all obstructions HUM HUM PHAT  
OM I prostrate to Bhagavativajra Varahi HUM HUM PHAT  
OM To the queen of the female arya practitioners, invincible in the three realms HUM HUM PHAT  
OM To you who destroy all fears of evil spirits with your great diamond-like means HUM HUM PHAT  
OM To you whose eyes empower those who sit on the diamond throne not to be conquered by anyone HUM HUM PHAT  
OM To you whose wrathful body of psychic heat can desiccate Brahma HUM HUM PHAT
OM To you who terrify and dry up the demons and thus can vanquish all other forces HUM HUM PHAT
OM To you who triumph over all that can make you ill-tempered, excited, or stupefied HUM HUM PHAT
OM I bow to Vajra Varahi, the consort who overpowers lust HUM HUM PHAT

**A10**
**THE THREE OFFERINGS**
All the things I possess and what is not mine, What is actually placed here and what I mentally create, I present you an ocean-like cloud of these various offerings: outer, inner, and secret.

**A11**
**MANDALA OFFERING**
The body, speech, and mind of myself and others, Our wealth as well as our virtues amassed in the past, present, and future, An excellent jeweled mandala together with a mass of Samantabhadra’s offerings: I envision these all and present them to you, O my Guru, my yidam, and the Three Precious Gems. Accepting these in your compassion, bestow on me waves of your blessings.

IDAM GURU RATNA MANDALA-KAM NIRYATAYAMI

**REQUESTS**
**A12**
I humbly beseech you, my precious Guru, Just as the buddhas of the three times and ten directions have tamed (sentient beings), You too enact the buddhas’ deeds in countless realms, Taking the form of a saffron-robed monk.
A13  
I humbly beseech you, my precious Guru,  
Esteemed by Vajradhara, for those meager of mind,  
As a field of merit more holy  
Than the endless circles of infinite buddhas.

A14  
Every supreme and mundane attainment  
Follows upon pure devotion to you, my protector.  
Seeing this I forsake my body and even my life;  
Bless me to practice what will only please you.

B1  
MERGE WITH GURU V AJRADARA  
Requested in this way, my supreme Guru  
Comes to the crown of my head.

B2  
DISSOLVE INTO EMPTINESS, BECOME THE  
DHARMAKAYA  
Once more he gladly (merges with me),  
We become of one taste.

B3  
MANIFEST OUT OF EMPTINESS AS THE DEITY  
With the pride of being Vajrasattva I embrace (my consort) Bhagavati  
While holding a vajra and bell symbolic  
Of the secret of great bliss simultaneous  
With the secret of (voidness) free from the mental fabrication of true  
existence.
From this moment on, without any sense of loss,
I send forth my body and, likewise, my wealth
And my virtues amassed throughout the three times
In order to help all beings, my mothers.

**RECITATION OF VOWS**

(For fully ordained monks only).

**THE EIGHTEEN ROOT BODHISATTVA VOWS**

1. Praising myself and belittling others;
2. Not sharing my wealth or the Dharma;
3. Not forgiving even if (others) apologize;
4. (Doubting and) denying the Mahayana;
5. Taking offerings intended for the Triple Gem;
6. Abandoning the Dharma (through sectarianism);
7. Disrobing (monks or nuns);
8. (Committing) the five heinous crimes;
9. (Holding) distorted views;
10. Destroying places such as towns;
11. Teaching voidness to those untrained;
12. Discouraging others from full enlightenment;
13. Causing others to break pratimoksha vows;
14. Belittling those who follow Hinayana;
15. Proclaiming false realizations (of voidness);
16. Accepting gifts of what has been seized from the Triple Gem;
17. Passing false judgment;
18. Giving up bodhichitta:

These are the eighteen root (bodhisattva) downfalls.

**PREREQUISITES FOR BREAKING THE ROOT VOWS**

Not regarding these as detrimental,
Not forsaking the wish to repeat such behavior,
Delighting and taking pleasure in them,  
And having no shame or consideration  
Are the four binding factors that must all be present  
For sixteen of these to be complete.  
But for the other two – holding distorted views and giving up  
   bodhichitta –  
These (four) are not needed.  
I shall guard myself (from all these downfalls).

**B7**  
**THE FOURTEEN ROOT TANTRIC VOWS**  
1. Despising or belittling my Guru;  
2. Disregarding any practice;  
3. Speaking badly of my vajra brothers;  
4. Abandoning love for any being;  
5. Giving up wishing and entering bodhichitta;  
6. Scorning the teachings of sutra or tantra;  
7. Revealing secrets to those who are ripe;  
8. Abusing my own aggregates;  
9. Denying (or doubting) voidness;  
10. Remaining close to malevolent people;  
11. Not recollecting the view (of voidness);  
12. Causing someone to lose faith;  
13. Not upholding my word of honor;  
14. Despising women:  

These are the fourteen root (tantric) downfalls.  
I shall protect myself from them at the cost of my life.

**B8**  
**SIX ADDITIONAL PLEDGES**  
1. I shall abandon the four basic non-virtues, as well as liquor and  
   misbehavior;  
2. Devote myself to a holy, protecting Guru;  
3. Treat my Dharma friends with respect;
4. Cultivate the ten virtuous actions;
5. Never withdraw from the Mahayana;
6. Avoid walking over or showing disrespect (to a sacred object).
All these (additional) pledges I shall honor.

**THE EIGHT SECONDARY VOWS**

1. Relying upon an unqualified consort;
2. Sitting in union without the three recognitions;
3. Showing secret substances to an unsuitable vessel;
4. Fighting or arguing at an offering ceremony;
5. Giving false answers to sincerely asked questions;
6. Staying more than a week in the home of a shravaka;
7. Boasting that I am a yogi, although I am not;
8. Teaching the sacred Dharma to those with no faith;

**THE THREE ADDITIONAL SECONDARY TANTRIC VOWS**

9. Conferring mandala rites without full preparation;
10. Needlessly breaking the pratimoksha or bodhichitta vows;
11. Acting in contradiction to the teachings of The Fifty Verses of Guru Devotion:

These are the secondary tantric transgressions.
I shall guard myself from them in accordance with the rules.

**THE TEN VOWS IN RELATION TO MOTHER TANTRA**

1. I shall perform all actions (first) with my left;
2. Make offerings (to women) and never abuse them;
3. Reject sitting in union with an unqualified (consort);
4. While in union, never be parted from the view (of voidness);
5. Relentlessly aspire to the path of (transforming) attachment;
6. Never forsake the two kinds of mudra;
7. Strive mainly for the outer and inner methods;
8. Never release seminal fluid;
9. Remain chaste in my behavior;
10. And abandon repulsion when tasting bodhichitta.

B11
I shall never transgress, even in my dreams,
The most minor rule of the pure moral training
Of the pratimoksha, bodhichitta, and Vajrayana vows.
I shall practice according to the Buddha’s words.

B12
As Buddha intended, I shall uphold
The complete sacred Dharma of insight and scriptures
As gathered together in the three types of vehicle and four tantric classes.
I shall liberate all beings by whichever means is suited to each.

CONCLUSION
C1
Through the force of white merit from this (virtuous act),
And by the (compassionate) power of Vajradhara throughout all my lives,
May I never transgress any vows I have taken;
May I complete the stages of the twofold path.

C2
In brief, may I be born in Shambhala, the great jewel treasury,
And complete there the stages of the peerless path
In as quick a time as the amount of merit
I have gathered from this virtuous practice.

C3
Throughout all my lives may I never be parted from perfect gurus.
By making good use of the glorious Dharma
To fulfill the good features of the stages and paths,
May I quickly achieve Vajradhara’s enlightenment.
THE FOLLOWING FORMULA COUNTS FOR RECITING SIX-SESSION GURU YOGA THREE TIMES

Each morning and evening recite as follows:

A1 (3x), A2–3, A4 (3x), A5–14;
A1–6, A8, A10–14;
A1–6, A8, A10–14;
B1–12
B2–4, B11–12
B2–4, B11–12
C1–3
26. ABBREVIATED SIX-SESSION GURU YOGA

THE PRELIMINARY PRACTICES

REFUGE AND BODHICITTA
1. In my heart I turn to the Three Jewels of Refuge,  
May I free suffering creatures and place them in bliss;  
May the compassionate spirit of love grow within me.  
That I might complete the enlightening path.

THE ACTUAL PRACTICE

SETTING UP THE MERIT FIELD
2. In the sky on a lotus, a sun, and a moon seat,  
I see my lama as Dorje Chang,  
Blue in color, holding dorje and bell,  
Experiencing great bliss with his consort Ying Chukma.

INVITING THE WISDOM BEINGS
3. On his brow a white OM, at his throat a red AH,  
From the blue HUM at his heart many colors shine out,  
Calling forth the awakened from all ten directions,  
Inviting them to him to melt into one.  
[JAH HUM BAM HO]

PROSTRATIONS
4a. To your blue lotus feet I prostrate, Dorje Chang.

If you have a Mother Tantra empowerment, turn to Verse A9 on page 214 in the full-length practice and recite “The Eight-Limb Praise.”
OFFERINGS
4b. With oceans of clouds I make triple offerings:
The lands, jeweled vase, the sun and the moon,
And all precious offerings I make unto you.

5. Powers supreme and powers mundane
Follow upon pure devotion to you, my protector,
Thus my body, my life, and my wealth I forsake
And ask for your aid only to please you.

After the first recitation of verses 1–5, go back and recite verses 1, 4, 5;
after the second recitation, do the same. After the third recitation,
continue with:

MERGE WITH LAMA DORJE CHANG
6a. Now my Lama requested comes to the top of my head

DISSOLVE INTO EMPTINESS, BECOME THE DHARMAKAYA
And dissolves till we both are one;

MANIFEST OUT OF EMPTINESS AS THE DEITY
6b. And I, Dorje Sempa, unite with Chomdenma,
Holding dorje and bell and feeling great bliss.

7. Land, body, and wealth and all virtues collected,
For the sake of all mothers I gladly release,
And I vow to protect all the vows I have taken
Nor transgress even one for the sake of my life.

Now recite the vows, Verses B5–B10 on pages 217–220 in the full-length practice.
CONCLUSION

8. By means of holding both sutra and tantra
May I liberate all living creatures completely.
May the virtues collected flow on toward the Dharma,
Preserve it, and nourish the prayers of the masters.

9. I request that the grace of the Three Jewels of Refuge,
Following on by cause and effect,
Shall fulfill all the prayers that I now set forth
And lead me across to enlightenment’s shore.

After having arisen as Dorje Sempa and recited these last three verses,
go back to Verse 6b and recite the rest two more times, thus completing
in one session three recitations of the practice. Each time you say, “And
I Dorje Sempa...” remember emptiness.

COLOPHONS
Full-length Six-Session Guru Yoga composed by Losang
Chökyi Gyältsän (the First Panchen Lama) and expanded by
the First Pabongka Rinpoche. Translated by Alexander
Berzin and Sharpa Tulku. Reprinted with permission.
Abbreviated Six-Session Guru Yoga composed by Ngulchu
Jeydrung and translated by Alexander Berzin and Sharpa
Tulku. Reprinted with permission.
Both versions lightly edited for the FPMT Prayer Book,
FPMT Education Department, January 1999. Revised

Headings and instructions in italics added by Robina
Courtin, Tubten Kunga Center, Deerfield Beach, FL,
February 10, 2014.
27. AN OFFERING OF TSOG TO GURU VAJRASATTVA
LAMA THUBTEN YESHE

A BANQUET OF THE GREATLY BLISSFUL CIRCLE OF PURE OFFERINGS: AN ANTIDOTE TO THE VAJRA HELLS

PRELIMINARIES
After completing either the abbreviated or elaborate meditation on the generation of oneself in the form of Vajrasattva, visualize as follows.

MEDITATION ON THE MANDALA OF GURU VAJRASATTVA: FIELD FOR THE COLLECTION OF MERIT

HUM
In the space before me,
From the enjoyment of indivisible great bliss and emptiness,
Appear the complete supporting and supported mandalas of Vajrasattva.

Clouds of Samantabhadra’s offerings fill all of space.
In the sphere of great non-dualistic bliss
All beings miraculously appear as gods and goddesses
Embodying thoroughly developed method and wisdom
As skillful dancers manifesting peace, expansion, power, and wrath.

BLESSING THE OFFERINGS

OM KHANDAROHI HUM HUM PHAT
All those who create obstacles are dispelled, and by reciting OM SVABHAVA SHUDDHA SARVA DHARMA SVABHAVA SHUDDHOHAM they are purified of ordinary appearances.

All becomes empty.
And from the sphere of emptiness
Appears the letter AH, which transforms
Into a very large and spacious skullcup
Containing the five meats and five nectars.
Melting, they all transform
Into a great ocean of wisdom nectar.

OM AH HUM HA HO HRIIH (3X)

PRESENTING THE OFFERINGS AND RECITING THE MANTRA
This pure offering is the yogi’s commitment (samaya)
And, as the pure vision of their great bliss,
Transcends being an object of ordinary senses.
It is the basis of all attainments and the most supreme nectar.
Therefore, O guru, with your non-superstitious
Simultaneously born great bliss, please enjoy it.

1. HUM O miraculous rainbow cloud
Appearing in the space of dharma, 
Holy body of Vajrasattva –
Having purified the hallucinated vision
And dualistic conception that fails to recognize
That the guru, in essence, is the deity,
The dakini, and the Dharma protector –
In order to please you, Guru Vajrasattva,
I am presenting these sacred ingredients
As pure offerings to be enjoyed by your five senses.
Please bless me to generate simultaneously born great bliss.
2. HUM O miraculous rainbow cloud
Appearing in the space of dharmakaya,
Holy body of Vajrasattva –
Having purified the hallucinated vision
Of the five sense consciousnesses’ clinging
To the pleasure of desirable objects,
Thereby depriving this perfect human birth of all meaning –
In order to please you, Guru Vajrasattva,
I am presenting these sacred ingredients
As pure offerings to be enjoyed by your five senses.
Please bless me to abandon clinging
To the ordinary concepts and appearances of this life.

3. HUM O miraculous rainbow cloud
Appearing in the space of dharmakaya,
Holy body of Vajrasattva –
Having purified the hallucinated vision:
The demon dualistic conception and veiling obscurations
Of improper attention, superstition, karma, and delusions –
In order to please you, Guru Vajrasattva,
I am presenting these Sacred ingredients
As pure offerings to be enjoyed by your five senses. Please bless me to generate immaculate renunciation.

OM VAJRA HERUKA SAMAYA MANUPALAYA / HERUKA TVENO PATISHTHA /
DRIDHO ME BHAVA / SUTOSHYO ME BHAVA / SUPOSHYO ME BHAVA /
ANURAKTO ME BHAVA / SARVA SIDDHAM ME PRAYACCHA / SARVA KARMA
SUCHAME CHITTAM SHRIYAM KURU HUM / HA HA HA HA HO / BHAGAVAN /
VAJRA HERUKA MAME MUNCHA / HERUKA BHAVA / MAHA SAMAYA SATTVA AH
HUM PHAT

4. HUM O miraculous rainbow cloud
Appearing in the space of dharmakaya,
Holy body of Vajrasattva –
Having purified the hallucinated vision
Of holding oneself more dear than others:
The door to all suffering and the dualistic conception
That is the chief of all evils –
In order to please you, Guru Vajrasattva,
I am presenting these sacred ingredients
As pure offerings to be enjoyed by your five senses.
Please bless me to generate immaculate bodhichitta.

OM VAJRA HERUKA SAMAYA MANUPALAYA / HERUKA TVENO PATISHTHA /
DRIDHO ME BHAVA / SUTOSHYO ME BHAVA / SUPOSHYO ME BHAVA /
ANURAKTO ME BHAVA / SARVA SIDDHAM ME PRAYACCHA / SARVA KARMA
SUCHAME CHITTAM SHRIYAM KURU HUM / HA HA HA HA HO / BHAGAVAN /
VAJRA HERUKA MAME MUNCHA / HERUKA BHAVA / MAHA SAMAYA SATTVA AH
HUM PHAT

5. HUM O miraculous rainbow cloud
Appearing in the space of dharmakaya,
Holy body of Vajrasattva –
Having purified the hallucinated vision:
The stain of dualistic conception holding
What is merely imputed by superstition as true –

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In order to please you, Guru Vajrasattva,  
I am presenting these sacred ingredients  
As pure offerings to be enjoyed by your five senses.  
Please bless me to realize the great seal of emptiness.

OM VAJRA HERUKA SAMAYA MANUPALAYA / HERUKA TVENO PATISHTHA /  
DRIDHO ME BHAVA / SUTOSHYO ME BHAVA /SUPOSHYO ME BHAVA /  
ANURAKTO ME BHAVA / SARVA SIDDHIM ME PRAYACCHA / SARVA KARMA  
SUCHAME CHITTAM SHRIYAM KURU HUM / HA HA HA HA HO / BHAGAVAN /  
VAJRA HERUKA MAME MUNCHA / HERUKA BHAVA / MAHA SAMAYA SATTVA AH  
HUM PHAT

6. HUM O miraculous rainbow cloud  
Appearing in the space of dharmakaya,  
Holy body of Vajrasattva –  
Having purified the hallucinated vision  
Of ordinary appearance and conception:  
The eighty superstitions both gross and subtle,  
The violent, uncontrollable wind of the dualistic mind –  
In order to please you, Guru Vajrasattva,  
I am presenting these sacred ingredients  
As pure offerings to be enjoyed by your five senses.  
Please bless me to receive the four actual empowerments.

OM VAJRA HERUKA SAMAYA MANUPALAYA / HERUKA TVENO PATISHTHA /  
DRIDHO ME BHAVA / SUTOSHYO ME BHAVA /SUPOSHYO ME BHAVA /  
ANURAKTO ME BHAVA / SARVA SIDDHIM ME PRAYACCHA / SARVA KARMA  
SUCHAME CHITTAM SHRIYAM KURU HUM / HA HA HA HA HO / BHAGAVAN /  
VAJRA HERUKA MAME MUNCHA / HERUKA BHAVA / MAHA SAMAYA SATTVA AH  
HUM PHAT

7. HUM O miraculous rainbow cloud  
Appearing in the space of dharmakaya,  
Holy body of Vajrasattva –  
Having purified the hallucinated vision
Of experiencing the vajra hells
Resulting from the uncontrollable downpour
Of negative actions and broken samaya –
In order to please you, Guru Vajrasattva,
I am presenting these sacred ingredients
As pure offerings to be enjoyed by your five senses.
May infinite purity alone arise.

OM VAJRA HERUKA SAMAYA MANUPALAYA / HERUKA TVENO PATISHTHA /
DRIDHO ME BHAVA / SUTOSHYO ME BHAVA /SUPOSHYO ME BHAVA /
ANURAKTO ME BHAVA / SARVA SIDDHIM ME PRAYACCHA / SARVA KARMA
SUCHAME CHITTAM SHRIYAM KURU HUM / HA HA HA HA HO / BHAGAVAN /
VAJRA HERUKA MAME MUNCHA / HERUKA BHAVA / MAHA SAMAYA SATTVA AH
HUM PHAT

OFFERING TO THE VAJRA MASTER
The offering of tsog to the vajra master should now be made
while reciting

O holder of the vajra, please pay attention to me.
This pure offering presented by the assembled circle of dakas and
dakinis,
This nectar free of all divisions of subject and object,
Transcendentally blissful, please enjoy it eternally.

AH LA LA HOH

The vajra master then replies
O hail, great blissful wisdom!
The great collected offering,
The seed that causes the tum-mo heat to explode,
This joyful, blissful experience beyond concepts, beyond words –
Welcome, great eternal bliss!
AH HO MAHA SUKHA HO
Distribute the tsog offerings to the assembly.

VERSES OF PRAISE
Praise is offered by reciting the following:
Merely thinking of just your name
Eradicates all obstacles / and immediately purifies all negative karma.
Thus, to you unsurpassed Vajrasattva,
I pay homage and make prostration.

EIGHT-LIMB PRAISE
OM To you whose brilliance equals the fire that ends a great eon HUM HUM PHAT
OM To you who have an inexhaustible crowning top knot HUM HUM PHAT
OM To you with bared fangs and a wrathful face HUM HUM PHAT
OM To you whose thousand arms blaze with light HUM HUM PHAT
OM To you who hold an ax, an uplifted noose, a spear, and a skull staff HUM HUM PHAT
OM To you who wear a tiger-skin cloth HUM HUM PHAT
OM I bow to you whose great smoke-colored body ends all obstructions HUM HUM PHAT

OM I prostrate to Bhagavativajra Varahi HUM HUM PHAT
OM To the queen of the female arya practitioners, invincible in the three realms HUM HUM PHAT
OM To you who destroy all fears of evil spirits with your great diamond-like means HUM HUM PHAT
OM To you whose eyes empower those who sit on the diamond throne not to be conquered by anyone HUM HUM PHAT
OM To you whose wrathful body of psychic heat can desiccate Brahma HUM HUM PHAT
OM To you who terrify and dry up the demons and thus can vanquish all other forces HUM HUM PHAT
OM To you who triumph over all that can make you ill-tempered, excited, or stupefied HUM HUM PHAT
OM I bow to Vajra Varahi, the consort who overpowers lust HUM HUM PHAT

OFFERING THE REMAINING TSOG

OM AH HUM (3x)

To the assembly of the eight classes of wrathful governing protectors
I present all the remaining pure offerings –
The nectar of the five wisdoms contained in this skullcup –
An illusory appearance of indivisible bliss and emptiness.
Do your duty, the four rites for Dharma practitioners.

CONCLUDING PRAYER OF AUSPICIOUSNESS

May all be auspicious for me to see my mind as the lama:
Who understands perfectly all beings’ thoughts,
Whose speech fulfills countless beings’ wishes,
And whose pure body arises from an infinite collection of merit.

May all be auspicious for realizing the unity of dharma and rupakaya
By discovering my own subtle, continually residing consciousness
Through the power of taking the three bodies as the path:
The antidote to imminent death, bardo, and rebirth.

May all be auspicious for everything within samsara and nirvana
To be synthesized with great emptiness and great bliss
Through the unusual embrace of the mother: the sphere of space
        beyond all puzzling divisions,
And the father: the great blissful wisdom, the appearance of all existent phenomena.
POSTSCRIPT
The following poem in jest came uncontrollably and without
premeditation to the mind of the author while he was composing this
work:

All of samsara appears
As a foe to one who fears
He might be gored and torn
By the proverbial rabbit’s horn
Of tantric ordinations:
The golden ground foundation,
In the common path untrained,
In tantra unordained,
He has no initiation;
What a situation!
How strange! What a joke!
He’s a sky-flower yogi!

This tsog offering can be made to other highest yoga tantra deities by
substituting that deity’s name for Vajrasattva’s and by blessing the
offerings in accordance with the yoga method of that deity and reciting
that deity’s mantra.

Through the blessings of all the root and lineage lamas,
The great accomplishments of the mind-bound deity Vajrasattva,
And the divine actions of the dakinis and protectors of the three places,
May auspiciousness allow all beings to be satisfied by ultimate peace.

ORIGINAL COLOPHON AND DEDICATION
On the special day of the dakas and dakinis – the twenty-fifth day of the eleventh month of the Iron-Bird year (19 January 1982) – Venerable Lama Thubten Yeshe wrote this tsog offering of Heruka Vajrasattva for a puja performed at Bodhgaya, India under the bodhi tree by an international gathering of Sangha and lay students who together made
hundreds and thousands of offerings. This puja was offered by the Italian gelong Thubten Dönyö, a disciple having unsurpassed understanding of the sutra and tantra path to enlightenment and indestructible devotion to Shakyamuni Buddha’s teachings, and who was adorned outwardly with saffron robes and inwardly with the three sets of vows. This tsog offering was written with the prayer that all the Sangha of the ten directions enjoy harmonious relationships with one another, guard the precepts of pure moral conduct, and accomplish the practice of the three higher trainings, thereby becoming skillful guides providing great help to all beings.

It is dedicated to the speedy return of our great guru of unmatched and inexpressible kindness, Kyabje Trijang Dorje Chang. For the benefit of all sentient beings, our mothers, may we remain inseparable from this great guru during our entire path to enlightenment.

Furthermore, it has been noted that in many countries today – Tibet, for example – those whose lives are not opposed to the three ordinations of the pratimoksha, bodhichitta, and tantric vows are not considered to be human beings! Yet even in such extremely degenerate times there are still many fortunate practitioners, and it is very important that these yogis and yoginis have a method, such as this Vajrasattva practice, powerful enough for achieving the exalted realization of simultaneously born great bliss and emptiness. This profound method is easy and simple to practice, accumulates a great store of meritorious potential, and is capable of destroying all the negativities resulting from breaking one’s pledged commitments.

In fact, it is such a powerful method that many lamas of the Geluk tradition have stated that even transgressions of root tantric vows can be purified by reciting the Vajrasattva mantra. Therefore, one should understand that there is no negativity so strong that it cannot be purified through the
practice of Vajrasattva.

For all these reasons, then, this tsog offering has been composed by Vajrasattva yogi and follower of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha’s teachings, the bhikshu Muni Jñana.

TRANSLATOR’S COLOPHON
The above was translated with the kind assistance of Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche and Ven. Könchog Yeshe, and edited by Jonathan Landaw.
This abbreviated *tsog* offering practice should be preceded by self-generation into any highest yoga tantra deity on the basis of refuge and bodhicitta or a six–session guru yoga, sadhana of the deity, Lama Chöpa, etc.

Then, the requisite substances of *bala* (meat) and *mandana* (alcohol), together with the food offering should be blessed as you would bless the inner offering.

For convenience, an abbreviated blessing has been included here, which should be performed on the basis of having generated oneself as the deity.

After this, the tsog may be offered as indicated.

**BLESSING THE TSOG**

*E MA HO!*

Food, drink, five meats, five nectars – that which is in the skull – is in the nature of bliss and voidness.

Purified, actualized, and increased by the three vajras,
It becomes an ocean of uncontaminated nectar.

*OM AH HUM* (3x)

**OFFERING THE TSOG**

*HO! In order to please this assembly of the root and lineage gurus,*

The yidams, Vajrayogini and so forth,

The Three Jewels, and the ocean of dakinis and oath–bound protectors,

Together with the beings of the six realms who have been my mothers,

I present this blessed offering of inseparable bliss and void.

*OM AH HUM*

Having joyfully received this,
May all degenerated vows be renewed.

Please lead us quickly to the pure land of the dakinis,
And having quickly caused a great rain of supreme and common accomplishments to fall,
May all the obscuring false appearances of all motherly beings
Be effortlessly purified this very moment.

Recite once, three times, or any number of times.

**COLOPHON**

In these degenerate times (there are those who are) like Mt. Meru (when it comes to) taking commitments (upon themselves) but like the smallest atoms (when it comes to) practicing. So, in order to heal degenerated commitments of all sorts and in order to please the glorious, holy guru, I Thubten Zopa, a so-called incarnation, with great delight have written this at the time of the New Year of the Wood Tiger.

Also, by this, may the teachings of the victorious Losang (Dragpa) remain for a long time.

The additional practice for Blessing the Tsog was extracted from “A Tantric Food Offering”, by Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche.
According to Lama Zopa Rinpoche, “We are insane not to do this practice every day.”

There is no negativity that cannot be purified. The purification process is basically a psychological one. As Lama Yeshe says, it is our mind (and on the basis of that our actions) that create the negativity and it is our mind that transforms it by creating positive energy. Although we rely on Buddha’s methods for the purification, it is not as if it is Buddha purifying us or forgiving us; we ourselves do the purifying.

We purify by applying the Four Opponent Powers.
THE PRACTICE
Prostrate three times then sit. Bring your mind to a quiet state.

PRELIMINARY PRAYERS

I take refuge until I am enlightened,
In the buddhas, the dharma and the sangha.
Through the merit I create by practicing giving and the other perfections,
May I attain buddhahood for the sake of all living beings.

Recite other prayers if you wish, such as those in chapter 15.

1. THE POWER OF REGRET
First, as Lama Zopa Rinpoche, remember the definition of negative karma: any action that results in suffering, usually motivated by attachment, ignorance, or aversion.

“Almost every action I do, twenty-four hours a day, is motivated by worldly concern, attachment to the comfort of this life. It is like this from birth to death in this life and has been like that from beginningless rebirths. Nearly every action I have ever created has been non-virtuous, the cause of suffering.

“Not only that, but continuously I have also been breaking my pratimoksha, bodhisattva and tantric vows. Worst of all, I have created the heaviest of negative karmas in relation to my virtuous friends – getting angry at them, generating wrong views, having non-devotional thoughts towards them, harming their holy body and disobeying their advice.

“Having these negative imprints on my mental continuum is unbearable. It’s as if I’ve swallowed a lethal poison. I must practice the antidote right away and purify all this negative karma immediately, without a second’s delay.”

The reason to regret is based on the logic of karma: We experience everything due to our past karma, our past actions; so having harmed
others we ourselves will necessarily experience suffering in the future. Having broken my vows, I will experience suffering in the future. Thus we cannot bear the thought of the future suffering that we ourselves will experience.

Go through the three non-virtuous action of the body and four of the speech, regretting those we remember and those we don’t, in other words all the harm we have ever done to any sentient being since beginningless time.

Go through our vows and regret having broken them specifically: pratimoksha vows, bodhisattva vows, tantric vows.

For all of these, think like this: “I regret from the depths of my heart having harmed others, broken my vows, etc., because I do not want the future suffering. I am sick of suffering.”

Then think, “What can I do about it? Whom can I turn to?”

**REMEMBER IMPERMANENCE & DEATH**

Then, as Rinpoche says, remember impermanence and death: “Many people my age or younger have died. It’s a miracle that I’m still alive and have this incredible opportunity to purify my negative karma. Death is certain but its time is most uncertain. If I were to die right now, I would definitely be born in the lower realms. Because I could not practice Dharma there I would remain in the lower realms for countless eons.

Therefore, how unbelievably fortunate I am to be able to purify my negative karma right now, without even a second’s delay, by practicing the Vajrasattva meditation-recitation.”

**2. THE POWER OF RELIANCE**

**a. Refuge**

We rely upon, turn to, the Buddha, the doctor, who has the methods that we can use the purify.

