

Introduction to Tantra – Geshe Tenzin Zopa



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Introduction

In relation to Tantra, there are a lot of teachings which are not supposed to be revealed until you have been initiated, until you are already given the permission to practice Guru deity Yoga.

The root text that brought Tantra into Tibet is the Lamp for the path, by Lama Atisha. It serves also as a root text for the teachings on Lam-Rim, teachings on Lojong, teachings on philosophy, teachings on instructional lineage.

At the very end of the text, there are seven verses specifically dedicated to introducing Tantra. As any learner has access to The Lamp for the Path, including the part dedicated to Tantra, there will not be any limitation.

The verses from the Lamp for the Path dedicated to the introduction to Tantra are the verses from 60 to 67. **They are the answer of Lama Atisha to his good disciple Jangchup Wö** who presented seven questions to his Master in relation to the topic.

As for the elaborate hidden meaning or the elaborate interpretive meaning of the Tantra, Lama Tsongkhapa illustrated it in the Great Stages of the Tantric Paths and Grounds.

Through the seven verses composed by Lama Atisha, we are able to apprehend:

- what are the **prerequisites** to enter Tantra
- **how to enter Tantra**
- once you entered Tantra, what are **the practices and commitments to be expected**,
- and then, how to bring about **the benefits or results out of the practice to help all sentient beings in a meaningful way**.

But first of all, **the meaning of Tantra**. The straightforward meaning is the **protection of the mind**: the technique that **protects from ordinariness**: from our ordinary perceptions, from our ordinary mind.

The protection will be able to bring about the divine self, divine others, divine celestial, divine environment: from the ordinary in everything to the divine in everything.

The tool for that is the practice of Tantra.

I. General Prerequisites to be qualified to practice Tantra

In order to be qualified, you must have a correct habitual observation and practice of the teachings of the common path: the three principles aspects of the path: **renunciation, Bodhicitta and emptiness**.

Once you reached maturity on those three principles aspects of the path: knowledge, wisdom, practice and a certain habitual meditative training on, then **you become a “Fortunate One”**. You are qualified to aspire for Tantra.

To acquire this correct knowledge, you have to **study the Lam-Rim**. If you wish to learn the concise, highlighted, but at the same time totally complete version of it, with the lesser wordings, you can refer to Lama Tsongkhapa’s Three principles aspects of the Path.

Without a genuine proper sense of Renunciation towards the ordinariness of Samsara, of karma and delusions, there is **no sense of genuine longing for full enlightenment**. Therefore,

even if you recite mantras, even if you have initiation, even if you have deity yoga practice, it does not bring effective impact or any benefit for the spiritual development.

Without proper renunciation, there is no proper Bodhicitta. Without Bodhicitta, even if you practice powerful mantras, it will not become a beneficial cause of full enlightenment, which is beneficial for yourself and the rest of the sentient beings.

Tantric practices being within the Mahayanic context of the teachings, it has to be directly bringing benefit to all the sentient beings.

Then, **without the Wisdom of Emptiness**, there is **no possibility** to bring about the **actual purification of the ordinariness' impurities**, of both the impure samsaric person's aggregates and its environment.

Without the Wisdom of Emptiness, just by the mantra, you will not be able to do that. **Therefore, without emptiness, there is no meaning in Tantra.**

Those are the reasons why the three principles aspects of the path are the prerequisites.

II. The permission to enter the deity mandala: receiving the "wang" or initiation

Once you are qualified, to have the permission to utilize the yoga in relation to the deity, to enter its mandala (or celestial) and perform its practice, you need to receive an initiation.

In Tibetan it is called Wang: **the qualified Vajra Guru, who carries the lineage of the initiation, will grant you the initiation in order to authorize you to explore the tantric Yogas** (to practice the Tantra).

The initiation is the key to enter the doors of Tantra.

Without receiving initiation, you are able to recite mantras, such as Om Mani Padme Hum, which is also Tantra. It has its benefit. **But, in order to go into the process of the visualization in accordance with the sadhana, you need initiation.**

A. The initiation purpose: to permit and empower to practice Tantra IN ORDER TO BENEFIT SENTIENT BEINGS

The initiation is the entrance to the secret mantra or Vajra Vehicle.

It is aimed **to permit you to learn the detailed practice of the Tantra and empower you with the four activities and many others:**

- the eight different kinds of higher capabilities,
- the eight different kinds of techniques that you can accumulate and make as a conducive condition for the very serious practitioners or yogis, like the Mahasiddhas.

You will be also empowered to perform different activities like **the four activities of the deity:**

- **pacifying,**
- **increasing,**
- **controlling,**
- **wrathful activities.**

So, that is why the initiation is so important because it will lead you to develop all those abilities for the purpose of benefit others.

B. The specificity of Tantra: the union of method and wisdom

All practices of the Great Vehicle may be included within the Six perfections, which in turn are the subsumes of the skillful means and wisdom.

Sutric practices and tantric practices are all used in a complementary way as a main body, or as supplementary practices, to achieve the actual fulfilment of all those practices, including Tantra.

Without the practice of the Six Paramitas, Tantra has no preparatory practice. Tantra has no basis to build on the progress of the tantric practice, even if you have initiation.

So, even if someone is practicing tantra, the common practice of the Bodhicitta (which is the practice of the Six Paramitas) has to be carried on.

In the practice of Highest Yoga Tantra, these two become unified in one taste when the practitioner's very subtle blissful awareness cognizes emptiness.

In the Sutra, the practice of the five first Paramitas are the method aspect, the number six is the wisdom aspect. **They have to be practiced alternatively.** There is no oneness.

But when you practice the six Paramitas **after initiation, in tantric practices**, then **wisdom and method become unified.**

This is known as the wisdom of inseparable great bliss and emptiness: **the earlier five Paramitas will bring about great bliss and the sixth one will bring about emptiness.**

Tantra is called the Vajra Vehicle because of the **indivisible combination** of skillful means and wisdom as a single entity as the **adamantine property of destroying all obstructions.**

The sutric practice has no adamantine property to destroy all obstructions, like the tendencies of the delusions.

In order to overcome the most subtle defilements, you need the supreme antidote: the supreme power of one entity of wisdom and method. Only through Tantra, in particular through Highest Yoga Tantra, you can do that.

So, without Tantra, you will not be able to actualize enlightenment. **In order to become Buddha, you need to practice Tantra.** This is based on Buddha's teachings, and it is like that.

C. Four categories of Tantra

There are four categories of Tantra: **Action Tantra, Performance Tantra, Yoga Tantra, Highest Yoga Tantra.**

In the first three categories, **only the vase initiation** (which includes a number of subsidiary initiations) is bestowed:

- In Action Tantra, the vase initiation consists in **the water and crown initiations.**
- In Performance Tantra, it includes **these two, as well as the vajra, bell and name initiations. These five are called the Vajra disciple initiation.**
- In Yoga Tantra, the vase initiation **may also include the Vajra preceptor initiation.**

So, the earlier two tantric schools, **Performance and Action Tantra, have the Vajra disciple initiations**, but there is **not Vajra preceptor initiation.**

And, when it comes to the third level of the tantric school, the **Yoga Tantra**, on top of whatever initiation you have received before, you may add up another extra, which is **the Vajra preceptor initiation**.

The practice of Highest Yoga Tantra **requires the secret wisdom and word initiations, in addition to the vase initiation**.

From here, you already can understand the defining characteristics among those four schools of Tantra based on the permission and empowerment of the activities.

From there, you can also differentiate: the greater the initiation you receive, the more profound the initiation you receive, the greater the empowerment is.

D. Pledges and commitments

Initiation in Action, Performance or Yoga Tantra imply commitments **to observe the Bodhisattvas vows**.

In the case of Yoga Tantra (when the preceptor initiation is included), and in the case of Highest Yoga Tantra, **a commitment of both observing the Bodhisattvas and Tantric vows** is required. In all cases, there are additional pledges to keep.

Once you receive any Action Tantra or Performance Tantra, then **Bodhisattvas vows become naturally a commitment, whether the Guru gives the commitment or not**. You naturally take the commitment, and you practice.

Sometimes, in accordance with Action and Performance Tantra, we receive Chenrezig initiation, Tara initiation (NB: Tara has Action Tantra as well as Highest Yoga Tantra initiations), Medicine Buddha initiation. We think reciting the mantra is good enough. But no, the Bodhisattvas vows have to be taken as a commitment.

So, **when the preceptor initiation** is included in the third level of Tantra, the Yoga Tantra, then the **Tantric vows** are already part of the commitments. No question about Highest Yoga Tantra.

In addition to the refuge vows, you need to observe the **eighteen root vows and the forty-six secondary vows**. On top of that, you have to observe the tantric vows based on the five Dhyani Buddhas.

Once you receive the Highest Yoga Tantra initiation: like Yamantaka, Vajra Yogini, Heruka, Kalachakra, Guyasamaya, you have to do **six sessions Guru Yoga**, where you will find the entire precepts in the sadhana; besides the **specific sadhanas** that you may need to practice.

As a minimum, you need to uphold those three vows as a reminder, a reference. Then, the six sessions Guru Yoga is something that you must do daily, three times a day, three times at night.

