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Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The tool for that is the practice of Tantra.

I. Buddhist Tantra – definitions and lineages

In essence, Buddhist Tantra is the meditative practice of **activating the clear light mind to gain direct realizations into emptiness**, in order to eradicate all subtle defilements and attain enlightenment.

Its practice requires a **foundation in morality, discipline, renunciation, great compassion and wisdom realizing emptiness** as taught by the Buddha.

A. What is Buddhist Tantra?

Buddhist tantra **is premised on morality, discipline and the principles of renunciation, bodhicitta and wisdom realizing emptiness**.

Any practice that claims to be Tantra practice, but which does not involve ALL these principles

is NOT Buddhist Tantra.

Even if there may be the outward practices of chanting mantras and actions which take on the “appearance” of tantra, they are not part of Buddhist tantra if they are not firmly based on the above key principles. Merely having a kind heart and chanting mantras is not a Buddhist practice and certainly not Buddhist Tantra.

In philosophical terms, the Hindu motivation for tantra is to overcome the suffering of suffering and suffering of change. For Buddhists, the goal is to overcome the suffering of suffering, the suffering of change AND pervasive suffering as well.

Without eradicating pervasive suffering, we may attain higher rebirths including the god-states and attain the highest peak of samsara (4th stage of the Formless state of concentration) and remain there, thousands and thousands of years, but if we do not uproot karma and delusions (including their subtlest form), we cannot gain liberation from samsara, let alone attain enlightenment.

Merely having the urge to be free from the suffering of suffering, is something that even animals, hell beings and pretas have. Similarly with suffering of change – all beings hope for this, including free thinkers. However, as Buddhists, we strive to be free from all 3 forms of suffering (i.e. including pervasive suffering) and the entire aspects of samsara.

In summary, whilst other traditions of tantra focus on escaping this life’s suffering and even heightening sensual pleasure, Buddhist Tantra has nothing to do with gross bliss and ordinariness.

It is abandoning samsara for self and others and attaining enlightenment.

Based on pure morality, discipline, renunciation, bodhicitta and wisdom realizing emptiness, meditation is used to activate the subtle clear light mind of one’s consciousness.

This clear light mind is then directed towards the meditation on emptiness to accomplish direct realizations on emptiness right there. Without direct realizations on emptiness, enlightenment will not be possible.

Therefore, one can already see the total difference between Buddhist Tantra and other tantras. One should not mix Buddhist Tantra with practices of others.

The meaning of the word Tantra can be explained in a few different ways.

The commonly used explanation is that “tantra” means “a continuum”, of which there are 3 aspects – the base, the path and the result:

- The base refers to the person who practices Tantra;
- The path is the technique which purifies the base (person) e.g. in the lower tantra, there are the yogas with and without sign which target purification; whereas in the Highest Yoga Tantra (HYT), the *generation stage and completion stage practices form the path which purifies the base through purifying the defilements which obscure realizations of the suchness of mind. Purification here includes the total purification of the obscuration to omniscience.
- The result is the Buddha’s Truth Body (Dharmakaya) which is the state of the total extinguishing of all defilements like Buddha Vajradhara. Tantra practice involves the continuous 19 purification of the

base/self-using the meditative techniques of the generation and completion stage of the HYT to eliminate subtle defilements and accomplish the Wisdom Truth Body of the Buddha.

To finish with, although some Chinese Mahayana practitioners assert that they do not practice tantra, in fact, they do. For example, the famous Om Mani Padme Hum and the long Kuan Yin mantra (Tar Pei Jou) - both of these are mantras and part of the Vajrayana practice. The meaning of the 6 syllables mantra as taught in the Chinese Mahayana system is the same as that taught in the Vajrayana/Mantra Vehicle.

B. The lineage of the four schools and of the principal deities Tantras

Brief history of the Buddha's teachings

The **1st Turning of the Wheel of Dharma** was at Sarnath, where Shakyamuni Buddha taught the 4 Noble Truths to those of the Theravadan inspiration.

The **2nd Turning of the Wheel** was at Rajgir (near Bodhgaya), where the Buddha gave the Mahayana teachings suited to those practitioners who aspired to achieve bodhicitta (great compassion) and wisdom realizing emptiness. **While doing so, the Buddha simultaneously manifested revealing the teachings on Tantra at Amravati, South India.**

In the **3rd Turning of the Wheel** at Vaisali, Buddha gave clarification teachings on the various schools of emptiness and in particular, clarified the Cittamatra view.

After the Buddha passed away, for a period of about 400 years, the first 2 yantras (the Hearer and Solitary Realizer practices of the Theravadan tradition) were already well established in India, with many supporting institutions.

The Mahayana practitioners were scattered, and its Vajrayana practitioners had taken to doing their practices in caves and in forests, such that Vajrayana was seen less and less in open society and become increasingly hidden from the ordinary world.

It came to a stage where there was even criticism by followers of the first 2 yantras that the Mahayana was like a sky-flower i.e. a fantasy; there was confusion as to whether Buddhist tantra was part of the Buddha's teachings. Then came the illustrious scholar and master Nagarjuna of Nalanda, who 10 was prophesized by the Buddha himself and restored the Mahayana.

At this juncture, it is relevant to point out that Tibetan Buddhism is of the Mahayana tradition, which contains both the Sutra and Tantra teachings by the Buddha. Hence, the term "Vajrayana" that is popularly used to denote Tibetan Buddhism, is not entirely correct. **Tibetan Buddhism is Mahayana in its totality i.e. it preserved both the Sutra and Tantra teachings as taught by the Buddha and is not a creation Tibetans!**

Due to the fact that the Mantra Vehicle practices were well preserved in Tibet, this gave rise to people calling Tibetan Buddhism "Vajrayana". **Hence, the mistaken opinion that Vajrayana or the Mantra Vehicle is a Tibetan Lamas' creation, rather than as part of the Mahayana Dharma that originated from the Buddha himself.**

The lineage of the Action Tantra came from Shakyamuni Buddha himself. It was taught while he was still holding the monastic precepts as a monk when he was in the 33 Gods Realm visiting his mother's reincarnation to repay the kindness of his mother, on the summit of Mt Meru.

After his mother Maya passed away, he realized her reincarnation was born in the Thirty-three Gods Realm. During one of the summer retreats, before the period of the summer retreat starts, he traveled there using miraculous powers. There, he conferred initiations.

Then, as well as in the Southern world, during that lifetime, he also conferred initiations in relation to Action tantra. During that time, his main disciples were the Bodhisattvas, like the 8 Bodhisattvas such as Manjushri.

Then, **Performance tantra** was taught again in the Gods Realm which name is Based and essence adorned with flowers celestial Realm. The disciples were Bodhisattvas and Gods.

Then, **Yoga tantra** was taught when Buddha arose in the form of each central deity of the initiations, such as Vairochana. He arose in the main deity. Then, he initiated. So, the first one where he did that was the fifth celestial realm which is the Desire Realm, which is also at the summit of Mont Meru.

Then, **Highest Yoga Tantra – Maha Anuttarayoga tantra** - was taught in the human realm, in the land of Urgyen, which is regarded as where Guru Padmasambhava was born from a lotus. He turned the wheel of Dharma.

In the Highest Yoga Tantra category, there are 3 main deities that are practiced namely Guhyasamaja, Heruka and Yamantaka:

- **Guhyasamaja practice is the root of the Father tantra practices and focuses on the method/ bodhicitta practices** (its cultivation is said to be more effective in daylight hours);
- **Heruka practice is the root of the Mother tantra practices and focuses on wisdom/emptiness practices** (its cultivation is said to be more effective at night);
- **Yamantaka** (the wrathful form of Manjushri, **the wisdom aspect of the Buddha is in the category of Father tantra**;
- **Vajrayogini is in the category of Mother tantra.**

Guhyasamaja practice was taught to Indrabhuti by Buddha; Yamantaka practice was requested by Yamantaka's consort Samundhi and taught at time of subduing demonic forces. Hevajra tantra was requested for by Vajragarbha was taught when the Buddha arose in the land of Magadha at the time of destroying the 4 maras. Heruka tantra was requested for by Vajrayogini and Buddha manifested as Heruka and taught it on summit of Mt Meru.

In conventional world, the Mont Kailash is considered to be Mont Meru.

II. The entry to practice Tantra

A. The prerequisites

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

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

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

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

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

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

Tantric practices being within the Mahayanic context of the teachings, it has to be directly bringing benefit to all the sentient beings. Only then, the tantric blessings will be received.

In Vajrapani initiation Tantra, it is stated:

This very vast, very profound mandala of the great retention mantra of the great Bodhisattvas [the Tantra], difficult to penetrate, most secret then the secret which is not fit to be shown to sinful sentient beings has been mentioned very rarely by you, Ô Vajrapani, how can it be explained to the sentient beings who have not heard it before.

Then, Vajrapani replied:

Manjushri those of Bodhisattvas who practice the Bodhicitta deeds through the approach of Secret Mantra when they have engaged in and achieved cultivation of the altruistic mind of enlightenment may enter the mandala of the great retention mantra where the initiation for great wisdom is bestowed. Those who have not completely achieved this are not to enter.

They should not be shown seals (hand symbols) nor secret mantras (Tantra)."

So, the entrance to Tantra is Bodhicitta. If you have not matured sincerely and cultivated Bodhicitta the heart is not fully dedicated.

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

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

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

The refuge also must be genuine: the uncommon refuge, not just the refuge in Buddha, Dharma, Sangha. **It must be the refuge to the Guru, the refuge to the deity. You also need to have the Bodhisattva vows.**

Through initiations in relation to the earlier tantras (which are action tantra, performance tantra, yoga tantra), as well as during the gradual stages of the practice, all this has to be intact in order to enter into Highest Yoga Tantra (HYT).

One must gain maturity in all those aspects, train into those precepts to succeed in the practice of Highest Yoga Tantra.

To have a deeper understanding of tantra, it would be **good to refer to Lama Tsongkhapa's "Great Exposition of Secret Mantra" (Nga Rim Chenmo).**

Lama Tsongkhapa composed 18 great treatises in both sutra and tantra and among the 18, his "Great Exposition to the Common Path" (Lam Rim Chenmo) and the "Great Exposition of Secret Mantra", are the most outstanding.

These 2 treatises are able to educate and guide us in an unmistakable manner in the most profound teachings of the Buddha.

It is generally **advised to even receive the oral transmission on the Nga Rim Chenmo**, as a requirement to receive an initiation of any of the 4 classes of tantra. Otherwise, one would not be qualified to receive the oral transmission of the Great Exposition of Secret Mantra.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sutric practices and tantric practices are all used in a complementary way as a main body, or as

supplementary practices, to achieve the actual fulfilment of all those practices, including Tantra.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A. "Resultant vehicle" and "four purities"

We call Tantra, the Mantra Vehicle, the resultant Vehicle.

The path, the vehicle, the teachings are tools to experience the full resultant purity. **The four purities are the purity of the form body, the four purities of possessions, the purity of the place, the celestial place and the four purities of the activities.**

- **Buddha's body purity is Buddha's form body:** through the tantric yoga you have to become adorned with Buddha's body, even in the causal stage, and are able to function fully in a similar way to the actual resultant Buddha's form, such as the practice of the self-generation as the deity.

- **Then, the possessions:** you see everything as divine celestial possessions, everything as pure nectar, such as the food, drinks, clothes, adornments, everything you use you regard as pure as celestial objects (and purify them this way).

- **Then, the environment**, such as the world where you live, through the deity yoga you have to turn it to a celestial mandala, even on your spiritual journey you have to experience the celestial environment as Buddha Pure Land.

- **Then, the fourth one are the deeds.** Using self-generation then all your activities are pure, even at the

causal stage you have to perform just like the Buddhas deeds of body, speech and mind which taking in the Sutra, there is not.

Only the Tantra, especially Highest Yoga Tantra, carries that technique. Because of that, you call as a resultant vehicle, that is also one of the key differences in comparison of Sutra and Tantra.

Then, another interpretation is for **actualizing the four resultant purities of four resultant stages:**

- the first one is referring to the **Nirmanakaya, the form body of the Buddha**, through the Highest Yoga Tantra, you become the deity. Then you manifest in the ordinary form: the look that you have and engage in benefiting sentient beings, the Nirmanakaya, through self-generation.

- Then, the second form is the **Sambhogakaya form**, the resultant Sambhogakaya body. Through the deity yoga you are able to become the Sambhogakaya form, in the causal stage after receiving a Highest Yogic Tantra initiation. Then you receive for example, Tara initiation, you become Tara, you are doing like Tara, manifest looking like Tara. There is a Sambhogakaya like Chenrezig 4 arms, one thousand arms Sambhogakaya form, Medicine Buddha Sambhogakaya form. You become that. You are able to become the deity not just in visualization, the Highest Yogic Tantra carries that.

- Then, next is the environment. **All the environment becomes the deity's mandala**, Tara's mandala, Buddha's mandala, then Zhambala's mandala,

- Then, **the deeds of the body, speech and mind:** all become deeds of Tara. After you become Tara, whatever activities you do even though you are eating, going to job, everything becomes Tara's activities, the deity's activities.

That is the profound meaning and ability of the Highest Yogic Tantra practices.

In Sutra, the Nirmanakaya form body, the Sambhogakaya form body, and also the purity of the celestial and all the deeds, only can become a realization in visualization, in imagination. You can visualize "I am oneness with Tara, with the deity".

But actually, **becoming the deity is not possible.** In front generation you visualize Tara on top of your crown like in Sambhogakaya form or in the space in front of you. It is the same for the mandala and the deeds.

Then, the Tantra is also called **Vajra vehicle**. Why is it called the Vajra vehicle? **The enlightenment is delivered through the union of wisdom and method, the ultimate union of wisdom and Vajra sattva, the Vajra mind, and that is the essence of the wisdom, and that is the essence of the Six Paramitas, and the essence of the Six Paramitas is the essence of the Mahayanic vehicle.**

In Sutra, the wisdom and method, you cultivate separately. There is no union, no "in one form", union in the same moment. When you practice wisdom, the method has to be on pause, when you practice method, wisdom has to be on pause. It goes all the way up to the ten Bhumis.

