

On Devotion and Receiving Blessings

By Various Teachers

Jason Espada, Editor

Preface

The Heart is the Seat of True Understanding

In the West we tend to prize the intellect. We reward its achievements with degrees, and careers. On a more everyday level, even when we simply speak of having an idea, or of understanding, it usually means just knowing something conceptually. This is fine as far as it goes, but it's limited. There are other ways we can know, and this becomes clear especially when we study spiritual traditions and practices.

How can we begin to talk about this in any meaningful way? I often think of this passage from the biography of Carl Jung where he describes his encounter with the Native American chief, Mountain Lake, in New Mexico, back in 1932.

Chief Mountain Lake said: "See how the whites look... They are always uneasy and restless. We do not know what they want. We do not understand them. We think that they are all mad."

When Jung asked why he thought they are all mad, Mountain Lake replied,

"They say they think with their heads."

"Why of course," said Jung, surprised at his comment, "What do you think with?"

"We think here," said Chief Mountain Lake, indicating his heart.

There is such a fundamental difference, but what can we as modern, educated Westerners take from this? We do have our feeling, and intuitive sides, but they need to be developed, and brought to the fore, especially when it comes to spiritual studies, and practices that aim at self transformation.

Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo said,

The way that Buddhism has been transplanted in the West, often bypasses faith and devotion, and it becomes very cerebral almost, all up in the head. We need very much to bring our practice down into a much deeper level of consciousness, which is opened through our faith and devotion...

I have found in my own life and practice over the years that often there is that gap between knowing something conceptually, and really feeling it in my heart, and embodying it. I think it's this way with many others too, unfortunately.

As a remedy, and to accomplish the teachings, more and more, I believe we do need these heart qualities. Then even what appears to be simple teachings, such those on taking refuge, or celebrating our good fortune here, or wishing for the safety, peace, and health of others become something truly profound.

When we can feel what they are saying, we *slow down*, we generate more of these qualities, and receive more of the benefit. This is something mysterious, and not at all easy to talk about. The best I can do to encourage myself is simply to watch the effect of going more slowly and attentively, with reverence.

As it says in *The Little Prince*, *It is only with the heart that one can see rightly...*

I've been reflecting on one insight that's expressed in Western traditions, that *the heart is the seat of understanding*. With this in mind, there is a balance between head, or intellect, and heart knowledge.

Ringu Tulku said:

To get an experiential understanding you have to go deep into yourself and learn how to bring your awareness and mindfulness to the place from which you deeply experience. It is a matter of 'heart' rather than 'head'.

Sometimes it is said that the longest journey is from your head to your heart, which is what we mean when we talk about developing the right view and understanding it experientially.

This is an on going process...

Two Traditions

In the devotional practices of the Theravada, there is seldom a description of Pure Lands, or Celestial realms or beings. When the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha are praised, their qualities are enumerated, and they are featured as worthy of reverence, and being followed. They are brought to mind and celebrated as reliable supports for our spiritual practice, and for our whole lives.

In Tibetan Buddhism, in contrast, devotional practices are often accompanied by visualization. This is true whether it is in the practice of taking refuge, in connecting and receiving inspiration from our teachers, or in any of the Vajrayana practices.

Whatever enlightened being is the object of one's faith can be visualized. I have heard that this way of practicing can be adapted to other religions as well. Jesus, or Mary, for example, can be brought to mind and meditated with in this way.

Whatever the form of our devotions, we receive the benefit. *Em Ah Ho! How wonderful!* In comparing different practices, it seems to me that, universally, they help us to realize freedom from difficulties, and the enjoyment of enlightened, positive qualities. The Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Holy Ones, and Saints always meet us right where we are, with their grace.

A note on these contents, in four parts

I've gathered these teachings then first of all to reflect upon, to encourage myself, and of course also to share with others to enjoy.

For years, this collection had only the second section, *On Devotion and Receiving Blessings*, and in a way this is the center of gravity of this volume. This section also stands alone, and can be found [here](#). My reason for highlighting what these teachers express so well is that we have truly received something *of another order* when we connect with a realized teacher, or a living tradition.

These passages emphasize the nature and role of our reverence and receptivity, and the nature of the divine, the blessings we receive and are supported and sustained by in our lives. We can see and feel something powerful, sacred, and profound. Health and gratitude and wonder become established more and more, and when we express something of what we have learned, it is from this light.

I've tried in a few places to express the nature of what the Noble Ones give to us, and to our world, but it is a challenge, because it doesn't fit into our ordinary ways of thinking. I preface this collection then with reflections on the *Tenets of Pure Perception*, as a way of beginning with Right View, and then indicate where essays on the theme can be found.

Over the years, I noticed that a few poems and the *Praises* to the Buddha and my teachers gradually found their way into the same folder. These are presented here in Part I. The selections in part III, *On the nature of the guru* go into this subject in some depth. Hopefully all these make sense, and hold together for the reader as well.

Recently I added the meditations in part IV, that are *On the Guru Yoga of the Sixteenth Karmapa*. This is just one example of how this traditional practice

is done. Once the principles are clear, meditations such as this can be adapted, in line with our personal affinities.

*May we all be blessed by the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas,
and receive all that our noble teachers intend for us
May we then accomplish results in our practice,
of greater freedom and ease,
and the flourishing of our lives here*

* * *

About these selections:

The Traditional teachings in this collection are my own versions, and the the texts and prayers offered here have been edited, and in some places revised, according to my understanding. In these cases, I have done my best to be true to the meaning.

Tenets of Pure Perception

Sacred outlook is a way of experiencing the world as essentially divine in nature, having great beauty and potential. It is seeing:

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

and 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 realms of existence

That there are past and future lives

That karma works, negative actions create suffering and positive actions create happiness, and bring light into the world

That the way we experience ourselves and each other and the world depends on our mind

That true mind sees things the way they are, and naturally has right values, and is healing

That the purpose of our lives here is to care for each other, and,

Those who show us the best ways to do this are our venerable teachers

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 vows are powerful

That prayer is effective

That ritual works,

and,

That mantra works

*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!*

For more information on the subject of Sacred Outlook, and Pure Perception, see:

Opening the Door to Pure Perception (2023)

and,

Essays on Buddhist Prayer (2023)

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Ringu Tulku

Thrangu Rinpoche

Tulku Ugyen Rinpoche

Garchen Rinpoche

Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche

Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche

Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche

Dudjom Rinpoche

Namkai Norbu

Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo

Kelsang Gyatso

Bokar Rinpoche

The Twelfth Gyalwang Drukpa

Rob Preece

Chamtrul Rinpoche

Mingyur Rinpoche

Chogye Trichen Rinpoche

Thich Nhat Hanh

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Homage to my teacher

Lama Yeshe

In Praise of Big Love

Lama Zopa Rinpoche

Dilgo Khyentse

Pabonkha Rinpoche

* * *

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Recollecting the Qualities of the Three Jewels, Praise, and Taking Refuge

Homage to the Founder,
 the Endowed Transcendent Destroyer (of defilements),
 the One Gone Beyond,
 the Foe Destroyer,
 the Completely Perfected, Fully Awakened Being,
 the Glorious Conqueror, the Subduer from the Shakya Clan

(Recollection of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha)

This fine report of the Buddha's reputation has spread far & wide,
 that he is

Worthy of honor and reverence,
 being the Great Benefactor of us all;
 He is an Arahant, completely purified,
 a Fully Enlightened One;

Accomplished in Knowledge and Conduct,
 Well-gone,
 Knower of the world,
 He is an Incomparable teacher for those to be trained;

A Teacher of devas and humans,
 the Awakened One,
 he is a blessing to the world.

(Recollection of the Dhamma)

His Liberating Teachings
 are well explained,
 they are timeless,

to be seen here and now;
 They are inviting,
 leading onwards,
 and to be experienced individually by the wise

(Recollection of the Sangha)

And His Spiritual Community has practiced well,
 with understanding, and integrity;
 They have practiced with faith and clear intelligence,
 with diligent effort and dedication,

They are worthy of praise and respect;
 They are worthy of love and support
 They are worthy of gifts,
 worthy of hospitality,
 worthy of offerings;
 They are an incomparable field of merit for the world!

An Awakened One has appeared in the world.
 He has taught the Way to freedom,
 and generations of his followers
 have realized his teachings.

Homage!

I take refuge in the Buddha,
 the Great Compassionate Teacher

I take refuge in the Dhamma,
 in all the Liberating Teachings

and I take refuge in the Noble Sangha,

the Accomplished Spiritual Community,
the Great Assembly of Saints and Bodhisattvas

I praise and celebrate,
honor and support all those who are cultivating
these paths and their results

Praise and Taking Refuge

Endowed with excellent qualities,
of purity, transcendental wisdom, and compassion,
the Great Teacher has enlightened the wise
like the sun awakening the lotus -
I bow my head to that peaceful Chief of Conquerors.

The Buddha, the Noble Lord,
who is the supreme, secure Refuge of all beings -
as the First Object of Recollection, I venerate Him with bowed head.
The Buddha is sorrow's destroyer, and He bestows blessings

I take refuge in the Buddha,
and to the Buddha I dedicate this body and life.
In devotion I will walk the Buddha's path of awakening.
By my devotion to the Buddha, and by the blessings of this practice,
by its power, may all obstacles be overcome.

The Dhamma is excellent because it is so clear and inspiring,
Its actual nature is known when put into practice -
it can be seen then as Path and Fruit, as Practice and Liberation.
This Dhamma holds those who uphold it from falling into delusion.
I revere the excellent teaching, that removes darkness from the mind

The Dhamma, which is the supreme, secure Refuge of all beings -
as the Second Object of Recollection, I venerate it with bowed head.
The Dhamma is sorrow's destroyer, and it bestows blessings

I take refuge in the Dhamma,
and to the Dhamma I dedicate this body and life.
In devotion I will walk this excellent way of Truth.
By my devotion to the Dhamma, and by the blessings of this practice,
by its power, may all obstacles be overcome.

Born of the Dhamma, that Sublime Sangha
 is guided in body and mind by most excellent virtue.
 I revere that assembly of Noble beings perfected in purity.

The Sangha, which is the supreme, secure Refuge of all beings,
 as the Third Object of Recollection, I venerate it with bowed head.
 The Sangha is sorrow's destroyer and it bestows blessings

I take refuge in the Sangha
 and to the Sangha I dedicate this body and life.
 In devotion I will walk the well-practiced way of the Sangha.
 By my devotion to the Sangha, and by the blessings of this practice,
 by its power, may all obstacles be overcome.

To the Buddha,
 the Savior having Great Compassion and Great Wisdom,
 with qualities like a vast ocean,

To the purity which makes one free from attachment,
 the virtue which frees one from the lower realms,
 to that Dhamma which pacifies, brings freedom,
 and reveals our true nature,

And to those who are liberated and who also show the path to liberation,
 the holy field qualified with realizations,
 who are devoted to the moral precepts,
 and to the benefit of beings,
 to the Sangha, the sublime community intending virtue -

Homage

I take refuge in the Buddha

I take refuge in the Dharma

and

I take refuge in the Noble Sangha

May all beings share in these blessings.

Praise to Shakyamuni Buddha

From the first moment of your great compassionate motivation,
to the ever-unfolding fulfillment of your aim,
this day, this hour,
I join in singing praises to you

Seeing the suffering of living beings,
you set yourself to sharing its remedy with all the world
I celebrate your boundless, compassionate activity

In Asia, and now on Western shores,
those who became your students,
and gained the results from practice,
wisdom, good health, peace and joy,
are too many to count

All this became possible in this world
because of your efforts, realization, and teaching
and so I bow to you, Supreme Sage

May I too continue the realization of your teachings,
in this place and time,
and throughout all places and times

In Praise of the Buddha's Liberating Activity

To the destitute,
you are wealth, and good fortune itself;

To the prisoner,
you are their release,
and walking again under the free and open sky;

To those who have been sick,
you are the feeling of relief when the fever breaks;

To the lost,
you are the main road appearing, at last;

and to the enslaved,
you are the breaker of chains

I praise you endlessly, as supreme,
and as our refuge and protector

All your forms are honored
for the benefit you bring

A prayer to Shakyamuni Buddha and to all Noble teachers

The Buddha taught the Way to end suffering
and to peace and well being,
and so I hold him on the crown of my head

He had great wisdom
and great love and compassion for all,
and so I hold him in my heart

And those who accomplished his teachings
throughout time
and became benefactors and teachers themselves,
I celebrate *all* of their accomplishments and activities,
all the peace and health they help bring into this world

My own teachers,
incomparably kind to me,
have supported and encouraged me in so many ways,
bringing them to mind brings me joy and strength

Having received all these gifts,
and seeing what great needs there are in the world at this time,
I pray
May I accomplish the best purpose with the Dharma

May I use it to bring benefit
to all who need help today
Now and always,
may it be this way for me

I pray to all my teachers to help me to do this,
and,
May all the prayers of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas
be accomplished exactly as they were made

Those of us who are fortunate enough to be studying the Dharma today should pause for a moment to appreciate the many generations who have come before us, each of them faithfully passing the Teachings on to the next...

And, as we recognize our debt to the past, we should also recognize our responsibility to the future...

- Adapted from *Describing the Indescribable*, by the Venerable Master Hsing Yun

Taking Responsibility

Adapted from *A Monastic's Mind*, by the Venerable Thubten Chodron

As we remain connected to the tradition and to these teachings longer and longer, we come to understand how our behavior affects other people, and we begin to feel some responsibility for the continuity of the teachings.

These precious teachings, which have helped us so much, began with the Buddha. They were then passed down through lineages of practitioners over the centuries, and because those people practiced well and remained together in communities, we are fortunate enough to receive so much positive energy...

