

The Uncommon preliminaries to enter Tantra – Ngöndro practices

The Refuge (Edition 2)

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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 of 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.

For my side, I conducted the common refuge, then did another round with the refuge and Bodhicitta and then another one with the tantric refuge.

Since we have so much time, you can start and complete the refuge 100.000 (+10.000 recitation) and then do another one.

About the tantric refuge, especially, especially for those who already have initiation, the last one will be more suitable. For those who do not, you can focus on the two earlier ones. Those who have Bodhisattva vows, the Refuge and Bodhicitta prayer will be more suitable. For the very beginner, you can recite the refuge precept.

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 refuge prayer will be the direct cause of your liberation and full enlightenment. Can you imagine the impact of a whole year practicing the refuge Sadhana and refuge prayer recitation?

Even though the different traditions of Tibetan Buddhism have a different number of Ngöndros and different emphasizes, there are generally four mains 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.

The refuge 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. Worldly refuge and Dharma refuge

A. Worldly refuge

There are different types of refuge based on different purposes, the main body practice, the commitments, etc.

There is worldly refuge and beyond worldly refuge (which is the Dharma refuge). Whenever there is a need for help or protection in relation to wealth, health, fear, status, you will look for a worldly refuge: material possessions, or an ordinary human being, ordination information, and then worldly gods. Also, animals, like Nagas, landlords, spirits.

Fear as well as faith and reliance on material power, individual people, Nagas, gods... are the cause for worldly refuge.

Some so-called Buddhists practitioners because they did not access to the actual teachings of the Buddha, do not know exactly the actual Dharma way to the refuge practice and they seriously take refuge in gods, humans, spirits.

They are plenty in Tibetan culture, Thai, Sri Lankan, Chinese, everywhere.

When someone who had taken refuge in Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, but continue to practice worldly refuge, this is a huge flaw because they did not manage to fulfil the ultimate purpose of taking refuge in Buddha, Dharma, Sangha and therefore, did not manage to take the full power of the Dharma refuge.

Therefore, one received limited protection, limited refuge only. This refuge is very temporary within this very lifetime.

All the qualities the gods have, Buddha already has them in a perfected way. So, when you take refuge in the gods, it is a sign that you do not trust, you do not have taken the full refuge in Buddha, you show limitations in your belief and trust in Buddha's abilities.

But it does not mean that since you are a Buddhist, you only show respect to Buddha and not to the gods or the other religions.

When you go for refuge, you need to have 100% conviction in the objects of refuge's abilities, the enlightened abilities.

The maximum level of achievements of those gods are the highest level of samsaric achievements. They bring immense benefits, but they also have their objectives and ultimate goal, which is not full enlightenment. Their ultimate goal is the highest of goodness of the three worlds they come from.

Liberation and full enlightenment are beyond those three worlds.

They can guide you all the way up to highest pick of the 33 gods realms qualities. But if you wish to go further then they cannot provide you any guidance. There is a possibility of diverting your purpose (if your purpose is to achieve full enlightenment).

So, if your purpose is to achieve liberation or full enlightenment, then no offence but the object of refuge is Buddha. Again, no offence, the teachings they share have infinite benefits to their followers.

B. The refuge of the small capable beings' path

The objects of refuge are Buddha, Dharma and Sangha to overcome the fears and limitations of the three lower Realms and have a protection to achieve higher rebirths in the human, demi-gods or gods' realms, having the conviction, faith, reliance of the power and ability of Buddha, Dharma, Sangha to do so.

The duration is just within the period of two lifetimes.

C. The refuge of the middle capable beings' path

Within that one, there are two categories of practitioners: the Hearers and the Solitary Realizers practitioners, or Sravakas and Pratyekabuddhas.

Their objects of refuge are Buddha, Dharma, Sangha.

For the Hearers, their main refuge is the Sangha members, the monastics, the Elders, the teachers. Their objective is to achieve the Sravakas' liberation, the self-liberation.

Their motive is the fear of the others' powers control of karma and delusions and the fear of falling into the six realms of cyclic existence. They have faith, conviction and reliance in the three jewels, but mainly, the Sangha community, especially the Elders, the teachers to discipline them through virtuous accumulation and restrict them from committing non virtuous, then stages by stages to lead them to the achieve Arhatship of the Sravakas path.

They get liberated by hearing the instructions of the sangha or Elders.

Then, the refuge in relation to Pratyekabuddhas: the main object of refuge is the Dharma: the truth of the path and the truth of cessation. Their ultimate goal is to achieve Pratyekabuddhas self-liberation.

The main causes of the refuge are again two: the fear of the others' powers control of karma and delusions and their consequences in the six realms of cyclic existence. They have faith, conviction and reliance in the three jewels, but mainly in the two aspects of the path (truth of the path and truth of cessation).

D. The refuge of the higher capable beings' path: the Mahayana practitioners

There are Mahayana Sutrayana practitioners and Mahayana Tantrayana practitioners. They are the same. The differences are in the **time needed to complete the path and the subtlety of their reliance**. Ultimately, they are the same.

They take refuge in the three jewels, but mainly in the Buddha.

When we talk about Buddha, we need to understand either the two bodies of the Buddha, or the three, or the four.

They take refuge in the Buddha because they see the highest level of cessation, which are the bodies of the Buddha.

When you interpret into two bodies, you have the form body and the wisdom body. The wisdom body is the highest and complete knowledge and the cessation and the achievement for your own benefit. Form body is the highest and most beneficial body of the Buddha for the benefit of all the other sentient beings.

The highest level of skillful means, the highest qualities which is the truth body to be in the service of sentient beings is the Buddha form body. So, **you achieve the wisdom body for your own benefit as a result of the second aspiration you made when you generated Bodhicitta, when you first enter the Mahayana path ("may I achieve the state of full enlightenment")**. **The form body is the result of the first aspiration you made ("for the numberless sentient beings' enlightenment")**.

Then, you can interpret with the three bodies of the Buddha: Dharmakaya, Nirmanakaya, Sambhogakaya.