As for Tantra, in Highest Yogic Tantra, **from the very beginning, even from the generation stage, you cultivate the Dorje sattva, Vajra sattva, the vajra mind, which is the union of wisdom and method and that brings the swift result of enlightenment and that also highlight why Tantra is the swift path.**

In the Perfection Vehicle, for example, the Madhyamika school presents emptiness **as the mind having emptiness as the object.**

While the HYT presents the conventional stage of the completion Illusory Body and in particular, the ultimate stage of the completion Clear Light mind ("ultimate" there does not refer to the object

(emptiness) but rather, to the subject (mind) cognizing emptiness), **the Sutra Vehicle does not present the subtlest cognizing mind i.e. the clear light mind, as is done in Tantra.**

In this aspect, the Sutra Vehicle is **said to be incomplete and thus, is unable to offer the method for the total eradication of defilements.** Therefore, to be able to use the clear light mind, one needs to train in the techniques of the HYT. That is why the Tantra teachings were revealed by the Buddha.

B. The four categories of Tantra and the different levels of initiations

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

You train in stages:

- **First, you receive blessings initiations. They are called Jenang.** It is a simple initiation in the form of blessing by the deity through the Guru or teacher bestowing the purification practice of body, speech and mind to the student, and actualize the divine body, speech and mind of the student by the deity through the teacher.

It is the access to at least the retreat. For Vajrasattva for example, without the blessing initiation you cannot do the retreat. You can still recite but it is not like qualified to become a retreat.

- **Then, there is a second level of Jenang.**
- **Then, initiation in Action Tantra, then Kriya Tantra, then, Yoga Tantra**
- **Then, you practice Highest Yoga Tantra.**

There are also **different Dhyanis Buddhas initiations to ripen our five aggregates: then eventually when you receive the Highest Yoga Tantra initiation, the five aggregates transform**

or actualize the results in the five aggregates, which are the actual five Dhyani Buddhas **which is the enlightenment**.

It is good to know that even when one receives only a **'Jenang'**, **naturally one is committed to that particular teacher in Guru and disciple relationship**.

As for the Great Initiation, it involves the preparatory stage which is called **'ta gong'**. This involves teaching on the preliminary practice, the Three Principal Aspect of the Path, analyzing one's connection with the deity through signs like analyzing dream as well as analyzing one's ability of conviction and faith on the first day before one gets into the actual initiation on the second day.

Through the explanation on preliminary practices, one then looks into oneself to check if one is ready and qualified to accept the Great Initiation, and to commit the commitment given by the teacher.

After that, one can get into the conclusion on accepting the actual initiation which is called **'ngoshe' - the actual performance of initiation**. Some initiation takes two days, some take one day, it depends on the different lineage lama.

When you take the Great Initiation, it involves four initiations. As long as one commits and presents with full decision to receive the initiation, one should participate in the ceremony.

At the end of the session, one pledges to oneself and convinces oneself that 'I have definitely received the initiation, and I will follow exactly the comment of this particular teacher.' **That's the moment that one committed one's relationship with the particular teacher as Guru-disciple. On top of that one committed the relationship of Vajra Guru and Vajra disciple.**

As in philosophy, you start learning about the lower schools, that will help you to understand the higher school.

Here Aryadeva says:

Train in stages like this. First, one training in the thought as a causal vehicle, the Bodhisattva vehicle. When one has done so, train in the resultant vehicle, the most subtle meditation...of Secret Mantra.

C. Pledges and commitments

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Then, whether the Guru gives you the commitment or not, every stage of the tantric path, **when you receive the initiation, as a commitment such as for the Kriya and Action Tantra, you have the tantric deities minimum of 600.000 mantra recitation commitment**. It is common, whether the Guru says it or not to do 600.000 as a minimum.

For Highest Yoga Tantra, the Guru will explain the commitment.

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

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

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

The four categories of Tantra also correspond to the practitioner's ability:

- Action/Kriya Tantra – focuses on external practices - an example is the Chenrezig Initiation.
- Performance Tantra – focuses on a balance between external and internal activities - an example is the Vairochana Initiation.
- Yoga Tantra – focuses more on internal activities and less of external activities - an example is the Sarvavid Initiation.
- Highest Yoga Tantra (HYT) – focuses on internal activities - examples are the Kalachakra, Yamantaka, Guhyasamaja, Heruka, Vajrayogini Initiations.

E. Yoga with or without signs - Generation and completion stages (cf. more details Part V)

Generation stage

Having taken an initiation, one is allowed to do the practice of **generating oneself as the Buddha deity's form**, holding one's mind as the deity's mind and one's speech as the deity's speech and viewing all living beings as deities.

The generation stage practice involves **the practice of purifying and transforming ordinary birth, the intermediate state and death into the 3 bodies of the Buddha**– the Dharmakaya (Buddha’s Wisdom Truth Body), the Enjoyment Body (Sambhogakaya visible to only Bodhisattvas) and the Emanation Body (nirmanakaya, visible to ordinary sentient beings).

Completion stage

Unless one has received a HYT initiation, it would not be possible to go into the details on the practice of this but generally speaking, this stage of practice involves the **training of the inner winds, chakras and drops**. By stimulating these, it enables one to **control one’s subtle inner wind upon which mind rides upon**.

By doing so, one is able to **gather all the inner winds and guide them into the central channel and then perform the 3 activities of:**

- **establish the subtle wind in the central channel**
- **dissolve it there and**
- **sustain it there.**

By doing this, one is able to experience spontaneous **bliss and clear light mind, which brings about an intense clarity of mind to meditate on emptiness**. The successful completion of this meditation **will erase all subtle defilements and render enlightenment at hand**.

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

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

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

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

Actualizing the deity without an understanding of emptiness means:

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

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

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

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

F. Without practicing Tantra enlightenment is not possible

It is possible to **reach the 10 Bhumis stage through the Sutra practice**.

But, in order to gain enlightenment, one must practice Tantra. Without it, your further reach is up

to ten Bhumis only. It is still within the path of training. You will not reach the path of no-more learning, the state of Buddhahood.

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

Here comes the importance of tantra. Without the four initiations, especially the word, wisdom; you will not be able to utilize the subtlest consciousness, the subtlest level of the mind base. Without that you will not be able to actualize the highest level of wisdom which will act as a direct cause of omniscience.

Even though you may be practicing Sutra up to the very last moment of the ten Bhumis of the bodhisattvas' path following the sutric path; in the Sutra, there is no method to actualize the innermost most subtle wisdom. **That can only be utilized through the activation of the subtlest wind, subtlest chakra, subtlest energy. In Sutra there is no method to do that.**

Only in Tantra. That comes from the practice of the completion stage. The name means completion of the cause for the Dharmakaya. "Generation" means preparation to the completion stage of the tantric path.

"Completion" means total completeness of the final causes required for the channels, the chakras, the winds, and the mind (which is the most subtle) to enlighten. Then, you actualize Dharmakaya.

All the four classes of Tantra have the tools or the practices that will lead individual practitioners to actualize enlightenment within one lifetime.

But the difference between the earlier three classes of Tantra and the fourth one, the Highest Yoga Tantra is **Highest Yoga Tantra has the practices or the tools, such as the practice of generation and completion stages, which has the tools and practices that can actualize enlightenment in one brief lifetime.**

As for the earlier three classes of Tantra, one can achieve enlightenment in one lifetime but not in one brief lifetime. So, it requires a longer period by consecrating, extending the life through the practice of Long-life deities, etc.

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

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

So, how to do that? The answer is do not worry. Keep practicing whatever you are able to, but:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

IV. What is the purpose of practicing Tantra and therefore who is suitable to receive an initiation?

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

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

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

A. The four activities of the deity

Verse 60

If you wish to create with ease

The collections for enlightenment

Through activities of pacification,

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

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

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

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

After that, you can apply those four activities to many other activities, which are directly

enhancing the realizations on your practice, as well as using those four activities **to bring effective skillful tools to bring benefits to the sentient beings.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

B. The miraculous powers or yogic conducive conditions

Verse 61

And also through the force of the eight

And other great attainments like the “good pot”

If you want to practice secret mantra,

As explained in the action and performance Tantras

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

There are many more such as consecrating long life through the action and kriya tantric deities such like White Tara, Namgyalma, Amitayus, **you consecrate a long life which is enough to complete the whole path within this very lifetime, to complete the collection of the three great stores of merits.**

There is also the practice of the **wealth vase** which when practiced sincerely, wholeheartedly, thinking “I need to completely pay off all my responsibilities because I want to enlighten” and dedicate wholeheartedly, so you can always have enough to practice in order to complete the whole path in one lifetime.

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

The inspiring example of the Great Mahasiddha Geshela Lama Konchog

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

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

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

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

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

The Tummo Fire. Geshe Lama Konchog was living in empty caves. There is a cave you can visit if you go to the village. Even on a sunny day, you sit there, the wind is unbearable. One can imagine four, five months of freezing during the winter. And for someone who does not even have clothes. He lived there.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Even by practicing Action and Performance Tantras you are able to do that. No question about the Highest

Yoga Tantra. I think Geshe Lama Konchog, even before he went into retreat, must have already developed all those Yogis qualities when he was studying in Monasteries. Because by then, he even had already all the resources of the common Tantra. When he was ready with all that, that is when he went on a strict retreat.

C. Key factors to gather those attainments

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

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

a. The eight attainments

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There are different forms of this practice, not necessarily all of them require such a high level of accomplishment. Even these days there are practitioners who subsisted for long periods of retreat time on flowers, or mineral essences. Sustaining on Air Chulen requires high levels of concentration and tantric capabilities.

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

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

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

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

b. How to actualize those attainments

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

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

Then:

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

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

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

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

D. How we should set up about gaining initiation

Verse 62

Then, to receive the preceptor initiation,

You must please an excellent spiritual teacher

Through service, valuable gifts and the like

As well as through obedience.

This is how **to receive an initiation:** we must first find and, through all our physical, verbal and mental

activities, please the excellent spiritual teacher from whom we hope to receive initiation. Why? **Our accomplishment of powerful attainments depends on the relationship we establish with our spiritual teacher.** We therefore **need to do what we can to nurture it.**

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

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

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

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

The preceptor initiation

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

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

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

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

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

V. The generation and completion stages

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

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

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

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

So, when you are practicing the completion stage, even just by doing the Yoga, even based on the day-to-day sadhana practice, it helps to purify ordinary birth, ordinary death, ordinary intermediate state.

It means that the karma to be reborn will be purified, and also to purify the results of the past Samsara, the past karma and delusions, the present contamination also has to be purified.

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

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

A. The death process and the inner winds

This is based on the text known as the Collective Explanations on the Theory of the Womb.

The life of the mind depends on the power of the inner wind energy which every single being possesses.

In order to bring about a virtuous direction for our consciousness during the death process, the inner wind energy has to be influenced by the positive energy.

Therefore, studying the death process for the Highest Yoga Tantra practitioner means studying the inner winds (the consciousness rides upon).

a. The inner winds

Inner winds are essential for the functioning of our body and mind. Their main role, however, is to act as mounts for the various minds (different thoughts like virtue, non-virtue, neutral).

Therefore, it is very necessary for us to know about these inner winds in order for us to gain control over the winds and consequently, control over our consciousness and its direction, for the purpose of purifying the stage of ordinary death, intermediate state and rebirth into three states or three bodies of the Buddha.

In Tantric Medical Theory, there are five root winds:

- **“Life Bearing Wind”** abides at the **heart** and supports life. Its function is causing the activity of inhalation and exhalation, as well as burping and the force behind our expelling saliva
- **“Upward Moving Wind”** moves in an upward motion. It ascends from the bottom of the body towards the upper parts and resides at the throat. This wind moves around the throat and mouth. It causes the activity of speech, swallowing of food & drink and saliva. This wind affects the function of one’s different joints
- **“Pervasive Wind”** abides at the crown of the head. It pervades the entire body, particularly the three hundred and sixty joints and supports general movement. It enables the body to move. Without this wind, we would be completely immobile. Thus, it allows physical movement, stretching and bending of the limbs, opening and closing of the mouth and eyelids.
- **“Fire Dwelling Wind”** sits on the third stage of the stomach, at the navel area and it moves throughout the internal organs such as the heart, lung, liver, bladder as well as through the inner channels in different limbs and thereby brings about the movement of heat). It

facilitates the digestion of our food and drink, brings the nutrients to different parts of the bodies and also refines bodily waste products such as urine

- **“Downward Void Wind”** abides at the lower abdomen. It moves in the area of the lower abdomen and also moves about in the womb, seminal vessel, urinary bladder and so forth. It holds and releases urine, feces, sperm and menstrual blood.

We need to have a general idea of these five root winds and their functions, in order to be able to engage in the practice of drops and channels. **In order to perform purification using drops and channels, first we need to be able to activate and direct those inner winds.**

From the practice of the HYT, the practitioner causes these winds in their causal subtle form to dissolve into the very subtle life bearing wind at the heart chakra. **Through the use of Tantric meditative techniques, one aims to bring all the inner winds that reside in all parts of the body into the Life-Bearing Wind at the center of the heart channel wheel (heart chakra).**

This has a great effect on the practice of the three kayas.

It is necessary for us to be familiar with the different movements of these winds and also the arrangement of the channels, **since it is through gaining control over the winds and drops flowing through these channels that the union of spontaneous great bliss and emptiness will be accomplished.**

Having a clear understanding of the placement of the channels, the moving winds and the drops cannot be over-emphasized as **it will greatly benefit us when we progress on to meditate on the body mandala.**

When we perform the body mandala practice, through the force of concentration, we will be able to penetrate the chakras at various places along the channels, which has the effect of activation of the inner winds and therefore the mind.

Teachings on the channels, drops and winds in themselves have no great significance. **However, they become profound practices only when they are motivated by bodhicitta and conjoined with a realization of emptiness.**

b. The channels

There are 72,000 different channels within our body, including the three main ones, namely the central channel which is flanked on both sides (with no intervening space) by the left and right channels.

These three channels are straight and adjacent to one another. The left and right channels wrap/coil around the central channel at various major places, thereby forming the so-called channel-knots (chakras).

These knots constrict the central channel. At each of these places where the channel knots occur except at the heart level, there is one twofold knot formed by a single coil of the right channel and a single coil of the left. They wrap/coil around the central channel by crossing in front and looping around it.

