

The Uncommon preliminaries to enter Tantra – Ngöndro practices

Lama Tsongkhapa Guru Yoga

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Introduction to the Ngöndros practice

In order for us to get opportunity to learn and practice Tantra, we need first to receive the initiation. **The initiation is the doorway.**

In order to receive the initiation, there are **two preliminary practices required: the common and uncommon preliminaries.**

First of all, the definition of Ngöndro: “Ngön” means “before” and “dro” means “go” or “actualized” or “practiced”, so “go before”, or “preliminary practices” to prepare to the main practice of Tantra, to make it a genuine Dharma practice, a genuine path leading to liberation and enlightenment.

The common preliminary is **the preliminary cultivation of practices to the main body practice of the three capable beings’ path, as well as the main body practice of the four classes of the Tantra practices.**

The uncommon preliminary **is mainly the preliminary practices to be accomplished before you conduct the main practice of the four classes of Tantra.**

It is absolutely essential to conduct the Ngöndros **before we engage in the Highest Yoga Tantra practices where we practice the essence of Tantra: the practice of the generation and completion stages of the path.**

Without the Ngöndro, we can encounter obstacles to receive the blessings of the practice, **because the basis of the person is not prepared to be a good container in order to sustain such a precious nectar.**

The practice can be thus side-tracked or have flaws, leakages and become worldly Dharma, resulting in the virtue generated not being the causes and conditions for liberation and full enlightenment (and instead becoming causes for samsara).

To practice the two stages of the tantric path, we need to have a pure vessel whose negativities and obscurations, defilements, would have been purified, especially the gross obstacles of the ripening of the past negative karma and negative karmic imprints.

We also need **stores of merit to digest such sacred and profound blessed Dharma like the realizations we achieve through the generation and completion stages.**

The preliminary practices **prepare us to be good containers.**

I. The common and uncommon preliminaries

A. The common preparatory practice

The common preparatory practice serves us to have a **good understanding and a certain level of real habitual experience of the Lam-Rim’s three principal aspects of the path.**

- **Without renunciation**, even as powerful as tantric practices can be, the Tantra **cannot be turn into a path.**
- **Without Bodhicitta**, Tantra **cannot be actualized as a cause for enlightenment.**
- **Without the emptiness wisdom**, you cannot use the front-generation of the deity, the self-generation of the deity, the body mandala, all the rest of profound Yogas, especially the generation and completion stages of the tantric practice. They **cannot be utilized** if we do not have a solid understanding on emptiness.

So, studying Lam-Rim is in fact actualizing the common preparatory practice for us to be qualified to enter tantric practices.

There are **four main common preliminaries: understanding and reflecting on the meaning of the four thoughts that shift the direction of our spiritual practice to a purest practice of the Dharma:**

- **Precious Human Rebirth**
- **Death and impermanence**
- **Karmic law causes and effects**
- **Flaws and limitations of Samsara.**

Those four Ngöndros are meant to make our main Dharma practice (whichever Yana or capable beings' path we want to practice) more successful in actualizing realizations on the path. **The firmer is your understanding and reflection on those topics and the more successful your practice will be in generating unbreakable, irresistible, spontaneous realizations** on the path.

By the power of motivation and dedications infused by altruism, any practice will become the direct cause for liberation and full enlightenment.

For example, we will get total and absolute confidence in our ability to achieve enlightenment within this very lifetime if we do take the full essence of this precious human rebirth, without being distracted and from now on, only focusing on practicing the Dharma, as death can happen anytime.

By applying the deep wisdom of the karmic law on causes and effects, then you will assure yourself not to waste any second of your time in generating even the slightest negativities, in only accumulating virtues, and constantly purifying any false.

For example, thinking that as long as I am not killing human being (bigger picture), I can allow myself to kill mosquitos. Unknowingly ignoring the law of how karma increases, multiplies and can never be washed away without experiencing the results, we may commit abundance of negative karma just because of lacking those foundational realizations.

Then, because generating a genuine sense of renunciation is the only way to make any virtue a cause for liberation, we must understand truly and deeply the falseness of karma and delusions; and renounce the six realms. Even Highest Yoga Tantric practices cannot become a cause for enlightenment without that.

Even when we label our practice as an altruistic practice, it will be just a label without that genuine sense of renunciation. It cannot be a genuine Dharma.

Therefore, we must practice those common preliminaries meditations daily and infuse our daily practices with them. We must nurture and prepare ourselves with them. Then, each and every practice become so solid.

The conclusion is **based on understanding the limitation of karma and delusions, and samsara**, we will make sure that whatever practice we are doing from now on become only Dharma practice, whatever action of our body, speech and mind become only Dharma.

We come to the point of not only seeing our capability in practicing Dharma, but also practicing Dharma now, and only Dharma. All that for the purpose of achieving full enlightenment to benefit all beings (higher scope) in one lifetime (Tantra).

The quality of our renunciation will define the level of your main body practice.

That preliminary should be taken as a basis to any form of Dharma practice, meditation, retreat, puja, guru yoga, the basis of the relationship with your Guru, the motivation to take more vows...everything; to readjust our system each time and avoid any leakage or flaws.

During the whole year before conducting the next Ngöndro, this common practice should also accompany us every day to make our practice the purest practice and most efficient on the path to enlightenment.

B. The uncommon preparatory practice

In the same way, the quality of the actual practice will be defined by the quality of the Ngöndro. This is so so important.

By upholding the common practice, even one recitation of the Migtsema will be the direct cause of your liberation and full enlightenment. Can you imagine the impact of a whole year practicing Lama Tsongkhapa Guru Yoga Sadhana and Migtsema recitation?

Even though the different traditions of Tibetan Buddhism have a different number of Ngöndros and different emphasizes, there are generally four main uncommon Ngöndros. “Uncommon” within the two schools of the Mahayana: Mahayana Sutrayana and Mahayana Tantrayana. This is “uncommon” to the Tantrayana.

In order **to make ourselves a suitable vessel** for the Dharma and get realizations on the path, there is the **Refuge and Bodhicitta to plan the seeds of enlightenment within our continuum.**

Then, in order **to clear obstacles** to be able to enter the path, to clear obstacles on the way once you are on the path and actualize the results; you have the practice of **Vajrasattva.**

Then, in order **to accumulate conducive causes and conditions** to enter into the path, and have a successful journey, you engage in the Ngöndro of **mandala offerings.** It is the practice our lineage use, like Lama Tsongkhapa.

Then, in order **to receive the blessings** of the path and the practice, to actualize realizations, then, you do the Ngöndro of **Guru Yoga practice.** The Guru is the creator of everything on our path to enlightenment and the ultimate objective, to actualize Guruhood.

Now if you want to practice Mother Tantra, there will be even one more layer of Ngöndro: to receive a Father initiation. There is the common, uncommon, maybe we should label it as innermost uncommon preliminary practice. But if you are already practicing Father Tantra, then, there is no need.

Among the people joining the retreat, you may already have your meditational deity. In case you do not have, **from my side, my motivation is to lead you to Mother Tantra.**

I feel it is my responsibility since I chose to face students and teach the Dharma (it is also the instructions of my Gurus), therefore I need to be responsible, that is how the decision came that it was time to move on and engage in serious Ngöndros practices and retreats.

Lama Tsongkhapa Guru Yoga retreat can be conducted in one or two weeks. But I purposely chose to make it a whole year of practice. Ultimately it is about purifying and accumulating merits. Conventionally, all the rest of your practice whether you are a scholar, a retreatant, a Lojong practitioner, will be boosted, nurtured. **How wonderful we have so much time to practice, it is a blessing.**

One of the commitments to go into these four major Ngöndros retreats is to receive instructions from someone who has received the instructions, the Ngöndro teaching (a great commentary or instructions on the four major Ngöndros).

I will regard those sessions as the Ngöndro teaching, even for those who participated in the teachings online or only participated in the first session. So, you can conduct the retreat. Also, there is a short transcript (that booklet you are reading now) which is not fully edited but it can serve as an instruction.

II. Lama Tsongkhapa Guru Yoga

A. Introduction

1. No merits, no realizations: the closest channel to receive the blessings of the 3 jewels

Now, **you are ripened to practice Tantra, you also have all the conducive conditions thanks to the purification and the accumulation of merits** that aimed to make you a pure vessel to receive the immeasurable blessings of the Dharma (in particular the blessings of the realizations in our spiritual practices).

The journey is not the easy one: it can be a lengthy journey, a complicated journey, with a lot of effort required. **We need those conducive conditions to keep ourselves very focused on a steady sustainable practice.** Even, in case it may take three countless eons of lifetimes and timeframes to achieve full enlightenment, we will never change our path or get discouraged, even in this roller-coaster lifetime.

As long as we carry these samsaric aggregates and live in this samsaric environment, in particular in those five degenerated times, the karmas are so stubborn, the delusions are more stubborn than before. On top of the eight worldly concerns, one of the worst obstacles.

Even when we meet a qualified Guru, we receive correct Dharma instructions, and we live in a quite nice environment, where many people are also practicing; somehow, we are dragged to practice for good wealth, for long life, for prosperity, to clear obstacles.

Somehow, we tend to go away from the main focus, which is the **benefit of future lifetimes**, in particular for the **benefit of full enlightenment for the sole concern of the well-being of all the rest of the sentient beings**. The ego comes in even in the Dharma field (expectations and recognition, fame, name...). You get upset when criticized, when somebody points out your flaws, even when it comes from your Guru.

And when we go through experiencing the process of samsara, when aging, facing sickness, obstacles, we start to go away from Dharma. That sometimes happens too when we are too distracted and happy.

All those obstacles fall into two categories: one is desirous excitement, the other one is dullness, laziness. Because of that, we cannot stay fully concentrated in practicing the Dharma.

This weakness does not necessarily come because we have less education or know less about the disadvantage of the negativities. It is mainly because of lack of merits. The reason why we do not fulfill our wishes in our spiritual journey, like getting realizations, is because of that. Lama Tsongkhapa said that precisely. His life is the illustration of that. Once we have the store of merit, then, whatever we wish will come in our way, in the mundane world, as well as in the spiritual world.

The Guru is the nearest channel to receive blessings. No matter how numerous and great Buddhas are out there, without the Guru we have no bridge to reach out to the blessings. Therefore, when you relate any practice in relation to the Guru Yoga, you actualize swiftly the blessings through the Guru.

2. A key practice in all traditions and lineages

All the different lineages as well as Sutrayana, Mahayana, they all have that king of Guru Yoga practice in relation to the Guru, their Elders.

In the lower Yanas, they do not really use this word “Guru”, they relate to the Elders in practices of veneration, service, respect, etc....

Even in Vinaya, mainly in the Hinayana tradition, the yoga of veneration, offering, respect, service, is one of the key Vinaya practice. When you become sangha and enter a Monastery, the seniority is extremely advanced, and it is an extremely serious practice. This can be regarded as Guru Yoga practice.

In both Mahayana Tantrayana and Mahayana Sutrayana, the Guru Yoga practice is one of the most essential practices to offer to someone who offered you transmissions, commentaries: you offer respect in both actions and thoughts.

In particular, in Tantrayana, the Guru Yoga practice is the essence. It is the root. It is the ultimate. It is the only way to actualize all the benefits of the tantric teachings and practices, including the Dharmakaya and full enlightenment.

B. What is Guru Yoga?

In Tibetan, Lama Naljor. “Lama” is referring to Guru. In Tibetan, it means someone who is extraordinary in precepts, in discipline, in the practice of concentration, in their wisdom. Lama surpasses you in qualities and you take that person as your example, object of veneration, your inspiration, object or state to be achieved.

We call it as **achieving the state of the Guru** which is **achieving the state of Buddhahood**. The **ultimate Guru** is the union of exalted wisdom and great bliss: **the union of the highest attitude of altruism and the exalted wisdom of emptiness**, or union of method and wisdom. That state is the state of Dharmakaya. **The definite or ultimate Guru is referring to the Dharmakaya.**

There is an objectified ultimate Guru and the “subjectified” ultimate Guru. **The objectified ultimate Guru is the Dharmakaya of the Buddha. The “subjectified” ultimate Guru is your own clear light mind.** Your own clear light mind **when it awakens in its absolute nature, is actualized in the union of great bliss and emptiness:** it is also called inner Guru.

The **conventional** Buddha nature is **the attitude altruistic aspect**. The **ultimate** Buddha nature is **the wisdom aspect**. Translated into **tantric terms**, it is called **great bliss and exalted wisdom**.

Whenever you focus on your own subtle mind, on **its absolute quality, the Buddha nature**, whenever you recognize that, you have this awareness of that, whenever you place your trust on that, whenever you recognize that is your ultimate being, **then you recognize your inner Guru, your inner guide.**

Whenever you see the inseparability of your so-called mind and that absolute nature, which is the Buddha nature within; **then, this is called the oneness of your mind with the Guru.** That

unified with the meditational deity (in particularly of a Highest Yoga Tantric initiation deity). **You unify Guru, Yidam and yourself, in oneness.**

And that oneness is the Guru Yoga practice. It is the essence of Guru Yoga.

So, what is really Guru Yoga? **It is the awareness and understanding being in recognition, abiding in oneness with the Guru, Yidam and your mind, inseparable, oneness.** That is the inner yoga, the inner Guru, the ultimate being of you, that is the Guru and that is the Buddha, that is the Dharmakaya.

Then, that Dharmakaya or the nature of the union of exalted wisdom and great bliss arises into a form of a Buddha or a deity. **It is in fact your true nature arising as a deity. Or the Guru absolute nature arising as a deity. Or the deity's own absolute nature, which is Dharmakaya, arising as a deity.**

Now that Dharmakaya arising into your teacher's form arising into a being which appears similar to you, your human form but who carries this quality of Lama. Again, that Guru is no other than arising from your own same nature. Therefore, Guru is in fact ultimately no different than you, your ultimate nature.

That is why Guru yoga is so essential, ultimate. **It is the root from where you can take off for your spiritual journey. It is also the final destination where you will land.**

It is only when you know that that you really know yourself. Until then you are in hallucination.

As long as you know that and are aware of that, you are inseparable from the Guru.

The reality is you are never separated from your Dharmakaya isn't it? Sometimes we think about our Guru as something external. But the Guru is just a manifestation in form of that Dharmakaya.

All those protocols of newly finding your Guru, your Yidam is only there to clarify only something that is already there behind the temporary clouds of our confusion, and we see it as disconnected. We do this Guru yoga to achieve this in realization.

Lama Naljor: "Nal" means "yoga", training, going forward, walking. "Jor" means "arrive": you arrive at the state of Guru. You arrive there through your practice which is the Yoga.

C. Lama Tsongkhapa Guru Yoga

As we are in the Gelug tradition, the Guru Yoga sadhana we will use in the Hundred deities of Tushita sadhana, Lama Tsongkhapa Guru Yoga.

1. Lama Tsongkhapa name mantra

In order **to open (or expand) the channel of the lineage blessings and really receive the blessings, which means for the blessings to become your path** (to actually actualize the path); **you do Lama Tsongkhapa Guru Yoga retreat**, with a 100.000 accumulation of Migtsema (+10.000):

Four-Lines Migtsema

Mig me tse wäi ter chhen chän rä zig

Dri me khyen päi wang po jam päi yang

Gang chän khä päi tsug gyän tsong kha pa

Lo zang drag päi zhab la söl wa deb

In English:

Avalokiteshvara, great treasure of non-objectifying compassion.

Manjushri, master of stainless wisdom.

Tsongkhapa, crown ornament of the sages of the Land of Snow:

Lozang Dragpa, at your feet I make requests.

Or Five-Lines Migtsema

Mig me tse wäi ter chhen chän rä zig

Dri me khyen päi wang po jam päl yang

DÜ PUNG MA LÜ JOM DZÄ SANG WÄI DAG

Gang chän khä päi tsug gyän tsong kha pa

Lo zang drag päi zhab la söl wa deb

In English:

Avalokiteshvara, great treasure of non-objectifying compassion.

