

In Praise of the Vajrayana

by Jason Espada

In Praise of the Vajrayana - A Brief Introduction to Buddhist Tantra

I.

The Skillful Means of the Mahayana

The Stages of the Path teachings cover the entire range of Buddhist teachings, from refuge, to teachings on liberation, to the Mahayana motivation and Wisdom. They conclude with reference to the Vajrayana, the 'lightning' or 'diamond thunderbolt' vehicle. We may wonder, if we have a compassionate motivation and right view, why we would need anything more. The answer that is offered is that Tantra is faster. It's out of a sense of urgency that we would seek out and make use of these methods.

The wonderful teacher, Lama Lodro Rinpoche, always emphasizes in his commentaries on different practices that the Vajrayana are the skillful means of the Mahayana, and should not be considered apart from them.

Alexander Berzin writes that 'Tantra is the method for putting all of the sutra practices together in an extremely efficient, holistic manner.'

and Beda Fredi said, 'Mahayana is the philosophy, and Vajrayana is the practice.'

If we understand the view, and the powerful motivation of someone who wants to help others through awakening, then these prayers and practices make complete sense. They come naturally.

II.

Sacred Outlook

Part of accessing these teachings, I know, involves a change in world view, from ordinary perception to what is called Sacred Outlook, or Pure

Perception. If Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are unknown to a person, and if they have a mundane view of themselves, and cling to that, then there's not much of an entry point, but when we have some openness and faith, our experience changes, we begin to see the divine nature of this world, of ourselves and all others. These methods work just as the traditions say they do. They help us to awaken greater wisdom and compassion, and the ability to help others.

III.

Prerequisites - the foundations for practicing Buddhist Tantra

Traditionally, in Sutrayana it's said that there are different levels of motivation for those who want to get the most out of Buddhism. They are - aiming for *higher rebirth*, for *liberation from samsara*, and for *enlightenment*. Specifically then in the Vajrayana, renunciation, bodhicitta and right view are the basis for practice. *All of these are based on ethical living*. Without one of these moving our mind and activity, our usual ego motivations are a cause of eventual suffering for ourselves and others. This is why the renunciation of samsara, otherwise known as aiming for freedom, has been emphasized by compassionate teachers in general, but *especially* before taking up these methods. Their reason is simply that if we only follow what our ego wants, and are not abandoning the common eight worldly dharmas, we're just making trouble for ourselves, and in fact these techniques can make things even worse for us.

It's been this way since the beginnings of ritual and people accessing forces beyond their usual sense of self - such methods have always been open to misinterpretation and misuse, but then they are not Buddhist practice.

It's really tragic that by far the most common association with tantra these days is with the manipulation of sexual energies. I can't speak to the traditions that teach this, except to refer to what Lama Yeshe says in his classic book, *Introduction to Tantra*, that

'We may feel that since tantra is advertised as a way of utilizing desire, all we have to do is indulge our uncontrolled appetites or increase the number of desires we already have and we will be following the path of a true practitioner. Some people do have this attitude, but it is completely mistaken. We should never forget that if wallowing in desire were the same as practicing tantra, we would all be highly evolved tantric yogis and yoginis by now!'

The Vajrayana introduces us to levels of being and to a world view that are completely beyond our ordinary conceptions, and to our innate capacities. This is radically different from anything we may undertake from our ego's perspective.

IV.

Self Power and Other Power

Even before we get to Vajrayana methods, in the Zen and Pure Land schools of Buddhism, the question of relying either on oneself, or on Another for spiritual development was worked with, and for some with receptivity, a way of combining the two has been taught. They say that we can do our own work on ourselves, greatly aided and inspired by the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, the saints and our own teachers. This is especially true when we practice Tantra, also known as Mantrayana.

V.

Beyond Binary Thinking

The most common questions when it comes to the divine in the Vajrayana is whether these Bodhisattvas are within us, or outside, and whether they are our own true nature, or independent of us. Such binary thinking - to say - if it is this way, it can't be that, and if it is that way, it can't be this - in my view doesn't apply when it comes to the activity of the Buddhas and

bodhisattvas. From what I can tell, all the ways of receiving their benefit are true, without any contradiction.

VI.

All this becomes more clear in the practice.

I would say that all of the Buddhist teachings are what they call 'self-revealing'. Without practicing, we may think we understand them, or speculate that something is or is not valid, but when we meditate and contemplate, pray and recite mantra, *the results are self evident*, both simpler and richer than anything we may have ever thought about them. The proof comes from the practice itself, and not otherwise.

VII.

The characteristics of Buddhist tantra

The Vajrayana is taught as 'having few hardships, many methods, and for those with sharp faculties'. When I think of all that people have accomplished using these methods, to heal and support people's freedom from samsaric sufferings, I'm amazed, and filled with gratitude.

We are all so different, and there are different methods to meet our own needs and temperament. For some, at times Tara or Quan Yin is most accessible, comforting and inspiring; for others, Manjushri, or the Healing Buddha; Vajrasattva practice is one of the profound means of purification, and Avalokiteshvara or Chenrezig can help us in wonderful ways, throughout all of our lives.

VIII.

Elements joined together

The Vajrayana makes use of:

the power of love and compassion

the power of liberating insight

the power of devotion

the power of concentration - samadhi

the power of the imagination, visualizing Pure Lands, and Buddhas

the power of sacred speech, prayer and mantra

and,

the blessings of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, saints and sages,
our lineage, and our teachers.

These are found in other ways of practicing, but in Buddhist Tantra they are joined together.

IX.

Empowerment

In addition, in the Vajrayana, we connect with a practice through rituals that are called *initiations*. The word *tantra* means *thread*, and refers to this transmission of enlightened energy, as well as to the continuum of our original nature.

I asked my teacher early on if a person could do a purification practice such as that of Vajrasattva without an initiation, and he said yes, but that it would help to have one, and I found what he said to be true. Initiations are also called '*the ripening empowerments*'.

X.

In times such as these

It's taught that in times of great need that Vajrayana practice is especially powerful. I can also attest to this being true. It really does feel this way to me now.

We are living in what they call a time of the degeneration, characterized by more wars, famine, threats to the environment and natural disasters; more addictions, loneliness and isolation; new and seemingly intractable diseases; more wrong views and deeply ignorant people, and an overall increase in disturbing emotions.

In times such as these we are very much in need of powerful methods to heal, purify, strengthen, nourish, protect, and benefit ourselves and our loved ones, and communities. For those with an affinity to these teachings, the tantras offer just such methods.

*I praise all the healing and comfort people have received,
all the light that's dawned,
and all the freedom that's been secured through these methods
May these increase more and more*

*I praise all the illuminating and liberating Activities
of the all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas
May we all receive their blessings*

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Part I. Introductory Essays

1. The Bodhisattva Vow
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The Bodhisattva Vow

There is a way of orienting ourselves to the world that many people over time have found to be greatly life-affirming. Based on universal love and compassion, and understanding the source of problems and their resolution, it is the intention to help others as much as possible. Included in that intention is freeing ourselves from whatever would keep us from offering such service. In traditional Buddhist language, the dedication to help others with both wisdom and compassion is called 'the Bodhisattva Vow'. Bodhisattva means, literally 'an awakening being'.

There are ceremonies for taking the Bodhisattva vow, but the true vow comes from our own heart. When we have this motivation, it is a breakthrough, no matter how many times it happens. It's the dawning of a new awareness. Finding the Bodhisattva vow in ourselves, re-affirming and strengthening that can give a person much courage and energy for their whole life. It clarifies everything, and helps us to have a feeling for our place in this world.

When we hear the cries of the world, we must be engaged -
Mahayana Buddhism

The term 'Maha-yana' in Mahayana Buddhism means 'Great Vehicle', and this refers to the aim, to work for the benefit of all. Being Buddhist in origin, the Bodhisattva vow includes the thought of enlightenment. In this and other religious traditions, the cause of our many problems is seen as ignorance, and the remedy is wisdom, or insight, which taken to its furthest point, is enlightenment. The vow is then taken to cultivate the highest wisdom, and to lead each and every one to that same state. Quite the expression of love, compassion and understanding of what we all need!

Two Traditional Verses

In the Zen Tradition, the Mahayana motivation takes the form of the Four Great Vows:

Beings are numberless, I vow to save them;
 Delusions are inexhaustible, I vow to end them;
 Dharma gates are limitless, I vow to enter them
 The Buddha's way is unsurpassable, I vow to become it

In the Tibetan Tradition, a verse for taking refuge and generating the highest motivation, bodhicitta, the mind of enlightenment, is recited before many of their diverse practices:

I take refuge, until I attain enlightenment,
 in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Supreme Assembly
 By the merit I have accumulated by practicing Generosity and other
 Virtues,
 may I attain Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings.

Here, the phrase, Generosity and other Virtues, refers to what are called the Six Perfections. These are the path of the Bodhisattva, as described in Tradition. They are Generosity, Ethics, Patience, Effort, Meditation, and Wisdom.

This Vow is the vibrant central principle of the Mahayana Path.

Yes, but how much can one person really do for another?

It has been asked many times – how much can one person do for another? What is this about someone vowing to do something so significant for another, such as 'carrying a person to the other shore', and freeing them from suffering? While it is true that ultimately every person has to understand and to actualize the causes of health and happiness for himself or herself, there is so much that can be done for another. I only have to think of what others have given me for this thought to become real to me.

We all need support and encouragement; freedom from fear and hunger; we all need to have medicine available, and enough warm clothes. Most of all, we need respect, love and clear teachings, in the form of good human examples, and in some language we can relate to. These are very great things, and the Bodhisattva vow is the intention to give all these things, all needful things, to all beings, our family.

Skillful Means

Once we arrive at the Great Way – the Mahayana , with its strong central motivation to serve all beings, and to liberate all living beings, we will utilize every resource, we will do anything to communicate the Dharma, take any form to meet people's needs, to benefit them, to speak in a way they can understand, and lead them step by step to freedom. Because of the great sufferings and needs that are here, we *must* search until we find the methods that work for us, and that are effective in helping others.

In Buddhism, over generations, a diversity of forms have developed from this very motivation to benefit self and others. These are called Upaya, or Skillful Means. Out of compassion, teachers and translators are not attached to any one way of doing things, or saying things. Although the forms may change, as long as we keep to essential principles of wisdom and compassion, then it is Buddhist Dharma. Skillful means are just what are necessary to help and to reach people.

When I think of loneliness, death, suffering, and all that is unpredictable and tragic in this world; the inevitable separation from friends and loved ones, the cruelty and madness, all the absurdity and waste – all of it – this one factor is the only thing I can think of that makes life livable. This one great vow reveals the capacity we have to help each other. It reminds me that there have been in the past, and that there are now, people who are working to help others, and that we can also take up this aim and this

work. That, for me, is the glory of being alive. We can actually do something of real value with our lives.

This intention makes it possible to live with an awareness of all the amazing good and all the terrible things, and to live with resolve, commitment and joy. This is the only thing, really, that gives me the courage to face whatever life may bring. If fear is the feeling of not being capable, then right here is where resourcefulness, blazing true confidence, and solidity are found. This one aim, this one intention, tips the balance, in favor of life.

{think of the Great Aim: bodhicitta is the aim to become a Buddha, in order to bring the greatest benefit to all sentient beings}

Vow

From this point forward,
I dedicate myself to removing the suffering of all living beings,
and to bringing them happiness

I dedicate myself fully to their healing and awakening;
to their all having comfort,
strength of body, mind, and spirit,
most excellent nourishment, health, longevity
every level of protection,
shelter, food, clothing, medicine, education,
joy and wisdom

In order to accomplish the needs of living beings
in the most effective way,
I will develop my wisdom and compassion
just as my teachers have done
I aim to become free of all faults, and complete in all qualities
and, day by day, hour by hour
to always offer as much help as I can

In this way, I will make a gift of my life
In this way, my own life will be fulfilled

I dedicate myself fully, leaving nothing out,
to the complete healing, fulfillment and enlightenment
of all living beings

No matter how long it takes
no matter how difficult it may be
no matter what it costs

With all my heart and with all my strength,
I vow to always serve all living beings
in every way that is necessary for them
and in every way that will bring each and every one of them
true and lasting health and happiness

From Going Beyond Ego-grasping and Revealing Our True Nature

All of the Wisdom teachings in Buddhism are talking about how our own mind projects an idea of things, people, ourselves and others, and then holds onto that idea, as if it were actually what is here, independent of our thinking. That ego-grasping is essentially wrong view. In Buddhism, it is precisely this wrong view that is identified as being the cause of all our negative emotions, negative actions, and unskillful karma. Of course, we are encouraged to see this for ourselves. No one else can do it for us.

And another crucial point follows this: ego grasping also keeps us from seeing what is actually here - what is called our True Nature, or Buddha Nature. Seeing through, or going beyond ego grasping reveals our Buddha Nature, which is naturally abundantly generous, ethical, patient, diligent, steady and Awake.

...

The action of ego-grasping, as well as the habit, the 'residue' or imprint of doing this is the cause of the afflictive emotions, and the self-perpetuating cycle of deluded suffering that is called samsara, with all the harm this involves.

Letting go of that wrong view, ego grasping, or seeing it for what it is and *seeing through* that, reveals a world of richness in ourselves and others. It was covered over by thinking, afflictive emotions and mental obscurations, but this true nature can be revealed. Then, effortlessly, respect for oneself and others, gentleness, generosity, and patience can arise. All the virtues are our Nature, and that's what I think teachers are pointing to, when they are discussing Wisdom, that going beyond ego grasping reveals our True Nature.

As Tulku Urgyen said, all the different methods come down to how conceptions are dissolved.

Then, beyond small ego-grasping, all the other Perfections function naturally, effortlessly. Then we *are* this truth, we *are* Generosity, Ethics, Patience, and the rest.

When teachers refer to interdependence, or to other reasonings, it is with the purpose of getting us only to see just this point that I made earlier: that we produce an idea of things that is not what is actually here. In Buddhism, all the analysis is just for that purpose.

Then, to be complete about it, so we're not just left with an absence of grasping our projected ideas, as one of the teachers, Khenpo Tsewang Dongyal pointed out, moving beyond our limited conceptions, we arrive at Greater Love, tolerance, Generosity, and so on. This is what makes the Perfections Perfections- that they are based on a realization of our nature that is beyond ego grasping. We arrive at the clear light nature of mind. I also like to call this the Ocean of Light that is in us and in all beings. It is, in the words of the Diamond Sutra, 'ungraspable and non-deceptive', and, in the Buddha's words, 'to be understood by the wise, each for himself'.

Of course, we need to calm the mind, and cultivate positive qualities, such as gentleness, gratitude, warm heartedness, forgiveness and generosity, to first pacify gross states and then to start to bring forward what is most true and best in us. And we need to cultivate the strength of discernment. But this sub-stratum is always here, as the verse says:

*It is not produced or destroyed,
not made better by seeing it
or made less by not seeing it...*

To go beyond ego-grasping and it's traces, sometimes the method is used of seeing ourselves, and others, and this world, as being made entirely of

light, translucent, and non-obstructing. We can still have concepts- how could we function without them?- but we need to learn to hold them lightly (pun, pun). This way we are not caught by them, to the seeming exclusion for a time of the greater world. Then our real depth and rich life is here. This realization is the cause of our own freedom from suffering and attaining happiness, as well as the basis for our being able to help others. As Dogen says, 'The treasure house opens, and we use it as we will'.

From A Collection of Buddhist Healing Prayers and Practices

In order to practice tantra effectively, we need to move at least to some extent beyond our habitual ordinary view. This is necessary not only so that we can believe in what we are doing and apply ourselves, but it is needed also so that we can access the resources we all have within us.

The bridge between the Mahayana and the Vajrayana

Although it is not usually expressed as I'm going to say it, I think there's a reason to speak explicitly about the natural bridge that exists between the Mahayana view and vajrayana view and meditation.

When a person sees through the ego, or sees that they are much more than they usually conceive of themselves as, the experience can be one of light, warmth, and richness. We could say they have a glimpse of the view, a truer experience, one that is more reliable. This happens when other elements, other than merely changing one's concept, are present.

There is a bridge linking the Mahayana Buddhist practice, of moving beyond ordinary, common ego grasping, and the vajrayana practice of mantra and visualization practice, and that bridge is what is referred to as Buddha Nature. When a person arrives at this from the study of various texts, and in his or her meditation, that can be the basis for all the various expressions of this fundamental nature. After all, where else can we get the energy, power or qualities that the different bodhisattva-divinities represent, other than from a source that contains all these potentials? Such is Buddha Nature.

From Like a Mosaic

When we are neither limited by our simple concepts, that we overlay onto experience and then take hold of as what is actually there, independent of our participation and thought;

And when we are not limited either by grasping at those elements that in turn make up a person, or place or experience as solid entities in themselves, then for our mind, the world opens up. Truly it does.

We enter into a world that is much like that described in the Avatamsaka Sutra, the Lotus and Vimalakirti Sutras, and in the Vajrayana - one of light, interpenetration, communion, compassionate responsiveness to the needs of beings suffering in the six realms and bardo, which are all appearances to their minds.

We are no longer caught in any limited concepts about ourselves, or others, our heritage, our community, or our world. The entire field is open to us, to receive and engage with.

Tantra is Resultant Path Practice

In Tibetan Buddhism, there are two ways to cultivate the mind, the causal path, and the resultant path practices.

In the causal path, we take our ordinary mind as the starting point, and through contemplation, and insight, we transform this mind, step by step.

In resultant path practice, we take the realization of our true nature as our starting point, and familiarize ourselves further with that. Tantra is called resultant path practice, because we begin with the goal in mind. This means we've had a glimpse of our original, enlightened nature, otherwise we'd have no basis to proceed, nothing to draw from to actualize these qualities, of wisdom, compassion, purity, and healing.

Ideally, these two work together, and compliment each other.

One example of causal practice are the instructions for gradually cultivating bodhicitta - the mind of enlightenment. We begin by getting in touch with our own samsaric suffering, and having compassion for ourselves. When we find refuge in the teachings of the Buddha and have faith that this is a path that can bring freedom from suffering, naturally our devotion deepens, and we practice the disciplines needed to accomplish our aim.

Seeing that all others are like ourselves, in not wanting even the slightest suffering, but not knowing what causes to cultivate to achieve their wishes, we naturally want to help them by sharing the knowledge of the path with them, encouraging them every step of the way.

There's a great difference between a mind that has merely glimpsed freedom and one that is established in that stable well being and peace, and who thoroughly understands the way to liberation. Wanting to help others as much as possible reveals the full significance of this knowledge, and

awakens the strong motivation to do all we can to help others through our own understanding, accomplishment, prayers and teaching.

This bodhi-mind develops the more we see suffering and what is needed for all beings caught in the terrible cycle produced by deluded karma.

By contrast, there is the mind that is originally one of love and compassion, and natural dedication to helping all life reach its goal of safety, peace and well being.

This is talked about in Zen, and in the Nyingma Great Perfection teachings, as well as in the Vajrayana, or tantra.

Revealing his Zen side, Thich Nhat Hanh referred to bodhicitta as 'beginner's mind, the mind of love';

and in *A Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems*, it's recorded that Nyoshul Khenpo would explain the specifically Dzogchen understanding of bodhichitta motivation in this way:

What is arousing bodhichitta according to the uncommon approach of Dzogchen? This is something that is not even mentioned in the other vehicles. It is summoning forth or evoking mind as wisdom.

The Great Perfection introduces the nature of mind as the source of all qualities. It is called 'the single - all sufficient method'. This is also called Buddha Nature, and it is the recognition of this that is the basis for tantra.

Without this insight, there'd be no way to proceed with Vajrayana practice. Ani Tenzin Palmo put it this way, when she said, to paraphrase, that it's not Tim, or Alice merely *pretending* to be Tara, but actually, Tara *pretending* to be Tim, or Alice. It comes down to this.

Lama Yeshe said:

According to tantra, perfection is not something that is waiting for us somewhere in the future. "If I practice hard now maybe I will become a perfect buddha" or "If I behave well in this life and act like a religious person, maybe someday I will go to heaven." According to tantra, heaven is now! We should be gods and goddesses (a divine being) right now. But at present we are burdened with limiting concepts...

Everything that we need in order to be complete is within us right at this very moment. It is simply a matter of being able to recognize it. This is the tantric approach.

The word for meditation in Tibetan is *gom*, which means 'familiarization'. We take this truth of who we are, and meditate on that in Tantra, our body a body of light, perfect and pure; our speech creative mantra, and our mind one with the mind of the Buddha; our environment a Pure Land, and our companions a retinue of beings with profound, wonderful qualities.

This is a training in recognizing the way things already are, in truth, all by themselves. When we stop a session of mediation, dissolving the visualization, what we are left with then is a purified vision. We can see the truth of ourselves and others and our world more clearly.

Both paths lead to the same realizations, but they have a different starting point, and one or the other may be suitable for a person at any given time. One thing is certain though, for resultant path practice to work for us, we need a glimpse or some experience to begin. This can come to us in meditation on our own, or we can be introduced to our true nature by a qualified teacher; or we may have an insight arise during an initiation. At that point, the resultant path, practicing tantra is open to us, realizing experiences of love, inner freedom and joy.

*May we all achieve everything the compassionate Buddhas and bodhisattvas intend for us:
the freedom and peace,*

health, joy and ability to help others

*May there be harmony and great love everywhere,
respect and reverence for parents and teachers and all true spiritual friends*

Part II. The Vajrayana View and Activity

View

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4. The Power of the Name
5. Blessings, Faith, and Devotion
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Knowing the World As a Sacred Place - An Invitation to the Vajrayana View

We are not here on Earth to be alone, but to be a part of a living community, a web of life in which all is sacred... this is something we each need to rediscover and honor anew...

- Llewelyn Vaughn-Lee

I.

If we begin with the view that this world is sacred, then everything that spiritual traditions teach us follows naturally.

This earth, and all that is in it is sacred: the trees, the mountains, and the rivers;

the fertile soil, the flowering plants, and the forests;

the air we breathe, and the sunlight, and the rain;

{Indigenous peoples, and all those who follow wisdom traditions have always known this, and it has sustained them}

Our bodies, breath, and movement are sacred, and those of all other people;

Our senses, our music and art, and silence;

And other species too- all these can be known without a doubt as sacred...

Knowing this brings great equality, solidarity, and affection, and we can begin to use words to describe our experience in this world such as

wonder, and awe, and exultation; reverence; holiness, divinity, blessings, and miracles.

A person with an ordinary view would not even dream of using such terms. For the time being at least, they are not in his or her vocabulary.

Spiritual traditions are here for us to know the sacred fully, and to share our knowledge.

We can see how life is when we are without this essential spiritual view-witness all the exploitation, and neglect, prejudice, and despair there is in the world. Beginning with an enlightened world view, by comparison, there are more possibilities, as well as the energy and inspiration to accomplish our aims on this earth.

To say it plainly, our world view is expressed in what we value, and what we feel is possible.

The prevalent world view at this time, tragically, is that of an impoverished scientific materialism, that excludes beauty and poetry, and so many aspects of our lives here. Remarkably, even the Buddhist traditions that have made their way to the West during the last century are mostly based on this limited view of ourselves and our world. It seems almost as though we walk on a different earth. We are all a part of something *magnificent* here, if only we knew it!

Once you see the sacred nature of this world, and all that is in it, you'll wonder how you could have missed it for so long; you'll grieve the loss, but then quickly turn to encourage others as much as you can, and you'll find you have abundant resources at hand for your work.

II. The Vajrayana Perspective

The starting point in Vajrayana Buddhism is an enlightened world view, one that affirms our spiritual nature, and the spiritual nature of all of our ancestry, and our world. This is how it can function as a spiritual path.

It is a view that includes the understanding of samsara and liberation, delusion, the six realms, and enlightenment, and Buddha Activity;

There are angels, and saints, and Buddhas and bodhisattvas everywhere, pervading all conscious life;

Our inherent Buddha Nature has traditionally been described as being 'like oil in sesame', or 'like butter in milk', as it's said, only needing to be churned to reveal what is within. The meaning is that we need only practice the teachings to know these things for ourselves.

If you ask, What is a Buddha? and, What is Buddha Activity? we can look at mythology, art and iconography-

Manjushri illumines, and cuts through illusion

Avalokiteshvara with one thousand arms, each with a different implement, shows us something of the innate creativity of our compassion;

The Healing Buddha cures all sorrow and affliction;

And Tara, ever youthful, quick to respond, fearless, bold, protects us like a mother, and awakens fresh energy and enthusiasm

- all these bodhisattvas, and more, inspire faith.

As I see it, the difference between the Mahayana and the Vajrayana then, is that in the Vajrayana these are not just stories. They are realities we can

know and actualize. We ourselves can *become* Manjushri. We can *become* Tara.

In the Theravada and in the Mahayana, wrong view is defined as self grasping ignorance. By comparison, in the Vajrayana, wrong view is referred to as mundane view, or ordinary perception. There is this great difference. Sacred Outlook, or Pure Perception is in direct opposition to the narrow, materialistic perspective, and it overcomes it, because it is verifiable for anyone who takes up the invitation.

*There are these fresh streams, flowing in the night, and at dawn,
where love is the light we see by...*

We take to be ordinary here what is in fact extraordinary in ourselves, and each other, and in the world all around us.

As the Saint Niguma said,

*On an island of gold,
You search in vain for common earth and stones...*

Now, we may ask, Why don't we see ourselves and our world this way? This is such an important question- in fact, I'd say it is *the* urgent question of our time, and of all times. Traditions tell us that it is because of our obscurations, and that these can be cleared away.

*Stay away from anything
that obscures the place it is in.
There are no unsacred places;
there are only sacred places
and desecrated places...*

- Wendell Berry

Our view can change, as when we wake up and become aware in a new way, and celebrate a fuller understanding. Then all that follows changes as well. This view will then become the basis for a new life, in a new world, with all our family.

For those who would make use of the miraculous in their experience, helping themselves and others, the teachings on Sacred Outlook offer a complete way of life and thought.

Every man, woman, and child, every animal, whoever has mind, has this great, indestructible potential for liberation and enlightenment. We each have an innate richness to draw from, and ever-present divine help.

The Vajrayana then also makes use of its View, and its Meditation, and Action. It takes up the practices of Sila, Samadhi, and Prajna, calm and insight, and compared to other traditions, to my thinking, it does so with a deeper understanding, and with more resources to draw from.

In Buddhism at its best, of course, there is no one size fits all, and no dogmatism. This is simply honoring fact that our spiritual lives here are unique, and most personal. In Buddhism, in truth, we should be warmly met right where we are. When we find a functional world view, we'll know it for ourselves. We can say, *'It works for me to think this way'*. It is practical, and onward leading.

This much can be said as an invitation...

Sacred outlook - Seeing beyond ordinary perception in modern culture, and American Buddhism

'Beware of confining yourself to a particular belief and denying all else, for much good would elude you – indeed, the knowledge of reality would elude you. Be in yourself for all forms of belief, for God (Truth) is too vast and tremendous to be restricted to one belief rather than another.' - Ibn 'Arabi

{I write this for myself, and my family; Here is the great 'what if it is so?'...}

So much of our pessimism and despair comes from the limited views we that hold of ourselves and this world that we live in. This is not entirely our own fault. It comes as well from our culture and upbringing.

We would expect that religions, such as Buddhism, would offer an alternative to the one dimensional world of consumerism and competition, and to the flat, affect-less life of scientific rationalism. Instead we find that Buddhism is often presented strictly as another philosophy, or just as psychology, and divorced from many of the elements that would classify it as a religion. This is understandable- to a point. Many people come to Eastern religions because Christianity and Judaism didn't work for them. And what's worse, they've had those teachings proselytized at them by arrogant, narrow minded fanatics.

We like to joke that many American Buddhists are in recovery from Western religion. For many, the straightforward, practical teachings on how to take care of our minds are of great appeal and benefit. This is all good, but, if this is all it is, there are some profound and precious things that are being left out of our understanding of ourselves, and our world and of Buddhist teachings.

One of the great things about these times is that we are able to look at how other people received and practiced these teachings. One thing we can

notice is that the starting place for many other people, in other cultures and times, has been very different than our own.

In most places, Buddhism is a tradition that is alive with wonder, rich with the presence of the sacred, and with the guiding influence of Enlightened beings. Here are a couple of quotes from modern teachers: The first is by Ani Tenzin Palmo, a British born nun, ordained in the Tibetan Tradition. She says, 'We are not alone. This universe is full of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who are on our side. And, as is known in all Buddhist countries, although it is not always emphasized in the West, we can pray to them.'

And Lama Zopa Rinpoche has said: 'You are not alone because all the time there are numberless buddhas and bodhisattvas surrounding you, loving you, guiding you, that is what they do...'

Now, if we compare this way of thinking to the general way people view themselves and this world, and the way that Buddhism is usually taught in the Theravada and Zen centers in America, there is a very great difference. One perspective says that we're pretty much on our own. Another perspective says that there are many enlightened beings we can call on, and that can help us. Now, suppose for a moment, What if this were so?

If this is true, as I think it is, then we've reduced our view of this world and ourselves, our traditions, and our options, and this is surely a great loss to us all. What we have when this is the case is a tradition that has been greatly dis-empowered, and therefore generations of students, and those they are connected with, are being deprived of very great benefit.

I recently heard an interview with Sister Joan Chittister, where she said that the maps we use are important, because they are what will be followed by future generations to make their way in the world.

My world is rich, but many modern day Buddhists don't share this view, and they explicitly or tacitly deny so much of our potential and possible experience. There are abundant resources available by which we can actualize our aims, and if these are not taken advantage of, then it's like going hungry, and having our whole family go hungry, while there are fields nearby that can satisfy those needs. It is such an unnecessary tragedy to not see this much.

Ani-la added that: 'This is not being theistic – this is being practical. If there's help out there, why not invoke that help?..

May we all be well and happy

May we all awaken to the blessings that are continually here for us!

In a rich world view, Saints, Buddhas, Enlightened Intelligence, Bodhisattvas, and Divine help are available. If we don't know this much, then what are we left with? – a string of doctrines, and we're on our own? No! Our lives, our world, our Traditions hold inconceivably so much more than that! And while it's true that not everyone can perceive these things, or has an affinity with thinking this way - this is how it is in the world - they should at least consider the possibility of help from these sources. And they should at least not dissuade others who can draw great benefit, solace and inspiration from the presence of enlightened beings in their world view.

Another thing that leads people to reject all religious views is that prayers or the methods used don't always work in the way they want them to. It's the truth that many factors are involved either in bringing a result, or when something does not work. Our lives have this inconceivable complexity to it, as much as we may want to over-simplify things. I can say with many others that the sum of it is beyond me. What then to do?

Where the methods, and the views they are based on enter into it, and I think the reason they shouldn't be rejected outright, but taken up where and when we can, is that they are born of our collective instinct for knowing, and for making things right in our lives. These are methods that have been reaffirmed in every generation. They are our inherited wisdom of what has worked in the past, very often beyond anything that was thought possible.

Let's look at this together. This is how it is in these times: the common, mundane perceptions we live with and pass around are really more accurately de-valued, degraded views, of ourselves, each other, and our world. This reaches these days, unfortunately, even into how religions traditions are taught and received.

I wrote this poem a few days ago:

*A grey scale teacher
splashes his grey scale paint-views
onto everyone and everything
They are a danger!*

*There is no joy there,
no color,
little depth of feeling,
little or no poetry or wonder,
richness or inspiration*

*Deprived themselves,
they deprive others...*

Part of the problem for us Westerners is our over-reliance on rational thinking. This function has its place, but there are also some things that only come to us through the door of the love, the door of the heart, through

faith and intuition, or direct experience. If we rely too much on the intellect here, it blocks us.

I've thought that one analogy that works to describe both what's true about the rational view and what it leaves out is a black and white photograph of a color scene. It's true as far as it goes, but there are many elements that are not seen.

Another analogy I thought of is this:

*If we look at an ocean through a pinhole,
what we see
is a pinhole's worth of the ocean
It's like this.*

Many spiritual truths don't lend themselves to being contained within concepts, and those who live just in the intellect suffer the loss of so many things, like the perception of beauty, mystery, wonder, intuition, inspiration and delight... These things are seen with the eyes of the spirit, and not with the eyes of the intellect alone.

Another element that plays into a common, mundane view is our pride. Every tradition, and common sense too tell us that humility is necessary for learning. It would be one thing if we knew we were arrogant, but when even this much self knowledge is lacking, it's really hard to learn from our teachers, this world, and our deeper nature. This is related to our receptivity. We can say: great humility, great receptivity; small humility, small receptivity; and no humility, then no receptivity whatsoever...

From culture comes a self created world view, and self fulfilling prophecy

{Here is a sketch of how de-valued, ordinary perceptions of ourselves and our world develop, and how they can be undone. Like any sketch, it leaves

out many things, but hopes to catch enough of the essential structure of what's going on to communicate its message.}

We live in a culture and a time that is lacking in its sense of the sacred. Wherever the best of human values are not given enough attention, or where religious culture is mocked or ignored, and where a sense of the beautiful is overridden by the volume and quantity of meaningless things, then we become inwardly impoverished.

We live in grossly materialistic times, that deny of the existence of everything beyond the reach of our ordinary five senses. Be assured, this has not always been the case in other times and cultures.

We may pride ourselves on having gotten over what we haughtily call 'infantile' views, of a spiritual world, or any higher order than what the average person can see. We denigrate 'magical thinking' as naïve, uneducated, false and misleading. We're so proud of our reasoning and science, and we set that as the standard for everything.

Modern consumer culture then isolates people, and over time, the human connections we all need grow thin. We become suspicious of our neighbors and friends, and set apart from family. The prevalent perspective is actually nihilistic, life denying, a tragic distortion of who and what we are.

The views many of us have inherited, just by the fact of having been born here, are then reinforced by our emotional reactions, which are then reflected back to us as appearances that are colored or tainted by our own minds. If our mind is not dealt with skillfully, a patina can cover everything. What all this adds up to is a disempowered view of what it is to be alive, to be a human being in this precious world of ours.

Collective views are shared in mostly unnoticed ways. They are pervasive, and are the ground of our sense of the choices we have, for change or development, or to remedy the problems we face.

To counteract this perception, or rather, misperception, we should be able to recognize diminished values, and degraded views wherever they exist, in ourselves, our family and neighbors, and in the world, so that we can replace them with something truer, something ever closer to the ideal. At the very least, our religions traditions and philosophies should offer us an alternative to nihilism. Life is available, and someone should say it out loud.

To love is to begin to remember who we are

What is it that brings light back into our lives? What will cause us to see ourselves and our world as it really is? Where will we find strength for all we need to do, and vision, and grace? Everyone, no matter whether they are affiliated with a tradition or not, can love. It can be a love for family, for art, for nature, for our teachers, for our young...

Love is the eye that sees beauty. In that one virtue there is light, and strength. There is daily food for the journey, courage and healing. We can add to this affection for our world a basic practice of meditation that quiets and clarifies the mind. Together, these two can enhance and deepen each other.

We struggle more than we need to, when we do everything but our inner work. That, we give short shrift. But this is that 'one needful thing'. With love, and regularly taking time for meditation and self cultivation, as a basis, and a way of life, we can begin to appreciate what Traditions offer, their great gift to us all.

In Tibetan Buddhism, basic ignorance manifests as what they call 'impure perception', or 'ordinary perception', the mundane view of the world that we carry with us, and this is seen as the root cause of how we limit ourselves and suffer. The opposite of this is called an enlightened view,

pure perception, or sacred outlook. This is a way of experiencing the world as essentially divine in nature, having great beauty and potential.

The following principles go beyond Buddhism alone, to reflect something of what is seen and lived with in other Traditions as well, and in the lives of contemplatives. They stand in radical contrast and in eternal opposition to the common, mundane view. Here are few tenets of a magical world view, pure perception or sacred outlook:

that all life is sacred;

that the Divine, freedom and peace, the Kingdom of Heaven, is within us all

that our fundamental nature is pure

therefore, that we all have the potential to become free from suffering and attain happiness; we can accomplish great benefit for ourselves and others

that this world is sacred, alive and responsive, and that we are inseparably connected to it;

that we are always connected to each other, to our whole family

that there are other worlds, other realities

that there are many levels of beings, seen and unseen

that we are not alone in this world

that there are powers we can call on, Saints and Saviors, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, Ancestors, and divine beings that will respond and help

that we are multi-dimensional beings, and so, things such as distant viewing, absent reading, and distant healing are possible

that there are faculties beyond the ordinary that can be developed, each according to our unique temperament and gifts, but to some extent by everyone

that prayer is effective

that ritual works

that mantra works

An enlightened world view, however we come to it, offers us spiritual food, expansive vistas, and the means to accomplish our aims; it offers us support, whenever and wherever it is needed most. I find such views closer to the truth of how things are. Whatever methods we then use, there is a workable operating basis for living that is full and rich. We are empowered by such views, and the heritage of our great resources is again, as ever, open to us.

From an enlightened perspective of this kind, the spiritual practices we do, such as study, meditation or prayer, aim to clear away what keeps us from knowing the truth about ourselves, and our lives here; the fullness of the gifts our teachers and benefactors have given to us, and what we have to draw from to act, to set things right as much as we can here in this world.

*May we all be aware of our true heritage,
and live lives of generosity,
great joy, and fulfillment,
of great peace, well being,
and benefit to all!*

- From A Belief in the Miraculous - Buddhism, Magic, and A Sense of the Sacred, from Great Circle Publications.

The Power of the Word – a justification

The value of reading out loud, and recording, and listening to useful teachings comes from their being expressions of the truth. It does not depend on their being read with a mellifluous voice, or on the translation. Something deeper is at work, which I call the esoteric power of the word.