At the heart level, there is a sixfold knot formed by three overlapping loops of each of the flanking channels. **This is the most difficult knot to loosen, but when it is loosened (through meditation) we develop great mental power, namely the realization of the clear light mind.**

At each of these various major channel-knots, a different number of spokes or petals, branch off from the central channel. **The central channel (tsa-uma)** begins at the forehead, at the point between the eyebrows and ascends in an arch to the crown of the head. From there, it descends to the spinal cord in a straight line to the space in between the anus and the tip of sex organ.

The central channel is of a clear crystal-like nature, not in any way heavy or solid. It is very smooth and soft. We should visualize the central channel as being closer to our back, a little bit in front of our spine.

On the basis of the bodhicitta aspiration and understanding emptiness, by activating the winds and channels, one is able to bring about the melting of the drops at the crown, which can bring about the attainment of great bliss and emptiness.

So, from here, we can establish that the melting of the drops at the crown, the white substance brings about the bliss of the different stages up to the tip of the secret organ but without release of body fluid.

Great bliss is experienced at this point and that energy is retained. The process is then reversed from great bliss backwards as well as transmitting bliss into the different channels including the 72 thousand different channels throughout the whole body.

To begin with, we have to understand how the central channel manifests within our physical body so that we will be able to identify the chakras precisely.

Along these three channels there are 7 chakras at various locations, each with a different number of spokes or petals:

- **The first chakra is located at the forehead (brow/ajna chakra)**, which has a certain number of spokes or petals.
- The next channel wheel is at the top of the **crown (crown chakra)** with 32 spokes.
- Next comes the **throat (throat chakra)** with 16 spokes,
- **the heart (heart chakra)** 8 spokes,
- **the solar plexus (navel chakra)** with 64 spokes,
- **the base of the spine (secret chakra)** with 32 spokes,
- and at the **sexual organ (jewel chakra)** has 8 spokes.

Here, you just have to reflect that within your body, those channels exist at those spots. **When you want to do the meditation on wind, channels and drops, it will be more effective by knowing the precise location of the chakras.**

In some teachings, the left and right channels are described as being wrapped/coiled around the central channel. The left and right channels are adjacent to each other and all three channels run straight up and parallel to one another.

The effect of the left and right channels is to bring about the constriction of wind in the central channel. Therefore, one can picture the left and right channels having a pressing effect on the central channel.

When death occurs, the wind that serves as the mount of the consciousness, dissolves into the wind in the left and right channels first. This, in turn dissolves into the wind in the central channel.

When the wind in the left and right channel dissolves, they become “flattened” thereby releasing the pressure they previously asserted onto the central channel, which in turn allows more movement of the wind within the central channel. **This induces the activation of the subtle mind.**

Letting the wind enter into the central channel, actualizes our subtle mind. This experience is felt by every single being without exception. When this dissolution occurs to the ordinary person, it brings great fear as they feel they are being completely annihilated.

As for the yogi, especially the HYT practitioner, he will use this experience of the activated subtle mind in the spiritual path. **Instead of being fearful, the practitioner uses the subtle mind to engage in the practice of purifying the three bases of death, the intermediate state and rebirth.**

Most ordinary people are completely overwhelmed by fear at this time. However, for the yogi, whenever the gross mind subsides and the subtle mind arises, the yogi knows that this is the time when the winds are moving within the central channel and that because of that, there will be the sensation of being annihilated.

The yogi will then remember that one should not be fearful but use this subtle mind to actualize the path by using the techniques of the HYT. The root substances, namely, the white and red drops, which we received from our father and mother at the onset of conception, reside within the central channel, upon which every act of our physical and mental activities (inclusive our health condition) are derived.

These white and red drops reside at two different places within the central channel. **The root essence from father, which brings about the white drop which has the ability of increasing the white drops in our body, resides at the crown (crown chakra).**

The red drop, the root essence from mother, resides at the navel chakra central and has the ability to increase the red drops. The white drop which has the ability to increase is able to produce the (seminal fluid) drops and again the red drop produces the blood (during menstruation).

The subtle and fused red and white drops, however, is called the indestructible drop and resides at the heart charka. This indestructible drop that abides at the center of the heart channel wheel within the central channel it the size of a small pea. Some texts described it as the size of a mustard seed. Many of the lamas liken it to a grain of the Indian red dhal. The red dhal is smaller than the black dhal.

The shape of the indestructible drop is slightly flat and roundish. Many lamas say it is half-moon shape. Whatever, it is not necessary that every human must have the same size or shape. Different texts have different versions. The indestructible drop is a mixture of white and red and hence pinkish in color. However, the top part of the drop is more prominently white and the bottom half-part more reddish.

The reason why it is called the indestructible drop is because of the moment when we were conceived in our mother’s womb, these two subtle drops (the white drop and the red drop), the substances which come from our parents, come together in union.

When the cells of our mother and father came together, they contained delicate, clear, essential drops of energy and formed a kind of oyster, joined at the base and opened at the top. The moment the consciousness enters there, the oyster closes and the consciousness remain inside. It remains closed up to the moment of death.

It opens at the first entry of life (of consciousness) and it again opens at the departure of the mind (during death time). During the period in-between (between life and death), nothing can destroy it. It remains inside the indestructible drop.

The practice of transferring of consciousness also known as powa, is about opening this “oyster” indestructible drop.

In the Vinaya Sutra, it is stated that the mind that enters into the indestructible drop is called the spirit of the mind. We can also refer to it simply as “mind”. Mind is very subtle and is in the manner of an inner wind. **This Life-Bearing Wind, which is clear and capable of cognition moves about like the wind.**

At the time of death, all the inner winds ultimately dissolve into this Life Bearing Wind and right there, the experience of the clear light of death manifests. In order to actualize the clear light mind, we have to bring all the inner winds, the gross winds and the winds within the three channels, including all the winds which were described before, the different stages of winds, into the central channel and dissolve them into the Life Bearing Wind which is within the indestructible drop.

The moment the winds enters there, it brings about the clear light experience and that why they call it the clear light of death. **The consciousness’ volume of grossness and subtleness depend on the rider of the horse.**

One’s consciousness, whether the gross aspect or the subtle aspect, functions on the basis of the inner wind. That is why consciousness/mind is said to be the rider of the horse (inner winds). Death begins with the sequential dissolution of the four elements, earth, water, heat and wind. **And the dissolution of the wind means that the wind is no longer capable of acting as the mount of the consciousness.**

At the time of death, this loss of ability of the inner winds to support the consciousness, induces radical changes that the consciousness experiences. What happens to the elements of the body with regards to the inner winds is this.

When the earth element (solid aspects of one’s body) dissolves, the inner wind which supports that element ceases. **The consciousness supporting the next element becomes increasingly manifest. The ceasing of the capacity of one element, followed by the greater manifestation of another element is called dissolution.**

It does not mean the earth element “melts” and becomes water. It is a matter of experiencing one element as becoming weaker and the next element becoming more prominent. In other words, when the “earth element” diminishes, the next element (water) is perceived more clearly. It is the same with regards to the dissolution of the other elements. The dissolution of the elements brings with it external sensations and internal signs and are associated with the decline of the aggregates and the effect on the different stages of wisdom.

c. The Stages of Dissolution During the Death Process

First stage of simultaneous dissolution (simultaneous because many aspects of the dying person are degenerating at the same time):

The factor or element that dissolves first is the “**earth element**”, the **aggregate of form**. The external sign is that one’s body becomes very thin, with the limbs being loosened, one’s body is very heavy as if sinking beneath the earth or as if the whole mountain is pressing onto you or that you have fallen into the crater after an earthquake, sinking deeper and deeper into the hole, ambushed

by colossal broken pieces of mountain rocks of various sizes. **These are the external signs.**

The internal sign is that one starts to have inner visions like mirage, the appearance of shimmering water in the distance. If you happen to go to the desert in the very hot sun, when you look at the sand in the distance, there appears an image of a pool of water there. This is only the reflection of the sun onto the sand. The inner vision of appearance of mirage is the first sign to occur when the death process begins.

At the same time, the basic mirror-like wisdom that we have i.e. the ordinary consciousness that is able to perceive many objects simultaneously starts to degenerate.

When this basic mirror-like wisdom degenerates, one's sight becomes unclear and dark. Objects of sight cannot be seen clearly and it's not because we watch too much television or at the computer too much. Here it is a natural, physical experience degeneration of that occurs during the death process.

Corresponding to this, the five senses also degenerate alongside the dissolution process. The first one is the eye sense. The external sign is one cannot open or close their eyes easily. At the time of dying, once you open your eyes, you don't have the strength to close them. Once you close them, you don't have the strength to open them again. The ability of the eye senses to focus on the color and shape of objects is diminished.

Second stage of simultaneous Dissolution

The second dissolution is of **the water element, giving way to the arising of the fire element.** The **external sign** is that physically one's saliva, sweat, urine, blood and bodily fluids begin to dry up and one begins to feel very hot. At the same time, one will experience that oneself is being drawn into the ocean, with no escape, feeling totally helpless. You feel you are drowning, totally encircled by strong swirling energy of water, dragging you to the deepest bed of the ocean. There is no solid entity to hold onto, only water.

The internal sign or vision is the appearance of smoke, just like we see in the incense puja and how smoke appears.

In terms of the aggregates, **the aggregate of feeling, namely that of pleasure, pain and neutrality (feelings of joy, suffering and indifference) are no longer felt.** A sense of being totally blank is experienced.

The internal sign of the appearance of smoke correlates with **the Basic Wisdom of Equality i.e. the ability of our ordinary consciousness** to recognize pleasure, pain and neutrality. One feels detached from one's mind.

In terms of the five senses, **the "ear sense" is dissolving.** External sounds can no longer be heard and even the buzzing in the ears cease. One no longer hears external or internal sounds. At this time, the practitioner should remember that is the experience of the second stage of dissolution of the water element.

Instead of being overwhelmed by fear when experiencing these signs, one should transform them into practice.

Third stage of simultaneous dissolution

The involves the **dissolution of the fire element, giving way to the wind element.**

The external sign is that one cannot digest food or drinks. The digestion process becomes incapacitated because the fire element is beginning to disintegrate, giving way to the wind element. At this time, one is no longer mindful of even close relationships because **the aggregate of discrimination (which enables us to recognize people and our relationship with them) degenerates** at this stage. One will not even remember one's family members nor the most loved one. You are totally cut-off from those memories.

One loses the capacity to distinguish between close relatives, friends and other people; one forgets the names of people and objects.

The internal sign is the appearance of fireflies or the sparks within the smoke. Like when we do Incense Puja, one can clearly see sparks within the smoke. Here, **the basic wisdom of analysis which in our ordinary consciousness is able to recognize and distinguish between persons and the level of closeness, remember names and so forth, is lost.** At that time, even if you wanted to call somebody or wanted to send a last message, you would not be able to remember the name nor the number.

In terms of the senses, **the nose sense degenerates.** Inhalation becomes weak and exhalation becomes stronger and longer. If you look at a dying person, the inhalation tends to be very short, but the exhalation is very long.

We have no choice but to experience these dissolutions. They are unavoidable. Therefore, we need to remind ourselves constantly of these dissolutions through the power of concentration and practice. This way, we will not be dominated by fear when the signs related to the various dissolutions at death-time arise.

Fourth stage of simultaneous dissolution

The factor **dissolving here is the” wind element.”**

The external sign is that inhalation and exhalation cease. This is because the inner winds begin to move towards the heart. At this time, the person will be declared medically dead (heart & breath stop). However, from the yogic point of view, the death process has not completed yet.

The internal sign is the appearance of a spluttering butter-lamp, that is reddish, very bright but whose flame is unsteady. It is reddish and very bright but unsteady. Some texts describe the appearance of the spluttering butter-lamp about to go out.

The aggregate of compositional factors degenerates.

The basic wisdom of achieving activities, i.e. our ordinary consciousness, that is mindful of external activities, their purpose and so forth, completely ceases. Even if somebody wants to remind you of things or plays a CD of Amitabha mantra, there is no hearing sense. Someone may try to place a holy picture for you to see but no sight is possible.

The “tongue sense” degenerates. The external sign of this is that the tongue becomes thick and short. The root of the tongue becomes blue and the tongue shrinks. **The appearance of mirage is appearing now.** When mirage appears, most of us ordinary beings are already helpless and find it difficult to practice, but not my late Master Geshe Lama Konchog.

Although that person may not be able to experience things through the bodily senses, the subconscious mind remains alert in all these experiences. This brings a lot of fear and negative thoughts of anger, attachment or ignorance. The fear itself is negative. The practitioner should strive to remain steady, have a clear and concentrated mind that is undisturbed by the dissolutions.

The first four stages relate to the dissolution of the elements in relation to the body. The next 4 stages of dissolution relate to the dissolution in relation to consciousness.

The first three of the 4 remaining appearances are the white appearance, the red appearance and black near-attainment appearance, which appear before one gets into the clear-light mind stage. Just before the clear light mind stage, the 80 conceptual thoughts also dissolve (i.e. from the 5th to the 7th stage).

The fifth stage of simultaneous dissolution

Factor dissolving here is the mind of **white appearance, where the wind in the right and left channels below the heart enter the central channel at the base of the spinal cord.**

The internal sign is of a very clear vacuity filled with white light.

Sixth stage of simultaneous dissolution

At this time, one should remind that oneself is already clinically dead and that one is entering the sixth stage of dissolution, namely the mind of **red appearance** occurs.

The sixth stage of simultaneous dissolution is described as **the mind of red increase and the upper and lower winds gathering at the heart.** The wind exerts force at the heart chakra. The upper wind moves in a clockwise circular movement and gradually goes downwards, and the lower wind spirals upwards in anticlockwise motion, and they simultaneously exert pressure on the indestructible drop at the center of the central channel.

To gauge where the location of the indestructible drop is, you need to measure from the crown up to the secret part. If we have unbalanced inner wind, there is one particular heart wind problem known as “nying loong”, where when one touches the area, it is very sensitive and very painful.

Between the spinal vertebrae number 6-7, where the indestructible drop resides, if there is too much wind movement there, it causes tension, agitation, impatience, insomnia and it can hurt right there.

It is not advisable to do acupuncture for that condition. It is **better to do warm oil massage. There are two medicinal herbs known as “gonyeh” and “zati”. Crush them together and mix them with heated massage oil and apply it to this area. It will help and soothe your mind.**

The internal sign, the vacuity is filled with redness. When the mind of red increase appears, when the upper and lower winds gather at the heart and dissolve into the ‘drop ‘and the internal sign appears like the first vacuity filled with thick redness, internally swooning.