When we receive ordination, and connect with this tradition, it's like we are on the crest of this wave, and receiving the virtue that all the Sangha before us have created for over 2,500 years.

After some time, we begin to think,

I've got to contribute some virtue so that future generations can meet the Dharma and so that other people around me can benefit.

We begin to feel more responsible for the existence and spread of the teachings.

After some time we begin to say,

What can I give to the community?

How can I help the Sangha?

What can I give to the individuals in the community?

What can I give to the laity?

What can I give?

As monastics and as lay practitioners we can ask ourselves,

What can I give to this 2,500 year-old community?

How can I help the Sangha and the individuals in it so that they can continue to benefit in the future?

Orienting ourselves this way, not only will we feel more content inside ourselves as we change our attitude, but we'll also be able to make a positive contribution to the welfare of sentient beings.

To make a positive contribution we don't need to be important or famous... We shouldn't make a big deal... if we just try to work on our own mind, be kind to other people, support them in their practice, and listen to them because we care about them, then slowly a transformation will occur within ourselves. Who we are as a person will change.

Adapted from *The Ceremony Praising Ancestral Teachers*, by Thich Nhat Hanh

Homage to the Ancestral Teachers of all ages!

With whole-hearted aspiration I bow my head and request all generations of Ancestral Teachers to bear compassionate witness to my words:

I am aware that just as trees have their roots, and water has its source, the Buddha and all generations of Ancestral Teachers are my source;

I am the continuation of you, my ancestors, and these are my aspirations:

I am determined to receive the awakened understanding, compassion, peace, joy, and healing energy that the Buddha and the Ancestral Teachers transmit to us;

I am determined to maintain these and to help them grow, never allowing this precious spiritual inheritance to come to an end;

I am determined to continue to realize your aspiration to help all beings;

I am determined to transform my own suffering, and to help the people of this time to transform their suffering;

I am determined to open Dharma doors for this and future generations which are appropriate, and that can help them to apply the teachings of Buddhism in all fields of life.

And, I vow to practice to live happily and peacefully in the present moment, to nourish solidity and freedom in myself, in order to help those around me.

I call upon my teachers and spiritual ancestors

May we all receive your blessings

May we all receive your light, inspiration, and strength

Lama Thubten Yeshe, Glorious Holy Being,
 May I always remember your example and your teachings,
 and aim to develop the same qualities as you in myself:

Just as you have done

*May I fully realize the Mahayana Heart -
 the love and compassion that cares for all beings
 as a mother does her only child;*

May I always remember

*Your Joy, Intelligence,
 Clarity, and Immaculate Purity;*

May I aim to develop the same qualities as you -

*The Concentration and Wisdom that cuts through all illusion,
 and realizes Perfect Freedom;*

the Great Confidence and Power to overcome all obstacles;

that Creative Ability to adapt to all circumstances;

and the Great Happiness and Fulfillment in the Dharma and in helping others;

May I always remember

Your Great Vision for the Mahayana Dharma;

Your Profound Faith and Devotion;

Your Generosity;

Your ability to provide shelter and safety to others,

as well as your Courage, and Ferocity when needed;

and, following after you, may I produce every single one of these same qualities in myself

May I always remember

Your Warmth and Gentleness,

Your Great Peace and Well Being,

Your Healing Energy,

and your ability to always uplift and to encourage others

How Wondrous!

May this greatly fortunate one, following after you,
always cultivate these same ways of being in this world

May all my actions always please You
And as much as I can, now and forever
may I fulfill your holy wishes

Thay

When your students said
they would build a monument for you,
you told them,
Ok, but please put a plaque down at that place that says,
'I am not here.'

And I know it this is true because I find you
in so many places in my life.

And, when I call,
you arrive together with your teachers, and ancestors,
and spiritual companions on the Way.

How then to even begin to praise you as you deserve?
and when I know you would have deflected such words, casually,
choosing instead to be unobtrusive?

You took me in when I was a wanderer,
unseen, unwanted,
A refugee, as you once were,
And your dwelling place will always be
great enough for us all

How can I speak also when your activity continues in so many ways?

I have you with me, so surprising at times,
a constant shelter, and sustenance,
your smile

And when I hear of some new amazing story from your time on this earth,
I am filled with wonder, and awe, and yet I feel, *of course,*
it all belongs

So many came to you and felt special, and seen, and understood
This is a quality of remarkable teachers,
and I have seen this for myself

There is silence and
a warmth of understanding between us,
and I pause and rest here today

You are Light on the path,
and manna,
and the delight of fresh water

And when I try to measure your devotion to the teachings
and your care for us all, oh, truly there is no end to it,
and so I praise you on this day,
and celebrate my somehow waking up
with to find this jewel in my hand

You and your teachers speak to me,
and my breath returns,
and it's all I need to make it over the high mountain pass
Remarkable!

The names and the gifts you cared for so well,
and spoke into this world
are ever new, and ever fresh,
How wondrous!

And when I set out early, and the road is veiled,
I would doubt, had you not told me
the way can be traveled,
and yourself shown how it is done

This lived experience is made
of the colors of the night and the day
Everything arranges itself, just as it's said,
and I find faith there

I have found, Thay,
that you are what all the teachings have only attempted to describe,
and this life of mine too,
when by some grace I bring you to mind,
and turn again to practice...

{Note: It's astonishing to me that, after all these years, I have never even
tried to write about my teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh, to set down even the
smallest part of what he has meant in my life.

I know it's in part because of the magnitude of these gifts, and how they
are an ineffable part of all my living. Truly, it's been this way since the first
time I met him, in 1989.

Like all true spiritual gifts, they don't fit in a simple telling, and yet, I feel
these are the most important things to at least to try to talk about.

In even half a verse, even one poorly written, there is something that is
more than the words, and so I will content myself with this much today,
and try do better, walking a sunlit road, in times to come.}

Essence of all the Refuges,
Lama Zopa Rinpoche, Vajradhara,
Impeccable Bodhisattva in these degenerate times -
I celebrate your boundless compassionate activity,
and I pray, for all our sake,
May you continue to guide us until samsara ends!

I beseech you to remember the mighty vows you have made,
and taught us all so well!
Be with us always!
Help us each to swiftly accomplish your stage,
cause the Dharma to flourish, and lead all beings to safety.

From this day forward,
always remembering our gratitude for what you and your Noble teachers
have accomplished here
May we fulfill your holy wishes,
and in every circumstance, accomplish only the actions that please you best

With faith and devotion,
may we find the fulfillment of our purpose here,
living with compassion and with wisdom,
just as you have taught

Today, and from this day forward,
May I bring clearly to mind the vows you have made,
realize every one of them perfectly,
and may the temporal and ultimate aims of living beings
be fulfilled

One night, lonely and afflicted,
I prayed to you, Karmapa:

'It's said that you are Avalokiteshvara,
and when I look at your heart I know this is true

I have long known Avalokita
as the one who has always been there for me,
appearing in the most difficult times

And so I turn to you, and I call out -

I pray you will give me refuge!

Look upon me with your compassion!

I am on the outside now, and I am calling to you!

Calling to you!

Hear me!...

{Like that I opened my heart, and I cried out, again and again}

And a Great Love welcomed me,
and gave me Safety and Peace...

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, then why mention two, or more? Our ordinary senses still obscure the intangible, the beyond-conception. Seeing the same vital principle expressed in a 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.

I come to you as She found me,
and not dressed up

To have known a redeemer-
I'll go on trying to say Her name,
Avalokiteshvara,
and take the measure of that gift -
I have to

Some few, with devotion,
wil understand

It was foretold,
that in exactly these times,
You would appear
to aid beings such as myself who struggle so to find the way

You have said that you would not abandon us now
You have said that you would come,
and somehow, miraculously, I believe it is true

The world is so much bigger,
the causes, and the dangers,
are more than we can face alone,
and so I pray

For myself and for all others like me,
who are searching,
who are reaching out
who are seeking peace
and a way to care for ourselves and others here,
make your presence known to us now

On this day, Guru Rinpoche, may you be known

Protect us now,
Lead us back from the edge,
Restore our peace

Protect us now,
Hold us back from anger,
Keep us back from every danger

Let your light pour down so that we may know each other truly

May your light and love stream down to heal us,
and this earth

On this day,
With all these glories unmet,
look upon us, compassionate one

And give to those without sight
the vision of this world revealed

O Guru Rinpoche, may you be known

I came to you hungry,
and in Your Presence I have forgotten all my hunger

I came to you cold, for dress,
and found myself clothed

I came to you in need, suffering,
and before I could begin to describe the hurt,
I was healed

I stand here amazed then, not knowing what to say...

I came to you for a place to stay,
and found myself in Palace Gardens,
with all I'll ever need

I came to you with all my many questions,
but it seems I've forgotten them all in Your Presence

This is enough for me, teaching me all I'll need to know
Light of Light...

I came to you to confess,
but now it seems I have lost what I carried with me for so long,
my ancient regrets, all my hopes and fears,
and my aspiration to go beyond all of this

All is renewed, and made whole in Your Presence

I came to you for learning,
and instead I found in myself this river of knowledge

How can this possibly be?
I cannot count the steps to getting here,
or how many times I was carried,
only to awaken in another land altogether

and so I gather all my family and new and old friends,
to share in this great good fortune,
in celebration

A Christmas Message of Peace 12/25/2022

Born in the lowliest of places,
some few saw and traveled,
and honored you as fitting for a King,
a Supreme One born into this world

For nine tenths of your life, you were hidden among us,
and when you spoke, it was to bring light
Tenderly, it was to free the world,
and nothing would be the same after that

Authorities, jealous of course,
their rule threatened, their arrogance exposed,
didn't understand, as it is to this day

Yet you showed what is possible for us all,
healing the sick, excluding none
And what seems to be impossible,
you accomplished everywhere you went,
dispelling doubt, as many times as needed
stilling storms, turning water into wine, raising the dead

The blind sought you out, as did those without hope,
drawn by an inner conviction,
and their faith in You made them whole

You are a Friend to all, without a doubt,
and it is supremely healing even to hear your Name
Who can say now that your time here was short,
when you continue to appear in countless ways?

But you enacted for the whole world to see,
your persecution at the hand of so called religious leaders,

and state power

and even then you showed only mercy,
a song that continues

With your final earthly cries,
the angels wept,
and vowed again to serve you,
to do your will, and the Will of the One who sent you

Even that most fierce opponent of yours,
on the road to Damascus,
in a flash turned to the greatest servant of Your message,
showing us all how much can change in a single moment of illumination

The underground stream, the fresh breeze,
the returning strength of those revived -
these are how you are known to us now

As the childish fight over ownership,
who grieves this more than you? -

You escape,
and set up church elsewhere,
in people's basements,
in solitary cells,
on sidewalks where the homeless are being tended to,
in connections restored

This Universal Church admits all,
its doors are always open,
and all are fed, with the food they need most,
with warmth, and kindness, and kinship

How can we *even begin* to praise you as we should?

In everything that you did, you revealed Eternal Life,
and all you do inspires followers of the Way,
with more humility

May all that you taught and showed us
be remembered today,
put into practice, and fulfilled

Part Two

On Devotion and Receiving Blessings - by Various Teachers

Ringu Tulku

Thrangu Rinpoche

Tulku Ugyen Rinpoche

Garchen Rinpoche

Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche

Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche

Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche

Dudjom Rinpoche

Namkai Norbu

Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo

Kelsang Gyatso

Bokar Rinpoche

The Twelfth Gyalwang Drukpa

Rob Preece

Chamtrul Rinpoche

Mingyur Rinpoche

Chogye Trichen Rinpoche

Thich Nhat Hanh

The Qualities of the Guru

Homage to my teacher

Lama Yeshe

In Praise of Big Love

Lama Zopa Rinpoche

Dilgo Khyentse

Pabonkha Rinpoche

* * *

Faith, Devotion, and Blessings on the Path of Liberation

On devotion, by Ringu Tulku

Blessing is more about receiving than giving, because if it is an enlightened being, a compassionate being, they would naturally give *anything*, including blessing, to everybody, as much as possible, because they are beings of compassion. They have no other agenda, but to try to help...

They *are* giving blessings all the time. There is no time that they are not giving. But does that mean that we are receiving it all the time?...we don't receive them...

So therefore, receiving the blessing is most important from a Buddhist point of view.

Blessing means transformation, blessing means positive influence, positive transformation... it has different levels, to awaken our own buddha nature, the positive qualities in ourselves, {through the method}. That is the ultimate way of receiving the blessings

And in order to receive the blessings it is necessary to have *devotion*

And *understanding the quality of the enlightened experience* is very important as well, because if you don't appreciate that, then you won't want to receive the blessing.

So, devotion is like aspiration, and clarity, and certainty, and this kind of devotion is necessary, and then, deeply opening your heart for that...

That is why prayer is a good thing, is an important medium..

and Guru Yoga is an important way of doing that...

And in the mandala, you include every enlightened being...

Devotion, by Ringu Tulku

As you become calmer, you become clearer. The fewer concepts you have, the more clear you become. In a way, the only thing we can do to make realization dawn is to relax in meditation and do nothing. This is how we will come to know the nature of mind.

Realizing the nature of mind has nothing to do with how clever you are. Sometimes, having a great deal of theoretical understanding is not the best thing. The only quality that is always stressed is devotion. *Meditative experience can arise through devotion.*

Devotion has three special qualities: inspiration, aspiration and certainty. When you are certain that something is true, it sparks your devotion to act accordingly. Devotion is not the same as belief; it arises when something rings true to you. Devotion is based on understanding the dharma, and inspiration motivates one to practice.