If you refer to the four bodies, then the wisdom body has two bodies: the wisdom body and the ultimate nature of the wisdom which is emptiness body. The wisdom body is the final perfected wisdom of the Buddha. The ultimate nature of wisdom is the final cessation by overcoming all the defilements and obscurations. Those two bodies are two wisdom bodies. Then, there are the two form bodies: the Nirmanakaya and Sambhogakaya form bodies.

The first aspiration delivers the form body, the second aspiration delivers the wisdom body. You take refuge in Buddha's wisdom body by seeing the perfections of the wisdom by overcoming all the flaws not just of karma and delusions, of Samsara, but also the flaws of Nirvana.

You gain the full ultimate trust and conviction in its ultimate ability and that is how you take refuge in Buddha because of Buddha is adorned with the perfected quality of being a refuge for you, because of the Dharmakaya quality.

Then, you go for refuge in Sambhogakaya because you have accomplished all the merits of the method and achieved the omniscient capability to be able to understand every single mental disposition of numberless sentient beings and adorn the most perfected attitude, the highest level of the qualities of the attitude, the omniscient altruism.

Because of that, I go for refuge in the Buddha. There is no limitation in his attitude who overcomes even the limitations attached to the Nirvana peace, which only carries the concern of your own perfection, not the perfection of others.

Even your own limitation is not fully perfected because you have not achieved the highest level of cessation. **Therefore, the Bodhisattvas go for refuge in the example of the Buddha who is the highest level of wisdom and attitude.**

Then, the Bodhisattvas go for refuge in the Nirmanakaya, which they see as the all-pervasive blessing, the highest tools of skillful means, which not only is able to reach all the Buddhas, but also is able to reach the higher level of beings like the Arya Bodhisattvas, the Sambhogakya Buddhas, as well as the least meritorious beings, the most ordinary beings, the lowest level of living beings.

The Nirmanakaya body of the Buddha carries that blessing, the skillful mean, by accomplishing all the most extended levels of meritorious aspirations that the Buddhas themselves accumulated from beginningless lifetimes.

For example, why Shakyamuni Buddha among the thousand fortunate Buddhas descended in the Southern world? It is because, unlike the other Buddhas, Shakyamuni Buddha, when he was training on the path, he made the aspiration not only to accumulate merits of method and wisdom, but also to descend to turn the wheel of Dharma and liberate us when it will be the five degenerated time.

And to perform that display, just having a Dharmakaya body is not enough, just having a Sambhogakaya is not enough, you need to have the Nirmanakaya capability. It does not mean that Dharmakaya is lacking the entire enlightened capability, but because of the interdependent conditions required established by Buddha himself during his training, the Nirmanakaya has special capabilities.

Why when we have health issues, do we specifically pray Medicine Buddha? It is because of the power of their aspirations during the training. In the same way, Tara is good for activities. Manjushri is good for wisdom. They are all Buddhas, but because of that third quality, the aspirations they made when they were ordinary like us.

So here, you too, whatever aspirations you make, when you get enlightened, the impact to the sentient beings will be displayed differently as a result. So, therefore, when we have the environment of so many Buddhas, initiations, sadhanas, lineages available, you try to grab as much Dharma as possible and put that as an aspiration, so that when you become Buddha and turn the wheel of Dharma you have this numberless skillful means, numberless ways of reaching out.

The cause of the refuge is great compassion and the fear of the limitations of karma and delusions, Samsara, the three lower realms, and Nirvana, of diverting your spiritual journey towards only self-benefit Nirvana for yourself but also all the rest of the sentient beings.

The power of wisdom will be boosted by Bodhicitta as the main motivator, as a back support in order to reach Buddhahood. **The Mahayana path, and the refuge that goes with it, is the only way to reach there.**

It is good to know that though in the refuge booklet it is said, you take refuge for one lifetime (the refuge for the small cope beings); **when you take the Mahayanic refuge and the Tantric refuge, you take refuge for this life and all the future ones until you reach enlightenment.**

So, it will protect you from being reborn in the three lower realms not only for your next life, but all lifetimes because of the inexhaustible fruit of the merits born from Bodhicitta. The merit is ever growing and not degenerating, because your aspirations reach all sentient beings thanks to Bodhicitta.

E. The refuge in Tantrayana

The object of refuge for Tantra is the deity such as Buddha Vajradhara who is the three in one: the deity, the Buddha and the Guru; or any form of Yidam, meditational deity you are practicing, with the understanding that the main object of refuge are the two stages of the path: the generation and completion stages of the path.

Their tools will deliver the swiftest transformation in the practice of the spiritual journey. That is how one lifetime enlightenment is possible, in comparison to the sutric path where you need to accumulate three great countless eons of merits in three great countless eons of times.

It is a long journey.

Not even the earlier schools of Tantra carry this capability, even though they also carry the one lifetime enlightenment blessings, tools and path, but not in one brief lifetime.

Only the Highest Yoga Tantra can. Even on this very cushion, you can achieve enlightenment.

It is not time, but your practice, faith, consistency, diligence and the blessings through the deity yoga practice, that which gives you the access to actualize the generation and completion stages of the Tantric path.

The cause of refuge is the urgency: you cannot even bear even one moment to delay the benefits of the three bodies of the Buddha towards all the sentient beings. Therefore, you take refuge in the subtlest and swiftest path to actualize the resultant refuge.

Going into refuge (in causal refuge) and achieving those objectives (Buddhahood) is called the resultant refuge.

III. The objects of the Dharma refuge

A. Taking refuge in Guru, Buddha, Dharma, Sangha who are free from any limitation

When we recite the refuge prayer, we can refresh our refuge practice in Guru, Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, and also acknowledge Buddha nature as one's innate nature, one's own true being.

And place confidence in the fact that, this Buddha nature will one day be fully awakened as a resultant Buddha, which is the ultimate refuge, through the cultivation of the path and the precepts.

Then, understand you have gone under the refuge of Guru, Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, because Guru, Buddha, Dharma, Sangha **are the straightforward quality free from all the limitations.**

These are the straightforward qualities:

- which accomplished **all the perfections**, all the goodness, all the virtuous qualities,
- which has **all the wisdoms**, all the skillful means,
- and most of all, has **omniscient wisdom**, which directly understands the entirety of one's past, present and future, including of the subtle karmas, mental dispositions, whose compassion, love, blessings, is all pervasive, without any bias. All pervasive.