Seventh stage of simultaneous dissolution

Then we come to the seventh stage of simultaneous dissolution, the mind of the **black near-attainment.** The cause of this appearance is due to the wind in the right and left channel above the heart, entering the central channel.

During this process, all inner winds enter into the very subtle Life Bearing Wind in the central channel, into the indestructible drop at the heart.

As the black near-attainment begins to dissolve, the mind of the clear light of death arises. The

appearance is like late dawn, clear, bright, without any signs of redness, white or darkness. A sense of calm, soothing, bliss is experienced within the subtle mind. The practitioner then remains in clear light meditation.

Here, the very subtlest mind experiences the feeling of bliss, and that blissful mind recognizes the lack of inherent existence. This combination of clear light meditation together with the blissful mind is called the union of great bliss and emptiness.

The practitioner can remain in this meditation for one day, two days, three days, one week, 10 days or more. It is up to the practitioner. This is the time that can be used by the practitioner to realize emptiness directly.

At this stage, one is not merely influenced by meditation on emptiness but is totally immersed in the actual realization of emptiness/the absence of inherent existence, coupled with bliss. The union of great bliss and emptiness is the actual Dharmakaya.

As a summary, once the physical aggregates/elements have dissolved, the dissolutions relating to the consciousness begin. Upon the inception of the fifth stage of dissolution, the gross senses cease and the subtle ones manifest.

First the gross thought processes cease; upon the arising of the mind of white appearance, the mental state experiences a vacuity filled by white light. Though free from gross thoughts, it remains dualistic and in turn dissolves into the heightened mind of the red (6th stage of dissolution) appearance, which then dissolves into the mind of black appearance (7th stage of dissolution).

The eighth stage of simultaneous dissolution

Just before this point, all that appears is a vacuity filled with darkness during which the person goes through a sensation of inner unconsciousness. This thus leaves **a totally non dualistic vacuity, bringing forth the 8th stage of simultaneous dissolution, namely the mind of clear light, free from the white, red and black appearances.**

At this moment, the consciousness leaves the body. **This is the completion of “death” according to the tantra teachings.** From the tantric perspective, the point of actual death is not linked to the inhalation and exhalation but to the appearance of the mind of clear light.

Every person will experience these dissolutions and inner visions as well as this stage of lucid vacuity for up to three days or more or less depending on the practitioner. The clear light state is the experience which occurs after the death process is complete; clear light meditation is using that experience in the path. Although everyone will experience the clear light state, not everyone knows how to do the clear light meditation.

After the 8th stage of dissolution, when the consciousness departs from the body, there are external signs. They include the red drop in the form of blood from the nose or pinkish or cream discharge and the white drop in the form of a whitish-fluid discharge from the lower body.

If the deceased person’s body was very weak, it is more likely that there will be the whitish discharge from the secret part/lower part of the body. **Until the consciousness leaves the body, there is a danger of the negative karma of destroying a human life, e.g. cremating or burying a body before actual death occurs.**

And in the case of a HYT practitioner who remains in the self-generation practice during the

death process, if one interrupts that by arranging for the body to be cremated, there is the danger of destroying an enlightenment body.

Likewise, there is the danger of drawing blood from a Buddha or Bodhisattva, as the practitioner might have been self-generating as a Buddha-deity. Therefore, until we see the signs, we have to be careful.

Prior to the consciousness leaving the body, any violent handling of the body will disturb the process of the death, possibly resulting in the lower rebirth for the dying person, as well as the caretaker. Especially for those practitioners doing practice during the death process - if they were in the midst of clear light meditation - and you happened to disturb that practice before they finished their meditation, we would cause them to lose the greatest opportunity to attain enlightenment.

Therefore, if death happens to a Dharma brother or sister who practices HYT, it would be best if taken care of by those who are familiar with this practice. In fact, as a general rule, we should take care of each other as advised by the teachings.

As a related point, we should not simply assume things. Since we know about this teaching on the dissolutions and signs of the consciousness leaving the body, we might think that once a deceased person remains after three days without any decay of the body, he must be getting into clear light meditation.

If this is in fact the case, **there is a danger of your committing the negative karma of lying** because you have merely assumed that the person is already in clear light meditation, which is like saying that someone has achieved the direct realization of emptiness. Unless you know for sure, there is a danger of breaking the vow against lying.

Therefore, we have to observe the deceased person's daily life to see whether the person was a serious practitioner or not, whether that person had qualities to have that kind of ability. Also, we **cannot rely totally on ordinary appearances.** A person practicing HYT need not be renowned as a very kind person because it is possible that **due to the force of his past lifetime efforts, he is now able to engage in clear light meditation.**

After the 8th stage of dissolution - When the clear light stage ceases, the consciousness then goes through a reverse process, going through the same prior 7 stages of dissolution. The mind is subtle. If we do not habituate ourselves with the signs and dissolutions, these signs can be fearsome, especially at the time of death.

Bardo-being

The person who has completed the death process is reborn into the intermediate state as a bardo being and its subtle body can go wherever it likes, through mountains, so forth, in search of a place to take rebirth.

It travels unobstructed, except for two places namely Bodhgaya's stupa or holy image and the other is the future mother's womb. Other than these two objects, a bardo being can travel anywhere, traverse miles within a microsecond.

The lifespan of the intermediate state can last for a period of 7 days depending on whether it meets its karmically-linked parent-to-be.

If they are not encountered within the first 7 days, the bardo being will undergo a small death, experiencing the 8 signs of the death process as outlined earlier. Then this being will again

experience the 8 signs of dissolution in reverse order and be reborn in the second intermediate state. This can happen for a total of 7 rebirths in the intermediate state, making it 49 days during which time a realm of birth will be found.

d. Focus on the dissolution of the eighty conceptual thoughts and the clear light of death

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

All coarse conventional appearances have stopped and only a vacuity appears. The four elements dissolve, the eighty conventional thoughts dissolve, then the three kinds of appearances (white, red, near black appearances), then the clear light.

Throughout this dissolution, there is a section where the occurrence of the dissolution of the 80 conceptual minds happens. **The 80 conceptual thoughts are already subtle levels of mind, but that subtle level of mind is not as subtle as the clear-light mind.**

The dissolution of those eighty conceptual thoughts happens with the fifth dissolution which is the occurrence of the white appearance and ends with number seven.

Once the white appearance occurs, red appearance, black-near appearance, and including the clear-light, **serve as the antidote to the eighty conceptual minds.**

Due to that reason, when white appearance starts, **there is no occurrence of negative emotions**, no occurrence of the ripening of the negative imprints during that period.

Once you have reached that virtuous mind at the time of the fifth dissolution, which is the white appearance, you are safe from conditional obstacles such as the arising of negative emotions. **Whatever others' factors that are still possible to arise are only virtuous imprints.**

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

The content within the subtle drop is very much the subtlest wind and the subtlest mind. That is what we call the subtlest drop. This primordial drop is accompanied by the lifeforce carrier wind, the subtlest wind and that lives within, of course the mind can go in and out, the consciousness can go in and out.

But this life carrier wind stays one lifetime within this drop, that is why we call it indestructible drop. The moment you are conceived, until the death, unless you exercise through the concentration and you can bring it out and back; otherwise, it never comes out that wind, because once that wind comes out then death occurs, the drop is destructed. There is no more indestructible drop.

So, indestructible in one life frame, one lifetime.

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

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

That clear light consciousness in a manner of its continuum. But it carries the potential we call karmic imprints.

But consciousness itself lives momentarily but it is not that that first moment of consciousness exists in that second moment of consciousness. It has already passed.

The emptiness of the subtle mind is called the clear light mind. And that clear light mind can turn into Dharmakaya. How possible consciousness to turn into Dharmakaya? It cannot. **Dharmakaya is the emptiness nature.** It has to have its own similarity, the similarity before which is emptiness.

To accomplish full enlightenment, the practitioner needs to conquer not only the gross defilements but also eliminate the subtlest defilements. **To do so, one needs to use the subtlest mind infused with wisdom to be able to penetrate the subtlest defilements. The subtlest wisdom is the Clear Light Wisdom is accessible through tantra practice.**

After the cessation of the gross mind, the subtlest consciousness experiences bliss. **That blissful mind with help of concentration will be able to recognize the reality of the clear light mind, which is ultimate truth.**

The concentrated subtle mind unified with the subtle blissful mind, is able to bring about the **union of the subtle blissful mind and the subtle clear light wisdom mind.** This subtle unification mind has the potency of being able to **penetrate the subtle defilements and eliminate them.**

One cannot hope to use one's gross mind to tackle subtle defilements. One needs the subtlest mind to overcome the subtlest defilements that is absolutely necessary for enlightenment to be attained.

e. The transformation of the ordinary form

When one accomplishes the Tantra path, the practitioner's body transforms.

There are a few possibilities:

- **The body dissolves into a formless state and one resides as the Wisdom Body**
- **The body dissolves into the Wisdom Body and from that Wisdom Body state, arises in a rainbow body,** in a luminescent (light) form, hence the different manifestations of Buddha- deities: some peaceful, some wrathful, most carrying implements. The appearances and implements illustrate the different methods of accomplishment.
- **Body may disintegrate into relics or after cremation or burial, give rise to relics.** That is also a sign of high attainments in tantra. If one has attained full enlightenment – the practitioner will have 5 different colors of relics which represent the total purification of the 5 aggregates and achievement of the 5 Dhyani Buddhas, which each color representing each of the different Dhyani 78 Buddhas. Some bodies though cremated, displayed the tongue, heart and eyeball remaining intact. This is the sign of accomplishing the 2 stages of the tantric path of the generation and completion stage. Masters who only recently passed away displayed such signs to prove that relics are not mere legend. One should generate even greater faith upon seeing these.
- **Some attain enlightenment in this very lifetime while possessing an ordinary human body but allow the physical body to live out the ordinary process, but their consciousness is one of omniscience.** Hence, an observer can never know who has omniscience. Only the realized practitioner will know.
- **Some enlightened beings reside in Dharmakaya forms, some in the Sambhogakaya**

state; some take birth into the world (i.e. in the nirmanakaya state) within samsara with bodhicitta motivation, in order to guide according to the disposition of sentient beings.

B. How to take death, intermediate state, rebirth onto the path

It is very difficult to activate clear light in a lifetime, unless your level of practice is so advanced, your concentration is so advanced, your meditation is so advanced, then you can use the tools of Tantra, such as the four joys.

There are very limited methods of clear light occurrence when we are living.

Sometimes when we faint or with certain shock, clear light occurs. **But if our concentration is not stable, when we faint, we lose our mind; we will not recognize it.**

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

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

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

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

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

a. Practicing deity yoga as a path

So, that is why when we do deity yoga:

- **we die, dissolve into the Dharmakaya**
- **When we transit from Dharmakaya, from the clear light to the intermediate state, we are the Sambhogakaya**
- **When we wake up, we wake up into Nirmanakaya.**

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

During the stage of completion, the meditator cultivates what is corresponding to death, the

intermediate state and rebirth as means to stop them. These three are known as the basic wisdom, enjoyment and emanation bodies of the Buddha.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

b. The importance of practicing again and again

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

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

For a practitioner who has a high level of training in virtue, like the wisdom of emptiness, during that period, the mindfulness of the wisdom will be at its highest level. **That will serve as a direct cause when the clear-light occurs, for the clear-light experience to result as the Dharmakaya. There you enlighten.**

For a **slightly lower level of practitioner**: if you manage to maintain the mindfulness during your meditation on emptiness until the moment when the wind element dissolves; then naturally during the three white, red and black-near appearances, you will have a higher quality of absorption state of mind. **Because of that, when the clear light occurs, you will be able to realize directly emptiness** (even though you may not be able to achieve enlightenment).

Then, **slightly weaker practitioner** than that, **if you are able to manage to meditate on emptiness, or any other virtue**, like Bodhicitta, remembrance of the Guru, the deity; **and to secure it up to the dissolution of the wind element**; then after that, naturally by the others' forces of the virtuous imprints of the past, that will condition the practitioner to travel steadily up to the clear-light. **When you experience the natural clear light, you will actualize a conceptual realization of emptiness.**

Then the **lowest ones, if you manage to die with a virtuous mind** and able to transit through the stages of the dissolution, when the clear light occurs, **you are able to manage to secure a great number of virtues and that will result in virtuous intermediate state.**

And in that virtuous intermediate state, **there is even the possibility of different stages of benefits you can actualize during the intermediate state**: at least you are able to secure the intermediate state of human precious life, intermediate state of gods and demi-gods, or intermediate state to be actualized in Pure Land. **Then the rebirth will be auspicious rebirth.**

The different qualities of the results described above depend on at least three kinds of factors:

- **One is familiarity with the practice**, especially to result in the highest result, the Dharmakaya.
- Then the greatest **familiarity should be with emptiness**. In order to result the Dharmakaya you need similar and direct cause. Even Bodhicitta cannot play that role, you need emptiness' wisdom.
- Then, another factor is **the great purification of negativity and a great accumulation of merits.**

By just familiarizing ourselves through meditation, the force is not good enough to result in Dharmakaya. In the same way, just purifying is not good enough. You need conducive conditions such as merits. **Therefore, the very much job of following the Buddha's path or practicing the Dharma is to do these three things: to repeatedly exercise in those three.**

To familiarize yourself with the path: study and practice the wisdom of emptiness, Bodhicitta, all other virtues as much as possible, especially the wisdom of emptiness. Then, consistently, every day, there is an aspect of purification practices. Then, there is the aspect of day-to-day accumulation of merits.

Many practitioners, when they pass away, just go into meditation. The clear light already expresses, but instead of the clear light getting out of the bases, the channels, chakras, your system; you are able to keep that and continue to experience for one week, sometimes even for one month, sometimes even for a few months. **It is very much how long you need to accomplish the path.**

If there is an intense natural habitual meditation within your lifetime then that will impact your subtle system.

So, if we are able to live a life in this meaning, then, at the time of dying, the death in fact is

not an obstacle, death in fact becomes one of the most favorable conditions to manifest one of the most important conditions to be enlightened which is the arising of the Dharmakaya, which is the arising of clear light.

An example of simple training for beginners or if one is seriously ill and thus very weak

1. On the basis of faith in the Guru-Buddha and having been initiated into the deity, just think – “I am the Buddha-deity”. Hold the view that one is the deity. This is far better than merely looking at picture of deity, which is “outside” of oneself.