The more you are able to let be and free yourself from concepts, the more you are able to open your heart. And the more you open your heart, the more you can relax in the nature of mind.

Using Devotion as a Medium for Meditation

From the teachings of Ringu Tulku

Devotion is a kind of feeling, a feeling of inspiration... It is an opening of the heart. When you feel devotion, when you feel inspiration, your heart opens. It's a kind of emotion...

There's a lot of similarity between devotion and compassion. They are both an opening of the heart.

Generally, compassion is an opening of the heart to other beings, and devotion is an opening of the heart to higher beings.

Therefore, for meditation, and especially meditations like Mahamudra, it's a very suitable mode, a medium for meditation.

That's why, maybe it's said that you actually can understand and realize Mahamudra *only* through devotion. Sometimes it is said like that.

And of course it relates to the three kinds of faith (faith as an intuition, verified faith, and unshakable faith), but it also refers to when our heart opens...

If we pray, and meditate, then devotion is a *clear* emotion. It's a very inspired emotion, but there is no attachment or aversion. There is no negativity in that. It's a very positive and clear emotion, an opening of heart...

When you are in a devotional state, and you allow your mind to be in that state, then it's not analytical - it's a non-conceptual state, but a *very aware*, a very clear, non-conceptual state...

So therefore, it's very often said that it's very easy to experience the true nature of your mind, your ordinary mind- the awareness, clarity, and emptiness nature of your mind...

When you're in a devotional state, and you look at your mind, your consciousness- then, 'look' does not really mean 'look' in a dualistic way, but *you feel* that state...

So, many times people get that experience of the true nature of our mind, the Mahamudra state, or the Dzogchen state when receiving an empowerment, or when doing guru yoga. Guru yoga is a practice of devotion...

On Devotion and On Receiving Blessings - by various teachers

Genuine devotion based upon trust and understanding is a very important medium in meditation. In a devotional state of mind we are free from negative emotions; there is no jealousy or anger, and not much attachment either. At the same time, devotion is very strong. It is an extremely intense, clean, and pure emotion. It is very distinct and has an almost nonconceptual quality.

When real devotion arises, we feel so uplifted that the hair on our body may stand on end and tears may well up in our eyes. In this state negative feelings do not have an opportunity to surface, so there is no delusion and no dullness either. It is an undiluted experience, very clear and precise. Devotion is not conceptual and does not involve any judgment. It is therefore the ideal state of mind in which to meditate. This is especially true of *Mahamudra meditation, which develops strongly in a state of devotion.*

- Ringu Tulku

Simply by receiving the blessing of the lineage, we can automatically develop a meditative state even if we have had no meditation practice previously.

- Thrangu Rinpoche

Three things are most important - devotion, diligence, and wisdom, or intelligence, or clarity.

We need to have a little bit of intelligence, or wisdom, or capacity. Without that, we can't understand, but even if we have that, we need to have diligence. Even if we have some understanding, or some little experience, we need to practice again, and again, and again.

Like we talked about with shamatha meditation - it's very simple. There's almost nothing that you can't understand, but then, just understanding doesn't make any difference to you. So, you need to do it.

It's the same with mahamudra, or vipashana - we can have some kind of experience or understanding, but then we need to continually practice that diligently.

But then, with all these things, it's not just your efforts, or your intelligence, you know... you are clever, and intelligent, and you work very hard, it's not that... it's a lot to do with, sometimes we call it blessings...

Something has to open up, and these things are not something we can do with effort. Your heart has to open. And there, devotion is very important.

That's why sometimes they say that experiences like mahamudra, and dzogchen, can only be through devotion. Sometimes they say like that. That's why guru yoga is always said to be an important path, an important medium with these meditations.

The more you have devotion, the more your heart is open, the more likely you are to have the experience of this.

That's why they talk about these three things.

- Ringu Tulku

When we use the very profound methods of mahamudra, when the guru points directly to the mind, then by meditating one or two days, perhaps one of us will realize the fruition. This is exceedingly fortunate. This is very important and is a very profound method. When we realize this quickly, we think, "I have realized just this one thing; the experience of mind." Some may scorn this, but we should never scorn this. It is truly the profound means to enlightenment. This is very important.

- Thrangu Rinpoche

If one just focuses on devotion one does not need to spend years studying debate, philosophy, grammar, art and so forth. In the past, thousands of practitioners attained accomplishment through the path of devotion combined with the paths of Mahamudra and Dzogchen.

- Tulku Urgyen

When we think with devotion of a past great teacher who has great wisdom and compassion, his or her qualities will be transmitted to our minds through the power of the unbroken lineage. That is because although the bodies of the old masters have died, their minds have never died. Their minds continue to remain pervasive as space. Thus whoever thinks of their great qualities with devotion will access their minds. Thus, our lineage is called the "practice lineage of blessings." This is something that scientists have not discovered. It is the meaning of 'Secret Mantra,' or 'Vajrayana Buddhism,' which teaches that depending on devotion one can receive the blessings and qualities of the guru. (65)

- Garchen Rinpoche

Even a short time spent meditating with great devotion will reveal more of our true nature than a hundred hours spent analyzing various philosophies.

The practice of Guru Yoga leads to the profound realizations of Mahamudra and Dzogchen, which penetrate to the core...

Devotion is indispensable in uncovering the qualities of wisdom...

Great blessings will come through this practice...

- Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche

On Devotion, by Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche

According to Dzogchen, and the special approach of the great Dzogchen master Shri Singha, there is a way of recognizing the nature of mind solely through devotion.

There are cases of practitioners who simply through their heartfelt devotion attained realization, even though their teacher had already passed away or was nowhere near them physically.

Because of their prayers and devotion, the nature of mind was introduced. The classic example is that of Jigme Lingpa and his consuming devotion for Longchen Rabjam.

In the prayer of Dorje Chang it is said that devotion is the head of meditation. This refers to the devotion which should be developed in the Vajrayana- a kind of devotion which completely and naturally awakens in oneself without imagination or fooling oneself. When it appears in one's mind, *common thoughts subside through the blessing of the lama and the experience of meditation arises naturally*, without putting any effort into meditation. Then the inspiration of the body, speech, and mind of the lama can be effective in oneself.

- From The Lama - The Source of Blessings, by Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche

The best method for eliminating obstacles during meditation is that of devotion to the Lama. Thanks to this, our mind becomes one with the mind of the Lama...

This is really the secret of meditation.

- Dudjom Rinpoche

People may sometimes feel that they have a problem because their teacher is not physically present with them.

We cannot spend all our time with our teacher. In fact this should not become a problem. The point is not that you always need the teacher nearby. It's true that you may sometimes need to ask the master something, but these days there are many possible ways of communicating with the master. If the teacher is still alive, it is always possible to meet with him or her at some point.

If you are really practicing seriously, you can, no matter what the situation, maintain communication with the teacher; because when you enter the practice and become a good practitioner, the teacher is found within you. The teacher is not only an external phenomenon. He or she can also manifest through your own clarity. We must have a clear understanding of this. The reality of our actual situation is that everything is not just external to us.

- Namkhai Norbu

The Lama is in our heart... The Lama *is* our true nature, and all we have to do is to really learn how to be quiet, and open to that nature, which is always within us, but normally covered over by all our busy conceptualization, and Trust in that;

And call out to the whole universe all the buddhas and bodhisattvas and the yidams and the Dakinis, and the protectors, and everybody, and say

Okay, here I am I've given my life to the Dharma, now what shall I do? You show me what to do... I have sacrificed and my life for you, so from your side, you, please reach out and help at this point ...

And really, if you trust in that and really really open yourself to their healing blessings, they will come; They will come, because the universe is filled with compassionate intelligence - we just have to plug into that energy, and it's through silence and surrender, and devotion;

It comes, because it's there always waiting, waiting to be called on;

Normally we're looking everywhere else. We don't know where we're supposed to be looking, but it's within us the whole time, just waiting, so trust in that...

- Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo

On receiving blessings, by Ringu Tulku

From Meeting Challenges

Sometimes we pray and I think we can get blessings through that. Most probably we can get blessings- I am sure we can get blessings!, but how much blessing I get does not depend on how much blessing somebody else is giving. How much blessing I get is how much blessing I am able to receive.

From a Buddhist point of view, the Buddhas are trying to give blessing all the time. It is never the case that a Buddha withholds blessings, otherwise he or she is not a Buddha.

So, how much blessing I receive does not depend on how much blessing a Buddha is giving me, 'because he is pleased with me'. It depends on how much I can receive because I open myself to those blessings.

If I practice, if I really work on opening my heart, then I receive blessing, whether the Buddhas like it or not. They cannot help themselves but to give blessing.

So therefore, blessing is also not dependent on somebody else. It is dependent on me. This is how to understand it. This is the practice. **

On the unwavering cushion of the union of method and wisdom,
Sits the kind Lama who is the nature of all Protectors.
There is a Buddha in the state of the culmination of cessations and
realizations.

Beseech him in the light of admiration, by casting away cynical thoughts.
Don't let your mind go astray, but place it within admiration and reverence.
Through not losing mindfulness, hold it within admiration and reverence.

- Kelsang Gyatso, the VII Dalai Lama

Your spiritual master is like the sun in space -
When your doubts or wrong views do not cloud him,
His compassionate light shines continuously:
In yearning faith and devotion, pray.

- Bokar Rinpoche

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).

- From a Vajrsattva Sadhana

True Devotion

When we pray to the Lama, we imagine his body, his face, his familiar expression facing us, and we think it's him, but truly, neither his body nor the expression of his face are quite the Lama.

The Lama is his mind and its own specific qualities.

When the Lama dies, some people may experience great sadness. The thought of not seeing his physical form any more creates in their mind a painful feeling of separation. In fact, when the Lama lets go of his physical form it is because he has finished transmitting what he wished to transmit to us.

If we have developed the understanding that our mind is not different from his, there is no more separation. There is no more sadness even if the Lama is no longer physically present.

That is true devotion.

- Kyabje Bokar Rinpoche

Many years ago in India, Tibet, Japan, Korea, and Thailand many people got enlightened, with the support and encouragement of wise and experienced teachers. Not many people are experiencing this kind of spiritual enlightenment in the West, in modern life and times. Why not? Because they are depending too much on the intellect; they're not depending on the lineage blessings and experience.

You can learn, you can know, but not necessarily be accomplished. You can be very big in your head, but that doesn't mean anything, except your head will be very heavy. And the teachings won't go to the heart because there's no lineage, no transmission of the authentic mind-to-mind non-conceptual blessings, from wisdom heart to your heart.

Question: What is it about authentic lineage that is passed on or transmitted?

A blessing. The blessing is something very mysterious, actually. It is not only mysterious, it has a lot of substance. There are also years and decades, centuries of experience here, amidst the blessings and teaching. There's an unbelievable sense of transformation of your mental state, liberating your mind and opening your heart.

How can I express it, because it's like tasting honey? It's sweet. But sweet means...what? It's inexpressible. I feel very happy, delighted, delicious, but I can't express it, until you taste it, and then we can share something of the experience together. This is one aspect of the blessing, of course...

- The Twelfth Gyalwang Drukpa

Adapted from Vajrapani - Clarifying Our Relationship to Power, by Rob Preece

The often used term *receiving blessings* is an interesting one in the context of tantric practice. In the Tibetan, the word usually translated as blessing is *jinlab*. This word is made of two syllables, *jin*, meaning power or inspiration, and *lab*, meaning *waves*.

The phrase that is sometimes used in reference to blessing is *receiving waves of inspiring strength*.

This phrase begins to make sense when we consider the nature of the energetic field within which practice is held. The subtle energy field {of contemplative awareness} is the domain within which we invite or invoke the a divine presence, such as that of our Noble teachers, the Buddhas and Celestial Bodhisattvas...

When we receive blessings, we are receiving waves of inspiration and power through this energy field we inhabit.

If we are open and receptive to the flow of their energy, it will change our own energy-body...

It is for this reason that after we have spent time in prayer, reciting mantra and engaging in visualization, it is important to rest quietly in the spacious quality of awareness that remains...

Within this quiet, open space, we digest {and assimilate} the felt experience of the practice, allowing both our mind and our energy-body to be subtly transformed...

When the process of prayer, visualization and recitation ends, rest in the space of awareness that remains, and, without any thought or visualizations, digest the effect on your mind and energy body...

It is helpful to notice the subtle felt-sense that pervades that spaciousness, enabling the effect of the practice to touch you more deeply...

.

Never underestimate the power of blessings.

Just how the sun shines on to this world without ever discriminating, the compassionate wisdom energy of all of the buddhas pervades everything. No matter where you are, no matter what you do, this energy is always there, it is always with you.

But just as you need to open your eyes to experience the light of the sun, you have to open your mind with unshakable devotion to experience the blessings of the energy of the buddhas. The more that your mind opens, the greater the blessings that will energize your mind and power your practice all of the way to your enlightenment.

You do not have to run around searching for blessings, as the compassionate wisdom energy of all of the buddhas pervades everything, everywhere. No matter who you are, or where you are, their energy is always with you.

All that you have to do is fill your mind with devotion, and your mind will just open up to their energy, and then the blessings will just naturally arise. The greater your devotion, the greater the blessings.

Never underestimate the importance of blessings. They uplift, clarify, and brighten your mind's energy, resulting in your mind becoming more powerful, and your practice becoming more fruitful.

~ Chamtrul Rinpoche

The living teacher embodies the wisdom of the practice lineage and functions like a lit lamp that has the energetic power to ignite the mind of the student. If you make a connection, you will get lit, too. This is what we call transmission.