On the crown of my head, a syllable PAM transforms into a lotus, an AH into a moon cushion, upon which, from HUM a white five-pronged vajra emerges, marked by a HUM at its center.
From the **HUM** light shines forth and the two purposes are accomplished. The light returns and transforms into white Vajrasattva with one face and two hands holding vajra and bell.

Seated in the vajra position, he embraces his consort, the white Vajra Prabhavati, who sits in the lotus posture and has one face and two hands holding curved knife and skullcup. The father is adorned with six mudras, the mother with five.

Both are adorned with silks and various precious ornaments. At their crown is an **OM**, at their throat an **AH**, and at their heart a **HUM**. On the moon disk at his heart stands the syllable **HUM** encircled by the hundred-syllable mantra.

Guru Vajrasattva’s right hand, holding a vajra, which represents compassion and bliss, is at his heart; his left, holding a bell, which represents the wisdom realizing emptiness, is resting in his lap.

Think: “Vajrasattva is my root guru, the holy mind of all the buddhas, the dharmakaya, who out of his unbearable compassion, which embraces me and all other sentient beings, appears in this form to purify me and all others.” In this way your mind is transformed into guru devotion, the roof of all blessings and realizations of the path of enlightenment.

Now invite the wisdom beings to merge with your visualization, the commitment being: imagine light goes out of from the **HUM** at Guru Vajrasattva’s heart to all the ten directions and hooks the energy of the body, speech and mind of all the enlightened beings of the universe. This light comes back and dissolves into the heart of Guru Vajrasattva, who now embodies all their energy. He is even more brilliant and blissful than before.

Now, say a prayer of refuge:

I forever take refuge in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha,
And in all the three vehicles,
In the dakinis of secret mantra yoga, in the heroes and heroines,
In the empowering goddesses and the bodhisattvas.
But most of all, I take refuge in my holy guru forever. (3x)
b. Bodhichitta In order to develop compassion, we need to rely upon other beings, the very beings we have harmed and who have harmed us, by developing compassion for them.

As Lama Zopa Rinpoche says: “But I am not practicing this Vajrasattva purification for myself alone – the purpose of my life is to release all hell beings, pretas, animals, humans, asuras, suras, and intermediate state beings from all their suffering and its causes and lead them to unsurpassed enlightenment.

In order to do this I must first reach enlightenment myself. Therefore, I must purify all my negative karma immediately by practicing the Vajrasattva meditation and recitation.”

Think in particular of people you have harmed recently; and in the past; and then, in general, all beings we have ever harmed since beginningless time.

Then remember those who have harmed you: have compassion for them because they will suffer as a result of the harm they have done to you.

Make the strong aspiration to do this practice of purification for the sake of all these sentient beings. “I must purify for their sake.”

3. THE POWER OF THE REMEDY

Think: “O Guru Vajrasattva, please clear away all negative karma and obscurations of myself and all living beings and purify all degenerated and broken commitments.”

Recite the mantra seven or twenty-one times or as many times as possible, practicing the three techniques of downward cleansing, upward cleansing and instantaneous cleansing.

First method: Visualize the white blissful kundalini energy flows down from Vajrasattva father/mother in union into your central channel. It spreads throughout your nervous system, flowing very strongly like water coming from a hose or like a very powerful shower, and flushes out all negativities of your body, speech, and mind through the openings and pores of the lower part of your body. All this negative energy is expelled in the form of snakes, scorpions, ants, long worms, etc. or as black tar or dirty black oil. Feel that you are completely
purified, clean clear, especially your gross negativities, and overcome with blissful energy.

Recite the mantra as you visualize (3 or 7 or as many as you wish):

OM VAJRASATTVA SAMAYA MANU PALAYA / VAJRASATTVA DENO PATITTA / DIDO MAY BHAWA / SUTO KAYO MAY BHAWA / SUPO KAYO MAY BHAWA / ANU RAKTO MAY BHAWA / SARWA SIDDHI MEMPAR YATSA / SARWA KARMA SU TSA MAY / TSITAM SHRIYAM KURU HUM / HA HA HA HA HO / BHAGAWAN / SARVA TATHAGATA / VAJRA MA MAY MU TSA / VAJRA BHAWA MAHA SAMAYA SATTTVA / AH HUM PHAT!

**Second method:** The blissful kundalini energy slowly fills your body starting from below. As the level of amrita rises, your negativities start to rise as well, floating on top of the nectar, like oil floating on water. Your negativities and defilements are slowly pushed upward by the pure amrita kundalini energy; it gradually overflows out of your body through all your upper orifices and your crown chakra. You experience great bliss.

Recite the mantra as you visualize this.

OM VAJRASATTVA SAMAYA MANU PALAYA / VAJRASATTVA DENO PATITTA / DIDO MAY BHAWA / SUTO KAYO MAY BHAWA / SUPO KAYO MAY BHAWA / ANU RAKTO MAY BHAWA / SARWA SIDDHI MEMPAR YATSA / SARWA KARMA SU TSA MAY / TSITAM SHRIYAM KURU HUM / HA HA HA HA HO / BHAGAWAN / SARVA TATHAGATA / VAJRA MA MAY MU TSA / VAJRA BHAWA MAHA SAMAYA SATTTVA / AH HUM PHAT!

**Third method:** An immense amount of powerful light energy, limitless blissful kundalini energy in the form of light, radiates from Vajrasattva’s heart. Immediately as it makes contact with your crown chakra, the negative energy, especially your ignorant attachment energy, completely disappears, just as when a bright light is switched on in a dark room, the darkness instantly and completely disappears. You cannot say that the darkness leaves through the window or through the door when a light is turned on. It just disappears, no longer existing
anywhere at all.

Recite the mantra as you visualize this. (See page 135 for the meaning of the mantra.)

OM VAJRASATTVA SAMAYA MANU PALAYA / V AJRASATTVA DENO PATITA /
DIDO MAY BHAWA / SUTO KAYO MAY BHAWA / SUPO KAYO MAY BHAWA /
ANU RAKTO MAY BHAWA / SARWA SIDDHI MEMPAR YATSA / SARWA KARMA
SU TSA MAY / TSITAM SHRIYAM KURU HUM / HA HA HA HA HO /
BHAGAWAN / SARVA TATHAGATA / VAJRA MA MAY MU TSA / VAJRA BHAWA
MAHA SAMAYA SATTVA / AH HUM PHAT!

4. THE POWER OF RESOLVE
The fourth step in the purification process, and such a crucial one, is the determination not to harm with our body, speech and mind again. Without this, we keep doing the same old things. The determination, the aspiration, to not harm again is like a beacon that guides our body, speech and mind in new directions. Remember, as Lama Zopa Rinpoche says, “Everything exists on the tip of the wish, the aspiration.”

Think: “I will never break my pratimoksha vows. I will never break my bodhisattva vows. I will never break my tantric vows and commitments.”

As for our other old habits, if we can’t commit to never do them again, then don’t lie to ourselves, as Lama Zopa Rinpoche says. So think carefully and then decide to refrain from them for a year, a month, a day, even a minute – whatever is realistic. Then in general vow to make the effort to avoid the others.

This determination not to do again is what gives us the strength to change.

HAVE FAITH THAT YOU HAVE BEEN PURIFIED
From the crown of my head, Guru Vajrasattva says, “Child of the race, your negativities, obscurations and broken and damaged pledges have been completely purified.” Generate strong faith that all is completely purified just as Guru Vajrasattva has said.
Wanting to merge with your mind, he melts into white light and absorbs into you through your crown.

Think: “My guru's body, speech and mind, Vajrasattva's body, speech and mind, my own body, speech and mind: same thing.”

“Union-oneness,” as Lama Yeshe would say. Meditate on this.

**EMPTINESS OF THE THREE CIRCLES**
Next, as Lama Zopa Rinpoche recommends, meditate on the emptiness of the three circles:

In emptiness, there is no I, creator of negative karma;
There is no action of creating negative karma;
There is no negative karma created.

Place your mind in that emptiness for a little while. In this way, look at all phenomena as empty – they do not exist from their own side.

**DEDICATION PRAYERS**
Finally, dedicate all the merit you have created by doing this purification to all living beings. *See chapter 19.*

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**THE FOUR TYPES OF KARMIC RESULTS THAT THE FOUR OPPONENT POWERS PURIFY**

1. **The power of regret** purifies the experience similar to the cause, which, let’s say for killing, is to get killed, to die young or to get sick.

2. **The power of reliance.** *Refuge and bodhicitta* purify the environment result, which for killing is living in a place where the food and medicine are not conducive to good health.

3. **The power of the remedy,** in this case the visualization and recitation of mantras – or whatever action one does as the actual
antidote – purifies the *throwing karma* that causes birth in the lower realms.

4. The power of the resolve or determination not to do again purifies the *action similar to the cause*, which in a sense is the worst result: it’s the habit to keep killing, which propels one back into the lower realms.

THE MEANING OF THE MANTRA WORD BY WORD

**OM** the qualities of Buddha’s holy body, speech, and mind; all that is auspicious and of great value

**VAJRA SATTVA** the being who has the wisdom of inseparable bliss and emptiness

**SAMAYA** a pledge that must not be trangressed

**MANU PALAYA** lead me along the path you took to enlightenment

**VAJRA SATTVA DENO PATITA** make me abide closer Vajrasattva’s vajra holy mind

**DIDO MAY BHAWA** please grant me a firm and stable realization of the ultimate nature of phenomena

**SUTO KAYO MAY BHAWA** please grant me the blessing of being extremely pleased with me

**SUPO KAYO MAY BHAWA** bless me with the nature of well developed great bliss

**ANU RAKTO MAY BHAWA** bless me with the nature of the love that leads me to your state

**SARWA SIDDHI MEMPAR YATSA** please grant all powerful attainments

**SARWA KARMA SU TSA MAY** please grant all virtuous actions

**TSITAM SHRIYAM KURU** please grant your glorious qualities

**HUM** the vajra holy mind

**A HA HA HA HO** the five transcendental wisdoms

**BHAGAWAN** one who has destroyed every obscuration, attained all realizations, and passed beyond suffering

**SARVA TATHAGATA** all those who have realized emptiness, knowing things just as they are

**VAJRA MA MAY MUTSA** do not abandon me
VAJRA BHAWA the nature of indestructible inseparability
MAHA SAMAYA SATTVA the great pledge being; the great being who has
the pledge, the vajra holy mind
AH the vajra holy speech
HUM the transcendental wisdom of great bliss
PHAT! clarifying the transcendental wisdom of inseparable bliss and
emptiness and destroying the dualistic mind that obstructs it

THE GENERAL MEANING OF THE MANTRA
You, Vajrasattva, have generated the holy mind (bodhichitta) according
to your pledge (samaya). Your holy mind is enriched with the
simultaneous holy actions of releasing transmigratory beings from
samsara (the circling, suffering aggregates). Whatever happens in my
life – happiness or suffering, good or bad – with a pleased, holy mind,
ever give up but please guide me. Please stabilize all happiness,
including the happiness of the upper realms, actualize all actions and
sublime and common realizations, and please make the glory of the five
wisdoms abide in my heart.

COLOPHON
By Ven. Robina Courtin, using the teachings of her lamas,
Lama Thubten Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche.

Statue of Lama Vajrasattva in the Vajrasattva gompa at
Tushita Retreat Centre in Dharmasala, India,
commissioned by lama Zopa Rinpoche in the likeness of
Lama Thubten Yeshe, as a reminder to students that the
Buddha is the Guru.
The practice of Samayavajra, Damtsig Dorje, is a powerful purification practice that purifies in particular the negative karmas accumulated in the relationship with the guru.

Since meeting Buddhadharma and taking all three levels of vows, you have broken and degenerated your samayas, especially the tantric samayas. So out of compassion all your gurus have manifested as Samayavajra so that you can purify all these negative karmas.

**VISUALIZATION**

At the heart of myself clarified as my guru yidam, is a variegated lotus and moon mandala. Above it is a green HA which transforms into a sword adorned with a HA inside the handle.

This then transforms into Samayavajra, who has a green holy body with three faces (central face green, right one black, left one white) and six arms, which embrace the mother who is in similar aspect. Both father and mother are marked with the three syllables. The first two hands of both are embracing. The second right hand holds a vajra; the third right hand, a sword. The second left hand holds a bell; the third left hand carries a flower. The mother’s right and left hands hold the
same implements.

At the heart of Samayavajra is a flat variegated vajra with HA in the center surrounded by the mantra. From the vajra, nectars flow down, filling and blessing your whole body and purifying all samayas degenerated due to carelessness, and all obscurations and negative karmas accumulated with your three doors:

2

OM AH PRAJÑA DHRIK HA HUM

Guru Samayavajra then says: “All your negative karmas, obscurations, and degenerated samayas are completely purified.” Generate strong faith that exactly what Samayavajra says has happened in reality: your mental continuum has become completely pure. Not the slightest obscuration is left. Even the heaviest negative karmas accumulated in the relationship with the guru have been purified.

**ABSORPTION**

Guru Samayavajra is very pleased and absorbs to the indestructible seed at your heart, your own subtle mind-wind. Your own body, speech, and mind become oneness with Samayavajra’s holy body, holy speech, and holy mind.

**MEDITATE ON EMPTINESS**

Meditate on the emptiness of the three circles: yourself, the creator, the action of creating negative karma, and the negative karma accumulated are all empty of existing by their own nature.

**DEDICATE IN EMPTINESS**

With this same awareness of emptiness and dependent arising, dedicate the merits: yourself, the dedicator, the action the action of dedicating, and the merits that are dedicated are all merely imputed by thought.

*Lama Zopa Rinpoche’s instructions in FPMT’s Guru Puja.*
PART SIX
OTHER RELATED TEACHINGS
THIS TEXT HAS NO COMPARISON
If you have received a highest yoga tantra initiation or a yoga tantra initiation, you definitely must practice *Six-Session Guru Yoga.*

This practice has no comparison. In Tibet, the Thirteen Golden Dharmas are kept secret and regarded as extremely precious; they are not spread beyond the walls of Sakya monasteries. However, these teachings do not compare to even one part of the *Six-Session Guru Yoga.*

Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo said *Six-Session Guru Yoga* is much more precious than three galaxies filled with gold. Why? Because the practice of *Six-Session Guru Yoga* has unbelievable benefits. It gives incredible protection. This practice eliminates so much heavy negative karma and purifies all ten non-virtuous actions. It purifies broken pratimoksha vows, bodhisattva vows, and tantric vows. It allows us to practice the general tantric vows, the samayas of the five buddha families, and the particular tantric root vows.

BY DOING THIS PRACTICE WE PRACTICE ALL THE SAMAYAS
By doing *Six-Session Guru Yoga,* we practice all the *samayas* and are reminded of the fourteen root downfalls and eight bompos of mother tantra samaya. We accumulate unbelievable merit by keeping the samayas and vows of tantra.

WITHOUT PURE MORALITY, NO REALIZATIONS
According to the root tantra of Manjughosha, without practicing the pure morality of these vows, we have no basis for tantric realization and no way to achieve enlightenment. Even if we don’t do many other
practices, living purely in the samaya vows is enough.

Therefore, this practice gives incredible protection. This practice keeps your three levels of vows pure. The immediate benefit of the practice is that you do not fall into the lower realms. If you don’t fall into the lower realms and instead receive a perfect human body qualified by the eight freedoms and ten richnesses, and along with that you meet with the Buddha’s teachings, you will become enlightened very quickly.

In other words, it seems that this practice actually creates the causes for you to receive a perfect human body and meet the teachings of Buddha – especially the tantra teachings – again in the future. Then, even if you do not become enlightened in this life, without much delay, you will become enlightened soon.

According to The Wheel of Sharp Weapons, the cause of receiving a perfect human rebirth – this body qualified by the eight freedoms and ten richnesses – is practicing the three levels of vows: pratimoksha, bodhisattva, and tantric. In this particular perfect human rebirth, you have the opportunity to practice not just the lesser vehicle path, not just the Paramitayana path, but also the tantric path. You are able to practice the entire teaching of the Buddha.

PROTECTION FROM THE LOWER REALMS AND DEGENERATING VOWS
How does Six-Session Guru Yoga keep us from falling into the lower realms? Six-Session Guru Yoga contains a review the three levels of vows. Reviewing these vows helps us remember whether we have committed and transgressions or not. If we haven’t committed any downfalls, we rejoice. If we have, we purify it right away by confessing and generating the thought to protect these vows again.

This practice helps us accomplish these things and these are what need to be done.

If a person living in the pratimoksha, bodhisattva, or tantric vows lives in degenerated vows and is careless about it, thinking, “Oh, if it’s a vice, it doesn’t matter,” then the negative karma is extremely heavy.

As Pabongka Rinpoche explained, if a person who does not hold
vows killed one hundred human beings and one hundred horses, and another person holding vows allows just one precept to degenerate, the second is much heavier than the first.

Even though the first person killed many human beings and animals, being careless and allowing your vows to degenerate is extremely heavy.

Practicing Six-Session Guru Yoga protects you from the incredibly heavy negative karma of degenerating vows, not confessing, and not generating the thought to protect them in the future.

WE ARE COMMITTED TO DOING OUR ACTIONS WITH PURE VIEW
His Holiness Zong Rinpoche said that after we take a tantric initiation, when we eat or drink, we need to bless the food and practice the yoga of eating and drinking — whether we eat three plates of rice or just one spoonful. If we don’t, the negative karma is eighteen times heavier than that of a fully ordained monk who broke his four root vows — killing human beings, lying about his realization, stealing, and engaging in sexual intercourse. If we eat with an ordinary mind and ordinary view, without the yoga of eating and blessing food, the negative karma is that much heavier.

This doesn’t apply to just food. When we dress in the morning, we should recite OM AH HUM and offer our clothing to the Guru-Deity while seeing ourselves as the deity. His Holiness Zong Rinpoche only mentioned food, but there are many ways to offer to the deity.

WE ARE COMMITTED TO MAKING OFFERINGS
We also have a commitment to make offerings — mandala offerings and so forth — to the virtuous friend six times a day. We must also practice loving kindness and the four types of charity six times each day — three times during the day and three times at night. You can also do one session in the morning, one at midday, and one at the end of the day; then one at the beginning of the night, one at midnight, and one at the end of night. This way, if your vows have degenerated, without much time passing you purify the vow and generate the thought not to
commit the transgression again.

The Fifth Dalai Lama’s lamrim, the Jamphel zhäl lung, says that from the moment we commit one of the ten non-virtues until we retake the vow, we constantly create the cause to be born in the hot hells.

NECESSARY TO INCLUDE THE BODHISATTVA AND TANTRIC VOWS
These points are very important to understand so that we become skillful and protect ourselves. Therefore, it is very important to include the bodhisattva and tantric vows in guru yoga practice. You can even take vows with the beginning prayer of refuge and bodhichitta. Since vows are taken with the mind, you can recite this prayer at the very beginning of the practice and take both wishing and entering bodhisattva vows.

Repeating this prayer and taking the vows again when you do guru yoga practices becomes even greater protection.

In Six-Session Guru Yoga, you take the vows again and generate the thought not to break them. Therefore, you stop continuously creating the cause to be born in the hot hells and so forth. It is unbelievable protection! At the moment, we can’t even stand some pain in the knees or back; we can’t stand a headache. Since we can’t stand even the smallest discomfort in the human realm, there is no way we could tolerate the hells, which contain the heaviest suffering of all six realms.

FOUR THINGS ARE REQUIRED TO BREAK A BODHISATTVA VOW FROM THE ROOT
1. Not seeing the action as a mistake,
2. Not changing your attitude,
3. Rejoicing in the action, and

His Holiness the Dalai Lama says if you don’t generate the opposite of these four mistakes within four hours, you receive a root downfall.

According to a text called Rongta, you also need to gather the four mistakes to break tantric vows from the root, except for the vows
against generating heresy and giving up loving kindness.

Therefore, doing *Six-Session Guru Yoga* again and again helps you avoid committing root downfalls. This is one reason *Six-Session Guru Yoga* is so valuable; it doesn’t allow your actions to become root downfalls. Even if you degenerate a vow, you purify it and it doesn’t become a root downfall. This practice is great protection.

According to Lama Tsongkhapa, if you commit a bodhisattva root downfall, you will not be able to generate the bodhisattva path, the right-seeing path, in this lifetime. I asked Geshe Yeshe Tobten about this and he agreed. I also checked with Zimey Rinpoche, and Rinpoche may have said that if you confess and purify, it is all right; it is only on the basis of not confessing and purifying that you cannot enter the bodhisattva path. This is similar to the shortcomings of making mistakes with the virtuous friend; if you make a mistake, then even if you practice tantra with much effort, it is like obtaining hell. That is also on the basis of not confessing and purifying, but instead, just leaving the karma without doing anything to purify the degenerated samaya. If you don’t purify the karma, it is like that, no matter how much other practice you do.

**PRACTICING VAJRASATTVA FATHER-MOTHER PURIFIES BROKEN ROOT VOWS**
The meditation-recitation of Vajrasattva father and mother – the maha-anuttara aspect – purifies any heavy negative karma, even breaking the root vows of highest yoga tantra.

Therefore, the most important practices are Vajrasattva and *Six-Session Guru Yoga*. Actually, *Six-Session Guru Yoga* is more important because this practice means living in the vows. If you don’t live in the vows, Vajrasattva practice has no end. If you don’t do the Six-Session Guru Yoga practice of living in the vows, generating the thought to not break them again, re-taking the vows, and practicing the awareness of living in the vows, then Vajrasattva practice is endless.
WITHOUT MORALITY, NO ENLIGHTENMENT

Other traditions talk about becoming enlightened by meditating, but they don’t talk about becoming enlightened by protecting morality.

According to Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo, if there is no morality, then whatever else you have is like a broken pot, a container with a hole in it. Whatever you put inside doesn’t stay; it runs out.

In The Foundation of All Good Qualities, Lama Tsongkhapa says that even if you have generated bodhichitta but haven’t trained the mind in the three types of morality, you won’t achieve enlightenment. “By seeing this and understanding this point clearly, please grant me blessings to keep the vows with strong, intensive, dauntless perseverance.”

The conclusion is that you should think of the benefits of practicing Six-Session Guru Yoga and how incredible it is.

WE NEED TANTRA TO GET ENLIGHTENED

You should not regret taking initiations just because you have broken vows. You shouldn’t think, “I made a mistake.” If you don’t take the opportunity to take initiations again and again in this life while the tantric teachings still exist, then at some time in the future, even if there is tantra in that country, you will have the same negative reasons for avoiding it.

If you don’t practice tantra and take initiations, there is no way to achieve enlightenment. To actualize the extremely subtle mind of clear light, which becomes the cause of achieving the dharmaekaya, you need to receive initiations. Even the tenth bhumi bodhisattva has to take initiations. Then, by taking the initiation from the vajra master and holding the deva wisdom mother, you will actualize clear light and cut off the subtle dual view. This is how you achieve enlightenment.

As it is mentioned in the teachings, if you compare someone who becomes an arhat in this life and someone who takes an initiation but is unable to practice the tantric root vows, the person who is unable to keep pure vows will reach enlightenment first. This person is unable to keep their vows and commits root downfalls and is born in the hell realms. However, before this being who became an arhat even enters
the Mahayana path, the person who took the initiation but couldn’t protect their vows will already be enlightened.

I asked Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche why Six-Session Guru Yoga is so precious, even more precious than the thirteen golden Dharmas.

Rinpoche said it is because Six-Session Guru Yoga is combined with lam-rim. If you do Six-Session Guru Yoga with lam-rim, and especially with lojong – the practice of thought transformation – the whole path is integrated into guru yoga practice. Rinpoche is saying that in other traditions, guru yoga is not integrated with the whole path. That is something that makes the Lama Tsongkhapa tradition very special. Rinpoche emphasized this.

The bodhichitta section of the lam-rim prayer in Lama Chöpa – renouncing oneself and cherishing other sentient beings – is only to be practiced by those who have a very brave mind. It’s a very special practice, very secret and very special. Therefore, when you integrate that into guru yoga, the practice becomes so special and so rare; more precious than the Golden Dharmas. Six-Session Guru Yoga has incredible benefits like these. It makes your vows pure and immediately stops you from falling down into the lower realms. It creates the cause for a perfect human rebirth and to meet the teachings. Six-Session Guru Yoga creates the cause to quickly achieve enlightenment.

COLOPHON

This teaching was given by Lama Zopa Rinpoche at Katoomba, New South Wales, Australia, in September 1991. Transcript provided by Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive and used with permission. Edited by Venerable Gyalten Mindrol, FPMT Education Department, July 2006.

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VERSE A1
THE PRELIMINARY PRACTICES
REFUGE AND BODHICHITTA

I go for refuge, until I am enlightened,
To the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Highest Assembly.
From the virtuous merit that I collect
By practicing giving and other perfections,
May I attain the state of a buddha
To be able to benefit all sentient beings.

The first verse of Six-Session Guru Yoga consists of taking refuge and generating bodhichitta. The visualization [of the refuge field of merit] for Six-Session Guru Yoga is essentially the same as the visualization for Jorchö or Lama Chöpa.

Because Six-Session Guru Yoga is based on those practices, if you know those practices, you will understand how to visualize in Six-Session Guru Yoga. The only difference is knowing the definitions of the vows; otherwise, it is similar. If you don’t know how to do Jorchö or Lama Chöpa, this practice could be a little unclear.

VISUALIZING THE REFUGE FIELD OF MERIT
There are several ways to visualize the refuge field. One way is visualizing the figures in the refuge field in groups, in the form of people gathering at a marketplace. When there is a market outside with things to sell, many groups of people gather here and there. The Tibetan is tom tsog: tom means market and tsog means gathering. Tom tsog means “market gathering.”
In another visualization according to the All-Encompassed Jewel Tradition, the root Guru sits in the center and the lineage lamas are piled up, one on top of the other. There is no ocean of milk or tree as in the merit field visualization according to Lama Chöpa, but otherwise, the elaborate visualization of the refuge field is the same.

According to His Holiness Serkong Tsenshab Rinpoche, there is a large throne in the center of the refuge field. Many levels surround that throne, like a stage in a theater.

On the throne is a lotus with eleven petals, and in the center of the lotus are five thrones. One throne is in the center, and there is another throne behind it, one on the right, one on the left, and one in front.

**THE ESSENCE OF THE MERIT FIELD IS THE ROOT GURU**

On the center throne sits your own root Guru in the aspect of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha. Why? Because all the realizations of the graduated path to enlightenment come from the root Guru; your achievement of enlightenment depends on the root Guru. Without the Guru, even though there are numberless buddhas, you will not attain the realizations of the graduated path to enlightenment in your mind. It is only by meeting the Guru that these realizations are possible. Therefore, the root Guru sits in the very center.

The very essence of the merit field is the root Guru. No matter how many hundreds of thousands of billions of deities you visualize, the root Guru is the principal one. Why does the root Guru appear in the aspect of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha? Because Guru Shakyamuni Buddha is the founder of the present Buddhadharma, the present teaching.

**VISUALIZATIONS ACCORDING TO SERKONG RINPOCHE AND PABONGKA RINPOCHE**

According to tantra, at the heart of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha sits Buddha Vajradhara. At the heart of Buddha Vajradhara is the concentration being, the syllable HUM. Sitting on the throne at Guru Shakyamuni’s right is Maitreya, surrounded by the lineage lamas of the extensive path – Asanga and so forth.
In front of them are the three groups of Kadampa lamas: In the center is the Kadampa Treatise lineage beginning with Potawa, on the right is the Kadampa Lamrimpa lineage, and on the left is the Kadampa Chengapa lineage.

In front of them are the Old Kadampa lineages and in front of them is Lama Tsongkhapa and the New Kadampa lineage – the eight disciples who did retreat with Lama Tsongkhapa in a solitary place.

Sitting on the throne on Guru Shakyamuni’s left is Manjushri, surrounded by the lineage lamas of the profound path – Nagarjuna, Chandrakirti, and so forth. In front of them are the lineage lamas of extensive scripture, starting with Kadampa Shumbawa lineage, and then the Lamrimpa lineage beginning with Gonpowa, and the Kadampa Chengapa lineage beginning with Chayulwa. In front of them is the New Kadampa lineage – Lama Tsongkhapa and his disciples.

This is the visualization according to His Holiness Serkong Rinpoche. All these figures – Maitreya, Manjushri, and the pandits in front – face toward Guru Shakyamuni Buddha. Vajradhara is seated behind Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, along with the lineage lamas of blessing. In some paintings they are scattered and in some they are piled one on top of the other and behind, so you can see the groups.

In the center is the Mahamudra lineage; on top is Vajradhara. The lineage lamas are in the aspect of Manjushri. In the front, on the left, and on the right are the lineage lamas of the Guhyasamaja, Yamantaka, and Chakrasmavara tantras. Lama Atisha and the lineage lamas of the Sixteen Drop Kadampa teachings are seated behind.

This refuge field is according to a vision of Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo. Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo once went on pilgrimage in Pembo to see the caves of the Kadampa geshes. When Rinpoche was alone inside one of the caves, the servants outside heard him make a sound of big surprise. Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo had seen the lamrim merit field inside the cave. When he returned to Lhasa, he asked an artist to paint it the way he had seen it. Other visualizations are basically the same, but the details differ according to the explanations of Panchen Lama Losang Chökyi Gyältsän or other lamas.

On the throne in front of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha sits your own
root Guru. Your root Guru is the teacher who transformed your mind from non-Dharma into Dharma. Among the gurus, the one who brought your mind into Dharma, the one who most benefited your mind, is your root Guru.

Your root Guru sits on the throne in front, his left hand expounding the Dharma like Lama Tsongkhapa, his right hand holding the lotus with the wisdom sword and Prajnaparamita text. All your other gurus are seated surrounding your root Guru, facing toward him. Those gurus who have passed away sit on lotuses, and those who are living are sit on cushions. If any of these gurus normally appear with missing limbs, other mistakes of the body, or are blind, you should not visualize them in that way; instead, visualize their bodies as perfect and complete.

On the first level below the gurus is Guhyasamaja. Yamantaka is on the right, Chakrasamvara is on the left, and Hevajra is behind.