2. There may be the tendency to mentally struggle to find evidence that one is a deity. For this, when lights and colors appear during the dissolution process, identify that light as the deity.

3. Then think, “I am in the state of the deity’s Pureland”.

If one can do this, it will be a virtuous, peaceful, protected mind. **If one dies at that time, one is assured of a higher rebirth and even a Pureland rebirth.**

However, to be able to do even the above few steps, **it is advisable for one to practice from now.**

Hence, before going to sleep, even when one is very tired, visualize oneself as deity and think “I am the deity”. Then if there are any indirect light rays coming into the room, think that the light beam is the deity and think “That’s me in the Pureland” and fall asleep with that thought.

It is worthwhile to train this way.

c. Understanding the illusory body

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

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

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

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

In the case of the pure illusory body, this analogy differs slightly, just as an echo is separated from the voice that created it, **the pure illusory body can leave behind the body which is its dwelling place.** The

illusory body appears with its complete mandala, namely its own environment and retinue, just as the whole phantom city of the smell-eaters appears.

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

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

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

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

VI. The initiation

Then, Lama Atisha says:

Verse 63

Through full bestowal of the preceptor initiation

By a spiritual teacher who is pleased,

You are purified of all wrongdoing

And become fit to gain powerful attainments.

The Vase initiation in the context of the Yoga Tantra and Highest Yoga Tantra begins with the Flower Garland Initiation.

All living beings have a disposition for enlightenment.

A. Advice on how to receive properly (and fully) an initiation

- **Just by attending the ceremony will not receive initiation.**
- **It is important to know the commitment before taking the initiation** (to be sure you will not break the samaya).
- **One needs to know and recognize the deity** (not attending a Tara initiation confusing Tara with Chenrezig).
- **One needs to be fully aware and concentrated while listening to preliminary practice, especially the foundation practice such as renunciation, bodhicitta and emptiness.**
- **One needs to really focus and be concentrated during the whole ceremony** like doing all the repetitions of mantras, vows that the Guru will require, doing correctly the visualizations, ...
- **One has to follow the sequence steps of practice on which the Guru guides you.** If you miss

that, then in fact you might end up not receiving the initiation, not only that, at the end of the session, when the Guru asks a question on whether you have received the initiation or not? You have to **reply to the repetition that the Guru advice you to repeat**. It is not just repeating the word, but you have to **feel from your heart** that you have received the initiation therefore you are expressing that you have received.

In every initiation, the Guru will ask:

‘tso-wei ji-tar ka-tsel-wa; di-tar tam-chye dag-gyi gyi’

‘tso-wei’ here refers to ‘Guru’ himself; ji-tar ka-tsel-wa’ means ‘whatever the Guru advice or comment’ di-tar tam-chye dag-gyi gyi’ means that ‘every single thing I will do as it is, as what the Guru have commented.’

You have to express this from the depth of your heart. This is the moment that you completely surrender your body, speech and mind in 100% total under the guidance from your Guru, and protection under your Guru, and taking him as an object of your refuge.

From that very moment, you promise to follow and do all the samaya. If it involves Bodhisattva vow, your samaya is to practice Bodhisattva vow. If it involves Tantric vow, your samaya is to practice Tantric vow, that’s the moment you commit that you will do exactly as what the Guru commented.

If what the Guru commented or advice is to live a life in Bodhisattva vow and Tantric vow, and if you happen to break the Tantric vow before the end of the initiation, in fact it will become incomplete.

Because there is a session at the very end during the dedication that you have to feel that you have definitely receive the initiation, and you will live a life as commented, **this is the ending of the final agreement, by then you are genuinely, naturally, spontaneously, wholeheartedly become the Vajra disciple, and the teacher become Vajra Guru.** And the practice is that you need to live a life on seeing the Guru in Tara if you received Tara initiation, and seeing the Guru inseparable from Buddha, Daka and Dakini and all Buddhas.

Therefore, to receive complete initiation, you must complete those three conditions:

- Complete motivation and cultivation of the teachings on Three principal aspects of the path
- Completed the whole process of the initiation (repetition, visualization, wholeheartedness and conviction)
- Surrender your body, speech and mind under the guidance of the Guru and to follow the Samaya

You need to gain ‘tob-lo’: tob’ is gain; ‘lo’ is mind. This is ‘the mind of gain’ at the end of the initiation to confirm that you have definitely receive initiation at any cost, so if you have these three things then you have received initiation.

B. Living in the practice of Tantra

The complete tantra practice is one where one studies, contemplates and meditates on the 2 stages continuously and lives in the recognition of oneself as deity for 24 hours. By doing so, it is guaranteed that one will not commit any negative karma because deities do not commit harms nor indulge in delusions.

Use different stages of wisdom – mindfulness, introspection, virtues, compassionate mind, understanding of reality - to analyze and challenge delusions and defilements throughout the day. **Seeing oneself as divine and having divine pride is not about supernatural powers but dwelling in the totality of virtue.**

This will be ultimately beneficial for self and for others. If we are able to live our daily life with great compassion, wisdom realizing emptiness, patience, kindness, there would be no need for sadhana, mantras, retreats!

To support this assertion, during the time of the Nalanda pandits, Nagarjuna did not have a thick Yamantaka sadhana to rely on yet look at his attainments and the extent of his benefit 100 to scholars and ordinary beings alike.

Prayer commitments are granted by our vajra/ initiation Gurus out of compassion because unlike in the olden days when distractions were few and supporting practitioners many, we no longer have the good fortune of being able to gain great concentration with ease. Prayer commitments help us with this.

Without discipline, we will not only take things for granted, but we will also simply forget what we are to do or think. **There are many factors which can destroy our wisdom. Through commitments, one's time will be applied to virtue.**

Hence, we cannot give up tantra just because it is not convenient for us to carry out all the practices. I am not in a position to say that there is no need for you to do the sadhanas given to you – if your Guru gave you sadhana 101 or mantra commitments, it is your duty to do them and it will benefit you to do so.

My comment is that you have to immerse yourself and your whole life in practice, i.e. practice 24 hours. The point is that as long as we take an initiation, we have the commitment to engage in the practice to the point of enlightenment.

As a word of comfort, some tantric practices like those in relation to Vajrayogini, even feeble practice will enable one to gain enlightenment in 16 lifetimes. Such is the great kindness of the Buddha-deities.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Buddha.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It is followed by the general permission to teach. **We are handed the wheel to encourage us in this, the conch to blow to signify the giving of discourses and the volume of Tantra to hold while**

making the hand gestures of teaching to symbolizes how to inspire students to practice.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

F. What happens after receiving the initiation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Two factors to develop while training in Tantra meditation

There are 2 factors while training in tantra meditation:

- **divine pride (Tib. “lhai nagyal”)**
- **and vivid appearance of the deity.**

The cultivation of divine pride of oneself as the Buddha-deity with all his qualities and having a vivid appearance of oneself as deity, will bring about the protection from ordinariness.

Whatever appears to the senses is viewed as the same essence of the deity: whatever form one sees is in the form of an emanation of the deity; every place, the deity’s mandala; every sound, a mantra.

Through this, **the protection of mind arises and together with the vows taken during the initiation, prevents us from the conceptual (i.e. ignorant view that believes in inherent existence), dualistic appearance.**

All forms of suffering, including problems with people and circumstances arise due to conceptual, dualistic thinking. Likewise, even one word of mantra is a mind protection technique – it keeps out delusions and safeguards the mind.

In the word “mantra”, the “man” means knowledge of suchness; the “tra” originates from “traya” which means “the compassion that protects migrators.

Therefore, mantra is the unification of wisdom and compassion which grants protection to migratory beings.

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

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

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

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

The four major Ngondros

Also called four preliminary practices, they **are common to all traditions:**

- **In order to ripen the potential for enlightenment, we start by conducting the refuge preliminary**, with a minimum of 100.000 recitations of refuge prayers.
- **Then, in order to purify any limitations** (to this potential, seed, of enlightenment), **we conduct the Ngondro of Vajrasattva**, with a minimum of 100.000 recitations of the long mantra syllables of Vajrasattva, in retreat.
- **Then, to nurture this potential with the conducive conditions**, for the seed to grow, **we will conduct a mandala offering retreat (100.000 mandala offerings with a mandala set as a minimum) to accumulate merits, which are the conducive conditions.**
- **Now, you need the easiest channel to ripen the blessings of the deity yoga** (such as the realization of the generation and completion stages of the path, such as including the wisdom body within your system). The nearest channel, the medium, is the Guru. There comes **the Guru yoga practice** (guru yoga retreat practice, in our lineage with the sadhana and 100.000 Migtsema recitations).
- Then, there is another uncommon preliminary that is recommended, which is to **receive a Father Tantra initiation**, like Yamantaka, Kalachakra, Guyasamaja, and conduct the retreat before receiving a Mother Tantra initiation.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A. Tantra should be approached with great care and skillfulness

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We did all sorts of things for generations and generations and it did not work.

They are so many spiritual methods related to Nagas, to gods, maybe related to the Buddhas but without that element of direct antidote, the altruistic wisdom and attitude, any meditation, **even the practice of Tantra, of the Highest Yoga Tantra can lack that direct antidote. It is just the ritual aspect of the Tantra that is practiced.**

Historically it never worked. **There are labelled in the society high practitioner born in the lower vajra Realms because of lacking the elements of altruistic wisdom and method**, then the mantra becomes lower energy, the tantric yoga becomes a gathering of offensive energy, instead of nurturing the chakras, channels, drops, it corrupted them and destroy the spiritual system.

Even in the practice of guru devotion, which is the foundation of the path, the root of the path, one of the essence practices, but lacking the elements of altruistic wisdom and attitude **turns into attachment and the relationship turns into Guru-disciple attachment, then instead of nurturing the Samaya, it destroys it.** It happens.

Then, any form of other spiritual practice until it lacks those two elements will be incomplete. Every stage of the spiritual practices from the beginning to the end, in all Yanas, when those two are lacking, still carry limitations.

Only Shakyamuni Buddha revealed those most profound, complete, powerful dharma, the antidote of not only the secondary problems in our life, but it is antidote to the root cause of all the problems makers: karma and delusions bring problems to us, which are the production of ignorance.

So, no matter how much antidote you apply to karma and delusions, it does not work, because the root cause is not affected. The ignorance is not affected. **Ignorance can only be destroyed through altruistic wisdom.**

So, for any level of practices you do including Highest Yoga Tantra practices, **if you have the bases of true altruism or ornamented by true altruism, then, all the levels of practice carry the weight, firmness in the practice.**

Otherwise even those practitioners of Highest Yoga Tantra when reality kicks in our ordinary life, then, you are shaken. Therefore, the essence is true altruism for all the practices including Tantra.

Practice wholeheartedness, complete refuge and spiritual benefit can be very fast. If you start to meditate, you start to experience in a more obvious way in deep meditation, deep cultivation, on emptiness. Then, you start to experience the taste. Same with bodhicitta.

Up to now, even when we do meditation, we do not really do deep meditation. Still so much dependent outwardly. We never really meditate inwardly. You cultivate emptiness at a more conceptual level, philosophical level, never really at a meditative level.

We never manage to get the point, to get the instruction, the essence. That is why it is so difficult to experience. Similar goes with Bodhicitta.

When there is an element of true altruism, all the leakages in any practice are sealed. Otherwise, there will be a lot of leakage, limitations.

Therefore, to prepare for Tantra and all along: the main focus is Lam-Rim, especially the great Lam-Rim, especially, true altruism: the wisdom chapter and the Bodhicitta subject.

You truly have to master that. If you really want to master the path and Tantra, that has to be done. Even if you are already a high level of practitioner, one thing we cannot put aside is the Lam-Rim.

Buddha taught the entirety of the Buddha's teachings for the purpose to understand, realize and bring into application the wisdom of emptiness. **It is about overcoming superstitiousness, which is the mind that is lacking wisdom of emptiness and bodhicitta.**

All conceptual minds are superstitious. All conceptual minds are false. So, **anything which is not viewed from the point of view of emptiness is superstitious. We have to purify purifying the fabricated or hallucinated aspect of the mind.**

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

Verse 64

Because the Great Tantra of the Primordial Buddha

Forbids it emphatically

Those observing pure conduct should not

Take the secret and wisdom initiations.

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

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

This statement by Atisha is in the context of a fully ripened disciple whose definite enlightenment is happening, after all the causal merits are matured, then without the Secret, Word and Wisdom initiations, he or she will not be able to enlighten.

Conferring the actual initiation to a definite ripened disciple is very very rare, conventionally such thing happening openly is **very very rare, almost none**.

If there are, then it **has to be conducted in a very well secured environment**.

Can you imagine even Lama Tsongkhapa did not do that. He was a monk, a fully ordained monk. Because of this particular actual initiation, he enlightened in Sambhogakaya, in intermediate state.

And if your merits are so high then you just conclude this life and go to the intermediate state and enlighten there. With those high merits, maybe just after clear light, you stay, and just like that in one moment you arrive. So, there is no excuse: **“Now I need to offer my monks and nuns vows back then after that then you are free to do any form of wrong doings?” Not like that.**

This is also for the lay practitioners: for the actual Wisdom and Secret initiations, the actual mandala performance, there is **almost none**. We cannot say none. There may be. But conventionally, openly, there is not such a thing.

And if in case that happens, you need to have **the secure environment of the Guru, the ritual attendant, all the sangha community's set to perform that. So, that is why here it is about misunderstanding. Those immatures did not study the exact teachings and carry the name of initiator, Lama, did not really understand what it is and then, take advantage of students.**

It happens. It happened a lot in Tibet before Lama Tsongkhapa. Then, Lama Tsongkhapa taught the discipline, explaining the actual meaning. It does happen in Chinese communities; it happens in Western communities.

So, in fact that is why it is said when you go in Tantra, and you get the greatest obstacles. That is the way it happens. And sometimes it happens due to a combination of unripen Guru and unripen disciple, and then, this can happen. Otherwise, none. This cannot happen.

So, whenever it comes to this particular section, the auspicious conferring of the ceremony of the initiation are provided but not the actual actions of the mandala like that.