Manjushri, master of stainless wisdom.

Lord of Secrets, destroyer of the entire host of maras.

Tsongkhapa, crown ornament of the sages of the Land of Snow:

Lozang Dragpa, at your feet I make requests.

That will really make yourself like a sponge, whatever practice you do, its nectar will be fully absorbed.

Based on the sadhana Lama Tsongkhapa Guru Yoga, you accumulate the **Migtsema: the name mantra of Lama Tsongkhapa** Four Lines Prayer or Five Lines Prayers (either way is fine).

When I did this retreat, my late Master Geshe Lama Konchog asked me to do the Five Lines. If you do the Four Lines, the Vajrapani prayer is skipped. For those who are very advanced practitioners, with a high level of practices, it is ok; **but as a beginner, we have so many hindrances, obstacles, especially obstacles of delusions, obstacles of unseen, like spirits, etc. Vajrapani is the antidote to that.** Therefore, Lama said it was good to do the Five Lines.

If you do it diligently, in two weeks, you can accomplish it.

2. The Hundred deities of Tushita Sadhana or Ganden Lha Gyäma

“Naljorna”, the main yoga starts from there:

- First you have the **invocation of the merit field**. You are creating, actualizing the merit field where you are going to practice the purification in relation to the Guru and accumulation of merits in relation to the Guru.
- Then the main activity, the main Yoga, is the **7 Limbs practice** to purify and accumulate merits.

This is the “Nal”. By actualizing this, you achieve “jor”, the state of the Guru.

By the end of the retreat, you may realize, awaken your true nature. Or at least, as a minimum, you gain the full conviction that your true nature is not different than the Guru, than the Buddha.

To truly respect and feel that (which is easy to say but not to truly feel it) you need to go through this Naljor, through this Yoga.

The entire Sadhana I shared with you was compiled by Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche. The first part, the Hundred deities of Tushita was composed by Venerable Dunlap Palden Sangpo. This realized Bodhisattva is regarded as one of the heart disciples, highlighted disciple of the first Dalai Lama.

He was also the disciple of one Lama Tsongkhapa heart disciple Jetsub Sherab Senge. This Master pledged to Lama Tsongkhapa directly during one of the public teachings occasions that when Lama Tsongkhapa publicly asked” in future times when I am not around who is going to preserve the teachings I have shared with you, in particular the tantric teachings?”

Even though at that time, Jetsub Sherab Senge was not among the first lines, he had a lot of merit and courage, so when nobody else raised his hand, he pledged. That is how the college tantric colleges started, colleges that for so many hundreds of years up to now preserved the lineages (especially) of the teachings on Guyasamaja, Heruka, Yamantaka, which are the three principal Highest Yoga Tantra deities in relation to Lama Tsongkhapa.

These are whispered teachings, only passed down mouth to ears from Lama Tsongkhapa, through those highly realized disciples. So, it is a very personal practice.

Therefore, whoever practices it, it becomes so effective to accumulate all the resources to gain realizations on the path. All those lineages’ holders (the heart disciples of Lama Tsongkhapa and Lama Tsongkhapa himself) are the proof of the efficiency of the practice.

The rest of the resources of the text assembled by Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche come from Pabongkhapa Dechen Nyingpo, one of the main lineage holders of Lama Tsongkhapa’s teachings.

Only that part of the sadhana is good enough in terms of purification and accumulation of merits. But there is also a great benefit of combining it with the rest of the practices, **such as the practice of Lama Tsongkhapa’s name mantra recitation or the yoga to actualize the seven different types of wisdoms.**

This practice is the abbreviated version of the Guru Yoga practice. The extensive one is Lama Chöpa. There is also the Six-session Guru Yoga practice. The essence of the Guru Yoga practice is as explained before the recognition of Guru, Yidam, your mind being one.

D. The importance of the practice of Guru devotion in relation to the Guru Yoga practice

1. The qualities of a qualified teacher

In the same way that we need a teacher to learn any skills in our day-to-day life, we need a skillful teacher to show us the path to enlightenment.

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://gurudevotion.pdf(tenzinzopa.com)).

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 in **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 on 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.

2. The qualities of a qualified student

Not only does the Guru need 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 **suitable 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, and your 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. **The Nonpartisan mind is having clear purpose for 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 to 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 that is beneficial for worldly purpose is non-Dharma. Anything that is not beneficial for liberation and enlightenment is not Dharma. What boosts our delusions or what creates 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, persistence 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 is 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 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 for 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.

3. 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 themselves 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 seeing the qualities in him allows you to always pay attention to anything that comes 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 about 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 throws 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 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 as Buddha**. Then the Tantra bestowing the initiation of Vajrapani adds:

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 on 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 are a lot of limitations, and it is so easy to see limitations. Therefore, even if you see it 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.

4. 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 your 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 negativity. 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 the Samaya pure 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 on 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 an abundance of negative karma. Because of breaking Samaya, 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 your Guru in all things.

III. Lama Tsongkhapa Guru Yoga retreat

A. Finding a good retreat place (preconditions for the place to be conducive) and setting up the boundaries

You need to find a good conducive retreat place: you can go to caves, monasteries, retreat huts, even your own house, as long as you have a retreat prayer room and the respect of your family (no interruption). Once you are in your cushion, you cannot interrupt the session.

Any place can be conducive.

Best if you can gather the six preconditions for meditative serenity mentioned in Lam Rim for Shamata practice (can be applied to any kind of retreat):

1. An appropriate place:
 - Easy access (easy to get food and clothing)
 - peaceful (humans, animals, elements, where landlords, Nagas, spirits are not disturbed by any human activities like mining, pure ground: no killing sexual misconduct, butchery, production of weapons...) or where past retreatants practiced there: the places carry the

spiritual power of past realizations or holy places (if not by performing the six preparatory practices you can consecrate any other place)

- good place that does not bring sickness
 - with ethical and like-minded companions around
 - not too crowded and quiet
2. having little desire (not craving any external conditions)
 3. being content
 4. completely giving up many activities
 5. pure ethical discipline
 6. completely get rid of thoughts of desire

You need then **to set the boundaries of the retreat**. It could be just within the four walls of your room, or the whole compound, the whole mountain, it is up to you. There is the retreat boundary to whom you are going to interact with and the boundary of the landmark: how much land you are going to cross.

As far as the landmark boundary is concerned, try to make it as big as possible. But during the retreat, try to stay in a small area, try not to go outside of your room. But in case of emergency, if you need to go to the doctor, you should include it in your boundary. This way you will not break the retreat.

About the people you can interact with, try to include as many people as possible. You must include your doctor, a few attendants, your family members, your teachers, a few Dharma brothers and sisters, who can assist you. **Try to limit the exposing of your body, speech and even your thinking** of those outside the boundaries, specifically about worldly concerns.

Also do not let them see your body and hear your voice. Because if they do, **that create obstacles in the Samaya**. If you see them, same thing. **But you need to be prepared, if you are not ready with that kind of environment you will get lunged.** You will have health problem.

Now, even if you are doing a Ngöndro retreat, **most of us already are doing deity yoga**. So, then, you open the curtains, the window, you do not worry about the sound, especially if you are doing it at your home with your family around...

Utilize the deity yoga practice: whatever you hear is deity sound, whatever you see is Daka, Dakini, the mandala. Whatever thought arises, do not even worry about it, regard them as deity thoughts. **That will help to secure the Samaya.**

That is why when you do the chanting or recitation, you go to more isolated places, so you can secure the samaya, of the mantra, of the energy. **Try to really consecrate the entirety of your body, speech and mind.**

B. Prepare the place and your mind (Blessing the cushion + 6 preparatory practices/7 Limbs practice + 9 rounds of breathing meditation)

Prepare the retreat cushion

Draw a svastika on the floor or on paper. On top of that, you put one kusha grass with the hair facing behind. On top of that, you put long-life grass in the same direction as one kusha grass, the grass with a lot of nodes. Usually, you can find some everywhere.

The svastika represents the auspiciousness to actualize the realizations on the path, including enlightenment. The kusha grass is to clear mishaps, impurities, pollution. The long-life grass is to be able to sustain health and enough life span to achieve all the intended realizations on the path.

For deity yoga, all that is a must. For Ngöndro, in the West, if really you cannot get kusha grass in the city, then, it is ok. You take whatever you have. Otherwise, it is beneficial to have it.

Then, place the cushion: try to find something stable. That is why in the Himalaya, you try to make a box, with just enough space for your knees and buttock, this way it is fixed. Before the retreat you need to **bleed the cushion**, that is why you need something stable that will not move until the end of the retreat and stay there fixed. It is the auspiciousness of immovable.

But in case, it moves at some point, no need to worry.

Then, if there is anybody who is familiar with the blessings of the cushion ritual, invite that person so he can bless you, the retreat and mainly bless your cushion.

If not, **you can bleed it by yourself** if you do not find anybody to do the ritual. Then you hold the vajra with your right hand at your heart, and the bell with your left hand at the level of your navel.

Hold the bell with your thumb, your index finger (on the top of the bell to stabilize it) and middle finger, with the curved part of the bell towards you. And hold the vajra with the part of the hand that is between your thumb and index finger, with the tip of your thumb touching the tip of your index finger.

Touch your cushion with the vajra and you can touch the ground with your fingers tips and say:

Om Vajra Bhumi Ha Hum

(like at the beginning of the long mandala offering).

Then, think your seat is blessed, it has actualized the vajra ground, it will support you all the way until you actualize enlightenment. You can use that for any kind of retreat: Lam-Rim, Lojong, anything.

Conduct the rest of the six preparatory practices to prepare and consecrate the place and your practice.

To be conducted before every session to make it even more conducive, meritorious and pure):

1. Make the place clean, comfortable and setting up the altar

With the motivation of cleaning the inner dirt: when you do the cleaning, whether you are using the brush or vacuuming, moping, you recite “Drul Pang Tima Pang”. A monk achieved Arhatship just by doing that first preparatory practice while cleaning the Monastery environment.

Then, **you set up the altar:**

- in the middle you arrange the Buddha statue or picture (representation of the holy body)
- on the right side of the Buddha’s hand, towards you (from your side, when you look at it is your left side, you arrange the scripture (representation of the holy speech)
- on the left side, the stupa (holy mind)
- in front, you arrange the offerings
- Guru’s picture goes always higher

- if you have a deity picture: at the right of the Buddha's hand, same side than the scripture, you arrange the Highest Yoga Tantra deity first, then Yoga Tantra deities, then Kriya Tantra deities, then Action Tantra deities
- you arrange the Father Tantra deities at the right side, and the Mother Tantra at the left
- you can arrange the Dharma protectors behind the Gurus and Buddhas images, or at the end of the two series of deities, or on a separate shrine
- you can cover the Dharma protectors with five-colors clothes, or arrange them in a box to not expose them to the public or the family
- you would do the same with the Highest Yoga Tantra deities.

2. Setting up extensive offerings

If you are a deity yoga practitioner, then it is good to always have two sets of eight offerings (best) for the self-generation and the front generation:

- for the front generation, referring to the offering for the Merit field, from the Buddha's right side, starting with water, water, flower, incense, light, perfume, music, food.
- for self-generation: from your right side, at the opposite: water, water, flower, incense, light, perfume, music, food
- there are no limits: you can arrange more sets
- you can also offer 8 water bowls offering symbolizing the 8 offerings
- or 7 water bowls offering, which represent the 7 pure water resources, or the 7 qualities of pure water (Tibet).
- if you can afford ("honestly acquired"), you offer in a container made with precious gems, the five precious gems: gold, silver, copper, brass crystal, rubies, topaz, then it becomes also an offering of precious jewel

3. Right meditation posture

Vairochana's posture is the best. You can use the half posture, like Mother Tara's sitting, or Maitreya sitting posture on a chair, or whatever is comfortable.

4. Visualization of the Merits field

Visualize the Lam-Rim/Lama Chöpa merit field:

- at the center is your Root Guru,
- then the Lineage of the Vast Conduct, referring to Serlingpa, Asanga, Maitreya
- then the Lineage of the Profound View: Shantideva, Nagarjuna, Manjushri
- then, the countless Buddhas of the three times
- then, the Arya beings of the Sravakas, Pratyekabuddhas, the Bodhisattvas, ordinary Bodhisattvas, Aryas Bodhisattvas, Hearers and Solitary Realizers along with those dwelling in the Buddha's words: which is referring to the Dharma protectors, who obey the Buddha's instructions to protect the Dharma and the practitioners.

You can do the visualization in three ways: visualizing one by one, or like the view of a bird, or just your Root Guru who is the essence of all.

You can conduct the whole 6 Preparatory practices with the whole 7 Limbs practice as a whole practice by itself and after that, do the sadhana of the Ganden Lha Gyalma.

Or you can start the sadhana of the Ganden Lha Gyalma now.

5. 7 Limbs practice: to purify obstacles to meditation and accumulation of merits, meritorious resources to the success of the meditation

- Limb of Prostrations :

Within those seven Limbs, prostration and purification are aimed at purifying obstacles. The rest are mainly aimed at accumulating merits.

They are mainly based on the Sutra of Good conduct, the King of Prayers as explained by Lama Tsongkhapa in the Middle Length Lam-Rim:

*As for the limb of prostration, the **prostration combining the three doors** is set out in the stanza:*

I bow respectfully with body, speech, and mind to all the lions among men without exception, in how ever many worlds there are in the ten directions and three times.

You are mainly doing the prostrations to all the Buddhas among the three worlds, all the Buddhas of the ten directions and all the Buddhas of the three times.

It not only purifies the minor limitations of our body, speech and mind but also their roots: the ego-centered ignorance, in another words, the self-grasping ignorance. Prostration is honoring, paying respect to something, someone higher or more important than your centered-egoistic identity, and that itself is the direct antidote to the root, the ignorance.

It is that powerful. So, when you conduct prostrations, at an immediate level, it purifies the imbalanced physical energies, imbalanced physical chakras, imbalanced nervous system, the blood flow, the organs from crown to toe.

Even for a bone dislocation, when you do proper long prostrations, it helps to adjust. The harmonized outer physical nervous system, the organs and the blood flow will directly impact a harmonious function of the inner chakra, the channels, the subtle spiritual nervous system and the drops (the subtle drop needs to be intact in order to utilize even the most profound practice of the clear light).

If our drops are not intact, pure, undamaged, and the channels are intact, then whatever meditation we do becomes very, very effective. Otherwise, it does not work. That is why the prostrations directly, immediately, impact that.

Then, when you do prostrations, emotionally you get some improvements. You may find it quite magic. If you feel a bit low, a bit unhappy, a bit confused, a bit dull, prostrations will immediately uplift you, your mind becomes clearer. You become more energized.

From a medical point of view, it is really healthy.

Then, in Tibetan Buddhist environment, especially in a monastic environment, there is not a lot of exercise, but most of the monks and nuns live very long life. What they eat is very simple, they do not have a lot of varieties of food. But it helps them to keep being happy emotionally and healthy physically, especially long prostrations.

When you do prostrations, each of the gestures has a special meaning.

First you join your two hands putting your thumbs inside your palms, that is the Buddhist way of doing prostrations (not with flat hands), the right hand being the method aspect of the path, the Bodhicitta, love, compassion; and the left hand, the wisdom of selflessness, of emptiness.

Together, **they represent the union of wisdom and method** to perform powerful practice of veneration, of purification, whatever benefit that comes from the practice you perform will be dedicated for that.

Then, **you place your hands on the center of the crown, to purify all the limitations to actualize the major and minor marks of the Buddha**, especially the Ushnisha, Buddha's crown, one of the marks of the Buddha.

Then, you place on the forehead, to purify whatever negativities you accumulated physically and accumulate all the causes to actualize Buddha's holy body.

Then, you place them on the throat to purify all the negativities accumulated through your speech, to accumulate all the causes to actualize Buddha's meritorious sound and speech.