Below them, on the second level, are the Kalachakra deities and other deities of highest yoga tantra. Below them are the deities of yoga tantra, performance tantra, and action tantra. Below them are the thousand buddhas of this fortunate eon, including the Thirty-five Buddhas and the Eight Medicine Buddhas. Below them are the eight types of bodhisattvas, and after that, the arhats – solitary realizer arhats and hearer-listener arhats. Below them are the dakas and dakinis and finally, the Dharma protectors from beyond samsara. Below them, outside the throne, are the four guardian kings.

ALL THE DEITIES AND LAMAS ARE THE MANIFESTATION OF YOUR ROOT GURU
When you visualize the refuge field, the most important thing to remember is that all these deities and lineage lamas are manifestations of your root Guru, including the arhats and bodhisattvas. They are not ordinary arhats and ordinary bodhisattvas who are separate from the Guru. All these arhats, bodhisattvas, dakas, dakinis, Dharma protectors, and lineage lamas are the manifestation of the root Guru. They manifest in these ways to protect us from the three lower realms and the suffering of samsara, and to guide us to enlightenment.

How can this refuge field be the manifestation of the root Guru? The
real meaning of Guru is the primordial, extremely subtle mind, the transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss and voidness, the dharmakaya, the absolute Guru, the holy mind which is called the unified primordial savior. The continuity of the dharmakaya, the absolute Guru, has no beginning and no end.

When you become enlightened, your mind becomes one with all buddhas, the dharmakaya. In *Lama Chöpa*, when we make requests to the Guru by explaining their different qualities and kindnesses, before reciting *khyö ni lama*, the Guru is described as “unified primordial savior.”

**THE REAL MEANING OF “GURU” IS THE DHARMAKAYA**

Therefore, when you use the word “Guru,” recite the word “Guru,” or actually see the Guru, whether in pure or mistaken aspect, the real meaning to remember is dharmakaya, the unified primordial extremely subtle consciousness that is simultaneously born great bliss, transcendental wisdom nondual with great bliss and voidness, the completely pure holy mind of all buddhas. This is the absolute Guru. If you always have this understanding, this realization, and this stable faith, then whenever you see, hear, or think of the Guru, any mistaken appearances on the outside will appear like a theater act.

This becomes great protection for your mind. If you can think like this, thoughts of mistakes, heresy, anger, and so forth will not arise in your mind. In this way, you won’t create obstacles to the attainment of realizations on the path to enlightenment. When you think of the meaning of “Guru” in this way – the dharmakaya holy mind of all the buddhas bound by infinite compassion toward yourself and all sentient beings – it makes sense that this dharmakaya has to manifest in these different ways to guide you and other sentient beings. Therefore, this absolute Guru – the dharmakaya holy mind, the transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss and voidness of all the buddhas, of which there is no beginning or end and which is bound by infinite compassion for you and all sentient beings – manifested this refuge field.

Because we don’t have the karma to directly see these other aspects of Buddha, the absolute Guru also manifests in a mistaken, ordinary
aspect. Therefore, the gurus you visualize also manifest in ordinary aspect, and that means a mistaken aspect. Therefore, there are logical reasons that explain how these are manifestations of the Guru. If you lose the point and don’t understand the real meaning of the Guru, if you only think of the Guru as a teacher from whom you have received teachings, it is difficult to understand how the refuge field is a manifestation of the root Guru.

All the figures in the refuge field are one — in the nature of the root Guru — and the root Guru appears as many. This is the most important awareness when visualizing the refuge field in Jorchö, Lama Chöpa, or Six-Session Guru Yoga. This is the very heart of guru yoga. The mind that transforms into that understanding and faith is guru yoga.

**ALTERNATIVELY, VISUALIZE THE GURU IN THE ASPECT OF SHAKYAMUNI BUDDHA**
If you find visualizing the extensive refuge field difficult, you may just visualize the root Guru in the aspect of Shakyamuni Buddha.

**TAKE REFUGE IN BUDDHA, DHARMA, SANGHA**
Then we take refuge in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. When you take refuge in the Buddha, you completely rely on the Buddha just as a small child relies on its father, with your whole heart and whole life.

You take refuge in the Dharma like a thirsty person seeking water, only much more than that.

You take refuge in the Sangha like a person who travels to dangerous places relies on a guide to help them find their way and protect them from robbers. The Sangha helps us actualize the absolute Dharma, the true path and true cessation of suffering.

For the same reason, we rely on the Buddhadharma. We take refuge in order to renounce fear of our own samsaric suffering and to generate compassion for other sentient beings who are suffering in samsara. Without compassion, it is not Mahayana refuge.
CAUSAL REFUGE AND RESULTANT REFUGE
We rely on two types of refuge – the causal refuge and the resultant refuge. The resultant refuge is taking refuge in the outer Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha so that we may actually become arya Sangha and then actually become Buddha. For the success of that, we rely upon the causal refuge, the outer Buddha, outer Dharma, and outer Sangha.

The first two lines of the refuge prayer include the graduated path of the lower capable being – the lower realms, perfect human rebirth, refuge, and karma.

The last two lines contain bodhichitta, the six paramitas, and also wisdom – the graduated path of the higher capable being.

The subject, action, and object of taking refuge are all merely imputed by the mind. They don’t exist from their own side; they are empty. Yourself, the act of obtaining, and the object you obtain are all empty from their own side.

THE SAMAYA OF VAIROCHANA
If you do the practice of taking refuge three times each day and three times each night, this fulfills part of the samaya of Vairochana.

VERSE A2
THE FOUR IMMEASURABLES
Next, we generate the four immeasurable thoughts. First, we generate the immeasurable thought of equanimity. We wish sentient beings to be free of attachment to those who are close and aversion to those who are distant from them.

We visualize emitting light rays to purify all sentient beings of their aversion and attachment. All of this becomes the charity of fearlessness. Generating the immeasurable thought of loving kindness, wishing that all sentient beings achieve transcendental happiness, becomes the charity of loving kindness.
SAMAYA OF RATNASAMBHAVA

May all sentient beings be parted from aversion and clinging feeling close to some and distant from others.
May they win the bliss that is specially sublime,
May they find release from the ocean of unbearable sorrow,
And may they never be parted from freedom’s true joy.

If you have taken a higher initiation, you must practice the samayas of Ratnasambhava: the charity of loving kindness and the charity of fearlessness. These two samayas are practiced in this way. Liberating sentient beings from the oceans of suffering is the immeasurable thought of great compassion; wishing that sentient beings may never be separated from the pure bliss of liberation is the immeasurable thought of great joy.

We combine the practice of the four immeasurable thoughts with tonglen. During the immeasurable thought of equanimity, we take on the anger and attachment of other beings. During the immeasurable thought of loving kindness, we give our happiness and all our threetime merits to other beings. Doing so becomes miscellaneous (material) charity, which is also one of the samayas of Ratnasambhava.

Generating the four immeasurable thoughts develops and strengthens our bodhichitta. The more a mother whose only child is sick thinks about her child, the more the wish to free her child from disease increases. Similarly, as we generate the four immeasurable thoughts, our bodhichitta is strengthened and extended.

VERSES A3 – A4
BODHISATTVA VOWS

From this moment on, until I am a buddha, May I never give up, though my life be at stake,
The attitude wishing to gain full enlightenment
In order to free from the fears of samsara
And nirvana’s complacency all sentient beings.

O buddhas, bodhisattvas, and gurus please listen
To what I now say from the depths of my heart...

Next, in front of the object of refuge, we take the entering vows of bodhichitta. We must generate the bodhichitta vows three times a day and three times at night. When you recite this verse, think that you are repeating the words after the merit field and in this way, taking the entering vow of bodhichitta.

After you repeat the bodhisattva vow three times, you should generate faith and think, “I have received the bodhisattva vows.”

VERSES A5 – A6
REJOICING AND REFRAINING

At this moment my life has become truly fruitful,
For having attained an endowed human body,
Today I have developed the true buddha essence,
Bodhichitta, and thus have become Buddha’s child.

Applying now any skilled means whatsoever,
May I always accord what I do with this essence
(And follow the actions of all Buddha’s children).
May I never confuse with this pure faultless essence
(Any teachings that lack this enlightening thought).

Then generate happiness by thinking, “Today (which means being alive and not having died) my life has become meaningful. By taking the bodhisattva vows, I have made my own life meaningful.” That is what the verse is saying: “Today I received well the human life, and therefore, I have been born into the race of the Buddha.”

Having taken the wishing and entering vows of bodhichitta, you are born into the race of Buddha. This is similar to being born into the
family of a king. If you are born into the family of a king, eventually you will become a king. Similarly, taking the bodhisattva vows means eventually you will become a buddha.

If you generate bodhichitta, you have to become a bodhisattva and then a buddha. Therefore, on this day, you have become the Buddha’s heir.

Having become the Buddha’s heir and remembering the infinite benefits you can achieve and use to benefit all sentient beings, without confusion you will protect well the precepts which you have taken.

What does “without confusion” mean? When the mind is not controlled, it becomes mixed up with delusion; it is like water mixed with dirt. The mind is unclear and can’t concentrate or see reality. “Without confusion” means without downfalls. It is practicing mindfulness. Think like this.

**REFLECT SIX TIMES A DAY ON THE HAPPINESS OF HAVING TAKEN THE VOWS AND THE MINDFULNESS OF KEEPING THEM**

You must reflect on these two things – meditating on the happiness of taking the bodhisattva vows and on the mindfulness of keeping them – six times each day.

When you do *Six-Session Guru Yoga* elaborately, you may insert special bodhichitta after the prayer of taking the bodhisattva ordination and meditating on the happiness of having done so.

**DISSOLUTION OF THE REFUGE FIELD**

Then we dissolve the refuge field.

The throne absorbs into the lotus, and the lotus absorbs into the refuge field from bottom to top, and from top to bottom, all absorbing into the root Guru, Guru Shakyamuni Buddha.

The lineage lamas of blessing absorb into Vajradhara, and Vajradhara absorbs into Guru Shakyamuni Buddha.

The lineage lamas of the extensive path absorb into Maitreya, and Maitreya absorbs into Guru Shakyamuni Buddha.

The lineage lamas of the profound path absorb into Manjushri, and
Manjushri absorbs into the root Guru, Guru Shakyamuni Buddha. Finally, the root Guru also absorbs into Guru Shakyamuni Buddha. This is how it is explained in the Jorchö practice.

Then Guru Shakyamuni, in the form of light, descends and absorbs into the center of your two eyebrows, where the opening to the central channel is.

The light absorbs into that space and blesses your mental continuum. This means your mental continuum receives all the qualities of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha.

This is one way of dissolving the refuge field. There are other visualizations.

**DISSOLVE INTO EMPTINESS**

You cannot do the practices of outer offering and inner offering that come later without first generating yourself as the deity. Therefore, as the refuge field dissolves into light, absorbs into the center of your eyebrows, and blesses your mind, you become completely empty. You become emptiness only.

You can recite the mantra of *shunyata*, OM SVABHAVA SHUDDHA SARVA DHARMA SVABHAVA SHUDDHO HAM, and then do the visualization of purifying yourself in emptiness. Yourself, the objects of refuge, and all of existence are merely labeled, depending on the base. Yourself and all of existence become in the nature of emptiness only.

Meditate like this, and then meditate on the graduated path of generation, using your principal deity and utilizing the three *kayas* on the path to enlightenment.

This is the main practice of *kye-rim*, the graduated path of generation.

This prayer and the meditation on *shunyata* are also done in the beginning of *Lama Chöpa*, when you generate yourself as the deity. Even when we do *Six-Session Guru Yoga*, it is very good to do this practice, because then you are practicing the importance of the highest yoga tantra path.
OUT OF EMPTINESS GENERATE AS THE DEITY
How do we become in the nature of emptiness only and generate ourselves as the deity? With the thought of the general path in your mind – renunciation, bodhichitta, and emptiness – visualize at your heart the syllable HUM in the nature of blue light.

Blue light beams radiate from the syllable HUM to all the ten directions. The blue light absorbs into all sentient beings and their environments. All sentient beings melt into blue light and absorb into you.

Guru Shakyamuni Buddha melts into light and absorbs into your forehead, between your eyebrows. Then the light absorbs into the syllable HUM at your heart.

When you breathe on a mirror, the condensation gradually absorbs into the center. Like that, your own body, which is in the nature of light, absorbs to the seed syllable HUM at the heart.

I am not going to discuss the twenty-five gradual absorptions that occur at the time of death. You have been through the meditation on the evolution of ordinary death many times, and therefore, there is no need to mention all the details. I will just mention the main part of it.

UTILIZING ORDINARY DEATH ON THE PATH TO DHARMAKAYA
When your body absorbs into the syllable HUM, the earth element absorbs into the water element and you experience the vision of the mirage. Think, “Now the vision of the mirage is appearing.”

The English HUM doesn’t fit here. It is better to visualize the Tibetan HUM, because there is a meditation for each part of the syllable.

The HUM gradually absorbs from the bottom to the top. First, the shabkyu absorbs into the HA. At the same time, the water element absorbs into the fire element and you experience a vision like smoke coming from a chimney. It is like the smoke in a room when you light a lot of incense; the entire space is filled with smoke.

Then the HA absorbs from bottom to top, and at that time, the fire element absorbs into the air element. At that time, a vision of fire sparks occurs, like when you burn a lot of dried grass.
Then the head of the HA absorbs into the half moon, and the air element absorbs into consciousness. Think, “I am seeing the vision of the flame.” It is like lighting a very small candle in a dark room or a big dark hole.

Then the half moon absorbs into the tigle, the seed. Think, “Now I am experiencing the white vision.” The white vision is as if there was snow everywhere, or like the autumn moonrise.

Then the tigle absorbs into the nada, the very fine line with three curves. Think, “I am experiencing the red vision.” The red vision is like the color of copper; sometimes the evening sky appears this way.

Then the nada gradually absorbs from the bottom to the top. Think, “The dark vision is appearing.” It is like you suddenly fell into a hole, a place that is very dark. Sometimes the lamas describe it this way.

When the nada has completely disappeared, the clear light vision appears. Think, “The clear light vision is appearing to me.” The vision of clear light is like the very early morning in autumn when there is no dust in the air. It is very calm and clear, empty of the white color of the sun or moon. It is not white and it is not dark. It is also not red.

At this time, remember, “I myself and all existence are empty of true existence, empty of existing by myself.” Meditate on emptiness. Mix the clear light and the emptiness. Then comes the wisdom which realizes emptiness only, the nature of great bliss.

**THREE THINGS: WHAT APPEARS: CLEAR LIGHT; WHAT YOU REALIZE: EMPTINESS; WHAT YOU EXPERIENCE: BLISS**

There are three things to remember: what appears is clear light, what you realize is emptiness only, and what you experience is great bliss. These three things should occur all together – the appearance of clear light, the definite understanding that this is empty of true existence, and the experience that this wisdom is in the nature of great bliss.

Then make the strong determination in your heart: “This is my future result time dharmakaya of Vajrabhairava (or whichever deity you practice). This is me. This is me.” Meditate on that for a while. This is called utilizing ordinary death on the path to dharmakaya, or
purifying ordinary death on the path to dharmakaya.

If you cannot remember great bliss, use the memory of sexual pleasure and then increase it thousands of billions of times. The more the wisdom that is in the nature of great bliss experiences that bliss, the more definite its understanding of emptiness becomes. The stronger the definite understanding of emptiness, the more the bliss increases. The more the bliss increases, the stronger the definite understanding of emptiness becomes, and so on.

DIVINE PRIDE OF BEING THE DHARMAKAYA
Hold divine pride: “This is my future result time dharmakaya, the transcendental wisdom of great bliss, of Yamantaka.” Meditate on that for as long as you can.

UTILIZING THE ORDINARY INTERMEDIATE STAGE ON THE PATH OF SAMBHOGAKAYA.
As you meditate on that dharmakaya, you manifest as the simple form of the deity, with one face and two arms. Your own mind that has the appearance of emptiness – the definite understanding of the mind of emptiness only, the object experiencing great bliss – and that thinks “This is me” is the creator.

This mind manifests the wind and fire mandalas. These manifest as the foundation for the complete mandala along with the mansion. Then, in the yoga of Yamantaka, for example, inside the mansion is Manjushri, the cause of the holder of the vajra.

When you reach this point in the meditation, you also become Manjushri. At that time, you should think, “This is similar to the taking the intermediate state body.”

THE DIVINE PRIDE OF BEING THE SAMBHOGAKAYA
Then think, “This is the sambhogakaya,” and hold divine pride. This is called utilizing the ordinary intermediate stage on the path of sambhogakaya.
UTILIZING THE ORDINARY REBIRTH ON THE PATH OF THE NIRMANAKAYA.
Afterwards, when you are manifested in the complete aspect of the deity, which is called the result holder of the vajra, think, “This is the nirmanakaya.”

THE DIVINE PRIDE OF BEING THE NIRMANAKAYA
Again, hold divine pride. This is called utilizing the ordinary rebirth on the path of the nirmanakaya.

I am not going to explain all the details of the mandala here. To understand that, you need to receive a separate commentary. I am just giving a rough idea of utilizing ordinary death, intermediate state, and rebirth on the path to the three kayas.

If you know these meditations and have received commentaries, you may do the practice as I just described.

If not, then the dharmakaya that is the object of your meditation manifests as the deity. The essence of the dharmakaya that manifests in the form of the deity is the base. On that pure form, we give the label Yamantaka, Chakrasamvara, and so on.

THE TRULY EXISTENT I IS NOT BASE UPON WHICH WE LABEL THE DEITY
Whenever we do deity practices, this truly existent I which appears to us is not the base upon which we label “I am Tara,” or “I am Vajrapani,” or “I am Vajrasattva.” The truly existent I is not the base upon which you can hold the divine pride of Tara, Vajrapani, or Vajrasattva. Believing that the I is Vajrasattva or Tara is totally wrong practice. The I is not the perfect base to receive the name “Tara” or “Vajrasattva.”

After you generate as the deity, light rays radiate to all sentient beings in all directions. All sentient beings become the deity you are practicing, and all environments become the mandala.

Then bless the inner offering and meditate on the front generation. Transform the offering goddesses and make the outer, inner, secret, and absolute offerings to the merit field as written in the text.
TAKING THE THREE KAYAS INTO THE PATH PROTECTS FROM HINDRANCES
This practice is extremely important. It protects you from outer and inner hindrances, and allows you to quickly receive the blessings of the special deity. You immediately accumulate extensive merit and also cut off your impure, ordinary perceptions. This practice cuts off the ordinary mind and the ordinary perceptions.

Taking the three kayas onto the path purifies ordinary death, rebirth, and the intermediate state. Your virtue will ripen and you will quickly achieve the result of the three kayas. Therefore, this practice is the best method and is extremely important.

VERSE A7
THE ACTUAL PRACTICE
VISUALIZING THE MERIT FIELD

In the sky before me, on a breathtaking throne of jewels,
On a mandala seat of a lotus, sun, and full moon,
Sits my root Guru, all-pervading Vajradhara,
With a blue-colored body, one face, and two arms...

Then we visualize the merit field. At a distance of one body length in front of you, the distance your hands reach when doing full prostrations, visualize a lion throne – very attractive, enchanting, and made of jewels.

The lion signifies the four fearless states. On the throne is a lotus, and fully developed sun and moon discs. These signify the realization of the merit field who sits upon the throne. They signify the three principal aspects of the path: the lotus represents renunciation, the sun represents absolute bodhichitta, and the moon represents conventional bodhichitta. According to tantra, they represent the path that is achieved: clear light, illusory body, and unification.
VAJRADHARA, THE ABSOLUTE GURU
Seated on this throne is your own root Guru in the form of the pervasive lord Vajradhara. As I mentioned before, when we say “Guru,” when we see or think of the Guru, we should always remember that the Guru is the dharmakaya, the holy mind of all the buddhas that has no beginning or end, the eternal, primordial, extremely subtle consciousness which is forever immovable from emptiness, like putting water into water.

This description of dharmakaya, the absolute Guru, is the ultimate secret; it is the main achievement and main path of highest yoga tantra.

The celestial mansion, the mandala, and the numberless supporting deities are all embodiments of this absolute Guru, the root Guru.

Whatever form appears, deity or mandala, it is the embodiment of that holy mind. Another name for this wisdom of bliss and voidness is Vajradhara. This is the absolute Vajradhara.

Now this absolute Vajradhara – the root Guru, the pervasive lord – manifests the interpretive meaning Vajradhara, who is in the aspect of having a blue holy body, one face, and two arms. He is holding the vajra and bell and embracing the mother similar to himself.

MOTHER AND FATHER THE SAME
The wisdom mother is not a separate being; she is the root Guru, the pervasive lord Vajradhara. That in itself manifests as an embracing male and female. The unification of bliss and voidness manifests as this one being, father and mother, in order to signify the attainment of that transcendental wisdom.

The father and mother are the same. That is why we say “embracing the mother similar to himself.” “Mother” is a more exact translation. “Consort” is not completely wrong, but along with the father and mother comes the child. There is some explanation in tantra related with this.

Vajradhara father and mother has the same meaning as the vajra and bell. The definite meaning of the bell is the transcendental wisdom realizing emptiness only; the definite meaning of the vajra is the transcendental wisdom of great bliss.
VAJRADHARA: HOLDING INSEPARABLE BLISS AND VOIDNESS

The reason we call this deity “Vajradhara” is because it holds the attainment of inseparable bliss and voidness. “Vajra” means inseparable. Inseparable from what? Inseparable from method and wisdom – the transcendental wisdom of non-dual great bliss and voidness. “Dhara” means “holding.” Holding the attainment of inseparable bliss and voidness is called “Vajradhara.” “Sattva” means “having.” Having the transcendental wisdom of inseparable bliss and voidness is called “Vajrasattva.” “Vajrasattva” has the same meaning as “Vajradhara.”

“Vajrabhairava” also has the same meaning. “Vajra” is method and “bhairava” is wisdom. “Vajrabhairava” is the unification of method and wisdom.

Many deities’ names are like this. Even the holy name expresses the essence of the deity. What the deity is – that is expressed through the name: Vajrasattva, Vajradhara, Vajrabhairava, Heruka, and so on.

The embracing mother and father show that the root Guru, the pervasive lord absolute Vajradhara, is the unification of method and wisdom, the bliss-voidness. The embracing mother and father also show the state of mind that is achieved when you become enlightened.

WE NEED TO UTILIZE ATTACHMENT

According to highest yoga tantra, in order to achieve enlightenment, you must utilize the strong attachment that arises from the pleasure experienced by the meeting of the male and female sex organs.

The main thing is the mind – the wisdom mind of unified method and wisdom. In order to develop the wisdom of non-dual bliss and void, we practice the samaya of the mudra, the body in the pure appearance of the embracing father and mother. In order to practice that path, this aspect of the father and mother embracing – the root Guru, the pervasive lord, the definitive meaning of Vajradhara – is shown as the interpretive meaning father and mother.

In order to signify the attainment of inseparable bliss and voidness, the unification of method and wisdom that is the definite meaning of
the vajra and bell, the deity holds a physical vajra and bell.

Vajradhara father and mother possess all the holy signs and exemplifications. Radiating and glorious, they are adorned with many jeweled ornaments and the divine dress called benzali. If this divine dress is spread out, it covers all three galaxies. If it is condensed, it can be held inside one hand. This is the quality of such dress.

MERELY REMEMBERING VAJRADHARA ELIMINATES ALL SUFFERING.
“Eliminates all suffering” includes everything from the thought of mistakes toward the virtuous friend to the subtle dual view. Remembering Vajradhara eliminates the suffering of the three lower realms, the general suffering of samsara, and the suffering of being bound to lower nirvana.

The two obscurations, all the wrong concepts that are removed by the graduated path of the three capable beings, which is the path to enlightenment, are included here. Therefore, Vajradhara encompasses every single sublime object of refuge.

VISUALIZE VAJRADHARA
He is seated in the vajra posture. At his forehead is an OM, at his throat an AH, and at his heart a HUM. Sitting in the vajra posture shows that Vajradhara became enlightened in the essence of the four postures.

WHITE OM REPRESENTS VAIROCHANA
The white OM at the forehead represents the vajra holy body of all the buddhas, which is embodied in Vairochana. This means the deity you are practicing is also Vairochana, the embodiment of all the buddhas’ vajra holy body.

RED AH REPRSENTS AMITABHA
The red AH at the throat represents the vajra holy speech of all the buddhas, which is embodied in Amitabha. Therefore, this deity is also Amitabha, all the buddhas’ vajra holy speech.
BLUE HUNG REPRESENTS AKSHOBHYA
The blue HUM represents the vajra holy mind of all the buddhas, which is embodied in Akshobhya. This means the deity is also Akshobhya, all the buddhas’ vajra holy mind.

Who are these deities? They are your root Guru. There is no deity who is not the root Guru, the absolute Vajradhara. There is no buddha who is not the absolute Guru, and the absolute Guru is the root Guru. Therefore, it is said that before the Guru there is not even the name “Buddha.”

This Guru-Deity is all the buddhas’ vajra holy body, vajra holy speech, and vajra holy mind. In other words, this is all the buddhas, one into many and many into one. The meaning of this is the same as in the refuge visualization.

INVOKING THE WISDOM BEINGS
From the OM, AH and HUM, light beams are emitted, invoking Guru Vajradhara from the natural abode, which means the dharmakaya holy mind of all the buddhas. Everything that exists is condensed into the two truths – absolute truth and conventional truth. Therefore, everything is covered by wisdom, by omniscient mind, the dharmakaya.

Wherever there is wisdom, there is the holy body. Even in this degenerate time, our extremely subtle mind and extremely subtle wind is together all the time. They have been together since time without beginning. They are inseparable. If you think like this, you will understand the extremely subtle wind that is the extremely subtle body.

The preparation to achieve the unification of the holy body and holy mind comes during the gross generation stage and the subtle generation stage, visualizing the tiny light the size of a mustard seed, the deity, the mandala, etc.

The direct cause to achieve enlightenment comes from the completion stage. Those who have experience of the unification of clear light and the illusory body are able to actually manifest the mandala and its deities, very small and equaling the atoms of a mountain.

Even during the completion stage, it is similar; they are able to actually manifest inconceivably many deities.
When one becomes enlightened, the wisdom mind is able to cover all of existence. That is the procedure.

Now replicas of Guru Vajradhara absorb into the actual Vajradhara. JAH HUM BAM HO. JAH invokes, HUM causes them to enter into the actual deity, BAM causes them to become inseparable, and HO stabilizes them. In this way, we see the Guru as inseparable from Vajradhara.

As it is mentioned in Fifty Verses of Guru Devotion, the vajra master and the vajra holder are not separate. We practice this samaya six times.

**VERSE A8**

**PROSTRATING TO THE GURU**

I bow at your lotus feet, 
O my jewel-like Guru Vajradhara, 
Your kindness heralds an instantaneous 
Dawn of great bliss.

The Guru’s kindness grants great bliss in just one second. Great bliss means dharmakaya or enlightenment. Again, it is the same. The root Guru is the pervasive lord, the absolute meaning of Vajradhara.

How does the Guru’s kindness grant great bliss in just one second? If we achieve enlightenment in this brief lifetime of this degenerate age, compared to beginningless rebirths or the lifespans of hell beings or gods, this one lifetime is considered just one second.

“Jewel-like Guru” means the wish-granting jewel. It’s not a comparable example, but this gives an idea of how the Guru is wish-fulfilling, granting every happiness up to full enlightenment.

In the short version of *Calling the Guru from Afar*, it is also mentioned that the Guru is like a jewel.

*The Fifty Verses of Guru Devotion* says, “In the three times, with devotion one should prostrate at the holy feet of the Guru.” This prostration becomes that practice. Also, in this way we are able to protect the mind from breaking the first bodhisattva branch vow.
VERSE A9

THE EIGHT-LIMB PRAISE

OM I prostrate to the bhagavan lord of the brave ones HUM HUM PHAT
OM To you whose brilliance equals the fire that ends a great eon HUM HUM PHAT
OM To you who have an inexhaustible crowning top knot HUM HUM PHAT
OM To you with baredfangs and a wrathful face HUM HUM PHAT...

Next we practice the eight limbs. If you have taken a mother tantra initiation, there is the samaya to recite the eight limbs each day. The first limb is praise to the father; therefore, first we visualize Guru Chakrasamvara.

At the end of each line is HUM HUM PHAT and as in Vajrayogini or Chakrasamvara practice, you ring the bell three times, once with each syllable. This signifies the three kayas. These syllables also have a very extensive meaning.

After the praise to the father comes the praise to the mother.

This prayer has incredible benefits. If you see the Guru or holy objects while on pilgrimage, it is advised to recite these eight limbs and make offerings to yourself visualized as Chakrasamvara.

Visualizing yourself as Heruka Chakrasamvara and offering the eight limbs is the same as having made offering and praise to all buddhas in the ten directions. In that minute, you immediately receive inconceivable extensive merit. Then you are able to experience simultaneously born great bliss with the great hero – the glorified Heruka – unceasingly, all the time.

You become fortunate; you become an object of Chakrasamvara’s compassion. The glorified Heruka, the Bhagavan, Dorje Phagmo, the four heart yoginis, and so forth – all the twenty-four holy place dakas and dakinis – actually enter into your heart when you recite this prayer. Extremely pleased, they bless your mental continuum and guide you with their great compassion.
FIVE BENEFITS FROM RECITING THIS PRAISE
There are actually five benefits you receive by reciting this praise.

1. Having made offerings and praise to yourself visualized as Chakrasamvara, and having remembered the meaning of the syllables HE, RU, and KA, the first benefit is having made offerings and praise to all the buddhas in the ten directions.

2. Chakrasamvara is extremely pleased with you; you unceasingly experience great bliss with Chakrasamvara and he is extremely happy with you.

3. The third benefit is that all the dakas and dakinis of the twenty-four holy places actually enter into you and bless your mental continuum – the subtle mind, drop, and wind.

4. Fourth, they are extremely pleased with you and you are guided by them with compassion.

5. The fifth benefit enjoyed by anyone who practices the eight limbs is that anyone who sees, touches, or remembers you will accumulate extensive merit.