Then, you may ask a question. When we receive a Highest Yoga Tantra initiation, we did not receive the whole complete four initiations? No. you receive it. **You receive all the complete four initiations.**

Then, how about the Wisdom and Secret initiation? **That process happens with the Wisdom consort, not an actual human consort.** The actual human conferring is not talking about the actual initiation with the actual usage of a human consort. We do receive complete initiation.

So, therefore for those of you who attended a Highest Yoga Tantra initiation, from the very initial stage after a certain level of preparation you are asked to arise as a deity, because it has to go through the whole initiation. **So, once you arise in the deity then, you are able to go through this initiation of Secret and Wisdom with a wisdom consort, wisdom father and wisdom mother.**

So, through that, you accomplish the actual whole four initiations.

After you had done the commitment retreat, then you do the self-initiation, you initiate by yourself, isn't it? So, you go through all the initiations, and you accomplish the entirety of the initiation. **Then, one of the exercises of the four joys, that you do not do with a physical human**

consort. The four joys have to be exercised in relation to the Wisdom consort.

C. Bliss in Tantra and its nature

The ordinary meaning of words can really create confusion, can't they!!

In the context of tantra, "bliss" is not about the ecstasy derived from sexual activities or union. It's not about the sensation that accompanies the peak of sensual pleasure. Thinking of bliss in this way in relation to tantra is TOTALLY WRONG.

Buddhist tantra is to overcome delusions, not enhance it. **Ordinary bliss is from the sexual organ and is in the nature of the suffering of change.**

Bliss in tantra, however, is experienced in one's central channel and is one of pacified joy, clarity and peacefulness, which pervades all channels, and the more concentration is placed on that, the bliss increases and can be non-ceasing.

The clear light mind is the most subtle mind which can be utilized to meditate on overcoming subtle defilements and achieve enlightenment itself. In our daily lives, we use the gross mind to engage in all forms of activities and conceptual thought.

There are, however, brief periods of time when our gross minds are less dominant e.g. during sleep, fainting, orgasm, sneezing. Due to the decline of one's gross mind during these periods, one is briefly able to access the subtle mind and if that happens, there is a sensation of bliss experienced in the central channel.

This has a bearing on one's aggregates because the person then experiences bliss throughout his whole being, including the nervous system. To touch the clear light mind, the gross mind has to shut down.

However, it is very difficult to shut down the gross mind. **We are constantly distracted** and responding to sense stimuli of all kinds.

Therefore, during sleep, fainting or orgasm, our mind is withdrawn to a smaller point, and this causes the weakening of the gross mind and momentarily the clear light mind manifests, where bliss may be experienced.

However, because these states are natural occurrences and the time-periods are brief, most of us are not sufficiently trained to be able to utilize these periods to meditate.

We certainly cannot induce fainting by knocking our heads! As for sleeping, we rarely have control over it and in fact, sleep tends to control us!

Hence, **training in tantra meditation is needed. In tantra, there is reference to the practice of the 4 stages of bliss or the 4 Joys. These are techniques used in the various categories of tantra to shut down the gross mind and to activate the clear light mind.**

D. The four joys

Then, the four classes of tantra are also defined in relation to the stages of **taking attachment onto the path**. It also has the element of taking anger onto the path. Here, in relation to taking attachment onto the path, like it was once said in Hevajra tantra that **"through looking, laughing, embracing, uniting the tantra are of four types"**.

So, this is the practice also in relation to the four different levels of joy, which are stimulated by the attachment, bringing about the full quality of wisdom and bliss. Developing full quality of wisdom and that bliss brings about the highest level of concentration and utilizing the union of method and wisdom and bring about the eradication of negations such as the attachment.

Bliss should arise through positive, virtuous admiration. When doing deity yoga, one is firmly holding divine pride and views all other beings as pure, divine beings. Joy arises at this.

The yoga of the four joys from the Highest Yoga Tantra and the common categories of the four schools of tantra in relation to the four joys are different:

- For **Action Tantra**, you are able to exercise the purification in relation to attachment by stimulating the wisdom and method and the concentration by attachment that drives by simply **looking at it, father to the mother, or mother to the father**. Not further, not beyond that.
- Then **Performance tantra, on top of the looking, then it also includes interaction of seeing and laughing**. On top of looking “father to mother”, “mother to father”, there is then an expression of laughter. That again stimulates the attachment and again in a similar way, it brings about bliss and method, then, that will lead to concentration, and that concentration acts as an antidote to purify the most subtle level of attachment.
- Then, with **Yoga Tantra, you add on top of the earlier two, embracing**.
- Then, **Highest Yoga Tantra, then, you utilize the all the basis of the earlier three, then the fourth one, the union of wisdom and method, the union of father – mother**. That brings an intense desire, and that intense desire brings about intense concentration, the most subtle level of bliss. Then, **that union with the method which brings about the highest quality of concentration, that concentration arises from the union of intense bliss and method**.

Then, you purify the most subtle level of attachment through the exercise of the four joys.

So, it has to be conducted:

- **with an absolute wholeness overwhelming wholeness arising of Bodhicitta, then, the great quality of wisdom of emptiness**.
- and also of course those two have to be built on a **basis of the absolute understanding of the limitation of the delusions, limitation of samsara**.
- Then, **clear objective of full enlightenment** that which is overwhelmed by seeing the conditions of unbearable suffering of numberless sentient beings.

So, one begins by **generating oneself as the deity** eliminating one’s ordinary appearances. From there, one **meditates on emptiness**. From that wisdom state arises a **visualized wisdom consort** by looking at the visualized wisdom consort, **bliss is generated, melting sensation is felt from the crown to the throat**.

When the wisdom consort expresses his/her **laughter** the non-conception **greater bliss is generated from throat to the heart chakra**.

When oneself **embraces the wisdom consort** that drives even greater bliss. **From the heart chakra to the navel chakra, when one is in meditative union with the wisdom consort then the greatest bliss is experienced from the navel chakra to the tip of the secret part generating supreme great bliss.**

Then, after that you have to withdraw from the tip of the secret part all the way up to the navel, then to the heart, then to the throat, then you have to place it back to the crown.

Then, if there is any fluid lost then there is a transgression. So, in order to stay within the boundaries of the yoga, you have to manage to bring back to the crown and then you have to repeat that many rounds.

Remember always – Buddhist Tantra is not about ordinary ecstasy; it is about activating the clear light mind to destroy defilements.

To further train in this purpose, **one reverses the process of the downward-melting sensations – and in so doing, bring back the sensation** (and fluid if there was any) upwards through concentration. **One therefore practices in this concentration, going up and down.**

This is done to overcome the gross mind and get closer to the subtle mind. **When one reaches a sustained, effortless, blissful mind without any influence of gross thoughts, one is very near to or may even be in the clear light state and this is when one uses that blissful concentration mind to meditate on the emptiness of the blissful mind itself and the emptiness of clear light mind, i.e. the emptiness of emptiness.**

Channels, drops, winds, mind have to be protected and kept fresh and not be allowed to degenerate. So, if a practitioner releases seminal fluid during practice, it harms one's tantric practice. It harms the concentrated clear light practice.

So, the whole purpose is to withdraw from the arising of conceptual gross to the even most subtle conceptual mind which is obstacle to the arising of clear light. So, the whole purpose of this practice is to **gain the subtlest aspect of concentration, through the subtlest greatest aspect of wisdom and subtlest and greatest form of method, in the form of bliss.**

Void and bliss are stimulated by desire. Ultimately to overcome the entirety even from the root of the desire.

These stages of practice are described like “in the manner of insect” (the name of the practice) meaning that there is one particular insect born from the wood. The whole purpose of being born from the wood is to eat the wood. So, when the insect is born, the entire wood which produced the insect is totally consumed.

This analogy illustrates that meditative stabilization is generated from bliss (in dependence on desire) and is cultivated as emptiness (whereupon desire is consumed and eliminated).

So, the whole purpose of using the attachment, the attachment is the cause to born great bliss and **that great bliss blocks, because the mind becomes more concentrated, the grosser mind, the conceptual mind**, especially experienced through meditation, otherwise you cannot experience that. **That helps to experience the void, emptiness.**

Then, through the yoga in relation to the deity, you are able to unite wisdom and method, bliss and void, and through the **uniting of the subtlest level of bliss and void**, the highest quality of

bliss and void help **to generate the quality of one-pointed concentration.**

Because of that therefore you are able to take clear light onto the path to actualize Dharmakaya, to actually realize a direct realization of emptiness; if not, at least a conceptual realization of emptiness; if not, it is a cause for so many purifications, even from the root, and so many purifications.

Therefore, even if liberation is not successful, at least you are able to secure great quality of virtue to be able to have the opportunity to practice again. This is the main purpose.

Verse 65

If those observing the austere practice of pure conduct

Were to hold these initiations,

Their vow of austerity would be impaired

Through doing that which is proscribed.

Verse 66

This creates transgressions which are a defeat

For those observing discipline.

Since they are certain to fall to a bad rebirth,

They will never gain accomplishments.

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

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

E. Lama Tsongkhapa's example

Lama Tsongkhapa had already accomplished the three great countless eons of merit before he passed away. He even has the opportunity to experience that even before the occurrence of clear light.

But he observed Vinaya precepts. Before Lama Tsongkhapa came to Tibet, there were many practitioners, especially tantric practitioners who let go of the Vinaya precepts in order to utilize the four initiations, and indulged in ordinary sexual activities, thinking it was beneficial to tantric practice.

Lama Tsongkhapa powerfully demonstrated that the supreme basis for success in HYT is perfect Vinaya ethics. He remained a strict upholder of Vinaya vows and accomplished the two stages of generation and completion and attained enlightenment in one lifetime.

In reality, at a conventional aspect, yes, when you have the Vinaya precepts, you will not be able to harmonize the actual fourth initiation, because you will not be able to actualize it on this human body, using the human body for the union of Father-Mother. If that happens, the Vinaya precept breaks, the transgression happens.

But without that, you cannot activate the subtlest mind and chakras.

But in the intermediate state, you do not use this gross body, you use the subtle body, which still has five aggregates. The subtle body is already released from the Vinaya precept which is one life-time precept. When the clear light concludes the period of the Samaya to the Vinaya precept is complete. Now you transition like a lay man practitioner in the intermediate state.

So, when you use the bardo clear light, or intermediate state clear light, you enlighten as Samboghakaya.

Lama Tsongkhapa enlightened in Samboghakaya in order to observe the completion of the three great countless eons of merits.

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

To answer this question:

Verse 67

There is no fault if one has received

The preceptor initiation and has knowledge

Of suchness listens to or explains the tantras

And performs burnt offering rituals,

Or makes offerings of gifts and so forth.

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

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

In order to give tantric teachings like explained, and also to listen tantric teachings, explain tantric teachings:

- **First one should have received the preceptor's initiation**
- **At least have received the Kriya Tantra, Action Tantra, Yoga Tantra initiations as much as from the start, from the earlier schools**
- Also, **have learnt the practices**, have done the commitment retreat
- Then on top of that, **there is an unmistakable understanding of emptiness**, that which one will not explain falsely.

Also, **when listening to tantric teachings, you will not hear wrongly. When you interpret, you will not misinterpret.** Without emptiness, very much all the aspects of the implements, tantric rituals, can be explained mistakenly, misinterpreted, misrepresented. So, the emptiness will protect that.

Initiation puts the initiator into the greatest responsibility in relation to the receiver and also your own principles as a practitioner, you cannot do anyhow. So, if you really understand the seriousness of the initiation, then, it is so hard to offer initiations.

It does not mean that the Lama is stingy and also Lama knows if you are really consistently accumulating merits whether it is through Sutra or whatever, when you accomplish the three great countless eons of merits, then Buddha Vajradara volunteer without invitation, he will come and initiate you.

If you are only stuck there because of one initiation, he volunteers. The deities who volunteer to initiate you. No worries. There is no such way. **When the merits are accomplished, the purification happened, Buddha Vajradhara himself will voluntarily say please be sit down, I will do all the work even without your request.**

Anyway, my late Master Geshe Lama Konchog says that to really initiate you have to have the capability to initiate.

He said “even if you offer just a blessing initiation [this is just a personal instruction – from Geshela to Geshela] minimum completeness of all the Ngondros retreats [so there are about twelve of them like water bowls, tsatsa offerings, prostrations, etc], on top of that a minimum of one father tantra deity great retreat commitment, the amount of mantra, of sessions to accomplish the great retreat for one father tantra, and great retreat of one mother tantra. Then, after that you conclude, just for this deity yoga, besides the Ngondros, 8 years you discipline in it, you really are inseparable with the practice of the deity father tantra, mother tantra.

Then, you offer the blessing initiation. The receiver will definitely be able to receive the purpose of the initiation, you will really be able to initiate. So, since Tantra initiations are the most secret, most needed practice, most profound, it is so powerful, the initiator has to at least mature a minimum to initiate. Otherwise, how do you grant the blessings?

VIII. Guru devotion, the Guru-disciple relationship

We need to first meet with a qualified Vajra Guru. Then, we exercise in guru devotion, even before receiving initiation, exercise in guru devotion, the teacher-students relationship through cultivating the practice in actions and thoughts.

The essence of the practice is pleasing the Guru. What pleases the Guru is the progress in your spiritual practice. That is the best gift to the qualified Guru. The Guru will never expect anything else.

The Guru’s expectations for the disciple are the progress on the path in their continuum and if you are able to do that, then it is the best.

Now, **if you have material resources, then, the Guru is the most powerful object where you can accumulate the practice of offerings, charity, generosity.** Guru is regarded even among all the Buddhas, compared to the three times Buddhas, Guru is the most powerful object to practice that.

Then, the result of that is you enjoy the abundance of merits and if there is abundance of merits, then, there is abundance of happiness, of harmony, and prosperity.

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

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

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

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

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

I make requests to the supreme vajra-holder

Who controls the three doors, is intelligent,

Patient and honest, without deceit or pretense,

Who knows mantra and tantra and is skilled in

Both sets of suchness, in drawing and explaining.

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

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

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

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

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

- The first of the ten inner skills is the **ability to create a protection circle in meditation** to rid others of obstacles.
- The second is to **draw mandalas** which can be worn as protection amulets.
- The third skill is in **giving the secret initiation**
- The fourth is in **giving the wisdom initiation**. This implies the need for competence in giving the other initiations as well.