One part of Aryasura's Aspirational Prayer in 70 Stanzas says,

*May all these beings be tamed
by relying on the sphere of action of my speech...*

and he is referring to something more than mere eloquence, or to a pleasing or authoritative sounding voice. That "sphere of activity" of his speech refers to the function of the truth that is in his mind. This is something mysterious and profound, communicating mind to mind, where time is not a barrier, or distance; and where race, culture, language, and social status are all transcended.

Christians have long known of this hidden aspect of the word, or idea, how it communicates power and blessing, and how it can inspire and guide us beyond what is specifically said. Through reading or listening, to be in touch with the Word is to be in touch with the Author of the Word, and in the case of a holy book, or teaching, it is to be put in touch with Truth Itself.

The Power of Truth in Buddhism also has a long honored tradition. Several early prayers recount teachings of the Buddha, and then conclude to the effect of, "because of the truth of these words, may our noble aspirations be fulfilled".

A recent commentator to this tradition, Piyadassi Thera, described the process of recalling the teachings as having the purpose of uplifting the mind of the listeners, even temporarily, to that level, where there is natural grace in abundance.

When it comes to spiritual subjects, a reading doesn't get its worth then from production values, or from classically appealing voices, or from scholarly translations. The value flows *through* these forms, to reach and to nurture generations of hearers.

The Power of the Name

Why is it that a name has deep meaning for one person, and not another? Why is it that hearing a word, or remembering an image can re-awaken strength and inspiration for some, but not for others? What is in the heart of these two different kinds of individuals is of a different nature, surely, and this is a fruitful subject to go into, for reasons I hope will soon become clear.

If you look up 'the power of the name' especially here in the West, the first references are mostly to the name of Jesus, which I will say something about in a bit, but first I want to explore this phenomena - that of *a word* or *a name* having power, as a universally recognized and applied truth.

We find this recognition in indigenous spirituality, where learning something's name requires deep respect and attention, and makes it possible to use call on that being as an ally;

The power of the name is also traditionally honored in Judaism and Islam, and is re-awakened through remembrance in Hinduism and Buddhism as well.

From the Hindu Tradition, we've received deities' mantra and dharani, that are *sacred words with the power to protect and redeem...*

And in the Theravada countries, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Cambodia and Burma, Protective Discourses, or *Paritta* are traditionally recited, including one called *The Banner Sutta*, that encourages the devotional recollection of the Buddha, saying,

*If you think of me,
any fear, terror,
or standing of hair on end that may arise in you will pass away...*

Consider how it is when a devout student brings his teacher to mind - tears may come to his or her eyes. *They are moved with gratitude* when they sense again all they have been given, and how much they have been helped, upheld, supported and encouraged.

Another person by comparison, especially the overly-intellectual, or the jaded materialist, tragically, would not know the gifts that are offered by our saints and the Holy Ones. Those who would decry this as 'magical thinking' are missing the point, and the benefit. For a time, their minds are closed.

The qualities that are there in a person when we see the power of the name at work are, universally: *reverence, humility, deep gratitude, and inner quiet, faith and devotion*. Without these, the name loses its deep significance, and it can stop working for a people. This is in spite of the fact that sacred words do have a certain power 'from their own side'. This only goes so far.

The Third Commandment in the Bible is usually translated into English as *Do not use the Lord's Name in vain*, and although I've heard this for decades, it never really occurred to me what this meant. Of course, we may relate it to cussing, but that's just our common, superficial reading. Take this precept apart however and its' great significance begins to reveal itself.

To do something in vain is to act, but not get any result from it. Take for example, *I went to the store looking for soda crackers, but my efforts were in vain*, or, like it says in the blues song, *All my love in vain...*

In each of these there was something hoped for, but not received in the end. What then could using the Lord's Name in vain mean, or *have promised*? Or, to put it another way, What was *not* received? I would say that *the meaning*, or *the power* of the name was not received.

With a callous mind, such as one that would use the Name of Jesus or the Divine or the Lord merely as a cuss word, what is absent is - the glory, or

the life enhancing power of that is manifested as that Name. Such a debased mind came first, and was expressed, and the great loss continued on. Such is the meaning of this precept 'Do not use the Lord's Name in vain' as I understand it now.

When we connect with a divine being, such as the Bodhisattva Avalotikeshvara, or Tara, and we do so with reverence, a power comes to us, and this is what we are uplifted and healed by. It is of another order altogether than what the mundane mind, or ordinary perception usually thinks possible, or even existing, but there it is.

The same happens I see now when people cherish the sacred Name of Jesus, or Mary, or a Saint. I know that truly these have the power to heal, and to uplift and illuminate a person's whole life.

Those qualities that enable the sacred to be known deserve to be spoken about, and unfolded in each of us, so that the fullness of life can be received and given:

Reverence contains humility and awe, and through it we are uplifted. We may feel this for our precious teachers, or for Divine Beings, such as Jesus and Kuan Yin, or the Buddha; we may feel this for our sacred earth, for one another, and and for our Noble Ancestors.

In each instance, feeling reverence for even a moment is enough to empower us and to guide our steps. We are not alone, despite what our ordinary mind tells us. We have not been left on our own, to struggle and to suffer here. The Ones we feel are our Companions in the spiritual life are *always* with us, as angels and ancestors, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, Saints and Saviors, and Great World Teachers.

Humility is often singled out, emphasized and encouraged in spiritual teachings across traditions for good reason, because arrogance or pride, even in very subtle forms, closes us off from divine support and deeper

nourishment - how much more so the blatant, closed minded egotism that is so common among materialists?

The great thing about humility though is how easily we may again open to deep truths, if we are not attached to our views, even for a short time. Many things can open a person, a loss, or personal suffering, a crisis in the family or in our world.

We may find again in a flash, and with thankfulness, that we are part of something far greater than ourselves in our striving. That divine help is always available, when we recall a name or recite a mantra, if we only knew it. We can awaken greater compassion, healing energy, wisdom and strength through mantra and through remembering the Sacred power of the Name.

Thinley Norbu said:

Because sublime beings are miraculous, their histories do not fit within non-spiritual reality and ordinary, intellectual reasoning.

Our usual way of thinking is so narrow, and it excludes so much that we need new language to speak of our experience when we open to the greater truths about our being here. We speak then of *mundane view* and *sacred outlook*, or *ordinary perception* and *pure perception*.

This is in the realm now of Right View, and where it leads, naturally.

At the end of many Vajrayana (Tibetan Buddhist) practice texts, the last instruction we're given to meditate on and to carry out with us into the world are that 'this very world is the Pure Land' we've been visualizing, 'all forms truly are divine, and all sounds are sacred sound - mantra'. That we don't see ourselves and others and this world this way is precisely the reason for our regular sadhana practice. It opens our vision to the truth and the enduring qualities of our being here.

The third of these mentioned highlights the sacred nature of of the word, or speech, and of the Name.

This is something that's been for the most part lost in our times, and so the effect of our prayers and mantra, the Holy Names are used in vain, ie to little or no effect, but this can change. We can again re-awaken the sense of the sacred, through our reverence, humility, inner quiet, gratitude, faith and devotion.

A word should be said here also about the place of of *silence* in the spiritual life.

See how common it is for monasteries and ashrams to be places of solitude, free of common distractions and noise, and also free of so much unnecessary talk. This naturally leads inwards, and refines the mind in ways that are too seldom known or held up as something we can and should all have as part of our lives. Without quiet, we stay on the surface of things, and then even our words, and the Names we use lose much of their potency.

One needs only take some time off from talking and from this immersion in language that is our common lot it seems, to see directly what I'm talking about here.

I used to take one day a week off from talking, and everyone I knew was aware of this. More time off from speaking will show the effect of so having many words and concepts. For the most part, we live in an ocean of language, with all the effects that has. Silence then purifies and sensitizes us to the deep effects that language can have at its best, such as we find in poetry, prayer, and sacred texts, and such as we find in the teachings of Noble Ones. Inner quiet enables us to benefit from mantra and from the Sacred Names we connect with and use, and receive sustenance and inspiration and guidance from.

Faith can lead us then where the intellect alone cannot go. What we know in our heart, by faith, is far greater than conceptual understanding, useful as that is in its own domain. With faith, we trust in our Sources of guidance, and healing. We can rest in that, and there is Peace found there, for our whole lives.

The way we experience this is ultimately most personal, and yet we can communicate. Now, how extraordinary is that? Here, we know our unity. We are of one family.

The power of a Sacred Name, when we are awake to its significance and what it represents, can transform our sorrow and pain, our loneliness and despair. Faith and devotion follow and increase naturally, and by the spiritual potency of the Name, the Way is opened again to peace and fulfillment.

Now we may reasonably ask, are all Names equal? A dogmatic person of course would say no, and insist we use only the names they alone claim to have received and understood, but we can see all the disastrous effects over time that such ignorance has had. My guide here is: *By their fruit you will know them.*

When we see the results of virtue and harmony, healing and respect for elders and traditions, both our own and beyond our own, that is a True Name, one that leads to the realization of Universal Truth.

*May our faith in the Divine deepen
and may that holy strength nourish and guide us all our days*

*May all beings everywhere awaken to the beauty of this world,
our ancestry, and our precious children*

May there be joy and the fullness of health everywhere and always

Blessings, Faith, and Devotion

The blessings of the Divine, of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, Saints, and liberated Sages encircle the globe at all times. Whether or not we are receptive to them, however, or draw these currents to ourselves, depends on our own inner state. This is where faith and devotion come in.

One kind of faith is receptivity. With it, we are open to something greater than ourselves reaching our lives, healing, illuminating, and guiding us.

Disbelief or spiritual pride block the receptivity we could have. Once we've made up our minds that things are a certain way, and that we are without support from the subtle realms, we've removed ourselves from the benevolence that is always here, at least consciously; And whether or not we put it in words, if we hold ourselves as equal to, or better than our wise spiritual guides, ancestors and teachers, we place ourselves above them, and can't receive very much from them. Humility is a prerequisite for learning anything, and never is this more true than when it comes to connecting with the divine in human form, or from the unseen, archetypal levels.

Alone one night, out of distress and shorn of pride, crying out, the hook of our faith can, in that moment, catch a pure force at work everywhere in the world. And our lives can change just like that. We may fluctuate, or even fall away from practice altogether for a time, but a seed of transformation has been planted. The world can become luminous again, larger by an untold measure, as new possibilities dawn.

Once faith has opened the way, and an intimation of a greater love and wisdom has reached us personally, the devotion that is then born is best described as a depth of love and trust that acts as a magnet for blessings. We begin to orient our lives around the sense of the divine wisdom that speaks to us in our own innermost language.

Faith then matures in us to a deep peace that comes from being held in tender, divine care, and from knowing our capacity to grow and change. Such trust in our teacher is also responsive. It strives to be ever more awake, learning the language of the heart that is becoming more sensitive to being guided.

The path develops in this way. We are not alone in our reaching for happiness. On the contrary, this world abounds with grace and blessings. If we are receptive to it, we can know this for ourselves, manifesting beautifully in our lives.

From 'Lineage'

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma Sambuddasa

Homage to the Blessed One, the Noble, the Perfectly Enlightened One

"Lineage is very important in Buddhism. Lineage is not only the historical record and genealogy of masters who have held a particular teaching, nor is it only the teaching itself expressed verbally or on a page. These are important, of course, but what is even more important is the spiritual vitality of that teaching as it is transmitted from mind to mind and heart to heart. In other words, the lineage lives in the thoughts, words, and deeds of persons who have received, cherished, practiced, and accomplished it."

- Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche

When I remember something of what we are all heirs to, a new power enters my limbs, and I'm aflush with love and devotion. I am carried along, even as I labor. And how is *that*, exactly? Even I wonder at it, but if you want to know just what result can come from fellowship, and knowing yourself to be part of this family, this lineage, and the inspiration that brings, then I can only advise this: stay here a while, and then look at what is born. Surely we do our ancestors and teachers proud, continuing what they have given us, aiming always to do it justice, and adding ourself to it, as they would have wanted. This love now continues with us, fashioning the best of all gifts for those we meet, and for our children, and our children's children.

The Resonance of the Saints

Even though a holy man or woman may have laid down their earthly form, their influence remains as a blessing to all who know them. This is hard or impossible to believe for the average materialist, and even in some circles where spiritual or religious matters are discussed, many have trouble accepting this idea.

In modern life, our senses are turned outwards. We may have grown numb and jaded, and disillusioned with false promises. We seldom register the slight changes that happen as a result of a written word, or an image; a voice, a melody, a color, or movement in the world. Still, if we were to train our attention to pick up on the usually small changes, they may lead us to discover marvelous things about our being here, and our connections to one another.

Usually when we think of some miracle happening, we assume it would be a gigantic change, something so out of the ordinary that it startles us awake into a new level of awareness. We imagine that something like a levitation, or an object materializing, or some illness suddenly vanishing without a trace would convince us we live in a miraculous world, however, it doesn't usually happen that way. There are great and small miracles happening, and we remain unconvinced.

I try to remember a line I thought of a few years back: 'The problem with a miracle on Monday is that by Tuesday we've forgotten about it.' Coarse and jaded we are, oh yes indeed.

The problem is that those dramatic moments so easily fade into memory, and disbelief. It would seem we would need to witness ever new and more impressive miracles to keep our faith going, and even then, I doubt we'd believe.

There is a tradition established in the time of the Buddha of not displaying any powers that were developed through concentration, such as clairvoyance. The reason was plain. The Buddha wanted to teach people the way to freedom. We can only imagine how crowds would gather wanting to see some unusual event, and if some display was made, that's what they would remember. They would go home having learned nothing.

When we speak of a holy man or woman, or a divine being, what we are referring to is someone who has reached the truth to an exceptional degree. Saints of any tradition can be known by their spontaneously ethical and deeply loving nature. They often have an elevating quality to them as well - we may feel blissful for hours or even days after meeting one. Witness the response many people have had to the Dalai Lama, or to Lama Yeshe, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, or to Amma.

That a holy person's influence remains after their body returns to the elements brings another level to it altogether, however. It means that, wherever we are, if we have faith and some connection to that teacher, or seer, or prophet, we can be enriched, uplifted, healed, and guided by them. This is not unheard of in the Indian Tradition. They realize that a saint transcends the limitations of his or her form even while they are alive, and that their blessings remain ever fresh and vital.

Often the reason people go on pilgrimage is to connect with the energy of a saint or divinity. Although a their presence is not limited to any one place, owing to the conditions of our senses, for some people it is easier to connect with that energy on an etheric level in a place where a saint has physically been.

People's respect and devotion to a holy person, or a teacher or divinity can also help us to connect with them. Devotees can consecrate a place or an object. They can literally help to imbue it with a particular spiritual power. More than once, I have seen and experienced how people's devotion can

open a channel between the worlds, so to speak, between these different levels of being.

Even just hearing someone speak of their teacher with great faith and devotion can open up access for us, for a time, and we can see and feel and receive something of what they are so moved and inspired by.

I have thought that we need to develop our language to talk about spiritual things, as ordinary words and concepts do not reach into the mystery, as Rumi says. They often have a way of excluding from our vision and senses those deeper sources of nourishment, strength and guidance.

When we speak of the resonance of the saints, it is their being that continues, and that communicates through their works, and through their students and devotees. At any time, we can pick up on the energy of a healer, a humble, wise scholar, a lesser or more well known protector and benefactor, or a great world teacher. Knowing this for ourselves comes as a supreme gift.

We are encouraged to avail ourselves as much as needed of the energy of the saints and the divine life, for our own sake, and for the sake of our family, community and world. The problem is only that we are distracted, that our senses are so covered over, and that we so strongly disbelieve anything out of the ordinary. But even some slight opening on our part, some remembrance, and all our faith can be vindicated, all of our faithlessness destroyed. After connecting to a saint, our old habitual sense of the world begins to fade. Our lives are blessed, and they become that much more of a gift to others.

Tantric Dimensions

It is an open secret among contemplatives of every tradition that we hold treasures within. We can have access to agencies and spiritual support that we don't usually avail ourselves of, and that are not commonly talked about, and their existence is the basis of our faith. The reason we don't know these things is only on account of the way we ordinarily use our mind. If we were to learn to turn around and connect with these truths, then the whole way we see ourselves and others and the way we engage the world right there would change.

Different religions have their own language to talk about what is unseen by the gross senses. Each in their own way have tried to make a language for the uncommon experience, and to show a path for all our benefit. In Buddhism, what are known as Tantric Dimensions can be talked about and accessed once we've adjusted our lives and perceptions in some ways. People can make their way there by accident, or because of their karmic dispositions, but it's usually then without reference points, or a clear way to get there again.

I heard the phrase 'tantric dimensions' first from a Tibetan Buddhist teacher from the Kagyud lineage here in San Francisco, Lama Lodro Rinpoche, who mentioned it towards the end of a set of wisdom teachings. It's placement there let me know that there are some requisites we need before we open to these kinds of experiences. In the Gelugpa lineage they speak of The Three Principle Aspects of the Path, as a minimum prerequisite for practicing tantra: the need for letting go of lesser, egocentric interests and motivations (renunciation), for great love and compassion (the bodhisattva motivation), and some understanding of the insubstantiality of our generic ideas about ourself and others and our world (right view). With some concentration, we need to be able to see through these, with love, and when we do, another world entirely opens.

I imagine a person going through a passageway into a large, well lit, circular room, with a number of doors going around. Behind each door is a different experience, of the divine life, such as that of Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion. Entering, we find ourselves in another realm altogether, with beautiful qualities of space, light and warmth, of pure friendliness, and spiritual presence. We can adorn it any way we like, suitable to our own mind, such as seeing it as a temple made entirely of light, where offerings are made, or as a Pure Land paradise, ever in the company of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, saints and sages. The truth will come through to us however we behold it.

Spending time and meditating there is sure to have its effect, opening our heart and strengthening us, informing anyone who has such an experience of just what love and wisdom we all carry with us, at all times.

The starting place for entering these dimensions is the same, and we can call that inner freedom and what it consists of, or, of our own deeper nature. From this ante-room-like experience, we can then access any of the tantric dimensions, each with different marvelous qualities and different purposes. According to our makeup and needs we will be drawn to one rather than another.

From there, we can access the sacred realm of Tara, the Divine Feminine, the Protectress, and Inspiration, the one who leads us creatively, and with joy. She helps immediately and abundantly when things are uncertain and jeopardous. Another of her forms, of White Tara, facilitates healing and greatly strengthens our constitution. We can access the realm of Manjushri, the bodhisattva of Wisdom, or that of the Healing Buddha.

Each of these has an historical aspect, energetically. This is made by the great prayers, visualization and mantra recitation of teachers and practitioners, past and present. In connecting with any of them we are connecting with this, surely, as well as these as with archetypal forces.

An archetype is an aspect of the universal soul we all share, and so connecting with any sacred quality within naturally leads to great respect for both ourselves and all others, who we will naturally recognize all have this same potential and source of strength, light and peace within.

Being Buddhist, by their nature, such wisdom intends our relative and ultimate well being, with each of our needs fulfilled, and all the way up to our liberation and enlightenment.

The realms we enter with these practices then are vast, and rich, beautiful beyond description, and worthy of all praise and celebration. We return with songs and poems, liturgies and clear explanations of what these teachings are about, after all. We return with renewed strength and inspiration, and carry the blessings we have known into all of our relationships, sharing them with all beings and with all the world.

That we don't speak of these things often enough, or that when we do they seem abstract and removed from where we are right now is only because we haven't met the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, angels and ancestors, guardians and protectors who are with us even now. Once we do, it's not difficult, I don't think, to speak of the divine light as being with us at all times, and as a trustworthy source of strength, comfort, guidance and support.

May we all know the ocean of blessings we carry within,
live with great love and compassion for all beings everywhere,
and fulfill all our compassionate aims,
now and always

Speaking of Angels

Preface

There's a story only I can tell. If it were not so, I'd leave it to others to say. Trying to use other people's language doesn't quite work for me either. I find myself stuttering, and getting lost too easily.

By far most of what people write never makes it into print, or it is not seen by others - indeed, it is not *intended* for that - but is set down just for the sake of clarity for the one writing it.

Sometimes there is a part of ourselves that understands perfectly, while another part is in the dark. The writer stands between the two, making apparent what had been obscure, making tangible what had seemed remote, making practical what had been inaccessible before.

When I read others' accounts the spiritual life, I enter their world view, and I'm constantly aware of the need to translate what they say so that it makes sense to me. Another part of me flows on, understanding the inner world in my own way.

So much is not born because it receives no encouragement from others in this world. A very few truths make their way to the surface on account of some encouragement felt from within. There's freedom in this, since the work then is only partly my own, shaped as it is by these finer forces I've come to know and write about for my own understanding.

On World View

For me, telling these stories is an act of faith, more than for curiosity. Since a world view *is comprehensive*, it covers all we think and feel, and do, and aim to do. Starting anywhere, as with a circle, will soon bring the full sense of the view that is intended.

Having an experience of a different order from the common life, whoever we are, changes *everything* for a person. It can be denied - 'I must have been dreaming', or it can turn a person's world upside down. It can also fit, somehow, and then our world is made larger, more beautiful, and interesting, with more possibilities.

The knowledge of angels or shining ones is usually kept secret, because of how personal these experiences are for people. We naturally draw back from any disbelief, or doubt, or denigration from others. We organize our inner life around these truths as we've experienced them, and so, until our knowledge is firm, we protect the light that guides our lives.

* * *

Angels I have known

I can tell of healing angels, guardian angels, and those who support my life in this world, 'money angels' I have called them.

As others have pointed out in their traditions, as with God, the angels, devas, and all those we can say are of a higher order of being are not bound by time and space, as most humans believe and experience themselves to be. They can appear as a circumstance, illuminated with the same feeling of warmth and intelligence as when they appear to us clothed with divine form.

One thing their appearance very often has in common across traditions and folk's telling of angels is that they come when they are most needed.

They can permeate our dreams, or rise up as a feeling when we're just walking down the street one day; they can come as a voice, or as a righteous impulse, or a sense of direction when we're lost.

Their nature is love and wisdom and power, beyond our usual thoughts. They communicate spiritual truth, and help us wherever we are in our lives. As an order of spiritual being, they have this function everywhere they are found. This is most personal. If we're receptive, we can learn a lot from them.

* * *

When the Buddha taught, it's often recounted that *the light of devas filled the grove*. Beings from other levels came to hear him teach the path to liberation and enlightenment. In subtle ways, they celebrate his teaching, with songs of praise and offerings of celestial flowers.

* * *

There is a class of beings who respond to our spiritual efforts. At times we can feel how they rejoice even when we just have *the thought* to practice.

I remember once when I was on retreat in 2012 and I thought of studying an in-depth introduction to the Pali Sutras, and sensing what felt like happiness and encouragement from the local spirits. I don't know the extent of their powers, only that they can facilitate learning in myriad ways.

I've heard one definition of blessing as 'removing obstacles'. There was a time in my early 30's when I felt like the road was cleared of obstructions to learning, and that whatever I turned to study came to me with very little effort on my part. We can say part of it was karmic affinity, but, truth be told, it felt like there was more to it than that. I felt like a part of it was help from the spirit world, surely.

Back before the days of the internet, I found out about the existence of *transcripts* by one of my beloved teachers, Lama Yeshe, and I sent letters out to centers all over the world, asking if they'd be willing to send me copies of whatever they had. Lo and behold, within a couple of months, from

every continent, photocopies of the books of these teachings appeared on my doorstep.

Now, you can say there was nothing exceptional happening, but the *inner feeling* was one of being helped.

* * *

An experience at work

I worked for an unusual bookstore for about six years, and there was a period of time when I would do my prayers and meditations at the beginning of every work day there. This sometimes took up to three hours, and it often happened that I had not a single sale during that whole time, but that *within a minute* of completing my practice, someone would approach the counter with books they wanted to buy. This happened so regularly that I almost came to expect it- and this was during a recession, mind you. I knew it was unusual, and that I was being helped by unseen, benevolent forces, and yet, such is the life of a person who is on their contacts, as they say, in touch with the spiritual world, and divine helpers, the shining ones.

* * *

When I was living in the South West, I heard a story from the father of my host. He was disabled, without the ability to walk without crutches, and he told me about the day his second son was born. He said he pulled into the hospital parking lot, and felt unable to move and be with his wife. He told me he felt so angry and and that he prayed powerfully, in a way that shook heaven and earth, and he felt a heat moving from the soles of his feet upwards, unlike anything he had ever felt before. Once this power entered his body, he was able to walk without difficulty to the maternity ward. He also said nothing like that happened again to him.

We keep stories like these in some hidden place, since they don't fit in with our culture's consensus reality. I imagine in another time and place and culture we'd openly discuss these things, and encourage our receptivity to the divine.

{See: Miracle stories, from *A Belief in the Miraculous - Buddhism, Magic, and a Sense of the Sacred*.}

* * *

How it feels at times

I recall staying at Tushita Retreat Center, in Dharmasala, India, in the late 1990's. By that time, I'd already had my fill of *the theory* of meditation, and the wisdom teachings, and I wanted to practice. Soon after arriving, I remember I made what felt like a half hearted prayer that, if there was anything I could learn while there about what is meant by Wisdom in that tradition, may it be so. Right away, I felt like a gentle breeze had blown open a door- that was the image that came to mind- and, sure enough, I was able to take another step in my study while I was there.

I'm reminded of a verse by Rumi where he says,

*Bring even your dry, hypocritical prayers
God, in his Mercy, accepts even bad coin....*

Why sometimes great effort is needed, and why at other times the slightest movement of thought can change the world is a mystery to me. All I know for sure is that there is this interchange between the worlds that people speak of, and that we can know and facilitate in our own lives. If it weren't for that, I'd not be writing these words.

* * *

Our Guardian and Protector

The divine has these two sides to it. One is what we feel and see, and trust in; the life we share with others, and our family. The other side of this divine realm is far more personal than that. It is uniquely individual, and can only be talked about in terms of its being *a feeling of Companionship*, beyond this one life even; of a Guardian and Protector; like an older, wiser, loving guide. This connection is one we cherish, and can learn from our whole lives.

It comes to us as healing most often, because when we suffer and are stripped down to what is essential, this is what we spontaneously turn to. This is the one that reaches out to us, and that carries us through the most difficult times; that reminds us of our heritage, and of all the other times that a way was made out of no way;

If we have any capacity to care for others, it's a reflection of the grace and encouragement, the warmth and love we've received from our guardian and protector.

Some may say we're anthropomorphizing- giving a human form to experience, but it does feel true to say it this way.

There is an intimacy, and a trust that isn't being referenced if we're just calling it our true nature, though it is that too. These incredible gifts come to us, inspiring many to try to find language that begins to express the extraordinary.

What to make of these few hints? Well of course that our world is richer, more complex and benevolent than we commonly believe. There are intimations of a greater world, invisible to a gross worldly view- one that is truer, more hopeful than reductive materialism.

The way is open. Our world is filled with loving and intelligent, spiritual force, and if we trim our sails we can receive these blessings. The current of divine help can carry us to the shore of freedom, fulfillment, and peace.

* * *

Deities and Their Retinues

What I have been calling 'The Shining Ones' are naturally existent phenomena. They are talked about in every time and culture. That being the case, there are some ways of thinking about them, and their Activities.

If we read about them, and approach them from the outside, they appear to us in one way, and if we relate to these truths from within, then it is a completely different experience.

We use art and poetry to communicate about things that don't come across when we only use ordinary language. An example of this can be found in the descriptions of Deities in Tibetan Buddhism - which are not creator gods, as in monotheism, but are *enlightened beings*, and aspects of our own nature. I remember something I wrote a number of years back called *The Power of Symbols*. In it, I said that what are called Archetypes are aspects of the universal soul we all share. They also exist outside of ourselves, or we could say in the realm where the inside and outside are one.

It's axiomatic across spiritual traditions that we don't fully know ourselves. Vajrayana practice can be a great help in that respect. Meditating on these divine forms brings out their qualities, helps us to awaken to who we are, and gives us the means of benefitting others.

It is often asked if that's all there is to these 'Yi-dams' - the names and forms used in meditation, and the question is an interesting one if we look into it carefully. It assumes we are here, our ordinary selves, in an ordinary world, with perhaps, we hope, some light in the sky we can use to help us

see and make our way through life. The Divine, as I understand it, has no such limits. We can't say it is there, but not here, or that it works in one way, but not in others.

How can we begin to speak of these things? And, what does this have to do with liberation and enlightenment?

If we take the Buddhist path as exclusive, in the sense of it being the one and only way to Universal Truth, and to living fulfilled lives here, helping each other as much as we can, then it would seem that Enlightened Beings as represented can be a help, but only somewhat. Another view is that the Buddha discovered and taught a universal path, with many ways to express liberating teachings, including though visionary forms that then get passed down as poetry and religious art.

Such is the case, I believe, when we come to the Tibetan Buddhist Deities. They are given names and forms, and they act to free us from confusion, and to benefit us in countless ways. How to speak of them more fully? Art does this with a *mandala*, with the main divine form in the center, surrounded by his or her *retinue*.

One way I heard to describe the retinue is that when a King travels, he has his Queen and Ministers, his doctors and Generals and soldiers with him at all times. Wherever we have one, we have the others.

Esotericists would say that the retinue of Divinities are elements that are 'enfolded' in their nature. Practicing any mantra and visualization will make all this clear as can be. These are qualities that are here for us to be revealed from within, and then they are fully self evident.

In the Vajrayana practices from Tibetan Buddhism, they take refuge in the Three Jewels, and they also have what they call Tantric Refuge, which is refuge in the Lama, the Yidam, and the Dharma Protectors (Devas). Here are lines used for this combined practice:

*I take refuge in all the Glorious, Holy Lamas;
 I take refuge in all the Yidams, the Deities gathered in the mandalas;
 I take refuge in all the Buddhas, those who have conquered and gone beyond;
 I take refuge in all the Supreme Dharma;
 I take refuge in all the Noble Sangha;
 I take refuge in all the Dakas, Dakinis, Protectors and Defenders of Dharma,
 who possess the Eye of Transcending Awareness*

In this practice, it's taught that the Lama is the Blessing Root, the Yidam is the Accomplishment Root, and the Dakini is *the Activity Root*. This is a way of talking about Divine Activity.

Dakinis are called 'Sky Goers', and the reference is clearly to their abiding in the space of the mind.

Without understanding the poetics of these practices, we'll take them all too literally, and they will become fixed in our perceptions and traditions, instead of liberating us, and moving throughout our lives, illuminating and healing, providing for our needs, and and those of our loved ones.

A couple of examples: in Medicine Buddha practice, both in its Sutra and Tantric forms, the main Medicine Buddha is accompanied by healers and what they call oath bound protectors, who are described as having the ability to help us with material resources;

The well known practice of the loving Bodhisattva-Divinity Tara often makes use of prayer to the Twenty-One Taras, which are different expressions, or manifestations of Tara, that meet different needs. Experiencing these individually increases the sense of richness, and our understanding of the basic practice.

Tara is also known as 'the Queen of the Dakinis', since she is the Activity of all the Buddhas.

One verse of praise says:

*Homage to Tara, she swift and fearless,
whose eyes flash like lightning,
born from a lotus in an ocean of tears of Avalokiteshvara,
Lord of the Three Worlds...*

And one teaching has it that the Bodhisattva of Compassion, on seeing how much more needed to be done in samsara, felt great sorrow, and from his tears Green Tara and White Tara manifested, and told him, *We will help you!*

With love and compassion, and an understanding of Buddhist Wisdom, all this makes much more sense than reading about it as if it were something separate from the Mahayana in general.

In practice from the heart, all that is said in the mytho-poetics, about the mandala, the Buddha and retinue unfolds beautifully, and quite naturally.

Engaging in these practices from within, faithfully, and over time reveals everything we need to know about them, and accomplishes the purpose of both ourselves and others.

* * *

Angels, Devas, Shining Ones

Sometimes a strong prayer opens the door
for you to manifest,
sometimes a few words on a page;

Sometimes you arrive unbidden,
and you are always welcomed

You always bring comfort,
and encouragement,
and increase faith
in divine activity in our world

Whenever I hear stories about you,
no matter the distance,
or how long ago they happened,
they feel as if they are talking about *today*,
and in *this place* where I am now

Honored Friend,
companion throughout all my lives,
guardian and protector,
help me to remember you

and may Devas kindly guard and protect
all children,
all mothers and fathers,
all elders,

all those who are poor,
the vulnerable,
the infirm

the doubting,
the despairing,

all travelers,
all those who struggle and suffer,
all those who are lost,
and all who are in need of healing

I pray,
comfort them,
and lead them all to safety,
health, and peace

Devas and the Arts

There are countless ways the divine can communicate with us, and remind us of our true nature, our heritage, that to be born here is to be in a sacred place at all times. We forget, remember briefly, and then forget again, and we struggle and suffer so, having lost our true identity, having misconceived who we are and who others are, and the nature of this our holy earth.

There is *no limit* to the beauty of nature , and to the arts, and often they are the nearest we come to re-remembering, to embodying this profound knowledge of the sacred. What *is* voice and instrument, color and movement, the inspired word, the unity and enrichment we experience through the arts? We know it as ancient and eternal, and we know ourselves and all others as worthy of reverence and celebration.

When I think of experiences of listening to Bach, or Mozart, for example, and being lifted out of the sense of this struggling, suffering world, it seems the angel of grace herself is with me then. I know it is this way for others also today, and every day, and I'm left wanting to clarify and enjoy just what has moved through this day and this form. It is light and subtle nourishment I wish for everyone, for all beings, at all times, this wonder and ease.

The arts will go on forever because these are eternal truths we are graced to be here with, and to enjoy. There is no end to the inspiration today, and it is something altogether outside of time, reaching into our experiences of name and form, and time. My joy will also go on forever because of this.

And oh how we need the grace of inspiration in our lives! We need this as we do air and food and water, and we need to share the gifts we have received every day, in as many ways as we can. This is all entirely natural, without effort.

Praise to the holy form, the sound of the divine, the loving heart of the world!

* * *

Can we become angels?

In the Taiwanese Buddhist and Taoist Tradition, a person can ascend to the level of a God, through having lived an exemplary life. If we ask how can we become an angel, I have to admit my vision dims at this point. The most I can say is that it seems we'd be speaking not of lifetimes, or aeons of spiritual development to reach that level, but of evolutionary time.

What we can do is aim to go in that direction, of being more purely loving, more dedicated to the benefit of others, more gentle, and patient, and more generous. We can celebrate all the things the angels do, the right efforts people make, every small success, and every positive motivation, and every great action that benefits living beings. If we do these things, we feel we are in the company of the angels, holy beings, sharing in their work, being cared for and supported by them.

* * *

Healing with angels

It's natural to ask whether we can use prayer and meditation to heal ourselves and to help others heal with the help and support of this Divine Activity. It seems to me there are Beings of Light that exist for exactly this purpose, that we can align ourselves with them, and their energy can flow through us. This quickly reaches the limits of language, but at least this much should be said. For those who disbelieve, it's almost but not completely impossible to offer convincing evidence. For anyone with receptivity, and a willingness to consider other possibilities far from the usual, some perception of this pure spiritual life can happen.

* * *

The 'How-to', in part

For accessing angels and witnessing their extraordinary Activity, the first thing I think we would need is a world view that allow for such things. Even without that, at times, the working of the Divine makes itself known, but, we may also block out any awareness of such subtle and profound events.

{See [this wonderful story](#), for an inspiring example, *Frank Martin's Miraculous Journey to a New Life*}

We can be open to the thought that such beings exist, and that they communicate in many ways. This is a start, and it makes the rest, of contact, and understanding, and being in harmony with them easier, beyond anything that can be expressed in language.

In addition to this *receptivity*, we can *take care of our physical environment, and our ethics*. When we keep these clean, the spirits are happy, and we can feel their presence and support.

Angels can come through in times of despair and disarray, but then it's a more difficult revelation. We are loved, and for the divine, for holy ones, there is no barrier to that. When we *pray* for help in times of need, we can feel the presence of what can be called the angels of comfort. When we pray for others, if our inner vision is open, we can see and feel their blessings being shared.

Celebrating all the wonderful things in this life, in particular those of a spiritual nature, puts us in accord with the divine. When we praise and rejoice in activities of good people, and of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, we join the angelic host.

We can also practice *gratitude*, and *humility*, a part of which is *deep listening* and attentiveness throughout our lives. Then we'll see more and more of what is happening in the spirit realm, woven throughout our own lives.

It may seem strange to add, but because it's so obvious we may miss it, and that is to say that if we want help in some area of our lives, *we should ask*. There is some spiritual help that comes to us in part because of our willingness. It's as if it's waiting eagerly for our assent, for our own openness, to change or to learn.

* * *

More can and should be said on this subject, but for now, perhaps this is enough.

May all beings benefit.

May we all receive all the help we need in our lives

May the sick and injured be completely healed,

May the lonely find good friends all their lives,

*May those who need work and material resources receive all they need
in abundance,*

*and may this whole world be a manifest place of love and harmony,
peace and celebration!*

Tantric Refuge

When a Westerner takes up Vajrayana practices, I think it's because they have a sensitivity to those finer spiritual forces woven throughout this world, and they are able to make use of their benevolent influence in their lives. Without this sensitivity, such practices as prayer, mantra and visualization would not make very much sense, and indeed we hear them criticized by outsiders to these traditions. There's not much value in debating people with greatly different perceptions, but perhaps describing the world view and ways of engaging the divine in the Vajrayana will be of interest and even practical to some and so I thought to write out a few thoughts on this subject. Mostly I do this for my own benefit. If others find some advantage in these ideas, even better.