Because of that reason, we go for refuge to that ultimate refuge without a doubt that it will cause our total purification of our own limitations and conditions us **to actualize the same achievements than Buddha** himself.

That is the reason why one took refuge in Guru, Buddha, Dharma, Sangha and the qualities of immeasurable love, compassion, blessings, omniscient wisdom. These qualities are the most inspiring qualities, the most inspiring virtues.

B. Setting a Bodhicitta motivation with the four immeasurable thoughts, the very purpose of one's life

You truly aspire to actualize them **for your own ultimate benefit, as well as the ultimate benefit of the rest of the sentient beings; as well as your temporary benefit**, the benefit of this mundane life of this very lifetime, for the benefit of this very moment; **as well as bringing a secure, positive, beneficial environment to the others**, starting with the person who is sitting next to you that fly that keeps flying all over your face, and the ants which are crawling everywhere.

That is what you aspire for. And thinking about these boundless immeasurable qualities of the Guru Buddha is so inspiring. **It is truly heart-touching.**

Therefore, the very purpose of life, the very purpose of existence and the very purpose of this retreat, of this right very moment is to actualize that benefit.

On that basis, you set firm, correct, most beneficial motivation now through the guidance of **the four immeasurable thoughts**, you express that from the depth of one's heart, wholeheartedly, sincerely. **You generate Bodhicitta motivation in that way.**

C. Remember that Shakyamuni Buddha is kinder than all the three times Buddhas (let's remember all that he went through specifically for us and let's 100% practice)

Among the thousand fortunate Buddhas who will come into our world, the Southern world, for us, the people of the five degenerated times, **not all Buddhas will teach the complete path.**

Shakyamuni Buddha provides the complete Dharma, which is uncommon, special, compared to those thousand fortunate Buddhas who are going to display similar kinds of deeds, coming to this Southern world to turn the wheel of Dharma.

Most of the Buddhas, 997 Buddhas, will not teach the complete teachings of both Sutra and Tantra.

Most of the Buddhas will only reveal the Sutric teachings, not because there are limitations in those Buddhas in their omniscient capabilities. It is because of their karmic connections with the sentient beings of that time and era, **in relation to the aspiration that the Buddhas themselves made when they were on the path of training.**

Shakyamuni Buddha, countless eons of lifetime before becoming a Buddha, when he was just similar like us, even from the very first time when he was as a beggar, when Buddha passed by

Him, even though he had nothing to offer, whatever food he had been given by others, He offered it to the Buddha.

He rejoiced in Buddha's qualities and made this aspiration: **"May I be just like Him and may I come to the world during the five degenerated times".**

Among all the different times, he chose to be back during the most distracting time, in the most distorted world, when not only intelligence is degenerating, but also the lifespan is degenerating, even the delusions become more stubborn, and environmentally there are so many distractions.

a. In those degenerated times, it is so hard to understand the Dharma and take it as personal instruction

One of the most tragic times. **It is so hard to help. Even if you provide help by teaching Dharma, it is so difficult to understand:**

- Firstly, it is so difficult to even meet the Dharma.
- Secondly, it is so difficult to be inspired by the Dharma.
- Thirdly, it is so difficult to understand Dharma, even if you learn it.
- Finally, even if you understand, it is so difficult to understand as an instruction to yourselves.

You always listen to the Dharma thinking this teaching is for somebody else, not for me, seeing limitations in that somebody, **thinking this Dharma is an antidote for that somebody, instead of seeing this limitation is within me and this teaching is for me.**

This human intelligence becomes so corrupted that the smartness of the intelligence interprets everything in a hallucinated way or wrongly, with a lot of misinterpretations, **even when you are actually hearing a profound and a correct nectar of the Dharma directed at you.** That kind of position.

b. Shakyamuni Buddha got enlightened specifically for us (karmic connection)

So, in short, **that very lineage, that very first reincarnation of Shakyamuni Buddha**, who first time aspired with all his heart in bodhicitta, in particularly dedicated to the beings of the five degenerated times like us; from that point of you Shakyamuni Buddha is **extremely closely connected to us.**

He achieved enlightenment for us, specifically for us, for each and every one of us.

And on top of that, **there are so many Buddhas who remained in Dharmakaya. They do not openly illustrate in the Nirmanakaya form as Shakyamuni Buddha**, which is more accessible to the ordinary beings, more accessible to the limited merits, people like me.

c. Benefitting us in the three kayas forms and in the Guru form

So, Buddha is not only benefiting and inspiring from the Dharmakaya existence; but he also manifested in the form bodies:

- **In Sambhogakaya form** who resides within the Bodhisattvas realms and extensively turns the wheel of Dharma,
- and at the same time manifests in the **Nirmanakaya form** of the Buddha, such as the historical Shakyamuni Buddha.

Then, on top of that, **he manifests into a Guru form**, in the most ordinary aspect, with whom, even us, we can directly engage in face-to-face conversations.

We are able to enjoy the Dharma directly without needing to go through any other channels, with direct transmissions. **The Guru manifests at the same level as us, conventionally, so we do not feel too much of differences in every level.**

Through the heart of compassion, and the aspirations that he made, he even manifests that way.

So, Shakyamuni Buddha is not only special and kinder than all the rest of the three times Buddhas, but also special and kinder in relation to the karmic connection even among the thousand fortunate Buddhas.

d. A life of renunciation and hardships to benefit us

So, Guru Shakyamuni Buddha for countless eons of lifetimes, worked for us, for each and every one of us.

He observed all the precepts, accumulated and accomplish three countless great eons of merits then brought about all the benefits of the Dharma that we are enjoying, the nectar.

From that very first reincarnation [that beggar], and then for numberless lifetimes [some of the reincarnations are highlighted in Jataka tales: five hundreds fortunate lives of Shakyamuni Buddha, five hundreds unfortunate lives reincarnations of Shakyamuni Buddha] throughout his journey on the Bodhisattva path, **it is all started from that one aspiration “may I be just like the Buddha, may I be just like you the Buddha and be able to bring benefit to all the sentient beings”.**

It started from there, then he worked life after life.