E. The different practices of Yogas: outer and inner Yogas

In the four schools of Tantra, **the main yoga and practice is the external Perfections:**

- such as the cleanliness, completeness, perfectness of all the arrangements (the front generation when you arrange the altar, and its setting, has to be the main focus).
- also as from the practitioner's side: the motivation (Bodhicitta), the speech, physically, everything has to be "clean"
- the environment where you practice has to be very neat, lean, ordered

- all the implements have to be complete according to the sadhana practice.

Action and Performance Tantra are more focused on the outer Yoga. There is an inner Yoga with inner visualization, meditation, but the focus is on the outer Yoga.

As for the Yoga Tantra, it is more focused on the inner Yoga.

Then, in relation to the Highest Yoga Tantra, both are important. But the inner Yoga is specifically more extensive, more advanced, more profound.

F. Yoga with or without signs - Generation and completion stages

In the first three categories of Tantra, **the Yoga with or without signs replaces the stages of generation and completion of the Highest Yoga Tantra.**

One of the special highlights of the Highest Yoga Tantra is the practice of the two generation and completion stages, which is not found for the three earlier schools of tantric practices.

But there is a similar practice. **The Yoga with signs serves as a substitute for the generation stage, Yoga without signs for the completion stage.**

Yoga with or without signs refers to the deity yoga accompanied or not by the understanding of emptiness.

Actualizing the deity without an understanding of emptiness means:

- while doing the front generation of the deity and visualizing the deity above your crown and in your heart,
- or absorption of the deity,

you are doing it while having the faith and conviction, that the deity is really out there, on the altar (statue), or on your crown, and then really melting into your heart.

You do all that **without using the tools of emptiness to actualize the deity.** That is the Yoga without signs.

The Yoga with signs **is using the emptiness tools to actualize the front generation, the self-generation, etc.**

G. Without practicing Highest Yoga Tantra, enlightenment is not possible

It is possible to **reach the 10 Bhumis stage through the practice of the lower classes of the Tantra.**

But, in order to gain enlightenment, one must practice Highest Yoga Tantra. Without it, your further reach is up to ten Bhumis only. It is still within the path of training. You will not reach the path of no-more learning, the state of Buddhahood.

In order to reach the state of Buddhahood, you need to actualize the Highest Yoga Tantra. It is the only way.

The generation and completion stages act as the direct and unique cause to generate the wisdom body of the Buddha and the form body of the Buddha.

H. No rush: when the student is ready the Master appears

One may think we are already aging so quickly. Death is certain, time of death is uncertain. So, you really want to become a Buddha right now, or at least within this lifetime. At the same time, it seems that there is no way to practice Tantra soon.

So, how to do that? The answer is do not worry.

Keep practicing whatever you are able to, but:

- **aspire to realize enlightenment within this very lifetime,**
- **accumulate as extensive merits as possible**
- **and purify as many negativities as possible,**

and whether you are already practicing or not the lower Tantra, or just practicing Sutra, it does not matter.

As soon as you reach the 10 Bhumis, when your merits are almost complete, your purification is almost accomplished, **then Buddha Vajradhara voluntarily will descend to be your Guru to initiate you, all the initiations right there will be actualized.**

Therefore, it is **safer** to do that, rather than rushing to find a Guru, who may be not qualified, or rushing and later break the Guru-disciple relationship Samaya, that would be a disaster.

Rather adopt the steady way. And when you are ready Buddha will come for you.

But, if you think you have all the qualities described by Aryadeva in the Four Hundred Stanzas about the ripen disciple (cf. later) and all the prerequisites to practice Tantra; then, well go and look for the Guru accordingly with what the Lam Rim explains. Not like “a dog meeting fresh meat”: without considering if it can be poisoned or not.

Even the Guru-disciple relationship, you should develop it in accordance with the Lam Rim, that is the safest. Then, timely, you will get help by a teacher. If not, Buddha Vajradhara himself will come to you.

III. Who is suitable to receive an initiation?

The verses 60 and 61 define who, in general, is suitable to receive an initiation.

Those are the one who, **with the intention of creating the great stores of merits and insights necessary to achieve enlightenment, wish to help others:**

- **by developing the four activities of the deity**
- **and the miraculous powers or yogic conducive conditions.**

A. The four activities of the deity

Verse 60

If you wish to create with ease

The collections for enlightenment

Through activities of pacification,

Increase and so forth, gained by the power of mantra,

This verse of the Lamp for the Path is roughly talking about **the purpose of practicing Tantra: creating the three great countless eons of merits, by not taking three great countless eons of time.**

With the Yoga initiated through the sadhana, you are able to fulfil that without having to physically accumulate extensive Yogas. **You can complete the two collections of merits, and you will actualize enlightenment.**

For example, once you received the initiation, you can do **the commitment retreat and perform the four activities of the deity activities** accomplished through the power of Tantra, such as **fire pujas**: pacifying fire puja, increasing fire puja, controlling fire puja, wrathful fire puja.

After that, you can apply those four activities to many other activities, which are directly enhancing the realizations on your practice, as well as using those four activities **to bring effective skillful tools to bring benefits to the sentient beings.**

Peaceful activity involves mainly focusing on **pacifying sickness and interferences and negatives. We may do this for others or for ourselves as part of our service to others.**

Through the **activity of pacification**, with the power of the deity yoga self-generated as Yamantaka, Vajra Yogini, or whatever deity, you are able to consecrate all the ingredients of the fire puja. It has unbelievable benefits. Then, you create the celestial mandala of the deity which will bring one of the most effective purifications of the negativities.

Increasing activity involves mainly focusing on **gathering** what is needed as **conductive conditions** in life such as good health, long life, prosperity, merits, positivities and good qualities. With the **increasing fire puja**, you will be able to accumulate immeasurable merits (that is why it is called “increasing”) with just one activity.

Controlling activities mainly focus on **gain control by attracting anything that is required for virtues.** Activities to accumulate capabilities to be able to subdue other beings and make them conducive for virtues, peace and dharma: to win over those who are hostile to the peace and the dharma etc.

Then, you will gain through the practice of the **controlling fire puja** the **control of all the conducive conditions** required to swiften your path to enlightenment. You are able to **control those others who are in the wrong path** to hook them back to the right path. It is like a service to the sentient beings. You can do so effectively.

And they are many beings who are deeply tormented by delusions and negative karma. There are no way the earlier three activities are able to bring benefit to them. **Wrathful activity is mainly focus on subduing those of extreme, intense, great and subtle negativities and obstacles to life and practices.**

You may need to perform a **wrathful fire puja**, overwhelmed by compassion (like Guru Padmasambhava and all the deities).

When you look at the deities, under their feet, there are animals, men, or women, lying down. They are beings that are so wicked that it is really difficult to tame them, to turn them into attendants to the deity or into Dharma protectors to your Dharma activities.

Most of the Dharma protectors have been transformed through wrathful activities to turn them into helpers to the Dharma, and in a skillful way to liberate them.

This is done **gradually and skillfully, so that interest and affinity develop of their own accord.** Such activities like controlling are **not exercised to exploit or manipulate others,** but because the **virtues and dharma teachings are antidotes and medicine that cure the suffering and its causes and brings well-being of sentient beings.**

Wrathful activities are mainly used towards those who remain harmful and cannot be restrained in any other way.

We too, from the very beginning, can do some activities according to our abilities.

And those of you who already have received initiations, who already are getting into those practices, you may find amazing impacts, very powerful, very effective.

B. The miraculous powers or yogic conducive conditions

Verse 61

And also through the force of the eight

And other great attainments like the “good pot”--

If you want to practice secret mantra,

As explained in the action and performance Tantras

Through these activities, we actualize miraculous powers or yogic conducive conditions such as the "good pot" out of which we can take whatever (and whenever what) we wish and whose contents never run dry. This pot of plenty can perform its task even though it is small and light.

There are many kinds of powerful attainments, and different versions exist of the eight mentioned here.

a. The inspiring example of the Great Mahasiddha Geshela Lama Konchog

There are different conducive conditions you will be able to gather and develop called yogic conducive conditions, like the “good pot”.

In a small vase, collect certain substances according to the tantric sadhana practice. Consecrate it. Then, you will need neither food, nor any resources. That is how the Yogis can remain in caves, without the need of kilos of rice and flours.

My late Master, Geshe Lama Konchog acquired all these activities and all the benefits coming from them. Many witnessed that with their own ordinary eyes, it was not just legends.

Geshela was capable to live with just a little bit of tsampa, taking it just little by little. But then, one day, it was finished. That night, when he went on meditation, he had a dream, or a vision of his Guru giving him dough of tsampa squeezed and mixed with a bit of butter, and sweet. The next morning, in front of his door, bags of tsampas had been delivered. He did not know who brought them.

Throughout his twenty-six years of strict retreat, he lived in retreat places where there was nobody. When he was in Milarepa’s cave, then later in Tsum Valley, at least for fifteen years, he did not have any human contact at all.

The Tummo Fire. Geshe Lama Konchog was living in empty caves. There is a cave you can visit if you go to the village. Even in a sunny day, you sit there, the wind is unbearable. One can imagine

for four, five months of freezing during the winter. And for someone who does not even have clothes. He lived there.

He also lived under a Juniper tree for three years. There was no house, no protection. The villagers witnessed that. There was snow everywhere and, in the middle, there was Geshe Lama Konchog.

All that thanks to the **chulen practice**, or extracting nutrition, which is another great benefit. Some people make pills, some flour substance. Geshe Lama Konchog in his cave used the inhalation of the air and sustained the body with that. He did not even have to rely on tsampa.