- The fifth skill is **proficiency in separating enemies of the teaching** from their protectors and tutelary deities in order to stop their harmful activities.
- The sixth is the **art of offering ritual cakes to worldly and supramundane guests**.
- The seventh is **expertise in different forms of mantra recitation**.
- The eighth is **the use of coercion** when practices associated with the stage of generation, such as visualization and mantra recitation, intended to actualize the deity, have been properly performed without success.
- The ninth skill is in consecrating representations of enlightened body, speech and mind and prayer beads.
- The tenth is competence **in activating the mandala, making offerings, entering the mandala and performing self-initiation**.

Now, the outer skills:

- The first one consists of **meditating on the mandala with and without form**. This refers to external mandala, namely the residence and the deities within it, both of which have form, and the internal mandala, the wisdom of bliss and emptiness, which is formless.
- The second is to maintain meditative stabilization of oneself as the deity within the mandala.
- The third is proficiency in the **various hand gestures for offering adornments to the deities**.
- The fourth skill is in **the performance of ritual dance**.
- The fifth is the **ability to assume a wide variety of postures such as the vajra position**.
- The sixth is in **mantra recitation**.
- The seventh is in conducting peaceful, increasing, powerful and wrathful fire offering rituals.
- The eighth is in **making outer, inner and secret offerings**.
- The ninth is in **performing peaceful, increasing, powerful and wrathful** activities as well as giving protection and inviting different kinds of guests.
- The tenth is in **concluding rituals and sending guests back to their different dwelling places**.

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

B. The qualities of a qualified student

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

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

It is said that one who is nonpartisan, intelligent, and diligent

Is a vessel for listening to the teachings.

The good qualities of the instructor do not appear otherwise

Nor do those of fellow listeners.

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

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

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

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

So how to define Dharma and non-Dharma, what is worldly Dharma. **Anything beneficial for liberation and enlightenment is Dharma**. Anything is beneficial for worldly purpose is non-Dharma. Anything that is not beneficial for liberation and enlightenment is not Dharma. What boost our delusions or what create the causes for liberation and enlightenment. **Even with a correct motivation, without basic discrimination, you may follow the wrong path, mistaken instructions by mistaken speakers.**

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

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

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

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

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

Therefore, whenever you are around the Guru, whatever he manifests, laughing, crying, walking, sitting,

everything you try to interpret into Dharma. Another meaning is **whatever instructions you receive you practice consistently, all the time.** These are the five qualities of the disciple.

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

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

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

C. The Guru-disciple Samaya

a. A shared responsibility

One should study and cultivate Ashvaghosha 's "Fifty Stanzas on the Guru" (this is the renowned text on guru devotion) and having purified the modes of reliance on a Guru, enter Tantra.

The "Fifty Stanzas on the Guru" is to be explained to one who has gone for refuge in the Triple Gem, is trained in pure thought, namely the altruistic mind of enlightenment and who has taken the uncommon refuge, namely taking refuge on the basis of the Guru-Deity, during an Initiation. After this, the recipient is turned into a vessel suitable for Tantra.

Then, as a main manner of process when you aspire to enter Tantra, that is what Rahulashrimitra's advice states:

At a time of joy, the student with pressed palms and bending down, 27 should confess all his sins and take refuge in the Three Jewels. He should practice well the mind of enlightenment and take the lay and bodhicitta vows; engage in purification and renewal of damaged vows previously taken. In concordant stages, he should rely in excellent ways on a Vajra master. Having done all this he should ask his guru, "Please bestow initiation on me".

Therefore, **taking an initiation that is publicly organized sometimes can go wrong:** you are either just dragged by your friends or pushed there without directly requesting the teacher with all the earlier prerequisites preparations.

In fact, in the treatises, it is stated that the number of tantric disciples to receive an initiation, usually should not go up than twenty, ten, or five, or three.

It is the responsibility of both the Master who will bestow the initiation, the institution, which is organizing, and the students, for it to be really perfect.

To receive the initiation from His Holiness, there is almost no way to ask and get a personal permission but a Guru like His Holiness is universally established, universally known, universally honored Guru.

But otherwise, if there is a way, especially for Highest Yogic Tantra initiation, to have at least

one audience with the Guru and request the initiation for you, even organizing for a future time for the Guru to conduct such an initiation, that is auspicious tradition.

Then, if you already know the Guru well, you know the mandala, you must have an irresistible faith in the initiation, once you have taken the initiation, especially in Highest Yoga Tantra initiation, **there is no U-turn, no second thought.**

After that, even if the Guru behaves in a completely opposite way to what one would expect from him, still from your side as a follower you can see the Guru in Buddha, Guru in that deity. **After you take the initiation, the slightest imperfection either in thought or either in action arises and there is no greater obstacle than that for your spiritual journey.**

So, if you are really looking for enlightenment then that seriousness is needed.

For example, Guru Shakyamuni Buddha throughout his lifetime have conferred all his initiations secretly:

- The first initiation was conducted when he was turning the second wheel of Dharma, in Rajgir. Simultaneously he manifested the Kalachakra in Amaravati, turning the tantric wheel and granted initiation.
- All the rest of the initiations, Buddha did not even do them with his Nirmanakaya form, he manifested Vajrapani, he manifested different deities, like Heruka, Yamantaka, etc etc. He manifested in the form of a deity to initiate.

If you take a tantric initiation when you have all the prerequisites, then, by keeping pure samaya, and upholding all the precepts accordingly; on that very cushion, in that very session, enlightenment is possible, that much power.

Otherwise, there will be some obstacles: if you do not respect the commitments properly, if there is any misperception that occurs (that obstacle can be ignorance); then, during eons it will be so hard to dispel it out that very heavy obstacle.

The tantric treatises taught the practitioner who should aspire to practice Highest Yoga Tantra the best is fully ordained sangha, observing purely the fully ordination vows. On top of that, you must Bodhisattva vows. If not, the five lay vows purely, if not the refuge vows purely.

It is so rare to have this precious human life with six elements (4 + 2 of the indestructible drop), the eight freedoms and ten endowments, is extremely most rare than being born in the Pure Land, in Buddha Pure Land, you should really take one lifetime enlightenment potential.

So, it is almost like one lifetime chance, opportunity, **you really want to make sure you do not enter Tantra to accumulate great number of obstacles that will obstacle for eons of lifetime's future.**

I am not scaring you not to enter Tantra, you should as quickly as possible, because it is so rare, but don't rush to gather all those prerequisites.

Those who are already practicing: quickly purify the obscurations, retake the vows, practice as pure as possible, and make sure one lifetime enlightenment will be delivered like tomorrow, as if there was no next life, as if it was the only chance to get there.

b. How to restore broken Samayas

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

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

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

You can find the Samayavajra and the Vajrasattva Practices in the FPMT Retreat Prayers Book (**to listen to the entirety of Geshela's instructions for those two practices as guided meditations, Middle**

Lam-Rim, June 2024, teaching
#9:<https://longku.fpmt.ch/de/mediathek/teachings/audio/1378/2.2.7.1391>).

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

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

On top of that, if the broken Samaya or the karma created is in relation to the Guru, one of the specific ways of purifying, **besides Samayavarja is confessing to the Guru of having broken the Samaya and then ask for forgiveness if the Guru is alive**, it is very important. And obtain guidance and clarification on what sort of purification needs to be done and carry out the advice.

If not, then you can also confess and ask forgiveness before the representative of the master (the Resident Teacher of the master's center or one of the closest disciples, even the attendants), or a person who has a close Dharma connection with this master and whose decision would normally be consistent with the master's views.

One can also confess and seek guidance or in front of certain holy objects, like statues or pictures of the Guru, the mala or vajra or bell of the Guru, texts held by the Guru. Or you can visit the Guru's mandala or shrine, and there you do three prostrations, kneel down and ask forgiveness to keep intact the Samaya with the Guru, which is the most important.

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

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

If due to lack of mindfulness or laziness, one transgresses vows, in order to restore them, one can:

- Do as indicated above
- **Re-take the Initiation from the same master**
- **Do self-initiation practice** (provided one has done the necessary HYT retreat complete with fire puja)
- **Participate in Guru Puja with full concentration.**

c. How to rely on the Guru in thoughts

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

This has two points: the root, training in faith, and remembering his kindness so as to generate respect. Jewels' Blaze Dhāraṇī (Ratnolkādhāraṇī) says: Faith, a preliminary practice, gives birth like a mother to all good qualities, guards them, and makes them increase. This says that faith gives birth to excellent qualities that have not yet arisen, and once they have come into existence, it maintains and increases them.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Then the Tantra bestowing the initiation of Vajrapani says:

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

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

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

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

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

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

So, that is it. Everything is there. **The moment you see even one little limitation, it becomes an obstacle to you to actualize the benefit of the Dharma, the realizations.** It does not matter if there is a fault or not, but from your side, seeing the qualities, that helps to condition to gain realizations on the path.

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

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

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

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

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

d. How to rely on the Guru in actions

About how to rely on the Guru in actions, Maitreya's Ornament of Mahayana Sutra says:

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

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

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

Then:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Then:

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

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

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

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

Lama Tsongkhapa writes in the Middle Length Lam-Rim:

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

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

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

Lama Tsongkhapa says:

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

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

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

Then Buddha Vajradhara statement says:

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

IX. Tantric deities - the symbolism

Tantric deity images are sometimes peaceful and sometimes wrathful; some are in solitary pose whilst others are in the posture of Father Mother deities in union.

All tantric images - every aspect of them - from the image of the deities themselves, to the implements they carry and the ornaments they wear, are pure symbolism. They have totally nothing to do with ordinary form and samsaric activities.

The appearances and implements illustrate **the different methods of accomplishment.**

The entire manifested form of a deity, from crown to toe including the aura, represent **the stages of the paths, techniques and practices of tantra.**

The ornaments, in particular those made of bones and skulls are the **classic representation of impermanence.**

The most talked about and misunderstood is the image of the Father-Mother deity in union. Our ordinary minds tend to misinterpret these. In fact, it is not at all about the union of two contaminated, desirous, deluded male and female coming together in sexual union – this is absolutely wrong view!

In fact, **the Mother-Father image illustrates that ordinary, desirous sexual indulgence is to be eliminated by the antidote of wisdom and method (bodhicitta) presented in the completion and generation practices of tantra.**

Wisdom refers to the wisdom realizing emptiness, the clear light wisdom represented by the Mother deity; the method is the highest compassionate state of mind namely bodhicitta, represented by the Father deity.

All existences arise as merely labelled and do not inherently exist. Samsara and nirvana are merely labelled, yet sentient beings are overwhelmed by samsara and delusions.

So, the union based on samsaric, desirous attachment **is to be eliminated by the unification of wisdom and method.**

The deity holding weapons and implements, reminds the practitioner of the different antidotes to be applied to the corresponding defilements e.g the curved-knife is to cut off ignorance; ropes represent mindfulness being needed to tie the mind to virtue in order to tame the wild mind; the skull-cup holding the 5 meats and 5 nectars (body fluids) - whatever view one might have in relation to these, the purpose of such an image is to train us to transform all that is averse to us, into that which is blissful.

Likewise, the practitioner trains in transform all adversities into the Path.

Hence, it is not that tantra practice uses bizarre images like skulls and bones and such fearsome objects. **These are designed to eliminate ordinary perception and transform our mind to reach our innate nature,** which is the Buddha nature, the clear light nature, capable of pure, divine view and actions.

The moment we are able to go away from ordinary appearance and able to manifest the Buddha nature, clear light mind, that itself is the state of enlightenment.

How did these tantric deity forms come about? Some of these images were verified by the deities themselves through e.g. self-arising images in rock faces, caves (there are many in Tibet and Nepal).

Some images appeared to Realized Beings in retreat who then drew images of them, and we can rely on them because of the undisputed standing of those realized themselves:

- **Lama Tsongkhapa had many direct visions of Manjushri and Yamantaka,** who then gave detailed descriptions of the images;
- **some deities were requested to put their mark onto rock walls, such as Guru Padmasambhava** who came in human form but who was in fact emanation of Manjushri and placed his footprint, handprints and head prints onto many cave-walls in various places, as a legacy to generate faith and to convince people of their existence.
- **Milarepa who dissolved his form body into the Illusory rainbow body** was witnessed by a human community at that time. He too put **his footprint** into the rocks.
- Sometimes, **when a disciple has profound faith and conviction, deities appear on the basis of (i) the disciple's supplication for the deity to appear and (ii) the disciple is blessed and gains a perfectly clear and detailed image of the deity.**

X. Bodhisattva Vows and Pledges of the 5 Dhyani Buddhas

Bodhicitta has two aspects:

- Aspiring bodhicitta, which refers to the wish to attain bodhicitta
- Engaging bodhicitta refers to taking the Bodhisattva Vows to engage in the acts of the 6 Perfections and actually doing them.

A. The Bodhisattva Vows: 8 root vows and 46 secondary vows

a. 18 Root Vows

One commits to abandon:

1. Praising oneself or belittling others (to make oneself look better).
2. Even though able, not giving material aid or teaching Dharma, due to selfishness
3. Not forgiving others but harboring a grudge and holding it even when they apologize. Best practice is to hold them as one's first object of compassion.
4. Abandoning the Mahayana teachings by saying that some parts of the teachings are not Buddha's teachings and promoting one's own fabricated doctrine. Believing that worldly virtue is more valuable than cultivating bodhicitta.
5. Taking back offerings given to Triple Gem and using them for their own worldly purpose.
6. Criticizing any of the 3 traditions of Buddhism. Although Mahayana aspires beyond liberation, it is for larger purpose of enlightenment without denying the value of practices of liberation.
7. Harming an ordained person – physically, mentally, verbally – causing them give up 104 their robes.
8. Committing any of the 5 heinous crimes (killing mother, father, Arhat, causing schism within Sangha, wound a Buddha).
9. Cultivating and holding wrong views.
10. Destroying towns, country by fire, pollution, etc... any place inhabited by others
11. Teaching emptiness to those who are untrained. Must explain clearly and not use wrong, broad statements like all things are non-existent. Ensure that the listeners are ready to listen.
12. Discouraging those who are practicing Mahayana teaching and encourage them to only train in self-liberation.
13. Encouraging others to abandon their Patrimoshka (lay and ordination vows) vows. Discouraging people from practicing Bodhisattva vows, tantric vows.
14. Causing others to hold incorrect views that you might hold of Hinayana practice.
15. Declaring false realizations of emptiness.
16. Accepting gifts that have been stolen from Triple Gem.
17. Taking materials from (thereby causing distractions to) the practitioner of the calm abiding and giving them to someone else, as it might cause that practitioner to be distracted.
18. Abandoning bodhicitta.

b. 46 secondary Bodhisattva vows

These relate to the practices of the 6 Perfections (generosity, morality, patience, joyous perseverance, concentration and wisdom).