Then, the last one, placed at the heart purifies all the negativities accumulated through your heart and then accumulate all the causes to achieve Buddha's omniscient enlightened mind.

After that, **you gradually lie down on the ground**, flat. The texts emphasize going down like a big tree, as in slow motion. Your feet should be together side by side, because then all your body structure is very straight up, stretched. If your balance is not that good, of course you can put a bit of distance between them.

Then, when you do the hand gesture, you should stretch your arms as much as possible before gathering your hands on your crown.

The more you cover space and ground you cover around you with your gestures, the higher **the number of dusts you cover. This is the number of merits you create to achieve the higher beneficial body of the Dharma Kings, or the Kings of the 33 Gods.** That will be the number of reincarnations you will obtain as a Wheel turning King, which is so beneficial. You will also be reborn as a deva or a human, a son or daughter of the Gods.

Then, once on the ground, put your hands a bit back behind and gather them in a vast gesture, as if you were gathering things; before stretching your arms ahead and put them again at your crown, before stretching and expanding them again around your body to pull you back on foot. It's a bit as if you were swimming.

You should not remain too long on the ground. **You should get up as swift as possible.** Then, when you do down, you always touch the ground with **full flat palms**, not fists, and stretch your fingers as much as you can. Traditionally, you would do **three times** like that in front of holy objects or your Guru. But you can do as many times as you can.

Then, they are **short prostrations** called prostrations of Five Limbs: forehead, palms and knees. You do not have to lie down. You can also do three times just the hand gesture and bow down the upper part of your body. You can also just join the palms of your hands at the level of your heart, **even with just one hand at your heart, with the thumb inside.**

That gesture of respect, we do not only do it to the Guru or the Buddhas (even a holy object the size of your thumb, or a "defect" painting or Tsa-tsas), but to everybody. **There is a saying: you offer the same respect that you have to the Buddha to all sentient beings, because the sentient beings are the whole purpose of the existence of the Buddha.**

Therefore, the culture of greeting everybody with that gesture of respect is so meaningful whenever we meet each other. So, when you go to pilgrimage or to a temple, one thing to accumulate merits is to at least do the prostrations with your hand at your heart to all the holy objects.

That was the physical type of prostrations. Now, the **verbal prostrations: it consists in offering praises**. If you are doing prostrations to the Guru, you can say:

“All magnificent Glorious Enlightened Guru, may I become just like you” or “I prostrate to the Guru”, “Lama Kyab Su Chhi Wo”. Or to the Buddha: “I prostrate to Buddha”, or to the Dharma “I prostrate to the Dharma”, or to the Bodhisattvas “I prostrate to the Bodhisattvas”, you prostrate to the Arhat, to the Sangha, to the Stupa.

Whenever you are saying those words, you are doing the prostration of speech. It is because Sariputra, in his previous life had prostrated in front of Buddha’s picture and expressed his aspiration to become like Buddha that Sariputra had this immense karma to be one of the closest to Shakyamuni Buddha and his attendant.

Then, **mental prostration**: you see the Guru as Buddha and generate faith and veneration. You do that to the Buddha too, remembering his qualities and express genuine sense of inspiration and faith. You do that to the Dharma, the Sangha, all holy beings.

When **you do prostrations and want to purify something specifically in relation to the Guru**, if you displeased the Guru, disobeyed the Guru, or Guru’s advice, did not follow the Guru’s instructions, or criticize the Guru, whatever karma you committed, maybe in the past, in this lifetime or there may be possibility in the future, such karmic imprints may be carried in your heart, in order to purify that; **then you recite: “Lamala Kyab Su Chhi Wo”**. Then if you do manage you do long prostrations, or one of the other forms of physical prostrations, three times, hundreds of times.

Then, if you have **some karma committed in relation to certain holy objects, certain holy places, certain individual holy beings, and certain Sangha**, then **you can express their names, and do prostrations**. Under the instruction of Manjushri that saw he needed to purify obscurations and accumulate merits in order to realize emptiness directly, Lama Tsongkhapa engaged in **35 Buddhas** Prostrations practice and accumulated many hundred thousand of prostrations, on top of mandala offerings (specifically for the accumulation of merits). You can establish a special karmic connection with 35 Buddhas and 35 specific qualities of those Buddhas, that you will be able to achieve, and the 8 Medicine Buddhas.

Or you can also do **Vajrasattva** recitation.

But the most common one is the 35 Buddhas. It is even better if you memorize the 35 Buddhas prayer, because when you recite them, you are doing verbal prostrations too. Then, by reflecting on the meaning, you do mental prostrations at the same time. **By combining them, you are doing the three prostrations together**.

You can also recite the **8 Medicine Buddhas to make it a powerful healing practice**: in the Medicine Buddha puja, you have a section of reciting seven times the names of the Medicine Buddhas.

If you cannot memorize them, you can record your own voice and play it when you do the prostrations. You can listen to others’ recordings too, but it is best with your voice to accumulate

merits of your own speech. Then, you focus on your physical gesture and mental attitude generating faith in the Buddhas and their qualities.

The Sutras describe all the benefits of doing prostrations. The first one is you will have a beautiful body whenever you will reincarnate, not in a worldly way, **a meritorious body to inspire others in virtue, to influence them with virtuous inspiration**. Then, wherever you are, it brings harmony, peace and happiness, people feel so comfortable and happy to be around you. Not only the people, but your presence also blesses the place and the other living creatures. The place you touch is where everybody gathers and feel so wonderful and inspired. You create that kind of karma and energy.

Then, **you will be able to live pure morality**. It conditions to observe the vows in pure morality, that is why those who keep Tantric vows, Bodhisattvas vows, Sangha vows, one of the tools to preserve pure vows is doing prostrations. You will have more devotion, the more prostration you do and the more devotion you develop, towards your Guru, the Dharma, Buddha, Sangha, virtues, ...You will always pursue being near to the Guru, being near to the Dharma, the Buddha, the Sangha.

Your mind will become so clear and courageous towards activities in relation to the Dharma, to virtues activities, so enthusiastic. Otherwise, you will always excuse not to practice, instead of having the mental attitude of “I can do it, I will do it right on”. Eventually you will develop the most courageous Bodhicitta mind.

Then, “I will achieve enlightenment. I will make sure I will achieve enlightenment within this very lifetime, within this very retreat time, on this very cushion, within this very journey”. Then, you will achieve enlightenment, the exalted wisdom. The prostrations will act as a direct cause, not a conditional cause, to the Dharmakaya body of the Buddha, the wisdom body of the Buddha.

You cannot have all the Buddhas on your altar, but one thing you can do is inviting all the Buddhas as your merits field where you are going to do prostrations there to all of them through your mind.

While doing prostrations, you manifest yourself in numberless bodies, not only the merits field is numberless but the practitioner too through your visualization, to accumulate another round of numberless merits. Then, you also **visualize all your previous reincarnations** in all Realms, all of them manifested under the form of a human, same as you, you carry the same mind set, the same devotion, same inspiration and same manner, exactly.

You also bring all your future reincarnations, the possibilities of being reincarnated in all Realms, and all your reincarnations in the Bodhisattvas path, the 10 Bhumis Bodhisattvas path, all of your reincarnations as a sentient being, same as you, same inspiration...And you are the leader. When you recite you are the chant leader. When you are doing it, everybody is watching you.

That itself actualizes the effectiveness of purification of past karma as well as the purification of all the karmic imprints that will result for future consequences.

You absolutely feel their presence. It is the words of the Buddha. So, if you really follow the instructions of the Buddha, it becomes real. Not just imaginary. Sometimes you can visualize as big as Mount Meru to cover more space, or sometimes so tiny as atoms, so you have numberless Buddhas, numberless beings, numberless reincarnations of you around, to accumulate extraordinary merits and extraordinary purification.

As explained in the Middle Length Lam-Rim, you can use this verse from the King of Prayers to combine with the **physical prostrations**:

Bowing to the power of prayer for good conduct, all the buddhas directly appear to my mind. I bow sincerely to all these buddhas with as many bodies as there are atoms in the world.

Then, **mental prostrations**:

On every atom, as many buddhas as there are atoms are surrounded by bodhisattvas. Everyone is absorbed in meditation on suchness. I fully venerate all of these accomplished ones.

Then, **verbal prostrations**:

I extol the good qualities of all the buddhas. I praise all of the sugatas with the sounds of an ocean of songs in voices of inexhaustible seas of praise.

It is important to utilize your own speech. This way you use the sense organ, the tongue, which is part of the physical aggregate, to create a sound that will create its own karmic impact. Then, the sound, the tongue, the body, the mind, each of them has its own special karmic meritorious accumulation, which will be a cause to bring all the benefit from the prostrations.

- **Limb of Offerings**

You should regard each of the different types of offering in their numberless infinite forms.

The offerings that can be consumed, regard them as nectar. Those which cannot be consumed, you offer them as jewels, precious gems, beautiful objects to see, to hear, to be touched. For example, flowers, it can be divine flowers in the Pure Lands, decorative flowers in the celestial of the deities, you visualize them. Then, in the human realm flowers, you can visualize all the flowers that exist in the world, not only the flowers you planted, all the wildflowers and so on.

You can offer what is owned by you and by others in the visualization. When you offer things that belong to others, including tree or plants owned by Nagas or spirits, those beings accumulate merits too, you are sharing your merits with them, that how you are helping them. You are benefiting them. So, when you do not have time for meditation, wherever you go, whatever you see, you can say “Om Ha Hum” and offer everything.

Then, everything around becomes pure. The environment becomes like an extensive celestial offering by the power of the mantra: Om multiplies, Ha transforms into divine pure offering, Hum purifies all the impure substances in relation to the object (even ugliness, incompleteness). On top of that if you are able to dedicate the merits to the owner, that would really be a Bodhisattvas’ way of life.

Then, if you are practicing Tantra, you can use the Eight Lines of the Dakinis prayers. Whenever you recite that, you are actualizing what you see as Heruka, Vajrayogini celestial. For example, if you see a mountain and recite the prayers, that mountain becomes Vajrayogini Mountain.

So, now when you go for a walk, **you just make extensive offering yoga of practice.** Similarly, you turn your groceries into supplies for the Buddhas, the Dakinis. This is so powerful. That is why it is called secret mantra, swift path, because it is so precious and powerful.

Similarly, instead of going to the toys store to buy cows, horses, elephants for the altar, in the fields, there are plenty of cows and horses. If you do the offering of those animals, the animals will benefit from it. You can offer also your body, others’ body.

So, even when you see your friends and family, instead of saying “hello” you can say “Om Ha Hum” if they do not mind. If the person is wearing beautiful ornaments, or clothes, you do the same “Om Ha Hum”. You cause them to accumulate a similar benefit than you, even if they do not know the Dharma.

If you carry that kind of mind, you start to see offerings to the Buddha in everything through your practice. This is very powerful to transform our mind and purify our impure views, our negativities.

Same, **any sound becomes offerings**. Now, you are carrying the lenses or the earplugs of the offering. Whatever sound you hear, you make an offering, even the complains of someone, you also make an offering out of it. If you really want to overcome the complaints of somebody, arguing does not help, you make the offering.

By the power of your own interpretation and perception, that is what you call taking everything onto the path to enlightenment. It is a Lojong practice. Then if you can offer even a bell to the stupa or holy object, there are so many benefits.

Even when we offer incense, there is some light when we light it up, that also becomes a light offering. That light also will be a substitute to the butter lamp if you do not have one. Similarly, crystals in the sun will reflect rainbowed colored lights, then, the light of the sun, of the moon, the lights in the city the light in your room. We ignore all that and we just offer tiny candles and think we are great practitioners.

And that will make meaningful the use of electricity, otherwise, turning on the lights will exhaust your merits and money. Think of Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche and all his massive light offerings. Making light offerings is so important to purify our ignorance. Our wisdom will increase, emptiness will be realized as quick as possible.

Incense offering includes two practices: the offering of incense sticks and the incense powder which has a different meaning. The sand mandala too includes colored sand mixed with medicinal colors, incense colors, herbs colors, natural precious colors if you do it properly. If you gather them together and put that on the altar. That also becomes part of the incense offering.

You can make the offering even more meaningful conjoining the offering with the Bodhisattvas’ way of offering, which is called the Samantabhadra’s clouds of offering practice, you can find in the prayer book. Just by the power of the prayers, it becomes extensive.

Lama Tsongkhapa keeps on quoting the King of Prayers Sutra:

I offer these buddhas and bodhisattvas fabulous flowers, glorious garlands, cymbals, scented balm, precious parasols, excellent butter lamps, and superb incense. I offer these buddhas and bodhisattvas’ sublime garments, supreme scents, sachets of fragrant powder equal to Mount Meru, and every wonderful thing in a splendid array.

Unsurpassable offerings are set forth in the stanza:

May all these unsurpassable and vast offerings appear before all the buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Whatever offering you do on top of those, you mention them and then recite if you want to put the offering into words:

Through the power of faith along with virtuous deeds, I pay homage and make offerings to all the conquerors.

- Limb of Confession

By combining the purification and accumulation of merits of the Seven Limbs practices, eventually, we will actualize the complete purified state of our being, which is Buddha's form body and Buddha's wisdom body.

In the Middle-Length Lam-Rim, quoting the King of Prayers, you will find this verse:

I confess each and every one of the negative actions I have done with my body, speech, and mind influenced by desire, hatred, and ignorance.

Any limitation needs to be confessed.

No questions about the negative actions that performed through our body, speech and mind, that are by nature negative such as killing: causing life of others, causing pain to others, by nature is negative, whether you have this motivation or not, whether you have wrong or positive motivation or not, it is negative.

Misleading others with words by nature is negative. In a similar way, the arising of desirous attachment, like arising of anger, aversion, ignorance, does not need motivation, by nature is negative. **It is harmful by nature.**

Then, **the action that are not by nature harmful but done with a harmful motivation or intention, or a harmful conclusion, they have to be purified.** Similarly, there are certain actions, limitation or aspiration which can be included as negative, as obstacles, that need to be purified, even though by nature it is not negative, such as self-nirvana, **aspiring to self-nirvana**, to remain just for yourself completely in the peace of nirvana just by completely forgetting about the concern of well-being of others. Comparing to the altruistic path, **it falls into a limitation and needs to be purified.**

Then, there are many limitations in relation to correct views, as by nature not believing in Buddha, Dharma, Sangha. By nature, not believing in karma, is not negative, but in relation to the view that you hold as a Buddhist, whose views are based on the Dharma, then if you do not believe into Buddhas, Dharma, Sangha then it falls into wrong views. You need to purify that. Then, if you do not believe in the laws of causes and effects, rebirth and reincarnation, then, as a Buddhists all these are limitations that need to be purified.

There are also many views that carry limitations, in comparison to the ultimate view. By nature, the view held by Vaibashika or Sautantrika or Cittamatra or Madhyamaka Svatantrika, holding the dualistic view of inherent existence, or even non-Buddhist view like permanent existence, are not negative. So many people follow these views. They have their own reason to follow that and are benefited from that including in believing in God, in a creator.

But, as a follower of the correct view of Madhyamika Prasangika, following the view of Shakyamuni Buddha, of Nagarjuna, Lama Tsongkhapa, then the earlier views are to be negated. They are obstacles. They carry limitations and need to be purified. Otherwise, we will not be able to actualize the ultimate view, isn't it?

Therefore, "negative action" are not just the actions that are negative by nature, or by intention. There are many different forms of limitations. This audience is mainly a Mahayanic audience. Lam-Rim audience are Mahayanic audience, even if at the moment for some of us the purpose is for now only higher rebirth or a purposeful life. Ultimately our goal is to achieve

Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings. Even if you are following the small scope, your ultimate goal is to follow the higher scope.

Self-liberation is due to desire. Desire is a very broad subject. In relation to the individuals who aspire to self-liberation, they may not accept that their intention to pursue self-liberation is due to attachment desire. But from the Mahayanic point of view, this is attachment desire, because this is about self-concern, the concern of self-cherishing purpose, isn't it?