In the *Heruka Root Tantra*, Chakrasamvara said,

If one makes prostrations with effort, one accumulates the same merit as having made offering to all the buddhas. The great hero will be with you without ceasing. Dorje Phagmo and I, along with the dakas and dakinis, the messengers, will abide together in the heart of that practitioner. Anyone who sees this person will accumulate merit.

Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo says we should not doubt that we have the fortune to actually see Heruka father and mother, the dakas and dakinis, etc. We shouldn’t wonder, “If I practice, will I achieve Heruka or not? If I invite them, will they come or not?” You shouldn’t doubt in this way.

You should remember the words of Buddha Vajradhara, who said that if you recite this eight-limb praise, then Heruka mother and father will always abide in and bless your mental continuum. Therefore, there
is no need to doubt whether we will see Heruka or not, whether they will descend into us or not, whether they will abide within our mental continuum or not. Therefore, having generated stable faith in this root tantra verse by Vajradhara, you should recite the eight-limb praise.

When you recite this prayer or any praise to a deity, either you prostrate or visualize that you are touching your head to the throne, to the deity’s feet. Then you offer these prayers of admiration.

**BE JOYFUL HAVING OFFERED THESE PRAISES**

After you have recited this eight-limb praise, you should generate great joy, thinking, “All the dakas and dakinis actually came; they descended into my heart and are abiding there.” This is one way to generate special happiness and joy while reciting this eight-limb praise.

Another way is to think, “I have purified all my obscurations and negative karmas accumulated since beginningless rebirths.” Having generated this thought, you then confess all degenerated samayas – the heaviest negative karmas that one has accumulated in relation to the Guru – to Chakrasamvara and all the dakas and dakinis who have entered into you. You confess and think that these karmas are immediately purified; they do not exist.

After that, you make strong requests for success of your practice or whatever else to your heart Chakrasamvara and dakas and dakinis. Then think they all have accepted your requests.

Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo says that this practice of the eight limbs includes doing things such as traveling to many distant holy places with much hardship and making many thousands of offerings and prostrations to the holy representations of the holy body, holy speech, and holy mind, doing many pujas to eliminate obstacles – many protector pujas and incense pujas, making tea offering to the landlords and the country devas.

This practice includes all these methods of eliminating obstacles and creating success. As it says in the texts, this practice is so easy! You don’t have to bear hardship to practice it. It accumulates incredible merit and becomes incredible purification of obscurations in just one second.
By doing this practice, all the works of this life, future lives, and the intermediate stage succeed. Whatever work you do – prayers for a living person, prayers for a dead person – succeeds and you can use this to benefit all living beings.

**WITH THIS PRACTICE, THE DAKAS AND DAKINIS ENTER INTO YOU**

Therefore, we must cherish this practice. The forty-third chapter of the *Chakrasamvara Tantra* mentions that no matter how far away the dakas and dakinis are and no matter where they are abiding – at the crossroads, in the family house, at the holy mountain of the Hero Chakrasamvara – they see you when you do this practice. As soon as you do this practice, without delay, all the dakas and dakinis in the ten directions see you and enter into you. Then they bless your mind.

**LAMA YESHE PRACTICES THE EIGHT-LIMB PRAISE**

Lama Yeshe used to practice this eight-limb praise a lot. For example, he would recite it if someone was sick. When we went to Solu Khumbu the first time, women complained of back pain and this and that. Lama used to put a mala on the back of the woman and recite the eight-limb prayer. At the time, I didn’t understand why Lama recited the eight limbs when someone was sick. I didn’t know that it has these incredible benefits.

**VERSES A10 – A11**

**OFFERINGS AND MANDALA OFFERING**

Next come the outer, inner, and secret offerings, which are part of the samaya of Amoghasiddhi. After that is the mandala offering. In *The Fifty Verses of Guru Devotion*, it is mentioned that you must offer a mandala to your root Guru three times a day. This practice fulfills this requirement.
VERSES A12 – A14
REMEMBERING THE KINDNESS OF THE GURU AND MAKING REQUESTS
Then comes the section that defines what the Guru is and describes the kindness of the Guru. After that, we make requests to the Guru.

When you begin this prayer, think of the eight benefits of correctly devoting to the Guru, and the eight shortcomings of incorrect devotion. Try to get that idea, and then make the strong determination, “From now on, I won’t let even one thought of mistakes arise.” Generate strong, dauntless, intensive devotion of remembering the qualities of the Guru, and resolve to live your life with that devotion.

Remember the kindness of this manifestation which guides you according to your own karma. Without this manifestation, there is nothing to guide you to enlightenment. Think of the meaning of this prayer, what the Guru is and how your Guru does all the actions of numberless buddhas in numberless buddha fields.

If you remember the Guru’s kindness in this way and stop any thought of mistakes in the virtuous friend, then making requests to the Guru actually becomes requesting all the buddhas. Also, you will be able to see whatever actions done by the Guru as pure.

VERSES A12
THE GURU IS THE ESSENCE OF ALL THE BUDDHAS

I humbly beseech you, my precious Guru,
Just as the buddhas of the three times and ten directions have tamed (sentient beings),
You too enact the buddhas’ deeds in countless realms,
Taking the form of a saffron-robed monk.

This first verse helps us see that the Guru is the essence of all buddhas of the three times and ten directions, taking the form of a saffron-robed monk or any other aspect that benefits and subdues sentient beings. Even though we can’t see the Guru as Buddha, we can see the Guru in the form of a saffron-robed monk.
According to the level of our fortune, the essence of all the buddhas of the three times and ten directions manifests to subdue our minds and our delusions. We are extremely fortunate that we don’t see the Guru in the form of a dog or a monkey.

When you recite, “You too enact the buddhas’ deeds in countless realms,” you should think, “The Guru is enacting the deeds of the buddhas for me.” Of all the buddhas’ deeds, the most supreme are the deeds of the holy speech, the work of giving teachings. In order to achieve enlightenment, we need to receive teachings on the path we are following; otherwise, there is no way to achieve our goal.

By giving teachings, the Guru completely explains the base, the path, and the result of enlightenment. When we think like this, we understand that the actions of the Guru are the deeds of the buddhas; there are no other actions to point out. There is no separation between the way the Buddha guides us and the work the Guru does for us.

Does the Guru’s work of giving *lungs*, initiations, commentaries, explanations of tantra, and advice lead us to enlightenment or not? Do these activities plant the seed of the path and the result of enlightenment in our minds? Yes, they do. Do these activities lead us to enlightenment or not? Yes, they do! These actions benefit us; they help us enter into the graduated path and achieve enlightenment.

Shakyamuni Buddha generated bodhichitta, entered the Mahayana path, and accumulated merit for three countless great eons, worked hard, experienced many hardships following the path, and then achieved enlightenment – the state in which the qualities of all realizations and purity have been completed and all obscurations have been abandoned. He did this in order to guide us out of the suffering of samsara and lead us to enlightenment.

**ALL THE BUDDHAS ARE WORKING FOR SENTIENT BEINGS**

There are numberless buddhas who are fully enlightened, who have achieved the state of omniscient mind. After achieving the state of omniscient mind, if they were to abide in that blissful state without working for sentient beings, that would be cheating all sentient beings.
That is not possible!

Even when they were bodhisattvas, from the time they generated bodhichitta, they completely renounced working for themselves and worked only for sentient beings. When they entered the Mahayana path, they renounced self-cherishing thought and only generated the thought to cherish others. Since they only worked for others when they were bodhisattvas, why would they stop after they achieved enlightenment? Therefore, buddhas are definitely working for us sentient beings.

**NO SEPARATION BETWEEN BUDDHA AND GURU**

How does Buddha work for me and other sentient beings? How does Buddha save me from the suffering of samsara and lead us gradually to enlightenment? There is no other way except the work the Guru does for us. There is no separation between the way the Buddha guides us and the work the Guru does. This is how we should think.

**VAJRADHARA IS ALL MY GURUS**

To make your practice more effective, it’s very good to think of Vajradhara as the embodiment of all gurus. You can meditate on how to correctly devote to the Guru by visualizing the one aspect of Vajradhara. Vajradhara is in essence all the gurus, and the essence of all gurus is that one aspect of Vajradhara.

From the syllable HUM at Vajradhara’s heart, all gurus are transformed, carried out on the tip of light beams, and then they return and surround Vajradhara in their ordinary aspects – the saffron-robed monk or whichever way the Guru manifests to subdue the minds of sentient beings. In essence, that one being is Vajradhara, and Vajradhara manifests the different aspects of gurus.

It is very effective to think in this way. Don’t think only of the Guru of this life. Think, “These gurus are one essence with all my past life gurus and all my future life gurus, until I achieve enlightenment. They are also one essence with my present life Guru.” Remembering that each guru is the entire essence of Vajradhara helps us generate devotion to those gurus to whom we may have difficulty generating devotion. You generate strong devotion to the others by looking at
them as one essence, different manifestations but otherwise the same.

In our past lives, these gurus gave teachings and led us to accumulate virtue. That is how they saved us from the lower realms and led us to this human rebirth. Again, in this life, they are giving teachings and showing us how to practice and accumulate virtue. Again, they are leading us to future lives as a human being, which is the best opportunity to practice the holy Dharma. Like this, by revealing different teachings, they lead us on the graduated path from happiness to happiness to full enlightenment.

Think: “Definitely the works of the Guru lead me to enlightenment. If the Guru’s actions are not the work of the buddhas, what else could be? If these gurus are not Buddha, who else is the Buddha who guides me and works for my benefit?”

THE DHARMAKAYA IS THE SELF-CONDITION FOR GENERATING VIRTUE

There are four types of causes and conditions involved in generating virtuous thought: one is called the self-condition. This is all the virtue we have accumulated in our minds. The dharmakaya, the holy mind of Buddha, is the self-condition for generating good karma or virtue. Without depending on the dharmakaya, there is no way for the result of virtue to arise and no way to create good karma. Where does the dharmakaya exist? In the holy mind of the Guru. Therefore, the gurus are Buddha. You should meditate like this.

There is one very short meditation on this subject, how to correctly devote to the Guru through thought and how to correctly devote to the Guru through action. The first is how to devote to the Guru through thought.

There are four reasons that transform the mind that does not see the Guru as the essence of Buddha into the mind that does see the Guru as the essence of Buddha.

The first reason is that Vajradhara said that the Guru is Buddha. The second is that the Guru is the agent of all the buddhas’ actions. The third reason is that even nowadays, the buddhas and bodhisattvas are working for all sentient beings. The fourth reason is that nothing is
definite in one’s own view.

Without going over these things in detail, this meditation is very effective for the mind – short and very good. This is like debating; you are debating with your superstition, which is the seeker of mistakes in the Guru.

Padmasambhava said, “If one does not realize the Guru is Buddha, one’s mind cannot be liberated by the blessings of the Guru. Therefore, reflect on the Guru’s qualities and always pray to the Guru.” Padmasambhava is saying that to liberate the mind from the eight worldly dharmas, from the bondage of attachment that clings to samsaric perfections, from the bondage of ignorance that grasps at true existence, from self-cherishing thought, from the dualistic mind, and from impure conceptions, we need to receive the blessings of the Guru in our minds.

In order to receive the blessings of the Guru, we need the mind of devotion that sees the Guru as the essence of Buddha. The more we see that, the greater the blessings we receive.

According to Padmasambhava, in order to see the Guru as the essence of Buddha, we must reflect on the qualities of the Guru. The more you think about your own good qualities, the more you see yourself as pure. You don’t see your own mistakes as much; the good qualities overwhelm the mistakes. Similarly, in order to see the Guru as the essence of Buddha, you must reflect on the qualities of the Guru.

THE MORE WE SEE THE GURU’S GOOD QUALITIES, THE CLOSER WE GET TO ENLIGHTENMENT

How do we train the mind to see the Guru as the essence of Buddha? By thinking about the good qualities of the Guru. The more good qualities you see, the fewer mistakes you see. It doesn’t matter whether the Guru is actually a buddha or not, whether he is enlightened from his own side or not enlightened. From your side, if you look at the Guru as Buddha – one who has completed all realizations and all cessations – and you see the Guru’s good qualities, you become that much closer to enlightenment. Each time you think of the mistakes of the Guru, you become further from enlightenment.
If you look at the Guru as the essence of Buddha, you receive only profit and never loss. If you think of the mistakes, there is not one single profit; you receive only loss. It doesn’t matter from his own side whether he is Buddha or not, whether he is enlightened or not, ignorant, a bodhisattva or not a bodhisattva, an arhat or not arhat.

If you practice faithfully from your side, looking at the mistakes as little as possible and trying to see the Guru’s good qualities, you receive only great profit, and without difficulty, you quickly achieve all the realizations of the path to enlightenment.

Kadampa Geshe Potowa said, “Whether the Guru has great blessing or small blessing does not depend on the Guru; it depends on the level of devotion in the disciple’s mind.” Depending on how much devotion you have, you receive that much greater blessing from the Guru.

DEBATE WITH THE SUPERSTITIOUS MIND
Visualize Vajradhara surrounded by all the gurus. First think, “All my gurus are Buddha.” Then watch your mind; watch to see what the seeker of mistakes, the superstitious mind, says in response. The superstitious mind says, “You’re saying the gurus are Buddha, but you are just visualizing it. That’s all. They are not Buddha, because this Guru has such-and-such mistakes. He is very miserly in material possessions and has a lot of attachment to food. He is ignorant in the Dharma and tells a lot of lies. He doesn’t practice what he teaches. He doesn’t know tantra teachings. He sleeps a lot.”

Just listen to what the superstitious mind says. Then tell that mind, “The way you see the gurus, this appearance, is only the projection of your hallucinated thought. In fact, it is not like that. Why? Because Vajradhara said that in degenerate times, he will manifest in ordinary forms. Buddha does not tell lies or cheat sentient beings.”

Then that superstitious mind, the seeker of mistakes, says, “Oh, yes. I know that quotation. I know. It doesn’t mean that all gurus are Buddha. It means that among these gurus, there is a Buddha, not that they all are Buddha.”

You say, “If none of these gurus who give commentaries, who give initiations, who give ordination, who explain tantra, who give advice –
if none of these gurus are Buddha, then that means the buddhas have
given up and are not working for me. They work for other sentient
beings, but not for me. In that case, Buddha has a partial mind. In that
case, the work that all these gurus do for me, which leads me from
suffering and on the path of happiness to enlightenment, is not the
work of Buddha. Then Buddha does not work for all sentient beings by
manifesting different forms according to the level of my mind; Buddha
doesn’t have compassion for me and is cheating sentient beings, not
keeping his vow to work for all sentient beings according to the level of
their minds. If Buddha does have compassion for sentient beings, if
Buddha is working for sentient beings by manifesting in different
forms according to the level of beings’ minds, then there is no one to
point to except the present gurus who are working for me.” Think like
this.

You can also check like this: when you say the gurus are Buddha, let
the superstition arise, the seeker of mistakes. Think of one particular
Guru: “He’s not Buddha because he has mistakes.” It is very good to
think about this Guru. Watch each Guru and see if you find mistakes or
not.

Then as you see the gurus as having mistakes, use these quotes from
Vajradhara and these four reasons I mentioned. If you follow your own
projections, the superstitious mind, the seeker of mistakes, you will
find mistakes with everyone. When you see mistakes, the conclusion is
that none of the gurus are Buddha, that it is impossible for them to be
Buddha. Ask yourself whether each one is Buddha or not. When the
answer comes, “They are not Buddha because I find mistakes,” ask
yourself if your view is correct.

Does everything that you see exist? If everything we see exists, then
when we take LSD, whatever appears in that view should exist,
whatever billion dollars we dream we are receiving should exist.

When a magician transforms things, the beautiful woman that
appears to us should exist. When we see white snow mountains, but a
person with a defect in the eye sees the snow as yellow, that yellow
snow should exist. If everything you see should exist, these things
should also exist.
Then the superstitious mind says, “Oh, no. I really see these gurus. They definitely have mistakes, because I clearly see it.” In that case, there are many things you see with your eyes that are actually false. There is nothing definite.

To us, everything appears as truly existent. When we lose something in the house and cannot find it, we actually believe it doesn’t exist, even though it is there. When we get a fever or disease, that mind actually believes what it sees.

The conclusion is to put this question to the superstitious mind, the seeker of mistakes: “Isn’t that possible that my gurus purposefully manifest in the aspect of having mistakes? Isn’t it possible that they do this in order to subdue my mind?” That is possible.

Then again, put the question to the superstitious mind: “Isn’t it possible that these mistakes are only the projections of your own hallucinated thought? The mind which is affected by drugs sees all kinds of hallucinated views; the defective eye sees all kinds of illusions.

Like that, isn’t it possible that when you see mistakes in the Guru, it is only the projection of your hallucinated mind?”

Then put a third question to the superstitious mind: “Isn’t it possible that Buddha is showing an ordinary aspect? Isn’t that possible?”

Put these questions to the superstitious mind, the seeker of mistakes. The superstitious mind, the seeker of mistakes, can’t give any answers to these questions.

These questions are difficult to answer. At this point, this reasoning is enough.

But then the superstitious mind, the evil thought, says, “What need is there to look at the Guru as Buddha? Just because someone is a guru doesn’t mean that person is a buddha. I have become a guru for others, but in my experience, I am not Buddha.” Then you put this question to that mind, to that evil thought: “Then your disciples cannot meditate on you as Buddha because you are not Buddha? Don’t your disciples need to stop seeing your mistakes and instead look at your qualities, so they can generate devotion? Isn’t it necessary for them to generate devotion in this way? According to you, it isn’t necessary. That means
your disciples can’t follow you as their Guru in thought and in action, because you only see your mistakes and not your qualities. If you let them do that, your disciples will fall into the hell realms. But you say it’s not necessary to look at the Guru as Buddha.”

THE CONCLUSION: WE CAN NOW SEE THE GURU IS THE BUDDHA
The conclusion is that because of these reasons, without seeing mistakes and only seeing qualities, we are able to see the Guru as the essence of the Buddha. That devotional thought becomes the door to receive the actual Buddha’s blessings, and then we are able to generate the path to enlightenment.

In that way, it is highly meaningful. There is the possibility of quickly achieving enlightenment. There is freedom. If you are able to practice well like this, all the rest happens very easily.

VERSE A13
THE KINDNESS OF THE GURU

I humbly beseech you, my precious Guru,
Esteemed by Vajradhara, for those meager of mind,
As a field of merit more holy
Than the endless circles of infinite buddhas.

The next verse is remembering the kindness of the Guru, and then offering respect. As it is mentioned in the text, the present Guru is kinder than all the buddhas, kinder even than the present founder, Guru Shakyamuni Buddha.

In this degenerate time when the teachings of the Buddha are like the sun setting in the evening, none of the previous buddhas, great yogis, or pandits have been able to subdue our minds. But our current gurus are subduing our minds by revealing the teachings to us. This is extremely kind. We were left behind; none of those previous buddhas were able to subdue our minds and we were left without guides. Then in this
degenerate time, this Guru has appeared to guide us, to reveal the teachings.

In this way, remember the Guru’s great kindness. Remember that each of our gurus has been kind from beginningless lifetimes, in this life, and will be kind in future lives until we achieve enlightenment.

Remember the kindness of each Guru. The present Guru has been so kind by teaching the Dharma, blessing our minds, and guiding us by giving miscellaneous things. Therefore, remember the kindness of your root Guru and offer respect.

In the first verse, we remember the qualities of the Guru and generate devotion; in the second, we remember their kindness and offer respect, which means offering service. Remember all the kindnesses of all the past life gurus who guided you and brought you to the perfect human body you have now. Remember the future life gurus who will guide you to enlightenment.

If you don’t become enlightened in this life, then remember these future life gurus. Thinking in this way makes the kindness more encompassing.

**VERSE A14**

**PLEASE THE GURU**

Every supreme and mundane attainment Follows upon pure devotion to you, my protector.

Seeing this I forsake my body and even my life;
Bless me to practice what will only please you.

Then in the last stanza, you request the blessing of the Guru, and give up your life and body in order to do only what pleases them. This is an extremely important prayer, to always please the Guru and never – not even for a second – displease them.

Pleasing the Guru is the most important practice and it brings every success. It is the most important practice for achieving enlightenment in this lifetime.

Praying like this every day creates the cause to be able to do this in
future lives. Why is it so important? Why is pleasing the Guru emphasized so much? Because pleasing the Guru brings the most powerful purification.

Even if you made mistakes in the past, such as breaking the advice or breaking samaya with the Guru, pleasing the Guru is the best and easiest way to purify these. Everything is completely purified. It is also the quickest and easiest way to accumulate the most extensive merit. It is the quickest way to receive the blessings of the Guru, the quickest way to achieve enlightenment, and the quickest way to enlighten all sentient beings.

Devoting to the Guru doesn’t mean that when the Guru does something you like – smiling and giving things – you have devotion and respect, but when the Guru shows wrath or anger and points out your mistakes, you give up the virtuous friend. That is not correctly devoting to the virtuous friend. The text is not saying that.

It says, “After receiving the Dharma, one should have perfect reliance. One should correctly devote to the virtuous friend until one achieves enlightenment.”

VERSES B1 – B2
ABSORPTION AND MAHAMUDRA MEDITATION

Requested in this way, my supreme Guru
Comes to the crown of my head.
Once more he gladly (merges with me),
We become of one taste.

The visualization is similar to what the meditations on mahamudra describe below. Instead of visualizing light the size of a mustard seed, you visualize a pink HUM – white but having a red complexion – the size of a mustard seed. Five-colored light beams in the nature of great attachment and great bliss radiate from the HUM.

In Lama Chöpa, there is a prayer requesting blessings that the Guru may abide in the central channel and place his feet on the eight-petaled lotus at the heart, so that we may actualize the unification of the illusory body and clear light.
As with that prayer, here you can do the nine transformations from the completion stage. You can do the practice of illusory body and clear light. You may also do the different practices of mahamudra meditation (see below), or take the self-initiation within *Six-Session Guru Yoga*, using Vajradhara.

Before Guru Vajradhara absorbs into your crown, there is a very short self-initiation – the four particular initiations which purify and revive degenerated tantric root vows – that you may also do here. Then meditate on emptiness. As much as possible, try to understand emptiness and then place the mind in the unified state of bliss and voidness. This is the definitive meaning of guru yoga. It accumulates the merit of transcendental wisdom and also protects us from the eleventh tantric root downfall, which is failing to remember emptiness. We must remember emptiness every day.

Then, as mentioned by Pabongka Rinpoche, the place and all the beings within it appear as illusory, and all become empty like the reflection of the moon in water. They don’t truly exist; they are merely imputed by the mind, like a water bubble coming from water.

**HOW TO MEDITATE ON ABSORPTION AND MAHAMUDRA**

Mahamudra related to the practice of guru yoga is the one pure path through which all the buddhas of the three times proceeded. It is the essential practice of the holy minds of all the learned Indian and Tibetan pandits and great yogis. It accumulates merit in such a short time. This advice is like the fire at the end of time, which immediately burns up any heavy negative karma and downfalls. This is like the hook which brings all the general and sublime realizations.

The verse from *Lama Chöpa* that I mentioned says:

I seek your blessings to actualize in this life the path of unity Of clear light and the illusory body that arises From placing your feet, my savior, in the eight petals of my Heart at the very center of my central channel.

In tantric meditation, the word “heart” refers to the indestructible seed
where the subtle consciousness and subtle body reside. Every time the Buddha absorbs into us, it is absorbed into that subtle consciousness. It isn’t absorbed into this body made of blood, bone, and flesh. The subtle body – the vehicle of the mind – is what becomes the cause of Buddha’s holy body, the cause of the illusory body. When we meditate on mahamudra, we should meditate as this verse from *Lama Chöpa* describes.

You look at the Guru with eyes full of tears, hairs of the body rising up, and with intensive dauntless faith. Make intense requests for a long time from the very depths of your heart, from the depth of your bones. Then visualize that the thrones melt into light and that light absorbs into Vajradhara, who melts into light and absorbs into your heart. When the Guru becomes oneness with your mind, think that your mind is blessed. The appearance is not concrete or solid, but shimmering. Your mind is extremely happy, like a child who has not seen its parents for a long time. The child is so happy when it sees its parents. From beginningless samsaric lifetimes, your mind has been separate from the Guru. Now you are meeting the Father Guru.

For practitioners of mahamudra who have realization of seeing the Guru as the essence of Buddha, who have unshakable devotion, nothing brings greater happiness than this experience.

After the Guru has absorbed into your heart, you shouldn’t think of temporal things, expectations, undesirable things, or what might happen in the future. Cut off all those superstitions. Don’t think of the past and don’t think of the future. Don’t think of any other thing such as the thought of present objects. Don’t let these thoughts arise.

Keep the mind focused single-pointedly on this appearance, which is shimmering but not solid. Concentrate for a while on the oneness with the Guru. You should not lose consciousness or fall asleep, and you should not stop the comprehension of the mind. Your mind is engaged in single-pointed concentration. Do not move from that state.

Watch the clear and perceiving nature of the mind and keep the mind on that. The mind should stay loose, not tight. Let it be free, not intense. The mind should be kept loose, but inside, the mind should not be completely loose; it should be strongly tied to the object of
meditation. The mind should not comprehend any other object.

If you place the mind on that for a while, the mind becomes calm. When you don’t disturb water, it becomes very clear. Place the mind in its own clear, perceiving nature. Then, once the nature of mind becomes clear, you should depend on remembrance and awareness. Remembrance means you don’t forget the object of meditation, and awareness is recognizing the hindrances to meditation. Check occasionally to see if the hindrances are arising or not.

FINDING THE OBJECT TO BE REFUTED
Then meditate on emptiness with remembrance and awareness. Strongly concentrate on emptiness. When the energy weakens, strengthen the mind’s hold on emptiness, then increase it more and more.

THE I RISES WHEN WE CRITICIZE OURSELVES
If it is difficult to find the I, think: “I have been creating so much negative karma and have made so many horrible mistakes. I will be born in the hell realms.”

While you are thinking in this way – criticizing yourself and thinking how many causes you have created to be reborn in the hells – watch the I.

When you criticize yourself by thinking of all the negative karma you have accumulated to be born in the hell realms, then you see the I. You feel the I very strongly: there is an I above the aggregates that exists from its own side, a real I that will be born in the hell realms and suffer. This appearance comes very strongly. That is what we should recognize and that is what we should realize is empty. The emptiness of that is the shunyata of the I.

THE I RISES WHEN WE FLATTER OURSELVES
Alternatively, you can flatter yourself – tell yourself how good you are! Remember your good qualities. Think: “I will receive a perfect human body in my future lives. I will achieve enlightenment.” While thinking in this way, watch how the thought of I arises. The main point is how
the aspect of I arises and appears to that thought. We need to accurately recognize the way the I appears to the mind.

When you flatter yourself, the same appearance comes – the truly existent I that is neither body nor mind, that exists above the aggregates but is not of the aggregates, the real I here, existing from its own side. This I is happy.

THE I RISES WHEN WE EXPERIENCE DANGER
The same thing happens when you fall off a cliff; the appearance of I that is neither body nor mind arises. We don’t think the body and mind will fall down. We don’t think this body will fall. When we start to fall, we think of this I that is neither body or mind. This real I that exists from its own side is going to fall down. A lot of fear arises in the mind.

The appearance of this I comes when we are in danger, when we start to fall or are in a car accident. We think the I which is neither body nor mind, this real I which exists from its own side – not the one that is merely labeled on the aggregates – is going to fall down. This I is going to be killed. We think, “Oh, I am going to be killed. I am going to fall down.” This I – the truly existent, self-existent, independent, inherently existent I – is what does not exist at all, even in name. This is the I which cannot be found anywhere.

THE VARIOUS VIEWS
In order to realize the emptiness of the I, we need to recognize the object of refutation, the object held by our ignorance that grasps at true existence. We need to discover that the truly existent object of refutation is empty.

It is not the self-entity according to the doctrine of the Vaibhashika and Sautrantika schools. The self-entity refuted by these two schools is the I that exists without depending on the aggregates; it is not the I that exists without depending on name or on being merely labeled. It is not that. Even if you are able to recognize this selflessness of persons, that is still not the ultimate recognition of the subtle object of refutation, which is the opposite of shunyata.

According to the Chittamattra school, phenomena do not exist
without depending on our experience of the impression that is left on the consciousness. Phenomena do not exist separate from the karmic imprint in the mind that perceives them. However, this is still not recognition of the subtle object of refutation, which is the opposite of shunyata.

Even if you realize the object of refutation according to the Chittamatra School – the object existing only from the side of the object without depending on the non-deceptive mind that labels it, the I that exists only from the side of the object – still you have not recognized the subtle object of refutation, which is the opposite of shunyata.

When you realize that the subtle object of refutation that is the opposite of shunyata is false, then you realize shunyata.

THE ULTIMATE VIEW: PRASANGIKA-MIDDLE WAY: THE I IS MERELY LABELED
The highest philosophical school, the Madhyamakam contains two views. According to the Madhyamaka-Svatantrika, there is something which exists from the side of I, without being merely labeled by the thought and sound.

According to the Madhyamaka-Prasangika, the last and ultimate doctrine, the I that exists without being merely labeled by thought and sound is the subtle object of refutation. By realizing that this is empty, that it is false, you realize the absolute nature of the I.

IF YOU EXPERIENCE DARKNESS THIS IS A MISTAKE
When you meditate on shunyata, when you plan to see the appearance of the I, you may experience an appearance of darkness. When you try to recognize the object of refutation, which is empty, you experience an appearance of darkness from the outside. You think, “I must try to see how the I appears to me” and when you intensively try to see how the I appears, you close your eyes and because of that, you experience a vision of darkness coming from the outside. This happens. This is a mistake.
A SOLID FEELING: A MISTAKE
Sometimes when you meditate, planning to see the appearance of the I, you may experience a very solid feeling. That is still not recognizing the object of refutation. This feeling comes because we are thinking, “I will look at the I with my whole complete mind,” and we check the I intensively. The mind is intense and tight and we forget to check the state of our minds. Then some kind of solidity arises. It feels like there is a stick inside of you, or a stupa, but that is not the object of refutation.

THE MIND SHOULD BE LOOSE BUT THE IDEA OF SEEING THE I SHOULD BE TIGHT
The mind should be quite loose when you meditate, but the plan to see the appearance of the I should be tight. While the idea of seeing the I is tight, the general mind should be kept loose.