4 conditions must be present to completely break a vow:

- 1. Failure to regard the action as wrong

- 2. Failure to resolve not to repeat the transgression of the vow
- 3. Rejoicing for having done the action
- 4. Having no shame or consideration for others.

B. The pledges of the 5 Dhyani Buddhas

In Tantra, given that the goal is the **elimination of defilements and the attainment of enlightenment, the practitioner commits to the pledges of the 5 Dhyani Buddhas (which represent the purified aggregates) and the pledges of the 5 Dhyani Buddha families** in brief, are:

1. Pledges in relation to **Buddha Vairochana** = 6 pledges – the first is to **train in the 3 types of morality; taking refuge in each of the Triple Gem.**

The 3 types of morality are:

- refraining from negativities of body, speech and mind (as per the individual liberation vows);
- the morality of accomplishing virtue and performing continuous virtuous actions;
- the morality of working for the benefit of sentient beings. There are 11 ways to help sentient beings. Out of these 11, two refer to miraculous powers and having clairvoyance. Apart from these 2, ordinary beings can perform all the other 9.

2. Pledges in relation to **Buddha Akshobya** = 4 pledges - Those in relation to vajra mind, vajra speech, mudra commitment and commitment of vajra master.

When one receives HYT initiations, it is important to have the vajra and bell as the samaya implements. In terms of their nature, the vajra and bell symbolize the unified state of great bliss and emptiness of the Buddha.

- **The vajra mind pledge means to remind oneself of the indivisible bliss and emptiness**, arising from the practice of bodhicitta and wisdom realizing emptiness.
- The **vajra speech pledge is represented by the definitive bell which symbolizes wisdom realizing emptiness**. Seeing the bell should remind us of the view of emptiness, especially reminding us that dependent-arising and emptiness are non-contradictory and complement each other.
- **Mudra commitment or commitment of the seal – this requires one to meditate on the oneness of self and deity, the inseparability of self and the deity**. The reason for practicing in this manner of inseparability from the deity is for our minds to overcome ordinary appearance.
- **Vajra master commitment: This means seeing that the master is the source of all common and uncommon attainments.**

3. Pledges in relation to **Buddha Ratnasambhava** – 4 pledges: Generosity - 4 types:

- **Generosity of material things** e.g. food, clothing etc. Making offerings can be in relation to holy beings and giving charity to those in need.
- **Generosity of giving protection from fear** e.g. helping anyone in danger and this includes removing fear or troubles experienced by others.
- **Generosity of giving Dharma** – out of pure motivation, giving even one verse of Dharma

qualifies as generosity of giving Dharma. Helping to build stupas, statues, holy images, sponsoring teaching events are all considered as generosity of Dharma. Whenever one engages in generosity with pure motivation, that single act of generosity contains all the forms of generosity. With regards to generosity in Mahayana practice, it is the attitude accompanying the deed that holds the greatest significance.

- **Giving loving kindness to all beings.**

4. Pledges in relation to **Buddha Amitabha** – training in the outer tantra, secret tantra and the 3 Vehicles.

- The **external tantra includes Action and Performance tantras.**

- The **secret tantra includes the Yoga Tantra and Highest Yoga Tantra.**

Within the first 2 classes of tantra, especially Action Tantra, the emphasis is on the need to observe external behavior like cleanliness and so on. For the other two, emphasis is on inner practice.

- **The 3 Vehicles refers to the Hearer, Solitary Realizer and Bodhisattva paths.**

Since the practice here is HYT, the reason for much emphasis on the need to observe the vows of the lower classes of tantra and the training into the 3 Vehicles is to show that **although one is doing HYT, one needs to have respect of all the practices of the lower classes as well and not look down on them.**

The mental objectives of each vehicle might be different, but the trainings are important as one is trying to benefit all beings. To show that one has to learn and respect all the trainings.

5. Pledges in relation to **Buddha Amogasiddhi**: There are 2 commitments:

- **To follow the pledges of all the other Buddhas**

- **To make offerings internal** (mentally transformed offerings of 5 meats and 5 nectars), **external** (outer objects), **secret** (offering consorts to the deity guru) and **suchness offerings** (remembering voidness), as much as possible.

XI. Questions and answers

Q: Is there any sequence for taking initiations – e.g. should we take Mother Tantra initiations first or Father Tantra initiations?

Ans: Firstly, the purpose of Father Tantra Initiations like Guhyamsamaja and Yamantaka is to attain the Illusory Body; the purpose for taking Mother Tantra Initiations like Heruka is to attain Clear Light.

However, it is not necessary to adopt any particular sequence when taking initiations. The common practice is that once one has received a Father Tantra class of initiation, one is qualified to take any Mother Tantra initiation which requires a HYT initiation.

The commitments for HYT are similar e.g. 6 session guru yoga (this is to remind oneself of the Bodhisattva and Tantric vows) and one should always view one's Vajra Guru, Buddha, yidam (initiation deity) as inseparable.

If you forget this, even doing long sadhanas will not help you progress on the spiritual path. Best is to do sadhanas in morning. Be calm and focused and generate a sense of joy in meeting tantra and engaging in its practices. No forcing, otherwise, more “lung” (unbalance in the nervous system). Wake up early and sleep before midnight.

Q: It is said that depending on the quality of one’s practice, one can become Buddha in one lifetime or 16 lifetimes but do tantric vows last beyond one lifetime?

Ans: All vows do not last beyond the lifetime in which they were taken but the merits derived from taking those vows, carry on.

Q: If a person can become a Buddha in 16 lifetimes through taking certain initiations and thus clearly have karmic connection to Buddhas, why is that there are some people who change faiths?

Ans: Karmic interruptions do happen, but imprints are not lost. The teachings on the 12 links of interdependent origination show how interruptions to karma occur.

Q: Do we need initiations from both Father and Mother Tantra categories?

Ans: It is not necessary to do so. Every practice of a tantric deity contains practice for the unification of both method and wisdom practices.

Q: Is it true that the only beings truly qualified to engage in tantra are Bodhisattvas. Since I don’t have bodhicitta, I’ve taken initiations for the purpose of planting positive karmic seed to practice tantra in the future but have not put much effort into tantra practice. Is this the right approach?

Ans: It is not true that only Bodhisattvas are suited for tantra.

As long as you are a Southern Universe (earth) being, you are a qualified base to practice tantra.

However, one needs extraordinary inspiration to practice tantra and a firm understanding in 3 Principal Aspects of the Path because without these, one will not obtain vows fully:

- **Without renunciation towards samsara**, taking vows would only be in name. **There are 4 doors to breaking vows –**
 - (1) ignorance (no knowledge of vows, no Lam Rim etc),
 - (2) disrespect to Dharma/vows/Guru/ not seeing the advantages of having vows;
 - (3) carelessness (not bothering whether we hold or do not uphold the vows);
 - (4) forgetting the vow. With a clear understanding of Lam Rim and vows, take the initiation.
- **Cultivating bodhicitta is fundamental to taking initiations** – there is no point in taking initiations nor will you actually receive the initiation unless one has bodhicitta motivation to take the initiation to attain enlightenment to benefit not only self but all sentient beings.
- **One requires an understanding of the wisdom realizing emptiness.** Otherwise, how could we do self-generation properly?

We cannot simply think of ourselves as sitting there as a solid person and then without any meditation on emptiness, suddenly we become Yamantaka. Without emptiness understanding, it will not be possible to carry out the tantra practices correctly.

Q: Usually, we are able to read and learn about the vows before taking them – refuge vows, 5 and 8 vows, bodhisattva vows. But when it comes to Tantric vows which are given only in Highest Yoga Tantra category of initiations, we can only learn about the vows after we receive the initiation – why so?

Ans: Tantric vows are intensive and strict. They confer heavier blessings, and are very precious, thus not simply revealed.

For those without enough merit, when you hear the tantric vows, you might even misinterpret them and misuse the vows. Or one might not have strong enough faith to digest the teachings on those vows.

Hence, at the outset, a firm conviction and commitment to undertaking any vows for the sake of liberating all living beings is needed. **Lay vows and bodhisattva vows are lighter and are more easily understood and require less mind transformation.**

Q: 6 session Guru yoga commentary – when can we read Commentaries on HYT practices?

Ans: One can read Commentaries only after receiving the Commentary from a lama.

Q: There are 4 categories or classes of tantra: Could Geshela please explain why only the 1st category (Kriya/Action Tantra) and the last category (Highest Yoga Tantra) are most only commonly given?

Ans: It is possibly because Kriya Tantra is the simplest of all categories to practice and thus suitable for beginner to Tantra; as for HYT initiations, this is important because HYT practices (generation and completion stage practices) are needed to attain enlightenment.

Q: I have some fear of taking tantric vows of HYT, how can I change my view?

Ans: The feeling to have when taking an Initiation is one of great joy, premised on one's understanding of the common/Sutra Path. Of course, tantric vows given during HYT initiations are stricter than Bodhisattva vows.

Dharma is rare and tantra is even rarer. Meeting qualified masters with realizations to confer HYT initiations is even rarer. No point participating in HYT for its ceremonial aspects.

However, if the fear experienced is great, perhaps it is a sign that it would be better for the person to train more in the common path/ Sutra path before taking the initiation.

Q: What if one accidentally reads a Commentary before receiving the Commentary from a qualified master?

Ans: In order to read the Commentary on the Guru Puja for example, requires one to have received

a HYT initiation. Yet in the monastery, even young monks read it, though they cannot really understand it.

However, in-depth study on tantric vows requires HYT initiation.

Q: What is the difference between self-generation and self-initiation?

Ans: Self generation means visualizing oneself as deity; self-initiation is doing the complete self-initiation practice, with oneself as initiation leader.

Q: We were told that even if we don't hear all instructions during an initiation, we can think that whatever the lama asks us to do, we regard ourselves as having done - how effective is that?

Ans: Motivating that way is fine but there is no guarantee that one will receive the initiation fully. If one is mentally blur during the initiation, it is doubtful whether one has received the initiation or not. It is best to pay attention and follow the instructions.

Then even if there may be some lapses in hearing all the instructions, if one has strong conviction that one has received the initiation, then one would indeed have received it.

Q: If one has a busy life, should one take on more initiations?

Ans: For me and as advised by the past Kadampa masters, it is advisable to focus on a single deity because our wisdom and effort may not be able to manage the practices of many deities. To accomplish the practice of one deity is to accomplish the practice of all deities.

Q: What is purpose of visualizing the Buddha's body and the Buddha's mandala?

Ans: Visualizing the Buddha deity is to practice the 3 bodies of the Buddha's form + qualities. Visualizing the Mandala is to visualize the celestial mansion as that is one's future abode. **It is taking the resultant state into the present causal stage of practice.**

However, the main point is that **every mandala has the 5 Dhyani Buddhas, which represent one's purified aggregates. One should reflect on the qualities of each of these Buddhas and the practices associated with them to achieve purity.**

Q: Vajrasattva and Bendasattva - which is correct?

Ans: They are same – Bendza is Sanskrit, other is Tibetan.

Q: If a person is in coma, will the person still experience all these signs (the signs associated to the dissolution stages of the death process)?

Ans: Whether one is in a coma or not, when death occurs, all the external and internal signs are experienced. The length of appearance of the signs can be long or short.

For some people, it could even take months. That is why I said, it may be that we have already started. The moment we take birth, we are already heading towards death. Similarly with our skin.

As the earth element dissolves, our skin becomes very rough, loose and very dry, requiring us to apply cream.

Q: A person who is clinically dead, i.e. breathing has stopped, brain activity has stopped but the earth element may still be intact - how would this person be aware of the external & internal signs?

Ans: Although that person may not be able to experience things through the bodily senses, the subconscious mind remains alert in all these experiences. This brings a lot of fear and negative thoughts of anger, attachment or ignorance. The fear itself is negative. The practitioner should strive to remain steady, have a clear and concentrated mind that is undisturbed by the dissolutions.

Acknowledgement and dedication

Lamp for the Path to enlightenment, Lama Atisha

Lam-Rim Chenmo, Lama Tsongkhapa

Middle-Length Lam Rim, Lama Tsongkhapa

Collective Explanations on the Theory of the Womb

Four Hundred Stanzas, Aryadeva

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

Ornament for the Mahayana sutra, Maitreya

The Tantra bestowing the initiation of Vajrapani

Ten Teachings Sutra

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

Transcripts “Introduction to Tantra”, Geshe Tenzin Zopa, Hayagriva Buddhist Centre, July 2024

Transcripts “Introduction to Tantra”, Geshe Tenzin Zopa, Rinchen Jangsem Ling, Nov-Dec 2024

Introduction to Tantra, Notes, Geshe Tenzin Zopa

Four classes of Tantra, Geshe Tenzin Zopa

Buddhist Tantra, ebook, Geshe Tenzin Zopa

Learn to Differentiate between initiation, oral transmission, commentary and lecture etc., notes, Geshe Tenzin Zopa, LDC, 2008

(Transcripts “Introduction to Tantra” – Hayagriva/RJL - 2024, compilation and edition: Ven. Tenzin Kunzang: all mistakes, errors, omissions are mine only. Please refer to the original videos)

Dedicated to the swift and unmistakable return of Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche, the good health and long life of all our Gurus, the success of all the holy projects of our holy Gurus, to create the causes and conditions for all the rest of the sentient beings to see all their inner, outer and secret obstacles dispelled, so they can practice the complete Dharma (including Tantra), wholeheartedly, steadily and swiftly, according to the teachings and instructions received from their precious teachers and achieve full enlightenment as soon as possible for the welfare of all beings, for the world peace and all the victims of natural catastrophes to actualize a precious human rebirth and full enlightenment.

Care of Dharma Materials

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Lama Zopa Rinpoche recommends that images of holy beings, deities, and holy objects not be burned. Ideally, if undamaged, they should be put in a stupa.

Otherwise, put them high up in a tree inside a well-sealed structure, something like a bird house, so that the images are protected from the weather and do not end up on the ground or a cushion or a seat.