One of the benefits of doing confession purification practices is that we can purify what we committed in the past, also stop committing new action in the future. In relation to results, to purify the consequences of the past committed karma and stop the formation of the future karmic consequences to be experienced.

There 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.

The negative action comes in two forms: Definite and Indefinite Karma. Once you committed a karma, once the four factors of the karma are already completed, including its conditions for the results to ripen, one has definitely to experience the results. This is called definite karma.

By applying the four-opponent power, one will still have to experience the results; but the purification will reduce the duration of time of the consequences, or the intensity of the consequences.

Certain karmas are supposed to be experienced in the Lower Hell Realms, but due to the power of the purification practice, the results will be only experienced by having a disturbing dream, or a headache, or a stomach pain, or born in the Hell Realm but for just one moment, or a day, instead of remaining there for eons.

You can find the Samayavajra and the Vajrasattva Practice 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, or any 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 purification and that may help.

Or, you may have found a Guru, and you may find it so difficult to obtain teaching, 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 karma, so you can do this practice.

While doing the Samayavajra practice, you need to have a genuine sense of trust, to believe, a total conviction in the practice. On the basis of the Four Opponent Powers, take refuge in Samayavajra (1st power), confess and purify all your negative karma, even those that you do not remember (2nd power). It is very possible that we must have committed some karma that we forgot since beginningless past lives.

Confess also all the tendencies to commit karma in the future, all of them have to be purified with a sense of urgency “I must purify right now” as if you have swallowed a poison. Generate an even greater sense of urgency: if we pass away from this life before purifying all the negativities, there are so many negative karmas that would bring the possibility to be born in the Lower Hell Realms for countless eons. That is much scarier than just dying because of poison. Then the visualization and the mantra recitation are the 3rd power, the antidote.

Then, hear Samayavajra saying:

Guru Samayavajra then says: “All your negative karmas, obscurations, and degenerated samayas are completely purified.”

The Omniscient One can see even your subtle karma, while we cannot. Until we become Buddha, we will not be able to see it. So, trust the Omniscient One when he says that statement that you are completely purified. Then, make sure to be mindful that “even at the cost of my life, I will not commit any negativity in the future” (4th power).

There should be a time frame in order to make an effective purification: for example, “at least until I finished this purification practice”, or until next morning, best being “even at the cost of my life I will not again”. The rest of the sadhana can only be done if you have the initiation, otherwise, you simply visualize Samayavajra dissolve into a light form and enter your heart merging with it and Guru Samayavajra and you become inseparable.

Meditate on the three spheres of emptiness: meaning understand yourself, the creator of the negative karma, the karma created and the purification practice (the blessings; you being inseparable with the deity), all lies in emptiness of inherent existence. Then, dedicate the merits.

In a similar way, you can do **Vajrasattva** with or without initiation, there will just be differences in the way of visualizing Father and mother Vajrasattva or Solitary Vajrasattva (depending on the initiation), at the top of your head or merged with your heart, but without the arising of Vajrasattva as in the Highest Yoga Tantra sadhana. If possible, one of the most meaningful things, on the basis of a daily 21 times of Vajrasattva 100 syllables mantra recitation with a glimpse of meditation of the Four Opponent Powers, then conducting a 100,000 Vajrasattva retreat.

It is regarded as very powerful and one of the meaningful highlights of the precious human rebirth. It requires about three months of your full-time. And the rest of life with a daily 21 times mantra recitation. **That will give a great protection of not committing new karma and will purify intensively past karmas, even those of the karmas newly accumulated will never multiplied. Because once the karma is committed it multiplies.**

It is good to memorize these particular verses:

“Through ignorance and delusion, I have broken and degenerated my commitments. Guru, be my savior and refuge. Lord, holder of the vajra, endowed with great compassion, in you, the foremost of beings, I take refuge.”

(Vajrasattva replies) *“Son of the lineage, your negative karmas, obscurations, and all broken and degenerated commitments are now cleansed and purified”.*

Every now and then, while you are walking, eating, doing anything, just take one minute and do this. It will be really helpful. Or, suddenly something happens, for example, while walking you accidentally step onto an ant. Right there you recite “Om Vajra Sattva Hum” and say those verses sincerely, feeling the presence of Guru Vajrasattva. Feel that not only the mistake is purified but also you help the victim to whom you accidentally caused harm.

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.

If it is negative in relation to **individual liberation vows**, like refuge, lay vows, committing 10 non-virtues actions, one should refresh the refuge and together refresh the lay vows, minimum three times a day and three times at night. Otherwise as much as possible.

If it is individual liberation vows in relation to Sangha, if you are pre-ordained Sangha then you purify through your ordination abbot. If it is in relation to novice or fully ordained Sangha, that must be purified within the Sangha community in the presence of minimum 4 fully ordained Sanghas, the more the better.

Then, **Bodhisattva vows**, you need to purify by retaking the Bodhisattva vows from the Guru, during initiations or separately, or you retake Bodhisattva vows in front of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas’ holy objects, or visualizing Buddhas and Bodhisattvas’ holy objects.

In relation to **Tantric vows**, you retake them through initiations, in the presence of the Guru, or in six-session Guru Yoga practice, Guru Puja practice.

Then, if you take the **8 Mahayana precepts**, you confess through Vajrasattva practice, but instead of reciting “Vajrasattva” in the mantra, you recite “Pemasattva”, the lotus. You can use the mantra of pure morality and recite it twenty-one times:

OM AMOGHA SHILA SAMBHARA [SAMBHARA] / BHARA BHARA / MAHA SHUDDHA SATTVA PADMA VIBHUSHITA BHUJA / DHARA DHARA SAMANTA / AVALOKITE HUM PHAT SVAHA (21x)

It is good to recite it whenever we have free time, because we may not know when we will be limiting the precepts to keep 24/24 the Samaya very purely.

Then, those of you who have initiations, you have **daily sadhana or commitments**. There is possibility of not doing them correctly, doing mistakes, limitations that need to be purified. As mentioned before, we cannot take lightly any limitation. If you are doing Yamantaka sadhana, there is a section with the mantra “Om Yamantaka Samaya”, then you can take the occasion to do a Yamantaka Vajrasattva purification. You can do similarly with Heruka. It is Vajrasattva in many manifestations designed to purify specific limitations that happened in specific practices.

- Limb of Rejoicing

I rejoice in all the merit, whatever it may be, of all the buddhas of the ten directions, bodhisattvas, pratyekabuddhas, those with more to learn, those with no more to learn, and all ordinary beings.

Those are the five kinds of beings (the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Pratyekabuddhas, Sravakabuddhas, Ordinary sentient beings) to rejoice not only in the merits you created but also all the merits created by the others, like all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the ten directions.

It is a huge opportunity, when you think about the benefit of rejoicing.

If you want to practice just one thing, practice rejoicing. It is one of the best ways to keep our mind happy: day to day, our heart filled with happiness, positivity. The benefit out of it is supreme.

That is why Shantideva made a statement: “rejoicing is the greatest virtue, among all the virtues”.

If our mind is so easy to scatter by worries, by worldly concerns, by sensual distractions, then you practice rejoicing, with your mind totally invested in rejoicing: like taking the time to rejoice to all the merits accumulated by the Buddhas in the South, in the East...one by one.

Rejoice in the merits of the 35 Buddhas, the 21 Taras. Reflect on each quality of each of the 35 Buddhas starting with Shakyamuni Buddha’s Major and Minor Marks, Buddha’s deeds. Unbelievable. Wow. 21 Taras. Take the 21 Praises and reflect on each of them. You can read the commentary. 5 Dhyani Buddhas. All the levels of Bodhisattvas’ merits. Ordinary Bodhisattvas. Pratyekabuddhas, Hearers, “Those with more to learn” are the learners who have not achieved cessation from the three paths.

Think about all the merits and qualities, including yours, fill your heart with joy, and feel happy.

That is called Rejoicing. In the Sutras it is said that rejoicing in our own merits doubles them. It is the easiest to feel happy. But we hardly do that. We are busier to think about all the negativities we did, or we may commit in the future, in the form of worries. And we hold onto past limitations we committed; you keep reminding them.

The only way we should remember them, as serious practitioners, is when we do confessions and purification practices, to remember and acknowledge them. Other than that, we should never think about them and forget about it. The first step of a Purification is forgetting them, letting them go from our grasping.

When we come to the point when we are losing the grip of grasping of holding onto past negativities or wrongdoing, that is a good sign. Our heart should be filled with Rejoicing.

It is so wonderful to remember all the retreats you did. Some people may think why I should recall. It is for rejoicing purposes. How many amazing Dharma events did you have with your Gurus? With your Dharma brothers and sisters? How many great things have you done in the temple? In Dharma centers? in the service of Guru, in the service of sentient beings? How many practices of generosity, forgiveness, acceptance, kindness to your family members?

It is good to recall them, to remember them, again and again and feel proud of yourself. You should reward yourself. Make you a nice coffee, nice tea, nice meal. Or a nice outing. Go for it. With that heart of “wow, well done”. Not only in this lifetime.

You must confirm to yourself that from beginningless lifetimes, you accumulated immense and immense of merits. The proof is your present time being born as a precious human rebirth during the time of the Compassionate Buddha manifesting in the form of Guru and be able to enjoy the Dharma, can you imagine?

This is the result of your unbelievable accumulation of merits. One lifetime is not enough to accumulate that many merits. You must have accumulated them from beginningless lifetimes. Not just from beginningless lifetimes “samsara, samsara”. Yes. When you want to purify, when you want to gain renunciation. Some people misunderstand “practicing Buddhism is so depressing, you always talk about samsara, lower Hell Realms, karma...” Yes, some particular time, particular practices require that.

But there is a lot of time when we get to think about wonderful, amazing things also. Sometimes you must imagine “wow this must be my past lifetime”. And admire yourself. I must have been the attendant, or the very close friend to this particular virtuous friend, or the Guru. I would think like this: “I must have been this very cute puppy to my Guru in my past life, that is why I get the opportunity to meet my Guru”. Just to think about that is wonderful right, this cute puppy. Or a cute human being, why not?

It is so healthy, so wonderful to have that mindset. Then, if you feel comfortable, think about it all that you have: the food, the clothes, sustainable health, friends, family...is the result of your past life, or many lifetimes. Feel proud of yourself. And rejoice about that. That will double your merits without spending much time, many efforts.

Then, people who have less vows than you, less merits than you, whoever is doing good things, you rejoice and feel happy for them. This way you will accumulate double of their merits. When you rejoice on the merits of Bodhisattvas, you will accumulate half of their merits. Unbelievable and it is so easy to feel happy about Bodhisattvas’ deeds, their way of life and virtues. So, easy compared to human beings, isn’t it?

There are numberless Bodhisattvas like Shantideva, Lama Atisha, Lama Serlingpa, Arya Nagarjuna, Bodhisattvas Manjushri, Chenrezig. When you rejoice in the Buddhas’ merits, you think about Buddha Chenrezig, when you think of Bodhisattvas, you can think about Bodhisattva Chenrezig.

When you rejoice in the merits of the Buddhas, you accumulate 1 of the ten of their merits. Then, rejoicing in the merits of the Guru, I think it would be even more, or maybe equal to rejoicing in the merits of the Buddhas. Here, it is not said how many. It should be more. Rejoicing in anyone’s merits during a solar eclipse multiply hundred million times. Sometimes, it sounds like “How could it be possible”? We should not have that kind of thoughts.

In order to gather all the three countless eons of merits, which is unmeasurable, some take countless eons, others take just one moment like that. That is why Buddhahood is possible within this very moment, in this very cushion, in this very lifetime. Or it can happen hundreds of million eons of lifetimes later. It all depends on the accumulation of merits.

We do not mind if it takes three great countless eons to achieve Buddhahood but also you may regard the possibility that you may achieve Buddhahood right now. So, try to accumulate as many merits as possible also this way.

Then, rejoicing during a lunar eclipse multiplies the merits seven hundred thousand times. This is the words of the Buddha. Just think of His Holiness, Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche, your Gurus, totally filled with selflessness, altruism Bodhisattva's ways of life. Completely in peace, in positivity. You see all those qualities in them in every breath, every move. It is so heart touching, heartwarming.

You can naturally feel so fortunate, in the expression of feelings, feel fortunate to have met this Guru, receiving his teachings, this Guru...feeling so wonderful. That is rejoicing. Naturally your heart, your life will be so filled with purpose and meaning. **Not even one moment is wasted.**

If you do whatever you do in the service of even one sentient being, you are following the advice of Shakyamuni Buddha, of the ten directions Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, the Gurus: even one beneficial work for one sentient being, just one ant crawling, reciting mantras or caring for them, you are following them. Even just that, one action a day, feel "how amazing I am".

Your heart can be completely filled with bliss and positivity. In the heart of that person there is no room to feel agitation, meaningless, depressed, angry, unhappy.

All of you here you are spending your whole day, dedicating your whole life in your very best in an altruistic way. The entirety of the day you are obeying, following the Bodhisattvas and Buddhas and Gurus' guidance. You are trying your very best. Unbelievable rejoicing. Life is so worth living. Whatever inconvenience that can come from Samsara, compared to the meaning of your life becomes very small.

Gradually, the way we train our mind like that, in the heart of rejoicing, then you will find no meaning in giving any focus on those unhelpful thoughts that come in your way.

You will be so forgiving, understanding to yourself. You make some mistake. Do not focus on that. You are still a sentient being, you are already doing so great. You are following your Guru's and Buddhas' and Bodhisattvas' advice the best you can, 24 hours: you also go to bed like that. And some more altruistically, with altruistic intention. And if you do this mistake, how can you freak out, and pay so much attention. It is so easy to purify the mistake, to forgive yourself for that mistake. It is such a wonderful way to take care of yourself.

Don't focus on that. Yes, you have this limitation, forget it. You have such an amazing and purposeful life. Why do you focus on the moment of anger you had a few minutes ago? Let it be purified. Let go. Rejoicing is so wonderful.

- **Limb of Requesting to Turn the Wheel of Dharma**

I implore all the protectors, lights of the world in the ten directions, who have reached Buddhahood, which is without attachment, to turn the peerless wheel of the teaching.

This is so important. **We should practice it all the time. That way we will never experience the poverty of receiving Dharma nectar. And you will see every action, all the deeds of the Guru, as teaching thanks to this practice. And whenever you read the text, you will see every letter, every word as a teaching.** It turns the wheel of Dharma educating you and also causing you to realize the path in reliance on those words you read in the text, those words that you listen to.

Then, whenever you need instructions or advice, you timely receive them.

If we do not have the merits through this Limb of practice, no matter how many teachings you receive, you do not hear the instructions, you do not hear the Dharma teachings, you hear something else. Even if you learn the teachings, and train in it, you never realize the path.

Sometimes just to expand or express your sincerity in requesting Dharma teachings wholeheartedly, not only voicing out to request the teaching, but you can also visualize yourself in numerous forms and then in one voice wholeheartedly, sincerely, respectfully requesting them.

- **Limb of Supplication (or request)**

I supplicate, with palms joined in prayer, those wishing to demonstrate their final nirvāṇa: please stay as many eons as there are atoms to benefit and bring happiness to all beings.

So, when you request to the Gurus not to pass into Parinirvana then you can do it in many different ways: Long-life Pujas, mandala offerings, fulfilling the Guru's wishes; most of all, keeping pure Samaya in relation to the Guru, then practicing the Guru's advice. **Then the Guru will live with us for a long time.**

In case the Guru sees the necessity of showing the teaching of impermanence and death to the disciple, **then, the manifestation of the Guru will manifest swiftly for us to continue to enjoy the Dharma.**

You can also dedicate Long-life Retreat, like Amitayus Retreat, Namgyalma Retreat, White Tara Retreat, or daily recitation of White Tara practice in the name of the Guru to fulfill the Limb of the Supplication.