Because of the chulen, your body becomes radiant, as if you had eaten healthy food. He had a huge body. He looked magnificent. During many years he was not cutting his hair. The villagers who look after the cows saw him and chased him thinking he was a Yeti, a big monkey. They used slingshot.

Then, there is **quick feet**. If it was just one person who saw that and reported it, you may have thought that person was confused, but fifteen of them (some of them are still alive). They simultaneously saw he was doing that. There was no way that mountain can be crossed, and he was so quick (gesture similar of flying). These are all yogis' conducive conditions.

That is why the yogis, whenever they are attached to a certain place, they leave. They renounce. On the contrary, when they feel that certain places are impossible to reach (for example it is impossible to cross the river to go on the other side), or when it would take too long for common people to go there; they purposely chose those places to practice.

Once their meditation wisdom sees the benefit of such places to enhance their practice, they go there. And the moment they thought about it they already reach there. They almost carry wind like fast walking power. This is what it means quick feet.

Then, there are also another quality **to be able to make pills**. I am sure there are many other great Lamas, they have the same skill. But Geshe Lama Konchog, I used to live with, I was his attendant, so what I know I can claim that.

One of the eight great attainments you can achieve is to make **nectar pills**. In order to make nectar pills, you would use three hundred different medicine herbs. Just to remember exactly each of them it is not easy. I saw the notes. It is very complicated. Not many people know how to do that. It is very rare.

On the request of Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche, long time ago at Kopan, Geshela made huge bags and offered them to Rinpoche. Rinpoche has been giving them all over the world to his students. Sometimes he gave two pieces, three pieces, for many many years. Such nectar pills carry the power.

They put in black tea, or maybe alcohol, saffron water, whatever. If not just nectar pill and they taste with the left ring finger every morning. That also brings glow to your body, your energy. It purifies the karma, the contaminated impurities that are attached to your five aggregates.

From this one pot plenty can be performed, even though it is small and light. Some they purposely carry in a vase even smaller than that (gesture of a few centimeters). Best if you can made out of precious gems like gold, silver, copper brass (the most common one).

Those really advanced tantric practitioners, they are expert in all this. Especially if someone wants to be a tantric Guru, you need to be expert in all this to really be an absolute tantric Guru.

Another quality is to make **chulen pills** as a substitute to the food. Due to the power of the mantra and the tantric sadhana practice you are able to bless the flour and it becomes a nutritious supplement to the body. Not the same as the one we can buy made by corporations (they carry a lot of limitations).

Even by practicing Action and Performance Tantras you are able to do that. No question about the Highest Yoga Tantra. I think Geshe Lama Konchog, even before he went into retreat, must have already developed all those Yogis qualities when he was studying in Monasteries. Because by then, he even had already all the resources of the common Tantra. When he was ready with all that, that is when he went on a strict retreat.

b. Key factors to gather those attainments

If you explore more some of the details of the tantric treatises, even in relation to Kriya and Yoga Tantra, you will get into all those details and how to do about it. What we are exposing now it is shorter designed sadhanas for us to practice and we can be contented with that. We did not really manage to explore more elaborate teachings. Because of that, for many of us, we did not know about all those attainments. Therefore, **knowing is one of the conducive factors**.

Then, another factor is that you need to **keep the pure Samaya of the sadhana**, especially doing repeated retreats, accumulating immense of numberless of the mantras. A **genuine sense of the faith and conviction towards the front generation and self-generation** is another key factor.

c. The eight attainments

There are many kinds of powerful attainments and different versions of the eight mentioned here.

The first one is the pill: the nectar pill. Nowadays you can get dutsi cho ma from Dharamshala which is under the guidance and the consecration of His Holiness, **and mani pills**. If you are able to obtain dutsi cho ma or mani pills, take even just one piece every day. In the monasteries, in Tibetan communities, sometimes when you have the flu, you take that, you do not take flu medicine. And it is very powerful in many ways.

If you have some many pills for some time, as long as not it is not molded, or spoiled, you can still take them. If it is dry then, there is no expiry dates, I think. Normally it is good to keep it in the fridge since we have different type of weather. Then you can take one.

The main thing is that it will purify the contamination of the body, speech and mind by the karma and delusions. It is one of the more powerful Yoga.

Sincere practitioners of tantra perform the Yogas of sleeping, waking up, and tasting the nectar (containing nectar pills in it) daily, such as those sincere Vajrayogini practitioners (it is part of the daily practices of the 11 Yogas). After performing the waking up yoga each morning, one takes a nectar pill, made from special ingredients and consecrated through rituals, to purify the body speech and mind.

When such nectar pills are in short: supply one pill, either dissolved in a small quantity of saffron water or either in black tea or alcohol and, after it has been blessed by the inner offering blessings accordingly to the sadhana; a drop of this solution is placed on the tongue to taste it to purify and gain blessings.

Due to taking such blessings and living practicing such inner Yogas, I witness even very old retreaters residing in remote and harsh weather places had a special aura and radiance and were strong although they did not exercise or consume nutritious foods.

The pill is prepared from the required ingredients and activated through the ritual and the mantra recitation. Taken daily it makes us resplendent, radiant, strong and energetic; enabling us to accomplish our aspirations and develop higher perceptions. It helps if you want to meditate on emptiness.

Mental accomplishment come easily if you are in a good physical condition. A poor physical condition obstructs our realizations and brings obstacles. **It will not just improve the meditational accomplishments, mental accomplishments, but also will help with the physical conditions.**

The second attainment is the Eye ointment. When the activated ointment is applied, it makes us clairvoyant, enables us to see treasure hidden underground, in the rocks, over the mountains etc and to exert control over anything we see and know conducive places to practices, know others intend disposition to benefit others skillfully, accordingly with what is best for others benefits etc. You can apply to the eye to gain a certain degree of clairvoyance, to be able to see your past lives or able to see future times.

There are specific dedicated practices to create such ointment. Bless some plain water, saffron water, or water with added substance, even the consecrated vase water or the bath offering; and apply it to the eye. You can drink a bit.

Then, the **third one is the sword, or knife**, you consecrate it. Then, when you hold the sword that is how you will be transported very swiftly. It is different from the quick feet. This one will even enable you to fly. When activated, we merely need to grasp its hilt and are **instantly transported to any places one wish to be, including to pure land or celestial realm** we wish to visit, faster than any air travel.

Then, **the fourth one.** There are certain mantras you recite, then blow on your whole body. With this one you will specifically blow on your feet **to go underground.** You are able to walk freely underground, no need to use channels, you can move like a fish. You can walk through walls and mountains.

The **fifth is flight and the capacity to use space by levitating and walking in the air** for the benefits of one's practices and service to other beings.

The sixth is the feat of making ourselves and others invisible for protections from harm givers including of dangerous wild animals. You apply an ointment to your eye, your feet or your body, and you become invisible.

When I was in Malaysia, I wanted to go to the shopping mall. I disguised and tried to use this technique. I did not want for the students of the center to see me, so, I checked. It did not work. They caught me: "oh, Geshela you are here? I thought you were in the center, but you are here".

The seventh ability to relied on "taking the essence," Chulen which helps sustain nutrition such as food that we need **for the body to sustain. It helps protects from illness and bestows immortality or gain enough life spend that requires to complete the path.**

There are different forms of this practice, not necessarily all of them require such a high level of accomplishment. Even these days there are practitioners who subsisted during long periods of

retreat time on flowers, or mineral essences. Sustaining on Air Chulen requires high levels of concentration and tantric capabilities.

Number eight is quick feet which allows practitioners to move at a great speed to reach swiftly favorable places for practices, or to be in the service of others' needs.

There is a story at the Rachen Nunnery. One nun was seriously sick. A group of individuals went to look for Geshe Lama Konchog. At that time, he was doing retreat in front of the Ganesh Himal, on the other side, behind the jungle. It would take a whole day to reach there, maybe even two days.

Before that, Geshe Lama Konchog had been introduced to the villagers, so the people knew he had powerful healing powers. So, they searched for him and ask for his help. Geshela said "ok go first, I will come". They left. After maybe half an hour, they saw Geshe Lam Konchog who was now actually coming from the opposite. Geshela said "I did my job" and went back to his cave.

When the group finally arrived at the Nunnery, they were told that Geshela Lama Konchog had come in-between at the Nunnery, healed the nun and left within that period of half an hour. This is real, this happened within our lifetime. Geshela used all these capabilities.

d. How to actualize those attainments

Stable accomplishment of the insights associated with the practices of generation stages of deity yoga give rise to these powerful attainments.

Even if we are unable to reach this stage, we can accomplish similar to them by first receiving initiation of the karmic affinity highest yogic tantric deity. Then:

- without breaking the commitment given by the Guru,
- and by doing the practices associated with the mandala into which we have been initiated,
- and doing retreat on the sadhana and reciting the related mantras the required number of times based on the commitment (a minimum of 100.000 times, sometimes/then 200.000 times...) including performing the concluding ritual fire pujas,
- keeping pure Samaya related to the guru and the deity on the bases of keeping pure morality, stable concentration and sharp Wisdom of Emptiness.

After this, we do the practice associated with the particular powerful attainment we wish to gain. That is how you actualize them.