We can read the deeds of those lives and learn how many sacrifices he made, how he renounced his own comfort, and how many dedications in virtue he did, just for that one purpose.

In order to help us, to benefit us, to be able to reveal the purest wisdom, the most beneficial attitude, such as altruistic wisdom, and altruistic attitude, and reveal the complete path, the Sutra and Tantra, he took upon him all that just for our benefits.

e. Can we afford to still get distracted while the Buddha gave us all?

So, now let's think and evaluate if we are wasting our life by not practicing Dharma, even though we have access to it. Now let's think is there any room for us to get distracted by any worldly concern, by any minor samsaric day-to-day obstacles.

While someone out there, like Shakyamuni Buddha, worked from countless eons of times for us and provided everything for us, yet we are not taking it. Even when we encounter Dharma, we take only a very little fraction of the teaching, of the practice, not the complete teaching.

We also never really pay full attention, put full concentration, full mindfulness, into the practice.

So, when we think of the effort that Shakyamuni Buddha invested for our temporary well-being as well as our ultimate well-being, now let's ask ourselves: “can I afford to waste my life? Can I afford to still get distracted?”

When we think of Shakyamuni Buddha, we need to feel that.

IV. Refuge practice retreat – Refuge and Bodhicitta practice 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 on 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 exposition 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 creates 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 problems.

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)

Then, **do some preliminaries to the preliminary retreat: setting up the altar**, if you have the facilities. If not, then on a proper area, on a table, you put the picture of your Guru, the refuge field.

As far as the offerings are concerned, for this retreat, there is no front generation or self-generation. Therefore, whatever offerings are fine: 7 water bowls offering, one water bowl offering, one or a hundred lights, or an abundance of flowers and fruits. You can make a general tormas as an offering to the Buddha.

Prepare the retreat cushion: draw a svastika on the floor or on a paper. On top of that, you put one kusha grass with the hair facing behind. On top of that, you put one long-life grass in the same direction, as the 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 **bless 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 bless 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 (for an extensive most useful and meaningful explanation cf. tenzinzopa.com/ebook/ebook/gurudevotion.pdf, page 75) **to prepare and consecrate the place and your practice.**

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

I. 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 arrange 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.

II. 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

III. 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.

IV. 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 preparatory and preliminary practices as a whole practice by itself, and after that do the sadhana of the Ganden Lha Gyalma (with the accumulation after the glimpse of Lam Rim meditation – cf. commentary and sadhana in Four Ngöndros booklet on Geshela’s blog).

Or you can start the sadhana of the Ganden Lha Gyalma now (with the accumulation after the Lam Rim meditation).

Or you can conduct the whole Preparatory and preliminary practices and use another sadhana. For example, the Refuge sadhana for the refuge retreat.

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

- Limb of Prostrations :

When you do prostrations, each gesture has a special meaning. First you join your two hands putting your thumbs inside your palms (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 methods to perform powerful practice of veneration and purification.

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, in slow motion. Your feet should be together side by side.

The more space you cover around you with your gestures, the more ground you cover with your body, not only the surface, but the space beneath also all the way down to the final grounds, the better. Touch the ground with your palms and stretch your fingers.

The number of dusts you cover 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, gather your arms in a vast gesture, before stretching your arms ahead and put them again at your crown. Then, stretch and expand them again around your body to pull you back on foot. You should not remain too long on the ground.

Then, there are short prostrations called prostrations of Five Limbs: forehead, palms and knees. You do not have to lie down. You can also just join the palms of your hands at the level of your heart, or even with just one hand at your heart, with the thumb inside.

That was physical prostration.

Now, you associate the gesture with verbal prostration by offering praises (Lama Kyab su chhi o, 35 Buddhas, Vajrasattva...). For mental prostration: you see the Guru as Buddha and generate faith and veneration.

You can also visualize you are leading all the rest of the sentient beings in doing prostrations.

- Limb of Offerings

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.

Be creative, the bigger the visualization accompanying the actual offerings the better (cf. Geshela's extensive commentary, In the footsteps of the Guru mentioned earlier tenzinzopa.com/ebook/ebook/gurudevotion.pdf).

- 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.

Every limitation needs to be confessed.

- Limb of Rejoicing

Rejoice in all the merit 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.

If you want to practice just one thing, practice rejoicing. It is one of the best ways to keep our minds 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”

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. Rejoicing in anyone’s merits during a solar eclipse multiply hundred million times. Then, rejoicing during a lunar eclipse multiplies the merits seven hundred thousand times.

- Limb of Requesting to Turn the Wheel of Dharma

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. 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

When you request the Gurus not to pass into Parinirvana, 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.

- Limb of Dedication

Dedication is as equally important as motivation because it fulfills the three purposes (Lama Tsongkhapa):

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

By dedicating in Bodhicitta and Emptiness, if anger arises or any negativities, all the merits you have been accumulated and dedicated will not be destroyed and be forever remaining 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 achieves 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.

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

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

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 next 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

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.

For the texts of the prayers and description of the visualization cf. Part V of this booklet.

1. Taking Refuge and Generating Bodhicitta

Cf. prayer in part

2. Four Immeasurable Prayer

Cf. prayer in part V

3. Invocation Prayer

Cf. prayer in part V

4. Actual Visualization on Lama Tsongkhapa

Cf. description in part V

5. Seven-Limb Prayer

Cf. prayer in part V

6. Mandala Offering

Cf. prayer in part V

7. Requesting Blessings

Cf. prayer in part V

8. Glimpse Meditation on Lamrim topic

Cf. prayer in part V

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

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

D. Refuge practice or Refuge and Bodhicitta practice: the different prayers

There are different versions that you can use.

1. The Refuge prayer

Sang gyä la kyab su chhi o

Chhö la kyab su chhi o

Gen dün la kyab su chhi o

In English:

I take refuge in the Buddha.

I take refuge in the Dharma.

I take refuge in the Sangha.

