

Advice for Mountain Retreat

Nectar for the Mind that Wishes for Liberation

By The Eighth Khamtrul Dongyu Nyima

*Precious guru, no different from all the buddhas,
The supreme light illuminating the unsurpassable path of perpetual bliss,
Who has the kindness to reveal it in detail to sentient beings,
Thinking of you I prostrate with faith,
And respectfully place you as an ornament on the crown of my head.*

Those who have made contact with their pure past aspirations and virtuous karma have the excellent intelligence to direct their interest far away from the worldly involvements of this life. Remaining in solitude, they wish to accomplish permanent well-being for themselves and other beings. For them, here is a brief explanation of the disciplines required.

This world of samsara is by nature suffering, like a prison or a pit of burning coals. Whether born in the higher or lower realms, one never passes beyond this condition. Perceiving it as such, do not be attached to any worldly happiness or wealth and cultivate a mind that genuinely renounces it. You have obtained the best type of body, one that enables you to strenuously apply yourself to the means of gaining liberation. You have been accepted by an authentic guru and have met the essence of the Buddha's teaching. Reflecting on all this, be happy with your extremely good fortune.

However, one does not know how long this vessel-like body will live. The time of death is completely uncertain and the karmic law of cause and effect is unequivocal. Therefore, it would not be right to continue amassing wrongdoings and die without having accomplished the permanent goal. Do not let the opportunities of this precious human body go to waste.

Immediately begin your practice and enter the genuine Buddhadharma. Without interruption, maintain an intelligent state of mind that decides, "I will not neglect the great responsibility of diligence under any circumstance."

Put your unshakable trust in the excellent refuge, the Three Jewels, and in your kind root guru who embodies them all. Think, "Whatever you do, you know best," and in this spirit, accept the guru as the only one in whom you can place your hopes without hesitation. Cultivate an uncontrived, fervent devotion for the guru and cut off the ties of wrong views, doubts, a restless mind with too many ideas, and so forth.

Since beginningless time you have had a continuous series of rebirths in this samsaric state. All beings, not only a limited number of them, have alternately been your parents. Realize that they have been as kind to you as your present parents but are now going the wrong way, confused and deluded, wanting happiness but engaging in activities that bring about the opposite. Contemplate this with intense loving-kindness and wish them happiness. With strong compassion, wish them freedom from suffering. Persistently generate the great undertaking of bodhichitta that includes the thought, "I shall single-handedly establish them at the level of Buddhahood." As much as possible, try to eliminate self-cherishing and detrimental clinging to self-centered considerations. Through the highest intention of benefiting others, become accustomed to giving away what makes you happy and taking others' sufferings upon yourself. If you cannot actually do it, just imagine it. Once you are familiar with this, learn to turn whatever you do into something beneficial for others.

You may have to deal with concrete dangerous enemies or with obstacles, hallucinations, and so on, created by spirits intent on disturbing you or causing trouble. No matter what happens, instead of creating much wrongdoing by getting angry, put on the superior armor of patience. Always expand your mind with love and compassion and try your best to be of help. The more you cling to thoughts of "demons" the more numerous

and intense the undesirable situations and harm caused by malevolent beings there will be. Knowing them all to be only manifestations of your own mind 's deluded conceptions, leave no more room for doubt about it. Thus, tame your mind over and over again.

Instead of censuring people, making them unhappy by abusing or blaming them with harmful intention, regardless of their high or low status, let yourself be flooded with affection and loving kindness. On seeing faults in others, do not criticize. Instead, look at your own faults and recognize them. Try your best to discipline this unruly mentality, bad disposition, and habits.

There may be certain small and large virtuous actions that you still cannot perform. When you see them being performed by others, such as your guru, Dharma brothers, other practitioners, or lay devotees, regardless of their position, do not become competitive or envious. Rejoicing in their deeds, do your best by various means to accumulate a great amount of immaculate wholesome actions.

Thinking, "Such a lowly person as I cannot help others," you become frustrated and disheartened. Put aside these feelings and take on yourself the suffering of all beings. No matter what unwanted events you encounter, such as sickness and misfortune, feel joyful, as past karma is thus exhausted. In addition, imagine that you take upon yourself all the pain, wrongdoings, and obscurations of all beings. When this actually does happen, take any adversity as the path to enlightenment by means of such joyous determination.