Then, we do that also to the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Deities, Dharma protectors, for their blessings to always be closed to us. That very much is constructed by reciting the names of the Buddhas, supplications of the Deity, the Buddhas, doing sadhanas of the Deities, the aspirational prayers of the Buddhas.

- **Limb of Dedication**

Whatever little merit I have accumulated by prostrating, offering, confessing, rejoicing, requesting, and supplicating, I dedicate it all to enlightenment.

All the roots of virtue represented by the previous six limbs are made the common property of all sentient beings and never come to an end, since they have been dedicated with strong aspiration as causes of complete enlightenment.

If you thus develop an understanding of the meaning of those words and slowly do as was taught without allowing your mind to wander, you will gather immeasurable heaps of merit.

Five of these limbs — prostrating, offering, requesting, supplicating, and rejoicing — belong to the collection of accumulations. [30] Confessing purifies obstructions. One aspect of rejoicing, the cultivation of joy in one's own virtue, multiplies the virtue. By means of dedicating, the virtues of

collecting, purifying, and multiplying, however small, are multiplied manifoldly, and what would normally come to an end after producing a temporary effect is made inexhaustible.

So, the dedication is as equally important as the motivation because it fulfills the three purposes:

(1) accumulating, (2) purifying, and (3) multiplying and making inexhaustible.

By dedicating in Bodhicitta and Emptiness:

- If anger arises or anything negative, **all the merits you have been accumulated and dedicated will not be destroyed and remain forever there**
- And not only by dedicating in altruism, Bodhicitta multiplies since the dedication is done in the concern of numberless sentient beings, then **your merits will be numberless, as equal as the number of sentient beings.**

Then, no matter how tiny the merit, if you dedicate it in Bodhicitta it will last until the last sentient being achieved Buddhahood. It will benefit from now until Samsara ends. It will never be exhausted and eventually **it will turn into the inexhaustible merits of Buddhas' enlightened qualities: the perfected merit of wisdom and the perfected merit of method.**

That will turn into the perfected merit of wisdom as Buddha's wisdom body, all pervasive forever existent, forever beneficial. **The inexhaustible merit of method eventually will become Buddha's form body forever living; every single method benefiting the rest of the living beings.**

Even after the entire sentient beings achieve enlightenment, they will live in complete perfect virtues, because of multiplying, purifying, accumulating, they will become inexhaustible.

The practice of rejoicing also carries certain elements of the practice of dedicating such as accumulating. By rejoicing it also prevents the obstacles to consume the merits. By rejoicing, it will multiply the merits until achieving the perfected enlightened qualities and become inexhaustible too.

6. The last (6th) Preparatory Practice: The Request

Sixth, as for the final preparatory practice, with a clear visualization of the objects, offer a maṇḍala, and with strong aspiration, make numerous requests: "Please grant blessings that all erroneous attitudes such as disrespecting the spiritual teacher may cease and that all the nonerroneous attitudes toward the spiritual teacher may come about with ease. I request blessings that all outer and inner obstacles may be pacified."

Request not to pass into Parinirvana, to always turn the wheel of Dharma, to quickly grant the blessings, blessings of realizations, to clear obstacles.

In the FPMT Prayer book you can also find this verse if you practice Deity Yoga practice towards the Guru from whom you received initiations, Tantric vows, Bodhisattvas vows, you can conjoin this:

Special Request for the Three Great Purposes:

*I prostrate and go for refuge to the guru and the Three Rare Sublime Ones.
Please bless my mind.*

Please bless me and all mother sentient beings to immediately cease all the wrong concepts from disrespect to the virtuous friend up to the subtle dual appearances of white appearance, red increase, and dark near attainment.

*Please bless us to immediately generate all the right realizations
from respect for the virtuous friend up to the unification of no-more-learning.
Please bless us to immediately pacify all outer and inner obstacles. (3x)*

At the end, if you know the Guru's name mantra you can recite it 21 times or one mala.

Then, **you can visualize the Guru absorbing into your heart**, cf. detailed explanation of the visualization in the section dedicated to the prayers in relation to the Guru III.C. Prayers to receive the blessings of the four initiations or empowerments, In the footsteps of the Guru, ebook mentioned earlier tenzinzopa.com/ebook/ebook/gurudevotion.pdf).

Make a few rounds of the 9 rounds of breathing meditation (for a detailed explanation on how to conduct it and the visualization to make it a purification practice cf. [vajracuttersutra.pdf](#) page 13) to set up your mind in the session and the practice.

C. Preliminary prayers and actual sadhana (commentary)

After the preliminary practices, come the preliminary prayers and the setting up of the Bodhicitta motivation: **Refuge and Bodhicitta prayer, Invocation four lines prayer, Samanthabhadra's offering prayer to accumulate merits for the success of the retreat.** Usually, you would have vajra, bell, and saffron water as well in the vase.

You can ring the bell while doing the invocation. Sprinkling the water to bless the offerings.

If you do not have a vase, a glass of pure water will do. You can have a singing bowl if you do not have a proper dorje and bell. No worries if really you do not have any of that.

You can find the Gandan Lha Gyalma sadhana and description of the visualization later in this booklet.

- 1. Taking Refuge and Generating Bodhicitta**
- 2. Four Immeasurable Prayer**

You might want to use the longest version in relation to the Guru Yoga practice as at the end you request the blessings of the Guru deity to achieve the realizations of each of those immeasurable thoughts.

- 3. Generating special Bodhicitta**
- 4. Purifying the place**

To purify the place, the retreat environment, the implements, the offerings, the resources (food, water, air) if there are any impure substances (in particular contaminated from wrong livelihood even the tangka if channeled by any wrong livelihood of others, that would clarify any obstacles to your practice).

At the time of Buddha, Buddha's disciples and attendants were using this prayer to purify everything before Buddha's arrival, even the disciples (broken samaya), the air... so that everything became conducive for the Buddha to shower the nectar of the Dharma.

This way whenever Buddhas was teachings everybody and everything was pure vessels to receive the Dharma and for the Dharma to be the antidote to our samsara.

You can also engage in Gektor practice to dispel any kind of hindrance: a ritual torma offering to the interferers. Usually, you need someone that knows how to conduct the ritual to help you to do that.

If you do not or do not know how to do the practice those 4 lines prayers will be enough.

So, it is very beneficial. It is always beneficial to do any Dharma practice (or studies) with a pure heart. That prayer can fully ripen you to get the full benefit of the sadhana or teaching.

5. Offering prayer

Hold your vajra with your right hand in front of your chest pointing out and the bell with your left hand at the level of your heart while reciting (cf. picture below) and ring the bell while reciting the prayers.



6. Actual Visualization of Lama Tsongkhapa and the merit field

This whole visualization is seen as made of pure light, having nothing to do with physical matter. The image is at the height of the forehead, at a distance of one body length, as large as possible and facing yourself.

First - visualize infinite **pure celestial space** where there is a giant throne, **a square platform** fully and perfectly adorned with all precious jewels and supported by eight white snow-lions (two at each corner) symbolizing Buddha's eight sovereign qualities. The snow lions are transformations of great bodhisattvas and are visualized alive and made of light.

On the throne there is a white and colorful eight petals lotus (symbolizing renunciation) and on the lotus are the sun (symbolizing the wisdom of emptiness) and moon (symbolizing Bodhicitta) disks, cushions of light for Guru Lama Tsongkhapa who is seated upon them. Those

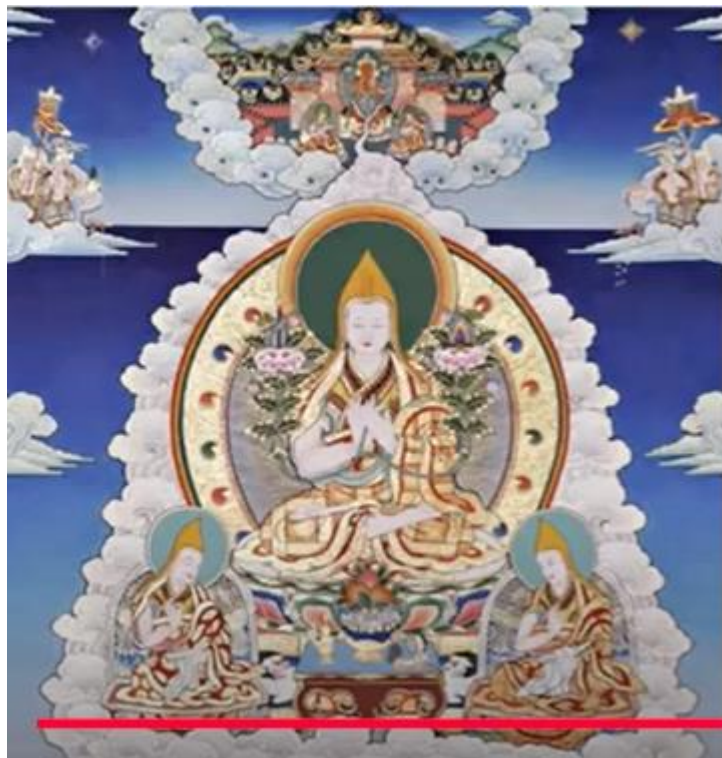
three symbols indicate that the Lama sitting on this throne embodies the three principal aspects of the path.

Uncommon symbolism:

- **Lotus symbolizing clear light**
- **Sun: the illusory body**
- **Moon: nondual attainment of the Buddha's form and wisdom body.**

Reflect on that will enable you to leave imprints in our continuum with the awareness of your mind being one with your Root Guru who appears to us as Lama Tsongkhapa. Guru Lama Tsongkhapa is the embodiment of all the Buddhas of the three times descending in a human form to guide us.

Lama Tsongkhapa is looking directly at you, very pleased of you engaging in the practice.



His holy body is transparent, made of pure golden light, his crown chakra is placed **with white syllable OM embodying Chenrezig, the Buddha of compassion, red syllable AH at his throat embodying Manjushri, the Buddha of wisdom, and blue syllable HUNG at his heart embodying Vajrapani, the Buddha of power**, who is one essence with all the Buddhas, Deities and Gurus.

Light rays emanate from every pore, streaming outward in all directions, and through each beam go numberless manifestations, which ripen sentient beings on to the path to liberation.

He is dressed **in fully ordained sangha robes** which do not touch his body, but remain about one inch from it, showing the power of his realizations. **Wearing Pandit's hat** in golden yellow symbolizes the great scholar of a dharma. His appearance is very peaceful. Every atom of his holy body has the power to give realizations.

His hands are in the mudras of turning the wheel of Dharma, the two hands symbolizing the inseparability of the two truths, the wisdom of dependent arising and emptiness. We can see both the palm and the back of the hand, the two faces of one hand: as the two truths, the two wisdoms,

they are two aspects, interpretations of one entity. The meaning of emptiness is dependent arising, and the meaning of dependent arising is emptiness.

It is also the inseparability of sutra and tantra as Lama Tsongkhapa clarified the misconceptions around the practice of Tantra, upholding his whole life the Vinaya precepts of a fully ordained monk and at the same holding the essence of the practice of Tantra as his heart practice.

It also symbolizes that Lama Tsongkhapa is always liberating numberless beings on the path to liberation from the ocean of Samsara by giving dharma teachings by his great love and compassion.

At his right shoulder, adorned with a Lotus, there is a wisdom sword representing the profound Dharma and at the left wisdom sutra representing the extensive Dharma.

The sword is Manjushri's sword symbolizing Lama Tsongkhapa being oneness with Manjushri, as well as the sharpest wisdom of Lama Tsongkhapa. It indicates someone who achieved a direct realization of emptiness. Just seeing the sharpness of the sword cuts off the ignorance grasping in our heart and dispel obstacles.

The lotus on the left contains at his heart the 80.000 verses of the Prajnaparamita Sutra associated with an echo filling the whole space (including our ears senses) making us only hear the Prajnaparamita Sutra. Without any delay we are directly awakened into a direct realization of emptiness.

An aura of light is surrounding his whole body. Happening uninterruptedly, live transmissions of complete dharma nectar, Lamrim, attended by his heart disciples like Gyaltsab-Je (more senior aspect) and Khedrup-Je (younger and wrathful aspect), and numberless fortunate ripen disciples including yourself.

Feel your heart is totally subdued to Lama Tsongkhapa and his two disciples. Their vision dispels all misconceptions.

Maitreya's Pure Land is far more beautiful than any landscape in the world. Then, in the middle a huge pagoda which is a teaching shrine where Maitreya Buddha does not have even a moment of pause.

Maitreya's position is ever ready to descend to the Southern world to succeed in Shakyamuni Buddha's legacy. When the end of the era of the degenerated times (which is the time of Shakyamuni Buddha turning the wheel of Dharma) will come, then Maitreya will come and proclaim the Dharma.

This practice helps to create the karma to be reborn as Maitreya first disciple when Lord Maitreya will turn the wheel of Dharma. Another practice is building statues of Maitreya, making Tsatsas or paintings of Maitreya...

Lama Tsongkhapa is descending from Tushita and getting bigger and bigger, the clouds of Bodhicitta extend, who can now see the whole Lama Tsongkhapa's mandala in front of you.

On the crown of Lama Tsongkhapa and his two disciples there is a Om, on their throats a Ha, on their heart a Hum, on their navels a SO, at the secret point between anus and genitals HA. It is the mantra of the five Dhyani Buddhas.

From the seed syllables of this mantra, emanates infinite light rays towards the ten directions showering all sentient beings, including you. They also reach the Pure Realms, including Maitreya Pure Land and the celestial there.

From there all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas' blessings absorb into Lama Tsongkhapa and his two disciples. From there, the light rays bring all the benefits to you and the rest of the sentient beings.

That creates the conditions for Lama Tsongkhapa and his two disciples to bring active benefit to purify you and accumulate the two eons of the types of merits, when you will engage into the seven Limbs practice which comes after.

For some it may be difficult to do the whole visualization or for others to visualize being that close to Lama Tsongkhapa; others can see them close yet not clear or seeing them lively and not "just" as a representation like a picture, all due to karmic obscurations.

Whenever you have some difficulty, reinforce the visualization of the 5 syllables mantra and relight the light rays from those seed syllables, that will help purify the karma.

Also, if during the retreat you start to notice some arising of delusions, laziness, any physical or mental sicknesses, any obstacle in the retreat environment (like wars, famine...), you can do the same visualization with the same focus (as everything is a ripening of our karma, therefore we need to purify it).

7. Invocation Prayer

Hold the dorje and bell in the same way than for the offering prayers.

The savior here is referring to Maitreya, the future Buddha, the main teacher of Tushita.

"Hundred" is just expression of "many". There are infinite teachers there. Tushita is somewhere above the 33 Gods Realms: on the center there is Mont Meru and, on the peak, the 33 Gods Realms.

The reason why **Lama Tsongkhapa is descending from Maitreya's heart (cloud = infinite Bodhicitta)** is because Lama Tsongkhapa's reincarnation is residing in Tushita heaven and Lama Tsongkhapa is also regarded as Maitreya's emanation. Two different entities but one in essence.

Lama Tsongkhapa is regarded as the King of the Dharma. Scholarly speaking he is the crown jewel of the snow mountains. He conquered all the scholars from all other traditions, all the Yanas. He achieved enlightenment/omniscience in one lifetime. He expanded the unmistakable profound meaning of Nagarjuna's teaching on emptiness.

By doing so you are inviting the merit field.

8. Seven-Limbs Prayer

This practice depending on the sadhana can come in a different order. Here, it starts with the 1st Limb: **Request to remain for a long time** (for the whole merit field).

You reinforce the previous visualization. You can visualize the size of a thumb to work on your concentration abilities or as big as possible to expand the merits to actualize the conducive conditions for the success of your practice.

You can alternate both during the retreat for full benefit.

Your Guru is oneness with Lama Tsongkhapa and is perfected in all the good qualities emphasized by Maitreya in the Mahayana Sutra. If you are doing this practice, many of you may already be practicing Tantra, maybe not Highest Yoga Tantra, but the lower schools of Tantra. So, you already have a living human Guru.