Although the ultimate purpose of Tantra is not practiced for that, these attainments can help us to experience **physical and mental well-being and** have all the **conductive conditions to actualize realizations** on the path with ease. And also, being **able to work effortlessly and spontaneously for the benefit of others and swiftly reach enlightenment.**

If this is what we wish, if we wish rapidly to complete the great stores of positive energy and insights, and are prepared to practice the four categories of tantra in the prescribed way, we are ready to enter the Vajra Vehicle.

C. How we should set up about gaining initiation

Verse 62

Then, to receive the preceptor initiation,

You must please an excellent spiritual teacher

Through service, valuable gifts and the like

As well as through obedience.

This is how **to receive an initiation**: we must first find and, through all our physical, verbal and mental activities, please the excellent spiritual teacher from whom we hope to receive initiation. Why? **Our accomplishment of powerful attainments depends on the relationship we establish with our spiritual teacher.** We therefore **need to do what we can to nurture it.**

This is about **pleasing the Guru through thoughts and actions**, and **specifically please the Guru through your practice of the Dharma teachings and through your devotion.**

“Being obedient” means listening, **doing according with the teaching the Guru has taught you. And that is the gift.**

If you have material gift, then yes you can offer. But that is not the main thing. And from the Guru’s side he or she never seeks material gift, never seeks attention or praises. But Guru always has expectations from the disciple to practice the teachings they preach.

The best gift is the practice, like Milarepa. He has nothing materially to offer to Guru, except his practice. That is the supreme gift.

D. The preceptor initiation

The preceptor initiation invests us with **the authority to rule the kingdom of the teachings. It presages the day when we will embody the teachings ourselves and have the confidence and spiritual authority to perform the activity associated with them.**

One cannot reveal the Highest Yoga Tantra without receiving the Vajra preceptor’s initiation, which is mainly referring to the **vase initiation and its nine different kinds of initiations.**

In the same way, **without receiving the Vajra preceptor’s initiation, you cannot practice Highest Yoga Tantra, even if you may be able to practice the earlier three schools of Tantra:** Action Tantra, Performance Tantra, Yoga Tantra.

In Highest Yoga Tantra, it is part of the Vase initiation, which permits us to practice the stages of generation. **It is the only tool that will enable you to practice the generation stage.**

The secret, and wisdom and words initiations will qualify you to practice the stages of the completion. So, in order to become a Buddha, we have to receive them all.

a. The generation and completion stages

The practices of the two stages of the Tantra stop the ordinary occurrence of the death, and intermediate stage and rebirth.

Central to the practice of the stages of generation, it is a process by which we vividly imagine **substituting the wisdom truth body of a Buddha for death, the enjoyment body for the intermediate state, and the emanation body for rebirth.**

It is called the stages of generation because we develop and enhance this process which prepares and ripens us for the stages of the completion. The generation stage is meant to lead you to the completion stage.

The completion stage is to bring about the result of the absolute completeness of all the qualities of enlightenment.

So, when you are practicing the completion stage, even just by doing the Yoga, even based on the day-to-day sadhana practice, it helps to purify ordinary birth, ordinary death, ordinary intermediate state. **It means that the karma to be reborn will be purified, and also to purify the results of the past Samsara, the past karma and delusions, the present contamination also has to be purified.**

The stage of the completion is a yoga practiced by one who is still learning, in which the energy wind is drawn into, rest and dissolve within the central energy channel through the power of meditation. It has **five stages**:

- **isolation of the body and speech**
- **isolation of the mind,**
- **illusory body,**
- **the actual clear light**
- **and the union of the two truths.**

b. Death process – clear light of death, intermediate state and rebirth

At the end of the natural dissolution of the four physical elements (at the end of the death process), **and the increasingly subtle states of the awareness** (that occurs as we are dying in an ordinary way), **the most subtle level of the consciousness enters the so-called clear light of death.**

All coarse conventional appearances have stopped and only a vacuity appears.

So, **the four elements dissolve, the eighty conventional thoughts dissolve, then the three kinds of appearances (white, red, near black appearances), then the clear light.**

When this clear light comes to cease, we are in the intermediate state: **the indestructible drop opens, the clear light mind comes out from the indestructible drop**, right there, at the very next moment, **you reach the intermediate state.**

The **very subtle energy wind** that acted as a mount for the clear light consciousness, **and the clear light consciousness** also itself, are **respectively the main and cooperative causes for our intermediate state body**, which is not the body of flesh and blood that can be impeded by the normal obstructions.

Eventually our intermediate state's existence ends when conception takes place, after which coarser physical and mental elements once more develop.

c. How to take them (death, intermediate state, rebirth) as a path

After death, there are seven times, or chances, to experience the clear light. Therefore, **each of the seven deaths of the intermediate state gives the opportunity to actualize enlightenment with the sambhogakaya form of the Buddha's body.**

So, that is why practitioner who are **well-trained through the yoga of sleeping, dreaming, waking up, are able to easily utilize the actual clear light onto the path.** If you are good in the yoga of sleeping, then you will be very easily able to actualize the dream onto the path to actualize sambhogakaya.

Then, if you have **well exercised in the yoga of waking up**, then when you reborn again, **then you are reborn with all the conducive conditions to carry on your path**, tantric practices and within this lifetime, **before even passing away, you may be able to achieve rainbow body, illusory body of the Buddha.**

These three stages are compared to sleep, dreaming, and waking up. As we fall asleep, a dissolution, like the one which precedes the clear light of death, momentarily occurs. All coarser forms of awareness temporarily stop and only subtle mental consciousness is active. **This is the clear light of the deep sleep.**

The energy wind which supports this awareness acts as the main cause for the dream body which manifests as we begin to dream. This dream body is extremely mobile and not subject to the obstructions as is our ordinary body. **When we stop dreaming, it merges into our subtle energy wind and mind.** We then wake up and resume our ordinary physical and mental activities.

d. Practicing deity yoga as a path

So, that is why when we do deity yoga:

- **we die, dissolve into the Dharmakaya**

- **when we transit from the Dharmakaya, from the clear light to the intermediate state, we are the Sambhogakaya**

- **when we wake up, we wake up into Nirmanakaya.**

Not an ordinary Tenzin Zopa. The moment you wake up, you are the deity. It could be Tara, it could be Chenrezig...Not one groggy Tenzin Zopa looking for breakfast, not like that. But Tara, Chenrezig, Vajra Yogini looking for nectar.

During the stage of completion, the meditator cultivates what is corresponding to death, the intermediate state and rebirth as means to stop them. These three are known as the basic wisdom, enjoyment and emanation bodies of the Buddha.

The three bodies of the path: **in the form of clear light, illusory body and the reentry of the illusory body into the old body which acts like a jewel casket; are cultivated in order to attain the resultant three bodies of the enlightened beings.**

So, do we exercise in the three kayas during our day-to-day session based on the sadhana? To actualize the resultant three kayas, **we have to practice now.** At the resultant time, when the actual death, intermediate state and rebirth happen, **we will be able to take them as a path, as the meeting of the father-mother and the son.**

Through actualizing isolation of the body, speech and mind, **the illusory body and the unperfected union** (the stage of the dissolution that ordinary occurs at death), takes place **in a controlled way** (as a result of meditation), and **the analogous and actual clear light manifest, which replaces the clear light of death.**

In each practice, this occurs through drawing the energy wind into the center psychic channel and by allowing them to rest and dissolve there, so that the exalted wisdom of the inseparable great bliss and emptiness arises.

The process becomes progressively refined until the wisdom truth body of an enlightened being is attained. The manifestation of the impure and pure illusory bodies corresponds to and stops our birth as an intermediate state being.

The energy wind on which the analogous clear light awareness rides, and the analogous clear light awareness itself, serve respectively as a main and cooperative causes for the impure illusory body.

When we arise from the analogous clear light, the impure illusory manifests. **Eventually through prolonged practices, the actual clear light is attained. Once we arise from that, the pure illusory body manifests.** It is pure in that all the obstructions forms born by the disturbing emotions and their seeds have been eliminated.

When we enter the clear light again, **we attain the unperfected union of the clear light and illusory body, since the pure illusory body is now part of our continuum.** By exercising that, eventually, you become **purier and purer**, less and less obstructions. That is how **gradually you are able to achieve the resultant three bodies of the Buddha.**

e. The importance of practicing again and again

So, that is why, doing the sadhana, doing retreats is so important. Doing daily sadhana is a one time a day training. If you do retreat, you do at least four sessions, **a very concentrated habitual training happens.**

So, keep repeatedly doing that, then when the actual natural death comes, when the natural intermediate state will come in our way, when the natural rebirth will come in our way; all those three will experience the resultant impact of the training in the three kayas we are doing now.

f. Understanding the illusory body

There are twelve analogies that help us to gain the understanding of the illusory body. Even such an understanding is said to be both extraordinarily beneficial and fortunate: the illusory body is like a phantom created by the magician.

Although it looks like a real body and is complete in all details; it is a product of energy wind and mind. So, even when we visualize, we should visualize like that while we are training now. When we will actually achieve it, it will be like that, not a tangible thing.