Without understanding this practice, when the mind becomes intense and tight, the wind goes into the upper body. Because of this, you experience a feeling of something very solid like a stick or a stupa inside.

IF YOU JUST SEE THE AGGREGATES: A MISTAKE
Sometimes when you check the appearance of the I, when you think, “Now I am going to recognize the I,” you may only see the aggregates. You don’t see anything else; all that appears is a body. This is also a mistake. It arises when you meditate and think of nothing else but the aggregates.

Generally, there is no I which exists separately from these aggregates, except what is merely labeled on the group of the aggregates. This is how it really is.

Definitely, the appearance of the aggregates is not what appears to the ignorant mind that thinks I. Definitely this mind of ignorance experiences the I existing from its own side, but in the case of this mistake, you are unable to discriminate the appearance of the I; you don’t see anything except the appearance of the aggregates, this body. This is how this mistake arises.
THE SPACE BETWEEN TWO THOUGHTS IS NOT EMPTINESS

Sometimes when you try to check up on the appearance of the I, nothing appears to your mind. The thought of I disappears. This is because when the simultaneously born ignorance that thinks I arises, you miss it. You should try to check the appearance of the I as it arises, but instead you try to look at the appearance of the I after that thought has stopped. The previous thought of I has stopped, but the next thought of I has not yet arisen. You try to watch the emptiness that comes between these two thoughts of I, but this is not real emptiness. The emptiness in between the two thoughts does not mean that you don’t have the appearance of the I; it’s not for that reason.

WHEN IT’S DARK AND YOU TOUCH THE PILLAR, IT SEEMS SELF-EXISTENT

When we look at how the I appears to the simultaneously born ignorance that grasps at true existence, it is like walking into a room at night. When you go into a room at night and the light is off and your hand touches a pillar, you think, “There is a pillar here – a pillar existing from its own side.” The pillar appears as truly existent, clearly existing from its own side.

When the light is on, you see the pillar and touch the pillar. Someone who recognizes the object of refutation is aware of that object of refutation all the time, but it’s more clear when the light is off. Then when your hand touches the pillar, it’s easier to recognize the appearance that the pillar is existing from its own side, a real pillar. You experience touching a pillar that exists from its own side; that is the appearance that comes.

However, the appearance of a pillar which is merely labeled on that base does not come. That’s what should happen, but that does not happen.

Nothing exists from its own side even in the slightest. When we walk on the floor, we feel the floor. The ground feels truly existent from its own side. There is existence from its own side when we step on the floor. We feel the ground from the side of the ground. This ground that
exists from its own side when we walk on it is the object of refutation. That is what is called truly existent or self-existent or independently existent – those objects that we see existing from their own side.

When you look at colors, you see brightness from its own side. You see red from its own side; you see yellow from its own side. On the yellow color, you see a yellow color that exists from its own side. When you look at red, you see a red color that exists from its own side. Colors are very good for recognizing the object of refutation – to realize shunyata, the absolute nature of reality – because they are very bright.

When you look at water, you don’t see the water. The appearance of the water is merely labeled on that base, but you don’t experience it. You experience a real ocean existing from its own side – waves coming in and the color blue existing from its own side. There is water on the water that exists from its own side. You don’t see the water that is merely labeled on that, such as the truly existent water that doesn’t exist, or the independent water that doesn’t exist.

When you touch your hand, you feel the hand existing from its own side. You don’t see the merely labeled hand; you see the flesh existing from its own side. You don’t see the hand that is merely labeled.

It is the same when you touch something soft. There is soft from its own side, not soft that is merely labeled by thought and sound. When you touch something rough, you feel roughness from its own side, not the roughness that is merely labeled by thought and sound. You feel the truly existent soft and rough, which don’t exist. You feel the independent soft and rough, which don’t exist.

**EASIER TO RECOGNIZE THE OBJECT TO BE REFUTED WHEN IT’S EXTERNAL**

Sometimes it is easier to recognize the object to be refuted – that which appears to our ignorance as truly existent – with outside objects. As soon as you clearly recognize the outside object – that there is a blue color above the blue color existing from its own side – then right after that, think of the I. Immediately, you recognize the truly existent I, the object of refutation, the object of ignorance, which doesn’t exist at all from the head down to the feet; it doesn’t exist anywhere.
YOU THINK THERE IS AN I ABOVE THE AGGREGATES: IT DOES NOT EXIST
There is no need to use a lot of logic. Just like with the color blue, when you watch the I, you realize that there’s an I above the aggregates that truly exists from its own side. You see this very clearly. Then you recognize, “This is it – the object of ignorance, which does not exist and is completely empty.”

While you are recognizing this, deep inside your mind you understand, “This is empty. This in fact does not exist.” Then you single-pointedly concentrate on that.

Then you remember dependent arising – nothing exists from its own side. It depends on the thought which the mind merely labels upon the aggregates. That is how the I exists; nothing exists from its own side. Without thinking about many other logical arguments, you single-pointedly watch this truly existent I.

THEN THE I DISAPPEARS. . .
At the same time, the mind is aware that it is empty, completely false. Then this I disappears. You don’t know where it has gone. There is nothing to comprehend, nothing to hold on to, nothing to grab. The I becomes completely empty. In other words, “I am completely lost; I become completely empty.”

. . .FOR LOWER CAPABLE BEINGS, FEAR ARISES
For beings of lower capability, when the I disappears, fear arises from the very depth of the heart. But you should never think, “I am falling into the extreme.” There is no way to fall into the extreme; there is no way for the I to cease. You shouldn’t worry at all about the I ceasing; there is no way to end the I. Because consciousness does not cease, there will always be the I. You should go beyond this fear. You should never hang on to the illusion of the I or try to keep the I. Holding on to the I becomes a hindrance to realizing emptiness.
FOR HIGHER CAPABLE BEINGS, THERE IS INCREDIBLE HAPPINESS
For beings of higher capability, when the I disappears, incredible happiness arises. Tears come from the ears! The mind is extremely, unbelievably happy. The I is completely lost, just as when, in the evening, you see a bush as a tiger.

When you reach the bush and shine a torch light on it, you see the bush. The tiger has completely disappeared – there is no way it exists. Meditating in this way, let the I be completely lost. That’s what should happen.

THE I THAT IS LEFT IS THAT WHICH IS MERELY LABELED
We have been circling in samsara and suffering from beginningless time. That is because we have not yet lost the I; we have not yet realized emptiness. We have not realized that the object of ignorance, the truly existent I, is empty.

We discover that what is left is only the I. There is still the same appearance, but we no longer cling to the truly existent I. The I that is left is only that which is merely labeled upon the aggregates by thought and sound. That is all that is left. After we realize the truly existent I, the I existing from its own side, is completely empty, then all that is left is the I that is merely labeled on the aggregates.

Anyone can meditate on shamatha, which means seeking meditation from the view. There is seeking the view from meditation and seeking meditation from the view. This is seeking meditation from the view.

Whenever we realize that this I is completely empty, then we realize the shunyata of the I, the absolute nature of the I. In that way, we realize emptiness, through the logic of dependent arising.

ANOTHER WAY TO MEDITATE: REQUEST THE GURU AND EXPERIENCE THE FOUR BLISSES
There is another way to meditate and analyze mahamudra and this may be more effective for some people. Before the meditation in which Guru Vajradhara absorbs into you, it is good to make a requesting
prayer. You can do the mahamudra lineage requesting prayer.

The very essence of this prayer to the mahamudra lineage is this:

Please grant me blessings to see the Guru as Buddha,
To develop aversion toward samsara,
And to be able to carry the responsibility to liberate all mother sentient beings.
With this attitude of universal responsibility,
May I quickly achieve the common path,
Particularly the glorified unification of mahamudra.

The word “unification” means two things combined. According to tantra mahamudra, due to the blessing of the Guru entering the heart, the heart chakra, winds, and drops are able to function. When they are able to function through the practice of guru yoga and power of the Guru’s blessing, tummo, and so forth, the winds are able to enter abide, and absorb in the central channel. Then, because of the drops flowing down, you experience the four types of bliss and so forth.

SIMULTANEOUSLY BORN BLISS OF CLEAR LIGHT
The greatest bliss is the simultaneously born bliss of clear light, which occurs when the drops come to the fourth chakra. It doesn’t matter whether it is the fourth chakra up or the fourth chakra down.

You have been united with the clear light of simultaneously born bliss since beginningless rebirths. You are born with it. Through these practices, it is now actualized. It becomes visible.

ONE MEANING OF “UNIFICATION”
The word “unified,” as in the “glorified unification of mahamudra,” can have this meaning – the extremely subtle mind experiencing great bliss unified with emptiness.

This is tantra mahamudra – the extremely subtle mind in the nature of simultaneously born great bliss, which is the greatest bliss, the bliss of highest yoga tantra.

The bodhichitta melts and flows through the central channel, and
because of this, gross consciousness stops and the extremely subtle consciousness is actualized. While we experience this great bliss, we understand emptiness. The greater the bliss you experience, the stronger the emptiness you experience. The mind absorbs into emptiness very strongly. The more your mind is strongly absorbed into emptiness, the more the gross mind – the dualistic view, the disturbing thoughts – ceases.

ANOTHER MEANING OF “UNIFICATION”
The other meaning of “unification” is that your own mind and the mind of the Guru are unified. With that mind and that blessing, you meditate on emptiness. However, whether you do it according to sutra or tantra, you should have this understanding.

So “unification” could also have this meaning.

THE UNIFICATION OF MAHAMUDRA
But the main meaning is bliss unified with emptiness. That is the ultimate meaning of the glorified unification of mahamudra, the great seal.

“Seal” means mudra. One meaning of “mudra” is dependent arising. You cannot separate dependent arising from emptiness, and emptiness cannot be separated from dependent arising. This is the meaning of “seal.” When you put a seal on a package or a letter, it cannot fall apart. The contents of the package cannot be taken away by others. This is one meaning of mudra or seal.

Another meaning of seal is this unification of dependent arising and emptiness.

FIRST MAKE STRONG REQUESTS
Before Guru Vajradhara absorbs into you, make a short request. You are not making requests to just the root Guru who is in the essence of Vajradhara and integrated with all the other buddhas. Even though it is called “root Guru,” it means everything – all the other gurus. Make strong requests three times from your heart.
THEN NECTAR BEAMS EMITTED PURIFY ALL OBSTACLES
Then think that nectar beams are emitted from the holy body and purify all obstacles and all obscurations, particularly the concept of I-grasping, this concept of a truly existent I.

The subtle dual view that appears even during the appearance of the white path, the increasing red path, and the near-attainment dark path is also purified. This is the main obscuration that is purified by the completion stage. The generation stage purifies ordinary concept and ordinary appearance, but the completion stage removes even the subtle dual view and the subtle mind, the superstition that arises even during the time of white path, red path, and dark path.

Once this is purified and completely ceases, then all that is left is the extremely subtle mind. It is just like having achieved the clear light of meaning, the subtle wisdom directly perceiving emptiness. After that, there is no delusion. There is no attachment and so forth.

The meaning of secret mantra is protecting the mind. It contains these two – the generation stage, which protects the mind, and the completion stage practice, which also protects the mind. In this way, we are protected from obstacles and are able to generate all the realizations of the path. We purify all the obstacles that interfere in our development of the method and wisdom path to enlightenment, particularly the obstacles to developing wisdom, and then we generate all the realizations of method and wisdom, especially wisdom, from both sutra and tantra – the wisdom realizing emptiness and the transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss and voidness, the clear light of tantra mahamudra. Then we achieve the result, the two kayas.

THEN GURU VAJRADHARA ABSORBS INTO YOUR HEART
Then Guru Vajradhara absorbs into your heart through the central channel. Inside the central channel is the indestructible seed – half red and half white. Inside the indestructible seed is the extremely subtle mind. We visualize it in the form of a sesame seed, the size of a mustard seed, and in the nature of light. Vajradhara absorbs into this indestructible seed.
As soon as Vajradhara has absorbed into that, you should feel great joy that you are meeting the Guru in your own heart, meeting the Guru mind to mind.

When we think “meeting the Guru,” we shouldn’t concentrate on the outside form, but on the mind that is the dharmakaya, the transcendental wisdom. You should concentrate on the absolute Guru, the transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss and voidness, which as I mentioned is the completely pure, subtle mind that is experiencing the accomplishment of complete, infinite bliss non-dual with emptiness.

If you concentrate well on that, when your mind becomes one with it, you will feel bliss more easily.

**FINALLY WE HAVE MET THE ABSOLUTE GURU:**
**INCREDIBLE**
From beginningless rebirths, you have never met the absolute Guru. You have been waiting a long time and now you have met the absolute Guru and become one with it. This feels incredible – a million times better than a beggar who has won a million dollars! Much better than somebody who waited for many years to meet a friend and finally was able to find them; you feel a million times better than that.

You have met the absolute Guru, but that is not something physical. You have met the absolute Guru mentally. Don’t think of the past or the future. Just practice this awareness of the nature of the mind, which becomes oneness with the absolute Guru, the dharmakaya. Just single-pointedly look at that mind and spend a little time there.

**MEDITATE WITH PART OF YOUR MIND WATCHING**
Then go very slowly. While you are watching the nature of the mind, which is oneness with the absolute Guru, another part of the mind – a half or quarter of the mind – is spying, functioning like a watchman or the police. This watchman part of the mind is watching how the I is appearing – slowly analyzing. It is said when you are carrying a bowl filled with a drink and you are walking on the road, you are looking at the bowl, but you also have to watch the road. Otherwise, you might spill the drink or fall down dead. You must meditate in the same way.
Generally for us beginners, this is the way to begin the meditation, and the way to continue the concentration and not be distracted. Half the mind or a quarter of the mind is spying on whether you are meditating on the object or not.

Until we achieve single-pointed concentration, until we are free from attachment-scattering thoughts – both gross and subtle – we must meditate in this way.

If you put all your concentration on the object, then when you become distracted, because there is no mind watching whether you are meditating or not, you are completely distracted. That can last for hours! You don’t even realize you are distracted!

**HOW TO FIND THE I**
You should not be interested in how the I is appearing in general, but how your I is appearing to yourself. Ask yourself, “What am I doing?” “Meditating.” How does the “I am meditating” appear to yourself? Then you simply watch that and analyze that. What is the I? In reality, the I is what is merely imputed by the mind. Think like that. Therefore, anything else that appears is the object of refutation. It is false, an hallucination. Thinking in this way is very powerful. If you have a lot of merit from past lives, without many words or logical arguments, this can be enough to realize emptiness.

Concentrate single-pointedly on the I that appears, or on anything else that appears that is other than that which is merely imputed by the mind. This hallucination is the object of refutation. In reality, this hallucination is completely empty; there is no such thing, not even the slightest atom. While this I is appearing from its own side, in your heart, you are aware that it is empty.

For example, when there is a mirage, you see it, but your heart is aware that there is not even the slightest bit of water there.

**IF YOU FEEL FEAR OR JOY, YOU’RE SUCCESSFUL: YOU’RE FORTUNATE**
When fear of losing the I or incredible joy at losing the I – either one – starts to arise, this means you are successful. At that time, you must
realize you are extremely fortunate. From beginningless rebirths until now, you have never realized emptiness, but now it is starting to happen. You should know that you are extremely fortunate, that this is what has to happen. It is extremely important to remember this, to take this opportunity.

However, the reality is that the I, the self, never actually ceases. There is continuity of consciousness, and this phenomenon which is labeled in dependence on the consciousness never ceases. But when you realize emptiness, you experience the feeling that the I doesn’t exist.

Normally we would call this nihilism, but this experience happens. There is nothing to hold on to; this precious I that we have been holding onto since beginningless rebirths does not exist. That is realizing emptiness – there is nothing to hold on to. This is what is called seeing the middle way. When you have the experience of fear, you must complete that experience by going through the fear. The fear is like a bridge. By going through the fear, you will come to the realization that the I is completely empty. It does not exist. You should come to that point.

Then, every day, you must continue the meditation. Every day you must continue doing this analysis. Otherwise, if you don’t continue, the mind can become gross again, and you will not be able to see emptiness. You won’t be able to develop and integrate this experience or directly see emptiness. Every day, you must continue the experience by applying the meditations, from calm abiding – how to stop the scattering thought and sinking thought – to experiencing the I as empty.

These practices are a good opportunity to combine the meditations on emptiness. Then it becomes mahamudra meditation. It is a little more rich. This is particularly how to meditate on sutra mahamudra.

B3
**ARISING AS VAJRASATTVA**

With the pride of being Vajrasattva
I embrace (my consort) Bhagavati
While holding a vajra and bell symbolic
Of the secret of great bliss simultaneous
With the secret of (voidness) free from the mental fabrication of true existence.

Then, out of the wisdom understanding emptiness, which is in the nature of great bliss – the dharmakaya, the absolute Guru – you manifest as the deity Vajrasattva. According to the prayer, you can generate as Vajrasattva, which means white Vajradhara, in the same aspect. However, normally you manifest as whatever deity you practice – Yamantaka, Chakrasamvara, Guhyasamaja, etc.

This is the samaya of Akshobhya, the samaya of the mudra, and the samaya of remembering the bell and vajra. These three samayas are practiced like this.

**B4**

**GIVING BODY, POSSESSIONS, AND MERIT**

From this moment on, without any sense of loss,
I send forth my body and, likewise, my wealth
And my virtues amassed throughout the three times
In order to help all beings, my mothers.

Then we dedicate our body, possessions, and all our three-time merits to all sentient beings.

This is the samaya of Ratnasambhava. Of the four types of charity, dedicating our merit to all sentient beings is the charity of giving Dharma.

**B5 – B10**

**REMEMBERING VOWS**

Next we review our vows: the ordained and lay pratimoksha vows, the bodhisattva vows, and the tantric vows – the fourteen root downfalls and ten bompos that are mentioned in *The Fifty Verses of Guru*
Devotion.

Regarding the bodhisattva vows, if you keep your mind in bodhichitta, the thought of exchanging oneself for others, you won’t break as many vows. This is the essence of the bodhisattva vows. The best protection regarding the bodhisattva vows is to keep the mind in bodhichitta as much as possible.

There are particular samayas of mother tantra, so at this point you try to remember the samaya vows you have taken. Then you make the determination to follow these vows and not commit transgressions again.

This is practicing the samaya of Vairochana: abstaining from transgressing the three moralities, working for sentient beings – which is the morality of gathering virtue, and practicing the six perfections.

This also becomes the samaya of Amoghasiddhi, keeping all the other vows and samayas.

Regarding the samayas of the five buddha families, if you don’t know these, you should study them (see chapter 8). Then you try to recognize what you are doing in everyday life and try to integrate the samayas of the five buddha families. We try to recognize that we are practicing those. In this way, we can really enjoy life because we are living in the tantric vows, which bring enlightenment very quickly.

B11 – B12

PROTECTING THE THREE VEHICLES

I shall never transgress, even in my dreams,
The most minor rule of the pure moral training
Of the pratimoksha, bodhichitta, and Vajrayana vows.
I shall practice according to the Buddha’s words.

As Buddha intended, I shall uphold
The complete sacred Dharma of insight and scriptures
As gathered together in the three types of vehicle and four tantric classes.
I shall liberate all beings by whichever means is suited to each.
The next verse fulfills the samaya of Amitabha to practice individually the outer Dharma – the sutra vehicle – and the secret Dharma – action tantra, performance tantra, yoga tantra, and highest yoga tantra. Making this commitment is known as the samaya of the lotus.

It also becomes the morality of gathering virtue, which is the samaya of Vairochana, as I mentioned above.

Then we promise to liberate all sentient beings by whichever method is most suitable for them.

This is protecting morality by doing works for sentient beings, which again is the samaya of Vairochana.

C2
BEING REBORN IN SHAMBHALA
Then comes the dedication to be reborn in Shambhala. WhyShambhala? The reason might be because we have a karmic connection to be reborn in Shambhala. The Kalachakra initiation has been given many times by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and many other lamas; many more people come to these events than to other initiations. This shows that there is a karmic link to the people here in this southern continent. Perhaps this prayer is done for that reason.

It is also said in the teachings that if you do not become enlightened in the earlier time of the Buddha’s teachings, but if you leave positive imprints on your mental continuum in this life as much as possible, then in the later part of the Buddha’s teachings, you will practice the rest of the path and become enlightened in Shambhala, on that body, by being born in that pure realm.

If we can’t achieve enlightenment through the practice of tantra in this life, then the quick method is praying to be born in the pure land of Shambhala. In these pure realms, you have the opportunity to practice tantra, so by being reborn in Shambhala, you can complete the practice of tantra and achieve enlightenment. Therefore, this is a skillful method.
CONCLUSION

In brief, may I be born in Shambhala, the great jewel treasury,
And complete there the stages of the peerless path
In as quick a time as the amount of white merit
I have gathered from this virtuous practice.

Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo says that if we practice Six-Session Guru Yoga correctly, beginning with refuge and ending with the dedication, then the three vows become very pure. The particular instructions and practices of the Thirteen Golden Dharmas are regarded as very profound, but most of those practices cannot compare to this Six-Session Guru Yoga. This Six-Session Guru Yoga is great. It contains the essential practices according to both sutra and tantra. It is like a house that has everything! This is the pure path that pleases all the buddhas.

Six-Session Guru Yoga is the best method to take the essence of this perfect human rebirth.

COLOPHON

These teachings were given by Lama Zopa Rinpoche in Katoomba, NSW, Australia, in September 1991, and at Chenrezig Institute, Eudlo, Queensland, Australia, in September 1980.

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UNDERSTANDING THE OFFERING OF TSOG
LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE

THE MEANING OF TSOG

Tsog does not just mean offering a torma and food. There is a more extensive explanation of what tsog is and of the importance and benefits of offering tsog.

When only male yogis gather together, that is called a feast of heroes. When only female yoginis gather together, that is called a feast of heroines. When both yogis and yoginis gather, that is called a feast of heroes and heroines. That is what is called tsog.

It is said by Pandit Ratna Raksherita:

Those doing the activities of yogis, it is called the feast of heroes; similarly, those doing the activities of yoginis, it is called the feast of heroines. Those whose mind is enriched with control of the circle of integrated method and wisdom, that is called the circle of unification.

The real meaning of tsog is experiencing transcendental wisdom, the unification of non-dual great bliss with the wisdom of emptiness. The very essence of tsog is the offering of that experience, the male and female heroes and heroines who in essence are the Guru-Deity, and the oneself experiencing all of this as the Guru-Deity.

The real meaning of tsog is integrating method and wisdom, the transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss and emptiness. This is the secret meaning.

The reason we need the actual tsog substances is so we can develop the very heart of the Mahayana and tantric path, which brings enlightenment in just one brief life during these times of degeneration. The tantric path quickly ceases the defilements, including the actual
negative imprints left on the mental continuum by the delusions. It is quickest way to collect extensive merit. Otherwise, on the paramita path, it takes three countless great eons to collect enough merit to achieve enlightenment.

Therefore, we need to use the transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss and emptiness to increase this during this brief life during these times of degeneration. For that reason, we need to enjoy these tsog substances. This is the principal method of the circle of tsog – to gain general attainments, restore samaya and tantric vows, and pacify obstacles. This is the main cause to achieve the Heruka and Vajrayogini pure land, to be born there. Therefore, we should perform the tsog offering practice.

WHEN TO DO TSOG
It is best to offer tsog every day. If that is not possible, then we should do it twice a month. As it is explained in the Heruka Root Tantra:

Quickly attempt to make offerings.
Every waxing and waning of each month offer tsog.

Waning refers to the 10th of the Tibetan month; waxing refers to the 25th of the Tibetan month. The great tantric master Abayakaya says:

Every day [offer tsog] as much as possible;
It is especially admired in the nighttime.
[Offer tsog] at least once a month, or if that is not possible, at least once a year.
If one transgresses this circle, then your samaya is degenerated.

According the Heruka Root Tantra, the best time to offer tsog is the night time. From the Heruka Root Tantra:
Offering extensive food and drink –
Always do this at night time. Why?
Because it is admired to do it at nighttime.
Always wander at nighttime and always gather at night time.
This means the dakas and dakinis always wander at night time and gather at night time. The eleventh month of the Tibetan calendar is a special time of the mother. It is a special time of Vajrayogini and a special month to offer tsog to Vajrayogini. The twelfth month of the Tibetan calendar is a special time of the father. It is a special time of Chakrasamvara and a special month to do Chamrasamvara tsog. It is especially important to offer tsog during these months.

Heruka appeared to Khedrup Je and spoke:

If good tsog is offered [during]
The waxing and waning of each month,
Then one has no hardships, no difficulties,
And one goes to the pure land of Tharpo Kachö.

This is in the biography of Khedrup Je, who was Lama Tsongkhapa’s heart disciple.

**WHAT TO OFFER?**

Regarding the actual offering substances, even if you don’t have any other substances, you must have bala (meat) and madana (alcohol). These two are of utmost importance. From the tantra *Do Jung*:

Without torma intoxicating
You won’t have quick attainments.

“Intoxicating” refers to alcohol; it does not refer to other drugs.
From the *Heruka Root Tantra*:

Vajra goddess – intoxicating and meat –
If the capable being offers these with devotion and respect
Then Heruka will be actually pleased.
Therefore, make offerings with a very satisfied mind;
Then sublimeness will be granted.
This means that for those who do this practice, because it pleases Heruka, sublimeness will be given to you. It will be very easy to achieve full enlightenment. If you practice correctly, liberation is not far away and will not be difficult to achieve. It will be easy and it won’t take long. It is completely in your hands.

When you offer tsog, the tsog substance of bala should be on the right side and madana on the left side. The tantric text Nyingpo Gyen (Heart Ornament) mentions that we should use these special expressions for alcohol, “madana,” and for meat, “bala.” What happens when you use these two terms is psychological. If you just use the terms alcohol and meat, then it is ordinary and one experiences an ordinary appearance. Also, when taste it, you only taste meat and alcohol. When the practice is done like this, it does not become part of tsog practice.

Because you have purified and blessed the substances into nectar, you taste it with pure thought and pure appearance. The real meaning of tsog is transcendental wisdom, non-dual bliss and emptiness. Therefore, when you take the tsog, you should experience it like that. Even it you are not actually able to experience it in this way, at least visualize that you are experiencing that. Take it with recognition, with the pure transcendent mind.

**CHEESE AND JUICE**

This is very important advice. Cheese is not qualified for tsog. It needs to be meat, as I have explained in these quotations from pure tantric texts. I remember on one particular occasion in Bodhgaya, there were some Chinese Sangha. As I understand it, they would be totally shocked to see a Buddhist eating meat. According to their view, it is like killing a human being. This is because they are not familiar with tantric practice. Therefore, this is how they feel when they see Buddhists eating meat.

Once there were one or two Theravadan monks (the leaders of the temple in Bodh Gaya), at a tsog offering. At that time, the monks of His Holiness the Dalai Lama were passing out the meat and they offered it to them. His Holiness just smiled a little at the idea of offering meat to
somebody who wouldn’t understand. But Theravadans eat meat; they eat whatever people offer to them. Normally, they don’t eat in the evening. For them, offering tsog substances or food in the afternoon or evening is strange.

One may use cheese on such occasions when there are people from other traditions who would be shocked and lose faith to see Buddhists eating meat. But it seems even some monks and other people who think it’s a big deal use fruit juice for alcohol. Those who do the work of passing out the tsog should be aware of what to do. Tell them not to pass meat and alcohol to those who do not practice highest yoga tantra, such as Chinese Buddhists, or Theravadans who do not eat in the evening or afternoon. There are two things: the first big mistake is offering food in the afternoon, and the second mistake is offering alcohol to them. Those who are passing out the tsog need to have a little awareness about this, like having a sign about a dangerous dog – Beware of Dog!

Strictly speaking, tsog should only be served to those who practice highest yoga tantra.

Also, you can’t put tsog on the ground. Sometimes at Kopan, they offer the tsog and just throw it on the ground. It is always better to use a paper plate or paper bag. If you put it straight on the ground, the people who serve the tsog as well as those who receive it actually receive a tantric vice (bompo). This is very heavy. It is better to use a paper bag to protect the tsog, like they do at Namgyäl monastery.

When you offer tsog, first offer it to the vajra master. When you collect the remaining tsog, start from the bottom of each row and work up to the top, collecting from the vajra master last.

**OTHER SUBSTANCES AS WELL**
To collect more merit, in addition to having the bala and madana, you may also offer other substances. Offer them as extensively as possible. On certain specific occasions, if you have the substances, you can make actual torma tsog using tsampa (or oats or other kinds of flour that can be shaped). Make the shape of the torma into a heart of a man, or a breast. The torma should have decorations; it should have a dharma
wheel with flower petals around it, and it must have the sun, moon, and nada at the top. This is according to the tradition of Lama Tsongkhapa and Pabongka Rinpoche.
THE IMPORTANCE OF GURU PUJA
LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE

THE PURPOSE OF DOING GURU PUJA
The purpose of life is to free all sentient beings from suffering and lead them to peerless happiness, enlightenment, the cessation of all obscurations. The happiness of all sentient beings is our responsibility. But, in order to work perfectly for all sentient beings, first we ourselves must reach enlightenment, and in order to do this we need to actualize the steps of the path to enlightenment, starting with guru devotion.

All of this is contained in the practice of Lama Chöopa, The Guru Puja, by Panchen Losang Chökyi Gyältsen.

Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo highly praised the importance of practicing Guru Puja:

If you are able to do the practice of Guru Puja in your daily life, it contains all the important points of sutra and tantra. It is a complete practice, and it shows the palm [which means the heart] of the instruction of the ear-lineage of Ganden.

Ganden refers to the Lama Tsongkhapa tradition. There are two terms: Gelug, which means the virtuous tradition, and Ganden, which means the joyful one. Lama Tsongkhapa’s monastery, Ganden, was established before the other major monasteries of the Lama Tsongkhapa tradition, Sera and Drepung. Ganden means having joy or joyful one. I don’t know how others translate Ganden, but ga means joy and den means having, so having joy or joyful one. Nyen gyu means the ear-lineage. It can be translated as whispered lineage, but nyen means ear and gyu means lineage, so ear-lineage.