That Guru is perfected in all the qualities. Guru is kind in the three times: you meet this Guru in this life based on your merits and practice in your previous life. Then the Guru's commitment in this life is to always be with you, so you will meet the next life, ever lifetime Guru.

Kind in three times also because at your side guiding you during your life and at the time of death (clear light, intermediate state). With a solid practice of Guru yoga without any pause during the whole day and night, then the death process and the experience of clear light is the best opportunity to actualize the path.

It is the practice of the Guru Yoga of transferring consciousness. There is nothing other than having the Guru Yoga within your heart. That habitual mindfulness will help during the clear light you will recognize that is Dharmakaya, that is Guru's Dharmakaya and merge that with your own basis, the clear light, the Dharmakaya.

In case you will not achieve enlightenment during the clear light Guru will also guide you during the intermediate state to facilitate your journey there.

The Guru is also perfect Guru because **kind in three ways** providing you:

- precepts,
- granting you commentaries, oral transmissions,
- and initiations.

Guru is “delighted” to see you. Even if it is so hard to have pure Dharma practice, Guru is so delighted to see us engaging in this uncommon Ngöndro practice. For eons of lifetime, we stayed unripen. Now, we are putting so much effort into practicing the four major Ngöndros.

Living in the practice is the way to please the Guru, the Buddhas, Lama Tsongkhapa. The best offering.

Nowadays it is not easy to meet with our Guru. But with this practice we get to meet with our Guru every day. Every day we are comforted, nurtured, inspired by simply looking at the Guru's picture.

Close your eyes and recite by having all that in mind, reflect on the richness and comfort of this relationship. It is the best holiday, the best break, so blissful.

“Supreme field of merit” because it is the Guru, and because the purification and accumulation of merits that takes place here is in relation to the Guru. It surpasses all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Guru is the most powerful object to purify and accumulate merits.

You can accompany your recitation and visualization by **prostrating with your hands, bowing and visualizing you are emanating countless versions of you** representing all your past and future reincarnations. Your reincarnations are in all their realms of reincarnations, but in a human form carrying the same genuine faith and conviction and understanding, with you as a leader.

Each one of you is holding crossed vajras, or golden thrones, or Mount Meru of piles of cushions, or Digwa (red cover that ordained sanghas put on their cushion), to create the causes and conditions for your Guru to remain and have a long life (very auspicious to offer that to the Guru, one of the best offering you can make to your Guru for long life).

You request your Guru to stay for hundreds of eons.

For the **Limbs of prostrations (2nd)**, you emanate in countless versions of you and express the qualities of the omniscient mind and of the two truths which can only be realized by an enlightened mind.

You also **reflect on the meaning of Guru's and Buddha's omniscient qualities** (11 perfections, 6 perfections, 5 wisdoms, 5 concentrations, 8 powers) which are **the omniscient wisdom and omniscient attitude**.

It is so beneficial to purify our mind and develop and perfect our Guru devotion in relation to our human Guru. Because of our limitations, we can reflect our flaws in the Guru. With this practice we reflect Lama Tsongkhapa enlightened qualities to the Guru (because of the oneness Guru/Lama Tsongkhapa). Then when you are meeting with the Guru again, no more flaws.

There are 60 melodious effective speech that Buddha carries which are so effective to spread Buddha's teachings. For example, for the listener, hearing the Dharma will become a true healing, like the first disciples hearing the 1st wheel of Dharma, they receive healing, and they all received all according to their mental dispositions. We need to cleanse our negativity that prevents us from listening to Dharma with the same effectiveness as those disciples.

"Glorious renowned" because he purposely chose to live his whole life perfectly upholding all the precepts of a fully ordained monk instead of transgressing them to practice Tantra and enlightened in the intermediate state. His body is a golden body literally because he is totally pure, perfected in all vows (Vinaya included) and all three baskets.

In order to relate with the students, outwardly, the qualities of the Guru's speech must be greater than the qualities of the Guru's mind. Then, the qualities of the Guru's body are greater than the earlier two. Of course, inwardly, the heart is number one, than the speech, than the body.

But for the disciple's benefit, the Guru's body must be the first and on and on. **That is why the kindness of the Guru who manifests in an ordinary form surpasses the kindness of all the three times Buddhas. Because of the physical appearances to you.**

How fortunate we are just to have met the Guru.

If you can, you can do physical prostrations and integrate the multiplying prostrations mantra or 35 Buddhas, or Namu Gurubhya, or Lama la Kyab Su Chhi O... as explained (cf. earlier preliminary practices heading).

Limbs of offerings (3rd)

Limbs of confession (4th)

Here in relation to Guru Yoga practice, just by practicing it you can purify the transgression. Here, the most important opponent power is remorse. In relation to the Guru Yoga practice, you can take the Guru as the object of refuge, then, the Guru Yoga practice, the oneness in particular here, will be the antidote.

Limbs of rejoicing (5th)

Limbs of requesting to turn the wheel of Dharma (6th)

Visualization of you and your numberless reincarnations and all the rest of the sentient beings in human form holding Dharmachakra in your hands (Dharmachakra as huge as possible) made from the purest gold, silver, diamond, precious gems.

Remember how Brahma blow the conch shell and offered Dharmachakra while Shakyamuni Buddha was in retreat, then you visualize you and all the others doing the same in the loudest sound filling the whole universe, causing the Guru to turn the wheel of Dharma and liberate the numberless sentient beings.

Guru accepts right in front of you and is delightful.

If the Guru stops turning the wheel of Dharma, it is like being abandoned by our parents while we are still immature. That is why it is one of the most important practices in Buddhist teachings.

Whenever you are meeting with Guru, one thing you need to do is to always request Guru to turn the wheel of Dharma until the end of Samsara. It creates so much auspiciousness. Instead of giving chocolates, offer Guru a Dharmachakra. And offering kata is so meaningful because there is a conch shell and a Dharma wheel.

Limbs of dedication (7th)

Dedicate all the merits of all beings to be the cause of the essence of Losang Dragpa teachings to shine forever in every sentient being until the last being to actualize enlightenment.

9. Mandala Offering

After conducting the 7 Limbs practice/Guru Yoga (whose main goal is achieving the two main purposes of the path: purification and accumulation of merits), **we do the mandala offering here as a thanksgiving mandala to Lama Tsongkhapa and his two disciples, as they are those very important objects of our practice of Guru Yoga and fulfilling our wishes and aspirations.**

Of course, you can express gratitude in many ways but through the mandala offering, it is one of the most extensive ways: using the mandala base, all those benefits will be actualized (as commented in the booklet of the Ngöndro dedicated to the mandala offering).

You actualize all existence as a wish-fulfilling jewel, nectar, all the goodness. You create through your pure heart Buddha's land and assemble the whole of it in the mandala offering.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche assembled this text and added the complementary verses and the following notes (“due to the merits of having offered...”) to make our practice even more meritorious.

Some practitioners may extend the practice before reciting “Idam...”:

- **by offering their body, speech and mind**, because it is such a powerful practice dedicated to the Merit field being your Guru in oneness with your Lama Tsongkhapa and his two disciples, to release our heart and purify it from the bondage of the self-grasping, material things, your family members etc (especially when we transit from this life to another)
- **the three partial attitudes and the objects of those** (loved ones, strangers, enemies) to purify those and the karma created in relation to them

You will find some prayers in the Fpmt book (or in the mandala offering booklet).

10. Glimpse meditation on the Lam-Rim: the foundation of all good qualities

You can insert any Lamrim topic to meditate on at this point.

You can use the Foundation of All Good Qualities as support: recite one verse each day and reflect on its meaning.

It is regarded as extremely beneficial to accomplish the imprints of the entire path (the whole path in such a short period of time), in particular in relation to Lama Tsongkhapa (as our merit field), who is the authority of the text itself (the small Lam Rim) and at the same time the object of the Guru Yoga practice.

That creates the practitioner to actualize Lam Rim realizations so effectively and quickly.

If we are able to live a life like that, no doubt our subconscious will remember the whole Lam Rim at the time of death, because it brings such an impact in our heart.

In the visualization, the cloud on which Lama Tsongkhapa is descending from Maitreya Heart is still connected to Maitreya.

So, when you absorb the Merit field in your heart, the thread of the cloud stays connected to Maitreya: it creates the causes to be reborn in Tushita Pure Land where you will be tutored by Lord Maitreya and Lama Tsongkhapa themselves.

11. Requesting Blessings – Accumulation (Migtsema)

Through making supplications you will receive blessings by accumulating recitation of the Migtsema, which is also called Lama Tsongkhapa supplication prayer.

The 4 (without the line dedicated to Vajrapani) **or 5 Lines Migtsema Prayer** (more commonly used) is actually the second part of the Guru Yoga in relation to Lama Tsongkhapa. It is a **condensed form of Lama Tsongkhapa Guru Yoga**.

It can be nice to recite the 9 lines at the beginning and the end of the session.

That prayer serves as a direct antidote to any form of negative karma committed in relation to Guru to reestablish pure samaya. Guru is the most powerful object to accumulate merits. The Guru is also the most powerful object to generate negative karma on our path. Visualize all these negativities going out from your system in the form of dark smoke and you actualize a clear like crystal body.

While accumulating the mantra, **we make supplications to receive the following blessings:**

- **7 wisdoms**
- **Outer aspects of the enlightened qualities of Lama Tsongkhapa and to receive the outer blessings**
- **Inner qualities of Lama Tsongkhapa and to receive the inner blessings**
- **Enlightened secret qualities and their blessings.**

While reciting it, **you do the visualization of Lama Tsongkhapa as a Merit field:**

- **remembering his/the enlightened qualities of the three deities:** wisdom (Manjushri), compassion (Chenrezig), power (Vajrapani)
- the **three seed syllables** on Lama Tsongkhapa and his two disciples (crown: white Om, throat: red Ha, heart: blue Hum)
- **purification** of one's body, speech and mind creating the meritorious blessings the resultant enlightened body, speech and mind.

Then (second part) while continuing the recitation of the mantra, **you actually actualize:**

- **this purification,**
- **long life,**
- **and then the 7 wisdoms.**

The purification

While reciting you visualize **light rays emanating from the Om coming towards you with a white nectar flow which enters your crown, fills your entire body and purify any form of negativity.** You actualize all the causes and conditions to actualize the resultant body of Guru Lama Tsongkhapa.

Same from the Ha at the throat (red nectar flow) and the resultant speech of Lama Tsongkhapa.
Same from the Hum at the heart (blue nectar flow) and the resultant mind of Lama Tsongkhapa.

Another way of doing this visualization is **combining the three nectar flows in one** to cleanse any negativity, impurity, obstacles:

“By the force of having fervently requested in this way (e.g. reciting Migtsema), hollow beam of white light emanates from the heart of the perfect father and sons combining into entered my crown”.

Long life

To accumulate long life by clearing the inner, outer, secret obstacles to life (lifespan lost due to spirit harm, chocs, accidents, negative environment, diseases...), while reciting Migtsema mantra:

- visualize blood and pus (representing all diseases and their causes) going out from the down hole like urine, feces
- visualize spirit harms under the form of a scorpion going out from down hole
- past negative karma, obscurations, negative conditions, circumstances in the form of dark smoke going out from down whole.

Down there Yama, the lord of death opens his mouth and consume that. That cleanses everything. When the Lord of death receives that, he gets satisfied and immediately closes his mouth, faces outward and disappears without leaving any trace.

Have the full conviction and faith that through the blessings of Lama Tsongkhapa that all your inner, outer and secret obstacles are completely purified, and all the conditions for your healthy long life to actualize realizations on the path within this very lifetime are restored, actualized.

You can dedicate this practice to your Guru, family members, especially those who are going through health issues. Visualize their obstacles are consumed by the Lord of death.

7 wisdoms:

- Please grant me blessings to achieve **great understanding (or great wisdom)**, which is able to **understand and explain the meanings of extensive scriptures without resistance:**

Great understanding, in the form of **orange-colored nectar beams clarified as pure Lord Manjushri**, is emitted from Lama Tsongkhapa and his two sons, absorbing into me and filling my whole body. Then, atoms of nectars, which are clarified as pure Lord Manjushri, radiate out to the

victorious ones and their sons. Thus, the great understanding of the victorious ones and their sons, in the form of the deities' holy bodies, absorbs into me and fills my whole body.

- Please grant me blessings to achieve **clear wisdom**, which can **understand and clarify the details of very subtle and extremely difficult points without resistance:**

Clear wisdom, in the form of **orange-colored nectar beams clarified as the syllables of the mantra OM AH RA PA CHA NA**, is emitted from Lama Tsongkhapa and his two sons, absorbing into me and filling my whole body. Then, atoms of nectars, clarified as OM AH RA PA CHA NA, radiate out to the victorious ones and their sons. Thus, the clear wisdom of the victorious ones and their sons, in the form of OM AH RA PA CHA NA, absorbs into me and fills my whole body.

- Please grant me blessings to achieve **quick wisdom**, which quickly **cuts the non-understanding and wrong-understanding and doubts without resistance:**

Quick wisdom, in the form of **orange-colored nectar beams clarified as the syllable DHI**, are emitted from Lama Tsongkhapa and his two sons, absorbing into me and filling my whole body. Then, atoms of nectars, clarified as the syllable DHI, radiate out to the victorious ones and their sons. Thus, the quick wisdom of the victorious ones and their sons, in the form of the syllable DHI, absorbs into me and fills my whole body.

- Please grant me blessings to achieve **profound wisdom**, which can **understand and explain the meaning of scripture with depth and without resistance:**

Profound wisdom, in the form of **orange-colored nectar beams clarified as the implements (text and sword)**, are emitted from Lama Tsongkhapa and his two sons, absorbing into me and filling my whole body. Then, atoms of nectars, clarified as the implements, radiate out to the victorious ones and their sons. Thus, the profound wisdom of the victorious ones and their sons, in the form of the implements, absorbs into me and fills my whole body.

- Please grant me blessings to achieve the **wisdom to explain the Dharma**, which **gives definite, supreme understanding of all the meanings of all the words of the scriptures without resistance:**

Wisdom to explain the Dharma, in the form of **orange-colored nectar beams clarified as texts**, are emitted from Lama Tsongkhapa and his two sons, absorbing into me and filling my whole body. Then atoms of nectars, clarified as texts, radiate out to the victorious ones and their sons. Thus, the wisdom to explain the Dharma of the victorious ones and their sons, in the form of texts, absorbs into me and fills my whole body.

- Please grant me blessings to achieve **debating wisdom**, which enables one to **achieve bravery over evil debate without resistance:**

Debating wisdom, in the form of **orange-colored nectar beams clarified as wheels of swords (Dharma wheel with 8 Manjushri's swords inside)**, are emitted from Lama Tsongkhapa and his two sons, absorbing into me and filling my whole body. Then, atoms of nectars, clarified as wheels of swords, radiate out to the victorious ones and their sons. Thus, the debating wisdom of the victorious ones and their sons, in the form of wheels of swords, absorbs into me and fills my whole body.

- Please grant me blessings to achieve **writing wisdom**, which **makes meaning and sound perfect and gives clear understanding and happiness:**

Writing wisdom, in the form of **orange-colored nectar beams clarified as texts and wheels of swords**, are emitted from Lama Tsongkhapa and his two sons, absorbing into me and filling my whole body. Then atoms of nectars, clarified as texts and wheels of swords, radiate out to the victorious ones and their sons. Thus, the writing wisdom of the victorious ones and their sons, in the form of texts and wheels of swords, absorbs into me and fills my whole body.

Among the 7 wisdoms, take the time to do a strong visualization for those which are specifically requirements for you personally, and spend less time on the others (to leave imprints for the future or future lives it is beneficial to do them all).