Transmission or blessing does not just come through formal rituals and ceremonies, or through words. If a teacher rests his or her mind in realization and teaches from that place, that quality of mind can be expressed and communicated, and can be transmitted to a student ready to receive it. Through the teacher's hand gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice, and so forth, the student can receive and begin to embody the view that the guru is transmitting.

The living lineage comes through the teacher, not the historical Buddha. For the student, the teacher is kinder than the Buddha because he or she is the root cause of our spiritual maturation. Blessings come not only from the guru, but also through the guru, who is perceived not only as a living buddha but also as the prime vehicle for the dharma teachings and the noble sangha.

Our ability to recognize and use the benefits of the guru's blessings depends on our devotion. Devotion makes us receptive to all the guru offers.

- Mingyur Rinpoche

During an empowerment, if you have faith, you can receive blessings and recognize the true nature of mind. Even if the master is an ordinary person, if you receive the empowerment with faith, the blessings of the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and lineage masters will reach you, and you will be able to gain an experience of the nature of mind.

The experience of the nature of mind that comes through blessings is called the descent of primordial wisdom. It is something that may also be repeated continually throughout one's own practice of receiving the empowerments during the practice of Guru Yoga.

- Chogye Trichen Rinpoche

From *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching*, by Thich Nhat Hanh

If we read or listen with an open mind and an open heart, the rain of the Dharma will penetrate the soil of our consciousness...

The gentle spring rain permeates the soil of my soul.

A seed has lain deeply in the earth for many years just smiles...

When reading or listening, don't work too hard. Be like the earth. When the rain comes, the earth only has to open herself up to the rain. Allow the rain of the Dharma to come in and penetrate the seeds that are buried deep in your consciousness.

A teacher cannot give you the truth. The truth is already in you. You only need to open yourself - body, mind, and heart - so that his or her teachings will penetrate your own seeds of understanding and enlightenment. If you let the words enter you, the soil and the seeds will do the rest of the work...

The Qualities of the Guru , by Lama Yeshe

There is the need for an organic, living kind of force to come in touch with our heart.

The main reason that religion in both the East and the West has degenerated so much nowadays is the rarity of meeting good spiritual examples. If people never meet highly realized beings they have no way of knowing the limitless possibilities of their own human consciousness. It is not enough that there are texts recording the deeds and accomplishments of past masters. By themselves, such stories cannot inspire us very much. In fact, they may only increase our feeling of remoteness: "Buddha and Jesus lived such a long time ago," we may think, "and their purity belongs to another age. It is impossible for someone like myself living in this degenerate twenty-first century to attain anything resembling their level of purity."

The only way we can lay to rest these feelings of doubt, incapability and cynicism is by coming face to face with someone who has activated their highest potential. Only then do we have an example of purity and spiritual evolution we can actually see and relate to ourselves. Thus the outer guru is of utmost importance. We need the example of someone who, while human like ourselves, has developed beyond the bounds of what we presently think possible.

When we see someone who has reached beyond selfishness, who has transcended the petty concerns of this world while still living in the world, who speaks and acts from intuitive wisdom and who is truly dedicated to the welfare of others, then we can have faith and conviction that these attainments are possible for ourselves as well.

Homage to my teacher,
the Holy Exemplar,
in whom all Enlightened Qualities are found

On Guru Yoga

From *An Introduction to Tantra*, by Lama Yeshe

Either in front of us or above the crown of our head we visualize the main divine form we are practicing surrounded by the various gurus of the lineage. These lineage gurus are the successive masters who have passed on the teachings and realizations of that particular practice and include everyone from the first master of the lineage through to our own spiritual guide, the guru from whom we received the empowerment.

We then request the members of this assembly to bestow their inspiration and blessings upon us and, in response to this request, they merge with one another, enter us through the crown of our head in the form of light, descend our central channel, and dissolve into our heart center. As this happens, all ordinary dualistic appearances and conceptions dissolve into the clear space of emptiness. We then meditate upon the feeling that our guru, who in essence is identical with the bodhisattva-divinity, and our own subtle consciousness have become indistinguishably one.

The essence of the guru is wisdom: the perfectly clear and radiant state of mind in which bliss and the realization of emptiness are inseparably unified. Therefore, when we visualize the guru absorbing into our heart we should feel that an indestructible impression of that wisdom is being made upon our fundamental mind. From this time onwards we should try to recall this inner experience of great bliss and non-dual wisdom repeatedly, no matter what circumstances we may encounter.

In Praise of Big Love

Dear Nick,

I am writing to you this evening to express my deepest thanks for the publication of Big Love. I would have written sooner, but I kept having to wipe away the tears from my eyes...

I know now what it means when they say something is an auspicious event, because you have done justice to Lama Yeshe's remarkable life, which is quite an achievement.

I celebrate tonight, knowing full well that in times to come, all those who meet Lama through this book will be meeting his Great Love, and Wisdom. They will be connecting with the Mahayana Dharma, and incalculable benefit will surely come from that.

A little into the second volume, I suddenly realized that I was holding a sacred object in my hands. It is the result of millions of virtues, those of Lama Yeshe's, and *his* teachers; those of his students and benefactors, and the faith, and love and devotion of all those who worked over the years to bring this project to completion.

My deepest thanks to Adele, to you, Nick, to Lama Zopa, to the editors, designers, and printers, and all those who have added to the creation of this sacred work.

With gratitude,

Jason Espada.

With faith, we know with our hearts so much more than can be understood with the intellect.

Faith is also associated with devotion. If faith is trust and reliance, relaxing and believing in something, then devotion acts more like a magnet, drawing what we are devoted to to us.

Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche has these beautiful and true things to say about devotion:

Devotion creates readiness, just as in the Spring the sun and rain make gardens ready to plant seeds and start growth.

and,

Devotion is the key that opens the door of pure vision. It leads us beyond darkness, doubt and hesitation; it will help us recover from periods of difficulty. Devotion takes us beyond conceptions to an understanding of the true nature.

- From A Belief in the Miraculous

When your mind is filled with devotion you also experience great inner peace. Your heart is full of incredible joy and you see yourself as unbelievably fortunate. Even though there might be other difficulties in your life, such as no money, no visa or no job, your strong guru devotion overwhelms your problems and external things don't bother you much. Your life becomes very enjoyable and very meaningful.

- Lama Zopa Rinpoche

To have devotion constantly in your mind will endow you with lasting serenity and satisfaction. Remembering even the name of your spiritual teacher is enough to completely transform your perceptions. Visualizing the guru above the crown of your head, even for an instant, can dissipate the veils of illusion.

Devotion is the ring that allows the hook of the teacher's compassion to pull you out of the mire of samsara.

Enlightenment, inherent though it is in the mind, seems so difficult to unveil, but if you develop fervent devotion and fuse the guru's enlightened nature with your ordinary mind, enlightenment can be realized. Truly, to meditate on the benevolent teacher is a spiritual practice more profound than any other.

– Dilgo Khyentse, from “The Hundred Verses of Advice”

Devotion can be cultivated by appreciating the exceptional qualities of the object of our faith.

Obviously, some people like Asians and maybe Latinos, in general, have a natural capacity for devotion, perhaps it is because they seem to have a closer connection with their heart emotions, but we can all practice.

Really, all can practice opening the heart, because this is how blessings are received. It's very important, if we want to get the blessings, then we have to open up our heart, and our heart is opened through our faith and devotion. So we need to recognize how important this is.

The way that Buddhism has been transplanted in the West, often bypasses faith and devotion, and it becomes very cerebral almost, all up in the head. We need very much to bring our practice down into a much deeper level of consciousness, which is opened through our faith and devotion.

And definitely, as I say, if we think of the object of our devotion and really appreciate that,

Why is this special?

What qualities do they enact which I also need to develop?

- then we feel deep appreciation and love and devotion. It just comes up from the heart...

~ Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo

From Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand, by Pabonkha Rinpoche

They say we should recite verses on the guru's kindness when we contemplate how very kind he is. The following verses were spoken by Kumara Manibhadra in the section on the kindness of the spiritual guide from *The Laying Out of Stalks Sutra*:

*My spiritual guides, my exponents of the Dharma,
Are qualified to teach me all the Dharma;
They came with but one thought: to fully teach me
The tasks facing the bodhisattva.*

*Because they gave birth to me, they are like my mother;
They are like wet nurses feeding me the milk of good qualities;
They have thoroughly trained in the branches to enlightenment.
These spiritual guides keep me from that which harms.*

*They are like doctors who free me from death and old age,
Or like Indra the celestial lord raining down nectars;
They increase white Dharma like the waxing moon
And, like the shining sun, show the way to peace.*

*They are like mountains, unmoved by friend or foe.
Their minds are undisturbed like oceans.
They are dear ones who protect completely.
These were the thoughts that made me go to them.*

*Bodhisattvas, who are developing my mind,
Children of the buddhas who bring me enlightenment-
They guide me, the buddhas sing their praises.
I came to them with these virtuous thoughts.*

*They are like heroes for they shield me from the world;
They are my captains, my refuge and protection;*

*They are my very eyes, my comfort;
With these thoughts honor your spiritual guides.*

From *The Essence of Nectar lamrim*:

*I have given up family life, that pit of fire,
And carry out in solitude the Sage's deeds;
I taste the succulent nectar of the Dharma.
This is the kindness of my venerable gurus.*

*I have met the teachings of Tsongkapa,
Hard to find in a thousand eons of searching,
And gained faith in the way he taught -
This is the kindness of holy tutors.*

*Therefore my spiritual guides
Are protectors shielding me from lower realms,
Captains to free me from samsara's ocean,
Guides to lead me to high rebirth and liberation.*

*Doctors to cure me of chronic delusion,
Rivers to douse the great fires of suffering,
Lamps to remove the darkness of ignorance,
Suns to light the path to liberation.*

*Liberators from the closed prison of samsara,
Clouds that gently rain the holy Dharma,
Dear friends who help me, dispelling harm,
Kindly parents who are always loving...*

Contemplate these verses as you recite them, and remember the kindness of your own gurus.

Faith, Devotion, and Blessings on the Path of Liberation

When studying different Buddhist Wisdom teachings, we can notice how the insight they are pointing to is the same, and, we can also honor the unique qualities of each approach.

There are different ways to come to self knowledge, and to freedom from suffering. Some traditions rely on analysis to see through illusion. Study and debate, logic and the use of reasoning are the methods that lead to insight, revelation, and freedom from wrong views.

We can also have an experience of greater understanding and freedom through connecting deeply with an accomplished teacher. This is something that is not mentioned in most traditions.

*Faith comes in a few different ways. First, there is the *intimation* of a greater truth, something in us that says, 'Yes, this is the way to go'.

This becomes *verified faith*, as we follow our intuition. Our trust in a teacher or a tradition proves itself. We become healthier, more at peace, open to others and responsive.

After this, and higher than these two is *unshakable faith*. Having this kind of trust calms and steadies the mind. It becomes more clear, and experiencing the nature of mind happens quite naturally.

This kind of faith and trust is a little more of a challenge to talk about, because we're reaching now to some of the deepest connections a person can make with another in their lifetime.

When we speak of devotion to a teacher, this is something that is well known in Indian spirituality, but less so here in the West.

When we meet a teacher, and there is a deep karmic connection, something can happen that is inexplicable to the rational mind. At this point in our history here in the West, there are already a good number of stories of highly intelligent, educated and independent people being overwhelmed by such a meeting; they spontaneously cry, their heart opens, and right away there is a love and a trust they could not have imagined only moments before.

When there is this kind of a connection between a holy being and a student, it is unmistakable, rare and precious. As Ringu Tulku said, in meeting the spiritual teacher, half the journey is already complete. We can have an experience of awakening and insight in a moment, directly.

This is not easy to talk about, and it's certainly not the path for everyone. In fact, the progressive path is still often recommended in the Mahamudra tradition, even for those who have had such a profound connection and experience. It is considered safer, with less possibility of steps being left out.

The upside of faith and devotion as a path should be spoken as well, however, and praised as it should be, for those who can take this path.

It's possible that connecting with the enlightened mind of a realized teacher communicates more in a brief time than through years of study. I can say, I have some small experience of this happening. It is mysterious, and tangible.

They say in some lineages that it's possible to meet the mind of a teacher through his writings, or by seeing a blessed statue- and Indian spirituality would add- through dream or vision in meditation - and although this sounds like it's speaking metaphorically, the truth of it is, *this can actually happen*.

This is something that can't be manipulated, or bought, or else I'm sure everyone would take this easier path. Step by step learning by comparison at times can feel laborious, fragmentary, and very very slow. This is more a path of learning by intuition, and through love.

Connecting with an enlightened teacher communicates blessings. The energy is purifying, healing, illuminating, enriching, and vivifying. It brings with it a feeling of safety, and a keen, heightened awareness.

Faith and devotion we can notice here are related. Faith is *an openness*, or we can say, *a trusting receptivity*. Sometimes this comes after careful reflection, and sometimes it is just there - immediately, and beyond any amount of reason. It's amazing when this happens, and it is so unusual that it calls for our full attention. This is a kind of awakening in itself, with some part of ourselves knowing in a new way, and deeply trusting another.

Devotion comes soon after this, sensing the exceptional qualities of our teacher, as a realized being. These exceptional ones teach more by who they are than what they say. I have had the thought that *these are people I can learn from my entire life...* they are like looking up at the great Himalaya mountains, and seeing more and more...

Ringu Tulku describes devotion as *inspiration*, and, *an opening of the heart*.

As I mentioned, this is not at all the usual way of talking about learning, or about liberating realization, especially here in the West. Each approach has its own special strengths, and can be taken on their own terms, whatever works best for us.