Never let your mind wander or be without concern for your practice. Always rest naturally in the conviction that the essence of the self-arising mind has been empty from the very beginning. Do not grasp at the natural expressions of the mind, the experiences of bliss and clarity, or the union of these two, but relax at ease. Avoid acceptance and rejection, such as manipulating your meditation by thinking, "This is meditation; I am doing

this; this is what I need." Do not be absorbed by a continuous state of delusion in which you are not recognizing the undercurrent of subtle wandering thoughts. Whatever thoughts of subject or object arise, simply recognize them. Without grasping, relax in that state of awareness. Other than this, forget about the fabricated process of struggling with remedies to eliminate the undesirable, which is suppressing something and pursuing something else.

Once you have recognized the stark, clear awareness that transcends dualistic mind and is absolutely uninfluenced by thoughts of the three times, keep it always present through mindfulness, with or without effort. Thus, go about your daily activities without desire or clinging. The essential teaching, expounded from many points of view, in all the sutras, tantras, and profound ways, is none other than the means of seeing the naked, empty awareness, the real face of the ultimate nature. Therefore, exert yourself unremittingly in this.

At the end of your practice session, dedicate all the merit of yourself and others for the attainment of supreme enlightenment for the sake of all beings, just as the buddhas and bodhisattvas of all times have done. Do this in a state where the three spheres - yourself, sentient beings, and the merit to be distributed - are not conceptualized. Then, without just mechanically repeating them, make prayers of aspiration that you may be able to engage in even a fraction of the deeds and liberating lifestyles of the buddhas, their spiritual sons, and all the great saints and teachers of the past. Carry out your practice observing the three instructions concerning preparation, the main body, and conclusion of a practice, in a complete form without allowing it to become sloppy. Through these three points it is very important to make any virtuous action you perform significant, whether corresponding to the accumulations of merit, wisdom, or both in union.

If one has acquired mastery over the unity of appearances and mind, it makes no difference where one remains in retreat. Beginners however, should stay in a mountain hermitage, in a retreat place endowed with great

blessing. It should be congenial and pleasant, where necessities are easily available. It should be isolated from the hustle and bustle of the world, and devoid of bad companions, such as vicious people and persons with wrong views. Your dwelling, friends, household things, and possessions should be sufficient, however simple they may be. There is no need for further paraphernalia - you should possess the wealth of contentment.

Do not associate with bad companions who pretend to be religious but are accustomed to behaving without Dharma and have an immoral outlook. Do not rely on a teacher who teaches wrong views and behavior. Whether you enter the right path or not depends on whether your guru is properly qualified. Therefore, search for the right spiritual friend. Having examined him, serve him well through the three ways of pleasing a teacher. Avoid embroiling your own mind with masses of discursive, insubstantial words, or piling up ideas or things. Do not be satisfied with taking a little bit of vital instruction of teaching - which is the quintessence of his enlightened mind - and leaving it at that. Request from your guru the whole of the teaching without leaving anything out.

Scrutinize it earnestly and resolve correctly any misunderstandings regarding the doubtful points. Through the strength of your meditative experience deepen your conviction. Successively integrate in your being the learning, reflection, and meditation of the complete instructions, including those on avoiding pitfalls and enhancing the practice. Thus, make sure you are entering the unerring path.

It is a great loss to take bits and pieces of all kinds of teachings renowned to be very profound, having mere intellectual understanding of them and leaving it at that, without gaining confidence or first-hand experience in any of them. Once the instructions have merged with your being, you will see that the central topics of all Dharma teachings - whether imparted directly, indirectly, or by their own strength - have been taught with a common criterion and purpose. Thus, the different paths or their outcomes are all compatible. The teachings you were given by your root guru are in

accordance with your own faculties and particular fortune. Consider them all-sufficient, merge them all into one point and put them into practice. They will then be most effective.

Do not evaluate or criticize the diverse Buddhist traditions and different schools of thought, or the teachers holding those lineages who appear to be of either important or humble position whoever they may be. The skillful deeds that buddhas and bodhisattvas display in all kinds of illusory ways in accordance with the inclinations and capacities of those who are to be trained cannot be weighed by the minds of ordinary people. To see them as good or bad is a sign that one's mind is biased. Do not find fault with them, for if there is no faith the seed of Dharma becomes rotten from its core. Regard your perception as being perverted by your impure, deluded conceptions and adhere to this understanding. Be conscientious about it and discipline your faith and pure perception so that it becomes impartial.

When meditating on a deity, reciting mantra, and the like, follow the corresponding authoritative texts and be determined to perform them precisely as explained there. Do not do your practice casually, the easy way. Once you have taken the commitment to do that practice in retreat do not allow yourself to be diverted by any other circumstance whatsoever. If it is difficult for the attributes of realization to be born in your being, or if the signs that indicate you are close to accomplishing the deity take a long time to appear, do not become impatient or frustrated or develop wrong views and doubts. Stand firm in your devotion, including the three kinds of faith - admiration, aspiration, and trust.