All Buddhists are familiar with the practice of Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels, The Buddha as our Teacher, the Dharma as the Teachings we follow, and the Noble Sangha as our support, those who have accomplished the teachings, and whose practice we can emulate.

People who follow the Mahayana and then, based on that take up a Vajrayana world view and practices also Take Refuge in what are called The Three Roots: The Lama, Yidam, and Dharma Protector.

A combined verse of Refuge is sometimes recited and reflected on in Tantric Sadhanas, or methods of accomplishment:

I take refuge in all the Glorious, Holy Lamas;

I take refuge in all the Yidams, the Deities gathered in the mandalas;

*I take refuge in all the Buddhas,
those who have conquered and gone beyond;*

I take refuge in all the Supreme Dharma;

I take refuge in all the Noble Sangha;

*I take refuge in all the Dakas, Dakinis,
Protectors and Defenders of Dharma,
who possess the Eye of Transcending Awareness*

Although these are usually thought of as preliminary practices, coming before the main method, they are actually profound practices in themselves that deserve to be praised and taken up. It's a great advantage to understand the nature of Refuge and these sources of benefit for our lives.

The Role of Devotional Practices in Buddhism

Not everyone has a devotional temperament, but we do all need some amount of receptivity to truth as taught and embodied by our teachers, and those throughout time who have transmitted liberating teachings. If our understanding is just in our intellect, that is but the seed of accomplishment. It helps us a great deal to be able to feel in our heart the love and wisdom of our spiritual ancestors. When we resonate with them, beyond the language that is used, we are connecting with a rarified energy that can help us a great deal in our lives.

Buddhism has a reputation for being a do it yourself kind of religion, but that's just how it is seen by outsiders, or by those who prefer to practice by themselves, with the strength of their own will. There are other ways to connect with these lineages and practices though, and all are equally valid approaches. We're all so different in our makeup, there's no one way, honestly.

As Ani Tenzin Palmo said:

'We are not alone. This universe is full of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas who are on our side. And, as is known in all Buddhist countries, although it is not always emphasized in the West, we can pray to them.'

Ani-la added that: *'This is not being theistic – this is being practical. If there's help out there, why not invoke that help? ...'*

In Zen Philosophy Zen Practice, Thich Thien An describes what he calls Self Power and Other Power, and optimally, how they work together.

The methods of self-power and other-power were both originally taught by Sakyamuni Buddha, the founder of Buddhism. According to the teaching of the Buddha, every living being has a Buddha nature. Therefore, it is within the potential of every man to realize that Buddha nature and to become enlightened. But to reach that state is a tremendously difficult task, calling for dauntless courage and unflinching will power. Thus, very few people are capable of reaching enlightenment by themselves; very few have the required spiritual qualification. For the majority of people it is necessary to rely upon the help of others, and here we find the germ of the "other-power" schools.

We could also say that here is the reason we have the devotional practices. Connecting to wise teachers, and to the benevolent forces in the universe supports and helps us to to develop ourselves, to transform, to experience states of greater freedom and ease, and to help others. They can miraculously appear and provide just the help we need, against all disbelief. More commonly, they are a steadying influence, gentle encouragement, synchronicity or what mundane thinking would simply call good timing.

We do live in a magical universe, with an abundance of spiritual forces around and within us, permeating all of our lives here. That we don't often know them is on account of our obscurations, and our ordinary conceptions, but they are there.

The purpose of changing our thinking is that it leads to more openness, more receptivity to these positive spiritual forces, which facilitates their functioning in our lives. This can be done more formally, through reciting verses, but the actual change happens within, and is more subtle than that.

It's worthwhile to consider each of the practices of taking refuge in the Three Roots. Each of these are profound means of transformation, healing, liberation and enlightenment; they provide help, support and strength in various areas of our lives. This illuminates the meaning of taking refuge, and the advantages that are available.

When we contemplate

I take refuge in all the Glorious Holy Lamas

inwardly, we are turning towards our teachers. There are many ways this can be done. What they all have in common, I think, when they are effective means, are that these are heart-practices. Here especially, I think we have to find our own way, and that we can be open to learn from what works for others. Here is a simple verse I reflect on at times, along with directing my mind and opening my heart to the gifts and the light of my guides and mentors:

With gratitude,

I turn to my spiritual ancestors

I ask them for their support, protection and strength

and I open myself to their inspiring, positive energy...

Traditional Guru Yoga practices describe merging with the mind of the teacher, and this is surely one way we can connect with their wisdom mind. I also like to think that the function of a teacher is to help us to awaken our own wisdom, love, and strength. Reflecting on their lives and teachings and inspiring example, from our heart, awakens the sense of their presence in

us. This comes as assurance, guidance and revelation beyond what we knew before.

Taking *Refuge in all the Glorious Holy Lamas* is uplifting; it brings energy and inspiration. The Lama is called *the Blessing Root*, as connecting with our wise and loving teachers always has this joyful, exhilarating, and enlivening quality to it.

I've heard one definition of *a blessing* in Buddhism as that which removes obstacles.

In one teaching I was listening to recently, Lama Lodro Rinpoche mentioned that the Three Roots are included in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Why then would they be mentioned separately, meditated on in this way? I think the reason has to do with our teachers being closer to us than the Buddhas. They are the ones that make the teachings available, and cause them to appear to our minds as something we ourselves can achieve. There is no way to measure the great value of such a blessing in our lives.

I take Refuge in all the Yidams, the Deities gathered in the Mandalas...

The Yidams are referred to as *the Accomplishment Root*. These are the names and forms, and mantra practices we take connect with and take up to bring the result of our own and others benefit, in accord with the Holy Dharma. More than this, the spiritual life we are connected with has profound influence. This is so personal it's not easy to talk about, but something should be said, I think.

If you ask someone who is steeped in the Indian Spirituality whether they are monotheistic, or polytheistic, they may say they are both, or neither, or that such terms don't accurately apply. Truth is One, and the help that comes to us appears in many forms. Even for one person it can be that way.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche has said:

'You are not alone because all the time there are numberless buddhas and bodhisattvas surrounding you, loving you, guiding you, that is what they do...'

It can be surprising to find that others relate to the Divine in the same or even similar way as we do. It's uplifting to find that there are traditions we can relate to deeply, but the source of this feeling of being inspired by teachings on Buddhist Divinities is within us, as our own experience on some level, even just that of faith and intuition.

The *Yi-dams* are Buddhas and Bodhisattvas we take up as practices, either over the course of our whole lives, or when we have the need for certain qualities and powers to manifest.

When I think of the Buddhas on this level, I remember more fully that they are always with me, always available. I know in the next instant that these same Divine Qualities, of love, strength, and wisdom are in everyone, all throughout this world.

To *Take Refuge in all the Yidams, the Deities Gathered in the Mandalas*, changes what we think of ourselves, and others, and our world. A mandala is a sacred symbol we enter into in meditation, with a center, the particular aspect of the divine life, surrounded by all that we could say naturally emanates from and supports that Divinity. This includes His or Her Pure Land, and Hosts of Bodhisattvas, Protectors. We contain all this within us.

It's true, we are inherently rich, all of us, and this practice makes that abundantly clear. We all have access to resources we can make use of throughout our lives, for the sake of all beings in every realm, to ease their various sufferings and to provide whatever they need.

Avalokiteshvara

Tara

The Healing Buddha

*Manjushri
and Vajrasattva*

When we engage in Vajrayana practice, it's universally taught that we visualize ourselves and the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and Pure Lands not as flesh and bone, but as beautiful light, transparent forms, communicating, love. This is entirely in accord with how things are, as expressed in the Avatamsaka teachings:

*To all internal and external worlds
Bodhisattvas have no attachment at all,
Yet do not abandon works beneficial to sentient beings;
The great ones cultivate this kind of knowledge.*

*In all lands in the ten directions
They do not depend or dwell on anything;
They do not grasp things, such as livelihood,
And do not arbitrarily create distinctions.*

*They engage with all sentient beings
In all worlds in the ten directions;
Observing their essential nature,
They practice dedication reaching everywhere.*

There are a couple of ways we can hear the term 'non-attachment'. One assumes there is something there, and we are not going to take it up, or pursue it. This is ordinary non attachment. The other way, based on Buddhist Wisdom is to see there is nothing to be grasped, as far as an ego or identity goes, and so the mind is naturally liberated from attachment in a different way. We are then free to receive and give without obstruction, *unimpededly*, as they say.

The lines:

I take refuge in all the Dakas, Dakinis, Protectors and Defenders of the Dharma who possess the Eye of Transcending Awareness...

bring us to the third of the Three Roots. In general *the Dakinis* are referred to as *the Activity Root*. I have elsewhere written about these as the Buddhist equivalent of what we in the West refer to as angels. There are many levels of Divine Life, and safety and protection, healing and comfort, guidance and care comes to us in this form, at times, whether we see it or not. Being open to it makes for greater receptivity, appreciation and confidence in our lives that we are not alone, that we are helped in inconceivable ways on spiritual levels.

Taking Refuge in this Divine Activity is a gesture on our part of faith and a way of honoring the sacred help we have received in the past, are upheld by now, and will continue to be guided by and cared for in the future, until we reach an advantageous rebirth, liberation from samsara, and enlightenment.

Over the course of our lives, we're going to meet all manner of conditions that need to be responded to skillfully, with various means. We should all know the resources we have, simply by virtue of being human, and because we live in this world where there so many capable, compassionate spiritual lives dedicated to helping others. The way we find out just what we can access to help us is through faith and devotion. We move from a mundane world view to sacred outlook. The way opens just like that, and we learn gradually, almost imperceptibly, until we find ourselves one day standing on a very different ground, with this divine life all 'round.

The Avatamsaka Sutra and Buddhist Tantra

There are two ways a person can go about understanding Buddhist teachings. One is to study the sutras and commentaries, to listen to teachers and try to make sense of what they are saying on an intellectual level. The other way is to practice in line with what has worked for people in the past, all the way back to the Founder of the Tradition. When someone takes this second path, and they start to get some results, their reference point is then their own experience.

I say this only by way of preface to what I'd like to shine a light on here, which is the meeting place of the Avatamsaka Sutra teachings and Tibetan Buddhist Tantra. Both of these have been written about extensively, from the academic and practical points of view, but I've not seen them described together, and so I have this motivation to say what I see as they ways they converge. Everything I'll write here is just my own experience, of course, not backed up by any lineage or body of teaching, to my knowledge. I just thought it may be an interesting and potentially useful approach to the spiritual life, and so here goes.

When Thich Nhat Hanh talks about the Avatamsaka Realm, it's from the perspective of someone who is describing his own experience:

"In the Avatamsaka realm, the first thing that you notice is that there is a lot of light..."

On retreat with Thay on the Avatamsaka and Lotus Sutras in 1993, he made it clear that there is a way to know what is talked about in these scriptures for ourselves. The first couple of days he had us practice, he said, as preparation for more than just hearing the words, but of *experiencing* these truths for ourselves. The preparatory practices, or ways into these experiences, on retreat or in our lives, are the practices of mindfulness, and insight, and of great love.

I came to understand what a great poet Thich Nhat Hanh is by seeing how his teachings have unfolded for me and his students over the years. Although he introduced these themes in a five day retreat, those familiar with his way of thinking could sense that his recommendation during that short retreat was really for our whole lives.

Without mindfulness, concentration, and insight, the mind stays on the surface of things, but with it, more and more of this reality reveals itself. Having great love for our own lives, the lives of others, and this world is also indispensable to having a more true vision. The *light* he speaks of as being everywhere in the poetically named *Avatamsaka Realm* is there because of our affection and appreciation, because the light in us is revealing the beauty and preciousness of all of life.

He goes on to say:

“The beings in that realm emit light, and if you are struck by one of the beams of light, you yourself begin to emit light as well...”

and this is exactly how the world interacts with us, and how we share our realization with one another, with language, with memory and inspiration; with a look, in our joy of living, and in the gentleness and generosity we show one another. Far from solid objects we pass around, this light moves through all kinds of mind made barriers, to reach us in profound ways. We then go on with this life, giving in myriad ways.

An interesting thing happened in Buddhism a few centuries after Shakyamuni gave the teachings preserved in the Pali Canon. Sutras began appearing that had what seem to be fantastic elements to them, mythologies and descriptions of divine realms that were absent or given little mention in the earlier dispensation. Why could that be? One reason is given by scholars, who look at things from the outside. They debate the suppression or advancement of doctrines from an external, historical point of view. Another approach, in line with what I said earlier, is from the

perspective of someone who actually practices the teachings of the Historical Buddha.

As a result of taking up these teachings, a person is freed from the limitations of taking things to be what they are not, and, with love and compassion, more and more of what this life *is* is known and engaged with. All those sutras - The Prajna Paramita, The Lotus Sutra, The Vimalakirti Nirdesa Sutra, the Avatamsaka Sutra, and others, are describing the world as it is for someone with a degree of realization. Debate if you like, but I think that's missing the point, and by a very wide margin.

So where does it leave us humble practitioners? On the level of theory, it all sounds wonderful, but what to do with that? How could any of this help us in our daily lives and practice? Here again is where a Guide is invaluable. These worlds are not just fancy descriptions of experiences we can have, but they have a point to them.

All of the Mahayana teachings turn on the vow to benefit others. That vow as it's expressed is something much greater than the usual motivations we have, even when they are just and necessary in our time. The great Tibetan teacher, Yangthang Rinpoche, said that to think this world is the only one there is would be like looking through the eye of a needle and claiming that's all there is. The needs are extensive in just this world that we see alone, but the vows we hear about and are encouraged to take up in the Mahayana cover all we can see and feel for, and all that we will see as we mature, and as our capacities develop.

Buddhism is made accessible, I know, by limiting it to what people need in their lives, and what they can think of as attainable goals, such as getting out of their own suffering. Beyond this though, we find just how much we are able help one another, and a change happens in how we hold this whole venture, of getting free, and becoming available to our family and the world. The emphasis changes to one of endless dedication, borne of love.

This is the starting point for Buddhist Tantra. They say we need the renunciation of lesser motives and those kinds of enjoyments that hold us back from fulfillment, the right view of ourselves and others and this world, and great love and compassion. These *Three Principle Aspects of the Path* provide the entry to practicing Buddhist Tantra.

What tantra shows us is essentially how a person with these realizations sees themselves and others and this world, how they live, and their qualities and activities.

In formal Tantric practice, there are intentionally created visualizations of pure lands, seeing ourselves and everything and everyone else as being divine and completely made of light; of inviting lineage teachers and Buddhas and Bodhisattavas and their blessings; and there is sending out light and blessings to meet the needs of beings in this world, and in other realms as well. All this is 'performed', we could say, during a vajrayana meditation. It is then dissolved, and one rests in clarity without concepts about self, others, and actions. We then dedicate the merit, and rise up to enter into our daily activities, all the while training in the recognition that what we just imagined in meditation is *the way things actually are in themselves* to an awakened person.

If poetry and symbol are not understood from the inside, then religious teachings are worse than useless. The forms of vajrayana practice - a being with a thousand arms, emitting light, for example - is then at best an object of external worship, and at worse it can be a source of division. Whole books can and should be written about poetry and prose in religion, but suffice it to say here that if we are not using our own experience as a reference point when viewing metaphorical teachings, we're likely to get it wrong, and create problems. On the other hand, if spiritual imagery and metaphor, *from any tradition*, speaks to our own experience, it can only enhance our life and practice.

According to those who would take Buddhism and other religions just so far, our own salvation, and perhaps helping along a few others is enough to build a whole life's practice around. An interesting thing happens though as we grow and mature, and as our vision becomes more clear, and that is, that our compassion and our willingness to help others gets stronger, and more extensive. We then quite naturally start to search out other ways to uphold and to encourage our precious family, all beings, everywhere, and whatever their circumstances.

We don't really know just what we can accomplish until we experience healing and enlivening paths for ourselves, or until we meet someone who radically shifts our thinking about what is possible. When that happens though, we start to think about the whole matter of the spiritual life differently. It opens up brilliantly, and shows itself to be an endless path of learning and being of benefit.

Activities

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This is the way light moves

Suzuki Roshi, said

'Strictly speaking, there are no enlightened people, only enlightened activity'

and when teaching on the Mahayana Lotus and Avatamsaka Sutras in 1993, Thich Nhat Hanh said that in addition to the ultimate and the historical dimensions, we can think in terms of *the activity dimension*, which is the work of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, and own lives and actions based on wisdom and compassion. This exactly what the Buddhist tantra, the vajrayana teaches.

He has also said that: *'Practicing the path and liberating beings from suffering is the action of the bodhisattvas'*.

and

The action taken up by these bodhisattvas is to help living beings in the historical dimension recognize that they are manifestations from the ground of the ultimate.

Robert Thurman further clarifies what this practice is about, saying:

Once you have demolished the world which is built on the foundation of ignorance, then wisdom itself moves to build a world based on the foundation of wisdom.

- From an oral teaching by Tara Tulku

This is the way light moves

Your life
having travelled far
reaches me

Half a day's meeting is enough
or a verse
or a song played
and it's all here

and I see how
something of what you gave continues
and appears again in new forms
the same gift
the same love you unfolded so beautifully

this is the way light moves
from one time and place and person to another
not bound by convention
or age
not limited by our language

Seeing this much
I am at home again in this shimmering world...

An Introduction to Buddhist Prayer

In America, and in the West in general these days, people don't usually associate Buddhism and prayer. We usually think of Buddhism as a tradition that teaches quiet sitting meditation, and it is certainly that. Right below the surface, however, we find that there is a great deal of prayer in Buddhism. Some schools, such as Zen, may seem to use prayer in the usual sense only sparingly, while others, such as the Tibetan tradition use a wide range of prayers for different purposes. There are prayers for healing, for cultivating compassion and other qualities; prayers to pacify difficulty, and prayers invoking the blessings of our teachers, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, for support in all aspects of life.

To say what Buddhist prayer is, we would have to include two things: generally speaking, what Buddhism is, and, the nature of prayer.

First, a few words on the nature of prayer: What all prayer has in common, whether it is Buddhist prayer, or theistic prayer, is that prayer expresses a world view. Whether a person believes in God, or in angels, or in the intercession of Saints; or in the existence of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, prayer shows what a person believes in.

Even more simply, with some people, praying shows their belief that prayer works for them, even if they don't understand completely why it works. We don't need to have a lot of philosophy behind it. If a person has some experience of prayer being effective for them, that is enough to get them to pray.

A universal human activity

It's clear that people worldwide pray for all kinds of things. It seems to be a completely universal human activity: for example, parents pray for their children, without having to be taught; people everywhere pray for good

crops, and for safe journeys. I've heard one definition of prayer as 'a heart-wish'. In that sense, even atheists pray. And if there is a religious world view, then that is the form in which the prayer gets expressed.

As it is usually defined, prayer is reaching beyond what we usually think of as ourselves to receive support, grace and blessings from some benevolent power in the universe. It could be for ourselves, or for another, for a child or friend, or for the world. It is entirely natural, and spontaneous. It is the human expression of some need, or of gratitude.

Two kinds of prayer beyond words

In a brief overview of prayer, finally, there are two kinds of activity that need to be mentioned here, that are sometimes referred to as prayer, even though they don't follow the most known about pattern of using words. These two are silent prayer, and what can be called prayer-in-action.

The term silent prayer may be familiar to those who have studied Christian contemplation. Sometimes called 'the prayer of the heart', or 'practicing the presence of God', silent prayer can be a form of adoration, of thanksgiving, or it can be sitting quietly, with receptivity, a deep listening for guidance or for the answer to some problem.

A second type of prayer that may not usually be classified as such is sometimes called prayer-in-action. This is where it is not enough to wish for something, or to hope and pray for something with words alone, but when the opportunity arises, to sit still, or to speak, to recite, or to chant, or to move our limbs. This is inspired action, not separate from our prayers of aspiration. Here, there is a clear continuum between our thought and action. The same power flows through them, from the same original intention.

In both of these, silent prayer, and in prayer in action, there is experience on a level beyond words. Such prayer-fulness is then the state of a person's

whole being, an expression of values, and an expression of their faith. Of course it will remain the case that most of what people identify as prayer uses words, but this dimension of prayer is also fully deserving of our recognition and respect. The deeper, more encompassing definitions will always be there, for anyone who wants to pick up on them.

The second part of introducing Buddhist prayer, after speaking of prayer in general, would have to be to say something about what Buddhism is. Buddhism is a way to live life with greater wisdom and compassion. Its teachings concern the nature of suffering, and propose a path that leads to the absolute end of suffering, and to genuine happiness. This is accomplished through meditation and insight into our nature.

Prayer comes into the picture as soon as we start to consider the role of cultivated thought and intention in the spiritual life. Buddhism teaches training the mind, and one of the ways we can do this is by learning to direct our thoughts in a positive direction, away from harming others, and towards actions that benefit. Prayers of aspiration can set our motivation for a session of meditation, for a day, or for our whole life. Examples of this might be for a person to pray,

May I keep pure ethics today

or,

May I give up that habit

As with other kinds of prayer, the different kinds of Buddhist prayer express a set of values and a world view. Buddhist prayer, then, is prayer informed by a Buddhist world view. In every case, it is made up of a sense of where we are, and of the resources that are available to help; by what is going on and what is needed in the world and in the lives of living beings. It should be noted here that there is more than one valid, workable Buddhist world view.

A note on a Tradition that is beyond being theistic or non-theistic

In contrast to Western theistic prayer, Buddhism does not make use of the idea of a creator God. This is one significant difference. There are, however, many forms of Buddhism that recognize the existence of different levels of beings, such as devas, guardians, and local spirits. Many practitioners recognize and call upon the power and benevolent influence of our spiritual ancestors, present day teachers, as well as different levels of spiritually accomplished beings, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche has said,

You are not alone, because all the time there are numberless buddhas and bodhisattvas surrounding you, loving you, guiding you, that is what they do...

It may also come as a surprise to Westerners that, by sheer numbers, the great majority of people who refer to themselves as Buddhist practice what is called Pure Land Buddhism. Most of the Buddhists in Japan, Korea, and China, as well as many Tibetan Buddhists pray with great devotion to Amitabha Buddha, the Buddha of Infinite Light. Many millions of people recite his name-mantra 'Namo Amitabha' (homage to Amitabha) or 'Ami-tofu' and pray to be born after this life in his Pure Land of Sukhavati. This is regarded as being a heavenly realm, with ideal conditions for spiritual practice.

I think then that it's not enough to refer to Buddhism as merely non-theistic, and leave it at that. It is clearly not monotheistic, but it is, I would add, grounded in spiritual realities. Perhaps a better pairing then would be theistic and recognizing a diversity of spiritual life.

Generally speaking, theistic prayer is where you view the source of benefit as existing outside of oneself, and non-theistic prayer regards the sources of benefit as existing in oneself, or both outside and inside oneself. In Buddhism it's taught that ultimately the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and our own teachers are not separate from our own minds. Relatively, however, on the path we usually experience them that way, and so we can

benefit from connecting with them and relating to them within that framework, as we develop a deeper realization of our own enlightened qualities.

One of the ways of relating to Buddhas and Bodhisattvas is as a method of cultivation, where the 'external' and the internal complement each other. Here, one meditates upon a Buddha form with devotion and prayer, as a way to identify and to produce these same qualities in ourselves. The forms are used to help us to awaken our own Buddha Nature.

It's often asked: does the deity (Buddha or Bodhisattva) have an external reality?, and answered, relatively, yes; ultimately, no (meaning that they are not separate from our fundamental nature).

The reason I would first begin by describing all Buddhist Prayer at this point as the expression of diverse people's world view is to try to be as inclusive as possible. The truth be told, looking at the range of what is taught and practiced as Buddhism, there is simply no one way. Some people relate to the world as having many dimensions, and many spiritually advanced beings, and others just to this one world that we more or less agree on. No matter. Many different cosmologies or world views can work when it comes to Buddhist practice, or to the activity of prayer. However our mind is, there is benefit to be found in prayer.

Take, for example, the wish,

May you have happiness

or the verses for the cultivation of loving kindness and compassion,

May all beings be happy

May all beings be free from suffering

These are purely prayers of aspiration, and no faith is required in anything, beyond recognizing the power of love and compassion, and of our own thought and motivation.

From my own point of view, more important than the philosophy of prayer, is what all these practices point to. In whatever form we engage them they indicate the possibility of working with our heart and mind, and the possibility of transformation, benefiting ourselves and others. If we think prayer is something that could help us to accomplish this, there is plenty of room to have different world views and still have it work.

One example of a prayer that can work with different Buddhist world views, perhaps, would be recognizing that ethical action brings happiness, and unethical or hurtful action brings misery. We can then aspire or pray to live a moral life. Then, if our world view in addition includes the existence of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, highly realized beings that live to serve others, freeing them from suffering and bringing them happiness, or a connection to teachers, then naturally we will ask for their help and support.

May my teachers, and the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas help me to accomplish this.

Another example of a Buddhist prayer and world view would be that elemental universal wish for our children or family to have happiness. If this is informed by an understanding of the causes of happiness as taught in Buddhism, ethics, the training of the mind or meditation, and wisdom, then that wish for them in that sense becomes a Buddhist prayer. It reflects a Buddhist world view and understanding.

Again, if we include in our view the dimension of the existence of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and the blessing power of Saints and Sages, then, naturally, we reach to these sources of light and inspiration in our prayers, with the deep wish that they benefit those we pray for.

Here is a third example of what Buddhist prayer can be. By contrast, the peace of someone who has only known the effect that comes from taking a sleeping pill, and the peace of someone who has quieted the mind in meditation are very different. When a meditator or contemplative wishes for another to know peace and happiness, they have in their mind the inner peace and joy they have known. Such prayer is informed by their experience, the result of their Buddhist study and practice.

Buddhist prayer is the expression of what is felt by Buddhists to be ultimately worthwhile in life, and here is where another level of interest enters into it, if we want to know what many Buddhists are actually aiming to do when they pray.

All Buddhist prayer is informed by a Buddhist world view, on the nature of suffering and the path to happiness; of the preciousness of each life, and of our own potential. A fundamental prayer we can have from this perspective is

May all beings have happiness, and the causes of happiness

Then, if we are practicing taking care of our own life in the Buddhist way, by cultivating ethics, meditation and the freedom that comes with wisdom in the Buddhist sense, one result of whatever liberation we achieve is naturally a greater dedication to all others. This arises naturally - it does not have to be imposed from the outside. This is how the path unfolds. Beyond the level of obscurations and afflictions, *our nature is compassion*. From greater freedom, and greater empathy, our compassion can emerge. We can begin to recognize the fundamental equality of all, and to live our lives in response to that.

Enter the Maha-yana

What is called the Maha-yana, means the Great Way, in that, in its wish to benefit others, it aims to include all beings. A Mahayana Buddhist, in the

best sense, sees that what we all need for our flourishing is something more than the material alone. What we need, ultimately, for our happiness and well being, is wisdom.

The Mahayana Buddhist Way of Life is in many ways the complete opposite of self centeredness, and of short sighted, hedonistic, materialistic culture. It is mature prayer. It is altruism. And although it includes ourself, it is living in response to the needs of the world and of all living beings. It is a willingness to give one's life to that task of freeing all others from suffering and to bringing them all genuine happiness. Such a motivation places us in harmony with life.

This perspective, of wanting to benefit all others, is more than a reflex, or a superficial emotional reaction. It is the result of contemplation, and an open hearted response, seeing our place in the world of struggling, suffering sentient beings. As Shantideva wrote:

Although they long for happiness, they destroy the very causes of their happiness; and though they do not wish to suffer, they create the causes that bring suffering on themselves...

Such contemplations can shift the very center of our life.

Every Mahayana Buddhist, then, embraces what is called the Bodhisattva Vow as the highest ideal and aspiration, to free each and every sentient being from suffering and the causes of suffering, and to bring them all to immutable happiness. We aim all of our maturation, our thoughts and actions, prayers and meditations to that objective, of benefiting all others in every way necessary, material and spiritual.

This Bodhisattva Vow, and bodhicitta – the thought Traditionally expressed as,

May I become a Buddha in order to benefit all sentient beings

is a dependent arising. These causes and conditions come together: our perceiving the needs and seemingly endless sufferings of living beings, with compassion, and knowing a way out, naturally Vow arises from these.

Traditionally, as taught in the Tibetan Buddhism, before any practice, we set our motivation. We have the thought,

May this be for the benefit of all...

and this is the great motivation that empowers the prayers and meditations of a Mahayanist.

After that, during the practice itself, whatever it is, we aim to keep a clear continuity of intention. And at the conclusion we dedicate the merit, the positive energy of our practice, to fulfilling our purpose, for example,

By this practice, may all beings enjoy happiness, and the causes of happiness

When it comes to the activity of prayer, then, we can view Buddhist Prayer in terms of *path*, which is the cultivation of some motivation or quality, and in terms of *fruit*, which is what we give as a result of our practice.

Prayer as *a path* can be training the mind in ethics, or in loving kindness. We can reflect and cultivate the feeling, for example:

Meeting this person tomorrow, may I have patience, and not get angry with them. May I develop the qualities that will help them as much as I can...

In some places, this is called 'prospective memory'. As Matthieu Ricard taught, doing such meditations ahead of time that cultivate a positive quality, 'prime' us, or prepare us to engage with others in a better way.

Some people may wonder if prayer takes the place of meditation that calms the mind and by developing wisdom frees us from afflictions – meditation that has for millennia been regarded as the very heart of Buddhist practice. But it isn't the case that prayer replaces meditation, rather, at it their best, the practices of prayer and meditation are complementary to each other. With prayer we direct our mind and energy, and with calm meditation that liberates we can connect with and uncover more of our resources. We are able to offer something deeper and more useful.

In its broadest sense, prayer can be considered to be another name for Buddha Activity.

Buddhist Prayer *as fruit* then can be offering our light, and our peace to the world. This, at its best, can be a whole way of life for a Mahayana Buddhist. A Bodhisattva delights in benefiting others, seeing this as the most meaningful use of our life. No matter how difficult it is, no matter how long it takes, no matter what the cost.

The scope of this work is expressed in The King of Prayers, which has a verse that reads:

*Limitless is the extent of space
Limitless is the number of sentient beings
And limitless are the karma and delusion of beings
Such are the limits of my aspirations.*

And by Shantideva, who has the prayer:

*For as long as space endures
and for as long as living beings remain,
until then, may I too abide,
to dispel the misery of the world*

The Lam Rim Dedication has this verse:

*With my heart going out with great compassion
In whatever direction the most precious teachings have not yet spread,
or once spread have declined,
May I expose this treasure of happiness and aid*

Cultivating this path, we become more able to intrepidly engage and to guide others.

In nearly every school of Buddhism, understanding the mind has a central place. The power of thought, and in particular the power of intention is expressed in the line by Lama Zopa Rinpoche, that:

All of existence depends on the tip of a wish.

Thought is the power we use to shape our lives. ‘The tip of a wish’ here refers to our motivation. One teaching says if the root of a tree is healing, the branches, leaves, flowers and fruit will all be healing. Again, it is brought out that our motivation is the deciding factor in the quality of our work, our spiritual practice, and in what we give to the world.

As with meditation and mantra practice, an individual’s prayer can become a cultivated power. We don’t know what we are capable of, and what effect our own meditation and prayer can have until we make an effort.

It’s also true that the Traditional prayers we have received can be a great aid to our lives. Prayers that have been recited by many people for generations, with concentration and devotion, have built up tremendous power over time, and if we can connect with them, they can help us a great deal.

Add to this the fact that many of the Traditional prayers were written by people who are regarded as saints, such as Shantideva, Atisha, Tang Tong Gyalpo, and Tsong Khapa, as well as modern teachers such as Thich Nhat

Hanh, Dudjom Rinpoche and Lama Zopa Rinpoche. As such, they are rich with insight, and blessings.

Together with our own practice of having a good heart, meditation and prayer, we can gain the greatest benefit from Traditional prayers. For some, to be a self defined 'person of prayer' can be a complete way of life, responsive and awake. Prayer can connect us to the Divine. It affirms our connection with each other. It can engage our creativity in the moment, connect us to Traditions, and help us to meet both suffering and joy. Prayer gives us a means to respond, and to offer, if not an immediate solution to problems, then at least solace, and hope, and the best we can give at this time, not turning away in spirit.

Seeing for ourselves the great value and effectiveness of prayer, who would not want to engage its practice in some form? It is completely natural to want to do so, especially when we see more and more of the needs that exist, and what can be done with prayer. We can direct our mind to virtue, link up with and draw from sources of great benefit, and share that with all.

May all beings benefit.

Prayer as Buddha Activity

Prayer is Buddha Activity - the awakened heart responding to the needs of the world. To think of it this way is different from the usual idea about prayer, but doing so helps us to understand both the act of prayer, and what is meant by a Buddha, or one who is Awake.

The mere gesture of placing the palms together may or may not be one of prayer. It all depends on what is going on inside a person. Someone can be thinking of anything at all. When they are thinking of and appealing to the divine, in the unique way that only they can know, then the outward gesture of prayer, in the traditional sense, matches what is going on inside.

Prayer has been described sometimes as a conversation, and at other times as praise, or as a deep listening for 'the still, small voice'. It can be an upwelling, an exuberance. At other times, and it can be an attending to what we know, buried deep within us, as a source of solace, guidance and encouragement.

Prayer has been described as changing *us*, and not the nature of the one prayed to. We become more receptive, more malleable, more attuned to truth and love. This is true whether our prayer is in the Christian context, to God, or Jesus, or to the Saints of that tradition, or in a Buddhist framework, to the divine as found there.

Rumi said:

Work on your stony qualities and become resplendent like the ruby

Prayer also reaches out, in every tradition, it moves through us, and into the world. This is true whether we are in our cell, meditating on the world as it is, and on the needs of our loved ones, strangers, friends, co-workers and adversaries of the moment, or whether we are out and about in our daily lives, speaking, and working.

I remember a book of Christian prayer I came across in India in the 90's with the title 'Prayer in Action'. Its theme was that there are forms of prayer that are active, and that are without words at times, doing one's share of the will of the Father, building the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth.

This broadens the definition of prayer to divine activity, or to the activity of the divine in us and through us.

*Dig a well in the earth of this body,
or even before the well is dug
let God draw the water up.*

There is an effort to be made, then effortless-ness, something greater than our usual idea of ourselves becoming active.

There are the same ideas in Buddhism, and knowing about them helps clarify the nature of an awakened person, in any tradition.

There is an effort to be made, and then, when there is realization, or an awakening, the very nature of such a person is active. Whether they show peace and stability - I'm thinking of Thich Nhat Hanh and Ajaan Chah, sitting with such great stability and dignity- or whether they demonstrate the joy of the Way and the realized life, and thereby energize and encourage us, as with Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche, and some Zen masters, their being *is* their doing. What they are, and what they have realized inside communicates and inspires. It is a catalyst. It edifies and uplifts the mind and the heart. It is like the proverbial 'stream clearing jewel', cleaning the muck from our thought and perceptions, revealing the beauty and preciousness of this life and the world.

This buddha nature - this original nature- also acts by organizing, by teaching, by writing and speaking, by giving food and clothing, and

medicine and care, and every needful thing. It heals. It is grounded in this present reality, and is far seeing.

There is so much to be done in this world as it is now, but I have faith that we can awaken to the truth of our being here, and it is with this wisdom and compassion, this divine life, that we will continue creating a world based on truth, and love.

Great River of Compassion - An Introduction to Mantra - for Westerners

Avalokiteshvara, help me to say this rightly, for all who could benefit from it.

Mantra:

I: A set of sacred syllables, repeated to attain a spiritual benefit

II. From the Sanskrit: A tool for thinking. 1. Prescribed syllables, in Sanskrit, to protect the mind from defilements. They express the essence of specific energies. The recitation of mantras is sometimes done with specific visualizations. 2. Often, Mantra is used as a synonym for Vajra, or Tantra, as in 'Mantrayana' - the path of mantra.

In thinking about writing this introduction, I've tried to bring to mind the most commonly asked questions about mantra practices. I know, first off, that most people have no interest in this subject, feeling completely sure, for some reason, that these practices don't work, and that it's a meaningless subject for them to learn anything about.

A second, much smaller group tend in the opposite direction - without trying things, they believe what they hear. They take it on faith, or because it sounds reasonable, or because it fits with their world view of what's possible.

Both of these extremes, of tending toward credulity, or a pre-judged disbelief, would have to be set aside, before anything new can be learned, especially when it comes to more recondite subjects - where there is a lot that is hidden, or subtle - outside the range of our usual perceptions.

Instead of believing or not believing from the outset, perhaps someone new to this subject could listen to these ideas more as an invitation, to try some of these practices, or to see things in a different way.

I hope in these pages to be able to share some basic information, and to offer as much as I can in the way of warm encouragement to practice. The effects can really be great, profound and life-altering. They can change what we think of as ourselves, and what we think of as 'a human being'. As Rumi said, "Human beings are mines..." We have all these riches inside us. All these potentials. May they manifest effortlessly in whatever way, and as much as necessary for the benefit of living beings.

Imagine if someone told you that you had a pot of gold right around the corner from where you are standing, in your very own backyard. Whether or not you knew this person, it would at least be worth a look. If they even said that you had a single gold coin, most of us would at least look. The usefulness of money is something we can all relate to - 'no harm in trying', we'd say. And yet, compared to the claims that are made about the power of mantra, the usefulness of money is limited, almost nothing. There are other kinds of wealth near at hand that we can have access to and make use of.