2. The Common 4 Lines Refuge and Bodhicitta prayer

Sang gyä chhö dang tshog kyi chhog nam la

*Jang chhub bar du dag ni kyab su chhi
Dag gi jin sog gyi päi tshog nam kyi
Dro la phän chhir sang gyä drub par shog*

In English:

*I take refuge until I am enlightened
In the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Supreme Assembly.
By my merits of generosity and so forth,
May I become a buddha to benefit transmigratory beings.*

The two first lines are for the Refuge, the two other ones, for the Bodhicitta, very good when one has the Bodhisattva vows.

It also allows you to do two retreats at the same time: Refuge AND Bodhicitta.

3. The 6 Lines Refuge prayer of the Vajrayana practice (the Tantric Refuge)

There is a six lines prayer that some Gurus will emphasize **because it gathers a Guru yoga practice, a deity yoga practice and a refuge practice, all in one:**

*La ma la kyab su chhi o
Sang gyä la kyab su chhi o
Chhö la kyab su chhi o
Gen dün la kyab su chhi o
Yidam kilkhör ki dagso kor tang che pa nam la kyab su chhi o
Palgon dam pa choe kong we sungma yeshe ki chen dang denpa nam la kyab su
chhi o*

In English:

*I take refuge in the Guru.
I take refuge in the Buddha.
I take refuge in the Dharma.
I take refuge in the Sangha.
I take refuge in the Yidam and all the deities of your Yidam mandala.
I take refuge in all my Arya Dharma protectors and all the Arya Dharma other protectors of your
protectors' mandala.*

You can also use only the first four lines version of the prayer above.

Even without any Tantric initiation, because there are not elements of self-generation, it is ok. **It will create the meritorious conditions to meet with your karmic meditational deity/deities.**

So, if you can do the most extensive one, it is very beneficial. That will be the best.

4. Other options

You can also use the four immeasurable prayers, or the verses of Shantideva's Bodhicaryavatara, or Nagarjuna's commentary on Bodhicitta, or the verses to generate aspirational Bodhicitta and engaging Bodhicitta.

You can also use the prostration prayer "Namo Gurubhya..." because it also carries the element of refuge. It is also very beneficial to restore broken samayas, degenerating faith, criticizing, drawing blood ...

You can focus on the first line and visualize you are purifying the relationship with your Guru applying the example of visualizations described in the purification preparatory practices heading (tenzinzopa.com/ebook/ebook/gurudevotion.pdf), or in the next heading about the different ways to recite the prayers, or in the heading of this booklet dedicated to Lama Tsongkhapa Guru yoga.

At the end, visualize and understand you actualized pure basis to actualize Buddhahood. Then, take a few minutes to recite the other lines dedicated to the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha and do the same visualization with each one of them.

You can do the exact same way with "La ma la Kyab su chhi o".

Therefore, you can use any of those options: the Refuge prayer, or the Refuge and Bodhicitta prayer, or the Tantric Refuge (4 or 6 Lines) or any of the options listed above. There are different causes of practicing those different refuge practices based on different purposes (different Yanas).

You can also seek advice from your Guru. Guru may do observations to know which one would be most beneficial for you and for your retreat.

E. Recitation, accumulation and dedication

As far as the number of recitations is concerned, you have to accumulate **a minimum of 100.000 recitation of the prayer**. Usually, **we do some extra 10.000 as a supplement**, in case there would be some mispronunciation, or in case of any mistake in the recitation, or any limitation in the accumulation of the correct number.

It is a minimum, but you can accumulate as much as you like. Some practitioners may have accumulated one million, or more, while spending their whole life in retreat. Nowadays, there are still some practitioners like that.

By disciplining your body, speech and mind in reciting it 110.000 as a minimum (and living in the refuge practice for at least one year), you will achieve a huge consecration and purification of your body, speech and mind; in order to gain the cause of your resultant refuge, the path to it and the blessings.

If you do it properly, within two weeks, it can be completed comfortably with four sessions a day, each session of around two hours.

While doing the recitation, **visualize an uninterrupted nectar flowing from the object of refuge, ever shining rays of light, to you and the rest of the numberless sentient beings.**

You must have this conviction that same as you, when you receive the nectar and the light, all of them are receiving them as well and feel the same way simultaneously. And all of you are completely purified from any negativities and transformed into a pure light body like the Buddhas.

You still have the same aspect but in a light form. **Feel uplifted. Cleansed. Completely purified** from all your delusions and karma, empty of any difficulties, especially if you have some kind of health issues.

Then, **there are different ways to recite the prayers.**

1. Refuge prayer (3 lines)

If you are using the Common Refuge prayer, **you can do one by one or all the lines together** (cf. 3. Tantric Refuge prayer for instruction about those 3 lines below).

2. Four Lines Refuge and Bodhicitta prayer

You can recite either the first two lines about the refuge until the 100.000 (plus a supplement of 10.000), and then after the Bodhicitta lines.

The reason for that is to target your meditation and recitation on the refuge. You combine with the visualization described before for the Refuge part.

Then, you associate with the Bodhicitta lines a meditation on Bodhicitta: aspirational Bodhicitta, engaging Bodhicitta. You can do very elaborate using Shantideva's Bodhicaryavatara.

3. Tantric Refuge prayer

Or, if you are using the "Lama la kyab su cchi o" prayer, **you can do one by one or all the lines together.**

If you do one by one:

- **1st line: you focus mainly on your Root Guru and the lineage Lamas** and **make a special connection with them requesting** never to be separated from their guidance until you achieve enlightenment, requesting to always turn the wheel of Dharma, requesting to never depart into Parinirvana.

Visualize the Guru is totally **pleased by your request...Feel absolutely purified** from any negativities committed in relation to your Guru, such as harming their holy body, not obeying Guru's advice, then disturbing Guru's heart, criticizing the Guru, losing faith in the Guru, ...and completely under the protection of the Guru.

Keep repeating this visualization during the whole recitation.