*When it comes to liberation, it's in the Mahamudra and Great Perfection traditions that we hear of the great qualities of devotion.

Here are a few teachers speaking about this profound quality:

Simply by receiving the blessing of the lineage, we can automatically develop a meditative state even if we have had no meditation practice previously.

- Thangu Rinpoche

When we think with devotion of a past great teacher who has great wisdom and compassion, his or her qualities will be transmitted to our minds through the power of the unbroken lineage.

- Garchen Rinpoche

If one just focuses on devotion one does not need to spend years studying debate, philosophy, grammar, art and so forth. In the past, thousands of practitioners attained accomplishment through the path of devotion combined with the paths of Mahamudra and Dzogchen.

- Tulku Urgyen

and,

Mahamudra meditation develops strongly in a state of devotion.

- Ringu Tulku

Devotion is such a unique and precious human quality. With devotion, the mind is vividly awake, enthusiastic, and present. This is a kind of love, one that acts like a magnet for the blessings we receive from our teacher and the lineage, of inspiration, light and strength, and joy.

The closest we can come to describe devotion to a spiritual teacher, for someone who has not yet had such an experience is to say that it's something like being in love. The object of our affection is in our heart continually, shining there, bringing us joy. We cherish this connection.

It can be like this with a Noble Spiritual Friend, believe it or not, and it's possible that the connection goes even deeper. They open us to depths we didn't know we had.

A realized being, a Buddha, shows us something no ordinary relationship can ever give, and that is the way to liberation from the entirety of samsara. They themselves embody this inner freedom, peace and joy, and that is precious beyond measure. It's greater than anything else in the world. When we have doubts about the teachings, or about our own capacities, we need only think of them. They show us directly what is possible as human beings.

Since it's good for us to know and respect all valid spiritual paths, I've written these few celebratory words.

*May we all realize complete freedom,
and lead all others, without a single exception
to that very same state!*

Part Three - On the Nature of the Guru

Lama Yeshe Quote

The same basis, by Pabonkha Rinpoche

A note on the translation of one word

From Advice on Guru Practice, by Gomchen Gampala

On the nature of the deity, by Garchen Rinpoche

From Teachings on Guru Yoga, by Penor Rinpoche

Guru Yoga in Deity Practice, by Kenpo Karthar

From The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana

The Real Meaning of Guru I, and,

The Real Meaning of Guru II, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

From The Kagyu Lineage and Guru Yoga, by Mingyur Rinpoche

The essence of the guru is wisdom: the perfectly clear and radiant state of mind in which bliss and the realization of emptiness are inseparably unified.

- Lama Yeshe

You may think, "It is not always the same guru: many different gurus at different times have each contributed their own individual kindnesses" - but these gurus emanated from the same basis, the minds of all buddhas, the nondual primal wisdom of bliss and emptiness, which is of one taste with the dharmadhatu.

The gurus are all Buddha Vajradhara himself manifesting in different guises. In Tibet, for example, there was the being who was progenitor of our race; there were people who established the law; translators of the Dharma; kings and their ministers who spread and upheld the teachings; master translators and pandits; the reincarnations of the Dalai Lama; and so on. All these were only different guises for Arya Avalokiteshvara, the holder of the lotus. Our gurus are all similarly one entity.

Je Rinpoche says:

One should understand the foregoing to be the famous instruction called guru yoga, but one will go nowhere if one only meditates on it a few times.

That is, in order to understand that the guru is the embodiment of all buddhas, that he is all the buddhas in another guise, you must practice the Guru Puja, and so on, but if you do not understand this and merely recite the words, you will get nowhere at all.

So when you understand that the minds of all buddhas are of one taste with the essence of dharmakaya, bliss, and emptiness, and that they have arisen from this as the guru, you will understand that all buddhas - the hundred buddha families, the five families, the three families, and the one buddha family - are all the guru in different guises.

- From Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand, by Pabonkha Rinpoche

A note on the translation of one word

In the following selections, where Tibetan teachers used the word *yidam*, I have changed the most common translation of *deity* variously to *Divine Bodhisattva*, *Celestial Buddha*, *Divinity*, or *Divine Name and Form*.

My reason for doing so is that this word, *deity*, or *God* has such strong connotations especially for Westerners, because of our Judeo - Christian background.

My purpose here is simply to be true to the intended meaning, which is something quite different.

The word *yi-dam*, I have learned, means 'tight', or to be held 'tightly in mind', as the one we meditate upon, and ultimately recognize and identify with as our true nature, and the true nature of all beings.

The Bodhisattva Divinities exist on different levels at once. They can be prayed to, and their blessings can be received. This is historical fact, and tradition, and something that can be affirmed in one's own personal experience.

They also express different aspects of our universal true nature, and when meditated upon, they are both a means of awakening to truth, and the end itself of *sadhana*, or spiritual practice. When we take wisdom as the path, as we do in the Vajrayana, we learn to see this, more and more.

Buddhism is new in the West, and as we understand these practices, the meaning of the words is important.

May all the purposes of the Noble Ones be swiftly accomplished.

Advice on Guru Practice, by Gomchen Gampala

Kopan Monastery, Nepal, 1975

In Buddhadharma, guru practice is the most important thing. In fact, the only object to whom we need pray is the guru, because the guru encompasses the entire Triple Gem - the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. Therefore, first of all, it is necessary to find a perfect guru...

In the sutra teachings, we take refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, but in tantra, we take refuge in the guru.

As it says in the Guru Puja,

*You are my guru, you are my yidam,
You are the dakinis and Dharma protectors.
From now until enlightenment,
I shall seek no refuge other than you.*

This is the tantric way of taking refuge. You should try to actualize this; gain experience of it...

There's a prayer of request to the guru that goes,

*Magnificent and precious root guru,
Please abide on the lotus and moon seat at the crown of my head.
Guide me with your great kindness,
And grant me the realizations of your holy body, speech and mind.*

What is the kindness to which this prayer refers? It's what's happening here at Kopan Monastery - being guided by the guru, who out of his great kindness gives commentaries on the teachings and confers initiations, which ripen the mind.

With respect to the last line of this prayer, the essence of whatever deity you're meditating on - for example, Avalokiteshvara - is the guru. The Bodhisattva Divinities we meditate upon are manifestations of the guru.

When we request the realizations of our guru's holy body, speech and mind, we receive the blessings of the guru's holy body, speech and mind. These blessings purify the negativities of our own body, speech and mind, which then become one with our guru's holy body, speech and mind...

As the teachings explain, you have to decide completely that the guru is definitely buddha. If you don't come to that conclusion, then no matter what Dharma practices you do, they won't be of much benefit; they won't become a quick path to enlightenment.

Another teaching says, "Meditating on the guru's holy body is hundreds of thousands of times more powerful than meditating on countless Divinities in all their various aspects."

However, whatever Divine Name and Form you meditate on, you have to remember, "This is my guru's holy body." You should not think, "This is the Divinity, and the guru is something else."

Also, following your guru's instructions is far more beneficial than reciting the Divinity's mantra countless times.

There are two stages of the Highest Yoga Tantra path to enlightenment: generation and completion. While there is great benefit in meditating on the completion stage, doing it for even many eons pales in comparison to invoking the guru's holy mind just once...

There are many different Bodhisattva Divinities but in essence all of them are the guru. Therefore, when we make offerings to the various Divine Forms, we are actually making offerings to the guru.

The way to receive blessings is not to think that Avalokiteshvara is separate from your guru but that they are one. The really quick way to receive blessings is to concentrate on the guru and make your mind one with his holy mind, like mixing water with milk.

Don't think that Avalokiteshvara is somewhere else, is more beautiful than your guru or has no relationship to the guru from whom you receive teachings. It is not like that. Avalokiteshvara, or any other Bodhisattva Divinity, is the guru.

This is what I really want to emphasize...

The amount of Dharma you know, the number of realizations you gain, depends on how much devotion you have for your guru - the greater your devotion, the greater your Dharma understanding and realizations. It all depends on guru devotion...

On the nature of the Bodhisattva Divinity, by Garchen Rinpoche

Even though you have received many empowerments, if you understand the nature of the Bodhisattva Divinity, you understand that it is sufficient to only practice a single Celestial Buddha. By practicing a single Divine Name and Form genuinely, you are accomplishing the essence of all Bodhisattva Divinities.

In fact, it is better to focus on the practice of just one Celestial Buddha, because then it will be easier to habituate to that Divine Name and Form to the point where you will not forget about the Celestial Buddha.

To accomplish the Bodhisattva Divinity means to never forget about the Bodhisattva Divinity, it means that the Bodhisattva Divinity always remains in your mind, it never separates from you. As it is always in your mind, you become the Bodhisattva Divinity.

If you never separate from the Celestial Buddha you meditate upon, you will also remember this Divine Name and Form in the Bardo after death, upon which you will attain enlightenment into the samboghakaya form of the Bodhisattva Divinity.

Sometimes people worry about receiving too many empowerments because they think that they cannot keep all the samayas. Actually if you practice the root samaya of love, compassion and mindfulness, you are keeping all samayas of all Bodhisattva Divinities, even if you only recite the mantra of one Bodhisattva Divinity. In order to understand this you must understand the essence of the Bodhisattva Divinity. If you think that the Bodhisattva Divinities are all separate, there will be a conflict. Actually the power of one Wisdom Buddha, Divine Name and Form is contained within all Bodhisattva Divinities.

Various Celestial Buddhas and Bodhisattvas appear in order to suit the various thoughts and inclinations of sentient beings, but actually their

nature is one and the same. The nature of all Divine Names and Forms is bodhichitta. Therefore, if you practice bodhichitta and mindfulness, and only recite the mantra of one Bodhisattva Divinity, you are keeping all your samayas. If you do not practice bodhichitta and mindfulness, no matter how many different mantras you recite, you are not keeping your samayas. That is because bodhichitta is the very life-energy of the Divine Name and Form. Without bodhichitta the form would be like a dead body.

However, it is necessary to practice at least one Bodhisattva Divinity on a daily basis. In the various empowerment texts it is mentioned in the section of repeating the samaya that one must recite the mantra of that Bodhisattva Divinity, but this must be mentioned in each sadhana because in old days the masters would only receive this one empowerment and then practice this for the rest of their lives. For this reason it must be mentioned in each empowerment text, but for us, since we receive so many empowerments nowadays, it is crucial to understand the meaning and essence of the empowerment: It is said: "In the expanse of primordial wisdom, all the Buddhas are one."

From Teachings on Guru Yoga, by Penor Rinpoche

In the tantras it is stated again and again the importance of relying upon the lama as the source of blessings in one's practice. Regardless of the particular prayer that the student offers to the lama, regardless of how small or seemingly insignificant it may be, if it is based upon the student's complete trust and faith in the lama, then the blessings of the lama are always accessible to the student.

In *The Tantra of the Ocean of Timeless Awareness*, it states that it is far better to recite one small prayer to one's lama out of pure faith and devotion than it is to perform hundreds of millions of recitations of Bodhisattva Divinity mantras.

The effect of prayer is far more powerful when it is truly an expression of one's own faith and devotion in one's lama.

When one has established a connection with one's lama based upon trust, faith and devotion, there are different ways of relying upon that relationship through which various kinds of accomplishment can come about.

If a student intends to attain the most sublime accomplishment of enlightenment itself, the student identifies the lama with Vajradhara - the dharmakaya buddha.

If the student is particularly motivated to develop deeper wisdom, the student identifies the lama with Manjushri, the bodhisattva of wisdom.

In order to encourage his or her own love and compassion, the student meditates upon the lama as inseparable from Avalokitesvara, the bodhisattva of compassion.

To gain greater spiritual power the student focuses upon the lama as inseparable from Vajrapani, the bodhisattva of spiritual power.

To overcome various kinds of fear and anxiety one relies upon the lama as the very embodiment of the venerable Tara.

To promote one's own longevity one meditates upon the lama inseparable from Amitayus.

To overcome illness and disease, one meditates upon the lama as the Medicine Buddha.

To promote one's own wealth and prosperity one meditates upon the lama as inseparable from Vaishravana, Jambhala, or any of the wealth deities.

To purify the effects of harmful actions and to purify obscurations of one's body, speech and mind, one meditates upon the lama as inseparable from the Celestial Buddha Vajrasattva.

To increase one's own personal glory, wealth and opportunity, one meditates upon the lama as inseparable from the Buddha Ratnasambhava, the buddha of the jewel family.

To increase one's power – one's ability to exercise a powerful and beneficial influence over the world – one meditates upon the lama as inseparable from Amitabha or a Divinity such as Kurukulla.

If one wishes to enact wrathful activity, one meditates upon the lama as inseparable from Vajrabhairava or any of the more wrathful yidams.

*If one wishes to adopt the approach that combines all of these qualities in a single form, one meditates upon one's lama as inseparable from Guru Rinpoche.

In each of these cases, one's attitude is that of one's own root lama being the very embodiment of one or another of these aspects of enlightened being.

The Great Master Padmasambhava

The universal approach which subsumes all of these aspects is meditation upon one's lama as the very embodiment of Guru Rinpoche.

Guru Rinpoche should not be thought of in this case as simply an historical figure, i.e. as an individual who appeared after the Buddha Sakyamuni in our particular time and space.

The actual essence of Guru Rinpoche predates the Buddha Sakyamuni by eons.

The enlightened mindstream that is the enlightened mindstream of Guru Rinpoche is the single expression of the innate compassion, blessings and wisdom of countless buddhas from countless eons in the past, all focused in this single mindstream that is the mind stream of the great master Guru Rinpoche.