Like the moon whose reflection appears simultaneously in countless pools of water, then **the illusory body can appear in many different places to many different beings.** So, that is why, during the sadhana, you can manifest into many different levels of beings including Dakas, Dakinis; and **be able to go and make service to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and accumulate merits in the 10 directions Buddhas and deities' mandalas,** while maintaining the divine of your own deity. You can also manifest numberless emanation of your own deity, **being able to be different emanations to different beings and benefiting them according to their mental dispositions.**

It is like a person's shadow because it isn't flesh and blood. Like a shimmering mirage it is in continual motion and like a dream body it **can be moved anywhere, independently of your coarse body.** Although the illusory body, and the body which is the maturation of past actions, belong to the same person and are part of the same continuum, **they appear to be distinct like the voice and its echo.**

In the case of the pure illusory body, this analogy differs slightly, just as an echo is separated from the voice that created it, **the pure illusory body can leave behind the body which is its dwelling place**. The illusory body appears with its complete mandala, namely its own environment and retinue, just as the whole phantom city of the smell-eaters appears.

It is like an optical illusion: for though it is one, it can appear as many. Like a rainbow, it is five-colored but not solid. In the way that a flash of lightning appears from the cloud, it appears from the ordinary body; or in the case of the pure illusory body from the emanated body, which resembles a jewel casket. It arises from the clear light emptiness like a fish leaping out of clear water.

Inasmuch as its limbs, members and all its parts are complete, it is like the mirror image of Buddha Vajradhara. Of all these, the analogy of the dream body, the closest parallel. The clear light is comparable to sleep; and the reentry of the illusory body into the old body, is comparable to our dream body re-entering our ordinary body.

The return of the impure or pure illusory body into the old body (which acts as a precious container concealing it), counteracts ordinary birth. **The old body (which can be perceived by all) resumes practices for the attainment of higher path and activities for others' benefit**, such as teaching, etc.

This is the mindset that you need to carry when you go to sleep, and hopefully that will lead to the dream yoga, and when you wake up at least you are awake, so then if you have the idea now you start to think as mentioned before.

IV. What happens during the initiation

Then, Lama Atisha says:

Verse 63

Through full bestowal of the preceptor initiation

By a spiritual teacher who is pleased,

You are purified of all wrong-doing

And become fit to gain powerful attainments.

The Vase initiation in the context of the Yoga Tantra and Highest Yoga Tantra begins with the Flower Garland Initiation. All living beings have a disposition for enlightenment.

A. The Five Dhyani Buddhas lineages (and our specific karmic affinity with one of them)

This initiation determines our specific disposition by indicating the lineage of the Victorious Ones to which we have the particular affinity.

Thereby, providing the useful guidance of the spiritual teacher on how to take care of us, this is followed by the five initiations related to the five Victorious Ones.

These are the nine initiations we were talking about in relation to the Vase initiation.

The water initiation is associated with Akshobhya who embodies the purifications of the water elements, which is one of our physical constituents. It prepares us to **eliminate conceptions of the true existence and the stains which hide our particular dispositions**.

Then, the **crown initiation** is given. Related to the **Ratnasambhava** who embodies the purifications of the Earth element, **it implements the potential to become a Victorious One of the lineage to which we belong, creates the predisposition to gain the crown protection of the Buddha and to be crowned by the head of the lineage.** From the five Dhyani Buddhas, it is the crown Buddha.

The accompanying **scarf initiation** prepares us to **uproot completely the inimical disturbing emotions. The Vajra initiation** establishes predispositions to accomplish the Buddha's wisdom of inseparable bliss and emptiness. It is associated with **Amitabha**, whose enlightened great bliss arise from the desire and represents purified desire.

The **bell initiation** predisposes us to **accomplish the Buddhas' speech** from which flow the 84,000 teachings. Since using their speech to give teaching, it is the supreme activity of the Buddhas. This initiation is associated with **Amoghasiddhi**, the embodiment of the enlightened activities.

Next is the **name initiation** which establishes the **causes for attaining the name of the enlightened beings.** Since the name is sound, and therefore a form, this initiation is associated with **Vairochana**, embodiment of the purified aggregates of the form.

A series of the individual permission rituals related to each of the five Victorious Ones, **to permit us to turn the wheel of the teachings pertaining to the lineage**, is performed either before or after the actual preceptor initiation.

B. How to visualize (and what?) during the initiation

So, during the initiation if you know that this is happening, then you are able to go along and be able to receive a proper initiation. Otherwise, we will not know what is happening. In each case, the students visualize themselves as a Victorious, like the main deity. **One visualizes receiving the particular implement that the Victorious One holds.**

The preceptor initiation upholds us with the potential to take care of our own disciple. **We visualize ourselves as a white Buddha Vajradhara in example on the throne escorted by the Lion at the East door of the Mandala.** Except the identity of the deity, most of the deities has similar visualization of their Mandalas.

In preparation for this initiation, we receive three tokens denoting commitments associated with the enlightened body, speech and mind that we must keep: the blessings of the body, speech and mind.

The first is **the vajra as the mental pledge to always hold the wisdom of the bliss and emptiness**, the definite vajra. The second is **the bell as a verbal pledge reminding us to never be separated from the understanding of the emptiness**, which is the bell sound teaches. Everything taught by the Enlightened One is intended to lead to this. The third is **the consort as the physical pledge** symbolized by the embracing of the consort to remind us **to never stop imagining ourselves as the deity and consort.** This is about the wisdom consort.

This token differs in the preceptor initiation during the empowerment in Yoga Tantra. In Highest Yoga Tantra those who hold celibacy vows have to do visualization only.

Holding those three pledges, we are enthroned and invested with the authority over the kingdom of the teachings. As Buddha Vajradhara embracing his consort, we experience the wisdom of the inseparable bliss and emptiness. This is the actual preceptor initiation.

It is followed by the general permission to teach. **We are handed the wheel to encourage us in this, the conch to blow to signify the giving of discourses and the volume of Tantra to hold while making the hand gestures of teaching** to symbolizes how to inspire students to practice.

We receive **the bell and the ring** with our left-hand denoting that we will proclaim the teaching. The attendant will come around and pass the bell, pass the vajra, pass the crown, etc. We must have that kind of understanding and visualization, the symbolism, especially the teachings of emptiness.

We are then **given the eye ointment to cure the ignorance and to open the eye of our intelligence to the mental image of the emptiness**, and **the arrow to signify the direct perceiving insight into reality**; the **mirror represents the illusional appearance** of all the manifestations of the bliss and emptiness after meditating equipoise on emptiness.

This is followed by **the Mantra initiation** to enhance the accomplishment of the four activities and the ultimate Mantra, the wisdom of bliss and emptiness. During the initiation, the Guru will give the **oral transmission of the Mantra**.

Then, **we take the Vajra and hold it to our heart and remembering that if we wish to gain the highest powerful attainment, we must never forsake the contract of holding the ultimate vajra**, the five kind of enlightenment wisdom in the form of the undifferentiated bliss and emptiness.

C. The prediction of our enlightenment and the end of the initiation

To give us confidence, we are told we have the capacity to understand the emptiness of the three realms.

Then after that, predictions are read by the Guru, predicting you will definitely achieve realizations, you will become enlightened. The prediction is made concerning our own enlightenment.

Initially by initiating in the five Dhyani Buddhas, especially during a Highest Yoga Tantra initiation, you have to go and offer the flower, offer the stick, by then you already know which family you belong.

Then, **when the prediction happens at the end, you know you will enlighten through that family. Once you know that, then if you relate your practice closer to that lineage**, it could be Amitabha lineage, Ratnasambhava lineage...**then it becomes more effective to your practice**.

Generally, we go there, we look at it and after that we do not know which kind of family we belong to, isn't it? I do like that. To relieve our discouragement and fear we learn that enlightenment is possible even while we enjoy the five objects of senses.

So, even while we are in Samsara, enlightenment is possible. **So, when we come out from initiation, this is the confidence we have to bring back with us**.

This concludes the vase initiation, which purifies all the physical stains, empower us to practice the stages of generation and implements a predisposition to attain the emanation body of the enlightened beings. It is given using the mandala made from the color power to paint on the cloth. During the initiation, they use either physically 3D, or sand made, or drawn on the cloth.

D. What happens after receiving the initiation

When the spiritual teacher to whom we have cultivated good relationships has bestowed the preceptor initiation, we can by **instinctively practice the stages of the generation and completion and get rid ourselves of the disturbing attitudes and emotions, as well as their imprints**, and thus stop all causes and subtle forms of sufferings. We thereby **gain the Supreme and Uncommon powerful attainments enlightenment in this very life**.

If we are unable to do this, we can nevertheless accomplish what are called **the common and uncommon powerful attainments** in keeping our capacities and inclinations by receiving initiations, practicing the stages of generation during the required retreat and other rituals, the least of the attainments, the ability to perform pacifying, increasing, powerful and wrathful activities can be accomplished.

Tantric practitioners of the highest capacity attain the illusory body by practicing the stages of generation and completion. Enlightenment is certain in the very lifetime in which the illusory body is attained.

Practitioners of intermediate capacity achieve physical, verbal and mental isolation at the very end of this life. Through their great familiarity with the practice, they are able to use the clear light of death, the last stage of the death process, transform it into the clear light of the path and thereby sustain direct perception of emptiness. They pass through the remaining stages and **achieve enlightenment in the intermediate state**, which they enter manifesting an illusory body.

Those of the least capacity, through their knowledge of the death process and their repeated familiarization of it in meditation, can recognize the clear light of death, and though unable to enter into direct perception of emptiness; they can nevertheless meditate on it and visualize this to be the wisdom truth body of enlightenment.