Then there are two verses that can be recited altogether three times or one by one three times:

Please grant me blessings to achieve extensive great wisdom that is able to understand

And explain the meanings of the extensive scriptures without resistance.

I request that the wisdoms of hearing, understanding, and meditation may increase.

I request that the wisdoms of expounding, debating, and writing may be developed.

I request that the general and sublime realizations may be granted.

Please grant me blessings to be quickly like you.

I request that the transcendental wisdom of the simultaneously born great bliss may arise.

I request that the stains of truly believing illusory thought may be purified.

I request that the net of doubts that are only in the mind may be cut off.

Please grant me blessings to be quickly like you.

Those verses are the one who contain the supplication in relation to the seven wisdoms. So, you can recite either the seven wisdoms texts above or those two verses.

The meaning of the Migtsema

It was written by Lama Tsongkhapa as a praise to Venerable Rendawa, one of his most important Guru. He saw in His Guru an emanation of the three deities.

But then, His Guru straight away replied “that praise suits you not me”.

This supplication prayer is **so unique because it is an offering between two highly realized enlightened beings**. That makes it so powerful among all the mantras and supplication prayers.

It is also so powerful because in relation to **the Guru being Lama Tsongkhapa** who is the **embodiment of the perfected attitude and wisdom:**

- being Chenrezig who is the embodiment of the **compassion of all the numberless Buddhas**
- being Manjushri who is the embodiment of the **wisdom of all the numberless Buddhas**
- plus being Vajrapani who is the embodiment of the **power of all the numberless Buddhas**.

When Lama Tsongkhapa’s mother was conceiving his son, she had a very clear vision of the compassionate Buddha entering her crown. She had the vision of so many people gathered to come and pay respect to the baby because of seeing the baby as Chenrezig.

When we look for reincarnation of Lamas, the mother's signs play a very important role.

His father had a vivid dream while conceiving the baby that from Vajrapani Pure Land a vajra was thrown from there and entered the mother womb.

In relation to Manjushri there is a proposition by the Buddhas, that Lama Tsongkhapa is an emanation of Manjushri.

Therefore, when you make this supplication, you make it directly to the three deities and that will impact us to develop their perfected qualities.

To clear obstacles and have great success in the preservation of Dharma, chanting Migtsema is emphasized in the great monasteries for hundreds of years, especially in relation to the 7 wisdoms, **to become true great scholars like the great pandits.**

Also, to clear obstacles and gather the necessary conditions to practice and do retreats.

There are three types of compassion:

- non objectifying compassion
- compassion in relation to impermanent nature
- compassion in relation to the suffering of beings.

“Non objectifying compassion” is related to the compassion possessed by at least the Aryas beings expressed on having a correct view, having realized emptiness directly. In Tibetan Buddhism there are two aspects of Chenrezig: being an Arya Bodhisattva and a Buddha.

The “non objectifying compassion” is the most powerful tool to assist the antidote of wisdom to eradicate the subtlest defilements throughout the ten Bhumis.

Even if you actualize Arhatship, without compassion, the emptiness wisdom cannot perform to eradicate the defilement to omniscience, even though it may be able to help to actualize liberation. So, you cannot become Buddha.

“Stainless wisdom” is different than wisdom realizing emptiness, which still carries the stains of self-centered ego self-cherishing attitude and the self-centered ego ignorant.

“Lord of secrets”: Vajrapani is the **destroyer of the entire hordes of the maras**, meaning the maras:

- mara of delusions
- mara of death
- mara of distractions
- mara of defilements.

Vajrapani carries the power of overcoming the subtlest mara of defilements.

“Crown ornament of sages of the land of snow”: at that time, the major scholars of all the traditions were following Lama Tsongkhapa. Gyaltsab-Je used to be Sakya. Lama Tsongkhapa subdued him in debate and Gyaltsab-Je became his heart disciple after that.

His ordination name is Losang: wise mind and Dragpa: famous.

12. Request to abide at the heart

This is the conclusion. You can do those verses one by one or straight away the last one.

Visualize the two disciples and all the environment dissolving into Lama Tsongkhapa. Lama Tsongkhapa dissolves into light and enters your crown.

At the heart chakra, visualize **your heart** (at the center) which opens in the form of an **eight-petals lotus** redish color. In the center, the indestructible drop is contained. It looks like a lentil seed which mother egg (redish) and father drop (whitish).

The mother egg turns into a sun disk redish color. On top of that, father drop turns into a moon disk whitish color. Then, at the center is your Buddha nature, your consciousness in the form of light, subtle being, clear light, mental continuum (goldhish transparent energy).

Lama Tsongkhapa in the form of light enters that and becomes one with that. The eight petals lotus closes. You tie around the heart lotus with the Migtsema like a rope and Manjushri mantra like a rope.

The white cloud in light energy (where Lama Tsongkhapa resides) in the form of the thread still connected to Tushita (symbolism of Bodhicitta) and the golden energy (symbolizes Manjushri, can be in the form of DHI).

On top of the closed heart, you put a half cut vajra (symbolizes Vajrapani) like the drop, like an indestructible stamp. From there, you regard Lama Tsongkhapa (and/or the three deities) ever remaining oneness with you.

From now on any activity from your body, speech and mind coming from Lama Tsongkhapa and/or the three deities being one with you. You see anybody as emanations of the three deities. Living by that is living in Guru Yoga all the time.

Since there are three verses:

- 1st verse: Lama Tsongkhapa arrives at the crown
- 2nd verse: Lama Tsongkhapa arrives to the throat
- 3rd verse: Lama Tsongkhapa arrives to the heart.

Some Masters advise to visualize Lama Tsongkhapa arriving all at once. Do however you feel more comfortable.

13. Dedication

You can use the sadhana or other prayers.

You can also dedicate like this: from now on, whenever and however I engage with the world it is in the conduct of a Bodhisattva to preserve the Dharma, to dedicate the rest of my life in virtue and for the benefit of all the rest of the sentient beings.

The essence is Guru, yourself, and the deities in oneness. All your activities are born from that. Dedicate the rest of your life to the Dharma and all the rest of the sentient beings. That is Guru Yoga.

IV. Retreat guidelines (strict retreat, open retreat)

A. The road map for any retreat sessions (and for any type of retreat)

You can divide the retreat day into **4 longer sessions of a couple of hours each or many shorter sessions of shorter periods like 24 minutes or one and half hours each**, as it suits you.

1. Every session starts with sitting comfortably in the Vairochana 7-points meditative posture:

- Sit comfortably with your legs crossed in the full-lotus posture, the half-lotus posture or whatever position is most comfortable for you.
- Sit with your awareness directed inward, keeping your body upright, without leaning too far back or bent too far forward.
- Keep your shoulders relaxed and even. Set the right hand over the left with thumbs meeting and rest the hands on the thigh.
- Your eyes should be slightly open (neither wide open nor closed), and they should be fixed on the tip of your nose.
- Do not raise or lower your head nor turn it to one side; set it such that your nose and navel are aligned.
- Set the tip of your tongue upwards to the palate (behind upper teeth).
- Let your teeth and lips rest in their usual, natural position.

2. Quieten the body and mind and focus on the present moment while breathing in and out.

The breathing should be natural and gentle, not noisy, forced or uneven, without directing your breath in any particular way but simply being aware of your inhalation and exhalation.

3. Preliminary prayers, accumulation and dedication

For this specific Ngöndro, we will use the Ganden Lha Gyama (the text is slightly different than for the other booklets).

a. Taking Refuge - Generating Bodhicitta

SANG GYÄ CHHÖ DANG TSHOG KYI CHHOG NAM LA

I go for refuge until I am enlightened

JANG CHHUB BAR DU DAG NI KYAB SU CHHI

To the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Supreme Assembly.

DAG GI JIN SOG GYI PÄI TSHOG NAM KYI

By my merit from giving and other perfections

DRO LA PHÄN CHHIR SANG GYÄ DRUB PAR SHOG (3X)

May I become a buddha to benefit all sentient beings. (3X)

b. Four Immeasurable Prayer

How wonderful it would be if all the sentient beings were to abide in equanimity,

free of hatred and attachment, discriminating far from close.

May they abide in equanimity.

I myself will cause them to abide in equanimity.

Please, Guru-Deity, bless me to be able to do this.

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings had happiness and the causes of happiness.

May they have happiness and its causes.

I myself will cause them to have happiness and its causes.

Please, Guru-Deity, bless me to be able to do this.

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were free of suffering and its causes.

May they be free of suffering and its causes.

I myself will cause them to be free of suffering and its causes.

Please, Guru-Deity, bless me to be able to do this.

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were never separated from the happiness of higher rebirth and liberation.

May they never be separated from these.

I myself will cause them never to be separated from these.

Please, Guru-Deity, bless me to be able to do this.

c. Generating special Bodhicitta

For the sake of all mother sentient beings,

I shall quickly and more quickly

actualize the Guru-Deity's primordial state of buddhahood in this very lifetime.

*I shall liberate all mother sentient beings from suffering
and lead them to the great bliss of buddhahood.*

For this purpose I am going to practice the profound path of Guru-Deity yoga (3X).

d. Purifying the place

Everywhere may the ground be pure,

Free of the roughness of pebbles and so forth.

May it be in the nature of lapis lazuli

And as smooth as the palm of one's hand.

e. Offering prayer

May human and divine offerings,

Actually arranged and mentally created,

Clouds of finest Samantabhadra offerings,

Fill the entire space

**OM NAMO BHAGAVATE VAJRA SARA PRAMARDANE TATHAGATAYA / ARHATE SAMYAKSAM
BUDDHAYA / TADYATHA / OM VAJRE VAJRE / MAHA VAJRE / MAHA TEJA VAJRE / MAHA VIDYA**

VAJRE / MAHA BODHICHITTA VAJRE / MAHA BODHI MÄNDO PASAM KRAMANA VAJRE / SARVA
KARMA AVARANA VISHO DHANA VAJRE SVAHA (3X)

*By the power of truth of the Three Rare Sublime Ones,
The blessings of all the buddhas and bodhisattvas,
The great wealth of the completed two collections,
And the sphere of phenomena being pure and inconceivable;
May these piles of clouds of offerings arising through transformation
by the bodhisattvas Arya Samantabhadra, Manjushri, and so forth
– unimaginable and inexhaustible, equaling the sky –*

arise and, in the eyes of the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions, be received.

f. Actual visualization of Lama Tsongkhapa

g. Invocation Prayer

*From the heart of the savior of the hundred deities of Tushita,
On the peak of a cloud resembling a clump of extremely white fresh curd,
King of Dharma, omniscient Losang Dragpa,
Please come here together with your sons.*

h. Request to Remain for a Long Time

*In the sky before me, on a lion throne, lotus, and moon,
My perfect, pure
guru smiles with delight.
Supreme field of merit for my mind of faith,
Please abide for a hundred eons to spread the teachings.*

i. Prostration

*Your holy mind has the intelligence that understands the full extent
of objects to be known.
Your holy speech, with its excellent explanations, is an ear ornament
for those of good fortune.
Your holy body is radiantly beautiful with glory renowned.
To you, who are meaningful to see, hear, and remember, I prostrate.*

j. Offerings

Pleasing drinking water, various flowers,

Fragrant incenses, lights, scented waters, and so forth,
Oceans of cloud-like offerings, both actually arranged and mentally emanated,
I offer to you, the supreme field of merit.

k. Confession

Whatever non virtue of body, speech, and mind,
Especially those opposite to the three vows,
That I have collected from beginningless time,
I confess each and every one with fervent regret from my heart.

l. Rejoicing

You strove for much learning and practice in this degenerate age,
And made your freedoms and riches meaningful
By abandoning the eight worldly concerns.
Savior, we sincerely rejoice in your extensive deeds.

m. Request to Turn the Wheel of Dharma

Perfect, pure, holy gurus, from the billowing clouds of
Wisdom and compassion in the sky of the dharmakaya,
Please let fall a rain of profound and extensive Dharma
Upon the receptacle of those to be subdued, exactly as they need.

n. Dedication

May whatever virtue I have collected
Benefit the teachings and all transmigratory beings,
And, in particular, may it cause the essence of
Perfect, pure Losang Dragpa's teachings to shine forever.

o. Mandala Offering

SA ZHI PÖ KYI JUG SHING ME TOG TRAM
This ground, anointed with perfume, strewn with flowers,
RI RAB LING ZHI NYI DÄ GYÄN PA DI
Adorned with Mount Meru, four continents, the sun and the moon:
SANG GYÄ ZHING DU MIG TE ÜL WA YI
I imagine this as a buddha-field and offer it.
DRO KÜN NAM DAG ZHING LA CHÖ PAR SHOG

*May we meet the teachings of the Victorious One Losang Dragpa
Who had the morality of an eminently pure way of life
Was courageous in the extensive conduct of the Sons of the Victorious One
And accomplished the Yoga of the two stages of the sacred bliss and emptiness
May all living beings enjoy this pure land!
IDAM GURU RATNA MANDALAKAM NIRYATAYAM*

*By the merits of having offered this mandala
to Lama Tsongkhapa and his two sons,
may I, my family members and all sentient beings
be able to meet, practice and actualize
the teachings of the Victorious One Losang Dragpa.*

p. Meditation on Lamrim topic

*The foundation of all good qualities is the kind and perfect, pure Guru;
Correct devotion to him is the root of the path.
By clearly seeing this and applying great effort,
Please bless me to rely upon him with great respect.*

*Understanding that the precious freedom of this rebirth is found only once,
Is greatly meaningful, and is difficult to find again,
Please bless me to generate the mind that unceasingly,
Day and night, takes its essence.*

*This life is as impermanent as a water bubble;
Remember how quickly it decays and death comes.
After death, just like a shadow follows the body,
The results of black and white karma follow.*

*Finding firm and definite conviction in this,
Please bless me always to be careful
To abandon even the slightest negativities
And accomplish all virtuous deeds.*

*Seeking samsaric pleasures is the door to all suffering:
They are uncertain and cannot be relied upon.
Recognizing these shortcomings,
Please bless me to generate the strong wish for the bliss of liberation.*

*Led by this pure thought,
Mindfulness, alertness, and great caution arise.
The root of the teachings is keeping the pratimoksha vows:
Please bless me to accomplish this essential practice.*

*Just as I have fallen into the sea of samsara,
So have all mother migratory beings.
Please bless me to see this, train in supreme bodhicitta,
And bear the responsibility of freeing migratory beings.*

*Even if I develop only bodhicitta, but I don't practice the three types of morality,
I will not achieve enlightenment.
With my clear recognition of this,
Please bless me to practice the bodhisattva vows with great energy.*

*Once I have pacified distractions to wrong objects
And correctly analyzed the meaning of reality,
Please bless me to generate quickly within my mind stream
The unified path of calm abiding and special insight.*

*Having become a pure vessel by training in the general path,
Please bless me to enter
The holy gateway of the fortunate ones:
The supreme vajra vehicle.*

*At that time, the basis of accomplishing the two attainments
Is keeping pure vows and samaya.
As I have become firmly convinced of this,*

Please bless me to protect these vows and pledges like my life.

*Then, having realized the importance of the two stages,
The essence of the Vajrayana,
By practicing with great energy, never giving up the four sessions,
Please bless me to realize the teachings of the holy Guru.*

*Like that, may the gurus who show the noble path
And the spiritual friends who practice it have long lives.
Please bless me to pacify completely
All outer and inner hindrances.*

*In all my lives, never separated from perfect gurus,
May I enjoy the magnificent Dharma.
By completing the qualities of the stages and paths,*

q. Requesting Blessings: Nine-line requesting prayer to Guru Lama Tsongkhapa, accumulation of Migtsema, final request

NGÖ DRUB KÜN JUNG THUB WANG DOR JE CHHANG

Vajradhara, lord of sages, source of all realizations;

MIG ME TSE WÄI TER CHHEN CHÄN RÄ ZIG

Avalokiteshvara, great treasure of non-objectifying compassion;

DRI ME KHYEN PÄI WANG PO JAM PÄL YANG

Manjushri, master of stainless wisdom;

DÜ PUNG MA LÜ JOM DZÄ SANG WÄI DAG

Vajrapani, destroyer of the entire host of maras;

GANG CHÄN KHÄ PÄI TSUG GYÄN LO ZANG DRAG

Losang Dragpa, crown jewel of sages of the land of snow:

KYAB SUM KÜN DÜ LA MA SANG GYÄ LA

To you, Guru-Buddha embodying the three refuges,

GO SUM GÜ PÄI GO NÄ SÖL WA DEB

I make requests showing respect with my three doors.