- **2nd line you focus mainly on the Nirmanakaya aspect of the historical Buddha, the 17 Panditas, the Mahasiddhas, earlier and later Kadampas Masters. They are all Nirmanakaya aspects of the enlightened beings.**

Similarly visualize the **purification** in relation to destroying Buddha's images or harming actual Nirmanakaya's Buddha holy body, doing business in relation to Buddha's holy objects, stealing or misusing Stupas, Buddha's statues, Tangka paintings, pictures...

In short whatever infraction you may have done in relation to the Refuge commitments, understand that they are now purified, your body, speech and mind are purified.

You actualize the blessings of the holy body, speech and mind of the Buddha, as well as any kind of any form of blessings from the Buddha.

Your life force increases, your merits, your knowledge, your realizations do so.

You understand you are completely under the protection and guidance of the Buddhas.

- **3rd: the main focus is on the scriptures: you understand they contain all the realizations on the path up to enlightenment, the truth of the path (direct realization on emptiness) in the appearance of scriptures.**

They form a pile as huge as Mount Meru filling up the entire universe, you can hear the echo of the Dharma that dispels the root cause of samsara: the ignorant grasping, in you and the rest of the sentient beings.

Infinite light rays are emanating from these scriptures enter yourself and the rest of the sentient beings and **purify everything**, in particular any negative karma committed in relation to abandoning the Dharma, misusing the Dharma, disrespectfully putting Dharma material under the buttock, on bare land without any form of protection, treating them without respect. Then same than before, your life force, merits...increase.

You actualize all the blessings of the Dharma in particularly any form in relation to the Dharma.

You and all sentient beings are totally under the protection of the Dharma.

- **4th mainly focused on the Arya Bodhisattvas, Arhats, Solitary Realizers, Hearers, Dakas, Dakinis, you make the aspiration that they will always be there to assist and bless you in your spiritual journey.**

They are so pleased with you, then immediately infinite light rays and nectar flow from them and reach you and the rest of the sentient beings.

All the negativities are **purified**, especially, all the karma created in relation to the Sangha by criticizing the Sangha, dividing the Sangha community, stealing the material offered to the Sangha, or consuming them without the permission, whatever karma committed in relation to the Sangha is purified.

Then, life force, merits...increase.

You actualize any form of blessings in relation to the Sangha.

You then feel completely under the protection of the Sangha refuge.

- **5th is the recitation to the deities, your meditational deity and the rest of the deities of the mandala. The main focus is on Buddha Vajradhara, and the rest of the Yidams** like Guyasamaja, Yamantaka, Heruka, Vajrayogini, Kalachakra, Hayagriva, all the Highest Yoga Tantra deities.

You can also visualize all the other meditational deities of the four classes of Tantra like Chenrezig, Maitreya, Manjushri, Vajrapani, ...whatever deity you are practicing.

If you have time, take a moment for each one of them, that would be really beneficial. Otherwise, you use the bird eye meditation technique and focus on Guru Vajradhara, or your main meditational deity, and everyone is there.

You request the blessings of the common and uncommon and the supreme blessings: in short, **all the blessings on the stages of the path, including the blessings of the generation and completion stages**, which are so rare to achieve. **You specifically request that.**

Immediately the omniscient mind understands, then infinite light rays, rainfall like nectar comes to you and the rest of the sentient beings.

Similarly, any karma and obscurations, especially the obscurations to actualize the uncommon supreme blessings, they are **all purified** the moment the nectar and the light touch you.

Your body turn into light form body, your mind actualizes the Dharmakaya mind. Your speech becomes the meritorious speech of the Buddha.

Then similarly, your merits, knowledge increase.

The negativities especially in relation to broken samayas, like tantric vows, Bodhisattvas vows, breaking sadhanas, not completing the practice done with wrong motivations, wrong dedication, wrong visualization, mistaken recitation of the mantra, incomplete recitation of the mantra. Everything is purified.

You receive all the deities' blessings and are completely under the refuge and protection of all your Yidams and completely protected and secured within the deity mandala.

- **6th the Arya Dharma protectors.** Generally, the main protector of the Mahayanic practitioner, especially Mahayanic Bodhisattva practitioner, the practitioner of altruism, of the Lojong practitioner, the protector of the Bodhisattvas is **Mahakala**, like Six Armed Mahakala, which is a special protector of Chenrezig, the special attendant of the protection in relation to Chenrezig.

Then the Dharma protector **Vaishravana** (or Namthösé in Tibetan) in particular to the practitioner whose main practice is the three higher trainings such as Vinaya, such as Hearers, Solitary Realizers, those who follow the middle capable beings' path, their main practice in the three higher trainings.

Then, **Kalarupa** is the protector of those who follows the smaller capable beings' path or whose main practice is Refuge and the karmic law of causes and effects.

Then, generally, the Dharma protector of the practitioner of the Vajrayana path, whose main practice is the union of method and wisdom, is **Palden Lhamo**.

Generally, it is like that, but for individual cases, you may have your own karmic infinite Dharma protector: it could be **Hayagriva** or others. You can check with your Guru, or you may follow your own instinct.

They play an important role for the progress of the practitioner clearing obstacles on the path...

In this practice you also go for refuge in the Arya Dharma protectors, then, you make a supplication "please fulfil all the conducive conditions, clear all the inner, outer and secret obstacles", then while reciting, you do that visualization.

For somebody who practices Lam-Rim, the three Yanas, Bodhicitta...all those Dharma protectors are relevant to us.

From all the Dharma protectors, infinite light rays emanate...everything as mentioned before for the 5 other lines.

All the blessings that have a specific characteristic are achieved within your body, speech and mind. That is how all the negativities are purified, and you actualize all the conducive conditions to actualize your path.

That is why the six lines prayer is so significant. My late Guru specifically emphasized to do this one for my own individual case.

I am sharing the Refuge prayer retreat I did. I did a few Refuge retreats with that prayer. If you want to use it, you can. But generally, you would do the usual Refuge retreat prayer.

Also, **if you want to do the Refuge and Bodhicitta retreat**, then the prayer to use is "Sangye...", to have both elements, the usual Refuge and Bodhicitta prayer, that is **the most common prayer, to complete both Refuge and Bodhicitta Ngöndro retreats.**

So, unless you have a specific guidance from your Guru, I would suggest you use that one.