The translation could read, “It shows the palm of instruction of the text of manifestations of the ear-lineage of the Joyful One.” I think it should be translated that way.
I think it means that Manjushri manifested in the form of a teaching, or text. Lama Tsongkhapa received sutra and tantra teachings from Manjushri in the manner of a disciple receiving teachings directly from their Guru. It didn’t happen as some kind of vision or dream. Lama Tsongkhapa met and directly received teachings from Manjushri. This was definite, not like some kind of vision that you’re not sure you can really trust.

I think “shows the palm” is expressing that this is a key secret instruction that gives enlightenment in the very brief lifetime of a degenerate time. The expression also means that it shows it very clearly.

**THE LINEAGE OF MAHAMUDRA OF DRUBCHEN CHÖKYI DORJE**

Drubchen Chökyi Dorje [the mahasiddha Dharmavajra] was a disciple of a disciple of Lama Tsongkhapa. Chökyi Dorje was a Tibetan lama who, like Milarepa, achieved full enlightenment in the brief lifetime of the degenerate time by practicing tantra on the basis of lam-rim.

I think His Holiness the Dalai Lama also explained this in the mahamudra teaching during the first Enlightened Experience Celebration [teachings in India sponsored by Lama Yeshe in 1982]. I don’t remember whether we or some other people requested a tantric mahamudra commentary. There was a lam-rim commentary before it, I think. Alex Berzin translated the teachings, as those who were at the first EEC in Dharamsala will remember. At that time His Holiness explained that Drubchen Chökyi Dorje, this great yogi, this great enlightened being, is still living on Mount Everest, or Chumolhamo, in Tibetan.

**THE GREAT BENEFIT OF INTEGRATING THE THREE DEITIES: GUHYASAMAJA, YAMANTAKA, AND CHAKRASAMVARA**

There is also Gyälwa Ensapa. His Holiness Song Rinpoche used to mention quite often that Gyalwa Ensapa achieved enlightenment in the brief lifetime of the degenerate time very comfortably, eating delicious food. His Holiness Song Rinpoche used to say Gyalwa Ensapa achieved
enlightenment in comfort, without having to bear hardships as Milarepa did. His Holiness Song Rinpoche said that this happened because [of practicing] *Guru Puja* [which] involves integration of three deities: Guhyasamaja, Yamantaka, and Chakrasamvara.

Generally, in the Lama Tsongkhapa tradition one practices tantra by integrating these three deities. One way to do this is by doing the sadhanas of the three deities each day.

The general reason for practicing these three deities is in order to benefit sentient beings. In order to liberate sentient beings from the oceans of samsaric suffering and its cause and bring them to full enlightenment, you need to achieve the two kayas: the dharmakaya and the rupakaya. Once you have achieved the dharmakaya, while you are in that state, you then manifest in the rupakaya, as we recite in the second verse of the prayer of prostration from the seven-limb practice in *The Guru Puja*: “manifesting in various forms to whomever it subdues.”

Achieving the two kayas, unification of the holy body and holy mind, depends on achieving the direct cause of that, the unification of no more learning.

In order to achieve the unification of no more learning, the unification of the holy body and holy mind, you need to achieve the direct cause of that, the unification of learning, which involves the unification of the clear light and illusory body.

In order to achieve the unification of those two, you first need to separately achieve the clear light, which is the direct cause to achieve dharmakaya, and the illusory body, which is the direct cause of rupakaya. You need to achieve those two separately.

It is the Chakrasamvara teaching that gives detailed techniques for achieving the clear light. One has to practice mother tantra, which emphasizes clear light, and that practice is Chakrasamvara. The tantric teaching that emphasizes the means to achieve the illusory body is father tantra, specifically the Guhyasamaja teaching.

The Guhyasamaja teaching, particularly Lama Tsongkhapa’s commentary on Guhyasamaja practice, shows clearly and in detail how to achieve the illusory body. Such a clear explanation didn’t exist before
Lama Tsongkhapa. Of course, there have been many Tibetans who achieved enlightenment in other traditions, but as far as commentaries go, there hadn’t been such a clear explanation of the techniques before Lama Tsongkhapa. Anyway, this is why you need to practice Guhyasamaja.

Then, of course, for the success of those two practices, you need to practice Yamantaka, the wrathful aspect of Manjushri, the Buddha of Wisdom. While Manjushri is a peaceful aspect, Yamantaka is extremely wrathful. It’s a most powerful deity in eliminating obstacles. By doing the practice of Yamantaka, you are able to eliminate obstacles and succeed in the other two practices. Of course, by practicing Yamantaka you are also able to develop wisdom, because Yamantaka is a manifestation of Manjushri. It fulfills these two purposes.

That’s why you need to practice these three deities. Doing the sadhanas of the three deities each day is related more to the generation stage, I think. There is then a way of integrating the practice of the three deities according to the graduated completion stage. You practice Yamantaka to dispel obstacles.

Practicing the Six Yogas of Naropa, for example, is part of the Chakrasamvara practice. And there are Guhyasamaja completion stage techniques to open the heart chakra. The final instructions on how to release the knots at the heart chakra and open the heart chakra are from Guhyasamaja, I think. I don’t remember exactly, but it is something like that.

One reason that Lama Chöpa is so special is that it integrates these three practices. You begin by generating yourself as Yamantaka. The second merit field is from the Guhyasamaja body mandala. You visualize the different parts of the guru’s holy body as all the deities of the Guhyasamaja body mandala.

The Chakrasamvara practice then comes in the section of offering. Visualizing extensive offerings, with the sixteen goddesses carrying the various offerings, is part of the Chakrasamvara practice.
RECITE MANTRAS OF THE THREE DEITIES

Geshe Senge used to say that when we do Guru Puja we should also recite the mantras of the three deities. That practice is also the integration of the three deities. After the Guru has entered your heart, with that meditation you then recite the mantras of the three deities – by meditating on being oneness with them, I guess.

From Geshe Senge Rinpoche, a great yogi of Most Secret Hayagriva, I received almost all the oral transmissions of the teachings of Most Secret Hayagriva of a past incarnation of Kalka Damtsig Dorje, a great yogi of Most Secret Hayagriva. I received the oral transmission of the three volumes that have the entire practice of Most Secret Hayagriva, as well as two volumes on that practice by the Fifth Dalai Lama. I received them in Dharamsala over about three months, along with some incarnate lamas in the lineage of that practice. Keutsang Rinpoche, who in his past life was a great practitioner in the lineage of Most Secret Hayagriva, was there, as well as Jhado Rinpoche and Pari Rinpoche, another incarnate lama, who came from Tibet quite some time ago. Bakula Rinpoche was also there from time to time when initiations were given. Lama Gyüpa, the old lama who takes care of the altars at Tushita and Geshe Tsering, Lama’s relative, were also there.

“QUICKER, QUICKER”

When we generate special bodhicitta to practice tantra at the beginning of Guru Puja, there is the expression nyur war nyur wa, in Tibetan, which means “quicker and quicker.” In the general definition, the first quicker means quicker than Mahayana sutra, where you have to collect merit for three countless great eons. In tantra you don’t need to do that. Since you can achieve enlightenment within one life it is quicker.

Of course the lower tantras are quicker to achieve enlightenment than sutra, but Highest Yoga Tantra is even quicker than the lower tantras. This is the meaning of the second quicker. Not only can you achieve enlightenment in one lifetime, but you can achieve enlightenment in the brief lifetime of a degenerate time, when life is very short.
YOGIS WHO ACHIEVED ENLIGHTENMENT IN ONE BRIEF LIFETIME

The reason His Holiness Song Rinpoche used to say that Gyälwa Ensapa, unlike Milarepa, achieved enlightenment very easily and comfortably, by eating delicious food and so forth and without bearing much hardship, is because of this special practice in the Lama Tsongkhapa tradition of doing Highest Yoga Tantra practice by integrating these three deities. Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo says: “The great accomplished yogi Chökyi Dorje, Gyälwa Ensapa and so forth did this Guru Puja as their heart practice.”

Why are those two names mentioned? Because they are examples of practitioners who, like Milarepa, achieved enlightenment in the brief lifetime of a degenerate time. “And so forth” refers to the others who practiced Guru Puja as their heart practice. Having done this as their heart practice, the great accomplished yogi Chökyi Dorje, Gyälwa Ensapa and so forth found the state of unification in that life.

All the previous holy beings [which means the lineage lamas] did this as their heart practice. Even though the words are few, this practice contains great meaning and brings great blessing. It has found the great vital points. This means it has profound importance.

GURU PUJA IS AN ESSENTIAL PRACTICE

There is a text in which many different people – incarnate lamas, practitioner nuns and sometimes people from other traditions, such as Nyingma ngagpas – ask Pabongka questions by letter and Pabongka then replies to them. Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo usually emphasizes that even if one can’t do much else in daily life, Guru Puja is the essential practice.

I guess you begin the day with Guru Puja and then on top of that do the sadhanas of Yamantaka, Vajrayogini, Chakrasamvara, and so forth. Because Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo himself was a great yogi of Chakrasamvara, he quite often emphasized Chakrasamvara practice.

You should do the daily practice of Guru Puja, even if you can’t do the sadhanas of many other deities, such as Chakrasamvara. This
practice of Guru Puja is very profound, with many extra benefits, and is very quick to bring enlightenment.

**GURU PUJA LAM-RIM PRAYER INCLUDES EVERYTHING**
The lam-rim prayer in Guru Puja contains all the profound, vital points of the complete path of sutra and tantra.

The lam-rim prayer, the prayer of the steps of the path to enlightenment, in Guru Puja has lam-rim and also lo-jong, or thought transformation.

Generally, the whole of the lam-rim, from guru devotion up to enlightenment, is thought transformation. If your mind is not transformed into the path, how can you have realizations of the path? There’s no way, without transforming your mind. All the lam-rim realizations – guru devotion, perfect human rebirth (its usefulness and the difficulty of finding it again), impermanence and death and so forth – are lo-jong, thought transformation. When you say “general lo-jong” it covers everything, but when you say “lam-rim lo-jong” it specifically covers the part of bodhichitta, such as the paths of integrating the lifetime practice into the five powers and the five powers to be practiced near the time of death.

The lam-rim prayer in Guru Puja has lam-rim, thought transformation and, after the six perfections, the generation and completion stages of tantra. There are verses that show those paths.

**POWA**
The lam-rim prayer also contains powa. Many lamas do powa with Guru Puja. They do the whole Guru Puja, then when they come to the verse on powa, they do the “hic!” to shoot the consciousness of the person who has died to a pure land. They visualize Amitabha Buddha, Vajrayogini or another buddha on that person’s crown, then shoot their consciousness to a pure land. The second incarnation of Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo, the author of Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand, also does powa with Lama Chöpa.
Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo passed away a long time ago in Tibet, then reincarnated, escaped from Tibet and studied at Buxa in India, where I lived for eight years. He became a geshe then soon afterwards showed the aspect of cancer and passed away in a place called Kashang, near Darjeeling. That incarnation was just about to spread Dharma, having completed his study in the monastery and received all the lineages of the sutra and tantra teachings from His Holiness Trijang Rinpoche, who had received them from the previous Pabongka. He was just about to spread Dharma in the world like a flower opening or like the sun rising, but due to the lack of karma of sentient beings he took the aspect of cancer and passed away. There is now another incarnation, and we became close friends quite some time ago.

One time when we were talking about powa, Pabongka Rinpoche said that when somebody has died he just does Lama Chöpa. After the verse on the completion stage, with the clear light and illusory body, there’s a verse on powa. Of course, if you have achieved the clear light of the completion stage of Highest Yoga Tantra, you don’t need to worry about powa; you have overcome death and achieved the inner pure land. Such a practitioner can achieve enlightenment in the very brief lifetime of this degenerate time.

However, if you didn’t manage to actualize the completion stage realizations of clear light and illusory body, when you die you then do powa and try to achieve the outer khachö, the Chakrasamvara and Vajrayogini pure land. If you are able to be reborn there, you will definitely become enlightened in that life. So, it’s kind of the most profitable pure land.

It’s not so certain with Amitabha Buddha’s pure land. When I asked my root Guru, His Holiness Trijang Rinpoche, a question about this, Rinpoche said, “Yes, you can practice tantra there and achieve enlightenment.” But Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche and some other lamas, including maybe Denma Lochö Rinpoche, don’t accept that. They say that you have to reincarnate back in our world, this southern continent, then practice tantra here and achieve enlightenment.

That is the reason that verse on powa comes after the verse on the completion stage.
MEDITATE ON THE MEANING OF GURU PUJA

Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo also mentions that when we do this practice we should think of the meaning of the words and meditate, not just recite the words blah, blah, blah, like an express train. As much as possible we should reflect on the profound meanings.

Doing this definitely leaves an extraordinary imprint of the complete pure path to enlightenment. In this way it makes it definite that we will achieve the very essence of life, which means that we will definitely achieve the essence of the happiness beyond this life up to enlightenment, and especially enlightenment.

Doing the main practice of this Guru Puja is like hitting a target. When you shoot an arrow or gun or drop a bomb, your aim is to hit right on the target, your enemy or whatever you want to destroy. In the same way this practice hits the right point in an effective way. Therefore, you should attempt to integrate everything in this way. As Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo says, “One hundred waters are contained in Guru Puja.” He probably means that just as all the many streams from the snow mountains and other places go into the ocean, all the important practices of sutra and tantra are condensed here in Guru Puja. If you do this practice every day, you don’t miss anything. Since this is the very heart of the scriptures of the manifestation of the Joyful One, the blessing is unequaled by any other practice. Therefore, it has great importance.

On the basis of this, you then meditate on lam-rim and the tantric path of the main deity that you are practicing. This also contains all the important preliminary practices, the main one of which is guru devotion. Guru devotion is the root that enables you to receive blessings, the cause to achieve realizations of the path to enlightenment.

EXPLAINING THE VERSES

PURIFYING OBSTACLES

First, we need to do the preliminary practice of purifying obstacles, obscurations, and negative karma. In The Guru Puja, there is purification when one takes refuge (LC 3). Then there is the seven-
limbed practice, which contains confession in particular (LC 38). Also, one can practice Vajrasattva, [Samayavajra], and Confession to the Thirty-five Buddhas for purification [immediately before LC 38]; and one can also do the four initiations, both common and uncommon (LC 54).

Practicing like this is unbelievably powerful purification. One can purify not only broken pratimoksha vows, but even broken bodhisattva vows, which are 100,000 times heavier. And not only that: one can also purify broken tantric vows, which are 100,000 times heavier than bodhisattva vows. All these can be purified in a very short time by doing these practices.

Also, the vows can be revived and made pure by retaking them [immediately before LC 38].

So, within The Guru Puja there are many powerful means of purification.

CREATING MERIT
To create the necessary conditions for great merit one needs to do mandala offerings; this is what is normally advised. There are two places to do this within The Guru Puja (LC 32; and after LC 42); one can offer many mandalas at each of these places.

Then, there are the four different offering practices to the Guru (LC 33–LC 37): this creates the most extensive merit because the offering is done to the object with whom one has Dharma connection. The Guru is the most powerful object for creating merit, whether that person is actually enlightened or not.

GURU DEVOTION
Guru devotion is the cause of receiving blessings in your heart. The blessings you receive in your heart are the cause of your realizations of the path to enlightenment, due to which you are able to bring temporary and ultimate happiness, liberation, and the peerless happiness of enlightenment to numberless sentient beings.

The main places that you find guru devotion are as follows:
First, at the beginning, during the refuge visualization, the recitation of NAMO GURUBHYA, and so forth (LC 3), you meditate on seeing the Guru as Buddha, whether that person is enlightened or not. Then, when you do the second visualization of the merit field (LC 9–LC 14), when doing the prostrations (LC 18–LC 22), when offering mandalas (LC 32 and LC 42), seven-limbed practice (LC 18–LC 42) and so forth – all of these contain guru devotion, with the body mandala on each of the gurus’ bodies.

One can also visualize the holy body decorated with Guhyasamaja’s body mandala: this is another extremely profound meditation.

The prostration prayer (LC 18–LC 22) contains the very profound meditation of looking at the Guru as Buddha and reflecting on the deep extensive kindness.

And then, there is the section on the Guru’s qualities (LC 43–LC 53), before the Guru enters your heart (LC 54): this is another extremely important way of reflecting on the various qualities according to the Lesser, Mahayana and Tantra vehicles.

The first stanza in the section on the lam-rim meditation is a meditation on guru devotion as well (LC 84).

THE SPECIAL QUALITIES OF THIS PRACTICE
We recite the prayer of the steps of the path, the lam-rim (LC 84–LC 114), in order to leave an imprint on our mind of the entire path to enlightenment; and we meditate on the meaning in order to train the mind in the path. The imprint is the fundamental cause of the realizations of the path, and contemplating the meaning is the actual way of transforming the mind in the way of the path.

Practiced in this way, Guru Puja becomes extremely important. It has all the aspects that create enlightenment – just as a car has all the parts that make it function. It enables one to fulfill all of one’s own wishes and the wishes of others.

All the ancient yogis like Naropa, Tilopa, and Saraha; the Tibetan yogis like Milarepa and Gyalwa Ensapa; and yogis of other countries like China and Nepal achieved enlightenment in one short lifetime, in a matter of years. They were able to do this because of the strongest
practice of Guru yoga – devoting to the Guru and cherishing the Guru more than one’s life.

The arrangement of the words does not necessarily have to be exactly the same as in *The Guru Puja*, but the meaning will be the same; and it is the strongest practice of the meaning that brings the result. There are many different guru yoga texts in the four Tibetan Mahayana traditions.

**THIS TEXT IS SO SPECIAL**

This particular text, composed by Panchen Chökyi Gyältsen, one of the lineage lamas of the Panchen Rinpoches, is very special. Why?

First, it is special because it has the prayer of the stages of the path to enlightenment. Going through the prayer mindfully leaves, within minutes, the imprint on the mind of the entire path to enlightenment, including highest yoga tantra. Since this imprint is the fundamental cause of realizations of the path to enlightenment, *Guru Puja* is a very rich practice.

Second, it is even more special because it contains the specific Mahayana thought transformation instructions (*LC 90–LC 99*). When we practice this specific Mahayana thought transformation in daily life, we utilize whatever suffering or happiness we experience, and it thus becomes the cause of happiness of all the numberless sentient beings, who equal the sky. This practice of thought transformation itself becomes the path for achieving the peerless happiness, enlightenment.

When we practice thought transformation, life becomes very fulfilling, and nothing can disturb us. Whether enjoying happiness or meeting undesirable conditions, the mind is stable and happy and continuously develops peace. Life becomes satisfying and fruitful for numberless other sentient beings. By utilizing in the path to enlightenment all the appearances in one’s life, all obstacles and enemies become the support of one’s happiness, the support of one’s development of the Mahayana path.

Third, this *Guru Puja* is most special because it integrates the three deities of highest yoga tantra. Guhyasamaja’s main point of
explanation is how to achieve the illusory body; Chakrasamvara’s main point of explanation is the path of the clear light; and Yamantaka pacifies all obstacles, making it possible to actualize the illusory body and clear light, which makes it possible, in turn, to actualize the unification of dharmakaya and rupakaya, the path of no-more-learning.

Doing this guru yoga practice of integrating the three deities is very special. Other traditions, as well as Gelug, have practices of highest yoga tantra deities that don’t integrate these three, which can still enable one to achieve enlightenment in a brief life of degenerated time. But practicing this Guru Puja, which is an integration of the three deities, makes it much easier to achieve enlightenment in a brief life of degenerated time.

Doing this practice every day, with purification and many infinite skies of merit, brings the mind closer to the path to enlightenment and closer to enlightenment itself, and so much closer to freeing all sentient beings from obscurations and suffering and leading them to enlightenment.

Putting the meaning of this into practice in one’s life makes each day extremely rich and worthwhile. The meaning can be practiced twenty-four hours a day, during one’s whole life, daily. Not only while you are doing prayers, but day and night, whatever you do can be Guru Puja – whether you are eating, drinking, working or going to the toilet. This is a brief explanation of the benefits.
The great Indian pandit Naropa said, “Before the existence of the lama there was neither buddha nor deity.” He said this because buddhas and meditation deities are emanations, or embodiments, of the guru; that’s why there was neither buddha nor meditation deity before the guru.

The great siddha Tilopa said to the great siddha Naropa, “The great results, blessings and inspiration you get from having fervent respect for your guru is due to your guru, therefore you should have fervent respect for him.”

Jetsun Milarepa said, “Try to see your guru in his actual aspect of dharmakaya. If you can, you will receive all blessings and inspiration effortlessly.”

Vajradhara himself also spoke often about the importance of guru devotion. Since all these great beings have said these things, there’s not much need for me to comment further. However, at the beginning of his commentary to the Fifty Verses of Guru Devotion, Je Tsong Khapa said, “The only door for disciples who want to experience great bliss and gain the highest attainments without much effort is the proper cultivation of guru devotion. In order to open this door, I am going to explain the Fifty Verses of Guru Devotion.”

Thus, in all the commentaries by Je Tsong Khapa, everywhere – at the beginning and the end, in the dedication as well as in the introductory verses – he prays to cultivate pure and proper guru devotion.

Kyabje Trijang Dorje Chang often says, “Although the sutras and tantras all have the two types of meaning – definitive and interpretive – with respect to guru devotion, they’re unanimous on the importance of guru devotion; there’s no controversy on that point.” To show the
pure lineage of whatever teaching we’re studying – if it’s tantra its source should be Vajradhara and if sutra, Guru Shakyamuni Buddha – the great gurus are quoted in this way.

Atisha, for example, cultivated 157 gurus and his deeds in both India and Tibet were very extensive and he became extremely famous as a result. This was because of his guru devotion. Although he had 157 gurus, he said that he didn’t displease even one of them for even a single moment – that’s why he was able to do such extensive deeds.

Dromtönpa, too, although a layman, became one of the most famous of the Kadampa geshes – most of whom were monks – because of his guru devotion. He cultivated such pure, stainless guru devotion that even Atisha praised it. As a result, he, too, was able to perform extensive deeds to greatly benefit sentient beings.

Then there’s Jetsun Milarepa. From the point of view of realization and insight, many other siddhas were equal to or comparable with him, but because of his extraordinary devotion to his guru, Marpa, he became much more famous and widely renowned than any of them.

A story from the life of Sakya Pandita gives us a different look at guru devotion. He once requested his uncle, Dragpa Gyaltsen, to teach him guru yoga but he rejected the request, saying, “You regard me only as your uncle, not as a buddha, so it’s useless giving you such profound teachings.” However, later on, Dragpa Gyaltsen pretended to be sick just for the sake of Sakya Pandita, who nursed him so single-pointedly that he forgot to eat during the day or sleep at night – his mind was completely focused on taking care of his uncle. Because of his great guru devotion, Sakya Pandita was able to see his guru as Manjushri and achieve the ten kinds of knowledge. He became very famous and was invited to give teachings in Mongolia.

These examples of Dharma practice are not for your amusement but to show you that if you want to attain the levels of realization that these great beings did and become as renowned as they were, you should cultivate the kind of guru devotion that they did.

Lama Tsong Khapa’s relationship with his first teacher, Chöje Döndrub Rinchen, who cared for him from the ages of three to seventeen like a mother and gave him all the teachings, is also an
excellent example of guru devotion. Whenever Lama Tsong Khapa mentioned this great teacher’s name, tears would come to his eyes as he remembered his great kindness, and in his lam-rim teachings he praised the great teachers under whom he studied.

MENTAL AND PHYSICAL DEVOTION
Now we come to the topic of guru devotion. There are two ways of cultivating guru devotion: mentally and physically. The mental cultivation of guru devotion is elaborately explained in the lam-rim. The guru devotion expounded in *The Fifty Verses* is mainly the physical type.

In Tibetan, the title of this text, *Lama Nga-chu-pa*, literally means “Fifty Lamas” because it is composed of fifty verses on how to cultivate guru devotion. However, the meaning behind each verse is extremely profound because it contains words spoken in the tantras by Vajradhara himself. This makes it a most unfathomable teaching. There’s no Indian commentary on the Fifty Verses but we have the Tibetan one by Lama Tsong Khapa, which is widely renowned and the most famous commentary on this important text.

The teaching I am giving here accords to the root verses without the commentary. In order to properly give this profound transmission to his disciples, the guru should also have received the perfect transmission. If he hasn’t, his teachings will be of little use to his disciples. If he tells them, “I haven’t received it completely but since you have, you’re very fortunate,” that’s also incorrect. However, I received the complete teaching of *The Fifty Verses* from Kyabje Trijang Dorje Chang – who heard it from Kyabje Pabongka – several times in Tibet and also here in Dharamsala at the Tibetan Library, with a commentary by Khenchen Losang Thubgyen, root guru of the first Trijang Rinpoche.

The direct lineage of this teaching can be traced all the way back to Buddha Vajradhara himself, and since I have received the transmission and listened to the teaching a number of times, you can definitely receive the blessings and inspiration of this lineage.
Homage to the Bhagavan Vajrasattva

INTRODUCTION TO THE EXPLANATION

Homage & commitment to the undertaking

VERSE 1
Bowing in the proper way to the lotus feet of my guru,
Who is the cause for me to attain the state of a glorious Vajrasattva,
I shall condense and explain in brief what has been said in many stainless tantric texts about guru devotion.
(Therefore) listen with respect.

The best way to gain the high realizations or pure abodes of Vajrasattva or Vajradhara, the doorway to these, is to cultivate the guru who can lead us there. Therefore, he makes obeisance to his guru’s lotus feet; he touches his forehead to the lowest part of his guru’s body.

Ashvagosha then says that, having made obeisance in this way, he will now tell us about the fifty verses of guru devotion, the fifty verses that show us how to cultivate proper guru devotion, which is the root of all insights. He also says that what he is about to write is not his own fabrication but is in accord with the tantric scriptures written by Vajradhara; by taking the essence of these scriptures, he will now write these verses.

With respect to cultivating proper guru devotion, as it is said in the lam-rim, the disciple who wants to attain liberation or enlightenment has to cultivate proper guru devotion. As we all desire advantage and none of us wants disadvantage or loss, there’s only one thing to do – we have to cultivate proper guru devotion.

PRESENTATION OF THE EXPLANATION

BRIEF EXPLANATION
Correctness of being reverent toward a guru
VERSE 2
All the buddhas of the past, present and future,
Residing in every land in the ten directions,
Have paid homage to the tantric masters from whom they have
received the highest initiations.
(Is there need to mention that you should too?)

Just as the buddhas of the three times have revered the gurus from
whom they received initiations, oral transmissions and tantric vows
and teachings, so should we revere and respect them and cultivate
proper guru devotion.

It's a mistake to regard only the guru who confers initiations as a
vajra guru; we should also regard the guru who gives tantric teachings
in the same way. Lama Je Tsong Khapa clarified this point.

So, it mentions here receiving the highest initiations from a guru.
Just because a vase is put on our head doesn’t necessarily mean we
have received the initiation. An initiation should be given as the tantric
scriptures state, by having its meaning explained: the initiations we
have achieved and the paths that we have the karma to follow. When
we have gained all this knowledge we have received a proper initiation.

Initiations are of three types: causal, to ripen our mind stream;
pathway, through which we progress towards enlightenment; and
resultant, into the fully enlightened state.

The initiation referred to here is the causal one, which is a bit
different to the four initiations: vase, secret, wisdom and word.

The importance of cultivating proper guru devotion is stated in the
seventeenth chapter of the Guhyasamaja Root Tantra, [Sangdü Tsa
Gyüi], which has 18 chapters.

HOW ONE GOES ABOUT BEING REVERENT

GENERAL TEACHING ON HOW TO BE DEVOTED

VERSE 3
Three times each day with supreme faith
You must show the respect you have for your guru who teaches you (the tantric path)
By pressing your palms together, offering a mandala
As well as flowers and prostrating (touching) your head to his feet.

The buddhas of the three times prostrate to the vajra guru three times a day – morning, noon and evening. This shows that we, too, should cultivate proper guru devotion. That’s the actual meaning of this verse.

This verse also describes in a general way how we should make offerings to our gurus: we should fold our hands in reverence, offer mandalas and flowers, and prostrate to the feet of our guru three times a day.

Once we have received an initiation, we have pledged, or given our word of honor [Skt: samaya; Tib: dam-tsig], to offer a mandala to our guru three times a day, and it’s a great transgression if we forget. (Samaya means not to be transgressed.) However, this pledge is fulfilled by reciting The Six-Session Guru Yoga daily.

So now there is an exception:

VERSE 4
If you hold ordination vows and (your guru) is a layman or your junior,
(In public) prostrate while facing such things as his scriptural texts
in order to avoid worldly scorn
But in your mind (prostrate to your guru).

It’s not appropriate for a fully ordained monk [Skt: bhikshu; Tib: gelong] to prostrate to a novice monk or a layman in public, because it can cause ordinary people to criticize and disparage the Dharma.

So what should you do in a gathering if you, the vajra disciple, is a bhikshu and your vajra guru is a novice or a layman? On such occasions, you should prostrate physically to a statue, stupa or scripture on your guru’s altar but mentally prostrate to your guru.

By physically offering prostrations to scriptures or other holy objects you avoid causing the laypeople to generate bad feelings in their
mind, but since mentally you are prostrating to your guru, you’re fulfilling your commitment in that regard.

This is illustrated by an incident from the lives of the great masters Chandrakirti and Chandragomin, who often used to debate with each other. One day Chandrakirti, a monk, invited Chandragomin, a layman, to Nalanda Monastery, telling him he’d organize a grand procession of monks to greet him. But Chandragomin objected, saying that that would give the local lay-people a bad impression. However, Chandrakirti said he had a way around this: he was going to put a statue of Manjushrion a throne on a chariot just in front of Chandragomin, and in that way the people would think that the procession was for Manjushri.

So this is the kind of situation that this verse is talking about, but in a secluded area where there are no laypeople to generate a negative mind, you should prostrate directly to your lay guru, as is your commitment.

VERSE 5
As for serving (your guru) and showing him respect,
Such as obeying what he says, standing up (when he comes in) and showing him to his seat –
These should be done even by those with ordination vows (whose gurus are laymen or their juniors).
But (in public) avoid prostrating and unorthodox actions (such as washing his feet).