Our body contains medicine

When we're first introduced to the idea that there are healing properties within our body and mind, that can be contacted and increased, we might be surprised. After all, it goes against everything we've been taught about who we are - and these beliefs can be quite solid.

If someone says to you that your body contains healing properties that can be awakened and increased, it's like being told that there's gold nearby, in your own yard. First, you'd want to know where, and second, how much! Well, the teachings on mantra provide the 'where' - the directions, if you will, to inner treasures.

As far as the 'how much', I'll repeat what tradition teaches, and that is, that it depends on the person and the practice itself what will come about. As

always, there is the invitation to practice, to experience and see for yourself, along with the encouragement that these practices could be of great benefit to yourself and others.

If you find you are interested, then please do give these practices a fair try, in terms of time and effort, as it's said, to awaken the energy of the mantra.

Working from two directions

Let's say you want to cultivate compassion. You may choose to recite the compassion mantra, OM MANI PEME HUM. An experience like this may follow: you can feel peaceful, and have a warm feeling. You may see light like sunlight, rising from within. You may want to share that feeling or express that feeling in some way...

While reciting, you may pause, and say, "may all beings be happy", "may all beings be peaceful...", or make prayers of that nature.

The feeling then can be somewhat different - as if you are using a different part of the mind to cultivate good-will, love and compassion.

Reciting the mantra, you can have the feeling arising from within, surfacing, as it were, from the depths. And then, praying, or thinking May all beings be happy, from a contemplative level of mind, deeper than ordinary thinking, you may feel this same feeling is both being cultivated or awakened by your prayer, and also changing your surface thought and feeling.

Two explanations for why mantra works at a deeper level

It's taught in both the Indian and Tibetan traditions that the sounds of the syllables of mantra themselves have power. They embody, or express, or are the quality that we aim to produce, experience, or cultivate. The

sounds are themselves the quality we aim to experience, and to make use of to benefit self and others. This is one explanation.

The other explanation is that, through use over generations, mantras have been associated with qualities, or states of consciousness. And when we repeat the syllables of a mantra, we tap into a reservoir of particular life-energy, or power that has been built up over time.

Either way, if it works, that itself is proof enough. We really don't need a theory, though it may clarify some of what goes on. Personally, I feel there is truth in both explanations as to why mantra works.

Often when we read about the use of prayer or mantra, we read extraordinary statements - far from our usual world view. And I must say, in all honesty, that there is something in mantra that is beyond description, and that needs to be mentioned.

More food for thought - On world view

I recall reading early books about Tibetan Buddhism, the branch of Buddhism where mantra has flourished. They referred to the Tibetan Tradition as "Magical Buddhism", and in a way they were right. The starting point for much of the prayer, visualization and mantra in the Tibetan Tradition is what can be called a magical world view.

A magical world view, wherever it is found:

- asserts levels of reality beyond the physical world
- and that there can be interaction between the different levels
- in a magical world view, thought, or more particularly focused thought, is considered a creative force, a world changing force, to a much greater extent than is commonly believed.

- often in a magical world view, spirits of different types can be called on for assistance in various matters, and they will come – ancestors, saints, forms of divine beings, such as angels or bodhisattvas, or saviors
- sometimes in a magical world view, the whole world is thought to be alive, sentient

Magic, in it's most general sense, is changing the outside world by changing something in the inside world. This is often accomplished by ritual, or by prayer, meditation, the use of mantra, or a combination of these.

Sometimes it's asked, with so many mantras, where should a person begin? I think of one analogy I heard years ago, that points to an answer, and that at the same time offers an explanation of why one mantra may be more suitable for a person, and another not work for them. It goes like this:

Imagine a field or a plot of land, and beneath the surface of the earth, at different depths, are different kinds of seeds. The seeds that are closest to the surface are those that will give results first, or the most quickly. This is why gurus, or teachers with insight into a student's nature, their 'field', so to speak, are traditionally the ones who tell the student what mantra to practice.

The theory of karma - past experiences determining one's character and affinities - can be useful for some people, but it's not essential to accept as a prerequisite for practice. Just do some practice and you will see for yourself what mantra brings you what, if any results.

The quantitative and qualitative aspects of mantra practice

When we make contact with a tradition through study, recitation, chanting or mantra, we can feel that we connect with a flow of energy to some

extent. It may be a subtle feeling, or it can be something stronger, like a steady current. Sometimes it can be quite a forceful experience of energy, of a certain type of life that we are in touch with.

It can be like opening the sluice of a canal. We can feel we have contacted some source of energy, and we can feel it moving in us or through us. (See 'Imagine an underwater system of channels...' - the short poem on page_)

However, if we only talk about a quantitative increase in energy, as if life-energy were just a generic force, like water or electricity, that would not be saying enough. It wouldn't fully describe what we meet with and utilize when we connect with a tradition or make use of a mantra. We also need to speak of the qualitative aspect of spirit.

Ajaan Lee said this about the worth, or the value and power of certain states:

Things that are genuine, or pure, even though they may be small, can give rise to enormous results. Just as a piece of genuine paper money - a tiny strip of paper with the state seal - can be put to use in all sorts of ways. But if it's newsprint, even a bushel of it wouldn't be able to buy a thing. In the same way, a pure mind, even if we can make it pure for only a little while, can give rise to results way in excess of its size.

And, in speaking about specific qualities, here's how one teacher named Mingyur Rinpoche replied when asked, *What does blessing mean?*

He said, It is a particular type of power... various medicines have various types of strength, or power. Water has a power to wet things and clean things. Fire has a power to burn. When we put water in a field, it helps to grow flowers or crops. All phenomena have a particular power associated with them... Blessing comes as a particular type of power. (to accomplish a specific purpose).

For example, when one prays, “Grant me your blessing that uncontrived devotion may arise in me”, What happens is, that one receives that power, the blessing, and one’s defilements and obscurations are purified and dispelled. If one gives rise to devotion and faith and supplicates, then one has the blessing connected with arising of faith and devotion.

Many different practices

There are many different mantras, and many different practices that one can choose. Sometimes these are called ‘yidam’ or ‘deity’ practices. It think it’s important to consider clearly here what is meant by the word ‘deity’ in Buddhism. This is a difficult word for Westerners. We have a 2000 year monotheistic tradition that is in our Western soul, and any term that brings to mind our Western Tradition needs to be considered carefully.

All of the qualities represented by figures in Buddhism are within each of us. Every quality, of love, intelligence, purity, healing power - but usually we don’t see ourselves this way. If our self view were to fluctuate, even a little, we would find that simultaneously the way we view images representing enlightened qualities would change too.

If we see ourselves as ordinary beings, and we experience ourselves as fundamentally without these qualities, then naturally if we think of Buddha’s or Bodhisattva’s qualities existing at all, they are felt to exist outside of us. (more on that in a moment, but first, a little more on this line of thought)

If there is a change in our self-view, or the way we experience our self-nature, then when we look at these images we can feel that “this quality is there - it is in Tradition and it is in me, as potential perhaps, but in the same way the fully developed flower-and-fruit giving tree is in the seed and the first shoots”.

In addition to their being an external, historical aspect, like a reservoir of a particular energy that can be contacted, we can also feel that the image or the idea of what is called 'a deity' represents aspects of our own nature, fully developed.

Perhaps when we are there, when we are the fully expression of some enlightened quality, then we could look at the image, sometimes called 'deity', and, with understanding, say "That is me".

There may be one place where the Western idea of a deity and the way it is made use of in the Vajrayana overlap, and that is in it's external aspect. Names and forms of Buddhas and bodhisattvas can be called on, and they will respond. Not for everyone, and not always, but this is an inherited truth, this has been many peoples experience in many places throughout time. I've had this experience myself on many occasions or else I probably wouldn't be writing this.

Actually, many people have had the experience that mantra and prayer really do work in the ways they are praised - to heal, to harmonize, to clarify. But, again, as we say 'the proof is in the pudding'.

My feeling is that if others, or if even one other person could hear about these things, be inspired to practice, and gain some of this benefit, then my efforts here will have met with success. So I know I at least have to try to speak of these things.

To call on a holy Name, and to feel some response, this is precious, of inconceivable worth. But there is more intended by the practice of mantra and the forms passed down to us to be meditated upon. We can receive their benefit as needed in our lives. And we are also encouraged to cultivate this understanding, that we all have all these qualities within us. We are encouraged to bring them out as much as we can, and to live and act in this world, in enlightened and enlightening ways, with compassion and wisdom.

Mahayana

What's called 'Mahayana' in Buddhist traditions refers to a re-orientation towards teachings, self, and others in the world. All Buddhist lineages have teachings about love and compassion, but in Mahayana this aspect is placed right in the center. In this way of thought, the needs of all others, inclusively, and compassion for all is emphasized, and then every other practice, such as calm meditation, contemplation on mortality, karma or realizing selflessness, is seen in relation the suffering and confusion of living beings.

All these teachings then take on vast importance. When practiced, they can help us first to help ourselves, freeing, awakening, and increasing our ability to help, and they can directly help others. When held, and maintained, all these teachings and practices can be seen as being not just for ourselves. And then their potential, to bring happiness and to remove suffering, can be perceived to be as it is - as something enormous, limitless. Seen this way, our appreciation of the value of these teachings can increase enormously in our mind.

These teachings and practices have the potential to benefit self and others. They can open the way to peace, health and every enjoyment, so their value is naturally very great.

What then to say about mantra? In this context, a Mahayanist, whether they think of themselves as Buddhist or not, someone who has bodhicitta heart, the intention to remove as much suffering as possible and to benefit others as much as possible, naturally will look in an unprejudiced way for whatever can help. Naturally, there will be no obstacle to that kind of determination to help. What joy, then, when someone with these pure, good intentions, finds the study and practice of mantra. Even if this is not for everyone, due to karma and people's affinities, still, who would not be intrigued?

In the true Buddhist spirit of free inquiry, the way is open, and the warmest invitation is given, to try the practice for oneself, to see if they work as described in many places, or possibly too in ways that are even better. Of course, they may not work at all, but for those with an affinity with any of these practices, the results for oneself and for others can be very great.

Three meanings of the word 'Buddha'

Here are three possible meanings of the term 'Buddha', that can be seen as not contradictory, but complementary, and mutually fulfilling. The three are: The historical Buddha, the universal buddha - all Buddhas and bodhisattvas, enlightened and enlightening beings, and our own buddha nature.

Touching any of these, or furthering our understanding of any one, will add to our appreciation of all three aspects, not as separate, or competing, not as exclusive to each other, but as, each one, inclusive of the others.

The historical Buddha created, or creates all the many expressions - he is not separate from them. The expressions of this universal Buddha nature, as images, events, or teachings, are also not separate from the historical figure, the source, if you like. Any of these could be called the source.

And knowing our buddha nature enhances our appreciation of the historical Buddha, and the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. We have this within us.

Each person's way is unique and needs to be respected as such. Everyone's practice will be their own, unique path. Different practices will be needed along the way, and the whole range of teachings that people have used and benefited from should be known about, and, indeed, understood.

On Mantra and Initiation

Often before beginning the practice of a mantra, a person will attend a ceremony called an initiation. This is helpful, to introduce a practice, and to further realization, but it is not essential to begin or to receive the benefits of a practice. If you begin some practice, and get some positive result, then you may like to consider attending an initiation. This can strengthen your practice, and facilitate realization. An experienced Lama can share his or her energy, and connect us to a living lineage of practice, and this can be something really profound.

Some people gladly travel great distances to attend initiations, because of how important they feel these events to be. If you have any interest, and the chance to attend an initiation, by all means do take the opportunity. You can check with your local Tibetan Buddhist centers for a schedule of events and initiations, which are also called empowerments. Usually there will be some teachings or commentary along with the ceremony that will explain what will take place and how to practice in detail. Until that time, however, mantras and practices are available.

It's traditionally taught that what's called 'self-generation' - where one visualizes oneself as the deity - should only be done by those who have received the initiation of a particular deity, but that 'front generation' - where one visualizes the deity in space above and in front of oneself - can be done by anyone.

In front generation, we visualize, or see with the mind's eye above us, the Buddha or bodhisattva whose practice we are doing, and whose mantra we are reciting. It's helpful when doing this recitation and visualization, to see pure light and nectar streaming from the image we hold, and that is also made entirely of pure light. These represent, or carry the blessings of the Buddha.

We should also see ourselves, our own body, not in an ordinary way, not as flesh and bone, but as also being made entirely of light. Many teachers

advise, too, that when doing this visualization, we see ourselves in a pure land, and make the visualization as beautiful, peaceful, perfect, and pure as we can. This is helpful.

We can also do the practice without any elaborate or detailed visualization. We can just see light above us while reciting. Or without any visualization at all, we can just recite the mantra.

People ask, 'But isn't this all just the imagination?' And the answer is... yes, and... no. It may begin that way, but sometimes something else, something quite wonderful, can enter into the practice. When done properly, by someone with an affinity for a particular practice, we can receive benefits far more than we could ever have merely imagined. We can tap into something larger than what we usually think of as ourselves, and receive fresh energy and inspiration. We can receive and awaken these different qualities that then can be made use of to benefit self and others.

*May all beings be free from suffering and the causes of suffering
and may I be the cause of this*

*May I contribute to their freedom from suffering
as much as I can*

And,

*May all beings have happiness and the causes of happiness
and may I be the cause of this*

*May I contribute to their happiness
as much as I can*

May everyone receive, understand and practice well the teachings that will benefit them the most, freeing their minds from suffering and confusion, and may all arrive at peace, fulfillment and joy in this very life.

Imagine an underwater system of channels
one channel opens
and the stream of cool, pure water can be felt moving through
felt all the way back to its source

Contacting a spiritual tradition can be this way
the clean, clear life moving through
felt in this very place, and known to its origin

Teachers, practitioners, deities, protector spirits
virtues faithfully maintained
and given forward through lives

We are welcomed by this, our family
They are eager to assist the awakening life
the heart becomes very quiet watching this work
this far reaching, unceasing compassion

They speak behind their words
move behind the curtains of form
in silence, shaping
All of this is given to you, it is immanent
the life within the life

Extending Metta to the Seen and the Unseen

From a commentary on the Metta Sutta

Prayers and living for the seen is clear and obvious, and natural. It is what we can choose to extend and develop more and more. Directing metta to the *unseen* though, that is the domain of the sensitive person, those with some awareness of subtle levels, the psychic, or the mystic.

Most modern day Westerners would dismiss this line as archaic, or mere superstition, but a few won't. Some will see the purpose to it, and offer prayers of kindness, and for peace, and safety to those between the worlds, as well as local spirits; those of the earth where we are, as well as those who are without form, but felt and known in subtle ways.

*All of these we wish happiness, health and peace,
comfort and safety
May they be well and at their ease...*

The Buddha first taught the Metta Sutta to a group of monks to recite in order pacify conditions where they were meditating. This relates to their awareness of subtle levels, and their communicating a beautiful positive influence to those beings.

It recounts how at first the monks were disturbed by those local spirits who were at first accepting, but then became hostile towards them. As the monks practiced loving kindness as taught by the Buddha, and which included them, the spirits calmed down and became supportive. It's said they even protected the monks while they were there with them.

This world view is very different from the common materialistic world view, but it is more accurate. Those who don't see this world as having many forms of spiritual life would gloss over this line, while others will

delight in the thought that they can extend the energy of kindness to beings on all different levels, as it says, excluding none...

For them, the result will be an increase in those they will think of to pray for, and there will be greater harmony and support received in kind from invisible realms.

Benefitting the Varieties of Hungry Ghosts

There are times when language can help us to see more clearly into the lives of those around us, and into what is in our own mind. It's been this way for me with the Buddhist teachings on what they poetically call a hungry ghost. It's described as *a being with a huge mouth, and distended belly, but with a throat the size of a needle. Sometimes their mouth is depicted as being on fire...* This represents the karmic perception and mind of desire that can take over someone's life, and lead them into realms of deprivation and manifest suffering.

Looking into it further, I've been finding many expressions of what is essentially the same mind, although on the surface they may appear completely different. For example, the driven real estate agent, artist, student, or fitness fanatic look fairly similar in their determination and how they direct abundant energy to accomplish their aim, but we seldom link that mind with one of an addict laying in the street, or oblivious to everything other than getting their fix.

Sometimes our compulsions are approved of in society, and so we don't examine them too closely. When we do, we see that the driven, obsessive mind is not in control, and is never satisfied. It never reaches lasting peace and fulfillment, although it may believe it's striving for real satisfaction. That's the delusion of a restless spirit, insatiable, whether it's energetic, or worn out, and defeated.

I like to think of Capitalism as something of a religion we can be born into and surrounded by, usually without questioning its tenets - that the aim of human life is material comfort, security, and pleasure, and that if we only had enough, *or more than we do now*, we'd reach the very pinnacle of success, meaning, and human achievement. Of course, you won't hear or read this in any capitalist charter, but that's the unquestioned gist of it.

Food, sex, vacations, study and career advancement, accolades, dressing a certain way that's dictated, and ever changing for profit's sake (especially for women) the feeling of never having enough, *or being good enough* - these are fundamental values in consumer culture these days.

Paradoxically, we have more opportunities to learn and to experience the riches of culture and traditions than ever before, but instead of becoming more and more enriched and healthy and inspired, the opposite has happened. People are more bored, jaded and cynical than ever before. It has got to be alarming to anyone who gives it any thought. This is nothing other than the working of the devolving hungry ghost mind, leading people further away from truth and any real happiness.

How is it that we don't learn these things about ourselves and our mind? Part of it is our environment and culture, and part of it can be inherited from our family. Until we connect with good teachers, those who teach us how to get in touch with the deep sources of nourishment that are available, and with our noble ancestry, we wander aimlessly, trying many different things that we think will bring us satisfaction. One of the things we *don't* do is stop, or even pause long enough to turn inwards, and cultivate self understanding. It's restlessness dissatisfaction that is supported on so many sides that keeps us moving along the surface of life, dispersed and depressed and unappreciative of the treasures we already have in abundance.

I remember coming across a small booklet on contentment when I was visiting a Buddhist monastery in Thailand, in the late 1990's. I read through it in one afternoon, astonished at some of the ideas that were so readily apparent - essentially that our world has been made crazy by wanting, and that we can *put it all down*, and experience true rest and well being. Why are we not taught this in school from an early age?

I vividly remember the experience I had, even looking back now, all these years later:

It was like I was inside a massive factory, the size of several city blocks, and looking up, I could see that all the gears had stopped. I even heard them hissing, as they slowed down and got still, and saw steam coming off of them. I marveled at the sight of it for some time, and I walked around the monastery grounds with that vision that day. All my plans, and their variations, my hopes, yearning, moving towards and away from people, and events, all my ambitions, all these stopped moving, fell silent, and a big space opened up inside of me, with a whole lot more room, and peace, and clarity...

I realized then that contentment is an experience that has to do with being satisfied with what is enough, and in fact *more than* enough. I realized something also about the dissatisfied mind, or in its more extreme forms what we would call a hungry ghost mind:

It's nature is that it can never be satisfied, and that it is never truly and deeply happy and at rest.

It's like a bucket with a hole in it. No matter how long you pour water into it, it never fills up. Such is the mind of dissatisfied desire.

There's the story of the Buddha and the killer, Angulimala that speaks to how desire works in us, and what is needed. It's said that Angulimala had the misfortune of meeting a greatly deluded 'teacher' and believed him when he said that what he needed to be liberated was to kill a thousand people. He got up to 999, and made a necklace from their thumbs (which is where he got his name from - 'necklace of fingers'). When he got to the Buddha, he started chasing him, intending to make him his final victim. The Buddha kept walking slowly on his alms round, apparently paying no attention to Angulimala. Angulimala ran and ran and called out - 'Hey you, Gotama stop! Stop!' After a time, the Buddha looked over at him and said, 'I stopped a long time ago, Angulimala. It is you that have not stopped'. It's said that in that moment Angulimala realized he'd been misled, and that he became the Buddha's disciple, eventually accomplishing the teachings.

I have a friend who uses the Dharma door of bringing to mind the thought of 'no desires', in order to enter the timeless dimension of our being here. And just in case someone were to think he is then abandoning others, having no concern or effect on those around him and this world, well, all I can say is that you don't know Andy. He is a naturally joyful and loving being, a blessing to everyone he meets, and to this entire world.

We can see how craving can keep a person awake at night, or send them out looking for another fix, and another, whatever they believe will satisfy, or temporarily stop their suffering. We may romanticize it, but it's the same functioning everywhere it manifests - in relationships or career, with food and drink and drugs and over activity that misses the mark.

It's said,

*'Confused about causes,
driven on to try to satisfy their hunger,
again and again, these wraith like beings
receive the result of their actions,
leading them only more deeply into suffering and despair...'*

We usually don't see the nuclear energy of ignorant desire as the root cause of problems that are fundamentally related - although they do share a common base. The hungry ghost mind is pervasive in our culture in these times and it can be seen in a great many manifestations:

from food addiction and attachment, and drug, and alcohol addictions, to real estate speculators, slumlords and poverty;

from the greed behind economic exploitation, and wars of expansion or for resources, to the cruelty of industrialized animal agriculture, and environmental degradation

from sex addictions and sexual assault, and human trafficking, to pedophilia, infidelity, and porn, and the degradation and exploitation of women -

In every case of how we mistreat each other, and this planet, and miss the mark for our own well being, there is a lack of love and appreciation. There is little to no joy, and no real satisfaction, but only restlessness, voracious hunger, fear and something of a black hole that can't be filled without wisdom, or by just doing more of the same.

Even the restlessness we experience when we sit down to meditate can be a variety of the dissatisfied mind of craving. When there's the feeling of 'it's not enough', or 'I'm not good enough' that haunts us, that's a ghost mind - insatiable, and clearly in need of something qualitatively different to bring the peace and wholeness that we and our loved ones all seek.

The way that a hungry ghost mind comes to be is described very clearly in Buddhist teachings. The Venerable Hsuan Hua has one small book titled, 'The Ten Dharma Realms Are Not Outside of a Single Thought', where he says

'By conducting yourself as if you were a ghost, you fall into the ghosts' realm. Acting as a person does, you come to the human realm. Behaving like an asura, you join the ranks of asuras. Assuming the practice of an Arhat, you enter the realm of Arhats. Behaving like One Enlightened to Conditions, you enter that realm. Doing the deeds of a Bodhisattva, you join the retinue of Bodhisattvas. Performing the work of a Buddha, you realize Buddhahood. If you commit hellish offenses, you fall into the hells. All of this is brought about by the one thought that is right now in your mind. Thus we say that the Ten Dharma Realms are not beyond a single thought.'

There's a teaching from the Tibetan Tradition that is very much along these same lines. Using water as an example, it says, a hungry ghost or hell being mind will experience that substance as something foul and disgusting,

while a human being will experience it as water, something to drink, or bathe with, and a divine being, or one with divine qualities and a refined mind, such as a deva, a Buddha, Bodhisattva or Arhat will experience that same substance as nectar, entirely delightful.

This is how sacred outlook, or pure perception comes to be, on account of the purified mind. It is the kind of mind that experiences pure bliss, where others would miss it. I think we have all had experiences of this kind, at times delighting in simple things, and the richness of the day, and the arts, and each other, but perhaps we don't realize the dynamics of what is happening when we do. It's because our mind is more clear and pure at that time, and our heart open that we are able to deeply enjoy life, and point out its beauty and nourishment to others.

We should be taught how to take good care of our mind in school, for everyone's sake. As long as there's still even one person with a hungry ghost mind among us, there's a danger to us all. Such a mind could drink the entire ocean and eat all the harvests and still not be satisfied.

Another analogy that works for me to think about when it comes to identifying the kind of mind we can have is that of the taste we have in our mouth effecting our experience of what we eat. If we have in us some sour taste already, then everything can taste wrong, but if we have a sweet flavour, whatever we eat, even the simplest meal, can be delicious.

There's a section of the traditional ceremony for feeding the hungry ghosts, where we mentally transform our offerings into divine substances, so that it's received as delightful to the minds of spirits. *What we are really doing here is offering them love.* This is the truest gesture from our heart, and we pray that it will be received as such.

I heard it said that

'when we practice loving kindness, a certain nectar will be produced from our practice, and that we will be the first to benefit from it'. (TNH)

Kindness is gentle and sweet. It is delightful. In ceremonies at Tibetan centers, sometimes we're given a small amount of sweetened condensed milk, symbolizing amrita, or the divine ambrosia of kindness we are receiving and offering.

It's a problem because ghost minds are mistrustful, fearful and aggressive, and so we offer prayers, poetically, that 'their throats may be opened', and that they may be able to receive from us and from others and from our world all the beauty and nourishment that is life giving, as much as they they need.

Thich Nhat Hahh teaches that the hungry ghosts among us are rootless, disconnected from their families, community, spiritual ancestors, and this earth, our home. He advises the practice of getting in touch with and opening ourselves to these sources of support and sustenance, with prayers of gratitude and celebration. This is what we're all encouraging each other to do in some form, when we offer our hand of friendship, out of love. We are welcoming our brothers and sisters back to the community. It may take time, and it *certainly* takes great love and dedication to do this, but it is what is needed for every single one who has gotten lost and disconnected from community and from the truth.

In Buddhism its consistently taught that, by itself, having compassion for the great sufferings brought by anger, hatred, and craving is not enough. We also need the wisdom that sees all the way into root causes and works from there.

In the Lotus Sutra, it's taught that all beings have Buddha Nature, which is the capacity to become a Buddha, a fully enlightened being, and to help others in the best possible ways. Now, imagine for a moment if we all saw each other as innately having this potential - it would change *everything*,

from our economics, to education, to mental health care and religious instruction. How then can we realize this Buddha Nature? What stands in the way?

In the Tibetan Tradition, they talk about 'the two obscurations' that keep us from knowing our true nature - the obscuration of conceptual thought, and our emotional, or qualitative obscurations. When these are cleared away, it's like the clouds and overcast have been removed, and what remains is clear blue sky. We can free ourselves from confusion and afflictive emotions that block the light.

Traditions also speak about practice being to cultivate the experience of freedom from the kleshas, or afflictive emotions, of anger, craving, jealousy, pride and ignorance. I add sadness and fear to this list, since I can see how common they are, and how they can cover deeper knowledge of our nature.

The problem is that we don't understand ourselves, or each other. If we did, at least the path forward would be clear.

What we need to do is to listen to good teachers and develop a greater capacity to understand the evolution of our experiences, all the way to their roots, of both suffering and well being.

What follows is in reference to the mind of dissatisfied desire, but it applies equally to the other hindrances.

I recently heard Ajahn Amaro talking about how the cause of suffering does not look like the effect - otherwise we'd have nothing to do with it! I've thought, it can be like having a baby alligator, that is just two or three inches, and that looks nothing like the fourteen foot lethal reptile it could become in time, if it's fed. We should all know full well though how, if left unchecked, and not remedied, misguided desires, and the hungry ghost mind can be and is devastating. It can and does destroy individual lives, and lead to loss and grief among families, and nations.

In the instruction on breath meditation, one of the experiences we're encouraged to identify is called *vi-raga* - the fading away of a particular experience, tendency, or feeling. If for example, we trace the experience in body and mind of following desire as it settles down and fades away, we'll find it looks nothing like the full blown disastrous effect, but this is where the practice of memory and insight, sometimes called 'the dharma-eye' becomes essential in our gaining freedom, or in encouraging it in others.

We can identify that craving as a tendency in us before it starts to activate as a feeling, triggering memory, associations, emotion, and actions. At that point, *we can choose* to let it go, and to leave it be. Relinquishment - *caga* in Dharma language, is like throwing something out the car window as we're driving down the road - we don't hesitate or think of going back for it, especially if it's harmed us.

We can watch a tendency, or the trace of an experience or view getting smaller, and smaller, and becoming subtle, and then very subtle, until it is no more. That is the mind, that is impermanent and without a fixed nature, transforming.

Desire moves the mind. When we're without desire for anything outside of this present moment's experience of body and mind, and what we have now, it's very different than the restless dissatisfaction of a mind that is always desiring something more. Our mind can settle deeply and become very quiet and clear, and appreciative. It can develop the strength to see completely through concepts and projections, and know the fulness of life as it truly is.

Memory here is a kind of enlightenment. As Thich Nhat Hanh said, to be enlightened is to be enlightened *about something* - in this case, about cause and effect. And if we can see the evolution of our experience all the way back to the root cause of all our suffering being self grasping ignorance, we

will have in the palm of our hand the key to liberation, and to being able to most effectively help others.

Experiences, wrong views, and habits persist. We can see that some tendencies we have in us take years, or generations to get over. They can be ancestral or collective wounds we are heirs to, that we or those we care for may have added to with their unskillful thoughts and actions.

And so I pray and dedicate

*May we all have real compassion for our own suffering,
for the suffering people are experiencing now on account of craving,
and the potential for suffering that people have in them.*

*May we all be completely free from wrong view and all its effects,
and lead lives of great freedom, compassion, and capacity.*

*May we then engage others who need our help in getting free from both suffering
and its causes, until the lower realms are completely empty,
and our experiences are only those of peace, fulfillment,
joy and well being.*

Creating a Pure Land

{From The Middle Way View #1}

When we are in love, or are involved in a collaborative creative work such as playing music, we can't really say - we are here - and not over there as well; or that we are one, or two, or however many we may like to count.

There is a wholeness functioning, a dynamic that can't be caught and represented accurately by conceptual thought. We have to let go, and know it directly.

We can still be ourselves to the full, and also have an intuition of the invisible aspect, these unfathomable mysteries.

The Diamond Sutra says that we should

*give rise to a pure and clear intention
without our mind dwelling anywhere...*

When we are a part of our surroundings, or in communion, it is part of us, and we are part of it; there is a harmony, a dance-like movement, at once sensitive to every need, naturally resourceful and creative.

There is also the passage:

*How does one create a serene and beautiful Buddhafield?
By not creating a serene and beautiful Buddhafield.
That is what I call creating a serene and beautiful Buddhafield...*

This is about creating a sacred place, or a Pure Land. In this case, there is no ego involved, no *I am doing this for these people, or for my self*. When the ego is absent, there is great peace, and spontaneous, effortless creative

activity just happens naturally, *like reaching for one's pillow in the middle of the night*, as they say in Zen.

The Tao Te Ching has this passage that refers to the same egoless activity, that is not separate from others:

A leader is best when people barely know that he exists...when his work is done, his aims fulfilled, they will all say, "We did this ourselves."

This is something we can learn to trust, through insight, and watching carefully how our lives here actually *are* together.

Concerning ideas of self and others then, we really do need what Bob Thurman called *a tolerance of inconceivability*.

What our ego idea and our senses present to us is not all there is to us, or others, or to our surroundings. Ideas can be useful, as far as they go, but our life here together far surpasses any ideas we may have about it.

When teachings speak of non-referential compassion, there is an immediacy that is referred to, a newness, and resourcefulness, and timeliness.

We can also by extension speak of a non referential joy, abounding, a shared life of the spirit.

The imperfect and the beyond perfect

On a personal and social levels, as a human being, there are some things we must resist, and work to change. None of us should accept unnecessary suffering in ourselves or in the world; none of us should accept injustice, or threats to our own and our children's shared world; and none of us should accept war, especially now, with modern nations' destructive capability. Even if it means thinking ahead several generations, merely by virtue of being a human being, we absolutely have to work, and struggle to keep from becoming numb, or complacent.

There is so much need. How then to live with ourselves, and with all that is unresolved?, and how to live in this world? Where will we get the energy to work? Do we need to turn our back on suffering to get what we need? It is right at this juncture that I find a saving grace – like - aha - this world is not as simple as our thinking would have us believe.

When we bring to mind pairs of words such as happiness and sadness, peace and war, satisfaction and dissatisfaction, contentment and discontent, it seems that such opposites cannot exist at the same time, but in fact they can and do co-exist, and exploring this paradox can yield riches.

I'm just about finished reading the psychologist Robert Johnson's book on contentment, which I've enjoyed, and which has led to these and a few other reflections.

When it comes to happiness, usually we think in either-or terms. We are either dissatisfied, or we are satisfied. We can't possibly be both, can we?

Last week I wrote out some thoughts about what I called 'neurotic dissatisfaction'. It is the kind of mind that cannot be satisfied, no matter how many possessions or different kinds of experience such a person has. It seems it's gotten more common in our culture, for young people especially

to become more and more quickly jaded, burned out, sarcastic and disrespectful of just about everything. There is no happiness there, or satisfaction, or, it seems, the hope of satisfaction. It's a strange problem that needs profound work to change.

Just to be clear, when I refer to the possibility of being both satisfied and not satisfied at the same time, I'm not talking about the neurotically dissatisfied mind.

For people who are still capable of happiness, I realized that the things we are not and should not be happy with in life very much need the kinds of experience that 'have light to them'. These different experiences are available to us and they can and should co-exist in us. They may have to be experienced first one then the other, at times so we can take care of ourselves, but ultimately they shouldn't be kept separate.

I was thinking that the word 'contentment' doesn't go far enough when talking about the good; the word 'perfection' doesn't reach far enough either. There are some things that I think of as really being beyond perfection. What I mean is that sometimes, when we meet something great, with an open, fresh mind, the experience is more than we could ever have imagined it would be.

Our conceptual mind cannot begin to contain the beauty, richness, healing power, joy and nourishment of – say, for example, a cloudy morning, the wind, a friendship, kind parents, great teachers, the existence of music or the shades of color we call green.

Such things as the beauty of that child, and your smile, and so much more feed us; they sustain our souls and make them healthy and robust. When we put our mind entirely on such things, there is peace in meeting them, and we don't - we can't possibly ask anything more of them. How could I possibly ask anything more of a hummingbird? – I'm astonished – I realize I could never even begin to conceive of something like this.

These things have the feeling of being extraordinary gifts, so in that way we can say we are content with them. There is necessary peace to be found here. Such experiences are complete as they are, and what's more, they are overflowing, they move beyond themselves. They are life itself, and we all need to be in touch with these beyond-perfect things, for our own sake, for our family and friends sake, and for the sake of our communities and the greater world.

We each need nourishment, and nourishment is available. Maybe though the problem is that we haven't been taught to fully, rightly honor in our heart the sun, the wind, the earth, or friendships, arts, education, history or each other; maybe we haven't been taught to fully, rightly honor the miracle of our own eyesight, our breath, and motion...

Maybe we each need to learn how to be with these things quietly, in an unhurried way, and in an open-hearted way, so that we can receive their gifts. You can call it anything you like. Personally, I call it contemplation, but that's not quite it either for me. It's more like being with something and learning to be appreciative is being nourished by it. The joy of being alive is here.

Being in touch with the beautiful things, the life giving things is essential. Then, for everything else that life is, for all the 10,000 sorrows of the world, the benefit, the virtue of these gifts can continue. Real benefit can continue in places where it is needed most.

In Buddhist terms, when you see only the suffering of the world, with no apparent way out, that is called 'samsara'; when we see and experience only what is right, fine, pure, rich, unchanging, unmixed, undeluded, without affliction, peaceful, that is called 'nirvana'; and when you are able to see and experience both at the same time, that is called 'the realm of Buddha activity', and it's this last one, clearly, that this world needs more of.

One analogy for this is that we are able to hear two things at the same time, like music and a voice speaking, without the two obstructing each other in any way*. They co-exist in our perception, and they can influence each other as well. So, for example, the quality of music (Mozart's Clarinet Concerto, slow movement) can influence how a mother asks her teenaged son to clean up his room; or two people in dialogue can each influence each other's tone and what is said. They interpenetrate and effect each other.

*(this is why the bell - that which produces sound - is used in Buddhism to symbolize emptiness; when we don't grasp at self or objects, we experience ourselves and all things existing in an unobstructed way)

Buddha activity arises, we can say, from a base of something perfect, or, more accurately, beyond perfect. When in touch with suffering, compassion arises. We respond to this world out of a heart of love, for as long as is needed. This fundamental divine nature is touched by, and touches suffering, and is able to bring relief and transformation over time. That which is vast, and made of light both retains its' character, and at the same time is able to move, to touch, to influence, like light, like words, like rain. Now isn't that something?

An Essay on Buddhism and Magical Practice, in two parts

Part I: General Principles

Introduction, Dispelling Misconceptions, and The Universal Principles of Magical Work

1. Introduction - the reasons for this essay

2. Dispelling Misconceptions

Mundane world view and the disbelieving mind

Magic and Miracles

3. Universal Principles of Magical Work

View and methods

Every square inch

Wisdom Beings, Magical beings, Adepts, and more ordinary people

Part II - Understanding the Vajrayana

Bridges I: from liberating practice to the Mahayana, and Bridges II: from the Mahayana to Tantra; Parallels and differences; A higher synthesis

1. Bridges I: from liberating practice to the Mahayana, and

Bridges II: from the Mahayana to Tantra;

Buddha Nature as the foundation for Vajrayana practice

2. Parallels and differences

Parallels:

Mantras and Words of Power

Things that can be done with mantra

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Common Pitfalls

Ego inflation and the misuse of power;

Don't grasp at the higher teachings

Differences:

Tibetan Buddhism and Magical Traditions

The differences between general magic and Buddhism

The view and methods of tantra

Front generation, self generation, and both

On Empowerments

The Four Needs

3. A higher synthesis

Low, middle, and high magic

Introduction - the reasons for this essay

Reading the traditional commentaries on Buddhist tantra, I've noticed that there is almost no mention of it being magical practice, or of what can be accomplished using these methods. These are practices that have great potential to bring benefit to ourselves and our precious family, and the world.

Almost nothing is said of the abilities we have, or the ways we can benefit self and others in the areas of health, provisions, purifying the environment, or maintaining our fortunate conditions, but these are what the practices are for, supporting the supreme accomplishment, that of becoming a realized being.