Make a strong commitment to generate unflinching resolve and constantly maintain it with perfect diligence. Supplicate with great devotion to your guru and yidam, who are inseparable, and take the empowerments. Admit your weakened and broken samaya, wrong doings, downfalls, and whatever has conflicted with the Dharma and endeavor to keep your vows thereafter. Accumulate merit by making large amounts of actual or visualized offerings according to the practice. Without clinging to a self,

take all good and bad situations as the path, especially so when you have a lot of happiness and wealth and an abundance of property, friends, and possessions. Feeling satisfied and delighted with these opens the door through which many subtle, obstructing spirits sneak through unnoticed. These will steadily cause a natural postponement of your Dharma practice. You should be able to recognize them and use them as the path.

Aiming at wealth with the basis of apparently doing altruistic work for others is wrong livelihood, and by doing so there is a great danger of cutting the life vein of your own liberation. Try your best to abstain from this and strengthen your actions by profound distribution of merit and pure aspiration. Do not allow yourself to merely become a Dharma practitioner like one at the end of these decadent times who is hollow like a taxidermist's dummy. Instead, take as an example the liberating lifestyles of past siddhas and remain in solitude in the mountains. Always check and examine within and see whether your mind is caught in the grip of attachment to the eight worldly preoccupations involving desire or aversion, hope or fear, and the like. Enthusiastically take up the hardships connected with Dharma practice. Be capable of ignoring your own suffering. Avoid doing things that will make you ashamed of yourself. Be someone who is confident of dying without regrets. Follow in the footsteps of the enlightened beings of the past.

Although you may have gained the signs of progress in your experience and realization, do not cling to these as being something good, and avoid becoming conceited. Even though you may have some good qualities, do not spread the word around. How ever high your level of confidence regarding the view and meditation, do not overlook the relative plane of the phenomenal world. Outwardly carrying out all your activities with purity, you should be worthy of being a beautiful ornament of the Dharma. It may already be appropriate for you to practice the outrageous tantric actions. However, you should be skillful at it, for it would not be right if your behavior caused the unruly beings of these decadent times - who regard the Dharma and people in a distorted way - to stray toward the

abyss of the miserable realms. Do not be governed by likes and dislikes or attachment and aversion toward the people you know, whether you have a good or bad rapport with them. Instead, take hold of all those connected to you by making pure wishes to become of benefit to them.

In brief, emphasis is put on the following points which subsume all the preceding instructions: Feel immeasurable joy, faith, and longing, having met the profound path of the unsurpassable mystery that leads to the primordial land of liberation in one lifetime. Do not let the teachings you have received from the mouth of your holy guru remain at the stage of having merely requested and heard them. Avoid being caught up by doubts and hesitation. Merging together devotion and diligence, make full use of the opportunities provided by your precious human existence. Make your own mind your judge. Do not offend the buddhas of the three times.

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Because, in such a deluded person as I, there is neither understanding of the numerous teachings I have heard nor any real confidence, experience nor realization has sprung from reflection and meditation. These instructions and words of advice are like a blind man leading others. In addition to not having any special value for clarifying your practice, indeed, this advice will only cause people to criticize me and me to become ashamed of myself. Believing clay to be gold, you have persistently asked me to write this as you specified, which I have done only not to turn my back on your request. But as this work lacks the quintessence of the vital instructions, I beg you to not rely on this alone and kindly bring to your attention the numerous teachings on mountain retreat written by the great saints. In particular, please consult *Extracting the Quintessence of Accomplishment*, a concise, easy-to-understand text, full of the pith of profound teachings written by Jigdral Yeshe Dorje, Dudjom Rinpoche.

This instruction on mountain retreat called "The Nectar of the Mind Wishing for Liberation" was requested by the yogin Lama Yeshe Rabsel,

who offered me a scarf and three coins of silver some time ago. It was written by me, Kalzang Dongyu Nyima, who comes from southern Kham, a hollow man of the termination of these decadent times in the form of a monk, dull and insignificant, who walks at the end of the line of followers of the lineage of real meaning. I composed it in the Iron Ox Year, 1961, on the eighteenth day of the first month at Kalimpong, in the Aryan country of India, at the top of the mountain Durping, in my house called Chime Deden Photrang, the Blissful Palace of Immortality, close to the monastery Zangdog Palri, the Glorious Copper-Colored Mountain. May it cause goodness to become supreme.