Capable of maintaining awareness when they enter the intermediate state, they visualize they are manifesting an illusory body and that this is the enjoyment body of an enlightened being. They are aware when conception takes place and visualize that they are actualizing the emanation body form of an enlightened being.

Through their past familiarity with tantric practice, they will regain a close connection with it in their new rebirth, meet with past karmic connected spiritual teacher, again receive initiations, continue to practice and will achieve enlightenment after several lifetimes.

This is merely a brief introduction of some important features of tantra. It makes no detailed mention here of the actual practices involved until one is granted necessary permission of initiation in the practices.

V. What is the real purpose of receiving initiation and practicing Tantra?

Most of us like to receive initiations. Many do so just for common blessings and for the sense of common attainments such as for protection, prosperity, best of health and longevity etc. What is the real purpose of receiving initiation and practicing Tantra? It shouldn't be for just common blessings and powers.

It should be for great attainments. To actualized sharpest greatest and swiftest tools of path to fulfil ultimate benefits of all beings up to full enlightenment in shortest time, for that we must take the tantric path which is swiftest way.

For that we need permission (initiation) to do this and **our mindstream must be properly prepared and receptive through well training in common preparatory practices** (three principles aspect of path / Lamrim) **and uncommon** (preliminary / Ngodro) **practices**.

By fully participating in taking initiation of the deity we receive that permission and are made receptive of all the attainments up to full enlightenment swiftest way.

Tantra is the highest aspect of Mahayana practice. Its ultimate aim is the attainment of the form bodies, which an enlightened being manifests for the effective and complete benefits of others, and the attainment of the wisdom body, which an enlightened being manifests for the complete benefits of self.

Before undertaking it, we must embody qualities which are acquired by studying and engaging in what is generally practiced by those of initial, intermediate and great capacity.

Even if we cannot gain profound realizations, it is important to have unmistakable and clear understanding of the complete path of the common vehicle taught by the Buddha and which is what explained in the great works of Lama Atisha, like The Lamp for the path.

Then, we can be sure then that we have enough and strong proper foundation, which can stand with the supremely heavy weighted complex path of the resulted Dharma of the Tantra. **If we confine ourselves on some little and partial knowledge and short time little training on common path, we will never gain complete and ultimate benefits of Tantra.**

As a firm foundation one must gain unshakable knowledge and practices in common path of Lamrim:

- in order to gain and sustain unshakable faith and conviction from the start to the end result in triple gems, to the Guru and its instructions,
- and able to keep the Samaya, which are like the string that holds the different stages of the beads, that complete the realization on the stages of the path, up to full enlightenment effectively and swiftly.

A. Tantra should be approached with great care and skillfulness

Atisha now discusses who should and should not receive the secret and wisdom initiations of highest yoga tantra and whether, if one has not received them, it is permissible to give or listen to explanations of Tantra. He makes it clear that tantra should be approached with great care and skillfulness.

The secret, wisdom and word initiations empower us to practice the stage of completion.

The secret initiation is given by means of a mandala of the conventional "altruistic intention" and consists of tasting the combined white and red "altruistic intention," the secret substances generated through the union of the spiritual master and consort.

This is the essence held by the mandala. When the substances are referred to as the red and white "altruistic intention," the name of their result is being attributed to them. **They are the basis for great bliss which then becomes the wisdom of inseparable bliss and emptiness, the ultimate altruistic intention in the context of the Vajra Vehicle.**

The initiation purifies all **verbal stains**, empowers us to accomplish the **illusory body** and establishes predispositions to attain **the enjoyment body** of an enlightened being.

The wisdom initiation is given by means of a vulva mandala. The vulva is the source of great bliss, the essence held by the mandala. Since this has the potential to produce the highest wisdom, it is called the wisdom initiation.

Having received a consort with whom we enter into union, we experience the wisdom of inseparable bliss and emptiness. This initiation purifies **mental stains**, empowers us to meditate on the **ultimate clear light** and establishes predispositions to accomplish the **wisdom truth body** of an enlightened being.

The word initiation is given through a mandala of the ultimate altruistic intention. The blissful clear light mind experiencing emptiness directly is the ultimate altruistic intention. The union of the two truths, the ultimate clear light and the conventional illusory body, is one entity inseparable from the ultimate altruistic intention. The initiation is given to introduce us to this union, which is the essence of the mandala.

Whereas the vase, secret and wisdom initiations give rise to certain experiences in the initiate, the word initiation is a **matter of understanding the verbal explanation** given to introduce us to the union of two truth.

It purifies **physical verbal and mental stains**, empowers us to **cultivate the union of the two truths** and establishes predispositions to accomplish the **ultimate state of Buddha Vajradhara, the perfected union.**

B. The case of the practitioners with celibacy vows or similar to celibacy

Verse 64

Because the Great Tantra of the Primordial Buddha

Forbids it emphatically

Those observing pure conduct should not

Take the secret and wisdom initiations.

The meaning of this verse is that lay practitioners who have vowed to observe celibacy, as well as five kinds of ordained persons-novice monks and nuns, female trainees in virtue, and fully ordained monks and nuns, should not give or receive the actual secret and wisdom initiations.

This restriction, expressly stated in the Great Tantra of the Primordial Buddha, applies to ordinary people, not to those with high realizations. The example given is the Peacocks which thrive on poisonous plants to simply enhance the color and luster of their feathers, while the crow, ambitious to imitate the peacock, dies of poisoning.

Verse 65

If those observing the austere practice of pure conduct

Were to hold these initiations,

Their vow of austerity would be impaired

Through doing that which is proscribed.

Verse 66

This creates transgressions which are a defeat

For those observing discipline.

Since they are certain to fall to a bad rebirth,

They will never gain accomplishments.

The meaning of these verses is to know if those, who have vowed celibacy, give or receive in real time actual secret and wisdom initiations, transgress their vow to not engage in sexual activity, which is proscribed for them.

By doing what is proscribed, they impair their vow and break the discipline they have promised to observe, thereby creating a transgression which leads to a negative rebirth. **They may give and receive the secret and wisdom initiations, using the power of visualization and union with a consort and so forth through the power of visualization.**

Then this question may raise that if they are not permitted to take the real time actual secret and wisdom initiations, may they nevertheless perform tantric activities?

To answer this question:

Verse 67

There is no fault if one who has received

The preceptor initiation and has knowledge

Of suchness listens to or explains the tantras

And performs burnt offering rituals,

Or makes offerings of gifts and so forth.

What this verse means is provided they have received the preceptor initiation and have skills in the ten aspects of reality, they may listen to and teach the tantras, make tantric offerings, bestow initiation, perform burnt offering rituals, consecrations and the four kinds of activities.

They may also accomplish and use the eight powerful attainments. **Not only there is no fault if they do this, but it is extremely beneficial to do.**

C. In order to enter the gate of Tantra one must rely on a qualified Tantric Guru

Beside **common spiritual teachers' qualification and practices to cultivate as taught in the Lamrim bases on Maitreya's Ornament for the Mahayana sutra:**

Rely on a Mahayana teacher who is disciplined, serene, thoroughly pacified, has good qualities surpassing those of the student. That he is energetic, has a wealth of scripture knowledge, possessing loving concern, has a thorough knowledge of reality, skilled in instructing the disciple, and has abundance descriptiveness.

For a complete commentary of all those qualities and everything that is related to Guru Devotion and Guru Yoga, you can refer to the ebook about the reliance on the Guru, which is one of the key teachings and practices, [gurudevotion.pdf \(tenzinzopa.com\)](http://tenzinzopa.com/gurudevotion.pdf).

Lama Atisha says the minimum required characteristics of such a preceptor, or rituals master, or tantric initiation Guru should be as described in the verse from Guru puja:

*I make requests to the supreme vajra-holder
Who controls the three doors, is intelligent,
Patient and honest, without deceit or pretense,
Who knows mantra and tantra and is skilled in
Both sets of suchness, in drawing and explaining.*

What it means is an authentic tantric preceptors use **mindfulness and mental alertness to exercise control over their physical, verbal and mental activities.**

They have **great intelligence and practice the three kinds of patience** by not taking account of harm inflicted, by willingly accepting hardships and by gaining certainty with regard to the teachings.

They are **honest and sincere in their dealings with others and are free from deceitfulness and pretense.**

They have a **profound understanding of Mantra and Tantra** which they can explain clearly and are able to employ the methods described in Tantra to free their students from interferences.

There are **ten inner and ten outer aspects** of suchness or reality, with which a well-qualified tantric preceptor should be conversant. Those who confer initiation of the Action, Performance and Yoga Tantras need skills in the outer aspects, while those who confer Highest Yoga Tantra initiations should be skilled in the inner ones:

- The first of the ten inner skills is the **ability to create a protection circle in meditation** to rid others of obstacles.
- The second is to **draw mandalas** which can be worn as protection amulets.
- The third skill is in **giving the secret initiation**
- The fourth is in **giving the wisdom initiation**. This implies the need for competence in giving the other initiations as well.
- The fifth skill is **proficiency in separating enemies of the teaching** from their protectors and tutelary deities in order to stop their harmful activities.
- The sixth is the **art of offering ritual cakes to worldly and supramundane guests**.
- The seventh is **expertise in different forms of mantra recitation**.
- The eighth is **the use of coercion** when practices associated with the stage of generation, such as visualization and mantra recitation, intended to actualize the deity, have been properly performed without success.
- The ninth skill is **in consecrating representations of enlightened body, speech and mind and prayer beads**.
- The tenth is competence **in activating the mandala, making offerings, entering the mandala and performing self-initiation**.