RANG ZHÄN MIN CHING DRÖL WAR JIN GYI LOB

Please grant your blessings to liberate myself and others.

CHHOG DANG THÜN MONG NGÖ DRUB TSÄL DU SÖL

Please bestow the supreme and common realizations.

[NYUR DU KHYE RANG TA BUR JIN GYI LOB] (3X)

[Please bless me to become quickly like you] (3X)

Please grant me blessings to achieve extensive great wisdom that is able to understand

And explain the meanings of the extensive scriptures without resistance.

I request that the wisdoms of hearing, understanding, and meditation may increase.

I request that the wisdoms of expounding, debating, and writing may be developed.

I request that the general and sublime realizations may be granted.

Please grant me blessings to be quickly like you (3X).

I request that the transcendental wisdom of the simultaneously born great bliss may arise.

I request that the stains of truly believing illusory thought may be purified.

I request that the net of doubts that are only in the mind may be cut off.

Please grant me blessings to be quickly like you (3X).

r. Request to Abide at the Heart

Magnificent and precious root Guru,

Please abide on the lotus seat at my heart,

Guide me with your great kindness,

And grant me the realizations of your holy body, speech, and mind.

Magnificent and precious root Guru,

Please abide on the lotus seat at my heart,

Guide me with your great kindness,

And grant me the supreme and common realizations.

Magnificent and precious root Guru,

Please abide on the lotus seat at my heart,

Guide me with your great kindness,

And remain steadfast until I attain the essence of enlightenment.

s. Dedication

*By the force of the victorious one, Tsongkhapa,
Acting as our direct Mahayana virtuous friend in all our lives,
May we never turn away for even a second
From the pure path highly admired by the victorious ones.*

*May we be able to live a life of pure morality
Listening to many teachings, train in Bodhicitta
and have pure view and conduct*

Without polluting or corrupting the teachings of Lama Tsongkhapa, the second Victorious One

Glorious Guru

*whatever your body, continuum, lifespan or realm
Whatever your supreme or excellent name may be
May I and others become exactly like that*

*By the force of the praises and requests made to you
May all diseases, evil spirits, poverty, come to an end
May the Dharma and the good fortune increase in the region in which I and others dwell
Please bless us that the life of the glorious Guru be long*

*May all beings equaling the extend of space have happiness
May I and others without exception
accumulate merits and purify negativities
And may we bless to quickly attain Buddhahood*

*May I not give rise to heresy for even a second
in regard to the actions of the glorious Guru
May I see whatever actions are done as pure
With this devotion may I receive the Guru's blessings in my heart*

For the Dharma King Tsongkhapa, for the Dharma way to flourish

May all signs of obstacles be pacified,

may all conducive conditions be complete

*Due to the two types of merits of all the three times of myself and others may the teachings of
Lobsang Dragpa shine forever.*

*To Bhagavan, Tathagata, Arhat, Perfectly Complete Buddha, Vairochana, King of Light,
I prostrate. (1X)*

To Bodhisattva Mahasattva Samantabhadra, I prostrate. (1X)

*TADYATHĀ [OM] PAÑCHENDRIYA AVA BODHANĀYE SVĀHĀ /OM DHURU DHURU
JAYA MUKHE SVĀHĀ(7x)*

*To Bhagavan, Tathagata, Arhat, Perfectly Complete Buddha, Medicine Guru, King of
Vaidurya Light, I prostrate.(1X)*

*To Bhagavan, Tathagata, Arhat, Perfectly Complete Buddha, King [Fully]
Accomplishing [All] Dedications and Prayers, I prostrate. (1X)*

*Due to the blessings of the eminent victorious ones and the bodhisattvas,
The truth of infallible dependent arising,
And the power of my pure special attitude taking responsibility,
May all the aims of my pure prayers be accomplished.*

B. Strict retreat timetable

1. Sample timetable

5am – 7am	First Session
7am – 8am	Breakfast
8am – 9am	Do Karma Yoga Like: Cleaning the retreat environments or conduct preliminary practices like Water bowl Offerings, prostration and etc. or do one's daily sadhana commitments
9am – 11am	Second Session
11am – 1pm	Lunch
1pm – 2pm	Time to reflect: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- walking meditation,- reading or listening to teachings in relation to the retreat topic or Lam-Rim, Lojong Daily sadhana practices Prostrations (beneficial for physical health)
2pm – 3pm	Tea-time
3pm – 5pm	Third Session

5pm – 6pm	Dinner
6pm – 7pm	Do Karma yoga and Preliminary practices like: Clearing water bowls offerings, light offerings, prostrations, daily sadhana commitment practices and etc.
7pm – 8pm	Fourth Session
8pm – 9pm	Do purification practice accordingly with Vajrasattva practice or purify negativities by reflecting on the 4 opponent powers. - Cultivate a mind of rejoicing - Do supplication prayers never to be separated from the care and blessings of Guru Buddha - Express sincere requests to Guru Buddha to always turn the wheel of Dharma until end of samsara for the benefit of all beings. - Do final dedication of the day with Bodhicitta and Emptiness
	Go to bed: -Lay down comfortably on the bed in the reclining Buddha posture. -Set altruistic motivation to undertake sleep time for the benefit of sentient beings. -Try to fall asleep by focusing on the natural breathing inhalation and exhalation. -Or better still, fall asleep while doing Tonglen practices, i.e. when inhaling, think of taking upon oneself, all the sufferings (and the causes of suffering) of all sentient beings to destroy one's self grasping and self-cherishing; when exhaling, think giving all the happiness and merits of the 3 times to each and every single sentient beings and cause them to abide in the everlasting peace and happiness of full enlightenment. -Or try to fall asleep in meditation on emptiness, on deity yoga etc.

C. Practical advice

Another important thing is, even if you set for a three-hours session, **try to end the session when you are at the peak of the session, when you feel good, do not force.** That good spirit will be so helpful for you to have a very uplifting opening of the next session. If you feel tired, just do one hour, half an hour. In the same way, **do never end a retreat totally exhausted so that you aspire to do another one.**

Do not force yourself. During the retreat you do not feel it because you are inspired, blissed but, actually you are forgetting about your body. You try to practice 24/24 and think you are a hero. You can finish a retreat within three days.

But it is a mistake. Once you get into lung, to overcome that lung is very hard. **It happens to many retreatants. You have to be very careful.**

Also, during a retreat, **make sure you remember your body is an ordinary person's body. You need to eat properly, rest on time.**

So, try to wake up a bit early. **The best thing is to finish the recitation of the first session before the sun rises.** Then, you do the second session after a good breakfast. The best is to finish it before eleven, so you can have an early lunch (especially if you are taking precepts, then you have to finish your lunch before noon).

Because after lunch, you may feel a bit loose, try to spend more time on the first and second sessions. Try to make the third session slightly shorter. Then, regarding the fourth session, because of the dedication of the day, it may take slightly longer. Therefore, if you are having dinner, try to finish the third session before the sun goes down, for the rest of the day not to be too congested.

The last session should be done right after the sun goes down.

Try to have an early dinner. The best is to finish around 7 or 8 o'clock the last session, latest by nine. So that by 9, you are already ready to sleep. **Latest by 10, but not after that, to sleep at least 6 or 7 hours.**

Another important thing is to always start the retreat with just one session and a short one. Do not count the accumulation of prayers or mantras for the general counting of the whole retreat. Just recite three, six, seven times. **Do proper motivation and proper dedication. Whatever the length of time, do as little as possible in term of the number of recitations, because that number will be the minimum requirement each day.** Even if you fall ill, even if you are tired, if you get lung, whatever; the minimum must be that number in order to sustain the practice and not break the retreat.

As far as it concerns Ngöndro practice, you can start anytime the first session, in the morning, in the evenings (certain deity yoga requires to start at night, some even at midnight, others in daytime).

Same, the retreat should end with one morning session. That last session does not count for the accumulation of the numbers. Focus more on the dedication and auspicious prayers.

You have just completed a retreat, you have accumulated so many merits, you are in just a pure position. So, even the slightest dedication you do is far more effective than any other dedication you have done before the retreat.

Then, if you cannot to do lengthy session, you can do 6, 7, 10 short sessions. **But each session must be organized with a motivation, recitation, dedication.**

Also, **in your heart never regard the number as a target.** That is also one of the ways that somehow a retreat does not go well because you are not doing the meditation properly. You are rushing.

The teachings and the Gurus always say: “when you do retreat meditation is the main thing”. Counting the number is just part of it.

For a Ngöndro retreat, a fire puja is not required.

D. Open retreat: how to “go on retreat” while combining family and professional lives

In today’s time, there are a lot of ups and downs. **You go first into initiations, some go directly for Highest Yoga Tantra initiations,** then, **only after you start to learn teachings on Tantra, about the preliminaries and start to practice.**

Even if we have already chosen the other way, we can still reverse. **We can refresh the tantric initiation,** the best is to take it again from the same Guru you already received the initiation from, if not with another qualified Guru. **In between, you can start to do retreats.**

Sometimes, to get the whole commentary is very rare. Then, if we wait until we receive the commentary, it may be difficult. Time passes so fast. **So, what you can do is eventually try to get at least some general guidelines on the Refuge, on how to conduct the session.** And after that, the best is to go into retreat.

But then, in today’s time, life can be so busy. It is so difficult to find dedicated time, **you can do an open retreat: you do at least one session a day.**

If you receive specific individual instructions from Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche or different Lamas regarding the accumulation of prayers or mantras, type of practice, or even on the specific time of the retreat, particular place; **then trying to fulfill them is of course the most important in the practice.**

But then, if the Lama just advised you to do some Ngöndro retreat practice, then that means you can do in your convenient way. Here the point is if someone is really busy or already doing a lot of practice with only a short amount of time, in that case one of the criteria to fulfil the retreat is you have to conduct a session daily until you complete the target.

You cannot break even for a day until for example you achieve the 100.000 Refuge recitation (plus the supplement of 10.000). You have to be consistent. That is the first criteria.

You can maybe do it early morning, before the family is up, at dawn time, around 3 o’clock, up to 5 o’clock. If you can manage, sometimes you can do two sessions. **The other in the evening.** And **once a while, when you have time, you can do four sessions.**

The number of sessions is not limited, you can do 6, 7 sessions. During the day, when your husband is doing the groceries, or your children are out, you have one hour or even 45 minutes. It can be conducted even in one minute, isn’t? This way in your busy life, whenever you get some free time, you can be flexible, but consistent.

Of, course any retreat should be conducted setting a proper motivation, which is the usual way Bodhicitta motivation on the basis of refuge, then the rest of the preliminary practices as I mentioned before (do accordingly with what you can afford).

Then, you engage in the actual practice on the first day once you settle on your seat, then on the basis of the preliminary, recite maybe three times the Refuge prayer. Then, do the dedication accordingly as extensive as you wish.

But I would suggest you do as brief as there is in the dedication prayer book, so you can easily perform that much every day. That is the important part in order to be able to continue with the retreat in any circumstances.

But as a minimum, in order for you to accomplish the retreat, the first day, you just do just one session (a short one). **Because whatever amount of time, amount of practice, or mantra accumulation you do on that very first session, you have to sustain that number daily during the whole retreat as a minimum, until you accomplish the 100.000** (and the supplement of 10.000).

Sometimes we may be sick, you may need to stay at the hospital, traveling in an airplane, we have to manage to reach that number. For example, you do the recitation of the Refuge Prayer one time. **As long as you do not break that and sustain it, then even if it takes you one year, two years, it is ok.**

You can do that not only for the preliminaries but also for the Guru Yoga deity commitment retreat.

As far as it is concerned **combining the retreat with other practices**, for example another Ngöndro practice or even your daily practices, **because in all the other practice, Refuge and Bodhicitta are always here; you just conduct the practice, and when you come to the Refuge and Bodhicitta part, you recite more Refuge and Bodhicitta prayers.** And also in the motivation, you set the intention that you are conducting the Ngöndro retreat, together with the other Ngöndro retreat.

Then, you can also conduct as **an open retreat** since life is so busy. As a retreat you still must set the boundaries, but it can be an extended boundary, the entire city, the entire country can be within your boundaries, the entire people of the country. But in those retreats, try your best to stay a bit more focused, instead of being like the usual way.

If you are staying in the same city for the whole day, try your very best to go back there to conduct your sessions (if you are doing several sessions a day, yet not doing a strict retreat). It could be your house, your prayer room, if you do not have a prayer room, or staying at someone else's place, your bed, instead of doing it in your car or in the office.

Of course, you can do the rest of your practice there, but for this particular practice as it is a retreat practice, it is better to do it there.

But, if you are moving from one place to another, then you can do wherever you find a place that is conducive for you. It can even be during a flight or in a hotel.

This way you can still conduct the retreat. The day you accomplish the 100.000 (and the 10.000 of supplement), then you can claim you accumulated the completion of that retreat.

Acknowledgement and dedication

Extracts of the transcripts of “Saturday Workshop: How to Approach the Study and Practice of the Lamrim”, Thubten Norbu Ling, March 2023 (Tenzin Kunzang: all mistakes, errors, omissions are mine only)

Extracts of the transcripts of FPMT Longku Center Bern Switzerland, Ngöndro practices, September 2021 (Tenzin Kunzang: all mistakes, errors, omissions are mine only)

Extracts of the Preparatory Practice Guide for Lam Rim Meditation, Taitung Foundation Inc

Quotes from the teachings of FPMT Langri Tangpa Australia, Ngöndro practices – The refuge September 2024 (Ven. Tenzin Kunzang: all mistakes, errors, omissions are mine only)

Extracts of the transcripts of FPMT Rinchen Jangsem Ling, Malaysia, Introduction to Tantra Nov - Dec 2024 (Ven. Tenzin Kunzang: all mistakes, errors, omissions are mine only)

Extracts of Shamata meditation – A daily training Guide, Geshe Tenzin Zopa

In the footsteps of the Guru, collection of introductory teachings - Geshe Tenzin Zopa’s teachings on Guru devotion, ebook, [gurudevotion.pdf](#)

Extracts of the transcripts of Vajra Cutter Sutra retreat, Land of Medicine Buddha, March 2024 (Ven. Tenzin Kunzang: all mistakes, errors, omissions are mine only)

Fpmt retreat prayers book, Guru Puja, Vajrasattva practice, Samayavajra practice

Ganden Lha Gyalma

Lam Rim, Lama Tsongkhapa

Ornament for the Mahayana sutra, Maitreya

Four Hundred Stanzas, Aryadeva

Middle Length Lam-Rim, Lama Tsongkhapa

Tantra bestowing the initiation of Vajrapani

Ten Teachings Sutra

Fifty stanzas on Guru devotion

Lama Tsongkhapa Card, Fpmt Foundation store (cover picture)

With the understanding of the three spheres of emptiness, and just as all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the three times and ten directions did it before or will, the merits are dedicated to the good health and long life of all our Gurus, starting with Geshe Tenzin Zopa la, for the swift and unmistakable return of Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche; the success of all our Gurus’ holy projects and legacy; as well as dedicated to create the complete 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, wholeheartedly, steadily and swiftly, achieve the two tantric stages of generation and completion within this very lifetime, according to the teachings and instructions received from their precious teachers, for the welfare of all beings.

May all be auspicious for Geshe la, Geshela’s teachings, programs and projects, starting with this Ngöndros special program and the initiations that will follow.

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.