It's as though there were a stream right next to where we are walking, and there is thirst that we and our family feel. If we don't see it, or believe in it, we suffer unnecessarily. If we see the stream though, we can reach down and take a cup of this water to refresh, sustain and strengthen ourselves, and those dear to us.

When we come to the Tibetan Buddhist Tradition then, there are *two streams* meeting - that of enlightenment as taught by the Buddha, and that of magical practice. Knowing about each of these individually, we will have a fuller understanding of Vajrayana practice, also called Mantra-yana, or Tantra.

The two sets of principles, those of magical working and of Buddhism will always remain separate, and though the magical side of Buddhist tantra is hidden, or blended in, these distinct elements can be discerned, and understood. Then, when we return to applying these methods as a skillful means, with a Mahayana intention, the practice can be more effective.

I realize that not many Westerners are familiar with magical work as it is done in other traditions, and so they may not recognize these same principles being used here. I thought then begin with a few thoughts on this subject.

My reasons for writing this essay are twofold: to clarify the nature of Buddhist tantras, and to encourage their practice as much as I can.

Dispelling Misconceptions

The mundane world view, and the disbelieving mind

A person with an ordinary world view doesn't see their own worth, or that of others, or our precious world. There is not much joy, and little inner freedom. Life's a struggle, and they miss out on seeing the beauty that is here in such abundance. In contrast to ordinary perception that does not see what is extraordinary here, by training or naturally, some arrive at an enlightened world view, also called sacred outlook, or pure perception. In this, there is delight, celebration, wisdom, power and the ability to accomplish great things.

From the outset, whenever we talk about magic, saints or anything out of the ordinary we're met with disbelief and scorn by some people. Their view is one that is diminished, with few resources apparent to them. What's more, they often dissuade others from pursuing deeper subjects, and from their faith and devotion. This is quite common today, with materialistic, nihilistic, aggressively atheistic, arrogant people. Theirs is ever a contracted view of themselves, and others, this world and our natural born heritage.

The danger of such people, of course, is that they pull others into their impoverished state, and until we are strong enough in our own beliefs and experience we can be influenced by them. They cause doubt, and sow narrow mindedness, which is exactly the opposite of what we need, especially these days.

I can understand why people doubt so. For one, there have always been egotists taking up the costume of someone with depth and uncommon abilities. They can make money from it, or gain a following. Such people can even delude themselves into thinking they are special, instead of using whatever natural or cultivated abilities they have to help others.

Another reason people would doubt is because a door hasn't opened for them, despite their efforts or dire needs in this life. Perhaps they prayed, and nothing happened. Or, others prayed or engaged in ritual for them, and there was no result. They then go on to discount and disparage all forms of magical practice as for the backward, or uneducated, credulous and weak minded. From the outset then, they discard anything that doesn't fit their diminished world view, and that is a lot.

What we need is open minded inquiry, done over a period of years, to get to the truth of these things. Most of all, we need to have the experience ourselves of some deeper truth than is apparent to our ordinary senses.

All this is achievable by anyone who makes the effort, without pride or an agenda. The worlds that open then are far more beautiful and interesting, more rich and inspiring. There are then far more resources available to take advantage of for our own sake, and for the sake of all our family.

Magic and Miracles

If magical practice is described as producing results using little known methods, then what we call the miraculous has even less of a reference point in ordinary experience. A miracle could be described as an event that doesn't follow any known natural laws - as with a healing, or a change in the world not fitting the pattern of cause and effect.

If magic is not generally believed in, that miracles happen is given even less credence. In these times, if those who believe in the efficacy of prayer or mantra, ritual and the appeal to other Agencies are mostly thought of as unsophisticated, or fools, then those who believe in the possibility, or actuality of the miraculous are not even considered worthy of consideration. It is dismissed as naive, or criticized as irresponsible 'magical thinking' to believe in other forces or factors at work in our lives and in our world. And yet, some will tell you they have reason to believe in such things. They hesitate, knowing how it is usually met, or else they keep

it to themselves. When they do speak, it is only to say they have no rational explanation as to why some benefit has reached them, or their loved ones.

The activity of a saint, or an angel or the divine can't be understood with an ordinary mind. It's only touched on briefly in spiritual literature, and even then only with expressions of wonder and gratitude, and for the sake of opening our hearts and minds to other possibilities.

Of course, we are right to ask, if benevolent beings and miracles do in fact exist, then why is the world the way it is? Why is there this much suffering? And how do we reconcile these seemingly opposite thoughts - that there is so much that is tragic, so much struggle and despair, and there are those who are both compassionate and capable of offering help? I falter, except to say that there are such things as in this world, as blessings, and the inertia of karma or cause and effect, and the unknown.

In this regard, I am not an atheist, or a denier of what mystics and contemplatives and religious folk tell us. I do believe there are spiritual potencies *perovading* all our lives and this world.

Why is it we don't see this? Being Westerners in the 21st century, we're primarily focussed on things outside ourselves, and we completely believe our perceptions about ourselves and our world to be true. This is the main difference, I've noticed, between Western and Eastern ways of understanding this life of ours.

The default Western mindset looks at experience in various ways, and concludes that if something exists, we should see it, and that if we don't see it, it just isn't there. Eastern traditions take a completely different approach. They say that if we don't see something, then we need to adjust our own instrument of perception, our mind itself. It's as if the Westerner looks through a microscope and tells you what he sees or doesn't see, whereas

the Eastern contemplative learns to adjust the knobs on the device, and looks and sees into this experience we call living in that way.

Taking this second approach, I see miracles everywhere, that are not being registered. My own sense of it now is that there are blessings everywhere. It could be, as an old story goes, that, in truth, the world is upheld by the saints, praying in monasteries and in far-off mountains.

Thinking about cause and effect, the scientific method, and what is predictable sometimes carries over into what we believe about the spiritual influences in our lives. It's like we're adding up sums, and nothing falls outside of these ways of measuring what we see and experience. But when we come to the influence of the divine that goes by many names and comes to us in many ways, through saints and teachers, and animal guides, in dreams and in our own meditations - it is not rational, and it doesn't 'add up' or make sense to the logical mind. There is no way to measure the effects it can have.

We sometimes speak of grace in Western Traditions as being 'God's free and unmerited favor' - as a way of saying that what we receive is not on account of any amount of virtue or good works we have done, or because it is our karma - the blessings of this life go beyond such simple accounting.

We may say that grace is known in the love we receive from one another because there is no way to measure its beauty, meaning and power, and wondrous influence in our lives. It seems a gift beyond any calculation or anything that we could ever say we deserved.

It could be as well that in loving we bring the fullness of grace and blessings into our lives, into the lives of our family and friends, and this world. Surely this is something that its effect is beyond any measure.

The Universal Principles of Magical Work

There are principles of magic that go beyond any one place or tradition, and these can be divided into view, and methods. In terms of *view*, whatever the practice, they all have the following in common:

sacred outlook - an understanding of this world, ourselves and our fellow beings as essentially divine in nature;

the belief that spiritual help is available;

and the belief that through our prayers, and thoughts and actions, and our way of life, by our receptivity, we can receive great benefit from the divine within ourselves, as well as in our tradition, and natural world.

Seeing that we are not alone, that we can avail ourselves of the help that is available, and that our world is responsive to us, are factors in common with magical views everywhere they are found.

Then when we look at *methods*, there are elements we find everywhere in magical practice, whether we are talking about Indigenous American and Aboriginal shamans, Taoist, Christian and Hindu priests, Jewish and Hermetic Qaballists, Wiccans, and Druids, and in Tibetan Buddhist ritual. These include:

prayer, symbolic action, concentration, faith and devotion. These are all done on the basis of *a belief in the divine*, however we name it, and the efficacy of these methods.

Magic ranges from what's been called 'low magic' - making use of elemental and local spirits that are relatively more accessible, to 'high magic', which makes use of more subtle spiritual energies and dimensions to achieve an intended purpose.

All magic rests on a foundation of a magical world view, that holds other levels of reality and spiritual life to be real and something we can connect with and make use of in our lives here. It uses ritual, simple or complex, or meditation, with visualization, concentration, and and invocation of benevolence, wishing to bring that spiritual life to bear on present conditions.

Universally, magic is used:

for healing,

for gathering resources, to encourage a good harvest;

for purifying an environment of unbalance force, or harmful influences;

and, for extending a positive influence, such as protection, peace, and harmony.

Every Square Inch

If we were to ask, where is the divine life? Where are the angels, ancestors, guides and bodhisattvas? The answer is - the divine is everywhere. In every square inch there are countless Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, saints and saviors. We don't see this because of our obscurations, laziness, lack of faith and practice. Having a glimpse is enough though. Just as they say in theistic traditions that God is everywhere, and all his or her blessings are ever available to us all, the same is true when speaking of the light and power of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. It's endlessly beneficial nature is everywhere for us.

Wisdom Beings, Magical beings, Adepts, and more ordinary people

Wisdom Beings

Providing one has an affinity, one advantage to practicing the Vajrayana or any theistic tradition of prayer or contemplation is that it puts us in touch with wisdom and wisdom beings who can guide and protect us. Who or what this divine guidance is, is a deep subject.

When our mind is that of an ordinary person, we reflexively think of ourselves as separate from each other, from the natural world, and from our own depths, like we are a bubble, a self contained unit, and so when we meet a greater wisdom than we identify with we think of it as other than ourselves. We revere and supplicate it and receive their blessings into our lives in that way.

There is also truth in saying that we are never for a moment separate from each other, our heritage, this world, and in theistic terms, from God, or from our deeper wisdom nature.

Wisdom beings exist naturally to support, encourage, and guide us, and they do this by helping us to awaken to the truth of our being here, to joy, celebration, virtue, fulfillment, and right action in this world.

Ultimately, we are not separate for a moment. Relatively, we need the guidance, light and strength of those who embody wisdom and love: teachers and archetypes, the energies of the saints, angels, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

Magical Beings

People who have developed benevolent practices, when they are known about at all, are regarded as saints or sages, in some traditions as adepts, or healers. It's with good reason that most who accomplish any degree of

proficiency would rather be anonymous. They have all kinds of unrealistic ideals projected onto them, and are then are feared, envied, or put on a pedestal, none of which supports their work for others in the world.

Still, we should know that such beings have existed in the past, and exist now, if only to raise up our ideas of what a human being can be. Ideally, knowing about these beings can inspire us to develop a fraction of their wondrous qualities ourselves. This is not beyond any of us.

Adepts and more ordinary people

Every tradition that makes use of magical practices recognizes that some people have a greater facility for such work. Whether it is a family tradition of village healers, or a tradition of spiritual study, as in a monastery, different abilities are recognized.

In all traditions, there are those who are considered adepts. These are the ones that are able to make use of the most subtle truth, and they have far reaching spiritual powers. There is no limit to what such people can accomplish.

Most of us who follow these paths however are in the great middle as far as our sensitivity and ability to work with the forces of the universe. If we're wise and humble, we'll learn from those who've come before us, as well as those great beings. We'll take them as our sure guides as we learn how to connect with and make use of the spiritual help that is everywhere available to produce a good effect, for all our family.

An Essay on Buddhism and Magical Practice

Part II - Understanding Vajrayana

Bridges I: from liberating practice to the Mahayana, and Bridges II: from the Mahayana to Tantra; Parallels and differences; A higher synthesis

1. Bridges I: from liberating practice to the Mahayana, and

Bridges II: from the Mahayana to Tantra;

Buddha Nature as the foundation for Vajrayana practice

2. Parallels and differences

Parallels:

Mantras and Words of Power

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Differences:

Tibetan Buddhism and Magical Traditions

The differences between general magic and Buddhism

The view and methods of tantra

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The Four Needs

3. A higher synthesis

Low, middle, and high magic

Bridges I: From liberating practice to the Mahayana

The Historical Buddha taught effective methods for freeing the mind from confusion, that enable us to become more available, and effective in our work with others. From this freedom comes greater compassion, sensitivity and skillful action. Whereas someone suffering is relatively closed in on themselves, someone with more clarity and balance can recognize and also respond to the potential that's there for continued suffering. They are more far seeing than someone who is caught.

The Mahayana, or 'Great Way' has as its central principle the benefit of all living beings. It came into being organically as a result of liberated people registering the suffering of others, and naturally wanting to help them in every way possible.

Bridges II: from the Mahayana to Tantra

One can easily imagine Buddhists with a degree of concentration, the perception of other realms, and past and future lives, and compassionate, naturally wanting to do all they could to help others who were suffering or confused. We can imagine them taking up these methods to share the blessings of their tradition, to clear away obstructions and promote the most favorable conditions.

Traditions over the centuries have defined the goal of Buddhist practice differently. In the Theravada of South East Asia, the goal is defined simply as liberation. In the Mahayana Buddhist schools, they speak of *actualizing the body, speech, mind, qualities and activities of a Buddha*.

Magic has been around since recorded history. What Buddhism then adds is a different end than is usually taught and practiced when engaging these methods alone. The aim in Buddhism is complete freedom from suffering and the most helpful way of living with others.

With the Mahayana motivation clearly understood, we can see how the Traditions, by adding magical practices, extends what was regarded up to that point as Buddhist, and also increases the scope of magic to include helping beings to attain liberation and enlightenment. *This is Upaya - skillful means - taking up the universal methods of magic to fulfill its purpose.*

Buddha Nature as the Foundation of Vajrayana Practice

Our fundamental nature is beautiful, rich with good qualities, inherently joyful and creative, endowed with peace and clarity. If we don't know this about ourselves, were we to try to visualize a pure land, or ourselves as having positive attributes, it would just be a fiction painted onto the low opinion we have of ourselves, and others, and this world we live in.

It's for this reason that they speak of insight into our nature as being a prerequisite for practicing tantra. Without it, we'd have nothing to draw from to create a new world as an expression of sacred outlook, and the life we wish for ourselves and our loved ones.

We can practice a certain amount of concentration, and then vipassana, as taught in the Theravada, or for kensho, the Zen realization of deeper truth, or with the wisdom teachings of any of the different Tibetan lineages - the Middle Way, Mahamudra or the Great Perfection teachings. When any of these are practiced well, they remove our conceptual and emotional obscurations. They all lead to the same realization. When we add great love and compassion for all life, the world, our nature and that of all others shows itself as it is - endlessly beautiful, inspiring, and rich with all possibilities.

See all the forms in Tibetan Buddhist iconography - Thousand Armed Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion; the Divine Wisdom of Manjushri, brandishing a flaming sword that cuts through suffering and its causes; warmly smiling Tara, easing fears and comforting - all these are

contained in our true nature. There are external aspects as well, in history, and that have been effective in other people's lives before us, and living now, but when we take up practices, we are connecting with these qualities in ourselves. The external forms, eternally helpful as they are, are here for our own realization of the divine life.

Having a glimpse of our Buddha nature opens the way to practicing tantra effectively.

Parallels and differences

Parallels

Mantra and Words of Power

A number of ancient traditions hold the belief that certain sounds have spiritual power, and that we can accomplish particular aims through their recitation. The sacred languages of Sanskrit and Hebrew have been used by priests for millennia, and the mantras in Tibetan Buddhism have proven their efficacy across the centuries.

There is an element of karmic affinity, or course, whenever a person connects with any spiritual tradition, and the same holds true for mantra practice. A tradition or mantra may work for one person, but not for another for this reason. How can we tell if we have a connection, or if a practice is suitable for us? Traditionally a person's teacher will recommend one practice. These days though, not everyone has a teacher, and mantras are printed in books and broadcast far and wide.

We can simply experiment with an open mind and see for ourselves if a mantra helps awaken our spiritual nature, of love and understanding, if it brings us health and strength, or if it clears obstacles. Sometimes it's not obvious at first if a practice is working, the effect being quite subtle, but perhaps there is some change we can feel in our body, or some new energy we can sense.

Different mantras have different purposes. For example, they can help awaken our compassion, or wisdom, they can help to heal, to protect, to overcome fears, or restore harmony. They have a great many other wonderful uses as well, and these can be studied in the context of their individual practices. Most of all, we can refer to our own unfolding experience to understand the meaning, power, and purpose of mantra.

There's a teaching that says certain practices are 'self-secret', which means that they are known only by the right person at the right time. I've sensed the truth of this myself over the years. It's not at all easy to describe the profound effects of mantra, or connecting with a practice, but when it's right for us, we will feel at ease, and we will make progress in our meditation, and gain tangible results.

Things that can be done with mantra

As with other universal magical practices, we can use the methods known as tantras to heal, and to prolong life, to increase resources, clear away obstacles, remove harmful influences, and to calm fears.

At a certain level, we can influence the weather, put a stop to epidemics and fires, see and act in other realms, and receive prophecy.

Here is a list I made a number of years ago

Things that can be done with mantra

heal
 strengthen
 relieve
 purify
 bring light
 protect
 clarify
 liberate from samsara
 facilitate the liberation from samsara
 comfort the lonely
 bring about the manifestation of the good
 rescue the crazy, the out of balance
 hold back the endangered

give riches to the poor
 relieve depression
 cure depression
 give direction
 strengthen realization
 eliminate maras
 pacify, remove the influence of, transform maras
 increase realizations of the graduated path,
 and all realizations

In these and other ways, we can make use of these *magical means* to help ourselves and others. These are not difficult to understand, as both the use of verifiable working principles, and the expression of enlightened compassion.

Understanding Symbols From the Inside Out - Poetry and Prose in Religion

In all traditions we find spiritual poetry that has been spontaneously produced from a deep state of consciousness. Meditating on it can open a person to the source, the original experience that produced the idea or the image. Understanding poetry and symbols this way is deeper and richer, and it prevents misreading the religious image.

If we don't understand an image from within, we're much more likely to misinterpret its meaning. The idea it represents may lift up us, and be of value to us this way, but it won't be fully understood.

The starting point in Vajrayana is the recognition that we are divine beings now living in a magical universe, but we don't usually see ourselves and others and our world this way, and this is why we practice.

We can see symbols, for example of Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva of compassion with a thousand arms reaching out to help others as an

archetype, or as just an inspiring story. We can also learn to see every symbol as the manifestation of an idea that corresponds to something in our own experience.

Meditating on an inspired spiritual symbol, such as the clear blue sky, or on divine beings, or our world made of light, is a training in recognizing the truth of the way things are, realizing our own nature and that of all other sentient beings. This is helpful to keep in mind when studying spiritual traditions in general, and the Vajrayana in particular.

Common pitfalls

Ego inflation and the misuse of power

Through time and different cultures, those who have been effective in bringing changes by magical means have been misunderstood, or ostracized. Most people do not believe in magical work, or, if they do, it's with a great deal of fantasy, mixed in with unfounded prejudice. It's common to romanticize magical work or someone who accomplishes even a little of a good purpose using uncommon methods. They have had a lot projected onto them they didn't deserve.

It also happens, unfortunately, that a person can get an inflated ego when using magical methods, which is contrary to any spiritual path. It's common as grass for those who can see and access other levels of spiritual life to become proud, and to feel special on account of it, and better than others.

In indigenous cultures to this day it is recognized as well that some people misuse these practices to cause harm, or for the sake of gaining money, power, sex, and control. They are both respected and feared for this reason.

Just as there's a broad range of motivations people can have in daily life, so it is also with magical or even religious practice. Placing magical activity on a firm basis of ethics, on non-harming and the motivation to benefit is the best way to approach these subjects. It provides safety, and it makes sense in terms of the karmic effects it will bring as well.

In the Vajrayana, Buddhist principles are emphasized right from the beginning, and all throughout, of renunciation, great love and compassion, and the dedication to helping others in every necessary way. I'm sure even these methods have been misused, but if we're actually generating a

positive motivation at the outset, there's less chance that the ego will cause problems for self and others.

Don't grasp at the higher teachings

It's said:

*Don't grasp at the higher teachings
Develop the foundation practices,
and these will unfold naturally...*

We find in Buddhism and in other spiritual traditions with more advanced teachings that students will often want to skip over the basic practices. This happens either because people are lazy, or on account of their egocentric pride. There's something universal in this, unfortunately.

So for example, with the Dharma, we have people claiming to hold Mahayana Vows, but who don't practice metta step by step as a foundation; and there are those who don't want to put the effort into cultivating shamatha, or shi-nay, calm abiding practice, and would rather attempt insight directly, or read and talk philosophy. The result then is negligible.

When it comes to practicing the Vajrayana, though someone with an affinity for a particular method may get some result however they practice, it's taught that the fullest results come from gradually building up the mandala step by step, reflecting deeply on the themes, such as those presented in the Stages of the Path teachings, that give life to our motivations, and that activate our compassion and insight. This is done both as preparation for tantra, and also briefly in the course of a session of meditation.

Tradition here is the legacy of those who have come before, and left us the precious gift of their understanding. We'd be wise to take it up, for all our sake.

Differences

Tibetan Buddhism and Magical Traditions

There is a strong element in Tibetan lineages of emphasizing Buddhist ethics of non-harming as the foundation of all they do. They then add the Mahayana view and the bodhisattva vow as essential to their world view and their every practice.

In the Vajrayana, which is rooted in the Mahayana, we cherish all living beings, in all realms, 'as a mother loves her only child', and we work for them with the insight that liberates maintained all throughout.

Lama Lodro Rinpoche recently said,

'If you keep the Vinaya (Buddhist ethical code) and the Bodhisattva Vows, Vajrayana becomes so powerful'

The difference between general magic and Buddhism

Lama Yeshe has said,

Magic is not the path of liberation

and given how much prayer, ritual, liturgy and mantra are part of Tibetan Buddhism, the differences should be made clear:

Dharma is not for this life alone, and so the common motivations such as wanting to gain material advantage, or to subdue another are excluded from the very beginning.

As Bhante Gunaratana expressed it:

Supernatural attainment is one thing, and Supermundane attainment is another. By attaining supernatural powers alone, you can't destroy your defilements;

{You may even reinforce your defilements, ego grasping, and the rest, such as greed, and arrogance}

Supermundane accomplishment on the other hand, by comparison, makes you humble, and simple, and all your defilements will be destroyed.

Someone who has both supernatural and supermundane accomplishments will never abuse supernatural powers. (or use them for the ego's purposes)

Further, practice is imbued with great love and compassion that sees suffering and its cause for ourselves and our family and aims to remedy these.

'Samsara arises when one thinks that appearances truly exist, that they are not illusory...

'Developing all encompassing compassion, which is also transparent and free of grasping or partiality... one realizes the illusory, blissful being, the complete enjoyment body of enlightened awareness...' - Gyatrul Rinpoche

All practice is ultimately oriented to that end, of liberation and enlightenment, whether it be study, meditation, prayer, ritual, or mantra practice. Even if the temporal aims are the same, such as for good health, abundant crops, clarity and learning, or conducive conditions for a successful life, this is the view and motivation.

Without this foundation and vibrant thread all throughout, from a Buddhist point of view, merely gaining provisions does not have a clear aim. It can even be the cause of further wandering in the wilderness.

The opposite of the renunciation of samsara, that comes from seeing the unsatisfactory nature of unenlightened existence, is a deepening involvement in confusion and suffering, based on wrong views and actions. This is prone to happen in magical work that is not grounded in the universal spiritual values that are at the heart of the world. People have used these methods to further grasp at material advantages as ends in themselves, and they make for even more problems for themselves and others. Like using levers and pulleys instead of just a shovel, using more subtle energetic means to accomplish an end can result in even worse problems that then need even deeper remedies to resolve.

Atisha said:

Ask me what the results are of actions done desirous of the happiness, fame, and respect of this life and I will tell you: they are only the results of this life. Ask me what will happen in your next lives and I will tell you: you will be a hell being, a hungry ghost, or an animal...

When we come to magic through Buddhism we find that producing a good motivation comes first in all their methods. This includes taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, and generating bodhicitta, the mind of enlightenment. This is based in the Historical Buddha's teachings:

*Speak and act from a pure mind,
and happiness follows...*

and

*When the roots of a tree are healing,
the leaves, flowers and fruits will also be healing*

From the outset, this keeps the causes of suffering, of greed, anger, and delusion from increasing, and acts as a remedy to samsara.

Abandoning kleshas is the aim of Dharma

and

All true Dharma bears good fruit in time

and

Dharma is the wisdom and universal wish for the happiness of oneself and all others, now and forever...

When it comes to setting our motivations, as Westerners we have the additional challenge of usually practicing without a belief in previous and future lives. How then can we engage dharma practice where we can't conceive of such long terms results?

Khenpo Palden Sherab offered us the key here when he said

'As long as every aspect of your dharma practice is infused with bodhcitta, then your practice is going in the right direction.'

Thinking

May this bring only temporal and ultimate happiness to all beings

brings safety, and ensures a good outcome for ourselves and others.

The view and methods of tantra

Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche, in his book on the Lower Tantras says that Vajrayana practice is based on the Middle Way View. And what is this view? It is that things exist differently than the way they appear. This is the subject of the Prajnaparamita Sutras, and later commentaries.

For example, the Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines says,

*The skill in means of a Bodhisattva
consists in this,
that he cognizes that sign,
both its mark and cause,*

*and yet he surrenders himself
completely to the Signless [realm of dharma,
in which no sign has ever arisen].*

and,

*'one treats an actually non-existent objective support as a sign,
as an objective support.*

*The act of will (of a bodhisattva, in truth, actually) arises only in reference
to the conventional expressions current in the world.'*

and the modern day Tibetan teacher, Deshung Rinpoche said:

*'On the conventional level of reality, beings do not exist as they are perceived by
other unenlightened beings. The bodhisattva realizes that, in ultimate reality, there
are no beings who exist as unenlightened beings think, but he directs his mind
toward those beings as they perceive themselves.'*

As Freda Bedi said, Mahayana is the philosophy, and Vajrayana is the meditation. How to express this symbolically? And what then is Buddhist ritual, meditation and prayer?

The following is adapted from a teaching by Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche:

*(In Vajrayana) We aspire to a nonconceptually performed practice, free from
grasping or clinging. This means that when we practice or meditate, we should not
relate to our visualization as if it were a solid object.*

Our visualization must be experienced as a dynamic display of the true nature, like a transcendent wisdom rainbow body. We must understand that the visualization is totally empty of inherent existence, yet totally full of dynamic energies of love, compassion, and wisdom.

We train in seeing the world we live in as translucent, made of light, and holy, and that we are upheld by countless Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, Saints and Sages, ancestors, and the sacred powers of the earth, sky, water, and fire. In this way, the tantras affirm that divine help is always available in abundance. Visualization in this way can be the expression of Right View.

We can represent the way things are by seeing ourselves and others and this world as transparent like a rainbow, with light shining through, appearing and yet ungraspable. What's more, when we realize our inherent worth and the preciousness of ourselves and others and this world, we can intentionally visualize all this as being divine in nature, poetically adorned with jewels, exalted, and uplifting to behold in every way.

The Vajrayana makes use of our creative nature with visualization, and the power of compassion, prayer and directed thought. We call on the benevolent forces of the universe in order to help sentient beings.

Venerable Jigme explained that when we are visualizing we're working with our imagination. Not only are we working with imagined sights, but we're also working with imagined touch and smells and sounds, physical sensations and feelings. We can make this all as detailed, or as simple as we like. We can also do the practice without any elaborate or detailed visualization. For example, we can just see a healing sun, with beautiful light streaming down and blessing ourselves and others while reciting prayers and mantras.

We view the place where we are as beautiful, perfect and pure in every way, and send out light representing our praise and prayers to benefit

ourselves and others. The deep compassionate wishes we have become the object of our meditation, and this supports our healing and creative states of consciousness.

Front generation, self generation, and both

There are different ways we can engage these practices. When Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are prayed to, and visualized in the space in front of us, this is called 'front generation', and when a person sees themselves as the bodhisattva-divinity whose practice they are cultivating, this is called 'self-generation'. Traditionally, this second way of meditation is only done after receiving an initiation into the practice.

Sometimes the two approaches are combined, as described in the following passages by Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche. Here, the word 'deity' means a bodhisattva divinity, or a fully enlightened being, such as Avalokiteshvara, or Manjushri.

'The practices we have recently been discussing are mainly related with the teachings of extraordinary Kriyatantra. In these practices we become the deity, visualizing ourselves as enlightened beings with confidence and vajra pride. As a part of our visualization, we can see deity right in front of us as well. So one's own self is the deity and the deity is also in front of us...'

'In the general Kriyatantra teachings we visualize the deity in the space directly in front of us, and we remain as normal people in our ordinary forms. We perceive the buddhas as absolutely enlightened beings, while we perceive ourselves as obscured sentient beings. However, when we obscured sentient beings practice on the totally enlightened wisdom beings, we make contact with them and communicate with them by means of our joy, devotion, courage, and commitment. They then return blessings to us which are absorbed... and we eventually become the same as those buddhas...'

On Empowerments

They say in the Tibetan Tradition before one starts a particular practice of mantra, that we should receive the initiation for that practice. I remember asking one of my teachers about the difference between practicing with and without the initiation. He said there are some practices we can do without the initiation, but it helps to receive it. I then experimented and found what he said to be true. I had some result when practicing, but it was improved by taking the empowerment.

We can hear or read a mantra in a book and have some feel for its divine quality. I had this experience too, due to some positive karma. Still, if I had a choice now, and wanted to cultivate a particular mantra, I'd try to connect with a lineage of practice.

What happens during an initiation, essentially, is that we're meditating with the teacher, and it's their realization of the practice that they are transmitting to those who attend. Whether we are receptive, and register the unique quality they are embodying is up to us. I've read that it's not unusual for someone to take the same initiation a number of times before something connects.

In my own limited experience, I can relate the practice I've done to being at those rare events, both because of the initiation's extraordinary nature at the time, and because the usefulness they have had as a reference point since in cultivating those same qualities in myself.

My esteem for my teachers has only deepened over the years, and my gratitude for what they have given to the world, and to me has increased more and more as I've done my best to unfold what is held within these practices.

My recommendation for anyone with even a slight interest in the Vajrayana or a particular form of its practice is to search out where and where an

initiation of that kind is going to be given, and then make arrangements to be there.

Sometimes a commitment is given, that can be anything from a retreat, or doing the practice in full daily, to a few mantras, to - keep a good heart, and just do the best you can to practice. Sometimes people are also allowed to attend as a blessing, and there is no practice commitment. Check beforehand.

For someone with an affinity, great benefits can arise from connecting with a teacher, lineage, and practice, and these benefits unfold over time, through our own cultivation.

The Four Needs

There are four kinds of sufferings, or needs that people have everywhere, and that are responded to by them in various ways, including religion. The difficulties people have connects us with them, and we can recognize our own lives in theirs, and sympathize with them. Our fundamental condition is the same, everywhere you look.

When you see what people do, or read prayers or descriptions of visits to temples, or psychics, the same needs and wishes are expressed.

It's clear that the general areas of concern to people are health, relationships, resources, and emotions.

I. Whether people are asking for themselves or for loved ones, many of the rituals and prayers that are made are naturally for *the health of the body*. We can see the whole range in fact of people's beliefs in the ways they respond to the wish for the health of the human body. Materialists hand over agency to the modern physician, who may have a deep understanding of the mechanics of the body, but most of the time is lacking even basic knowledge of more subtle levels of our being.

People with more faith in or contact with spiritual realities turn to these in times of difficulty. They are able to draw upon healing influences that benefit their own body, and those of their loved ones. This kind of activity takes many forms, from meditation and prayer, to ritual, to asking for help from those with a vocation of prayer.

II. *The desire for a relationship*, not only out of loneliness, but also from the sense of being incomplete without a partner leads many people to pray and chant, visit spiritual counsellors, or engage in ritual to find some form of companionship. By far the most common kinds of simple magic are addressing this area of life. Whether or not we get what we want, this is the simple fact of it. There are a lot of reasons a ritual or a spiritual practice

may or may not work, but looking at the ways these methods and spiritual resources are used, we can only say that physical desire and wanting a relationship are a huge areas of human concern, and need, and often great suffering when these desires are not met.

III. We also find throughout time and cultures that people pray and make use of magical means *for the sake of resources*. This can include getting a job, or having good weather, and a good harvest.

IV. *The last category of human need is emotional*. A person can have everything else and still be deeply unhappy, as anyone here in the United States can tell you.

I remember when I was traveling, and meeting people who had preconceptions about this country. I felt like I wanted to tell them that one of the biggest lessons of this country is that material possessions by themselves do not bring happiness. Usually this message did not register, such is the power of people's dreams and fantasies of paradise as just having food, shelter, and physical health.

Buddhism points out that the root cause of suffering is self grasping ignorance, and that all of our problems - health, resources, relationships, karmic difficulties - come from this.

The reason Buddhists divide spiritual accomplishments into *common* and *supreme siddhis* relates here. Common siddhis would be such things as the ability to control the weather, to heal on an everyday level, to gather resources and good relationships. The Supreme Siddhi, by contrast goes much further than this. Enlightenment includes the other abilities, and establishes the root of health and well being.

According to Buddhism, as long as we don't have the spiritual realization of our true nature, our view is flawed, and our speech and action also are limited, and result in suffering, or at the very least, only temporary gains.

Only realization brings samsara to an end, and will give us the peace and health that we all innately seek.

The reason I relate Buddhist aims to human emotional needs is that this tradition is so practical. It begins right where we are and includes guidance for people wherever they are in their life. Beginning with ethics, and going from there to encouraging us to have greater love for one another, Buddhism and other spiritual traditions lead to greater and greater fulfillment, until their goals are reached. Seen this way, the aims of Buddhism then are good conditions for practice, liberation from wrong views and afflictive emotions, and enlightenment for the sake of all beings, all our precious family.

A higher synthesis

Low, Middle, and High Magic

Although we don't acknowledge it here in the West, Buddhist Tantra is magical practice. It is one of the skillful means of the Mahayana.

A working definition I have for magic that applies to all its forms is:

creating change in the inner world, in order to bring change in the outer world

This can mean anything from healing, or ending plagues and natural disasters, to attracting and promoting good conditions for crops to grow; from clearing adverse influences from a space, or a person, to easing some difficult conditions for ourselves or another. Ritual or inspired meditation practice lifts up the mind to a higher level, where we can connect with spiritual energy, and bring it to bear throughout our lives.

It's recognized that tantras are used as methods of transformation, in line with Buddhist aims. A well known verse says:

*Do no harm,
accomplish all that is good,
purify your mind,
This is the teaching of the Buddha*

Tantra is less often thought of as magical practice, but this is how it is usually employed. Based on a sacred outlook, seeing this world as divine in nature, with benevolent life here for us, we create the life we intend along these lines.

It's not spoken of as magic, I'm sure, for practical reasons. The ego may take hold of it, or it may be misunderstood if presented this way.

Superstition and unfounded prejudice may interfere with the work of temples, monks and nuns, and lay practitioners. Not knowing it in its nature and functioning though, at the very least, is yet another way we can miss taking the measure of the worth of these teachings and practices. Optimally, we should fully understand what we are doing, seeing it from different points of view.

Uniting what is called in Western traditions Low and High magic is the ideal.

Low magic in this context simply refers to using elemental energies of the earth, and nature's forces, and involving basic psychicism, and High is in reference to working with more subtle spiritual beings and energy. Elemental magic is most readily perceivable and so it's historically been the type most commonly used, and corrupted, for less than positive or far seeing aims.

By comparison, it takes some training, or unusual sensitivity to access and make use of more subtle magical working. This too can be corrupted by selfish motives, but owing to the dedication involved in traveling that path, such misuse is less common.

In the Western Esoteric Traditions, their point of entry to the Mysteries is the thought

I desire to know, in order to serve...

In the Wiccan Tradition, their protection is to seal their Work with the prayer

*May this be in the best interest of all,
according to the free will of all...*

Similarly, Buddhist Mahayana Vajrayana practice is based on compassion, and deep insight, and incorporates these methods, working with our natural world and on the more subtle spiritual levels as a means of benefit.

Without romanticizing magic, or having it become an ego trip, with safeguards built in, the Vajrayana leads us to the fulfillment of our potential as human beings, and to our being able to benefit ourselves and others in a variety of ways.

In the preliminary aspects of Buddhist Tantra, the protective force of Taking Refuge and generating bodhicitta - the thought of enlightenment for the sake of all beings - keeps us back from worldly motivations that compound rather than alleviate suffering.

In Tantric practice, this is emphasized because of the grave risk that these methods could be taken up by the ego, even in a subtle way, resulting in ordinary deluded pride, so limiting to oneself and others.

Magical methods of all kinds can work to benefit, or to create far more extensive problems. Refuge and bodhicitta then set our direction in life, as well as in meditation, prayer, and ritual work.

The motivations in Buddhist practice traditionally have been taught as being

*for lasting happiness,
liberation,
or enlightenment*

In this tradition, it's considered that anything other than these is misguided, and a cause of suffering.

The minimum level of motivation removes what are called The Eight Worldly Dharmas. These are in four pairs: pursuing pleasure and avoiding

pain; seeing material gain for its own sake, and looking to avoid loss; wanting praise and not blame, and wishing for a good reputation, and not obscurity, or being unknown.

'High', and 'low' magic at this point can also be thought of as referring to a person's motivation, coming from either the ego, or from our true nature, which is loving kindness, that is not separate at all from others and this whole ten directions world.

Seeking power, wealth, fame or pleasure as ends in themselves disregards karma - cause and effect, and ultimately fails to secure the happiness we seek. The Wisdom of Buddhist and other religious traditions then extends what we think of as the range of work to be done on all levels.

I would like to propose then that instead of referring only to Low and High Magic, we see this kind of working as being Low, Medium, and High in nature. These correspond to elemental magic, more subtle working, and spiritual realization.