Now, the outer skills:

- The first one consists of **meditating the mandala with and without form**. This refers to external mandala, namely the residence and the deities within it, both of which have form, and the internal mandala, the wisdom of bliss and emptiness, which is formless.
- The second is to **maintain meditative stabilization of oneself as the deity within the mandala**.

- The third is proficiency in the **various hand gestures for offering adornments to the deities.**
- The fourth skill is in **the performance of ritual dance.**
- The fifth is the **ability to assume a wide variety of postures such as the vajra position.**
- The sixth is in **mantra recitation.**
- The seventh is in **conducting peaceful, increasing, powerful and wrathful fire offering rituals.**
- The eighth is in **making outer, inner and secret offerings.**
- The ninth is in **performing peaceful, increasing, powerful and wrathful** activities as well as giving protection and inviting different kinds of guests.
- The tenth is in **concluding rituals and sending guests back to their different dwelling places.**

Tantric teachers who possess all these abilities are getting rarer and rarer.

D. The qualities of a qualified student

Not only Guru needs to be qualified, but **the student too needs basic ripening qualifications in order to fulfil the benefits of relying on qualified Guru.**

The defining characteristics of the student who relies upon the teacher minimum should have the required characteristics taught by Aryadeva in his Four Hundred Stanzas

It is said that one who is nonpartisan, intelligent, and diligent Is a vessel for listening to the teachings.

The good qualities of the instructor do not appear otherwise

Nor do those of fellow listeners.

Aryadeva says that one who is endowed with the three qualities is **suited to listen** to the teachings.

Non partisan. Certain translations mention “**impartial**”. There may be many explanations. What I understand is that you must be very clear about your objective of relying on the Guru, your purpose of practicing Dharma, purpose of choosing the spiritual path. **A clear direction without the bias of relying on your own ordinary mind pursues, and ordinary mind’s objectives, because that is tainted by worldly concern.**

Because even when you pursue the Dharma, you will pursue the Dharma for worldly purposes, for temporary benefits. If the relationship you establish with the Guru is not for liberation, but is for worldly purpose, then, you do not have that quality of nonpartisan mind. **Nonpartisan mind is having clear purpose of enlightenment.**

Then, the second one is **intelligent**. The intelligence here is merely referring to **having the discrimination of knowing what to be adopted, what to be abandoned.** As a minimum, for someone who is aspiring for true Dharma, you need to have a basic wisdom of the limitations of the ten non-virtues actions and the advantages of the ten virtues actions: of samsara and karma. It means you know what Dharma is, what is not Dharma.

So how to define Dharma and non-Dharma, what is worldly Dharma. **Anything beneficial for liberation and enlightenment is Dharma.** Anything is beneficial for worldly purpose is non-Dharma. Anything that is not beneficial for liberation and enlightenment is not Dharma. What

boost our delusions or what create the causes for liberation and enlightenment. **Even with a correct motivation, without basic discrimination, you may follow the wrong path, mistaken instructions by mistaken speakers.**

After that **diligent**. Certain translations mention joyous effort, persistent and constant practice. Then, even with the correct motivation, you are “intelligent” plus, you have received correct Dharma instructions, you meet a qualified Guru, you meet the complete Dharma, but **if you do not practice persistently, then you will not gain the realizations, or the benefits of the practice.**

He also says that if you have all these qualities, **the good qualities of one who instructs you in the teachings will appear as good qualities, not as faults.** In addition, he says that to such a fully qualified person the good qualities of fellow listeners **will also appear as good qualities and not as faults.**

Lama Tsongkhapa, in the Middle Length Lam-Rim continues with:

Even if one has both impartiality and intelligence, someone who is just like one of those listening to the Dharma in a life less painting is not a suitable vessel. Therefore you also need to have strong interest. Candrakirti's commentary states that, first, respect for the Dharma and the expounder of the Dharma and, second, an attentive mind are added, so that five characteristics are set forth. That being so, we can categorize this into four: strong interest in the Dharma, a fully attentive mind while listening, great respect for the Dharma and the expounder of Dharma, and holding to good explanations and rejecting faulty ones. Intelligence is a conducive circumstance for those four, and impartiality is what eliminates adverse circumstances.

To the first three qualities, two are added. **Always to be respectful to the Dharma** that you are learning and practicing, **and to the teacher**, physically, verbally and in thoughts; **and to be attentive, not to forget.** Attentive means both attentive during the teachings but also, whatever the Guru says to try to receive instructions to liberation, to enlightenment.

Therefore, whenever you are around the Guru, whatever he manifests, laughing, crying, walking, sitting, **everything you try to interpret into Dharma.** Another meaning is **whatever instructions you receive you practice consistently, all the time.** These are the five qualities of the disciple.

It is stated in Chandrakirti's commentary that if you, the listener, do not have all these defining characteristics of a suitable recipient of the teachings, then **the influence of your own faults will cause even an extremely pure teacher, who instructs you in the teachings, to appear to have faults.** Furthermore, you will consider the faults of the one who explains the teachings to be good qualities.

Therefore, although you might find a teacher who has all the defining characteristics, it may be difficult to recognize their presence. Thus, it is necessary for the disciple to have these three characteristics in their entirety in order to recognize that the teacher has all the defining characteristics and in order then to rely on that teacher.

If the disciple is not equipped in those 3 or 5 qualities, then even if the Guru, by his or her own side, is a real Buddha, he will not be able to fulfill all the spiritual purpose of the disciple's journey.

a. How to restore broken Samaya

They are many forms of purification. A very common in the Tibetan Buddhism Mahayana tradition is Samayavajra practice, Vajrasattva practice, 35 Buddhas confession practice. They are the general antidotes to purify any form of limitations.

Then, the main element of all those practices is the Four Opponent Powers. It is the key element to make the purification possible: Reliance or Refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, the deity or the Guru; then, the Power of Regret or acknowledging the mistake as a mistake; then, the Power of Antidote; then, the Power of Refrain or making a firm commitment not to do it again.

The Vinaya Sutra emphasizes that there is not any negative action that cannot be purified by the four opponent powers, even the five heinous crimes.

You can find the Samayavajra and the Vajrasattva Practices in the FPMT Retreat Prayers Book (**to listen the entirety of Geshela's instructions for those two practices as guided meditations, Middle Lam-Rim, June 2024,** teaching #9:<https://longku.fpmt.ch/de/mediathek/teachings/audio/1378/2.2.7.1391>).

The practice of Samayavajra is particularly recommended to purify broken Samaya in relation to Guru, if you harass the Guru for example, or any other limitations that we have in our mind stream for beginningless lives.

Certain individuals not finding qualified Guru could be due to karma committed in the past, that needs to be purified. Then, you can take that Samayavajra practice as a purification and that may help. Or, you may have found a Guru, and you may find it so difficult to obtain teachings, or you may find it is so difficult to get the blessings in relation to the Guru or to feel the benefits in the relation to the Guru, again it has to do with the karma, so you can do this practice.

On top of that, if the broken Samaya or the karma created is in relation to the Guru, one of the specific ways of purifying, **besides Samayavarja is confessing to the Guru of having broken the Samaya and then ask for forgiveness if the Guru is alive**, it is very important.

If not, then you can also ask forgiveness from one of the closest disciples, even the attendants, or in front of certain holy objects, like statues or pictures of the Guru, the mala or vajra or bell of the Guru, texts held by the Guru. Or you can visit the Guru's mandala or shrine, and there you do three prostrations, kneel down and ask forgiveness to keep intact the Samaya with the Guru, which is the most important.

Even the slightest of broken samaya with the Guru will become a huge obstacle in our spiritual path. But, when the Samaya to the Guru is pure then everything becomes so easy, life becomes so meaningful, spiritual life or any practice becomes so easy, actualizing realizations becomes so easy, any form of accumulation of merits becomes so vast, extensive.

With a pure intact Guru Samaya then, you will have the awareness and mindfulness of integrating all the practices into Guru Yoga practice which makes all the practice more effective and beneficial.

b. How to rely on the Guru in thoughts

In the Middle Length Lam-Rim, Lama Tsongkhapa writes that **two things** need to ripen in our heart to devote to the Guru in thoughts, **irresistible faith and a genuine sense of respect:**

This has two points: the root, training in faith, and remembering his kindness so as to generate respect. Jewels' Blaze Dhāraṇī (Ratnolkādhāraṇī) says: Faith, a preliminary practice, gives birth

like a mother to all good qualities, guards them, and makes them increase. This says that faith gives birth to excellent qualities that have not yet arisen, and once they have come into existence, it maintains and increases them.

Always admiring the Guru and always sees the qualities in him allows you to always pay attention to anything that is coming from the Guru's body, speech and mind. Then, **everything becomes an open book teaching**. Everything is inspirational.

That is how you become like the Guru. **Wishing is not enough; you have to train your body, speech and mind**. You have to train to think the way the Guru thinks, behave the way the Guru behaves. If someone says, "you behave like your Guru", it is a huge compliment. You have to trust the Guru. You have to train in all that so that it becomes stable. That way nothing can part from your Guru.