If you cannot multi-tasking, then you do the visualization first and then you focus on the recitation.

If you start to feel some pain in your hand, take some rest from the accumulation and focus on the visualization. Once rested, you resume the accumulation.

End the session with **an altruistic extensive dedication**, for the long life, good health and the fulfilments of all the wishes of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and all the Gurus. **Seal it in the three spheres of emptiness** (the virtue and merits created, the dedicator and the object of dedication, all lie in the nature of inherent existence).

V. Retreat guidelines (strict retreat and 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-point 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

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

SEM CHÄN THAM CHÄ DE WA DANG DE WÄI GYU DANG DÄN PAR GYUR CHIG
May all sentient beings have happiness and the causes of happiness.
SEM CHÄN THAM CHÄ DUG NGÄL DANG DUG NGÄL GYIGYU DANG DRÄL WAR GYUR CHIG
May all sentient beings be free from suffering and the causes of suffering.
SEM CHÄN THAM CHÄ DUG NGÄL ME PÄI DE WA DANG MI DRÄL WAR GYUR CHIG
May all sentient beings never be separated from the happiness that knows no suffering.
SEM CHÄN THAM CHÄ NYE RING CHAAG DANG NYI DANG DRÄL WÄI TANG NYOM LA NÄ PAR GYUR CHIG
May all sentient beings abide in equanimity, free of attachment and hatred for those held close and distant.

c. Invocation Prayer

MA LÜ SEM CHÄN KÜN GYI GÖN GYUR CHING
Savior of all sentient beings without exception,
DÜ DE PUNG CHÄ MI ZÄ JOM DZÄ LHA
Divine destroyer of the unbearable hordes of maras and their forces,
NGÖ NAM MA LÜ YANG DAG KHYEN GYUR PÄI
Perfect knower of all things without exception,
CHOM DÄN KHOR CHÄ NÄ DIR SHEG SU SÖL
Bhagavan, together with your retinue, please come here.

d. Actual Visualization on Lama Tsongkhapa

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). The snow lions are transformations of great bodhisattvas and are visualized alive and made of light.

On the throne there is a white lotus and on the lotus are the sun and moon disks, cushions of light for Guru Lama Tsongkhapa who is seated upon them.

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 color symbolizes the great scholar of a dharma. His aspect is very peaceful. Every atom of his holy body has the power to give realizations.

His hands are in the mudras of granting sublime realizations, symbolizing always liberating numberless beings on the path to liberation from ocean of samsara by giving dharma teachings by his great love and compassion. At his right shoulder on Lotus stamp there is wisdom sword representing the profound dharma and at the left wisdom sutra representing the extensive dharma.

Aura of light is surrounding his whole body. Happening uninterruptedly live transmissions of complete dharma nectar, Lamrim, attended by his heart disciples like Gyaltsab-Jey and Khedrup-Jey, and numberless fortunate ripen disciple including yourself.

e. Seven-Limb Prayer

GO SUM GÜ PÄI GO NÄ CHHAG TSHÄL LO

I prostrate reverently with my body, speech, and mind.

NGÖ SHAM YI TRÜL CHHÖ TRIN MA LÜ BÜL

*I present clouds of every type of offering, both actually
arranged and mentally emanated.*

THOG ME NÄ SAG DIG TUNG THAM CHÄ SHAG

*I confess all my negative actions and downfalls collected
from beginningless time.*

KYE PHAG GE WA NAM LA JE YI RANG

I rejoice in the virtues of ordinary beings and aryas.

KHOR WA MA TONG BAR DU LEG ZHUG NÄ

Please remain until the end of cyclic existence,

DRO LA CHHÖ KYI KHOR LO KOR WA DANG

And turn the wheel of Dharma for transmigratory beings.

DAG ZHÄN GE NAM JANG CHHUB CHHEN POR NGO

I dedicate my own and others' virtues to great enlightenment.

f. 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 all living beings enjoy this pure land!
 IDAM GURU RATNA MANDALAKAM NIRYATAYAM

g. Requesting Blessings

Nine-line requesting prayer to Guru Lama Tsongkhapa
 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)

h. Glimpse Meditation on Lamrim topic

You can insert any Lamrim topic to meditate on at this point. **You can use the Foundation of All Good Qualities as a support: recite each day one verse and reflect on its meaning.**

YÖN TÄN KÜN GYI ZHIR GYUR DRIN CHÄN JE

The foundation of all good qualities is the kind and perfect, pure Guru;

TSHÜL ZHIN TEN PA LAM GYI TSA WA RU

Correct devotion to him is the root of the path.

LEG PAR THONG NÄ BÄ PA DU MA YI

By clearly seeing this and applying great effort,

GÜ PA CHHEN PÖ TEN PAR JIN GYI LOB

Please bless me to rely upon him with great respect.

LÄN CHIG NYE PÄI DÄL WÄI TEN ZANG DI

Understanding that the precious freedom of this rebirth is found only once,

SHIN TU NYE KA DÖN CHHEN SHE GYUR NÄ

Is greatly meaningful, and is difficult to find again,

NYIN TSHÄN KÜN TU NYING PO LEN PÄI LO

Please bless me to generate the mind that unceasingly,

GYÜN CHHÄ ME PAR KYE WAR JIN GYI LOB

Day and night, takes its essence.

LÜ SOG YO WA CHHU YI CHHU BUR ZHIN

This life is as impermanent as a water bubble;

NYUR DU JIG PÄI CHHI WA DRÄN PA DANG

Remember how quickly it decays and death comes.

SHI WÄI JE SU LÜ DANG DRIB MA ZHIN

After death, just like a shadow follows the body,

KAR NAG LÜ DRÄ CHHI ZHIN DRANG WA LA

The results of black and white karma follow.

NGE PA TÄN PO NYE NÄ NYE PÄI TSHOG

Finding firm and definite conviction in this,

THRA ZHING THRA WA NAM KYANG PONG BA DANG

Please bless me always to be careful

GE TSHOG THA DAG DRUB PAR JE PA LA

To abandon even the slightest negativities

TAG TU BAG DANG DÄN PAR JIN GYI LOB

And accomplish all virtuous deeds.