Thinking of it this way, what we are calling magic is broadened to include the spiritual attainments, and our ideas of spiritual practice can be extended to include the different levels of magical work.

This gives a fuller sense of what it means to be a complete person practicing Mahayana Buddhism, making use of all available resources to accomplish our positive aims.

Part III. Practices and Commentaries

1. An Introduction to the Bodhisattva-Divinity Tara
2. Ocean of Saints
3. Why the Buddha is Regarded as the Supreme Healer
4. A Healing Buddha Practice_short form_10_16_19

An Introduction to the Bodhisattva-Divinity Tara

In order for us as Westerners to engage in practices that have come from the Tibetan Buddhist Tradition, without misunderstanding their nature or purpose, there are a few ideas that need to be spelled out. As Americans, we have certain common ideas, and so the same questions naturally arise, and these can be addressed at any point, but probably the earlier on in our study the better.

I would like to introduce Tara as an example of a practice that can be beneficial, and, when I think of doing this, I can see right away the kinds of questions I would propose we consider so the communication can have a better chance of success.

First, as with any divine being – or bodhisattva, we have the question, ‘Who is Tara?’ Of course we can see that there are different ways to answer this kind of a question. There are different levels to it. When we speak about the ultimate nature of anything, be it God, or Buddha, then this is a really deep question, maybe taking a lifetime to ask or to answer. If we are asking this type of deep question, this holds up a mirror to our own self. We can ask, ‘Who am I?’, and ‘Who do I conceive myself to be?’

Then again, especially if we are beginners, we really need more of an answer in terms of what we can all easily recognize and understand and work with. Maybe this approach will be helpful: using the simplest, least esoteric language to describe something that is both accessible and also profound.

Historically, and now in Western culture too, Tara is regarded as a protectress, a savior, a benefactor. The practice of calling on Tara in times of need has been successful for many people. She is called on to help liberate us from problems, and especially from fears. She has a reputation for quick action, for responding very quickly, with loving kindness and compassion.

Her practice can be done in different ways - with prayer, or through visualization and mantra recitation. Tara's mantra is Om Tare Tuttare Ture Soha (pronounced Om Tah-ray Too-tah-ray Too-ray So-ha). A person can also simply think of her and feel her presence with faith and devotion.

Meditators will tell us that we all have Tara within us; that all these qualities and wonders are contained within our fundamental nature. They tell us that if we do the practice these qualities awaken and are expressed in the world, and that in a sense we become Tara, and this I don't doubt. For the time being though, let's just stay with the outer, common belief and function, that calling on Tara works, that increasing what we can call *the Tara energy* in our lives works, even if we don't know all of why or how it does. If we have some karmic affinity, and some receptivity or openness, and we give these methods a fair try, we can see the result for ourselves.

'If I could only give you the moon...'

Another question that often comes up when talking about any of the bodhisattva-deity practices, calling on Tara for example, and praying for a husband or a wife, or for health, or wealth is, 'How is this Buddhist?', and I think I'm just now able to say what I've been thinking and feeling for a while now that Tara is of a certain class I call 'the Bodhisattva Sangha'. The word bodhisattva means someone who is dedicated to helping others in the fullest possible ways, and sangha means a spiritual community.

As a member of the Bodhisattva Sangha, Tara responds as we would, with kindness, to someone asking for something... If they ask for water, we give them water; if they ask for a coat, we give them a coat...

There's a Zen story about a monk who was told that a thief was coming, and so he threw his bowl and his robes out the window as the thief approached. The thief scooped them up, somewhat startled, I'd imagine,

and the monk called after him, saying, 'If I could only give you the moon! ...'

Such is the wish of Bodhisattva Sangha – their deep wish is for our true happiness, our freedom, peace and health, and so if we ask for food or shelter or medicine, they give us these without holding anything back, as a mother or father would give to their child, or a friend to a friend. They give out of their great means. They will give to us according to our needs, and they will give to us as much as we can receive. Their wish for us includes both the relative, provisional, day to day needs, and also those things that are of ultimate benefit, such as teachings and encouragement, and good conditions for spiritual growth. Their love and their kind wish for us is of one nature.

I heard someone give the definition of blessing, in the Buddhist sense, as that which removes obstacles to spiritual practice, which I think is a good definition because it includes both relative and ultimate things.

Making a distinction – the word 'deity'

If I had to choose one term that isn't translated well from Eastern culture to Western culture, it is the word 'deity'. More often than not, translators are not communicating the intended meaning. The reason is this: whether or not we identify with the Western religious traditions, as Westerners we have ideas about God as part of our culture. We have all these associations, automatically, for the word God and its synonyms that, in this case does not apply. When trying to understand what words are referring to that come from non-theistic cultures, some effort is needed to get at a clear sense of their meaning.

We can say for certain that Buddhism does not make use of the idea of a creator God, all powerful, and all knowing. It does however have teachings, and it does make use of practices that call upon and access what

can be called 'help from the other side'. There is calling upon beings that help.

When Tibetan teachers speak in English, sometimes they don't translate the word 'yi-dam', and they explain it as keeping the bodhisattva – divinity 'held tightly in the mind', as a method of meditation, as a path, and as a means of benefit.

A first level bodhisattva, in some teachings, is described as having at least the experience of insight into the cause of the end of suffering, that freedom and joy. And Buddhist teachings on what is called refuge tell us that if someone or some being is still subject to suffering or change, then that is not a reliable source of protection in the long term. We should seek true refuge, true and lasting protection and support. This, in Buddhist teachings, is what distinguishes Buddhas, or enlightened beings as true refuge.

Perhaps, rather than use the word 'deity', sticky, or perhaps misleading as it is, I would propose the term 'divinity' – since we do have the idea that the sacred can be here in this world; that it is here for us, available, and to be received with deep respect. The sense of divinity can be cultivated and awakened throughout our lives.

One more thought: regarding a question such as 'Where is Tara?' We usually divide the world up in our thinking in ways it is not actually divided. We say there is an inside and an outside to our life. Looked at energetically though, the so-called inside and outside are one.

If we think of Tara as an archetype, an aspect of the universal soul we all share, this can have connotations of being purely something inside. My sense is that it's truer to say that Tara, and the other Buddhas, Saints, or Bodhisattva Sangha exist in the realm of one-ness, where the inside and outside are both included, where they are one. I think this accounts, at least in part, for the effectiveness of these methods.

A note on the prayer that follows:

I usually don't comment on anything I write out that is more lyrical, since these sorts of things should speak for themselves, but in this case maybe it would add something to say the following.

I had the idea that describing a bodhisattva, or a guardian or benefactor can be likened to talking about a person. We may say the person has this quality, or likes to go here or there, or spend their time like this, all of which would be for the sake of trying to give us some idea of the person. All the different things we could say would be to introduce us to the essence of the person. So it is with this poem about Tara. The different aspects or qualities mentioned refer to something that is one essential nature – that is Tara. The purpose of writing this, and reflecting on it is to get in touch with what is being talked about.

One more thing may be worth mentioning. While much of this is very personal, I've been surprised to learn that others have had similar experiences with Tara. And so here I am writing this out this prayer and sharing it with others, with the hope that it brings others, my dear friends and family, the same, and greater, benefit.

In Praise of Tara

Holy Tara, Protector of living beings,
 May your blessings flow throughout all of our lives
 and by Your Compassionate Activity,
 may all the myriad needs of all the myriad beings
 be completely fulfilled

Tara

Your beauty tames the minds of living beings.
 You draw all beings to yourself.
 Your virtue calms their fears and brings them all fresh happiness.

You are the one who makes what seems to be the impossible entirely
 possible
 You conquer disbelief, and dispel doubt
 without leaving even a trace
 You are miraculous activity, beyond comprehension.

You are 'swift to regard', quick to respond,
 the remover of obstacles.

You are our protector

You are grace and blessings,
 the relative and ultimate liberator of beings

Your beauty inspires uprightness of moral character
 You pacify habit energy
 We shed our skins, lose our old ways,
 like leaves falling off of trees

You bring new birth, and give new strength

You purify the mind - like the stream-clearing jewel
You uplift and brighten the mind

For those with positive aims,
You are their Great Benefactress

You set all things right
You bring about reconciliation without impediment
without anything blocking it
You bring harmony to every surrounding circumstance

You help us to gather all positive conditions
You bring out the best that is in us all
You make all practices effective
It has always been this way
It is this way now
It will always be this way

You are the spring-like feeling of 'yes',
the sum of all optimism,
joyful positive energy,
the feeling of 'I can'

Tara,
May your blessings completely illuminate all of our lives
and may all the myriad needs of all the myriad beings
be completely fulfilled now

O, Bright Virtue!
You are light
You are grace in my life
and subtle nourishment
The blessing of all the women who have ever wished me well

You are instinctive love,
all-accommodating
naturally inclusive
comprehensive

You are embodied enlightened intelligence,
intuitive awareness, the heart awake,
and the flourishing of joy

You are playful, youthful, joyful, quick, charming, elegant, inspiring, wise,
warm, strengthening, encouraging, healing,
calming, stabilizing;

How can I call you? Tara - hope, positive energy, joyful, pure, wholesome
energy

With your rivers
nurture my limbs, these fields
With your warmth, your light
bring about the total flowering of goodness...
Tara,
May your blessings be established in all of our lives

Because this is Divine Feminine energy, quick to respond
with magical activity,
the equivalent of the patron saint of lost causes,
grace,
spiritual beauty bringing light, giving hope,
removing obstacles,
calming fear, pacifying suffering,
and protecting
bringing harmony to every surrounding circumstance,
bringing life, health, happiness, good fortune, and stability

and, being the Spring-like sum of all optimism, inspiring,
positive energy,
enabling all the good things we would do to become effective,
to become fulfilled,
to become complete,
This is called Green Tara
May all share in these blessings...

Ocean of Saints

Anandamayima
Amma

Teresa of Avila
Teresa of Lisieux
Catherine of Sienna...

Ani Tenzin Palmo
Jetsunma Kushok Chimay Luding

Mother Teresa
Yeshe Tsogyal
Mandarava

Saraswati,
Matriarchs,
Indigenous Grandmothers,

Holy Women of prayer and action,

Mary
Kuan Yin
Tara

Divine Activity,
gracing our world,

All you holy women, pray for us!

May your blessings be upon us!

...

*Ocean of Saints,
Holy Women of prayer and action,
May your blessings be upon us!*

*Om Tare Tuttare Ture Soha
Om Mani Peme Hung*

A few words on Ocean of Saints

We need to enter into the realm of metaphor, comfortably, to begin to speak of things as they actually are. We can see the limitations of ordinary language, how it mistakenly places objects and experiences outside of each other, and then attempts to convey relationship via subject-verb-object constructions. Things are both more simple, and infinitely richer and more complex than this.

When Christian theologians asked how many angels could dance on the head of a pin, by some they were mocked, as if they were looking for an actual number. The ignorance and arrogance of their critics couldn't be more obvious.

In the Avatamsaka Sutra, as recounted by Thich Nhat Hanh, angels, saints, and bodhisattvas come to the pregnant mother of the Buddha-to-be, to ask if he is comfortable. She expresses astonishment that, although there are so many of these holy beings, to offer homage to the future Buddha, they all enter into her quite easily.

Since all is a manifestation of mind, or our spiritual nature, as expressed in this text, and this is limitless, there is no problem. There is always plenty of room.

In this very moment, we are accompanied by the saints and holy beings, enriched by their lives and presence in our lives.

When we count, in a religious work, or in poetry, we are at the threshold of the mundane world, and the spiritual realm. Counting is something we do in our everyday life, and we have to get it right, by consensus, in order to function effectively; counting out change, giving directions, agreeing on when to meet, and telling time.

In the spiritual world, there is one, there is two, as in relationship, and then there are numbers that point beyond all counting. If we miss this cue, it's as if our pant leg were caught on the doorframe - we get no further.

Moving through because we've understood the significance of the metaphor, we can leave behind numbers and walk in the light of spiritual presence and truth.

The question then arises, if one single saint contains the fullness of spirit, why mention two, or more? Our ordinary senses still obscure the the intangible, the beyond-conception. Seeing the same vital principle expressed in a few different names and forms disabuses us of the tendency to hold onto a single expression, and miss the inner truth that is being revealed. Once we get to that, then the essence of all the saints and holy men and women is there.

It's this way, then:

Having one form of devotion to focus on, a name and form, a practice, focuses our mind and brings through the blessings. Devotions are our cultivated receptivity, and honor to have with us.

Why the Buddha is Regarded as the Supreme Healer

To my mind, there are two reasons why the Buddha has been regarded throughout time as the Supreme Healer:

The first is that the Buddha saw not only suffering, but its causes as well, rooted in ignorance, and, from his very first talk, proposed a remedy to *all suffering*. By developing the wisdom of insight into our own nature, the Buddha taught that we can become free from all karma and delusions, and all harm. This is a radical proposition that, over two millennia, many have investigated and verified.

If a person goes to an ordinary doctor, with one problem or illness, that is what they will be treated for. By comparison, it is said that this profound remedy goes to the cause of the entire range of our sufferings. Next to a medical model that treats only one symptom, or a few symptoms, this is vastly different, as it goes unimaginably further. It aims to cure all the oceans of samsaric sufferings, over countless lifetimes, that living beings experience.

A second reason why the Buddha has been thought of as the Supreme Healer is the scope of the enlightened person's concern, which includes every aspect of our life, health and well being, from the material and psychological, to the most subtle, spiritual levels. It is care that is comprehensive, all inclusive, and it is for all living beings. It is this range, the depth as well as this breadth of love and compassion, that distinguishes the Buddha.

Over two millennia, then, born of wisdom and compassion, many Skillful Means have been developed by the followers of the Buddha, and those with realizations, to meet the needs of beings.

These methods are what are offered in the Traditions.

There are many ways for the Divine Light and Healing Energy to pour into this world. If we feel we have an affinity with these teachings, we are invited to try these methods and see if they work for us. When we do, we may have the experience that we are supported as well by all the great pure energy of the Saints and Noble practitioners of the Lineages.

All of this has its source in the life of wisdom and compassion of the Founder. All of these teachings and practices can be seen as the continuation of activity of that realized life. And so I join my voice with those of the past and present, and sing with them, as part of one traditional verse of praise:

*Homage to the Completely Perfected, Fully Awakened Being,
the Supreme Guide*

*Homage to the Fully Awakened One, The Glorious Conqueror,
the Subduer from the Shakya Clan*

And, from the Seventh Dalai Lama:

*Honor to Buddha, the supreme sage,
the cosmic overlord who awakens
all beings from drunken ignorance
by manifesting the hundredfold light
of truth's brilliant door.*

May all the benefit that can come from healing practice
be received by all living beings,
each according to their need,
and, in whatever way I can, may I be the cause of that

- From A Collection of Buddhist Healing Prayer and Practices

A Healing Buddha Practice

O, my ten directions three times family,
all my beloved relations,
may I make a gift of my life

May my life, and this practice benefit us all completely.
May this bring health wherever it is needed,
the balance of the elements,
and the firm establishment of true health and well being,
long life, and happiness for us all

Contemplating the needs that exist..
May I know ultimate happiness,
the full cessation of all suffering,
and the complete realization of health and peace,
and share that with all...

May all beings have happiness
and the causes of happiness flourishing...
May all beings be completely and permanently free of suffering
and all the causes of suffering...
I rejoice in all that is beautiful and right in the world,
in all virtue and positive action,
and in all success, happiness and good fortune...
and abide in stable, impartial love

May I always cherish all my family
with the determination to accomplish for them the highest good
that is more precious than a wish-fulfilling jewel

May the supreme jewel, bodhicitta,
 arise where it has not yet arisen,
 Where it has arisen, may it not diminish,
 May it ever grow and flourish

For myself and all others, unenlightened living is suffering,
 and there is an end to suffering. Enlightened living is happiness,
 health, and peace, and there is a path.

And therefore:

I take refuge in the Buddha, the Great Compassionate Teacher,
 I take refuge in the Dharma, in all the Liberating Teachings,
 and I take refuge in the Noble Sangha, the Accomplished Spiritual
 Community

By the merit I have accumulated
 through Generosity and other Virtues,
 may I accomplish Buddhahood for the sake of all beings

Just as my teachers before me have done,
 May I accomplish the full realization of the healing buddha,
 and bring all others without a single exception
 to that very same state

May the Great Healing Light of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas,
 of all Holy Beings,
 and of all that is sacred and pure in the universe
 pacify, completely pacify, and then fully remove the sufferings of living
 beings,
 and bring them all true and lasting health and happiness

May real happiness, health, and peace awaken in us all!
 May all beings benefit!

{Om Namo Bhagavate Bekhandze / Guru Baidurya / Prabha Radzaya /
Tathagataya / Arhate/ Samyaksam Buddhaya //
Tadyatha / Om Bekhandzye Bekhandzye / Maha Bekhandzye
[Bekhandzye] / Radza Samudgate Soha //}

Tayata Om Bekhandze Bekhandze Maha Bekhandze [Bekhandze]
Radza Samungate Soha

By this merit, and by the virtue of any other good I have done,
together with that of kind hearted people everywhere,
and all excellent practitioners,

and by all the virtue and all the blessings
of all the ten directions three times Buddhas and Bodhisattvas

Saints and Sages, Arhats and Ajahns,
Lamas, monks and nuns,
and of all Holy Beings
May all beings benefit.

By all the blessings we have received,
and by the strength of our own awakened insight,
courage, and love,
may all beings have lasting happiness

From this point forward,
may we all experience only complete liberation
from every form of suffering,
nibbana, the remainderless cessation of dukkha

May we all experience peace, joy,
true health, and happiness.

For myself and all others,
May the supreme Awakening Mind
arise where it has not yet arisen
Where it has arisen, may it not diminish
May it ever grow and flourish

May our intentions equally penetrate
every being and place
with the true merit of Buddha's Way.

May this bring complete health wherever it is needed,
on outer, inner, and secret levels

May this bring about the balance of the elements,
and the firm establishment of true health and well being,
long life, and happiness for us all

By all this virtue
may all the environments where we live be purified,
and may we all accomplish the full realization of the Noble healing buddha

By this merit,
Wherever I am, and wherever I may go,
may I further the work of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas,
the awakening of light, complete freedom and peace.

By all this virtue,
May all holy teachers live long, and guide us until samsara ends.
And may there be peace and joy in all the world.

Commentaries by Lama Lodro Rinpoche and Geshe Wangdu

Three Qualities in Vajrayana Practice - Vajra Pride, Clear Appearance, and Pure Recollection, by Notes from the teachings of Lama Lodro Rinpoche

1. Chenrezig Commentary
2. Green Tara Sadhana with Commentary
3. White Tara Sadhana and Commentary
4. Highlighting the Wisdom Aspect of Purification Practice
5. On Purification and Healing
6. Vajrasattva Sadhana, with Commentary
7. Teachings on Mahamudra and Medicine Buddha

Three Qualities in Vajrayana Practice

Vajra Pride, Clear Appearance, and Pure Recollection

Notes from the teachings of Lama Lodro

How can I think of myself as a Deity? If you say 'My body is the deity' that makes it difficult - in that case, you're not getting the blessing of the deity. But the deity actually is my mind. If I can cultivate it...

The visualization of the deity's body is very different. The physical body is dependently originated, made of the five elements. To visualize, 'My mind is the deity - perfect enlightened quality' this is possible.

Vajra Pride means, My mind's quality is the Buddha - the Buddha's wisdom is always there. My mind is like a diamond, that can cut through everything. This is the meaning of Vajra - indestructible.

When I truly recognize Buddha, then I can destroy the ego. Even if the ego has been there for million years, or a billion years, it doesn't matter, because this mind is so strong. That is what my mind actually is, enlightened from the beginning.

Just pride is negative. Vajra Pride is very positive, the ultimate positive, and this is very necessary to understand, very necessary to know. You have to keep this awareness.

It's said:

*Your mind is Buddha -
there is no need to dispel any impurity*

It is spontaneously perfect

There is no need to add anything

Next,

Why don't I see this? - that's the next point.

The relative mind can't see this. It is obscured.

*It is so perfect,
it needs the perfect mind to see it*

How to see this? We need the wisdoms of listening, and reflection, and meditation.

It is ultimate wisdom.

You need to see this, then you are liberated.

It's said:

*You don't need to meditate,
You just need to become accustomed to it*

Keep the brightness within you.

*There is no need to remove anything,
and no need to add anything*

Pride means you are holding something in mind Vajra in Vajra Pride makes the meaning whole, complete. It indicates what kind of pride this is.

This is the antidote to the ego. It is becoming more familiar with selflessness, and your true qualities of enlightenment.

The next one is *Steadfast Clear Appearance*

This means that, whether we are seeing our own body as the deity, or visualizing the deity in front, every detail of color, arm, face, and ornament is very clear in your mind.

This is very important to know. This is how we develop vajrayana samatha meditation.

With Clear Appearance, keeping the deity in mind for the entire session of meditation, this will improve your concentration. Keeping your mind full of the deities' quality - this also acts as a purification.

The Deities bodies each have implements, and each have meaning, such as the Six Paramitas, purification, merit, wisdom, and so on.

These are the opposite of the mental poisons. They are the remedy to the mental poisons. This practice will uproot all these habitual patterns.

Samatha practice (by itself) doesn't get to the root of the problems. It can calm the mind down, but it doesn't remove the poisons. But this kind of Deity yoga practice can remove them from the root, because you are visualizing full enlightenment. You are giving full concentration to fully enlightened qualities.

While you are reciting mantras especially, you have to keep your mind there, on the visualization.

When the visualization isn't so clear, also, mindfulness recognizes it. You know, 'Alright, now it's not so strong', and you re-focus, and try to make it more strong.

That is Clear Appearance.

The third one we call *Pure Recollection*.

This is similar to Clear Appearance. Here we are focussing on the meaning of what is visualized - one face, three eyes for the three times; a wrathful face showing extraordinary compassion, as a remedy to the ego;

the color blue being a symbol of the Dharmakaya;

{and so on...}

You bring these enlightened qualities to mind by remembering the meaning of what is visualized - each implement, each color.

That is called Pure Recollection.

Bringing these three together when you recite mantra is very powerful. They make the practice very effective.

This applies to all Vajrayana practice.

The Sadhana of Avalokiteshvara (Tibetan: Chenrezig), with commentary by Lama Lodu

[Note: It's traditionally taught that what's called 'self-generation' - where one visualizes oneself as the deity - should only be done by those who have received the initiation of a particular deity, but that 'front generation' - where one visualizes the deity in space above and in front of oneself - can be done by anyone.]

Chenrezig Puja

This book contains the recitation for the meditation of the Great Compassionate One called 'For the Benefit of All Beings as Vast as the Skies', Tib. 'Dro.don.Kha.khyab.Ma.'

(Begin with REFUGE.)

Refuge begins with visualization, the object is Avalokiteshvara, four armed Chenrezig. The six, three jewels and three roots, Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, Lama, Yidam, and Dharma Protector, these condense into one.

The three jewels: the body is Sangha, speech Dharma, and mind is Buddha. Body, pure, perfect, acting on the path as a Bodhisattva is Sangha. Speech-teaching liberation from the ocean of suffering is Dharma. Stainless, pure mind is Buddha.

The three roots: Avalokiteshvara's body is the Dharma Protectors, speech is Deities, and mind is Lama. Body is Dharma Protectors, the one who protects from obstacles and preserves the teaching.

Speech is Deities, pure, perfect energies, appearing according to the needs of sentient beings. Deities represent pure speech. Speech is a very subtle level of consciousness.

In the word 'Yidam', 'Yi' means mind, and 'dam' tight, holding very tightly. Always keep in mind the perfection of the Deities, and do not forget. Always remember, instead of feeling fear at any time, always bring Deities, this view to mind. Avalokitehvara's speech is the pure energy of Deities, and Chenrezig's mind represents the Lama, or Guru.

Lama means Buddha. La- means space, sky, above all the world; physically, mentally, nothing above; true wisdom, compassion; wisdom is limitless, compassion, limitless.

La expresses all enlightened qualities. Ma, mother in any language, represents compassion, boundless compassion and loving kindness.

He who has these qualities is the mother of all sentient beings. Like the love of a mother for her child, the Lama has this love for all sentient beings. Perfect, stainless and pure wisdom, perfect, measureless.

He would not regret being born one million times to liberate one sentient being. Without discriminating, equal compassion for all, loving kindness for all, without exception, that is Chenrezig, that is the Lama.

Chenrezig represents the Three Jewels and the Three Roots; The Buddha, Dharma, Sangha; the Blessing Root is the Lama, , the Accomplishment Root is the Yidam, and the Activity Root is the Dharma Protector.

Visualize Chenrezig as the one who is capable entirely of protecting sentient beings from suffering.

The Buddhas, past, present and future, are whoever attained enlightenment. They are the 'transcendent and accomplished conquerors'.

'All the Supreme Dharma' is all the Holy, Spiritual Dharma that leads to liberation. Dharma is taught according to our afflictions. It is said that there are 84,000 teachings to meet our needs. Dharma is given by the Buddha to be practiced, and is all the truth spoken by the Enlightened Ones. The Dharma refines our mind, and leads from suffering to liberation.

The Noble Sangha are those who do not do any negative action, and are continuously doing positive action; noble and high beings, perfect and pure, and the ordinary Sangha are those who help and encourage us.

Dakas and Dakinis are male and female Bodhisattvas, also enlightened beings. They are the 'Protectors and Defenders of the Dharma'. When we take refuge sincerely, from the depth of our hearts, they will protect us from any obstacle and any hinderance, and they will guide us on the path of liberation.

Each symbol represents an enlightened quality. Dakas and Dakinis appear out of compassion, like a mother who is kind, gentle, and who loves her child with her whole heart- that mother will give up her own life to save her child, the Buddhas have that much compassion for all beings equally.

Sometimes a mother shows anger out of kindness, thinking, 'this may help'. Dieties compassion is so strong to subdue, to protect, and to lead to enlightenment. Sometimes a wrathful appearance is needed.

Whoever possesses the Wisdom Eye through their purity, and have the ability to protect sentient beings, all these are united in Avalokiteshvara. When you are taking refuge you are saying that you are under the protection of all these great beings, and not only you but all sentient beings.

Whatever sentient beings are suffering, they are protected and led to the path.

Recite until you feel devotion. Bring in your mind the purity and the activity of enlightened beings. Mind is Buddha, speech, Dharma, and Body, Sangha. Bring to mind their power, compassion and purity, This is a most important practice of the Vajrayana. If you are in refuge, you are 'inside'. 'Inside' also means looking at the true nature of mind.

Think: he can protect me, not only temporarily, not only this lifetime, but until enlightenment. How? Study and practice Dharma. Devotion is how you look at pure, enlightened qualities. Longing and practice, this leads to experience.

From this moment until the Heart of Enlightenment is reached, I and all sentient beings as limitless as the sky * go for refuge to all the glorious Holy Lamas; we go for refuge to all the Yidams, the Dieties gathered in the Mandalas; we go for refuge to all the Buddhas, those that have conquered and gone beyond; we go for refuge to all the Supreme Dharma; we go for refuge to all the Noble Sangha; we go for refuge to all the Dakas, Dakinis, Protectors and Defenders of Dharma who possess the eye of Transcending Awareness.

(Repeat three times from *.)

(Finishing the Refuge, the recitation for the Chenrezig meditation follows. First, the REFUGE and the Raising of BODHICITTA:)

Next, most important are the Six Perfections (sometimes Ten). We wish to gain enlightenment. Why?- because I want to free all sentient beings from suffering and guide them to enlightenment. This is bodhicitta, altruism.

The Six Perfections are: generosity, morality, patience, diligence, concentration, and wisdom.

Generosity takes the form of material giving, giving fearlessness, and giving Dharma. With skillful means we give so that they feel very free and safe. Pure giving knows what will benefit. The best generosity is to give the Dharma, to free them from samsara. The Dharma that you give is forever. When they practice they are liberated from suffering and attain enlightenment and are able to benefit other sentient beings. (Be careful that they are suitable.)

In this case, the generosity is the visualization of Avalokiteshvara, and reciting the mantra of Avalokiteshvara, and resting in the majesty and radiance of the true nature of mind.

Morality is whatever vow you have, especially during this practice, concentrate stage by stage (without anger, desire, jealousy, greed) according to the sadhana, not allowing these different kinds of afflictions.

Patience- summer hot, winter cold, knee hurt, thirsty, hungry- no matter what, I keep it until the end of the sadhana. By concentrating on the sadhana I can dispel impure view of the world and it becomes the Pure Land. So, whatever comes you take it.

Diligence is the opposite of laziness. We know what a great opportunity we have. Use this opportunity. Bring this good fortune to mind. This brings encouragement to go through any obstacles. Diligence is also called joyful striving. This will result in good. A little difficulty is no big deal. Think of the great result.

Concentration- each prayer has its own meaning. Concentrate on the meaning, on the visualization and the mantra.

Wisdom is knowing that what you visualize, mantra, prayer, sentient beings, all together, all this is emptiness, they do not really exist inherently. That is how you look.

With an overview of the practice, you think I will do this practice, then I will have the ability to benefit sentient beings.

Bodhicitta means the heart of enlightenment, altruism, Enlightened Mind. With sincere compassion, wish for others to be free from suffering. We have to experience, have sympathy, and send out compassion, wishing them happiness that lasts forever, and wishing them to be free from suffering forever. Send out this precious thought to others. Compassion and kindness are very important. Keep it always.

Refuge and bodhicitta are a very important part of the tantric sadhana. Refuge distinguishes one as a Buddhist, and bodhicitta distinguishes this as a practice of the vajrayana.

*** To the Buddhas, Dharma, and Supreme Assembly I go for refuge until Enlightenment. May I, through merit gained by gifts and so on, accomplish Buddhahood for the sake of all beings.**

(Repeat three times from *.)

(VISUALIZATION of the DIETY)

Generating Deities

Focus on the crown of your head and think: the rest of sentient beings have as I have. There is a lotus and moon seat with the syllable HRI, which is the nature of all Buddhas' compassion. This is sending many rays of light; white, red, blue, green and yellow, like sun rays, purifying all the world,

and the world becomes like Dewachen (the Pure Land of Avalokiteshvara). All beings become like Chenrezig.

The rays of light reach to all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and they send their blessing in the form of light which dissolves into the HRI. Then instantly this changes into Avalokiteshvara, Compassionate One. His body is white, crystal clear, luminous. It is radiating five-colored light rays, bright, shining. He has one face, beautiful, charming, and is gazing with compassionate eyes on all sentient beings.

On his forehead there is the syllable OM, at the throat center, the syllable AH, and at the heart the syllable HUNG. Light goes out the the Pure Lands, to the blissful realms, reaching to all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, all the lineage holders, all wrathful and peaceful deities. They emanate many forms of Chenrezig which dissolve into the crown of my head, like rain into an ocean. 'He is the essence of all sources of refuge'. He is the source of all protection of sentient beings.

On the crown of my head and all sentient beings pervading space, there rests a white lotus and moon seat. From HRI (on the lotus and moon seat) appears Noble All-Seeing One, white, bright, and radiating five-colored light rays, smiling charmingly and gazing with Eyes of Compassion.

He has four arms, the upper two joined together and the lower two holding a white lotus and crystal rosary. He is adorned by precious jewels and silks; a deer skin covers his upper part (left shoulder). The Buddha of Boundless Light adorns his head. He sits in the vajra asana. His back is supported by a stainless moon; he is the essence of all sources of refuge.

With one-pointed devotion, make the wish-fulfilling prayer. You can pray for what you wish to develop, the ability to benefit sentient beings; to

pacify, remove obstacles, hinderance, disease; for friend, or relative, when they experience sickness, death; if they are in the bardo. Of all sentient beings, your friend is the example. So think of all sentient beings, praying, 'give to them the effortless accomplishment...'

(Make the following prayer thinking all beings are making it with you as if in a single voice.)

*** Lord, whose white body is not clothed by fault, whose head is adorned by a Perfect Buddha, who looks upon all beings with Eyes of Compassion, to you Chenrezig I pay homage.**

(Repeat as least three times from *.)

(The SEVEN BRANCH PRAYER)

There is one part for each of seven kinds of afflictions.

Prostration, with all of our bodies, past, living and this body, with one-pointed devotion, is the antidote for pride. With self-cherishing, people think they are important. We become humble seeing the purity of enlightened beings.

To the Sublime One, the Mighty Chenrezig, to the Buddhas and their Sons, who reside in the ten directions and the three times, with complete sincerity I pay homage.

Second, offering, purifies attachment; to material things, house, car, mountain, landscape, flower garden. All of this I see and am attached to, all this I offer. Fill all the world with imaginary offerings, not because he needs them, but because I need to purify my attachment to things, including my speech, mind, and body.

I offer flowers, incense, butter-lamps, perfume, food, music, and other real and imaginary offerings and so on, and beseech the Noble Assembly to accept them.

Third, confession, purifies mainly anger, and other afflictions too. All this we confess: the ten non-virtues of killing, stealing, misconduct, harsh speech, meaningless speech, lies, divisive speech, envy, ill-will, and wrong view; also the five limitless actions, such as causing a split in the Sangha, or between a teacher and student. All these I repent from my heart, and I will not do these any more. We say this in front of Chenrezig, and this purifies any negative actions.

I confess all the unskillful actions caused by the power of conflicting emotions, the ten unvirtuous deeds and the five sins of limitless consequence done from beginningless time until now.

Fourth is rejoicing in the virtues of living beings, which will result in good for them (Hinayana Sravakas, Pratyeka Buddhas, Bodhisattvas). Theirs is fortunate karma. This is the antidote to jealousy, to rejoice in the happiness of others, to rejoice in the virtues of others.

I rejoice in the spiritual merit of whatever virtue Sravakas, Pratyeka Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and ordinary beings gather throughout the three times.

Fifth, to request teachings, purifies ignorance. This is very beneficial. It brings Dharma Wisdom and purifies ignorance for all.

I pray that the Dharma Wheel of the Mahayana, Hinayana, and of the Teachings common to both be turned in accordance with the wishes and aptitudes of beings.

Sixth, asking the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas to stay, is the antidote to wrong view. For us to appreciate teachers, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, it helps, it guides us. Without them we are lost. We appreciate them and ask them to look with compassion on all sentient beings and give them teachings.

I beseech the Buddhas not to pass into Nirvana as long as samsara is not emptied, but to look with compassion upon sentient beings who wallow in the ocean of suffering.

Seventh, dedication, is the antidote to doubt. We know this practice to be effective, and we say whatever suffering they have, may they be free from that suffering. This purifies doubt, hesitation.

May whatever merit I have accumulated be the cause for the Enlightenment of Beings; may I quickly become a splendid leader of beings.

Next is the prayer for the benefit of Avalokiteshvara to reach the six different realms. Visualize and pray.

(The Vajra words of prayer to the Excellent Chenrezig composed by the Great Mahasiddha, Tang tong Gyalpo, in his incarnation as Gelong Pema Karpo:)

I pray to you Lama Chenrezig. I pray to you Yidam Chenrezig. I pray to you Perfect Noble Chenrezig. I pray to you Lord Protector Chenrezig. I pray to you Lord of Love Chenrezig. Great Compassionate Victor, please hold us with your compassion, numberless beings who wander in endless samsara experiencing unbearable suffering. There is no other refuge than you, Protector! Please bestow the blessing to obtain omniscient Buddhahood.

Hell is there because the negative emotion of anger becomes so strong. There is unbearable suffering there. With no anger, hell realms disappear. Bless us, these beings and ourselves. Empty all the hell realms.

By the power of accumulating negative Karma from beginningless time, sentient beings, through the force of anger, are born as hell beings and experience the suffering of heat and cold. May they all be born in your presence, Perfect Deity. OM MANI PADME HUNG

Hungry ghosts are there because of greedy mind, greedy emotions. Hunger, thirst torture their mind. Chenrezig removes all this impurity.

By the power of accumulating negative Karma from beginningless time, sentient beings, through the force of greed, are born in the realm of pretas and experience the suffering of hunger and thirst. May they all be born in your perfect realm, the Potala. OM MANI PADME HUNG

Animal realm comes from stupidity. Animals' suffering and pain is removed and purified, and their realm is turned into a Pure Land.

By the power of accumulating negative Karma from beginningless time, sentient beings, through the force of stupidity, are born as animals and experience the suffering of dullness and stupidity. May they all be born in your presence, Protector. OM MANI PADME HUNG

In the desire realm, human beings experience suffering because of desire, longing, grasping. Through Chenrezig's compassion, wisdom, all this is purified, this world is purified into the blissful realm.

By the power of accumulating negative Karma from beginningless time, sentient beings, through the force of desire, are born in the human realm and experience the suffering of excessive activity and constant frustration. May they all be born in the Pure Land of Dewachen. OM MANI PADME HUNG

(This prayer, the vajra words of prayer to the Sublime Chenrezig, was composed by the Mahasiddha, Tang tong Gyalpo, who remembered them from a previous incarnation when he had been the monk Pema Karpo, who addressed this prayer one-pointedly to the Sublime Chenrezig while doing the Nyung Ne practice from his twentieth to his eightieth year.)

The demi-god, or jealous god realm is there because of jealousy. This is our own problem, not somebody else's problem. There the problem is our own mind. Chenrezig's compassion, wisdom, and purity purify this to a Pure Realm.

**By the power of accumulating negative Karma from beginningless time, sentient beings, through the force of jealousy, are born in the realm of the demi-gods and experience the suffering of fighting and quarreling. May they all be born in your realm, the Potala.
OM MANI PADME HUNG**

The god realm is the realm of pride. All this is purified.