This next verse shows the limits of the exception mentioned in the previous one, where it explains what a fully ordained vajra disciple should do in relation to a lay vajra master, even in public.
You can make material offerings, show general reverence, offer him a cushion, stand up whether he’s nearby or even far away, do things to help him accomplish his plans or projects and so forth.
What you should avoid is offering physical prostrations directly or washing his feet and so forth in the presence of lay people, as to do so might give laypeople the wrong impression and cause them to criticize.
THE REASON A MUTUAL INVESTIGATION IS NECESSARY

VERSE 6
In order for the words of honor of neither guru nor disciple to degenerate,
There must be a mutual examination beforehand
(To determine if each can) brave a gurudisciple relationship.

We should try to examine a spiritual teacher before beginning a guru-disciple relationship with him. Similarly, a guru should examine a student before accepting him or her as a disciple.

This is very important, right from the start. Before cultivating such an intimate relationship both should check each other very carefully because if, once established, this relationship is broken, it is a transgression of samaya – bad for both guru and disciple.

However, once we have accepted a teacher as our vajra guru, we shouldn’t continue examining him. That is to be done before accepting him as guru, and once we have done so we should only regard our guru as an enlightened being.

Further examination can only lead us to the vajra hell. Jetsun Milarepa said that when we are with our vajra guru we shouldn’t seek out his faults; we should cultivate a proper outlook and regard him as a perfect being.

If we are successful in this we will be successful in our practice. If we want to practice properly we must cultivate proper guru devotion. Without it, despite diligent practice, we won’t achieve anything worthwhile.

One great practitioner said: “No matter how much you try to seclude yourself in an isolated area, if you regard the buddhas and your gurus as enemies, your practice will be of no value because it will lack the root of substantial achievements.”

Guru devotion is essential for success in practice. Certain sutras recommend that examination go on for as long as twelve years, if necessary. It is very important that such examination be done properly.
When both guru and disciple are satisfied, the relationship can be established.

If the guru-disciple relationship is established without proper examination from either side, the sacred words of honor are in danger of degeneration. Therefore, we have to be very careful in this.

**THE GURU WHO IS TO BE RELIED UPON OR AVOIDED**

**THE CHARACTER OF ONE TO BE AVOIDED**

**VERSE 7**

A disciple with sense should not accept as a guru someone
Who lacks compassion
Or is prone to anger,
Is vicious, arrogant, possessive, undisciplined
Or boastful of his knowledge.

This verse explains the kind of guru we should not cultivate; it mentions some disqualifications.

An intelligent disciple should not cultivate such a guru.

**He should possess great compassion** – the wish that sentient beings be free from suffering and its cause. This is the most important qualification. If our guru is not compassionate there’s the danger that he’ll give up on us at the first sign of bad behavior. If he has great compassion, then no matter how offensive our actions, he won’t forsake or neglect us. Therefore it’s very important that our guru have great compassion.

As stated in the great commentary on Lama Chöpa by Kachen Yeshe Gyeltsen, “However the mischievous child offends his parents and misbehaves and worries them, they won’t lose love and compassion and will continue to value him. Although I, a vulgar rascal, don’t deserve your compassion, please don’t forsake me and guide me as parents guide their child.

- He shouldn’t be prone to anger.
- He shouldn’t be sadistic or hold a grudge.
• He shouldn’t be arrogant.
• He shouldn’t have a strong desire for possessions or wealth or cling strongly to material things.
• He should not be loose of character of body, speech and mind or careless in his practice of morality.

If the guru gambles and takes intoxicants, his disciples will follow the same path. We should try not to fall under the influence of such a guru. If possible, our guru should be like Nagtso Lotsawa’s: he lived with Atisha for nineteen years during which time he couldn’t see the tiniest stain or fault in him. We should try to cultivate a guru like that – one in whom we can’t find even a single shortcoming.

Similarly, Khädrub Rinpoche offered praise to Lama Tsong Khapa: “No matter how the buddhas, with all their wisdom, try to see if you have breached any of your vows, even a minor downfall, they won’t be able to find a single one.” This emphasizes that we should choose a guru who keeps his vows properly.
• He should not boast of his abilities or be fond of revealing his qualifications all the time.

THE CHARACTER OF ONE TO BE DEVOTED TO

VERSE 8
(A guru should be) stable (in his actions),
Cultivated (in his speech),
Wise, patient and honest.
He should neither conceal his shortcomings nor pretend to possess qualities he lacks.
He should be an expert in the meanings (of the tantra) and in its ritual procedures (of medicine and turning back obstacles).
He should also have loving compassion and a complete knowledge of the scriptures.

This verse explains the kind of guru we should cultivate; it mentions some of the qualifications we should look for in a guru, the
characteristics of the kind of guru who should be cultivated by an intelligent disciple.

• Stable means that he should have very subdued actions of body; he should abstain from non-virtuous actions of body, keep his bodily actions proper and moral; immutable.

• Cultivated refers to his speech; he should abstain from non-virtuous actions of speech, keep proper morality of speech, not hurt others by means of speech, sharp words, etc.

• Mentally, he should abstain from the three non-virtuous actions of mind as well as from pretentiousness; his mental attitude should be very pure.

• He should possess intelligence and discretion; if he doesn’t, he can’t lead us on the path to liberation.

• He should possess the three types of forbearance, or patience: a. forbearance of harm received from others; b. the ability to endure hardship; and c. the ability to hear profound teachings without being terrified.

• He should be true and unbiased, or impartial; not biased towards near relatives or repulsed by enemies; he should be even-minded towards all sentient beings.

• He shouldn’t be pretentious or conceal his shortcomings. Pretentious means pretending to have supernatural knowledge that he doesn’t have and concealing his shortcomings means always trying to hide his faults from others, especially with the intention of getting offerings.

• He should have the power to drive out interferences by means of mantras and tantric practice.

• He should be able to practice medicine, which actually means to help and benefit others by means of his teachings; to really pacify them.

• He should possess great compassion, the wish that all sentient beings’ suffering be alleviated.

• He should have profound knowledge of the scriptures, especially the Tripitaka.
VERSE 9
He should have full expertise in both ten fields,
Skill in the drawing of mandalas,
Full knowledge of how to explain the tantra,
Supreme pure faith
And his senses fully under control.

He should possess the two sets of ten qualifications, as mentioned in *The Guru Puja*. These twenty things are the ten externals and the ten internals that a Highest Yoga Tantra guru should possess.

A vajra guru of the lower tantras needs only the external ten; the internal ten are not necessary, although if he does possess them it’s all well and good. It’s important to be familiar with these various qualities.

THE TEN INNER QUALITIES OF A GURU
1. The ability to visualize protection wheels and can eliminate interferences. Protection wheels are visualized just outside the mandala and the mere sight of it is enough to terrify negative forces.
2. The ability to tie protection knots.
3. Skill in conferring the vase and secret initiations, that is, the first and second initiations, which plant the seed to receive the buddha’s form bodies.
4. Skill in conferring the transcendent wisdom and word initiations, that is, the third and fourth initiation, which plant the seed to receive the buddha’s wisdom bodies. In the fourth – the word – initiation, the disciples are made to understand the meaning of yuganatha, or great union.
5. Skill in separating enemies of Dharma from their protectors, after which those enemies are eliminated.
6. Skill in making sculpted tormas and the offering ceremonies.
7. Skill in reciting mantras both verbally and without uttering words, that is, mental recitation, such as found in the Vajrayogini practice. Mental recitation is very profound and usually taught only during the giving of a tantric commentary.
8. Skill in the wrathful rituals. In order to be able to do this, the initiation must be taken properly, the words of honor kept purely and the deity actualized correctly.
9. Skilled in consecrating holy objects.
10. Skill in self initiation, offering mandalas and so forth.

THE TEN EXTERNAL QUALITIES OF A GURU
1. Skill in visualizing, drawing and constructing mandalas of deities.
2. Skill in single-pointed concentration on meditation deities.
3. Knowing how to do mudras correctly.
4. Skill in performing ritual dances.
5. Skill in sitting in the vajra posture and the half lotus as well.
7. Skill in making fire offerings [Tib: jin-seg].
8. Skill in all the other offering ceremonies.
9. Skill in the rituals for subduing enemies of the Dharma, the teacher and sentient beings; who always harm sentient beings.
10. Skill in concluding ceremonies. The buddhas and deities invoked in front at the beginning of a practice should be made to return to their former place from where they were invoked, although some may be made to dissolve into the images.

Question: How can we know if the guru has these qualities and qualifications?

Gen Rinpoche: Actually, if the guru is really an authentic teacher, most of the qualifications would be known because of his reputation as a learned lama and great practitioner, but you yourself can understand after you have examined him properly. As I mentioned before, you should cultivate a guru about whom you can confidently think, “If I take this teacher as my guru my faith won’t degenerate later.”

When your faith in him is resolute you can cultivate that teacher as your guru.

We have finished enumerating the two sets of ten qualifications that the vajra guru should possess. Just as when we go to an unknown place we have to cultivate friendship with somebody who knows the way and can lead us to it, in the same way, when heading for enlightenment we
have to cultivate a guru who possesses the necessary qualifications to lead us there.

As Sakya Pandita said, “Even when buying a cow or a buffalo we check very carefully and throw dice to see if we should do so, how much more so, when seeking enlightenment, should we check carefully and cultivate the right guru?”

THE QUALIFICATIONS OF A DISCIPLE

Now we come to the qualities a disciple should possess. It is important that the right teaching be given to the right disciple, a disciple with the right qualities, otherwise it’s uncertain whether the teaching will benefit or not. If you lack some of the qualifications of a perfect disciple, you should purify your mind and accumulate merit. You have to create your enlightenment by yourself; nobody will bestow it upon you.

Vajradhara said, “Enlightenment cannot be found anywhere. Only by practicing the methods taught by the guru, purifying your mind and accumulating merit can you find enlightenment.”

The qualities a disciple needs are given in two parts: the qualities of the disciple in general – the disciple of the graduated path to enlightenment – and the qualities of the advanced, extraordinary disciple, that is, a disciple of tantric practice.

THE THREE GENERAL QUALITIES OF A DISCIPLE

1. The disciple should be impartial and not have a biased attitude. This is most important.

2. The disciple should have discretion or intelligence, a good faculty of discernment.

If the disciple is dull and doesn’t understand the subject even though it’s taught a hundred times, there’s little value in teaching that student.

For disciples with sharp intelligence, or discriminating awareness, everything becomes a teacher because they know what to cultivate and what to abandon. For dull, deluded or closed-minded students, making a guru-disciple relationship is like purposely seeking the lower realms because can’t observe it properly.
There’s an illustration to clarify this point. In Lord Buddha’s time, the great benefactors would invite the Buddha and his shravakas for lunch and it was customary that a discourse would be given after lunch. The eldest monk would sit on a cushion and give a discourse. Once the eldest was a monk who didn’t know anything and he sat on the cushion saying repeatedly, “Knowing nothing is suffering,” referring to himself.

The others thought that he meant that ignorance is the cause of suffering and contemplated the thought that all suffering comes from ignorance.

As a result of this, they achieved liberation. This shows how important intelligence is.

3. Not only should the disciple have an impartial, unbiased attitude and intelligence but also keen interest.

This is probably the most important quality, because if the student isn’t enthusiastic, it’s like giving a discourse to a scarecrow; the teachings won’t be kept in mind.

As a great Kadampa geshe said, “It’s no use giving teachings to those without keen interest. No matter how many you give, they’re of little value. You can lead a horse to water but you can’t make it drink. Even if you push its head into the water, it’ll just shake off the little water that does stick.”

So these are the three general qualities that a disciple should possess.

### THE THREE QUALITIES OF A TANTRIC DISCIPLE

_The Fifty Verses of Guru Devotion_ contains the essential teaching of Vajradhara himself as summarized by Ashvagosha. In other words, these teachings were actually given by Vajradhara in the same way that _The Guru Puja_ also has its source in the tantras. Every verse comes from the tantras and contains their essential meaning.

1. The disciple should be fond of doing virtuous actions and practicing the meditations.

2. The disciple should always show respect to the guru. This has great significance. It says “always,” that is, all the time. It doesn’t mean that when your guru is telling you some story you respect him and
when he’s rebuking you, you don’t. You must always respect him, all the time, just as Jetsun Milarepa always showed respect to Marpa, no matter what.

3. The disciple should always have strong devotion and make offerings to the meditation deity and always practice the yoga method of that deity.

Whatever initiations we have taken, we should continue that practice for the rest of our life.

Geshe Potowa said that when we engage in our tantric practices we shouldn’t be like a dog eating. If you give a dog a piece of meat he’ll swallow it whole without tasting or enjoying it and then look around for the next bit. We shouldn’t be like that. Having taken an initiation, we should practice it with care and enjoyment.

Disciples possessing these qualities are the really good ones. The qualities that make a disciple a bad one are similar to those of the guru we shouldn’t seek. A disciple should not lack compassion, be prone to anger, have sadistic views or lack faith in the guru or meditation deities.

This concludes the discussion of the qualities of the guru to be cultivated and the disciple who cultivates the guru. Next comes how to avoid disrespect for the guru and how to cultivate respect. This has two parts: how to abandon disrespect and how to cultivate respect.

EXTENSIVE EXPLANATION OF HOW TO BE DEVOTED TO A GURU

Giving up irreverence

(a) Abandoning belittling or deriding your guru;
(b) Abandoning disturbing your guru’s mind;
(c) The invisible consequences of disrespecting your guru;

and

(d) The summary of the meaning of all these verses.

Abandoning and belittling the guru: general
VERSE 10
Having become the disciple of such a protecting (guru),
Should you then despise him from your heart,
You will reap continual suffering as if you had disparaged all the buddhas.

If, having become a vajra disciple, you intentionally belittle your vajra guru – the guru who has given you initiations, taught you tantric practices and conferred tantric vows upon you – you will have to undergo immense and constant suffering.

Why? Because belittling your guru is the same as belittling all the buddhas. In the same way that making offerings to just one pore of your guru creates the inconceivable amount of merit of making offerings to the three time buddhas, so too does any negativity created with your guru become extremely heavy.

How do we belittle our guru? When we say things like “He doesn’t have good morality,” “He has no enthusiastic perseverance,” “He’s stingy,” or “He’s so short-tempered,” we’re creating that kind of negative karma – belittling means deriding, disparaging and so forth.

Geshe Potowa said, “In degenerate times disciples will belittle their guru in an honorific way,” that is, they’ll do it politely. This might seem not so bad, but it’s still belittling.

When Atisha came to Tibet he told the Tibetans, “All the major and minor realizations are developed by relying on the guru but since you Tibetans regard your guru as simply an ordinary man, there’s no way you can develop any realizations.”

Geshe Potowa also said that we should carefully examine a potential guru before establishing a guru-disciple relationship, but once we have taken him as our guru, we should cultivate proper guru devotion.

Even though he might pretend to be poorly educated, we still shouldn’t belittle him but instead cultivate pure guru devotion. Since the law of cause and effect is inevitable, if we behave in this way, in future we will meet with gurus such as Manjushrior Maitreya Buddha.

The benefits are infinite.
Vajrapani once asked Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, “What are the negative consequences of belittling the guru?” Taken aback, Guru Shakyamuni replied, “Oh, Vajrapani, please don’t ask me that! If I were to enumerate those consequences, humans, gods and even dauntless bodhisattvas would be terrified and die of shock. However, if you steel yourself by developing great courage before listening, although the negative consequences of belittling the guru are limitless, I’ll summarize a few for you.”

The consequences of belittling the guru are so unbearable that spelling them out would terrify even Vajrapani.

**Abandoning and belittling the guru: specific**

**VERSE 11**
If you are foolish enough to despise your guru,
You will contract contagious diseases and those caused by harmful spirits and will die (a horrible death) caused by demons, plagues or poison.

The invisible consequence is rebirth in hell.
Here, the visible consequences are enumerated. If you belittle your guru you will suffer from infectious diseases and die from harm inflicted by other sentient beings, such as snake bite or tiger attack.
Other ways you can die as a result of despising your guru are demonic interference, incurable disease and poison.
As has been said, “The greatly deluded and extremely ignorant belittlers of their guru will die from such diseases.”
As this implies, even those who have a little knowledge will not belittle their guru; only the extremely ignorant will do so.

**VERSE 12**
You will be killed by (wicked) kings or fire, by poisonous snakes, water, witches or bandits,
By harmful spirits or savages, and then be reborn in a hell.
As a consequence of belittling your guru you can also be executed by the king or die from snake bite, drowning or bandit attack.
Having been deprived of life by such interferences, you will be born in the great hell.
The source of these consequences is *The Great Hevajra Tantra*.

**Abandoning disturbing your guru’s mind**

**VERSE 13**
Never disturb your guru’s mind.
Should you be foolish enough to do so, you will surely boil in hell.

At no time, by neither body, speech nor mind, should you disturb your guru’s holy mind.
But if, out of deep ignorance or closed-mindedness, you do, you’ll be born in the great hells and from all sides be burned by fire.
The source of this statement is *The Secret Ornamental Moon Spot Tantra*, one of the great tantric scriptures.
It is also very clear in many sutras that you shouldn’t cultivate friendship with those who have belittled their guru; you shouldn’t even drink water with them.
If you do associate with them, your sacred words of honor will degenerate and, no matter how hard you try, you won’t be able to achieve any powerful attainments.

**The invisible consequences of disrespecting your guru**

**VERSE 14**
Whatever fearful hells have been taught, such as Avici, the Hell of Uninterrupted Pain,
It is clearly explained that those who disparage their guru will have to remain there (for a very long time).
Visible consequences are those bad results that you can see in your lifetime; invisible ones are those that you have to experience in future lifetimes.

This verse refers to the latter. The great hell – Avici, the Hell of Uninterrupted Suffering [Tib: rab-tsort, immense heat], the Hell Without Respite – the worst hell, as described in the sutra teachings.

Disciples who belittle their guru will be reborn in that hell and will have to remain there for a very long time.

One of the great tantras, The Ornament of Vajra Essence Tantra, says that no matter how hard they try – abandoning sleep by night and food by day, even for eons – disciples who belittle their guru will not only be unable to achieve any powerful attainments, they won’t even have auspicious dreams, and all their practices will become causes for rebirth in hell.

These are some of the invisible consequences of belittling the guru. The Heruka Root Tantra [Demchog Tsa Gyü] says that no matter how hard they try to receive initiations, enter the mandala and engage in tantric practices, disciples who have a very weak relationship with their guru – that is, who have belittled their guru – won’t be able to achieve any powerful attainments.

The Guhyasamaja Root Tantra says that – if they properly cultivate a vajra guru, receive initiations and practice correctly – even disciples who have committed the five immediate negativities, the most serious of non-virtues, can attain enlightenment in the one lifetime, whereas those who have not created any such negativities but have belittled their guru from the depths of their heart will never be able to attain anything, no matter how they practice.

Lama Tsong Khapa said that The Fifty Verses of Guru Devotion was written especially for disciples who take profound teachings from any gurus who just happen to be around but don’t cultivate devotion to any of them.

Out of his great compassion, Acharya Ashvagosha summarized what such disciples should do in order to help them understand their commitments properly.
Another scripture says that if you don’t regard the teacher from whom you hear even one verse of teaching as a guru, you’ll be reborn as a dog a hundred times or as a being that feeds on the flesh of its own mother.

Thus, the great Tilopa told Naropa, “For all these reasons you should be skilled in cultivating proper guru devotion.”

A great Kagyu lama once said that if you allow the sunshine of your fervent regard to fall on the holy physical form of your guru, the vajra river of inspiration and blessings will flow.

Another said that if you try to meditate on emptiness without supplicating your guru, you’re like a cave facing away from the sun – it’s impossible for the light to shine in. In other words, if you meditate on emptiness without making requests to your guru, your practice won’t bring realizations and you won’t be able to strike at the heart of your ego-grasping ignorance.

In his Uttaratantra, Maitreya Buddha said that you can realize emptiness only when you have fervent regard, or great respect, for your guru.

Gampopa’s disciples once asked him how he had achieved the realization of mahamudra. He replied, “When I was able to keep my guru, Milarepa, in mind all the time, that’s when I realized mahamudra.”

Similarly, Jetsun Milarepa said that since the guru is the quintessence of all the buddhas, if you can see him in his real form of dharmakaya, you will spontaneously and effortlessly receive all the inspiration and blessings of all the buddhas.

So, I think that’s enough citations clarifying these points; now please contemplate them properly.

**The summary of the meaning of all these verses**

**VERSE 15**

Therefore exert yourself whole-heartedly never to belittle your tantric master,

Who makes no display of his great wisdom and virtues.
It’s now clear that at no time should we belittle the vajra guru. The consequences of doing so are obvious. As mentioned above, Lama Tsong Khapa said, “The Fifty Verses of Guru Devotion is made up of quotations of Buddha Vajradhara himself, summarized in book form for those disciples who seek out many gurus but don’t cultivate proper guru devotion with any of them. In order to help such disciples, warn them, and save them from the worst consequences of belittling their guru and transgressing their guru-disciple relationship, Ashvagosha wrote this book.”

When Sadaprarudita first generated guru devotion for Dharmodgata he was on the highest path of accumulation, but as he cultivated proper guru devotion, he was able to attain the seventh bodhisattva stage within seven years – which, according to sutra, is impossible. However, his great guru devotion enabled him to do so.

As Vajradhara said, we should pray not even to see – even in our dreams – or hear of those disciples who have violated their guru-disciple relationship.

This completes our discussion of the verses dealing with abandoning disrespect for the guru. Those on how to cultivate respect are next.

**HOW TO GO ABOUT BEING REVERENT**

Cultivating respect for the guru has eight divisions:

(a) **Offering material**
(b) **Perceiving the guru as buddha**
(c) **Acting according to the guru’s word**
(d) **Looking after the guru’s materials and entourage**
(e) **Purifying temporal behavior**
(f) **Offering body, speech and mind**
(g) **Abandoning pride**
(h) **Not acting according to your own wishes**
Arranging teachings in outline, or summarized, form helps us understand them properly. Those with sharp intelligence can understand the essence of an entire text just from its table of contents.

OFFERING MATERIAL

(i) Making offerings to purify disrespect  
(ii) Offering ourselves and all our possessions  
(iii) The validity of making such offerings  
(iv) How to cultivate pure words of honor every day

Making offerings to purify disrespect

VERSE 16
(If, out of lack of awareness, you have shown disrespect) to your guru,
  Reverently present an offering to him and seek his forgiveness.
  Then in the future such harm as plagues will not befall you.

If, because of our overabundant delusions and recklessness, we have generated or shown disrespect for our guru, we should make offerings to our guru with both respectful mind and respectful gesture – whatever we present we should offer with both hands.

In this, we should copy the great masters who were learned and well-skilled in this field. We can learn a great deal from the way they behaved. When observing great masters, we shouldn’t be so concerned with the way they recite mantras and so forth as with how they behave purely in front of their gurus.

Also, the offerings we make to purify disrespect and ask for forgiveness should be charming, attractive things – good quality things that we like, not things we don’t.

If we do this properly and ask forgiveness, then in future we won’t be afflicted by infectious diseases or the other consequences mentioned above.
To show that he’s not just making this up, in his commentary, Lama Tsong Khapa quotes The Long Paramadya Commentary as the source of this method of counteracting the effects of disrespectful behavior.

**Offering ourselves and all our possessions**

**VERSE 17**
It has been taught that for the guru to whom you have pledged your word of honor (to visualize as one with your meditation deity),
You should willingly sacrifice your wife, children and even your life, although these are not easy to give away.
Is there need to mention your fleeting wealth?

There’s a Tibetan term in this verse, dam-tsig lobpön, samaya guru – the guru to whom you have pledged your word of honor – the guru you regard or visualize as inseparable from your deity.

For example, if you practice Yamantaka, the guru you regard as inseparable from the body, speech and mind of Yamantaka. That is your samaya guru. Of course, it’s the same with any deity that you practice, such as Avalokiteshvara.

We should offer our samaya guru our wife, our children, our life itself. Therefore, if we’re supposed to offer things like that, which are so difficult to give away, to practice generosity with, what need is there to talk about our fluctuating wealth?

The source of this statement is The Samputa Tantra.

**The validity of making such offerings**

Now we go into the details of the validity of this second offering, to prove that it is not meaningless, carries a profound meaning and was propounded by Vajradhara.

**VERSE 18**
(Such practice of offering) can confer even buddhahood on a zealous (disciple) in his or her very lifetime,
Which otherwise might be difficult to attain even in countless millions of eons.

The validity of making such offerings is that the pure abode of enlightenment, which is very difficult to actualize no matter how many eons we try, can be achieved within the hundred-year lifespan of this degenerate age by the pure cultivation of a vajra guru. *The Kalachakra Root Tantra* clearly states that no matter how many offerings you make to the Three Jewels in a million eons or how much charity to sentient beings you practice over the same period, you still can’t actualize enlightenment in a single lifetime, but if you cultivate pure guru devotion without transgression you can actualize enlightenment in a single lifetime of this degenerate age.

**How to cultivate pure words of honor every day**

**VERSE 19**
Always keep your words of honor.
Always make offerings to the enlightened ones.
And always make offerings to your guru, for he is the same as all the buddhas.

There are several points here so we’ll take them one by one.
“Always abide by your words of honor” means that your first word of honor to the guru who gave you the initiation of a certain deity is to always abide in that deity’s yoga.
“Always make offerings to the buddhas” means always make offerings to the buddhas, like Vajrasattva and so forth, in order to complete the accumulation of merit.
There are four types of offering – external, internal, offering of suchness and secret offering – and you should constantly make these offerings, visualizing them as extensive as space itself, and thereby complete your accumulation of merit.
“Always make offerings to your guru...” means always make offerings to your guru because as an object of accumulating merit, he is like all the buddhas.

**VERSE 20**
Those who wish to (attain) the inexhaustible (state of a buddha’s wisdom body)
Should give to their guru whatever they themselves find pleasing,
From the most trifling objects to those of best quality.

Alone, the word “inexhaustible” here is a bit vague, but through his kindness, Lama Tsong Khapa has clarified it. It means that we’ll achieve the dharmakaya, which is as inexhaustible as space; infinite. So it’s saying that disciples who wish to attain this inexhaustible state should make material offerings – from the smallest to the greatest – to their guru.

Furthermore, the guru, in order to help dissipate the disciple’s craving desire, should accept these things.

**VERSE 21**
Giving (to your guru) is the same as making continual offerings to all the buddhas.
From such giving much merit is gathered.
From such collection comes the supreme powerful attainment (of buddhahood).

Making offerings to your guru fulfills the requirement of making continual offerings to all the buddhas, and by doing so you accumulate the merit that brings the supreme powerful attainment of enlightenment.

Since you actualize the highest powerful attainment of enlightenment, what need is there to mention all other ordinary powerful attainments?

Obviously, you accomplish these by the way. This and all the other ideas written down by Ashvagosha have various tantras as their source.
So, now we have finished the first of the eight divisions of cultivating respect for the guru, that of making material offerings.

PERCEIVING THE GURU AS BUDDHA
This has two subsections:
(i) regarding him as buddha and
(ii) not stepping over his shadow

Regarding him as buddha

VERSE 22
Therefore, a disciple with the good qualities of compassion, generosity, moral self-control and patience
Should never regard the guru and Buddha Vajradhara as different.

First comes a description of the good disciple, one who has developed the qualities of great compassion – the root of the Mahayana path – who abides by the cultivation of pure morality, and has dedicated his or her body, speech and mind to the welfare of other sentient beings.

The disciple who is preoccupied by working for other sentient beings, abides by the three types of Mahayana morality and can endure all the hardships of the path should regard the guru as inseparable, not separate, from Vajradhara himself.

As Geshe Potowa said, “Disciples who regard Vajradhara as better than their own guru have no possibility of gaining powerful attainments.” This makes it clear that if, while practicing any meditation deity and doing the visualization, you regard the meditation deity and your guru as separate – the deity as very high and your guru as very low, separate – because of that great mistake, you won’t be able to actualize any powerful attainments, even if you meditate for a hundred years.

On the other hand, if you meditate on the inseparability of the meditation deity and your guru, it’s impossible that you won’t actualize any powerful attainments.
Furthermore, Vajradhara assured us that the guru is an emanation of himself. He said that in degenerate times such as this, we shouldn’t worry that we haven’t met Vajradhara because at such times he would manifest as the vajra guru.

Therefore, we should develop the skill of recognizing Vajradhara as our vajra guru, because that’s how he manifests at times like this.

So that’s the actual meaning of this subject, regarding the vajra guru as inseparable from Vajradhara.

**Not stepping over your guru’s shadow**

**VERSE 23**
If you should never step on even (your guru’s) shadow because the fearsome consequences are the same as destroying a stupa, Is there need to mention never stepping on or over his shoes or seat, (sitting in his place, or riding) his mount?

The text says that the negativity of doing so is the same as demolishing a stupa, which is one of the five near immediate negativities.

And if the negativity of stepping over the shadow of the vajra guru is so grave, it’s obvious that stepping over his shoes, mattress or cushions or riding his conveyance, such as his horse, must be much worse than that.

The instruction not to step over the guru’s shadow was given by Vajradhara in the tantras.

Lama Tsong Khapa’s elaborate commentary on The Fifty Verses, The Fulfillment of All Hopes, contains many quotations substantiating such advice. This commentary can be found in the first volume of the eighteen that make up Je Tsong Khapa’s collected works [Tib: Sung-bum].

Now we come to the third division of cultivating respect,
VERSE 24
(Disciples) having great sense should obey the words of their guru joyfully and with enthusiasm.
If you lack the knowledge or ability (to do what he says), explain in (polite) words why you cannot (comply).

This verse says that highly intelligent disciples should listen to the words, or orders, of their guru with great pleasure, or bliss; they should hear whatever he has to say with much enthusiasm and perseverance.
Whenever your guru speaks, listen with pleasure. If you can do what he asks, if you can act in accordance with his words, you should accept, but if it’s too hard, then explain your difficulty politely.
Don’t ignore what he’s asking, but tell him intelligently why you can’t do it. If your guru tells you to do something that you feel goes against your three types of morality, you can avoid doing it, but explain intelligently and unemotionally why.
One of the Jataka Tales is about a previous life of Guru Shakyamuni when he was born as a Brahmin disciple. The Brahmin teacher told his disciples to go out and steal for him. His logic was that since the universe was made by Brahma, if, as sons of Brahma, Brahmins take things, it’s no more stealing than if a son takes things belonging to his father – since they are his own possessions, he’s not stealing.
However, the disciple who was the previous life of Buddha didn’t go. His teacher said, “You don’t seem to like me.” Guru Shakyamuni replied, “Theft is at no time religious,” and intelligently explained many ways in which stealing wasn’t good. Later he became one of this guru’s best disciples.