If we think of the Buddhadharma as being divisible into the teachings of the sutras and the tantras, the teachings that we know of today as Buddhism are those which were spoken and taught by the historical Buddha Sakyamuni.

In the greater sense, however, the teachings of the Buddhadharma, and particularly the teachings of the secret mantra path are not limited to the expression of that single buddha. This is where the activity of Guru Rinpoche is considered to be so universal and so far reaching.

Wherever the Vajrayana teachings have been given by any buddha in the past, or are being given or ever will be given, wherever a spiritual teacher is

transmitting those teachings, the essence of Guru Rinpoche is embodied there – in that buddha, in that teacher, in that lama.

In different realms, in different universes, under different names, in different forms, the manifestations of Guru Rinpoche have appeared and continue to appear in countless numbers.

There are any number of accounts in the traditional literature that attest to this manifold display of Guru Rinpoche's activity.

In our particular time and space – as we experience the legacy of Buddha Sakyamuni as one of the one thousand buddhas who will appear during this age in which we live – all of these thousand buddhas and all the activity of these thousand buddhas, including the Buddha Sakyamuni, are all manifestations from a single source. They are all different aspects of activity that derives from a single source of blessing and a single source of transmission.

Throughout this enormous universe and this vast expanse of time, all of the hundreds of millions of manifestations of buddhas and teachers that appear are manifestations of Guru Rinpoche's energy. Therefore, the expression of Guru Rinpoche's blessings cannot be limited to a single time frame and a single region such as India or Tibet.

The accounts of Guru Rinpoche's miraculous birth in India and his journey to Tibet to bring the teachings there are simply one small aspect of the blessing and activity that is the totality of Guru Rinpoche.

Even the accounts of Guru Rinpoche's life that we have do not speak of a single figure, but of eight manifestations of Guru Rinpoche by way of expressing the enormous scope of Guru Rinpoche's blessing and activity.

This blessing and activity continues to manifest in all of the great teachers and masters who are emanations of Guru Rinpoche.

Guru Rinpoche has not died. Guru Rinpoche has not passed away. Guru Rinpoche continues to demonstrate this miraculous activity for the benefit of beings now and on into the future.

None of this teaching contradicts any of the teachings that were transmitted by the Buddha Sakyamuni.

The third turning of the wheel by the Buddha was the wheel of teachings concerning the definitive nature of reality and it is in this turning of the wheel that the basis of the Vajrayana teachings is found.

However, in our particular time and space, it is Guru Rinpoche who was most instrumental in developing and presenting these teachings of the Vajrayana.

In our ordinary perceptions, what we perceive to be the phenomenon of the Buddha Sakyamuni was someone who was born as a prince in what was then the north of India, the son of King Shudodena and Queen Mayadevi. He grew up and attained enlightenment, turned the wheel of the dharma, passed into nirvana with his remains being cremated, leaving relics that are still with us to this day.

The essence of Guru Rinpoche is birthless and deathless.

It is not something that we can limit to an entity that came into being at one point and passed out of existence at another point in time.

Guru Rinpoche's body is not a body of flesh and blood.

Guru Rinpoche's presence is not based upon any physical basis. It is ever present. It always has been and always will be, because it is not subject to the limitations of any corporeal form.

There are many occasions upon which kings and ministers in India would attempt to assassinate Guru Rinpoche. In one instance his body was committed to flames. An ordinary person would have been killed instantly, but Guru Rinpoche was never physically harmed in any way because his embodiment was not of an ordinary nature...

To meditate upon one's root lama as the very embodiment of the essence and blessings of Guru Rinpoche means that any practice you undertake of any Divinity, or any activity that you intend to enact in your practice – be it pacifying, enriching, magnetizing, or wrathful – in any and all of these ways your practice will be successful and fruitful.

If you pray to your lama as inseparable from Guru Rinpoche with your mind full of faith and devotion, Guru Rinpoche is never separate from you.

When it comes to Celestial Buddha / Bodhisattva Divinity practice, we may find judgments arising in our mind saying, for example, that this Divine Name and Form is better than that one, or this Divinity is more powerful than another one, or this blessing comes more quickly with this Celestial Buddha. These types of ordinary thoughts are not really appropriate when we are dealing with something of this nature. The only qualifying factor is the devoted interest and faith in the student's mind.

It may be that under certain circumstances, your faith is stronger in a given Bodhisattva Divinity and therefore that practice is more effective for you, but that does not mean that at a more ultimate level there is any distinction to be made between these various aspects of enlightened being. They all arise from the single vast expanse of timeless awareness, as equally authentic manifestations of blessing and power...

Guru Yoga in Deity Practice

by Kenpo Karthar, from *The Mountain Dharma of Karma Chagme, Volume One*

The last section of the chapter on guru yoga also begins with the invitation "*Lama Tsonдру Gyamtso, who emphasizes faith and devotion, listen.*" The reason why the emphasis on faith and devotion is mentioned at this point is not only to say that Tsonдру Gyamtso strongly possesses these qualities but to point out that they must be emphasized.

The practice of guru yoga, through which faith and devotion are generated, is the most important form of practice. At the same time, without faith and devotion, you cannot effectively practice guru yoga. If someone with no faith and devotion attempts to practice it, nothing much will happen.

The "jewel of many colors" is a legendary jewel that will adopt the color of the surface on which it is placed. Here it is used as an analogy for the way devotion to the guru can be used in conjunction with deity practice. The jewel is the guru and one's devotion to the guru. Placing the jewel on a surface that transforms its color is like visualizing the guru as a Celestial Buddha.

In the same way, by visualizing the glorious guru in the form of whichever Bodhisattva Divinity you wish, you will receive the blessing of that form on which you are meditating. *The point here is that the effectiveness of any Divine Name and Form meditation depends upon considering that visualized Bodhisattva Divinity to be your root guru taking that particular form.*

For any Celestial Buddha practice to be effective, it has to be a form of guru yoga.

"That precious wish-fulfilling jewel, although it has no thought, if it is placed on top of a victory banner, will rain down jewels, food, and clothing. In the same way,

that precious guru, when placed at the top of the victory banner of your devotion and supplicated with intense devotion and yearning, will rain down both common and supreme attainments."

The guru is like the legendary wish-fulfilling jewel that, if properly supplicated, will produce whatever is needed or wanted without thought of preference or partiality. Just as the wish-fulfilling jewel has to be placed on a victory banner for the blessing to be received, in the same way, supplication with devotion causes the blessings of the guru, and therefore all common and supreme attainments, to arise spontaneously, just as supplication of the wish-fulfilling jewel causes the rain of food, clothing, and wealth.

Karma Chakme Rinpoche now goes through the ways that you can apply this guru yoga to specific purposes. For example, if you wish to purify wrongdoing, visualize the guru as *Vajrasattva*, which is what we do in the second part of the preliminary practices, where the *Vajrasattva* that you are visualizing above your head is identified with your root guru. The purpose of this is to purify wrongdoing.

If you wish to purify obscuration, visualize the guru as *Akshobhya*.

If you wish to pacify sickness, visualize the guru as *the Medicine Buddha*. This will be most effective if your wish to pacify sickness is not merely to pacify your own sickness but to pacify the sicknesses of all sentient beings and the causes of those sicknesses.

If you wish to pacify demonic disturbances, visualize the guru as *Vajrapani*;

if you wish to exhibit miracles, visualize the guru as *Guru Padmasambhava*;

and if you wish for wealth, visualize the guru as *Jambhala*.

In all these cases, the motivation has to be altruistic. If you are wishing for wealth or for the ability to perform miracles for your own benefit and gratification, it is simply not going to work. However if you wish for the necessary resources or for the ability to perform miracles to benefit beings and the teachings, then visualizing your root guru in the indicated form and supplicating them will be effective.

From one point of view Jambhala is a mundane spiritual being, and from another point of view he is supermundane. Here, in visualizing the guru as Jambhala you are thinking of him as supermundane.

In the same way, if you wish to increase your longevity, visualize the guru as *Amitayus*.

If you wish to perform great benefit for beings, visualize the guru as *Avalokiteshvara*.

If you wish for a great insight, visualize the guru as *Manjushri*.

If you wish to establish the doctrine and firmly plant the Buddha's teachings, visualize the guru as the Lord of the Doctrine, which refers to *Buddha Shakyamuni*.

If you wish to pacify a danger, visualize the guru as *Tara*.

The point of all of this is that you should not think that you can only visualize the guru in one form. You should not think, "*Well, the guru is Vajradhara, so it is not acceptable to visualize him or her as Chenrezik or Buddha Shakyamuni,*" or, "*The guru is Buddha Shakyamuni, so I should not visualize him as Chenrezik.*"

You can visualize your guru as any of these Wisdom Beings and you will receive the blessing of whatever Divine Form you visualize him as.

For example, by visualizing the by visualizing the guru as *Vajradhara*, we receive the blessing of Vajradhara.

In any of these cases, in essence it is always your root guru visualized in the form of whatever Divinity you wish. By meditating on the guru and supplicating the guru in the particular form that is suited to your particular purpose, you will accomplish that activity efficaciously.

The True Mind of each sentient being leads and guides every sentient being.

- From The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana

The Real Meaning of Guru

From *The Heart of the Path*, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

In guru yoga, the essential point to understand is that all the buddhas are of one taste in the dharmakaya. The dharmakaya is the absolute guru, and this is all the buddhas. This is the very heart of guru yoga practice. Without understanding this there's no way to practice guru yoga comfortably. Even if we do the visualizations it won't be completely satisfactory because we'll be unclear as to how buddha is the embodiment of the guru and the guru is the embodiment of buddha. However, it will be extremely clear if we understand the very heart of guru yoga, that *the guru is buddha and buddha is the guru*.

We can integrate this understanding into our guru yoga practice by thinking in the following way. When we become enlightened, if there is one sentient being who can be guided by a manifestation of Tara, we will manifest in the aspect of Tara to guide that sentient being. Now, that Tara is the manifestation of all the Taras and all the other buddhas. It is not that there is a separate Tara with a separate mind who guides that particular sentient being and there are billions of other Taras who guide other sentient beings but not that particular one.

When a sentient being is ready to be guided by an aspect of a buddha and be taught Dharma, the buddha who reveals the Dharma to them has to be all the other buddhas. Otherwise that sentient being would not be guided by all the buddhas but by some buddhas and not others. This way of thinking creates problems in the mind. When Manjushri or any other buddha guides us, that guidance is the guidance of all the buddhas and that manifestation is the manifestation of all the buddhas.

In reality, even though there are numberless different aspects of buddhas, *the holy mind of all the buddhas is one but appears in different aspects to guide us sentient beings*, just as all the rivers that go into the ocean become one.

The dharmakaya is like the ocean in which many waters are mixed and our various gurus are like drops from the ocean. All our gurus are manifestations of the dharmakaya, the absolute guru, the holy mind of all the buddhas; the absolute guru manifests in {what we call} an ordinary form in accordance with the level of our karma. This ordinary form is the conventional guru, the essence of which is the absolute guru.

When we actually see or visualize a Divine Form or see statues or paintings of Celestial Buddhas we should recognize that they are all the guru. There is no Bodhisattva Divinity other than the guru.

The *guru* in guru yoga means our present gurus, who guide us to enlightenment by teaching us the alphabet, giving us commentaries, oral transmissions, tantric initiations, vows and personal advice; they are the embodiments of the dharmakaya, the absolute guru, the transcendental wisdom of nondual bliss and voidness. When we do *Guru Puja, Six-Session Guru Yoga* or any other guru yoga practice we shouldn't think that the central figure has nothing to do with our guru. When we are doing *Lama Tsongkhapa Guru Yoga* or *Guru Puja* we have to remember that there is no Tsongkhapa who is not our guru.

When we visualize Lama Tsongkhapa, the aspect we visualize is Tsongkhapa but our main focus should be on *Lama*, the guru. When we say "*Lama Tsongkhapa*" we know that we are talking about the dharmakaya of all the buddhas and that Tsongkhapa is the particular embodiment of this dharmakaya that is of one taste with the holy mind of all the buddhas. This will bring some change in our mind because we will quickly receive blessings. The mind that was previously dry and uninspired will develop great respect, devotion and inspiration to practice. Through effort in our practice, realizations of the lam-rim path will then come. This is how it is possible for us to achieve enlightenment.

Otherwise, if we concentrate just on the aspect of Tsongkhapa and not on the meaning of *Lama* when we practice *Lama Tsongkhapa Guru Yoga* or *Guru*

Puja, we leave out the guru yoga practice. Of course we can still accumulate merit by making offerings and so forth simply with the thought that Tsongkhapa is a buddha; after all, we accumulate merit by making offerings to bodhisattvas, Sangha, and even our parents, even though they are not buddhas, but for us to generate all the realizations from perfect human rebirth up to enlightenment, the blessings of the guru have to enter our heart.

It is similar when we meditate on Guru Vajradhara in the practice of *Six-Session Guru Yoga*. Vajradhara is the particular aspect we visualize, but it is more effective to focus on the absolute guru. It makes sense to relate to the absolute guru every time we hear or say “guru” or “lama.” It would be strange to simply think of the relative guru, the guru who appears to us in ordinary aspect and gives us teachings and not think of the absolute guru; it would be strange to think of the aspect and not the essence. If when we meditated on Guru Shakyamuni Buddha we saw him in essence as an ordinary person, a sentient being, we wouldn’t see any purpose in doing the meditation. If we meditate in this way, we haven’t understood guru yoga practice. We have to meditate on the absolute guru.