By the power of accumulating negative Karma from beginningless time, sentient beings, through the force of pride, are born in the realm of the gods and experience the suffering of change and falling. May they all be born in your realm, the Potala. OM MANI PADME HUNG

The six afflictions are the door to the six realms. Whatever we have, that means we are opening the door to that realm. To purify is to close the door to that realm.

Wherever I am born may my deeds, by equalling Chenrezig's, liberate beings from impure realms and spread the perfect sound of the six syllables in the ten directions. Through the power of praying to you Perfect Noble One, may beings who I am to discipline pay the greatest

attention to action and result, and diligently practice virtue and the Dharma for the benefit of beings.

(And then:)

Light goes to the six realms, and beings become Chenrezig.

From Chenrezig, light comes and all this land becomes the Pure Land, soft, gentle, beautiful, luminous. All beings are Bodhisattvas, no anger or afflictions; all sound is Pure Sound, Mantra Sound; all the mind, empty, yet that which appears, vivid and clear.

Through this one-pointed prayer, light radiates from the body of the Sublime One and purifies impure Karma, impure appearances, and the deluded mind. The outer realm is the Pure Land of Dewachen, and the body, speech, and mind of beings therein are the perfect form, sublime speech, and pure mind of Mighty Chenrezig, the indivisible union of appearance, sound, and vivid intelligence with voidness.

With that kind of pure view, recite.

(Meditate like this as you recite the mantra.)

OM MANI PADME HUNG

While reciting, Chenrezig moves from the crown of your head to your heart, and is there as a thumb-sized Chenrezig, on a lotus and moon-seat. Now you are Chenrezig, radiating light, purifying the world.

In his heart, on a lotus moon-disk, there is the mantra OM MANI PADME HUNG. Light fills his body, then your body, then goes to the six realms. All become Chenrezig's form, sound, mantra, and mind, empty luminosity, joy and bliss.

Send light to benefit sentient beings, then to lineage Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, wrathful and peaceful Buddhas, gathering blessings from them that dissolve into your heart. Again send out light, back and forth like that. Then, to particular beings, see their afflictions healed, their physical body healed; beings in the bardo, where there is confusion, send light that dispels suffering and difficulty.

During recitation, you can pause and practice taking and sending, removing the suffering of sentient beings and giving happiness and peace.

Recite as long as you can.

Then, the dissolution stage:

The Pure Realm dissolves into beings; these melt into you, and you into the Chenrezig at your heart; this to the mantra and the mantra into the seed syllable HRI. This is your own mind, shining. This transforms into a small dot, a crystal dot, small, small, then nothingness, nothing whatsoever, yet very sharp awareness, inseparable. Nothing clinging, grasping, just remain, completely empty space, without any kind of artificial thought, without concept, without intellect.

Dissolve everything into the Dharmakaya stage that is empty, also bright, shining, aware; luminosity, vivid, without grasping, without being attached to anything whatsoever. That is called Introducing the Three Kayas in One Point, the empty, luminous and unimpeded quality of your mind. Without 'I', bright, shining, do not grasp. Unimpeded means don't hold onto that.

That is the way to practice quiet meditation.

This purifies birth and death, creation and dissolution. This is Mahamudra practice.

(Recite as many times as you are able. Finally, let the mind remain absorbed in its own essence without making distinction between subject, object, and act.

Stay like this as long as you want, then immediately appear again as Chenrezig.

This land is a Pure Land, and you are greeted by Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Some of them hold vases containing wisdom nectars, which they pour on you, purifying any remaining traces of defilements or faults of body, speech and mind.

You see yourself as Chenrezig, and all others are Chenrezig, sound, mantra, and everything you see is pure mind, appearing, vivid and clear, yet not inherently existent, empty of this, transparent. All is a manifestation of mind.

Then repeat:)

My body, the bodies of others and all appearances are the perfect form of the Sublime One, all sounds the melody of the Six Syllables, and all thoughts the vastness of the Great Jnana.

Then you make the dedication.

(DEDICATING the MERIT)

Through this virtue, may I quickly achieve the realization of Mighty Chenrezig and may I bring every single being to that same state.

(This text, called 'The Recitation for the Meditation of the Great Compassionate One for the Benefit of Beings as Vast as the Skies', was

composed by the Mahasiddha Tang tong Gyalpo and bears the blessing of his speech.)

Through the merit of reciting and meditating may I and every being to whom I am connected, when these imperfect forms are left behind, be miraculously born in Dewachen. May I then immediately cross the ten levels and send out emanations for the benefit of others.

Through this virtue, may all beings perfect the accumulation of spiritual merit and awareness. May they attain the Two Supreme Bodies which arise from merit and awareness.

Bodhicitta is precious; may it arise in those who have not cultivated it. In those who have cultivated it, may it not diminish; may it ever grow and flourish.

Condensed Ritual of Green Tara, with commentary by Lama Lodo

[Note: It's traditionally taught that what's called 'self-generation' - where one visualizes oneself as the deity - should only be done by those who have received the initiation of a particular deity, but that 'front generation' - where one visualizes the deity in space above and in front of oneself - can be done by anyone.]

Condensed Ritual of Green Tara

The word 'sang' in 'sang-gye' ('bud' in 'buddha') means completely pure, like a cloudless sky; no self-cherishing, no greed, pride, jealousy, doubt, ignorance, hope or fear; free from evil, free from afflictions.

'Gye' ('da') means increase, flourishing, clear mind, completely pure, stainless, and rich; completely adorned with wisdom and compassion, boundless wisdom and compassion.

In that kind of mind we take refuge. In that quality of mind we take refuge.

The Dharma (speech) is the truth freeing sentient beings from suffering and bringing them to enlightenment. It has this perfect pure property.

Sangha (body) means harmony, especially in groups.

You should have confidence, trust that you are under her protection.

Bodhicitta means the heart of enlightenment- it means altruism. You're willing to bring all sentient beings to enlightenment.

Generosity is dedication

Ethics is altruism thought

Patience is applied physically, and mentally

Diligence is striving joyfully, understanding the benefit of the practice
Concentration- each word, bring the meaning in your mind, and focus
one-pointedly on the deity;

Wisdom all is seen as emptiness. This is called view. The deity, all
phenomena, they are not inherently existent. The nature of the deity, the
nature of all phenomena is emptiness, clarity.

The first, refuge, is for devotion, protection, blessing. The second,
compassion and kindness is to help release other sentient beings from
suffering.

**Until Enlightenment I go for refuge in the Buddha, dharma,
and the sangha. By the merit I have accumulated through generosity and
other virtues, may I attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient
beings.**

(Three times)

The Four immeasurables

We wish others to be completely and permanently happy, all limitless
beings, and for them to have no suffering, not temporarily, but
permanently. All without exception I wish them all to have bliss and joy,
and evenness.

**May all sentient beings have happiness and the cause of happiness. May
all sentient beings be free from suffering and the causes of suffering.
May all sentient beings never be without the supreme bliss which is free
from all suffering. May all sentient beings live in the great equanimity
which is free from all attachment and aversion.**

(Three times)

(emptiness and appearance)

We see ourselves as Tara, not as a physical form, but as a transparent body. The right hand is in the 'excellent giving mudra', and the left hand is in the 'excellent protection mudra'. She looks with compassionate eyes. She is transparent like a rainbow. Her green color represents multiple activities.

Light emanates from ourselves as Green Tara and goes to the buddha lands, and all the Buddhas, bodhisatvas, lineage holders, dakas and dakinis, protectors and defenders of the dharma who possess the eye of transcending awareness, all of them emanate Green Taras, which return to you and all of them merge with you like rain dissolving into an ocean.

OM Homage to the Transcendent Accomplished Conqueror, the goddess Tara. Homage to Tara who is the Heroine TARE. She who dispels terror with TUTTARE. She who grants all benefits with TURE. Salutation to the syllables SOHA.

(This condensed homage for Tara prayer was composed by Drom Rinpoche*, and contains great benefit. [Drom Rinpoche was one of the great disciples of Atisa, and was an emanation of Chenrezig.]

Recite to close the door to the hell realms, 'till the god realms.

We may do this 10 or 15 minutes, but we do it perfectly; a short time, but precisely, perfectly, as well as you can.

This realm is the pure realm, all sound mantra, form, the form of the deity, and mind completely free from grasping.

OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SOHA

**Venerable Noble Drolma, may I be known by you.
Please clear away all the conditions of disputation
and swiftly fulfill all wishes.**

([Recite] the Hundred Syllables)

**OM BENZRA SATO SAMAYA MANUPALAYA BENZRA SATO
TENOPA TITA DRIDHO MEBHAWA SUTOKAYO MEBHAWA
SUPOKAYO MEBHAWA ANURAKTO MEBHAWA SARWA SIDDHI
ME PRAYATSA SARWA KARMA SU TSA ME TSITA SRI YAM KURU
HUNG HA HA HA HA HO BHAGAWAN SARWA TATHAGATA
BENZRA MA ME MUN TSA BENZRA BHAWA MAHASAMAYA SATO
AH**

(AND:)

**Kindly forgive me for whatever faults I have done here, for whatever I
have been unable to do, and for whatever unwholesome deeds I have
unknowingly committed. My mind and the diety are inseperable. Let
mind rest in the primordial dharmadhatu.**

(Thus, guard the view of the true nature.)

We let the mind rest without any kind of artificial thought, as it is.

Don't worry about it being not good, don't get excited if it is good. Just let
the mind relax, without grasping or holding.

The mind has no location, no shape, no color. This is the nature of the
mind, dharmadhatu. Luminosity, it is joy and bliss. Never grasping or
holding, it is very present.

We do not need effort. We do not need to fix it or adjust it. We just relax, without any idea, concept. We leave mind as it is; bright, shining, joyous.

(Then dedication:)

Through this virtue I will quickly accomplish the Noble Drolma, and then may I establish each being on that level without exception.

Through this merit may we become omniscient. After attaining this, may we defeat the enemies which are the faults: the turbulent waves of birth, old age, sickness, and death, and may we liberate all beings from the suffering of the ocean of existence.

Bodhicitta is precious, may it arise in those in whom it has not arisen. In those in whom it has arisen, may it not be damaged. May it ever grow and flourish.

The Practice of White Tara – The Wishfulfilling Wheel called “Heap of Immortal Essence”, by Kyabje Pabonkha Rinpoche

One begins the practice by first taking refuge and generating Bodhicitta.

I go for refuge until I am enlightened, to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the supreme assembly. By the virtuous merit that I create by practicing giving and other perfections, may I attain the state of a Buddha, in order to benefit all sentient beings (3 times)

OM SVABAVA SHUDDHA SARVA DHARMA SVABHAVA
SHUDDOHO HAM

Everything becomes empty.

From within the emptiness on top of moon disc on a white lotus, my own mind is represented by the syllable TAM.

The utpala lotus with the TAM then transforms into myself as the embodiment of long life granting Goddess – White Tara.

With one face and two hands, (my) right hand is in the mudra of supreme generosity. (my) left hand is holding the stem of an utpala lotus and (I) have seven eyes; a youthful body adorned with the major and minor marks and a moon disc as a backrest.

The three points are marked by the three syllables.

From the seed syllable (TAM) light rays radiate inviting the wisdom Goddess (White Tara) and empowering deities.

(White Tara) merges into me becoming non-dual and through the initiation of the empowering deities, my crown is adorned with Amitayus.

From the (syllable) Tam at my heart, light-rays emanate extracting all life and essence of all good qualities of samsara and nirvana which dissolve into
my heart.

OM TARA TUTTARE TURE MAMA AYUH PUNEY JNANA
PUSHTHIM KURU SOHA (21 times)

OM TARA TUTTARE TURE SOHA (as many times as possible)

Recite either the vowel and consonant mantra or the hundred syllable mantra.

OM A AA I II U UU RI RII LI LII E AI O AU AM AH SVAHA
OM KA KHA GA GHA NGA
TSA TSHA DZA DZHA NYA
TA THA DA DHA NA
TA THA DA DHA NA
PA PHA BA BHA MA
YA RA LA VA
SA SHA SA HA KSHA SVAHA

OM PADMASATTVA SAMAYA MANUPALAYA
PADMASATTVA DENOPA TITHA DIDO MAY BHAWA
SUTOKAYO MAY BHAWA
SUPOKAYO MAY BHAWA
ANURAKTO MAY BHAWA
SARVA SIDDI MAY PAR YA TSA
SARVA KARMA SU TSA MAY
TSITAM SHRIYAM KURU HUNG
HA HA HA HA HOH BHAGAWAN

SARVA TATHAGATA
 PADMA MA MAY MU TSA
 PADMA BHAWA MAHASAMAYA SATO HUNG PAY

One completes the practice with the dedication:

If I see the signs of untimely death, let me straight away clearly see the form of Mother Tara, the wish fulfilling wheel, and, crushing the might of the Lord of Death, quickly become a deathless vajradhara.

By this virtue may I quickly realize Guru-Buddhahood, and transfer each sentient being into that enlightened state!

May the precious Bodhi-mind, where it is unborn, arise; may that born have no decline, but develop more and more.

Translated by Ven. Geshe Kalsang Wangdu's student and translator
 Michael

Lobsang Yeshe, after Geshe-la granted the White Tara Initiation at Tse Che Ling Center for Tibetan Buddhist Studies in San Francisco on August 16, 1996.

May all holy teachers live long lives and guide us until samsara ends.

White Tara Commentary, by Geshe Wangdu, given at Tse Chen Ling Center For Tibetan Buddhist Studies, San Francisco.

Lightly edited.

[Note: It's traditionally taught that what's called 'self-generation' - where one visualizes oneself as the deity - should only be done by those who have received the initiation of a particular deity, but that 'front generation' - where one visualizes the deity in space above and in front of oneself - can be done by anyone.]

From August 14th, 1996:

The main motivation for receiving this initiation is that we wish to have a long life, free from illness, in order to practice Dharma for the sake of living beings.

The main focus, and the direct benefit, then, is for one's own long life; indirectly, the purpose is to practice the teachings so we can help all other living beings.

White Tara Commentary, August 28th, 1996:

I thought that it would be beneficial to go over the sadhana of White Tara, the White Tara sadhana practice, and that that would be beneficial for those who wish in the future to do a retreat on White Tara.

So there is here a very brief form of the sadhana, which I will go over first, and then I can go more extensively after that.

The brief form of the White Tara sadhana that I have now and will be commenting upon is a sadhana which the Tibetan great master Pabonkha

Rinpoche has composed, and it's a very brief form, in fact only two pages. (Geshe-la, in English: 'I think it's composed especially for westerners!') (laughter).

If one were to do a retreat on White Tara, it would be highly beneficial for oneself and for others. The results would be that one's mind would be much calmer, and one would gain more knowledge and intellect, and also, the other immediate benefits would be that one would have good health, and long life, and also what we call material wealth as well. The particular, immediate benefits of doing White Tara practice are said to be that one will have success in whatever one pursues, whether it's spiritual or material-wise.

In one of the praises to White Tara, which is in the form of a prayer, or in stanzas, one of the stanzas at the end mentions that by praising White Tara, and by praising and respect, and by doing salutations to White Tara, those who wish to have children will have children; those who wish to have sons will have sons; those who wish to have daughters will gain daughters; those who wish to have possessions will gain possessions; and furthermore, all negativity and obstacles for one's practices would be all vanquished- that is one of the stanzas.

The most essential point is to do the sadhana in the proper way, with faith, and if one follows all the commitments and does it sincerely, with faith, then definitely the results will come.

Unlike other Buddhist deities, White Tara is known to be a deity which, if one follows the practice, it is one of the most simple practices. And it is very easy for us to follow and to do- not like other deities, such as Yamantaka or Guhyasamaja, other deities where the forms are even difficult to visualize.

And in fact, the mantra itself being short, one is able to complete a retreat with reciting one hundred-thousand times the mantra in one week, with

four sessions or even in three sessions a day. After the retreat then of course it would be highly beneficial to do a fire puja as well, and that of course can be done in places like Vajrapani where people there can help and know about it.

Then, furthermore, one of the main benefits, again, of doing White Tara practice, especially a retreat, is that one will be very influential and powerful in helping others. One of the other deities is also Yamantaka, which is said to be a very powerful, influential practice to do. Particularly one becomes powerful and will get the abilities to help and benefit others, especially people who are sick or unwell in any way.

Now I'll go over the brief sadhana, according to the text.

The first line reads here that, after sitting down, one should do what we call taking the refuge and generating bodhicitta. And after that is done, then one should meditate upon emptiness. Particularly one should visualize oneself as becoming the nature of emptiness.

One should imagine that one's gross body, the physical body, fades away, and transforms into the nature of emptiness.

One can actually imagine that one's physical body is fading away into space. And then one should feel particularly that it is the nature of emptiness.

After one's gross physical body is transformed into emptiness, then within that emptiness one should imagine that a white lotus arises from that empty space, a white lotus.

On the thangka up there, portraying White Tara, the lotus has been portrayed as being a pink lotus, however in the text it is said that the lotus should be white- a white lotus which has a thousand petals, which of course is quite enormous, quite big.

So then on top of the thousand petaled lotus one visualizes a moon-disk, a full moon-disk, which is flat on its surface.

I'd like to give a description of the significance of the lotus and the moon, and on many portraits of the deity there's also a sun-disk, however, all in common have, definitely, a lotus and a moon-disk, and I'd like to give the significance of them.

The lotus signifies renunciation. So, renunciation, to give a brief definition, is a wish, or the spontaneous wish to be free from cyclic existence, the wish to be free from that and to reach the state of liberation, nirvana. That sort of spontaneous wish or state of mind is renunciation.

Even if one is an ordinary being, without any realizations, if one were to have the renounced mind, then the faults of what we call samsara, the faults of what we call cyclic existence wouldn't hinder that person.

So the manner in which the lotus signifies renunciation is that, even though the lotus itself was born out of a pond, what we call a swamp, or a muddy pond, even though it grows out of that, when it blooms on top of the water, there's not even a bit of mud on its' petals, and it is free of the mud itself. That is how it resembles renunciation.

Having the renounced state of mind in one's continuum would be the same, where even though one is born from the cyclic existence, if one doesn't have the faults or the clinging to the cyclic existence, then the mind itself would be pure, as the lotus is pure, being unstained by the mud.

So the particular lotus we are talking about here, which resembles renunciation, is a particular lotus which grows in a swamp (which means that the whole surface is full of mud itself), and even though it grows out of a swamp, the mud of the swamp doesn't stain onto the petals.

So, if one knows the significance of a lotus, then as soon as one sees a lotus,

it's a reminder of what it signifies, which is renunciation, the renounced state of mind which we should generate.

Then, the moon-disk signifies bodhicitta, the wish to achieve enlightenment. The way the moon signifies that is that, when the full moon is out in the evening, as soon as that light comes forth, whoever is out in the moonlight feels a soothing effect, and particularly when it's very dark and there's no other light around.

When the moonlight is shining upon anyone, one feels a soothing effect, and that soothing effect is felt by everyone in the moonlight. So, similarly, the bodhicitta mind, the altruistic wish to achieve enlightenment, that sort of mind itself is a powerful mind where whoever has that mind brings a soothing effect for whoever is around.

So, whatever deity, or whatever is sitting on top of a lotus and moon-disk, that deity has achieved that state of mind, of renunciation and bodhicitta.

Some deities, as mentioned earlier, have on top of the lotus a sun-disk and a moon disk. First, a sun-disk, and then on top of the sun-disk, a moon-disk. Some deities have what you call the cushion of the lotus, the sun and moon-disk, all three.

The sun signifies emptiness, the understanding of emptiness, the wisdom realizing emptiness, in this way: as soon as the sun-rays come forth, it's very bright, and it illuminates everything; similarly, whoever has that wisdom realizing emptiness, it illuminates the nature of all existence, and the nature of all existence becomes very clear to that being.

That's how, by generating the wisdom realizing emptiness, all other doubts and all other ignorant states of mind are automatically extinguished. Therefore, the sun signifies wisdom, what we call the wisdom realizing emptiness.

So, after one visualizes the lotus and then the moon-disk upon the lotus, then one visualizes the syllable TAM, which is in fact the essence of one's own mind. The syllable TAM signifies our mind.

One should visualize that this syllable is made of white, radiating light.

So that syllable TAM which one has visualized, now we should imagine that transforming into White Tara. You know how like on T.V. ads, or whatever, we see things, there's something there and sometimes, suddenly it transforms, especially on song clips, you see faces transforming into different things. So this TAM we should imagine it transforming, itself, transforming into White Tara deity.

First there's nothing, and that nothingness transforms into a lotus and a moon-disk, and on top of that the syllable TAM, right? So then that syllable TAM now transforms into White Tara deity.

The text mentions the form of the White Tara deity. It says it has 'one face and two arms...' - it may sound strange to us in the beginning to say that. Why should they be mentioning 'one face and two arms'?, because we all have one face and two arms anyway. The reason why they specify one face and two arms is because there are many deities who have many faces and many arms, so it is specifying that this particular deity is with one face and two arms.

The right hand is in the mudra of Supreme Generosity, which means that, 'If you are willing, I will give you the ability to achieve enlightenment in this very lifetime'. That mudra itself signifies that the deity is willing to grant us the state of enlightenment. It's a mudra of generosity.

And in the left hand one should visualize the deity holding a white lotus flower called 'utpala'. The lotus stem goes out in three branches, and each stem of the branch has a different flower- one which is already opened and in full bloom, one which is about to open, and one which is just a bud.

These three represent the Buddhas of the three times.

The three different buds representing the Buddhas of the three times signifies that the Buddhas of the three times all had to rely upon White Tara in order to achieve enlightenment. White Tara is the Mother Goddess for all the Buddhas of the past, present, and the future, and it's only by relying on White Tara deity that the Buddhas have achieved their state of enlightenment. So that's why White Tara is known as the Mother of all Buddhas.

And then there's seven eyes- an eye on the forehead and two eyes where you have eyes normally, one eye each on the palms of the hands and the soles of the feet.

This portrait of the White Tara deity is a very good one. I found it to be very perfect in every way, so of course if you can get copies like this, then it will be very nice for you.

In here it explains that it should be a sixteen year-old youth, the facial expression... This portrait really portrays that. Maybe we can get laser scans of this...

Then of course when we visualize the actual body of the deity White Tara, we should not visualize and imagine it as being like our body, in a gross form, but rather the body itself is a body of light.

This reminds me of a question asked to me once in Dharmasala by a western monk who had difficulty in doing a meditation, particularly a visualization where one absorbs the lama into one's self. And he was relating to me that he finds it very difficult to absorb the lama into himself. When it comes to the top of his crown it feels like it's stuck there. So then I told him that that's maybe because you are visualizing the lama in a normal gross physical body, and in fact that itself is not proper.

We should visualize the lama above our head as having the nature of light, which is what is called an uncontaminated body, which is in the nature of light.

In fact it is mentioned that when we reach the third level of a bodhisattva that the physical body itself transforms into a light body, but in fact it's even more profound than that. The body of the Buddha is in fact all completely light, no stain of contamination, and it is the very nature of what we call a light body.

So therefore that is visualized, and it's even easier when we do the visualization of the body merging into ourselves.

So, although one should be visualizing one's teacher as being the actual Buddha, for that is the practice in general, when we do the meditation it shows that one part of our mind is fixed onto our guru's body as being flesh and bones, and that obstructs our meditation when we do the meditation of absorption, or merging the teacher into ourselves. So there's that conflict in our minds at that time.

Next, the White Tara deity is adorned with many jewels, head ornaments, precious jewels, and the clothes are silk garments, and of different kinds of colors. And again, even the clothing we shouldn't imagine as being like physical material, but in the form of light.

The aura on the back is shaped like a moon. Then one should visualize the three syllables at the three points, which is a white OM at the crown of the head, a red AH at the throat, and a blue HUNG at the heart.

So again, one should visualize at one's heart, even though it's not mentioned particularly here, through other sadhanas I know that one has to visualize a lotus, again a white lotus, and on top of the lotus a moon-disk, and on top of that the syllable TAM again, which is white, white light.

Then after having visualized the white syllable TAM, in white light, one visualizes light rays emanating from that TAM. The light rays go throughout all the ten directions, (which actually, literally means all directions), and then that light invokes all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas from the ten directions, and then by invoking the Buddhas and bodhisattvas from the ten

directions, the Buddhas and bodhisattvas from the ten directions merge into one's self, which is the White Tara deity.

One should imagine the merging as being like, for example, if it snows on a lake, as soon as the snowflakes hit the water, it just merges into the water. There's nothing left over. So that should be how we imagine the Buddhas and bodhisattvas all merging into ourselves, which is in the form of the White Tara deity. And we become one with all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, we merge with all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. And then at that moment, after we have visualized that all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas have merged into ourselves, at that very instant we should very strongly feel that we have become one with all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

It is said that when doing this visualization, where the light rays invoke all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas from all the ten directions, it is not necessary to imagine them merging into oneself from the top of one's crown. That is not necessary. It can be merging from all directions throughout every part of our body.

Then one visualizes that the deity of initiation gives us an initiation. And after having received the initiation from the initiation deity, then on the crown of our heads, which is in White Tara's form, we imagine that the long-life Buddha Amitayus resides there.

After having visualized the Amitayus on the top of our crown, which ornaments the crown, then again we visualize light rays emanating from

the syllable TAM at the heart, and this time the light rays radiate into all the directions, and not particularly to all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, but all throughout the universe, and to the five elements within the universe, the fire, water, wind, earth and space elements, all the five elements, and to what we call all the riches of the kings, all the riches and beauties of the kings and queens in this universe, in fact all the jewels and any beautiful object in the universe is invoked by the light rays emanating from our heart.

And we should imagine that the light rays are extracting all the qualities from the five elements, from all the riches and all the beauties within the universe, and it extracts it and brings forth what we call the essence back into us, in the form of light rays.

An example would be like when a magnet, a powerful magnet is put in the middle, and you have small pieces of iron all around. When the magnet is put amongst those pieces of iron, it suddenly draws in all the small pieces. That would be how we should imagine the essences, all the good qualities, the compassion and the good qualities of all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, and also the good qualities of the riches and beauties of all the different parts of the universe are extracted and brought to us. And they merge into the syllable TAM.

Also at the same time we imagine that the essence of what we call the life force, the essence of merit, and the essence of all the nourishment from all the different sources in the universe are all merging into ourselves, particularly into the TAM within our heart.

One should, of course, always be aware of the fact that the syllable TAM itself is our mind, the nature of our mind.

So when we visualize and imagine all the good qualities within the universe merging into the TAM, in fact we are visualizing all the good qualities merging into our own mind. And if this is done with strong faith, in fact it is said that one will certainly receive all the good qualities, of long

life, nourishment, and so forth.

I feel that extracting the essence from the five elements is actually a very factual practice. Whenever we get sick, or are unwell in any way it is said that it is because of the five elements being out of balance, or being not sufficient in our bodies. So when we visualize that we are receiving the essence of all five elements, in fact that in itself is the proper way to think of how we should be healthy, having the essence of the five elements in balance within ourselves.

So at this point, when we do this visualization, while we are still contemplating the visualization of the light rays going out in all the directions and then invoking all the good qualities, bringing them back and merging them into the syllable, while we are doing this visualization, then at this point we start doing the recitation of the mantra, the long mantra. We do it twenty-one times at the beginning.

Then after having done a twenty-one round of the long version of the mantra, then we begin the actual recitation of the actual mantra of Tara, which is OM TARA TUTTARE TURE SOHA, and at this point we begin counting, because if we're doing a retreat we're supposed to be doing a certain number of recitations.

If I were to relate from my own experience of doing a retreat, it is my own experience that I find it difficult to continue to focus on the visualization, and sometimes it can become too stressful for the mind. So I find it useful, beneficial, before beginning the recitation to try to focus very attentively on the visualization as explained in the text. And when I come to the point of the recitation, because I have focused very attentively on the visualization initially, because I have imagined that I'm doing the process of invoking the good qualities from all the different directions, then I try to relax the mind a bit from the actual visualization and just contemplate on the recitation itself.

Then, after I reach about one thousand recitations, I can go back into doing the visualization, while still reciting, but focusing more on the visualization - of sending out the light from the syllable TAM, and the light radiating out to all the directions and invoking the good qualities of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, and the five elements, and all the riches and long life, and so forth, and bringing that back in the form of light rays, and merging them into the TAM, doing that visualization, as explained previously.

You know, I feel that after doing some recitation, one feels that, 'I've done enough work to be able to receive more blessings'. (laughter) It's like even the visualization at that point becomes stronger.

So if one finds it difficult to maintain the visualization all throughout, then, not to be too stressful, but to remember that the main point is to have a relaxed mind, and to feel the blessings being received from all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

It is mentioned that when we do any retreat practice, the sessions should be as grain is- so for example if one had committed one's self to doing a one week retreat, let's say on White Tara, then on the first and second days the sessions are more brief, relaxed. Then as one goes into the third, fourth and fifth days, then one increases the length of the sessions, and even the focus and the visualization should be stronger. Then as one comes to the end, one decreases the length, and if one finds it to be quite stressful, the one can be more relaxed at this time.

So if one were planning to stay for two hours in each session, one begins the first day with maybe only an hour. Then on the second day one could start increasing the length of the session.

Sometimes when I do retreat I'll go into three hours each session in the middle. So then the longest in the beginning can be like two hours. So in the beginning, one hour in a session the first day, and then increasing more the second, and then eventually coming to two hours in a session. Then at

the end again decreasing the time, and coming back again to one hour.

The reason why it is said to have shorter sessions in the beginning of a retreat is that if one puts so much time and energy in the beginning, one may lose interest and one may become discouraged. So the time length is said to be like a grain, and the reason why is because the top and the bottom of a grain are pointed, and the middle is thicker. So that is how the duration of the time should be, small or short in the beginning, and then more extensive in the middle, and then short again at the end.

When we come to the middle of our retreat period, then we have to become quite accustomed to visualization, and to the actual meditation itself. Then if we extend our time we don't feel as tired or stressful. Then to decrease the time as one is ending the retreat is so that one will feel enthusiastic about doing a retreat in the future.

So then, to make it brief, at the end, after one does the visualization, then one does the mantra of the Sanskrit vowels and consonants, and then after that the Vajrasattva mantra, and then the dedication.

(Translator: I think it's the last verse of the dedication that's the verse that Geshe-la was mentioning:)

I pray that, by the power of these prayers and praises,
for all beings and myself, wherever they may dwell,
illness, demons, poverty, quarrels and wars
may be pacified,

May the Dharma and good fortune flourish

(The first verse of the dedication, I'm sorry...):

If I see the signs of untimely death, let me straight
away clearly see the form of Mother Tara, the wish-

fulfilling wheel, and, crushing the might of the Lord
of Death, quickly become a deathless vajradhara.

Then after we recite this dedication verse we can end our session. This is the most brief way of how to do a retreat on White Tara.

So even if one were not able to do a retreat on White Tara, to do the practice every morning for about half an hour, if one can do the practice and recite the mantra for, let's say, a thousand times each morning until one reaches a hundred thousand times, then that would be very beneficial in one's life, that would be very beneficial. And that could be done just as a practice, but not in a retreat form. It is similar to doing a retreat, even though it's not very strict. That could be done even if one is working, before going to work, one can do it in the morning. There is definite benefit if one is able to do that.

The particular sadhana which I have given tonight is a sadhana which has only two pages, so it's a very easy sadhana.

So I will conclude here tonight, and thank you very much, everyone. Let us do the dedication.

(dedication)

Highlighting the Wisdom Aspect of Purification Practice

by Jason Espada

From his very first talk, the Buddha clearly identified self grasping ignorance as the root cause of suffering. It's easy to lose track of this essential point once we're on the path, unless it's made central to our practice.

When it comes to purifying our faults, we may grasp even more strongly at the sense of a self, but this in fact only furthers samsara. In coming across what Khenpo Choga called '*defiling virtue*', I felt that this truth was being very clearly pointed out. In his commentary on Shantideva, he says

Virtuous deeds can be 'defiling virtue' or 'non-defiling virtue'. Defiling virtue is an ordinary wholesome deed, performed by ordinary people within the normal dualistic framework of their minds. Non-defiling virtues are wholesome deeds performed by an individual who has realized the absolute bodhicitta (wisdom).

I had heard that we need to go beyond positive action, as long as it has the flaw of any ego grasping at all in it, the seed of future suffering. But this term *defiling virtue* underscores the need for right view to be part of any positive action, such as purification, if we are to succeed in accomplishing our aims for self and others. We should practice in a way that fully addresses and uproots the very ego grasping that is the cause of samsara.

The same mistaken view can be perpetuated when we respond to suffering with compassion - ego grasping can be even stronger than usual, but we are not then practicing Mahayana compassion, or the Six Perfections, which by definition rely on Transcendent Wisdom being present and functioning.

Buddhist Wisdom cuts through ordinary appearances to the mind, and reveals our innate freedom and capacity that is hidden behind the veil of thought and emotional reactions.

It's difficult to avoid a mistaken way of practicing when we react strongly. It's like if we were caught by a rope - if we struggle, we may make things worse, and make it harder to escape the trap. What we would need to do at that time is to stop and look at the situation carefully. Then we can patiently loosen the bonds and get free.

In the same way, if we're reacting strongly to our own suffering, or that of others, or if we have the powerful intention to purify and to liberate ourselves or others from suffering, right then we need to be *especially careful* not to grasp even more intensely at appearances, so that we can find our way to a resolution to that situation, and to the freedom we seek.

To me, there's also a warning in the phrase 'defiling virtue', since we may become proud, or reify a sense of self around some new sense of being 'one who has purified his karma', someone engaging in this practice. Even if it just results in a sense of self being maintained and increased, that can become a place where praise or criticism lands.

Positive actions do lead to higher rebirth, and to states of happiness and well being, as far as they go. The truth of it, however, is that any ego grasping *at all* perpetuates samsara, that is life and experience based on a wrong view, and that is ultimately bound to change and to suffering.

All Buddhist traditions agree that we need to cultivate wisdom to fully transform the mind from its continual experience of circling in samsara, to a mind that is liberated. We need to transform *the alaya*, referred to by Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche as *the deep habits of the mind*.

The profound Vajrayana tradition makes creative use of visualization to help us become familiar with the way things truly are. *We practice with a single mind of right view, and, love and compassion, seeing ourselves and our surroundings as being made entirely of light, invoking blessings that*

dissolve into us, and sending out our prayers for the benefit of all those in need.

When we emphasize the Wisdom aspect in our practices of purification, and engaging others positively in this world, we can see how this one factor is essential for us to fulfill *all* of our purposes - from purification of faults and higher rebirth, to liberation, and the ability to help others in deep and lasting ways. *Right View brings each of these aims to their culmination.*

Em ah ho!

How wondrous!

Our Right Practice is then *the Middle Way*, at once recognizing our interdependence, and our great potential, that is also called our Buddha Nature. Practicing like this, we enter *the Avatamsaka Realm*, of continual Buddha and Bodhisattva Activity.

Joseph Campbell, the great Western teacher said that we can become *transparent to transcendence*, and I take this to mean that when we go beyond ego though thorough, sustained insight, we bring those natural qualities, of freedom, peace, and great love into all of our interactions in this life.

May it be this way for all of us

*May we all attain the state of freedom from suffering and the cause of suffering,
and share the blessings of peace and joy,
and great abundant resourcefulness with all beings*

On Purification and Healing - J. Espada

When it comes to Buddhist methods of healing, special mention should be made of the view of karma as the cause of illness. Karma in general means action and its results, and this is something neutral in itself. Whether it is positive, constructive action, or negative action, the same principles apply - causes bring results, and create seeds for the further repetition and expansion of an action and its effects. This is the way the mind and emotions and body either degenerates or improves.

In Buddhism, from wrong view and self grasping ignorance, the negative emotions of greed, anger, sadness, fear develop and increase, and this has effects energetically, and in terms of the elements, all the way down to the physical level. When these responses to life become habitual, they are imprinted and become a pattern that in some way defines a person's life. This is what we then speak of as a person's karma.

Healing karmic causes is different from just alleviating the temporary suffering of one negative emotion or a physical imbalance and illness. It goes much further than that. When we heal the karmic cause of a disease, we uproot not only the cause of that one effect, but of all the oceans of suffering, mental and physical, that could possibly result from that negative karmic tendency. It is really something joyful and profound.

Ultimately, it's the person liberated by wisdom who is fully healthy, and this should be known by everyone, so we can orient ourselves to the ideal.

Purification is then an ongoing practice for those in a monastic setting, as well as for contemplatives of every tradition. The reason is that we continue to make mistakes until we've completed the path, and we need to correct our way of living, thinking and being with others.

Another reason this practice is needed is that we all have a great store of experiences in the form of karmic impressions from our past actions. Like

seeds, unless they are transformed, we can carry these with us, and when the right conditions come together, they can ripen and bring us suffering.

I remember being in the waiting room with other patients at the hospital where a family member was being seen. Many of them were undergoing treatment for serious diseases, and I prayed and meditated, and tried many different mantras, but the only one that felt like it fit was one for purifying karma, that of Vajrasattva. This makes more sense to me now.

In the visualization used with this practice, we see our body made of light being purified, and becoming pristine, immaculate, and luminous. The four opponent powers are enjoined here: of refuge and the dedication to the ultimate benefit of others; dispassionately naming and relinquishing our past wrong actions; making strong vows that are in accord with our true nature; and virtuous action, in this case recitation. Practicing this way in time can bring radical, deep transformation, and healing.