Intelligence is always stressed as one of the very best qualities a disciple can have.

The fine print at the beginning of The Guru Puja says that at all times we should look for our guru’s qualities, not his faults or shortcomings. By seeing his qualities we will achieve all powerful attainments; by seeing his faults, we won’t.
Lama Tsong Khapa said, “The practice of disciples who pretend to listen to teachings and meditate without cultivating pure guru devotion is merely an echo; it’s nothing. It has no potential to yield any result.”

Also, in his *Abhisamayalankara* commentary, Gyältsab Rinpoche said, “Listening to teachings without cultivating proper guru devotion is like turning medicine into poison; it has no potential to bring a good result.”

All this shows that if we cultivate pure guru devotion, we’re sure to attain realizations, as illustrated by a story of three of Atisha’s disciples – Dromtönpa, his translator and secretary; Amé Jangchub Rinchen, his cook; and Gönpa Wangchug Gyeltsen (the Great Neljorpa, or Mahayogi), who spent all his time in meditation.

Atisha was always going to give him teachings and he remained in seclusion. So Mahayogi thought, “I spend all my time in meditation whereas the others don’t meditate at all. I must have higher realizations.”

Atisha was aware of this, so called them all together and examined them. He found that of the three, Dromtönpa had the highest realizations, Amé Jangchub Rinchen the second highest, and Mahayogi the least.

This example emphasizes the importance of guru devotion.

*Question:* So, we don’t always have to do what our guru tells us?

*Gen Rinpoche:* Ashvagosha says that we should always try to act in accordance with the words of our guru but are exempt if what we are asked to do is very heavy. In that case we can explain politely why we can’t do it. If your guru asks you to do something against the three types of morality – for example, say he asks you to kill a human being – you can decline.

Angulimala’s guru told him he could attain liberation by killing a thousand human beings in a week and wearing their fingers as a garland. So, you don’t need to doubt – these exceptions are mentioned in the *Lam-rim Chen-mo* and the *Jatakamala*, and the source of this advice is Vajradhara.
VERSE 25
It is from your guru that powerful attainments, higher rebirth and happiness come.
Therefore make a whole-hearted effort never to transgress your guru’s advice.

This verse tells us why we should follow our guru’s orders – we have to act according to his words because all powerful attainments, both common and supreme, are accomplished only by relying on him.
Through proper reliance on our guru we will achieve the prosperity of human beings and gods.
Once again, this statement comes from one of the tantras, The Hevajra Tantra. That text clearly states that if you abide by the words of your guru you will achieve all powerful attainments and even in this life receive all happiness.
However, going against what he says will only lead you to the lower realms, which is why Lama Tsong Khapa says that going against your guru’s words or disrespecting him is an extremely grave negativity.
According to tantra, the speech of the buddha is the sambhogakaya, so one word of the guru is the equivalent of one sambhogakaya. That’s why it’s extremely negative to transgress the guru’s words.

LOOKING AFTER THE GURU’S MATERIALS AND ENTOURAGE

VERSE 26
(Guard) your guru’s belongings as you would your own life.
Treat even your guru’s beloved (family) with the same (respect you show) for him.
(Have affectionate regard for) those closely around him as if they were your own dearest kin.
Single-mindedly think (in this way) at all times.

You should look after your guru’s possessions properly – you should cherish them as much as you do your own life.
Before Dromtönpa met Atisha, he was studying with another guru. By night he would tend his guru’s cattle; by day he would spin yarn with his hands, soften leather with his feet and, as his lama had a wife and many children, always carry his guru’s children on his back.

When he met Atisha and told him about his previous realizations and merit, Atisha said, “Your greatest merit was created when you were serving that lama.”

Therefore we, too, should respect and serve those closest to our guru – his family members, his foremost servants and helpers and so forth – learning from the lives of the great practitioners like Jetsun Milarepa and Dromtönpa.

When Gyälwa Dromtönpa was serving his guru in Kham, he used to lie in the mud so that his guru’s wife could sit on his back while she was milking the cows. Milarepa did the same thing; he had Marpa’s wife, Dagmema, sit on him while she milked the cows.

You should also treat your guru’s servants and so forth in the same way that you treat your beloved relatives. “Single-mindedly think (in this way) at all times” means that you must constantly keep this idea in mind so that it becomes very clear.

From the above you can now understand what Geshe Tölungpa meant when he said, “I get greater merit by giving food to my guru Loba’s dog than by inviting all the monks of Western Tibet and offering them a feast.” [He was called Tölungpa because he lived in Tölung; his ordination name was Rinchen Nyingpo. Similarly, Loba means a person from Lo; he was referring to Kadampa Geshe Chengawa.]

This is not a fabrication. The Guhyasamaja Root Tantra clearly states that it is much more meritorious to make offerings to one pore of your vajra guru than to the buddhas of the three times. As your guru is the representative of all buddhas, this merit far exceeds all others.

(If you make very clear, unmistaken notes during these discourses and keep them properly, they will form a commentary to The Fifty Verses of Guru Devotion. This commentary is very rare; the most famous is Lama Tsong Khapa’s. So if you preserve your notes, you’ll have a second commentary.)
PURIFYING TEMPORAL BEHAVIOR

This fifth section of cultivating respect for your guru has three subsections:

(i) avoiding bad behavior;
(ii) cultivating good behavior;
(iii) avoiding other bad behavior in general.

Avoiding bad behavior has two parts: what to avoid in the guru’s field of vision and what to avoid in the guru’s range of hearing.

What to avoid in the guru’s field of vision

VERSE 27
Never sit on the (same) bed or seat (as your guru), nor walk ahead of him.
(At teachings do not) wear your hair in a top-knot, (a hat, shoes or any weapons.
Never) touch a seat (before he sits down or if he happens to sit on the ground.
Do not) place your hands (proudly) on your hips or wring them (before him).

When he is standing you shouldn’t sit on a cushion or a mattress. If your guru is sitting on the bare ground you shouldn’t sit on a cushion. When traveling or walking on a road together you shouldn’t walk in front of him; he should go first.
All these points have their source in The Ornament of the Vajra Essence Tantra.
Similarly, you shouldn’t wear your hair in a topknot or in a plait tied around your forehead while in the presence of your guru.
If there is a long mattress on which you are going to sit together, you shouldn’t step over it before your guru sits down; if you do, it’s a downfall and you create negative karma.

Also, you shouldn’t sit with your hands on your hips or wring your hands in his presence.

VERSE 28
Never sit or recline while your guru is standing (or lie while he is sitting).
Always be ready to stand up and serve him skillfully in an excellent manner.

While your lama is standing, don’t sit or lie down. This is not made up but comes from what was said by Vajradhara himself.
You should always be very quick to do whatever you can do for your guru. Don’t be lazy or lethargic but very active in performing such tasks.

VERSE 29
In the presence of your guru never do such things as spit, (cough or sneeze without covering your head.
Never) stretch out your legs when at your seat, nor walk back and forth (without a reason before him.
And never) argue.

You shouldn’t spit, expel snot or blow your nose in front of your guru. Nor should you stretch your legs out when sitting before him.
Similarly, in his presence, don’t stroll about here and there in an arrogant manner, as if out for your morning walk, or quarrel or argue with others.

VERSE 30(a)
Never massage or rub your limbs.
Do not sing, dance or play musical instruments (other than for religious purposes).
As it says here, you shouldn’t rub your limbs or your feet in front of your guru, just as you shouldn’t wring your hands. Don’t sing or dance in front of him or play musical instruments, unless it’s during a religious ceremony. These are some of the things that you should not do within your guru’s field of vision.

What to avoid in the guru’s range of hearing

VERSE 30(b)
And never chatter idly or speak in excess (or too loudly) within range of (your guru’s) hearing.

The rest of this verse says that you shouldn’t gossip within earshot of your guru, where he can hear your frivolous talk and chatter. These admonitions to curb such wrong behavior and bad habits within your guru’s sense perception come from The Ornament of the Vajra Essence Tantra and The Vajramala Guhyasamaja Explanation Tantra.

Cultivating good behaviour

VERSE 31
(When your guru enters the room), get up from your seat and bow your head slightly.
Sit (in his presence) respectfully.
At night or at rivers or on dangerous paths, with (your guru’s) permission you may walk before him.

If you are sitting, stand up when your guru comes into view. When you sit, do so very demurely and not in a slovenly way that reflects your untamed mind.
If an apple tree is well laden, all its branches hang down; similarly, if your mind is well tamed, your behavior is very subdued. Try to be on your best behavior in front of your guru and not reveal your unsubdued nature.
Verse 27 said that you should not walk ahead of your guru, but this verse offers an exception. If you are traveling in a dangerous place you can go first; under such circumstances, it’s not right for your guru to go ahead. For the same reason you can also walk in front of him at night.

Similarly, when crossing a river by foot, you should go first to check the depth or for danger.

This advice also comes from the Ornament of The Vajra Essence Tantra. When checking the validity of such teachings, you should be able to trace them back to Vajradhara. If you can do so, there’s no need to look for any other source, just as when you trace a river back to its source, you can’t find any other origin for it.

Avoiding other bad behavior in general

VERSE 32

In the direct sight of the guru,
(a disciple) with sense should not (sit) with his or her body twisted around or lean (casually) against a pillar and so forth.

Never crack your knuckles, (play with your fingers or clean your nails).

When in front of their guru, intelligent disciples endowed with discretion sit correctly, not in a slovenly or arrogant fashion. Nor should they lean on pillars or walls for support.

Furthermore, don’t crack your knuckles etc. The sublime being who said this was Ashvagosha, who cited Vajradhara in The Ornament of the Vajra Essence Tantra in support of this statement.

OFFERING BODY, SPEECH AND MIND

VERSE 33

When washing (your guru’s) feet or body, drying, massaging or (shaving) him,
Precede such actions with (three) prostrations and at their conclusion do the same.
Then attend (to yourself) as much as you like.

Before you wash your guru’s feet, bathe his body or cut his hair, offer three prostrations. When you have finished, offer three more. After that, you can attend to your own needs.

VERSE 34
Should you need to address (your guru) by name, add the title “Your Presence” after it.
To generate respect for him in others, further honorifics may also be used.

Next comes the offering of speech. Whenever you utter your guru’s name, don’t leave it naked. For example, when you quote him, say, “I heard it from his great, holy speech.”
Pabongka Rinpoche said that we use our guru’s bare name too casually, without praise or honorific, but that he felt very uncomfortable whenever he heard his own guru’s name spoken like that. That’s why when we quote our lama we should say something like, “I heard it from his radiant, holy mouth.”

In the commentary, Lama Tsong Khapa says, “For example, if the guru’s name is Rinchen Dorje, you should say, ‘My precious lord Rinchen Dorje spoke of this and said....’ By this, having caught the attention of others, they become reverent to the guru.”

Similarly, in his commentary on the Vinaya Sutra, Acharya Gunaprabha said that whenever you take the name of the preceptor who bestowed vows upon you, you should say, “From his great radiant mouth....”

Therefore we should act in accordance with the following short story. Once Lama Tsong Khapa was giving a teaching just above the site where Sera Monastery was later built, when Khadrub Rinpoche came to meet him for the first time. He asked a nun living there where the venerable Tsong Khapa could be found. She didn’t answer immediately but went inside, washed her mouth, lit some incense and replied, “I don’t know anything about the name you just said, but if you
mean my Venerable Gracious Guru, His Presence Je Tsong Khapa
resides over there.”

Khädrub-je was very impressed by this nun’s subdued behavior and
said that this is how those who really abide by the vinaya should act.

Thus, when mentioning your guru’s name in front of others, in
order to arouse respect in them for your guru, add honorifics before
and after his name.

ABANDONING PRIDE

Now the seventh division of cultivating respect for your guru, the
elimination of arrogance in front of him.
This has three subsections:
(i) abandoning arrogance when taking orders from your
guru;
(ii) abandoning arrogance when listening to discourses and
so forth; and
(iii) eliminating arrogance in all actions.

Abandoning arrogance when taking orders from your guru

VERSE 35
When asking for your guru’s advice, (first announce why you have
come).
With palms pressed together at your heart, listen to what he tells
you without (letting your mind) wander about.
Then (when he has spoken) you should reply, “I shall do exactly as
you have said.”

First check the sincerity of your wish to work for your guru and your
ability to do so. Go to him with folded hands and ask reverently, “Can I
be of any help to you?”

When he does ask you to do something, listen to what he says
without arrogance and with folded hands. When he has finished
speaking, say, “I will do as you have said.”
VERSE 36
After doing (what your guru has told you), report (what has happened) in polite, gentle words.
Should you yawn or cough, (clear your throat or laugh in his presence), cover your mouth with your hand.

Whenever you smile or laugh in front of your guru, cover your mouth with your handkerchief or hand. If you have to spit, you should take your handkerchief out slowly.

When you have finished doing the work he asked you to do, with reverence, fold your hands and tell him, “I have finished that work.” This, too, has as its source the Ornament of The Vajra Essence Tantra.

Abandoning arrogance when listening to discourses and so forth

VERSE 37
If you wish to receive a certain teaching, request three times with your palms pressed together while kneeling before him with your (right) knee.

(Then at his discourse) sit humbly with respect, wearing appropriate clothing that is neat (and clean, without ornaments, jewelry or cosmetics).

When listening to teachings you should pay attention mindfully, dress properly, sit in a very subdued, well-composed way and keep your behavior in check.

When asking for a special teaching, kneel on your right knee and, with folded hands, make the request three times.

All the great, sublime beings attained realizations by cultivating perfect guru devotion; since we, too, want to attain realizations, we should also know these things.

Just as the great sublime beings of the past – Milarepa, Dromtönpa, Khädrub Rinpoche, Geshe Chengawa and so many others – cultivated proper guru devotion, served their gurus all their life and attained high
realizations, so should we emulate these great beings and cultivate proper guru devotion as explained by Vajradhara.

In the *Lam-rim Chen-mo*, Je Rinpoche explained how to practice guru yoga. First we prove to ourselves that the guru is buddha through logical reasoning and various quotations, thus becoming fully convinced that our guru is, indeed, buddha.

Then, seeing that our guru is buddha but in the aspect of the deity we practice, our guru yoga practice will be effective. If we try to practice without this recognition, we won’t achieve anything.

So, since we all cherish ourselves and none of us wishes the slightest of sufferings, we should really try to do the right thing. And as we do have high regard for Milarepa, we should try to emulate him and the way he cultivated guru devotion. Milarepa cultivated proper guru devotion with Marpa, and Marpa with his gurus, especially Naropa, and Naropa with Tilopa, and Dromtönpa with Atisha. To really appreciate all this, we should read the scriptures that explain about guru devotion. Then when we practice meditation in the context of proper guru devotion, interdependently, our realizations will increase like a waxing moon.

Ra Lotsawa said, “During the final decline of the doctrine, although there’ll be many practitioners, few will actualize the end because they’ll lack the necessary skills. Only those who cultivate the perfect guru, deity and Dharma protector will be able to actualize.”

Therefore, when we request teachings from our guru we should approach him in a composed manner, kneel on our right knee, fold our hands and request three times.

Also, in his presence, we should wear proper, clean clothing and not wear jewelry or try to make ourselves beautiful.

*Abandoning arrogance in all actions.*

**VERSE 38**

Whatever you do to serve (your guru) or show him respect should never be done with an arrogant mind.
Instead you should be like a newly-wed bride, timid, bashful and very subdued.

However properly we have revered our guru and made offerings, it should not be sullied by arrogance. In his presence we should try to maintain subdued behavior all the time, without arrogance.

We should act with decency and not always be looking around here and there.

The text says we should act like a newlywed bride, who shyly bows her head and acts very quietly.

VERSE 39
In the presence of (the guru) who teaches you (the path), stop acting in a conceited, coquettish manner.
As for boasting to others what you have done (for your guru), examine (your conscience) and discard all such acts.

You should check with your own intelligence and try to avoid doing acting in these ways.
Also, when walking with your guru, if you walk right behind him you run the risk of stepping on his shadow, which is very bad.
Also, if you walk alongside him you might walk too fast and get ahead. Therefore, walk to his side, just behind him, in a very skillful way.

NOT ACTING ACCORDING TO YOUR OWN WISHES

This is the eighth and final section of cultivating respect for the guru.
There are four things here that we should not do by ourselves but instead get our guru’s consent:
(i) when working for the benefit of others – for example, when you are going to give an initiation or teaching – get your guru’s consent;
(ii) offer back to your guru any offerings that you receive from that action;
(iii) avoid taking offerings or receiving others’ respect, such as prostrations or hand blessings, in front of your guru – from your point of view as guru, you must avoid such things but from your disciples’ point of view, they should do it; and
(iv) showing special physical respect.

When working for the benefit of others – for example, when you are going to give an initiation or teaching – get your guru’s consent;

VERSE 40
If you are (requested) to perform a consecration, (an initiation into) a mandala or a fire offering ceremony or to gather disciples and deliver a discourse,
You may not do so if your guru resides in that area, unless you receive his prior permission.

If your guru is in that locality, you should not do consecrations or fire pujas for others or give initiations and so forth without his prior consent.

Offer back to your guru any offerings that you receive from that action;

VERSE 41
Whatever offerings you receive from performing such rites as (the consecration known as) “opening the eyes,”
You should present all these to your guru.
Once he has taken a token portion, you may use the rest for whatever you like.

You should give your guru whatever offerings you receive from doing consecrations, giving initiations and so forth. He’ll take a small
portion and give you the rest, which you can then use for whatever you want.

In contemporary Tibet there was no greater lama than Pabongka Rinpoche. He received all the Nyingma teachings Öser Tretog Dorje. The lineage of whatever teachings we hear today from the two tutors [Kyabje Ling Rinpoche and Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche] comes from Pabongka Rinpoche. He is like both father and monarch. There’s no lama or aristocrat who hasn’t cultivated him as his or her guru.

When people talk about Lama Dorje Chang, they’re referring to Pabongka Rinpoche.

Avoid taking offerings or receiving others’ respect, such as prostrations or hand blessings, in front of your guru – from your point of view as guru, you must avoid such things but from your disciples’ point of view, they should do it

VERSE 42

In the presence of his guru a disciple should not act (as a guru) to his own disciples and they should not act towards him as their guru.

Therefore (before your own guru) stop (your disciples) from showing you respect, such as rising (when you come) and making prostrations.

Avoid receiving offerings in front of your guru. You shouldn’t make disciples of your guru’s disciples or give them an initiation without his consent.

If, in your guru’s presence, your disciples stand up for you, offer you prostrations or come to take hand blessings, try to stop them and make them sit down.
Showing special physical respect

VERSE 43
Whenever you make an offering to your guru or whenever your guru presents you with something,
A disciple with sense will (present and) receive this using both hands with his or her head slightly bent.

Showing special physical respect means that whatever you offer to or accept from your guru should be done with both hands, not one. This is the type of behavior that a perfect disciple should cultivate.
In an assembly of disciples, offering a khatag with one hand is proof that you haven’t heard The Fifty Verses of Guru Devotion.

VERSE 44
Be diligent in all your actions, (alert and) mindful never to forget (your word of honor).
If fellow disciples transgress (what is proper) in their behavior, correct each other in a friendly manner.

You should keep your vows and words of honor without any transgression, being mindful and alert all the time, and try to abide by the codes of conduct prescribed by Vajradhara.
If out of ignorance a vajra brother or sister – a disciple with whom you have taken the same initiation, together or apart – breaks a vow or breaches his or her words of honor, then, with compassion and a feeling of love and fondness, you should try to make that person avoid that wrong action.
You should regard your vajra brothers and sisters as more dear and sacred than your own relatives.

VERSE 45
If because of sickness you are physically (unable) to bow to your guru and must do what normally would be prohibited,
Even without (his explicit) permission, there will be no unfortunate consequences if you have a virtuous mind.

If we ask if we have to cultivate the behaviors taught in *The Fifty Verses* at all times, if there’s any time we don’t have to do them, there are certain exceptions. However, belittling the guru and disturbing his mind are not among them. At no time can we do these actions.

There are certain exemptions for the sick disciple who is too weak to get up but whose mind is virtuous: it’s not required to stand or prostrate or to ask the guru’s permission not to do these things.

The reverence of standing or prostrating can be done mentally.

**SUMMARY OF THE WAY TO BE DEVOTED**

**VERSE 46**
What need is there to say much more?
Do whatever pleases your guru and avoid doing anything he would not like.
Be diligent in both of these.

To summarize, we should try to do things that makes our guru happy and pleased with us and avoid doing things that make our guru unhappy and displeased with us.

**VERSE 47**
“Powerful attainments follow from (doing what) your guru (likes).”
This has been said by (the Buddha) Vajradhara himself.
Knowing this, try to please your guru fully with all the actions (of your body, speech and mind).

Why is guru devotion stressed from the very beginning? Because all common and extraordinary powerful attainments follow your cultivation of a proper guru, that is, by making your guru pleased.
This was said by Vajradhara.
By knowing this fact, then by all means – that is, by body, speech and mind – cultivate pure guru devotion and make your guru pleased with you.

**TIME FOR EXPLAINING HOW TO BE DEVOTED**

**VERSE 48**

After disciples have taken refuge in the Triple Gem and developed a pure enlightened motive [the vows of the wishing and engaging bodhichitta]
They should be given this (text) to take to heart
(How to abandon their own arrogant self-will and)
Follow in their guru’s footsteps (along the graded path to enlightenment).

If perfect disciples – those with pure mind and intention – having taken refuge then follow their guru correctly, he will lead them to enlightenment.

This *Fifty Verses of Guru Devotion* has been written in the form of a prayer so that we can recite it again and again and thus know what to cultivate and what to eliminate in order to correctly follow our guru.

**HOW TO BE A SUITABLE RECEPTACLE AFTER THE EXPLANATION HAS BEEN GIVEN**

**VERSE 49**

(By studying the prerequisite trainings of guru-devotion and the graded path common to both sutra and tantra,)
You will become a (suitable) vessel (to hold) the pure Dharma.
You may then be given such teachings as tantra.
(After receiving the proper initiations,) recite out loud the fourteen root vows and take them sincerely to heart.

As it says in verse 48, this text has been written especially for disciples distinguished by the two good qualities of having taken refuge
and the vows of wishing and engaging bodhicitta and who really abide by the commitments of both these practices of refuge and bodhicitta.

After that, disciples who have studied the lam-rim and *The Fifty Verses* and acted accordingly become disciples ripened for tantric practice.

Therefore, they should obtain initiations, study the stages and paths of tantra, know the fourteen major tantric downfalls perfectly, remain aware of them by memorizing them and ask their guru for teachings on them.

In short, we should cultivate the sort of behavior that makes our guru pleased and happy and avoid that which makes him displeased and unhappy.

Lama Tsong Khapa said that the practice of guru yoga is regarding the guru as buddha and seeing the deity as the guru in the form of the deity. That’s the actual practice of guru yoga; if we practice it in that way it will be effective.

The only way we can achieve all the major and minor good qualities is to depend on our guru and regard him as buddha.

Lama Tsong Khapa said that if we don’t respect our guru, then no matter how much we declare that we are listening to teachings, meditating and so forth, we won’t get anything worthwhile from whatever we do.

One of the root tantra s says, “I make obeisance to my gurus, who are the quintessence of all the buddhas, Vajradhara in nature – Vajradhara in the form of an ordinary being – and the root of all three objects of refuge.”

Similarly, from the same text comes the prayer we often say:

The guru is Buddha, the guru is Dharma,
The guru is the quintessence of all Sangha, too.
The guru is the creator of all happiness.
To all gurus, I prostrate (or, go for refuge, or, make offerings).

At present, what we want is enlightenment, the state that has all good qualities and not a trace of fault, shortcoming or disadvantage. To
accomplish this, we have to follow the guidance of a proper guru, and even if Buddha Vajradhara were to manifest in front of us right now, he wouldn’t say anything different from what our guru has told us.

_The Hevajra Root Tantra_ says that no matter how hard we try to find the great bliss of enlightenment, we won’t be able to find it unless we follow the guidance of the right guru.

All these quotations come from the tantras; I’m not making anything up. But it’s not only in the tantras that we find many quotations that prove that the guru is buddha.

The Buddha said that this is so in the sutras as well. For example, just before he entered _parinirvana_, Lord Buddha went to a mountaintop in south India, where he met a bodhisattva called Tongwa Dönden, who was crying and saying, “We are so lucky that the Buddha manifested on Earth, but after your parinirvana we’ll have no Buddha.” Lord Buddha said, “Don’t worry. After that I’ll manifest as gurus and abbots and at those times you should be smart enough to recognize me as such.”

So these are not fabrications but authentic sayings of the Buddha. Thus, as verse 49 implies, we should memorize the fourteen major downfalls of tantra and imprint them in our mind so that we don’t forget them.

If you can’t abstain from breaking these root vows, taking initiations becomes like purposely creating the cause to be reborn in hell. Lamas are not supposed to give initiations or tantric teachings to disciples who can’t keep these vows.

Vajradhara himself said, “You can’t keep lion’s milk in an earthen pot – the milk will sour and the pot will fall apart; both will be ruined. Similarly, Highest Yoga Tantra teachings should not be given to immature disciples lest they be reborn in miserable circumstances.”

If you listen to _The Fifty Verses_ attentively, you’ll make yourself a mature disciple for tantra if you’re not one already, and you’ll recognize the importance of knowing the fourteen major downfalls and protecting yourself from them.
BRINGING THE EXPLANATION TO A CONCLUSION

VERSE 50
As I have not made the mistake (of adding my personal interpretation) when writing this work,
May this be of infinite benefit to all disciples who would follow their guru.
By the limitless merit that I have gathered in this way,
May all sentient beings quickly attain the state of Buddha.

LAMA TSONG KHAPA’S CONCLUDING REMARKS

VERSES OF DEDICATION
This is the conclusion of the text. The great Ashvagosha said that he wrote this commentary with the intention of benefitting all mature disciples and dedicated the merit of doing so to the quick enlightenment of all sentient beings. This shows he is a great bodhisattva – he dedicates the virtuous actions he creates to the welfare of all sentient beings.

Actually, concluding by dedicating the merit of giving a commentary or doing other virtuous actions to the welfare of all sentient beings is a unique feature of the Buddhist doctrine; an exclusive feature not found in non-Buddhist texts.

In a text called Praise to You, the Outstanding [Khye-par-phag-tö], the author writes, “In your doctrine, whatever merit you create you dedicate to the welfare of sentient beings. Such is not found in outsiders’ teachings. Therefore, I regard it as one of the best features of your doctrine.”

It would be good for you to study this text on the distinctions between the Buddha and other teachers to strengthen your faith in the Buddhadharma.
COLOPHON
This Fifty Verses of Guru Devotion was rendered into Tibetan by the great translator Rinchen Zangpo and the great Indian Pandit, Padmakaravarma. There’s no Indian commentary but, as mentioned before, the great Tsong Khapa wrote an elaborate one, The Fulfillment of All Hopes, which he did at the request of two great Kagyu lamas.

He also wrote a commentary on the Six Yogas of Naropa at the request of Kagyu lamas and a very elaborate commentary on dzog-chen at the request of the great Nyingma lama, Tashi Palden.

Lama Tsong Khapa wrote his Fifty Verses commentary at Reting, where he also wrote the Lam-rim Chen-mo.

I received the transmission and teaching on The Fifty Verses from Kyabje Trijang Dorje Chang, who received it from Kyabje Pabongka, who received it from his root guru, and its direct lineage goes all the way back to Vajradhara.

If you want to have insights and realizations, guru devotion is essential. If you listen to teachings just for knowledge, guru devotion is not necessary, but it’s the gateway for practice and achievement.

During the meditation session, meditate on guru devotion. In between sessions read texts such as The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines, which describes Sadaprarudita’s cultivation of Dharmodgata, or The Flower Ornament Sutra [Skt: Avatamsaka Sutra], which describes the Youth Sudhana’s cultivation of many gurus including Manjushri and Maitreya and his subsequent attainment of enlightenment.

You should also read other inspiring examples of the practice of guru devotion, such as Naropa’s with Tilopa, Marpa’s with Naropa and Maitripa, Milarepa ‘s with Marpa Lotsawa, Dromtönpa’s with Atisha, Geshe Chakawa’s with Geshe Chengawa, Khādrub Rinpoche’s with Lama Tsong
Khapa and Sakya Pandita’s with Dragpa Gyaltsen, which I detailed before.

And, of course, there’s the original example of guru devotion in Ananda’s relationship with Guru Shakyamuni Buddha.

The insights they received through cultivating guru devotion is all in print and their names are still renowned.

You should develop the attitude: “As those great beings cultivated guru devotion and received realizations, may I emulate their achievements in this practice.”

And to think of a more contemporary example, there’s the way Kyabje Trijang Dorje Chang cultivated his root guru Kyabje Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo, and also his teacher when he was younger, Geshe Losang Tsultim, which is described in his autobiography.

COLOPHON TO THIS COMMENTARY
The root text was composed by Ashvagosha in the first century BCE, translated into English by Sharpa Tulku, Khamlung Tulku, Alexander Berzin and Jonathan Landaw, and published by the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in 1975.

Gen Rinpoche Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey gave this commentary at the LTWA in Dharamsala July–August 1976.

It was translated by Losang Gyaltsen and edited by Nicholas Ribush from his notes of the class.
Anuttara Yoga Pledge Card

If you are an Anuttara Yoga initiate you should carry these pledge substances on your body all the time. If that is not possible keep them with your practice text(s). They should not be shown to others. The picture of these substances should be treated as if they were the actual implements and substances.

The substances include the body ornaments, such as the crown, the bone costumes, bracelets, anklets, etc.; and implements like the khatvanga, dorje, bell, mala, damaru, fire puja instruments, action and long life vases, etc.

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