Otherwise, if we have no feeling of devotion in our heart and see the guru as an ordinary being, we won’t see any purpose in making requests to him; we’ll feel that we’re trying to get milk from a cow’s horn. We’ll think, “What is the point of making requests to an ordinary person, somebody who has been born from a mother’s womb and has the same flesh-and-blood body as I have? What am I doing praying to somebody who is a human being the same as I am?” Even if we say the prayers, we’ll have no feeling for them. Our heart will feel empty, as if there’s a hole in it.

Whenever we do guru yoga meditations or think of or physically see our guru we should immediately think, “This is buddha.” The instant we see the particular form of our mother, for example, even in a large crowd of people, we are instantly aware that it is our mother. There is the immediate

recognition, “This is my mother.” It is similar with guru yoga practice. We should immediately be aware that our guru is in essence the absolute guru.

At the moment we have to apply effort to think this but later a definite understanding that the guru is buddha will spontaneously arise in our heart, without need for logical reasoning or quotations, just as when we see our mother’s form we don’t have to exert any effort to think it’s our mother. This is the way to develop stable realization of guru devotion.

When we serve our guru with this awareness of the absolute guru, the holy mind of all the buddhas, even if we are offering only a cup of tea, we are spontaneously aware that we are offering the tea to all the buddhas. If we are sitting next to our guru we are aware that we are sitting next to all the buddhas of the ten directions. When our guru gives us advice, teachings or an initiation we are aware that all the buddhas are giving us the advice, teachings or initiation. Even if we don’t have realization of this, it is effective to attempt to listen to teachings with this awareness. We will then feel much more connection; we will feel much closer to all the buddhas.

Geshe Senge mentioned one high lama in Tibet who used “Guru” in front of the name of every buddha; he would say “Guru Arya Tara,” “Guru Yamantaka” and so on. Many lamas relate to Bodhisattva Divinities in the same way because the guru is the source of all the buddhas and the Triple Gem. From where do all the buddhas come? From the guru. From where do Buddha, Dharma and Sangha come? From the guru. And what is that guru? It is the absolute guru, the dharmakaya, the transcendental wisdom of nondual bliss and voidness.

If we miss the real meaning of guru we will think that a guru is simply someone from whom we have received teachings and won’t be able to figure out how all the Divine Names and Forms are manifestations of him.

The real meaning that we should constantly remember when we use the word *guru* and also when we see the guru is *primordial unified savior*, the

extremely subtle primordial mind of dharmakaya, the absolute guru. When we think of the guru as the primordial unified savior, the dharmakaya, we see that because this dharmakaya is bound by infinite compassion to us sentient beings, it has to manifest in various forms to guide us. As we don't have the karma to directly see aspects of buddha, it has manifested in the ordinary aspects of the gurus that we visualize...

The Real Meaning of Guru II

From Kadampa Teachings, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

If you understand the actual meaning of the guru, you don't see any difference between the Bodhisattva Divinity and the guru; you can't separate the Bodhisattva Divinity and the guru. If you understand what the guru really means, you discover that they're one. Therefore, when we hear the word "guru" or think of the guru, we shouldn't think that it is something separate from the deity- and this is not only during guru devotion meditation when we are doing analysis, by using logical reasoning and by remembering quotations, to try to prove to our mind, which sees the guru and buddha as two separate things, that they are one.

The main meditation is trying to discover that the guru and buddha are one. Even though there are two different names, they're one thing.

You train your mind by doing analytic meditation on how the guru is buddha; when you come to the conclusion that the guru is buddha, you then keep your mind one-pointedly in that discovery or experience, understanding that these two are one. You then keep your mind on that conclusion for as long as you can. This is fixed meditation.

By training your mind in this way, by doing analytical and fixed meditation together, your realization that guru and buddha are one gradually becomes stable. It doesn't change. For your mind it's unshakable, indestructible. Your devotion seeing the guru as buddha becomes very stable.

When day and night, all the time, this is what your heart spontaneously, effortlessly, experiences, this is the realization of guru devotion. This is what causes you to receive all the blessings of the guru or of the Bodhisattva Divinity (the Celestial Buddha), which is the same thing. From that you are then able to achieve all the realizations from the graduated path of the being of lower capability, which starts with perfect human

rebirth, to the graduated path of the being of middling capability, to the graduated path of the being of higher capability, which includes the tantric path, up to enlightenment.

When you see the guru, when you think of the guru, when you recite a prayer with the word “guru,” the understanding should come in your heart that,

This is the dharmakaya, the buddha’s holy mind, the primordial mind which has no beginning and no end, which pervades all phenomena, and which is bound with infinite compassion for sentient beings...

Whenever the karma of a sentient being to receive guidance has ripened, no matter where that sentient being is, without even a second’s delay, this can manifest in any form that accords with that sentient being’s karma and give guidance. Without any superstitious thought, this works spontaneously, effortlessly, for sentient beings, even though they are numberless.

It is like the sun. There’s only one sun in the world, but when it rises it is reflected in every body of water- oceans, rivers, and even drops of dew- as long as it isn’t covered. The sun doesn’t have the motivation, “I’m going to be reflected in all the drops of dew in this beautiful garden or in this country.” The sun doesn’t have such a plan.

This is the example usually given in the teachings: there is only one sun but when it rises it is reflected in every body of water that is uncovered. Like that, the guru is able to benefit all the numberless sentient beings.

Therefore, the guru manifests as Shakyamuni Buddha, founder of the present Buddhadharma in this world. The guru also manifests as all the lineage lamas, as well as the Divinities of the four classes of tantra, and reveals the path to achieve enlightenment of each Divinity.

The guru manifests as the thousand buddhas of this eon; as the Medicine Buddhas, who are very powerful for success if sentient beings pray to them, make offerings to them, or recite their names or mantras; as the Thirty-five Buddhas, who are very powerful in purifying negative karma.

The guru manifests in all these aspects of buddha, who have different functions. Even among the Thirty-five Buddhas, each buddha purifies specific negative karmas.

Relate all this to yourself. The guru has manifested to you in all of them, including Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, who taught 84,000 teachings-pratimoksha, Mahayana sutra (Paramitayana) and Mahayana tantra- and revealed the whole path to enlightenment.

It manifested also in the forms of bodhisattvas, such as Avalokiteshvara, Manjushri, Earth Store Bodhisattva, and the rest of the eight bodhisattvas. It manifested in the forms of arhats, such as the Sixteen Arhats.

It manifested in the forms of dakas and dakinis, and it manifested in the forms of protectors.

To guide you, the guru manifested all the many beings in the merit field. They are all manifested for you.

The guru manifested in all these many aspects to perform different actions to guide you, to help you to actualize the path and cross the ocean of samsara, to bring you to enlightenment.

* The guru doesn't manifest in only the merit field that you visualize for meditation. The guru manifests in any form that's needed by you and by any other sentient being. The guru manifests in all sorts of forms, even animal forms. The guru manifests in the forms of beggars, who cause you to collect merit. The guru manifests in all kinds of forms to guide you, to help you.

So, this is the absolute guru. This is what we have to remember here. The real meaning of guru is the absolute guru, the dharmakaya, the holy mind of all the buddhas.

There is the absolute guru and the conventional guru. We need the ordinary aspect of the conventional guru to guide us because we don't have the karma to be able to see the guru in the pure aspect of a buddha, without any faults, sufferings, delusions, or mistakes in their actions.

Since we don't yet have the karma to see the guru in the aspect of buddha, we need {what appears to be} an ordinary aspect to guide us. *Ordinary aspect* means having faults, having the sufferings of old age, sickness, and so forth, having delusions, and making mistakes in their actions. This is what *ordinary aspect* means.

Since we have only the karma to see and receive guidance from an ordinary aspect, the only way that the absolute guru, which is bound by infinite compassion to us and to all other sentient beings, can directly guide and save us is through the conventional guru, this ordinary aspect.

This aspect has manifested exactly according to the present state of our mind, which is impure. It is *only* from this aspect that we can receive guidance. Even though there have been so many lineage lamas in the past, we didn't have the karma to see and receive direct guidance from them. Even though there are numberless aspects of buddhas, they can't give us direct guidance because we can't see them. The only one left from whom we can receive direct guidance is this ordinary aspect, the conventional guru.

The absolute guru, by manifesting in or through this ordinary aspect, then directly guides us and saves us from suffering, from the sufferings of the lower realms and of samsara. The way this is done is by enabling us to abandon the negative karmas of killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, and so forth.

Starting by abandoning these negative karmas, we are then able to gradually actualize the path, removing first the disturbing-thought obscurations and next the subtle obscurations. It brings us to enlightenment by causing us to actualize the path.

The guru reveals the teachings, shows you the path, and from your own side you do the practices of listening, reflecting, and meditating.

By actualizing the path and ceasing the disturbing-thought obscurations, which liberates you totally from the oceans of samsaric suffering, you are brought to liberation. Then, by actualizing the Mahayana path and ceasing even the subtle defilements, you are brought to enlightenment.

This just happened because I mentioned that you yourself become the guru-Buddha and that you have to realize there's no separation between the guru and the Divine One you meditate on.

That's similar to saying that you have to realize there's no separation between your guru and buddha. Because this topic came up, I just expanded on it a little. But this understanding is the very point of guru yoga, of guru devotion. This is the very heart; this is what we have to discover, to realize.

The absolute guru manifests in all the Celestial Buddhas. With this realization you don't see any difference between Maitreya Buddha and the guru or between Tara and the guru. You don't see any separation between Manjushri and the guru. And it is the same with all the rest. It's all one being.

No matter how many different aspects there are, all the buddhas, in reality, are one. Why are there so many different aspects? Because sentient beings have different karma. However, in reality, they're all one, and that one is the guru, the absolute guru.

Colophon

Excerpted from a teaching given by Kyabje Zopa Rinpoche at Root Institute, Bodhgaya, India on December 29, 2006.

Revised by J Espada in December of 2024

From The Kagyu Lineage and Guru Yoga, by Mingyur Rinpoche

Within the Kagyu tradition, the main point, the main practice is the practice of meditation. What came down most predominantly in the tradition of the Kagyu are the instructions of how to practice, how to meditate...

It's said that the Kagyu lineage is called the lineage of blessings. This is because based on lamas' pure intention, devotion and faith connected with the interdependence of the pure lineage, there is great blessing to be obtained. So that's the explanation of the lineage completed. Now we will talk about Guru Yoga.

When it comes to the Vajrayana viewpoint of the teacher, then the teacher is viewed as Buddha. What is the reason for that? It's because if you view the teacher as Buddha you obtain blessings. Why is the swift accomplishment of blessings obtained? It's because between ourselves and the lama there is a connection. A very good, positive connection.

If we supplicate the lama with faith, it's like all blessings of the Buddhas come together united into the lama, and we receive the blessing of the lama, so therefore we also obtain the blessings of all the Buddhas.

The Buddha's blessing is like the sunshine. One's lama is like the magnifying glass and through him comes the sunlight, which is the blessing. Having connected with the lama's lineage, one obtains all the blessings of the Buddhas through him.

Whether we obtain the blessings of all the Buddhas and the lama depends on our faith... So generating faith for one's lama is very important.

What type of faith we have to generate? We have to have faith that the lama and the Buddha are inseparable, they have the same qualities.

There are two reasons for that: one is based on the relative truth and one is connected with the ultimate truth.

The one related to ultimate truth is that the lama has Buddha nature and the Buddha nature is Buddha. Therefore the lama and all of the Buddhas have identical nature. So the lama really is the Buddha.

And not only the lama is Buddha, the student also is Buddha. Why is that? It's because the student also possesses Buddha nature.

If you understand that, it's called the ultimate guru yoga. It's like the lama's mind and your mind are meeting.

When we say the lama's mind and the student's mind are united and become mixed, it's not like you have to pick some substance in your right hand and some substance in the left hand, grind them and mix them up together. It doesn't mean that.

The first thing to understand is that one's nature and the lama's nature are the same. Understanding that one also understands that all the Buddhas' nature is identical. If you understand correctly, one's own lama, his mind and your own are inseparably mixed. That's the reason relating to the ultimate truth.

What is the reason connected with the relative truth?

The Buddha said that generally all the Buddhas possess compassion and skillful means. For all the vast number of sentient beings the Buddhas do what they can to help each individual being appropriate to that being's nature. We ourselves have negative karma and illusions. Because of our impure perceptions we cannot perceive pure perceptions.

Right now this moment Vajradhara is present before us. We can't see him. We can't hear his teachings. This is due to one's own negative karma and

negative or impure perceptions, illusions. So, what are we able to see? We can see somebody who is rather similar to us, somebody of flesh and blood who suffers. Who appears to be like us because they have suffering and mental defilements. That type of person we can perceive.

So then the Buddhas in their infinite wisdom, compassion and skilful means emanate beings who look like us; {for me, like the Sixteenth Karmapa, Lama Yeshe, Thich Nhat Hanh, and Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche}.

In the world now there are many beings like that. They look like us, they appear to be the same. They need to eat food. They become sick, they need to take medicine from time to time, and they also manifest death, and sometimes they make a few little mistakes.

So they appear to be like us and because of that we are able to see them and relate to them. and we are able to listen to the teachings they give, but truly their real nature is that of the Buddha because they are emanations of Buddha.

If a lama has all the characteristics and he possesses the true lineage, he is an emanation of Buddha. That's the reason for relating to the dimension of relative truth.

So then, putting it in brief: one needs to have faith and supplicate the lama. The root of the blessing depends on our generating faith for the lama, devotion... We are not able to perceive Dorje Chang but we can perceive our own lama. So, who is more kind to us, is it Dorje Chang or the lama? It's the lama. If you understand that point, faith and devotion will arise. This is why in the Vajrayana tradition the practice of Guru Yoga is respected as something very important, the main point. That's the general meaning of Guru Yoga.