CHÄ PÄ MI NGOM DUG NGÄL KÜN GYI GO

Seeking samsaric pleasures is the door to all suffering:

YI TÄN MI RUNG SI PÄI PHÜN TSHOG KYI

They are uncertain and cannot be relied upon.

NYE MIG RIG NÄ THAR PÄI DE WA LA

Recognizing these shortcomings,

DÖN NYER CHHEN POR KYE WAR JIN GYI LOB

Please bless me to generate the strong wish for the bliss of liberation.

NAM DAG SAM PA DE YI DRANG PA YI

Led by this pure thought,

DRÄN DANG SHE ZHIN BAG YI CHHEN PO YI

Mindfulness, alertness, and great caution arise.

TÄN PÄI TSA WA SO SOR THAR PA LA

The root of the teachings is keeping the pratimoksha vows:

DRUB PA NYING POR JE PAR JIN GYI LOB

Please bless me to accomplish this essential practice.

RANG NYI SI TSHOR LHUNG WA JI SHIN DU

Just as I have fallen into the sea of samsara,

MAR GYUR DRO WA KÜN KYANG DE DRA WAR

So have all mother migratory beings.

THONG NÄ DRO WA DRÖL WÄI KHUR KHYER WÄI

Please bless me to see this, train in supreme bodhicitta,

JANG CHHUB SEM CHHOG JONG PAR JIN GYI LOB

And bear the responsibility of freeing migratory beings.

SEM TSAM KYE KYANG TSHÜL THRIM NAM SUM LA

Even if I develop only bodhicitta, but I don't practice the three types of morality,

GOM PA ME NA JANG CHHUB MI DRUB PAR

I will not achieve enlightenment.

LEG PAR THONG NÄ GYÄL SÄ DOM PA LA

With my clear recognition of this,

TSÖN PA DRAG PÖ LOB PAR JIN GYI LOB

Please bless me to practice the bodhisattva vows with great energy.

LOG PÄI YÜL LA YENG WA ZHI JE CHING

Once I have pacified distractions to wrong objects

YANG DAG DÖN LA TSHÜL ZHIN CHÖ PA YI

And correctly analyzed the meaning of reality,

ZHI NÄ LHAG THONG ZUNG DU DREL WÄI LAM

Please bless me to generate quickly within my mindstream

NYUR DU GYÜ LA KYE WAR JIN GYI LOB

The unified path of calm abiding and special insight.

THÜN MONG LAM JANG NÖ DU GYUR PA NA

Having become a pure vessel by training in the general path,

THEG PA KÜN GYI CHHOG GYUR DOR JEI THEG

Please bless me to enter

KÄL ZANG KYE BÖI JUG NGOG DAM PA DER

The holy gateway of the fortunate ones:

DE LAG NYI DU JUG PAR JIN GYI LOB

The supreme vajra vehicle.

DE TSHE NGÖ DRUB NAM NYI DRUB PÄI ZHI

At that time, the basis of accomplishing the two attainments

NAM DAG DAM TSHIG DOM PAR SUNG WA LA

Is keeping pure vows and samaya.

CHÖ MA MIN PÄI NGE PA NYE GYUR NÄ

As I have become firmly convinced of this,

SOG DANG DÖ TE SUNG WAR JIN GYI LOB

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

DE NÄ GYÜ DEI NYING PO RIM NYI KYI

Then, having realized the importance of the two stages,

NÄ NAM JI ZHIN TOG NÄ TSÖN PA YI

The essence of the Vajrayana,

THÜN ZHII NÄL JOR CHHOG LÄ MI YEL WAR

By practicing with great energy, never giving up the four sessions,

DAM PÄI SUNG ZHIN DRUB PAR JIN GYI LOB

Please bless me to realize the teachings of the holy Guru.

DE TAR LAM ZANG TÖN PÄI SHE NYEN DANG

Like that, may the gurus who show the noble path

TSHÜL ZHIN DRUB PÄI DROG NAM ZHAB TÄN CHING

And the spiritual friends who practice it have long lives.

CHHI DANG NANG GI BAR DU CHÖ PÄI TSHOG

Please bless me to pacify completely

NYE WAR ZHI WAR JIN GYI LAB TU SÖL

All outer and inner hindrances.

KYE WA KÜN TU YANG DAG LA MA DANG

In all my lives, never separated from perfect gurus,

DRÄL ME CHHÖ KYI PÄL LA LONG CHÖ CHING

May I enjoy the magnificent Dharma.

SA DANG LAM GYI YÖN TÄN RAB DZOG NÄ

By completing the qualities of the stages and paths,

DOR JE CHHANG GI GO PHANG NYUR THOB SHOG

May I quickly attain the state of Vajradhara.

i. Accumulation of the prayers and dedications

You will find a lot of dedication prayers in the Fpmt retreat prayers book.

Dedicate in the three spheres of emptiness and recite the prayers and mantra multiplying the merits (p.374):

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. |

| | |
|--|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 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 |
| | <p>Go to bed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 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. |

2. Practical advices

Another important thing is, even if you set for a three-hours session, **try to end the session when you are in 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 you are actually 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 body. You need to eat properly, rest on time.**

So, try to wake up a bit early. **The best 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.

C. 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, with a minimum of six Refuge prayer recitations** (*cf. the commitment once you have taken the refuge is 3 times during the day and three at night*).

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 free 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 usually a Bodhicitta motivation based on 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 based on the preliminary, recite 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 being able to continue with the retreat in any circumstances.

But as a minimum, 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 must 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 must 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.

Even if you are doing your refuge prayer three times during daytime and three times at night, try to always be aware of remaining in the refuge during the whole day (which is the reason of three times a day and at night).

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”, FPMT Thubten Norbu Ling, March 2023 (Ven. Tenzin Kunzang: all mistakes, errors, omissions are mine only)

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

Extracts of the Preparatory Practice Guide for LamRim Meditation, compiled by 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 footstep 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

Buddha Shakyamuni Refuge Merit Field PDF, shopfpmt@fpmt.org (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 HŪṂ 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.