Even when the Guru scolds you: "the Guru knows I have some unpacified secret obstacle. So, the Guru throw a powerful deity mantra to me to dispel all these hindrances. **Unseen obstacles are purified**". But if the Guru does not scold you that does not mean that you do not have any hidden obstacles.

Then, **always remembering the kindness**. Always express so much respect. With no faith you may receive some benefits, but they will not increase. **To receive fully the blessings, it is very much being like a container to receive the nectar of the Dharma. Especially the faith you develop through reasoning** on the advantage of the Dharma, of the benefits you receive by relying on the Guru. Not just blind faith.

First, how to cultivate the Guru devotion in thoughts. The Tantra bestowing the initiation of Vajrapani says:

If you would ask, O Lord of secrets [which is talking about Buddha] how disciples should see the Master? Then, I would answer that they should view them just as they view the Baghavan.

This is Buddha own guidance: see your Guru how you relate to the Buddha.

Then the Tantra bestowing the initiation of Vajrapani says:

Keep the master's good qualities in mind, never see upon their faults.

Very important. There are many times, **our own faults reflect on the Guru, our own limitations reflect on the Guru**. Then, we start to apprehend that as the false of the Guru. **So, always be mindful. The Guru is Buddha.**

Then, when your mind is pure, you can translate everything as a teaching, as Buddha's qualities, like the scolding as a powerful mantra, even just one slap as an initiation. **The benefit you receive is the enlightened benefit.**

Apprehend your master's excellent qualities; do not ever apprehend his faults! Apprehending his qualities will gain you siddhis; apprehending his faults will block their attainment.

In the Middle Length Lam-Rim, Lama Tsongkhapa comments the previous verses this way:

You should act accordingly. Thus if excellent qualities predominate in your guru but you think about him in terms of the few faults he has, this will become an obstacle to your own siddhis.

So, that is it. Everything is there. **The moment you see even one little limitation, it becomes an obstacle to you to actualize the benefit of the Dharma, the realizations.** It does not matter if

there is a fault or not, but from your side, seeing the qualities, that helps to condition to gain realizations on the path.

In today's time, due to our lack of merits, it is very difficult to actualize the perfect Guru. Therefore, in ordinariness' appearance, there is a lot of limitations, and it is so easy to see limitations. Therefore, even if you see false, you only focus on the qualities. **You may see false, because of our own limitations**, but do not focus on that.

Then, there is another Sutra, the Ten Teachings Sutra:

Develop the following ideas with respect to your teacher. I have wandered for a long time through cyclic existence, and they search for me. I have been asleep having been obscured by delusions for long time, they wake me, they pull me out of the death of the ocean of existence. I have entered a bad path, and they revealed the good path to me, they released me from being bound in the prison of existence. I have been worn out by the illness for long time, and they are my doctors, they are rainclouds that put out my blazing fire of attachment and like.

So, think like that and try to see the enlightened qualities of the Buddha and express gratitude, kindness.

So, seeing this we should never forsaking even at the cost of our life.

c. How to rely on the Guru in actions

How to rely on the Guru in actions? Maitreya's Ornament of Mahayana Sutra says:

Rely on the teacher by way of respect, material things, service, and practices.

Then, there is another Sutra, Fifty praises of Guru Yoga about the Guru Devotion practice:

What need is there to say much here. Do whatever pleases your Guru, eliminate all that displeases them. Analyze this. Strive at it.

Then:

Offering to your pledge master constitute continues offerings to all the Buddhas. Offering to them is the collection of merits. From the collections of merits supplies wisdom, comes the supreme attainment.

Then, again from the 50 verses, Lama Tsongkhapa quoted in the Lam Rim:

Furthermore, the student perspective differs from the Guru's perspective, the student must do this offering because the Guru are the supreme field through which the student accumulates a collection of merits and sublime wisdom. However, the Guru must not take the gift into consideration.

This is very good. In this regard Ornament for the Mahāyāna Sūtra says:

Through homage, offerings purely obtained, and service and practice, you should rely on a spiritual friend.

Even if you want to make a material offering, if you are capable, there are two things you need to keep in mind: **a material object that is pure by its nature, meaning not obtained through wrong livelihood**, like selling weapons, exploitation, ...and **pure by its motivation, meaning free from the 8 worldly concerns**. In the Middle Length Lam-Rim, Lama Tsongkhapa says:

The three means of pleasing the Guru are offering him material things, serving him and paying him respect with body and speech, and practicing in accord with his advice.

Then:

Second is bathing him, anointing him, massaging him, wrapping him up, cleaning him, nursing him when he is ill, and so forth, and talking about his excellent qualities. The third is the main one, which is practicing without going against his instructions. [...] It is said that the benefits are enormous, outshining the roots of virtue of making offerings and the like to innumerable Buddha's.

So, **the best offering is the practice**. The best offering is practicing **according with the instructions and the teachings**, whether you are close to the Guru or not, whether you are attending him or not. What will make your Guru the happiest is to live your life in accordance with the Dharma. To live with Bodhicitta to please your Mahayanist Guru. **And be diligent about your practice**.

What a qualified Mahayanist Guru does not like you to do? Waste your life in worldly concerns like the eight worldly concerns, following the delusions like committing negativities. They do not like that you get distracted by those. **The Guru is pleased when your whole life is infused with the Bodhisattvas' way life of life**. You take your entire ways of life, and you integrate them with the Bodhisattvas' way of life. **At least with your motivation**.

By keeping pure the Samaya and following the instructions properly, you will be able to purify all your past karma, even the heavier one that would bring you to being reborn in the Lower Hell Realms, just by having one little inconvenient dream, or some headache, by the power of proper reliance to the Guru.

Lama Tsongkhapa writes in the Middle Length Lam-Rim:

If you take someone as your spiritual teacher and then relinquish your reliance on him, you will be harmed by illnesses and evil spirits in this life, and in future lives you will have to experience the immeasurable sufferings of the lower rebirths.

We already have abundance of negative karma. Because of breaking the Samaya, then we are without protection. Then, all the karma will ripen and then we will experience suffering, obstacles in life and bad rebirth in future lifetimes. **When we rely on the Guru, we have protection and freedom. When we do not rely on a Guru we are not**.

This has to be understood in this way. It is not that by relying on the Guru, then we will experience all that if we break the Samaya. No, we already have created such karma and will have to experience the consequences. Relying on the Guru protects us.

Lama Tsongkhapa says:

Aside from that, excellent qualities that have not arisen will not arise, and those that have arisen will deteriorate and vanish. If you rely on non-virtuous friends and bad companions, your excellent qualities will also diminish, your faults will increase, and misfortune will befall you. Therefore, it was taught that this should be avoided in every way.

So, we should train diligently in the practice repeatedly as Lama Tsongkhapa says:

It will not be enough to perform the visualization in a single meditation session.

Then Buddha Vajradhara statement says:

Attainment follows proper reliance on the master. Thoroughly please you Guru in all things.

Acknowledgement *(in order of appearance)* **and dedication**

Lamp for the Path to enlightenment, Lama Atisha

Lam-Rim Chenmo, Lama Tsongkhapa

Middle-Length Lam Rim, Lama Tsongkhapa

Four Hundred Stanzas, Aryadeva

In the footsteps of the Gurus – Guru devotion, ebook, Geshe Tenzin Zopa

Guru Puja, Lama Chopal

Ornament for the Mahayana sutra, Maitreya

The Tantra bestowing the initiation of Vajrapani

Ten Teachings Sutra

Sutra of the Fifty praises of Guru Yoga about the Guru Devotion practice

Transcripts “Introduction to Tantra”, Geshe Tenzin Zopa, Hayagriva Buddhist Centre, July 2024
(Tenzin Kunzang: all mistakes, errors, omissions are mine only)

Dedicated to the good health and long life of all our Gurus and to create the causes and conditions for all the rest of the sentient beings to see all their inner, outer and secret obstacles dispelled, so they can practice the complete Dharma (including Tantra), wholeheartedly, steadily and swiftly, according to the teachings and instructions received from their precious teachers and achieve full enlightenment as soon as possible for the welfare of all beings.

Care of Dharma Materials

Dharma materials contain the teachings of the Buddha and thus protect against lower rebirth and reveal the path to enlightenment. Therefore, they should be treated with respect.

Printed Dharma materials, as well as phones, tablets, laptops, and hard drives containing Dharma, should be kept off the floor, beds, chairs, meditation cushions, and all other places where people sit or walk.

Dharma materials should not be stepped over or put in places where the feet or buttocks will point at them. They should be covered or protected for transporting and kept in a high, clean place separate from more mundane materials.

Other objects, including statues, stupas, ritual implements, malas, reading glasses, and so forth, should not be placed on top of Dharma books and devices containing Dharma materials. Avoid licking the fingers to turn the pages of Dharma texts.

If it is necessary to dispose of printed Dharma materials, they should be burned rather than thrown in the trash.

When burning Dharma texts, visualize that the letters transform into an A (ॐ) and the A absorbs into your heart. Imagine burning blank paper.

As the paper burns, recite OM ĀḤ HŪḤ or the Heart Sutra, while meditating on emptiness.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche recommends that images of holy beings, deities, and holy objects not be burned. Ideally, if undamaged, they should be put in a stupa. Otherwise, put them high up in a tree inside a well-sealed structure, something like a bird house, so that the images are protected from the weather and do not end up on the ground.