Like a lot of Westerners, I have difficulty believing in the ideas of rebirth, but as many teachers will tell us, this makes for a narrow view of ourselves, our mind, and our karma. It also effects how we see the spiritual practice we do. Looking within, I find many causes and potentials, positive and negative. This view that says we have a great store of karma is much more workable, and it leads to far greater conscientiousness, and enthusiasm for our own practice, and greater compassion for others.

*May we all totally purify even the most subtle remainder
of negative karma
and its cause in self grasping,
and may we then skillfully lead all others to freedom,
joy and ease,
and the full health of the Noble Ones*

Vajrasattva Sadhana, with Commentary by Lama Lodo

DORJE SEMPA MEDITATION AND THE RECITATION OF HIS MANTRA

**(which purifies harmful actions and removes the obscurations of the
mind)**

This text was composed more than eight hundred years ago by the Ninth Karmapa.

The Guru embodies all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Most important in attaining enlightenment is the Guru-disciple relationship. The Guru's kindness and compassion and the disciple's devotion- these two come together.

The Guru is closer to us, kinder than the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Due to our ignorance, impurity, we do not see Buddha right now. He is the past, present, and future Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, so it is very important to maintain devotion. His body is the Buddha, speech, Dharma, and mind is enlightenment itself.

The first prayer from our heart is for the blessing of the Gurus.

**Glorious and precious Root Guru who sits on a lotus-moon seat on the
crown of my head, through your great kindness, having taken me as your
disciple, grant me the accomplishments of the Body, Speech and Mind
(of the Buddhas).**

Refuge and Bodhicitta

Guru Vajrasattva, his body is Sangha, speech, Dharma, and mind, Buddha. Vajrasattva's mind is Buddha, his speech is Dharma, and his body, the Sublime Assembly, which shows how to practice with devotion and

compassion. In the Sangha, we learn how to do good things, in group practice. He is the Sangha as the Bodhisattva's perfect activity and example.

Think that you are under the protection of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. You are completely safe, not only yourself, but all sentient beings.

Enlightenment Mind - The Heart of Enlightenment

You wish to attain perfect Buddha in order to benefit all sentient beings and guide them to enlightenment; to free them all from suffering and discomfort, unconditionally, whoever is suffering. This is wishing and being willing to contribute to free them from suffering and the causes, not only temporarily, but forever, and make it so that all have happiness and the cause of happiness, not only temporarily, but happiness that lasts forever.

But this body, this mind, this speech, can only temporarily remove their suffering, only temporarily give happiness, therefore, I must strive, put all my effort into attaining enlightenment like the Buddha.

Great Compassion is without discrimination. This is very powerful. This kind of thought always in your heart, this means the Heart of Enlightenment, this means the heart of altruism, this means the heart of bodhicitta.

Generosity- whatever practice you have

Morality- no anger, desire, jealousy, greed, hope and doubt; none allowed. What you do not allow, that is morality.

Patience- when there is difficulty, either with visualization or laziness, or from pains, you take it, be patient.

Diligence- to visualize, to recite, and not allow distractions, this is the opposite of laziness. During practice, laziness is the main difficulty.

Concentration- on deities, mind not withdrawn from visualization

Wisdom- all these inherently not existent. Truly, they are empty, they are the nature of bliss and joy.

I take refuge, until I attain enlightenment, in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sublime Assembly. By the merit that I have accumulated through generosity and other virtues, may I obtain Buddhahood for the sake of all beings. (Repeat 3 times)

Next, bring your mind to a sense of emptiness, absence of thought, the natural state.

After you have quieted down your mind, visualize yourself (in your usual state) with a 'pom' on the crown of your head. This turns into a lotus, upon which is the syllable 'ah'. The 'ah' turns into a moon-disk on this lotus, upon which there is a white 'hung', which changes into a white vajra (with a white hung in the center).

White, red, blue, green, and yellow light radiates to the six realms, realms of confusion and suffering, and pain. These rays of light completely purify suffering and the cause of suffering. The rays of light then return.

The five colors again radiate, this time reaching to all holy beings, from Buddha to your Root Guru, wrathful and peaceful Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, Dharmapalas and Divine Beings. The rays of light return, and Vajrasattva appears. He is the power of purification of all Buddhas. Right leg out, and left leg drawn in, he is very peaceful and completely white, and transparent.

From Vajrasattva's heart, lights radiate to Divine Beings, from Buddha all the way through the lineage Gurus to your own Root Guru, all the tantric deities, past, present, and future, and Dharmapalas. Light reaches to please all the enlightened ones.

Light then returns from them in the form of Vajrasattva. Visualize the Wisdom Beings from their Pure Land merging with the Samaya Being, like rain dissolving into an ocean. They become one.

On the crown of my head, on a lotus-moon seat, is Lama Dorje Sempa, white in color and wearing all the ornaments. He has one face and two arms; in his right hand he holds a vajra and in his left, a bell; he sits in cross-legged posture.

(Rays of light emanate from Dorje Sempa's heart center, invoking the assembly of absolute knowledge deities [yeshepas] who are absorbed into him. Meditate that Dorje Sempa is in essence the union of all the rare and sublime jewels.

Then, think that there is nothing that cannot be purified; affliction (sin), obscuration, disease. Vajrasattva is the purity of all enlightened beings.

Before and during the recitation think (of the Four Powers):

1st- In the past, whatever action I have done due to my negative emotions, which cause me suffering and affliction, all these I repent. All these which obstruct, all these, so negative, I repent. Embodiment of enlightenment, I ask that you forgive me.

2nd- Now, even at the cost of my life, I will not do this action anymore. From my heart I repent. Because this causes pain, confusion, obstruction, I will not do this action anymore.

3rd- Trust and devotion. Trust in Vajrasattva. Have faith that this is the embodiment of all Buddhas, stainless purity and compassion, having the power to purify. Any virtuous action is the third power.

4th- You are purified because of the intention to benefit other sentient beings; altruism, bodhicitta.

Cultivate these.

Then say)

"Lama Dorje Sempa, please purify and remove all harmful actions, obscurations of the mind, faults and transgressions which I and other beings limitless as space have accumulated."

After this prayer, in Dorje Sempa's heart center, on a moon disc, the letter HUNG appears, surrounded by the hundred syllable mantra; from the syllables arises an uninterrupted stream of nectar which flows from his form, enters through the opening in the crown of my head, fills my body and purifies all harmful actions and transgressions.

Visualize at the heart of Vajrasattva, the hundred syllable mantra, on a moon disk. As the mantra is recited, a nectar stream uninterruptedly flows down and fills Vajrasattva's body with wisdom nectar. From his right front big toe, on the crown of your head, nectar flows down like a waterfall, through the crown of your head, and flows through your body.

**OM BENZRA SATO SAMAYA MANU PALAYA BENZRA SATO
TENOPA TISHSTA DRI BO ME BHAWA SUTO KAYO ME BHAWA
SUPO KAYO ME BHAWA ANURAKTO ME BHAWA SARWA SIDDHI
MEM PRAYATSA SARWA KARMA SU TSA ME TSI TANG SHRI YA
KU RU HUNG HA HA HA HA HO BA GA WAN SARWA TA TA GA TA**

**BENZRA MA ME MUN TSA BENZRA BA WA MA HA SA MA YA
SATO AH**

By the vow of Vajrasattva, keeping guard, thou Vajrasattva, stay near, steady me, satisfy me, enrich me, be loving towards me. Bestow on me all perfections. In all deeds, also, make my mind virtuous. The four joys. Blessed ones. All the thus-gone. Diamond (one), do not abandon me. Make me adamant. (Thou)being of the great vow!

OM BENZRA SATO HUNG

The hundred wrathful and peaceful deities of the bardo, all tantric deities are embodied in this mantra.

The flow comes in the nine openings as nectar, and pushes out obscurations, as pus and blood, obscurations, sickness, disease, physical and mental disease (as soot); cockroach, ugly creatures, nectar pushes them out, it pushes out the impurities from your body. All this goes under the earth. Keep reciting, not too slow or too quick. Pronounce each syllable. Completely concentrate your mind. Do not let it wander. Continue reciting while applying the Four Powers (regret, resolve, faith, and altruism).

All disease, any karmic action, especially any that cause obstruction to spiritual practice are completely purified by this.

"Protector! Through ignorance and delusion, I have not kept my commitments and have broken them. Lama, Protector, give me refuge. O Lord of beings, Holder of the Vajra, who possesses the true nature of compassion, I take refuge in you. I openly admit all the Vajrayana commitments of body, speech and mind which I have not fulfilled and have also broken, whether they be primary or secondary commitments. Grant me your blessing so that I am purified, and all harmful actions, obscurations of the mind, faults and transgressions are removed."

Vajrasattva overhead is pleased. Smiling, he speaks,

Dorje Sempa assures me that I am purified, melts into light and is absorbed into me. We become indivisible.

All is purified. Now I think of myself as completely clear and radiating.
(rest mind)

There is no past, no future, no present time mind; no color, no shape, nothing to analyze. Keep mind without contriving effort, relaxed mind, bliss and joy, yet very empty. Keep this as long as you want. If you like you can follow your breath, as long as you want.

Dedication Prayer

Through this virtue I pray all beings without exception experience the undying state of permanent bliss by merging supreme knowledge and methods and come to realize Dorje Sempa. Dedicating the merit of traveling the inner Vajra path, may I be granted the stage of Buddhahood.

Then we practice taking and sending, removing all suffering of sentient beings, giving all happiness.

This is the complete tantric path.

Teachings on Mahamudra and Medicine Buddha, by Lama Lodu Rinpoche,
Healing Arts Center, St. Louis, August 30th, 2012

A video of this teaching can be found [here](#).

Good evening. Nice to meet all of you. So, our topic today is... I'm not sure... I didn't see the flier, but I saw today on the way... So, anyway, it doesn't matter, we have to share some Dharma...

They told me - 'Mahamudra' - So, Mahamudra is - I don't understand Mahamudra, so, I can say something about Mahamudra, but I don't understand Mahamudra.

I don't understand Mahamudra, if I talk to you about Mahamudra it doesn't make sense. I have to understand Mahamudra before I talk to you.

Mahamudra is not simple. In some ways, it's very simple, so therefore our mind doesn't accept that. Somewhat, you know, it's very complicated - there are lots of conditions necessary to talk about Mahamudra. Before even talking about Mahamudra, you have to experience some kind of understanding. Then you can pass it down in a way that makes sense to people.

But again, if someone has realization of Mahamudra, understanding Mahamudra, but the receiver is not ready, then it's not useful.

It's like we're talking about a university professor - someone who has not finished kindergarten, they cannot go to first grade; someone who hasn't finished high school, they cannot go to university; and someone who hasn't finished university cannot become a professor, phd, or md, and so on...

So you have to go relatively stage by stage, you cannot jump ahead...

They say if someone has just finished second or third grade, or fifth grade or eighth grade - that eighth grade child, if you take them to high school, they will not know what the teacher is talking about;

And if someone has not finished high school, and you take them to university, and the professor is talking about deep, profound subjects, they will not understand either...

So, I don't know... I'm just meeting you today, and I'm talking to you about Mahamudra, which is talking about something, relatively, on the level of a professor, high level - phd philosophy, so if someone is on the level of kindergarten today...

Maybe some of you are already on a high level, and ready for Mahamudra. You may be on a higher level than what I understand. You may have more understanding and a deeper realization. It's possible. I cannot say that's impossible...

But again, I have to know, also, if I am capable, if I can teach you. I have to know you first. Then I know, then I can see what level you are on, and then I can give my idea of Mahamudra, and you can use it, and it will be very useful.

I just finished a one week retreat on Mahamudra on our retreat land. I didn't finish, due to different people coming, and I couldn't go into much detail there, so I stopped. So I continued with last night's talk, and I met some of you for a few hours today.

So I don't know what you are thinking, what your mental level is, maybe you are on a higher level than me, or, maybe you are confused like me also, maybe more confused than me even...

Every one has individual qualities, so I cannot say you are not qualified. I also don't know if you are qualified, because I don't have the wisdom to know your level of realization, so therefore, Mahamudra is far from us, but, we can go into the background of it a little bit.

What I saw today (on the flier)

'Medicine Buddha and Mahamudra' - that kind of makes sense, you know, actually, but again, at the same time the subject is entirely different.

Medicine Buddha is subject and object; the subject the person who is practicing, and the object is the deity, and the mantra recitation, the action will be light and clean, and healing, things like that, in the Medicine Buddha practice.

(By comparison) Mahamudra is something completely non-fabricated, transcending all conceptualization, and all intellectualization.

So then, Mahamudra is completely different.

If you practice Medicine Buddha, you can adopt Mahamudra practice at the end. If you've received teachings initiation and teachings you can do that.

So I'll review a little bit about Medicine Buddha.

Medicine Buddha is the Buddha who has dedicated his enlightenment to healing sentient beings from physical and mental disease. And especially in a dark age, when people are afflicted with more (negative) emotions, that make them mentally sick, and when the mind gets sick, unknown to them, that becomes the cause of their physical sickness - so the Buddha has dedicated himself to enlightenment in order to benefit, healing the sentient beings those who have such health and mental sickness.

So that is his dedication. So he worked hard for many lifetimes as a bodhisattva.

He didn't become a Medicine Buddha instantly, but he was a human being, just like us, and he motivated and took the bodhisattva vow. He dedicated his mind to be completely perfect with bodhicitta, with the enlightened attitude.

Then he trained his mind in love and kindness and compassion, and trained his mind in selflessness. So, with all these trainings, he went on many aeons as a bodhsattva but his dedication was always that he wished to heal sentient beings of temporary sickness and disease, and actually, the absolute, ultimate disease, with egolessness.

So, in this way, he finally attained enlightenment as the Medicine Buddha, the Healing Buddha.

So, Lord Shakyamuni Buddha has a sutra - the Medicine Buddha Sutra... there are so many Medicine Buddha Sutras, and Medicine Buddha Tantras, for different levels of practice. And Tibetan Medical Doctors, most of them, memorize the Sutra, or Root Text, and then they have to receive a commentary from their professor, and they study the Medicine Buddha for 12 years. At the same time, they have to have the empowerment, and they take this as a daily practice.

Before they complete their education as a doctor, they have to go on retreat where they focus on the Medicine Buddha, to accomplish the mantra recitation, then also they have to have some kind of experience of the Medicine Buddha, and they have to accomplish all these different things before they become a doctor and treat people.

Basically, a Tibetan Medical doctor trains very well in bodhicitta, a sense compassion and loving kindness. Before they treat patients, they meditate

on Medicine Buddha and recite the mantra, and then after the practice session, in the post-meditation session of the Medicine Buddha, the activity is the treatment of patients. While they are doing the treatments, they have to carry on the practice.

So that way, they are curing not only the sick people's disease, but also their karmic impurities. And this will greatly benefit the patients.

So the doctor patient relationship is one where the doctor has compassion, and the patient has devotion, trust and confidence, and whatever the doctor tells them, they listen. For example, if they say, you should not eat such and such a food, or, this is how you should take care of yourself in warm weather, or cold weather, they have to listen to them.

So, at the same time, they have a sense of devotion. If they don't believe in the doctor, they won't listen, and if they won't listen then they won't be effected. In Tibetan medicine, the patient has to have a sense of devotion, and the medical doctor needs to have a sense of love and compassion too. These devotion and compassion work together, then the Medicine Buddha can heal. And this is complete healing - not like heal this year, and next year the illness comes back... This is what the Medicine Sutra says.

Anyway, what we have here is a short sadhana. The Medicine Buddha has so many sadhanas, so many practices, but this is a combination of Tantra and Sutra. It is a very powerful healing practice.

In the beginning we take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, and generate bodhicitta:

Taking Refuge first:

The Buddha is my destination,

the Dharma is my Path,
and the Sangha are my companions.

So I have a sense of respect and devotion to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, and this is a kind of protection, in general against any obstacles or hindrances on my path.

Secondly, you have to generate bodhicitta:

You want to practice Medicine Buddha to accomplish the Medicine Buddha's qualities and perfections, so you can free all sentient beings forever from their physical and mental disease; and also bring them everlasting happiness

And this is why you wish to practice Medicine Buddha - to gain the Medicine Buddha's healing power, to benefit other sentient beings.

In the beginning of your practice, this is very important to cultivate.

So, Taking Refuge and generating bodhicitta is the preliminary practice of the Medicine Buddha. This is basic. Without these two, Taking Refuge, and generating bodhicitta, if you practice Medicine Buddha, it's not Buddhist practice. It will be non-Buddhist practice, and it won't be effective either.

Taking Refuge is very important so that the actual practice is intensified, and and can collect great healing power from the whole universe.

Also, you're generating bodhicitta, and that will contribute another power - that of your compassion, and for that reason Medicine Buddha can heal all sentient beings, of whatever disease they have, physical or mental. Because of your compassion, your caring for other sentient beings, if gives great power... You want to free all sentient beings...

So this is a big contribution. One session of actual practice can bring infinite benefit, and you will receive the blessing and power.

So this is important as a preliminary, cultivating devotion, with Refuge, and compassion, bodhicitta, to develop kindness and compassion towards all sentient beings, dedicating your practice for the benefit of other beings.

In the actual practice, simply, you visualize Medicine Buddha in front.

You can look at a picture carefully....

Simply, you can visual just Medicine Buddha, on a multi-colored fully blooming lotus, on a sun and moon disc, and then Medicine Buddha...

He is sitting in the Lotus Position, his body is blue in color, and he is wearing the monastic robes. In his left hand, he is holding a begging bowl, full of healing nectar, and in his right hand he hold the branch of an arura plant, which is the king of medicine. He holds this with the giving gesture...

Like Buddha Shakyamuni, he is wearing monastic robes, and his expression is very gentle and peaceful. You can see that he is made of clear blue light, transparent, and not substantial... it is like rainbow light, but full of wisdom and compassion. Actually *all* the qualities of the Buddha's perfection are in that form of the Medicine Buddha.

The form of the Medicine Buddha is blue, as described, but actually the healing energy of all divine beings appears in this form of the Medicine Buddha. He appears very gentle and compassionate, and he is looking towards you.

When you visualize that way, you can focus on this. Just place your mind one-pointedly on the Medicine Buddha, without wavering. Not thinking of

the past, not thinking of the future. In the present time, just focus your mind on the Medicine Buddha...

Then at a certain point, you can begin to think of the medicine in his heart. There is a moon disc, and the Tibetan letter *hung*, blue in color. This is the essence of all Buddhas' Mind...

So this blue hung, at the heart center of the Medicine Buddha, radiates light - white, yellow, blue, green and red... This is glowing from the hung at his heart center, and also from his body, from his aura, emanating from him...

Keep your mind on that.

The white light is the pure form of anger - the Mirror-Like Wisdom, that is radiating from the Medicine Buddha...

The yellow light is the mental poison of pride, transformed into the Wisdom of Equanimity, bright and shining...

The red light, bright and shining, is the pure form of our attachment, transformed into the aspect of Discriminating Wisdom...

The green light is the pure form of our jealousy, transformed into All Accomplishing Wisdom...

These poisons are completely dispelled...

Now blue light is shining, coming from his heart, and that is the purified ignorance, or stupidity, in the aspect of wisdom called Dharmata Wisdom, transcending all ego, and all afflictions. That's called Dharmadhatu Wisdom, or Primordial Wisdom, or Self-Arising Wisdom...

These are Wisdoms the Healing Buddha has accomplished, and he is completely free of these five poisons...

Now, we, ourselves, we have anger, and that brings some disease; desire, and that brings some disease; jealousy, that brings some disease...
Pride, that brings some disease, and stupidity, that brings disease...

These poisons are in our mind. All of us have these poisons - no one can say, 'No, I don't have these...' We all do. So, these poisons are the causes of our diseases... We all have some dis-ease, because the source is there. When the conditions come, the dis-ease comes... Then we are sick, and possibly die too...

But this is different than who we are. Our diseases come from our poisons.

All the Buddhist systems - all practice, whether Hinayana, Mahayana, or Vajrayana, all the practices the Buddha taught are the remedy for the ego. Our ego is the big enemy for us, keeping us in samsara, keeping us confused...

If we have ego, then we have these poisons, no choice. We'll have these five poisons continually in our life, whatever we do. And they accumulate more and more, and develop... This is how we live...

So now, we have to know, the Medicine Buddha, the energy of all Buddhas healing - his quality and perfection *is* the Five Wisdoms.

This wisdom is permanently there, no matter where we are. The Buddha's wisdom is with us all the time...

And the Buddha's wisdom is without discriminating, saying, 'You're a devotee, I will give you wisdom and blessing... You're not a devotee' - that's

not the way. The Buddha's wisdom is equally for all sentient beings, it pervades all sentient beings...

Wisdom is there already, but we need the cause, the condition. What is the cause, the condition? We need some sense of devotion...

We may not have devotion to anything, but we do have some sense of what we admire... Someone who has no anger at all, no desire at all, no jealousy at all, no pride, no ignorance,

when we see someone like that in the world, we admire their quality and perfection. We think, *'That's great, that someone can be like this!'*

- when we're thinking *'That's great!'*, that's a sense of devotion.

When we think, *'That's great'*, then you're longing to have this wisdom.

This devotion is the cause for the Medicine Buddha's healing blessings to be received.

Your sincere devotion invokes the blessings, as you recite the mantra:

Tayata Om Bekhandze Bekhandze Maha Bekhanze Radza Samungate Soha

It's great, this mantra.

When you recite the mantra, you can see it around the seed syllable hung shining more brightly...

The light is basically blue, but the light manifests five lights and these come from the Buddha to you.

They come to your head, throat, heart, navel and secret place, and the purify the five poisons, it dispels them, it heals them...

These five poisons, and mental dis-ease, first the light pacifies, and purifies them, and then, with the light coming continually, the physical dis-ease is also pacified. Physical discomfort is slowly dispelled...

This light not only temporarily, but completely cuts off the kleshas and sickness coming back and causing you to suffer again. You can be completely liberated, because this is not a temporary practice, this is the practice of the Buddha, and a true Mahayana practice.

So your practice is dedicated to liberation from samsara and attaining enlightenment. The Healing Buddha can serve this purpose at the same time.

In this way, you become clean and pure yourself, also, and, at a certain point reciting the mantra, you become completely transparent, in your visualization, and you become Medicine Buddha also.

After you become Medicine Buddha, identical to the one in front of you, you purify and dispel all these impurities yourself.

You can send light from your heart, shining, and from all around your body, as an aura, and as you keep reciting mantra, this light goes to all sentient beings, whoever needs it:

the realms of hell beings, the realms of hungry ghosts, the realm of animals, the human realm, the demi god realm and the god realm -

all these different realms, the poisons are the cause for being born there.

So, light shines towards them, and dispels their mental poisons and physical discomfort, wherever there are problems.

Specifically, we are in the human world, in the human realm, so we think of the human realm's suffering, the physical and mental problems, particularly those things that you see.

These people, light goes to them, and cures whatever discomfort they may have, it dispels it completely, and removes it completely.

While you visualize that, you keep saying the mantra, and you keep the mind focussed on the visualization in front, and also yourself as the Medicine Buddha.

In the beginning, if you have a hard time visualizing both, focus on the one in front, because that's easy, you can do it.

When you visualize yourself, sometimes it's difficult, but if it's not difficult, visualize yourself as the Medicine Buddha at the same time.

So this is one way we can practice healing. You can help people by reciting mantra and meditating on the Medicine Buddha.

And if you have some kind of medical training, when you are treating someone, for example if you are a masseuse, before you see your patient, you can do this practice.

Your patient has different afflictions. And the result of this practice, in the first place, will be that you will be offering them peace, mentally, and in the second place, what you do for them will really be effective in healing them.

So this is one way you can practice Medicine Buddha.

Another way is you can visualize yourself as Medicine Buddha. You focus on yourself as Medicine Buddha, completely, but then it's important you don't think 'I am Medicine Buddha', because then if you see your body, which is not Medicine Buddha, it will contribute to disbelief.

So what you do is, you have to think, *My mind is Medicine Buddha* not my body.

When you visualize, thinking 'My mind is the Medicine Buddha', then you are making this distinction between body and mind.

Thinking of Medicine Buddha, when you have this kind of sense of confidence that you *are* Medicine Buddha, through the blessing of the Buddha, and through the blessing of the lineage passed down to you, then you can say

I am the Medicine Buddha, I have blessing, and I'm empowered myself to visualize and to think of myself as the Medicine Buddha - in this case you actually, really are Medicine Buddha...

And again, when we talk about Mahamudra, in that case, Medicine Buddha is *within you*. Wherever you are, you are Medicine Buddha. What we are talking about here as the true nature of mind, that is Medicine Buddha. True nature of mind is Mahamudra. You see?

Mahamudra and Medicine Buddha are the same essence, but different technique.

In this case, your mind is here, now. Examine your mind right now. Where is your mind? Is your mind your body? Your body is so many things, lips, hands, arms, head, nose, eyes, feet, fingers, flesh, bones... so are all of these my mind? Then I would have so many minds. That's not possible...

Then I could remove every part, asking, where is my mind? Can I find it inside my body? I've never found it. I've never located it...

Is it outside my body? I haven't found it there either.

So what happens? My mind is... nothing...

My mind is nothing from beginningless time. What is that?

That is Medicine Buddha. That is Mahamudra.

So, nothingness, no matter where you are, in the hell realm, hungry ghost realm, animal realm, human realm, god realm, no matter where, *even enlightenment*, that emptiness will be there. That is Medicine Buddha. That is the Healing Buddha.

So therefore, you, Healing Buddha yourself, even now, each of you are capable of being healed yourself, and healing others. Why? You have protection. You have the true nature of mind. It's powerful! The mind can be powerful.

So that mind, what we are labelling as mind, there's nothing tangible, with shape, or color, There's nothing that can be pointed to, saying 'this is the mind'. So the mind is not really existent. Mind is beyond intellect, beyond concept.

So what you visualize as Medicine Buddha, that is what we are visualizing. When the mind is empty, it's called dharmakaya.

Much less ordinary people, when the Buddha stays completely in the state of the dharmata, even bodhisattvas don't have any communication with that. It's beyond any intellectual concept. But they attain such a state, while being full of love and compassion.

So therefore, out of this emptiness, what you are visualizing - yourself as Medicine Buddha - *is compassion and loving kindness*.

Medicine Buddha's form is compassion and loving kindness.

Out of love and compassion for all sentient beings, Medicine Buddha appears to heal all sentient beings.

So that is what we are visualizing as ourselves - compassion and loving kindness, *boundless* compassion, *boundless* loving kindness...

And you are not removed from the dharmata, total enlightenment, full total awakening, yet you are manifesting yourself as the Medicine Buddha.

Ordinary people have to visualize, but this is visible to bodhisattvas. They can talk to them and receive their blessing...

Through the Buddha, appears the Medicine Buddha. Medicine Buddhas appears to other Medicine Buddha, for the benefit of sentient beings, countless manifestations. This is due to compassion. Extreme, intense compassion comes in the form of the Medicine Buddha, to heal all sentient beings. That is why we can say *We are* Medicine Buddha, because we have the ability to heal sentient beings. *We do have* the potential for the five wisdoms.

The potential for the five wisdoms, right now, is in the deluded state, the negative state. We are ignorant, we are angry, we have desire, we are jealous, we have greed, we are proud... so these five wisdom, hallucinating the wrong things - this is not the original state...

When these poisons come, we act negatively in body, speech and mind. And this negative continuity obscures our Medicine Buddha more and more. Then Medicine Buddha doesn't effect healing, because we are obscured. The more poisons we have, the more we obscure the purity of our original being.

So, that is the reason, having received the empowerment and instructions, if you are confident for a moment of the session that you *are* the true Medicine Buddha, it can be greatly beneficial to yourself, and greatly beneficial to others. That's why you visualize yourself as Medicine Buddha.

So, in this case, you visualize Medicine Buddha completely, and in his heart there is the syllable hung, on a moon disc.

From the syllable, first we send out yellow light, which gathers the energy of the earth, which returns, and dissolves into you;

Then, second, you sent out white light, which gathers the pure water energies;

Third, sending out red light, it gathers fire energy;

Then sending out green light, this gathers wind energy, which returns and dissolves into the hung at your heart center.

This is also very important, because when we have sickness, or disease, at that time, our elements are imbalanced. Sometimes the fire element is too much, and that makes for discomfort in us; sometimes the water element is too much, and that makes another kind of disease. Sometimes the earth element is too much, or sometimes not enough also. When these elements are out of balance, it causes suffering, discomfort in our health.

So, this way of gathering the four elements, for example, sending out yellow light to gather all of the earth energies - from the top of Mount Meru to the center of the earth - all the energies of the earth you gather and dissolve them into you. Then, if the earth element is not enough, it will augment that, and if it's too much, it will reduce that, or balance it out.

The same can be done with the wind, water and fire elements. White light gathers all the energies of the water element - from the ocean, river, creek, wherever there is water all over the universe, and this light comes back to you and balances your water element.

Same with the fire element - light goes out to all the fire energies, and the light returns back and dissolves into you, and balances out your fire element.

Also, the wind element - the green light goes out and returns and dissolves into you, balancing out the wind element in you.

This will help with healing also.

Like that, in one session, you can recite the mantra, and visualize yourself as Medicine Buddha, and one by one you can send out these lights and gather the energies of the elements that merge with you.

Do this while reciting *Tayata Om Bekhandze Bekhandze Maha Bekhanze Radza Samungate Soha*.

This can also be very helpful.

After you practice this, what you do is then dismiss the visualization. You can dismiss it all suddenly, like a rainbow disappearing in to space, completely gone. There is no Medicine Buddha, no me, nothing on the outside. Everything is empty, spacious, totally relaxed.

At that time you can do anything you are capable of practicing, like mahamudra, or mahasandi. You can practice there, relax, as long as you want. Let your mind quiet down. (Then dedicate the merit)

Great mahamudra practitioners will say that you need to understand how to relax your mind. If it's too relaxed, that's not good. And if it's too tight,

that's not good either. If you can find the balance, then you can look at the view of emptiness, transcending everything.

Don't think, *I'm meditating, I should tighten my body and mind* - that's not good. If you're adjusting your meditation too much, just relax. But not so much that the mind is not clear. Find the right balance.

Not too tight, or agitated; but not sleepy and dull. You have to be awake.

Not too relaxed, but not too tight, then you have the view that is totally empty, without any kind of conceptualization there.

The great master Saraha also said *Holding things as real, that's being like a cow; but clinging to nothing, that's even worse..*

Clinging to things as real, you can't meditate on emptiness, but clinging to emptiness as a blank emptiness, that means you don't believe in Dharma, or karma - that's much worse.

At least someone who believes in the apparent reality of things will believe in good and bad. Then, even though they are not liberated, at least they won't fall down into the lower realms. They know negative as negative, and positive as positive, and that keeps them in the upper realms.

But not believing in anything, that's more serious, and results in being born in the lower realms.

Mind is empty, but don't have it be a blank, nothingness. Empty, but fully aware, you can see, you can hear, you can smell, you can taste, but without clinging to anything, that's the important thing.

You can hear - don't cling.

You can see - don't cling.

Smell - don't cling; taste - don't cling; feel - don't cling...

The great master, Milarepa, said, *'Meditation is clear light, completely without clinging'*.

He's talking about not clinging also. Even clinging to emptiness, that's wrong too. When you're totally relaxed, in the state of Mahamudra, then you have to let go of everything...

The difference between Mahamudra and an experience not being Mahamudra is whether or not there is clinging. If you're clinging to anything - that's not Mahamudra. If you're not clinging to anything - that's Mahamudra...

Because of that, Milarepa renounced everything, with a sense of revulsion for all samsaric activities. He didn't care about clothes, food, living in human society, or in a house - he lived in the mountains, with nothing. He didn't cling to anything, and he realized the actual, true nature of mind, clear light, without clinging...

At last he said, 'I was afraid of death, because of all my negative actions' - so he escaped society, lived in the mountains, alone, without distraction, and meditated on death. And after practicing, he was able to say, 'I no longer have fear of death' - this was after meditating on impermanence.

Whenever he would think of coming down the mountain, and going into town, he'd tell to himself, 'Don't go! If death comes while you are down there, it will be trouble. Sit where you are, and keep practicing, guard the true nature of mind!'

Many times he thought of going, but he convinced himself to practice.

That's the way to meditate, if you want to realize Mahamudra. We're just meeting for one day, two days, or one hour, two hours and talking about Mahamudra, it can't be done that way.

In Mahamudra practice, we need lots of purification, and lots of the accumulation of merit, and *lots of calm abiding practice*.

Calm abiding practice is very important for Mahamudra. Then you need the perfect view of emptiness. Then you introduce Mahamudra, simply, and it's possible to have the experience.

Then, you have to go through all these practices - like the Four Thoughts: Impermanence, Precious Human Body, the Law of Karma, and Samsaric Suffering.... just meditate on these for a long time...

When your mind really understands these, you realize you can use this precious opportunity to get enlightenment, to become free from suffering forever, and *that this is a great, great opportunity*. This chance may not come again...

So then you renounce, and any teaching you receive from a qualified teacher you will understand. You'll be able to practice with few obstacles, or, if there are obstacles, you'll be able to overcome them, because you've let go of everything else. To let go of everything is freeing in a way, by itself.

When you have completely renounced, and you bring to mind love and compassion, which are very important for Mahamudra, love and compassion can come easily. Love and compassion can come infinitely...

The Buddha himself said,

*'Limitless as the sky, all sentient beings pervading space
are afflicted with suffering,
and my prayer is*

May all these beings be free from suffering...'

The Buddha dedicated himself in that way.

We also have to train our minds very well in love and compassion. As I talked about last night, not like individual love and compassion, but infinite - non referential love, and non referential compassion, without clinging.

This is easy to come, if you renounce. And this loving kindness and compassion makes everything you do become Dharma. Whether you're talking, walking, eating, or drinking, all become Dharma, because you're mind never wavers from bodhicitta. Everything becomes Dharma. You're destination is close, and your progress is continuous...

Then, if you go to the meditation on emptiness, it comes easily; if you meditate on deities, it comes easily; if you recite mantras, then your speech, mind and body are on the path to liberation, without obstacles hindering your practice. See?

Then you can go to the different kinds of view of emptiness, through the different stages of meditation. Then you can be introduced to Mahamudra. If you go step by step, when Mahamudra is introduced, you don't need anything else.

Teachers give these teachings to students who have purified. Before they are ready, they won't give them. He'll just have them continue with purification. Then when the teacher sees that the student is ready, they will give the teachings, and (snaps fingers) the student will realize.

One example, is Tilopa, who transmitted Mahamudra to Naropa. Naropa performed 12 great and 12 lesser difficulties, to purify, and make his mind suitable to receive Mahamudra teachings, but he took this as his purification.

Tilopa had accomplished the practices of wind, channel, and bindu, so he could fly, and one day while Tilopa was walking in space, Naropa was walking in sandy water. Meanwhile it was very hot weather, and Tilopa wanted him to follow more quickly, but it was impossible. So finally, expressed himself as if he was so angry, and he took off his sandal and hit Naropa in the face with it. When Naropa regained his consciousness, he realized Mahamudra.

How's that?

So, Mahamudra is simple, but you have to be ready for it.

Also, in Tibet, there was one yogi who was very scholarly, a very high yogi. The Tibetans put him in jail, because they thought he was a Chinese spy. He went to England, but the Hinayanas couldn't relate, but he became very learned. The Tibetans were a little afraid of him, and didn't know what to do with him. So they put him in jail, and he stayed in jail a long time, but it didn't effect him at all.

At one point they realized there was nothing they could do to make him suffer, so they just let him go, and all the scholars in Tibet went to see him. They realized he was a great master, but he didn't teach them at all.

They came, and wanted to chase them out, so he lit a cigarette and blew smoke in their face. They were learned, but they weren't qualified to receive teachings. To scare them away, he even put his cigarette out on the top of a Buddha statue. They must have thought he was mad. He tried to make them dislike him, but they wouldn't leave.

One of his disciple though, Dawa Zangpo, wanted to receive Mahamudra teachings, and he asked for them many times. One day though he agreed, and said, you have to listen to everything I say. Dawa Zangpo agreed, and said, Ok, if you give Mahamudra, I'll follow your instructions.

The teacher said, Ok then, I really like to drink. So I want you to go out and get the best chang (Tibetan beer) from all over town, and bring it to me! I want to drink. He said, Ok, why not?

He went and got the beer and said, here is my offering, now give me the teachings (point out my mind).

He said, ok, pour me some chang first, which Dawa Zangpo did...

And the yogi drank and he drank, but the disciple got drunk. He passed out, and when he woke up, he realized Mahamudra.

Again, that student had the karma, from many lifetimes.

And this teacher, from the 19th century, everybody put him down, but now His Holiness the Dalai has asked that everyone collect the stories of this yogi. And the book is amazing. It is very interesting for Tibetan Culture and Tibetan Religion.

In any case, this is the way that Mahamudra is simple. It can be transmitted in all kinds of ways.

If the disciple is ready, and the guru is capable, it's possible.

Even if we have some kind of sense of realization, better we go step by step. Even if you are qualified, it's good to do that.

Question: I just have one question, about Medicine Buddha practice. When we were visualizing ourselves as Medicine Buddha, and we make offerings, we offer them to ourselves as well?

Answer: Yes. You who are an illusory person, make illusory offerings to yourself as the *actual* Medicine Buddha. You understand?

(I make an offering to my Buddha Nature?)

To the true nature of mind - the Absolute Medicine Buddha. Yes.

Dedication

*May these words reach whoever can benefit from them,
May people everywhere take up whatever practices are most helpful*

*May mantra, prayer and samadhi be known and practiced,
may their benefits arise wherever and whenever needed
and may the activities of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas
flourish without end*