How do we practice the Guru Yoga actually? How do we do it?

If we have understanding and appreciation that the lama's mind and the Buddha's mind are identical and that the lama is in fact a Buddha, then we can meditate on his body. If one is not able to generate that strong faith, then one feels that the lama manifests as Buddha Sakyamuni or as Vajradhara, not the way he normally is, and you also think that his manifestation contains all of the essence of the Buddhas.

One supplicates one's lama and asks that I myself and all sentient beings may be free from suffering; temporary suffering now and all suffering up until the point we reach the end result, perfect enlightenment.

And then please give me the blessing so that I will have the realisation of the mahamudra, please give me all the blessings.

You make a prayer like that.

What is the main part of the practice of the Guru Yoga?

It's the receiving of the empowerments. The empowerments are four in number.

The first one is from the lama's forehead a white light emanates and touches one's own forehead. One feels that one's physical obscurations, defilements and impurities are completely purified, and one receives the blessing of the body of the lama. That is classified as the vase empowerment.

The second part is that from the lama's throat a red light emanates and touches one's throat centre and one feels that all of one's impurities, obscurations and defilements related to speech are completely purified and one has received the blessing of the speech from the lama. This is called the secret empowerment.

The third thing to happen is that from lama's heart centre a blue light radiates out and strikes one's heart centre. One feels that all of the defilements, obscurations and impurities related to mind - our mental impurities - are completely purified and one has received the mind blessing of the lama. This is called the wisdom-knowledge empowerment.

The fourth empowerment: one imagines simultaneously white, red and blue lights coming out and striking one's three places. One feels that all of the body, speech and mind impurities, defilements and obscurations are completely purified and one has received in totality all the body, speech and mind blessings of the lama. This is called the word or mahamudra empowerment.

Finally the lama dissolves into light and this dissolves into oneself. The meaning really is that in the end the lama and oneself become inseparable and their essence is identical. So you need to understand that, and then you relax. That is the absolute true Guru Yoga.

When one is visualizing the lama external to oneself and supplicating him, that part is related to relative truth.

When one has done the visualization of the lama dissolving into light and the light dissolving into oneself, you recognize that the lama's mind's essence and your essence are identical, the same, and relax in that, that's the ultimate truth Guru Yoga.

That's the explanation of Guru Yoga.

Part Four

The Guru Yogas of the Sixteenth Karmapa and Padmasambhava

A Simple Visualization

Homage to the Victorious One and His Heirs

From an article on Guru Yoga

The Karma Kagyu Lineage Prayer

Preliminary meditations

The Continuous Rain of Nectar

Additional prayers

The Guru Yoga Which Continually Waters the Seedlings of the Four Bodies of the Buddha, translated by Freda Bedi

A Guru Yoga of Padmasambhava

Three prayers

A Simple Visualization

In this practice we see the Buddha, ourselves and others, as having bodies that are made entirely of light. We see ourselves in a Pure land...

The Refuge Tree

Imagine that you are in a large, open, sacred space, beautiful, adorned with flower gardens, lakes, and wonderful trees, with birds sweetly singing...

The sun is brightly shining, as a few clouds float by... It's a lovely day... perfect in every way...

We see before us now the Buddha, or our main teacher, the Holy Exemplar, in whom all Enlightened Qualities are found, at the center of what appears as a great Refuge Tree, surrounded by Bodhisattvas, and all our ancestral teachers, including our very own Root Teacher or Teachers...

These holy ones are all made entirely of beautiful light, and appear in the space in front and above us, on celestial clouds, on lotuses and moon cushions... They smile upon us...

Whatever is most pleasing and uplifting, that is what we see and feel before us now...

Imagining yourself to be praying in the Garden of Eden, or in a Pure Land, can be very helpful.

Imagine that you are now praying in the Garden of Eden together with and in the presence of all the exalted souls of the Saints, and righteous people of the past, and present.

Imagine, as you are praying, that any Saint that you have personally known, physically seen, or heard about is praying with you.

Feel the elevated bliss, light, and power generated from such a visualization flowing through your prayers.

Have the sense that all these Noble Ones, the whole company of heaven and faithful here on earth are present...

All should join together - one to the other and one above another - so that they all can receive the heavenly flow of blessings, by way of those above them who are closer to the source of supernal goodness.

{The Baal Shem Tov}

With this Right View and a pure motivation, as we recite verses of refuge and aspiration prayers, meditate, and recite mantra, we visualize that we receive blessings from the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, from all the Bodhisattvas and Devas, from all Holy Beings, and from all that is sacred and pure in the universe, in the form of light and nectar. These dissolve into ourselves, and into all those we see as being with us now, our family and friends, those we don't know, and those who are experiencing any difficulty at all...

We visualize that the light and nectar heals and calms, and nourishes, and inspires us all.

May all share in these blessings.

May all beings receive all they need to awaken and be free.

May all beings have happiness, and all the causes of happiness flourishing.

Meditate like this... Make prayers of aspiration...

To conclude, dedicate the merit to all beings.

Homage to the Victorious One and His Heirs

Homage to my Spiritual Teacher, the Holy Exemplar,
in whom all the Enlightened Qualities are found

From an article on the Guru Yoga of the 16th Karmapa

The Vajradhara Lineage Prayer started the 2 hour supplication to the guru that opened the heart in an ever increasing litany of devotion...

{Then, in this order}

After taking refuge, arousing bodhicitta with a prayer for the happiness of all sentient beings, purifying with the vajrasattva mantra, and reciting the 4 line mandala offering we come to the heart of the practice – the essential mahamudra supplication to the guru...

The Karma Kagyu Lineage Prayer

Great Vajradhara, Tilopa, Naropa,
 Marpa, Milarepa, and Lord of the Dharma, Gampopa
 Knower of the three times, omniscient Karmapa
 Lineage holders of the four great and eight lesser schools
 Drikung, Taklung, Tsalpa, glorious Drukpa and others,
 You who have thoroughly mastered the profound path of Mahamudra
 Unrivalled protectors of beings, the Dakpo Kagyü
 I pray to you, the Kagyü lamas
 Grant your blessing that we may follow your tradition and example.

Detachment is the foot of meditation, it is taught.
 Attachment to food and wealth disappears
 To the meditator who gives up ties to this life,
 Grant your blessing that attachment to ownership and honor cease.

Devotion is the head of meditation, it is taught.
 The lama opens the door to the profound oral teachings
 To the meditator who always turns to him,
 Grant your blessing that uncontrived devotion be born within.

Unwavering attention is the body of meditation, it is taught.
 Whatever arises, is the fresh nature of thought.
 To the meditator who rests there in naturalness,
 Grant your blessings that meditation is free from intellectualization.

The essence of thought is dharmakaya, it is taught.
 They are nothing whatsoever, and yet they arise in the mind.
 To the meditator who reflects upon the unobstructed play of the mind,
 Grant your blessing that the inseparability of samsara and nirvana be realized.

Through all my births, may I not be separated from the perfect Lama
and so enjoy the glory of the dharma.

May I completely accomplish the qualities of the path and stages
And quickly attain the state of Vajradhara.

Preliminary meditations

{The Four Thoughts}

At this time, these exceptional conditions have come together for me
I celebrate this life that I have now... it is more rare than a star in the
daytime...

However, these conditions are impermanent
One day, by nature, all of this as it is now will no longer be seen...
Death comes to all in this world and the time of death is uncertain.
I should meditate strongly on this, and use this understanding well...

May I see that giving careful attention to actions and their results,
with right view and a positive motivation,
is the dividing line between creating the causes of suffering
and those of happiness, for myself and for others,
in this world, and the next,

and that there is no lasting happiness in samsara...

{Taking Refuge and the Vow of Individual Liberation}

An Awakened One has appeared in this world.
He has taught the way to freedom,
and generations of his followers to this day have realized his teachings.

Homage!

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,
the Great Assembly of Saints and Bodhisattvas

I will relinquish harmful actions,
and accomplish virtue and inner freedom according to the teachings.

{The Bodhisattva Vow}

May I think all beings with great love and compassion,
and generate the supreme awakening mind
May I think of them all as my family, and care for them all as my own.

May I clearly see that what I and all others so urgently need in this world
is complete liberation of mind, perfect peace and freedom,
and that in taking care of myself, I am taking care of all of us
With an understanding of the Noble Truths,
may my love and compassion become the dedication to helping others
through my realization of this path

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...

The Vajrasattva mantra

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

The Short Mandala Offering

The ground is sprinkled with scented water and strewn with flowers,

Adorned with Mount Meru, the four continents, and the sun and moon.

Thinking of it as a blessed Buddhafield, I offer it

So that all beings may enjoy the happiness of perfectly pure Buddhafields.

The Continuous Rain of Nectar, a guru-yoga for the sixteenth lord, Rigpai Dorje, that causes the four-bodies to germinate.

Homage!

In these dark times,
 you tame those difficult to tame.
 To the Lama, Guide for the World,
 I bow and pay respect.

Fortunate minds are like an utpala flower grove,
 that blossom with the radiant drops of your nectar.

{Contemplate the ordinary dharmas (precious human body, impermanence, karma and the faults of samsara) and the three kinds of faith (trust, aspiration, and certainty).

Abandon the causes that harm others,
 and develop the causes that benefit others.
 Take this binding commitment before you begin.}

The main part:

OM SOBHAWA SHUDDHA SARWA DHARMA SOBAWA SHUDDHO
 HAM

purifies.

From the play of the expanse,
 birthless dharmadhatu, free from elaboration,
 the essence of indestructible nada,
 appears before me vast clouds of limitless offerings

And upon an enrapturing lion-throne, lotus and moon

instantly appears, complete and whole,
the embodiment of the three roots (lama, yidam, protector)

He is the power of the Buddhas, smiling peacefully,
with the complexion of the harvest moon,
wearing a black crown with gold insignia, that liberates on sight
(woven from the hair of) one hundred thousand (dakinis).

His two hands hold a dorje and bell,
symbolizing the unification of skillful-means and wisdom,
wearing the three dharma robes,
his legs in vajra posture,
unwaveringly abiding in the realm of inseparable bliss and emptiness,
possessing the major and minor marks of a buddha,
he abides in blazing splendor.

{With complete trust and reliance, supplicate}

Lama of great kindness, embodiment of all sources of refuge,
Glorious Karmapa, Activity of all the Buddhas,
Grant your blessings, I pray, for myself and for all beings,
May the darkness of ignorance be dispelled,
and the unborn clear-light arise

{Repeat this a few times.¹}

From the three syllables in the glorious Lama's three places,
the three, white, red, and blue lights simultaneously radiate,
and melt into my three gates, granting the four empowerments².

¹ Additional prayers can also be read and reflected on here.

² Additional notes on visualization can be read and meditated upon here, as follows.

From the lama's forehead, {from a white letter OM}, a white light emanates and touches one's own forehead. One feels that one's physical obscurations, defilements and impurities are completely purified, and one receives the blessing of the body of the lama..

{OM...}

From the lama's throat, {from a red letter AH}, a red light emanates and touches one's throat centre and one feels that all of one's impurities, obscurations and defilements related to speech are completely purified and one has received the blessing of the speech from the lama...

{AH...}

From lama's heart centre, {from a blue letter HUM}, a blue light radiates out and strikes one's heart centre. One feels that all of the defilements, obscurations and impurities related to mind - our mental impurities - are completely purified and one has received the mind blessing of the lama...

{HUM...}

Then one imagines simultaneously white, red and blue lights coming out and striking one's three places. One feels that all of the body, speech and mind impurities, defilements and obscurations are completely purified and one has received in totality all the body, speech and mind blessings of the lama...

Finally the lama dissolves into light and this dissolves into oneself... the lama and oneself become inseparable, their essence identical

{and one meditates like this...}

My deluded mind attains equanimity,
and all habitual patterns are purified,
complete liberation, the svabhavikakaya, clearly arises

Rest relaxed in this uncontrived, innate state.

KARMAPA CHENNO

{Repeat many times.}

The Lama's Body, Speech, and Mind,
and my own body, speech, and mind blend inseparably.

{Without conceptualizing between meditation, meditator, and meditating,
rest in that state.}

{To end, make dedication and aspiration prayers to multiply the
accumulated merit}

Through this merit,
(for) sentient beings as vast as the sky,
(who have) accumulated negative acts and downfalls
through habitual tendencies since beginningless time,

May all confusion of the dualistic mind be eliminated
without exception.

May the all-pervading expanse,
the basis, one's own nature, be realized!

With the armour of an ocean of unwavering prayers,
through complete dedication to the ocean of primordial enlightenment,
and through dedicating an ocean of dedications without distinguishing
(between the dedication, dedicator, or dedicated),
may the ocean of samsara be truly shaken!

The basis is the all-pervading expanse of non-composite clear light
The path in which this becomes manifest is the greatest journey
The ultimate fruit is the result, complete buddhahood
May it arise.

May we achieve the level of the lama's four bodies (the four kayas).

Jago Namgyal Dorje respectfully offered an auspicious scarf and requested this prayer from the sixteenth small fragment of the lineage of Karmapas, known as Rigpai Dorje. It was spontaneously composed during the waxing moon of the seventh month of the Earth Dog year, (1959), that happiness and goodness increase³.

³ A commentary on this practice by Lama Lodu Rinpoche can be found [here](#).

{Additional prayers}

I pray and supplicate my precious lama

Bless me that my mind may let go of belief in a self

Bless me that contentment may arise in the stream of my mind

Bless me that non-dharmic thoughts may cease.

Bless me to realise that my mind is unborn.

Bless me that delusion may naturally subside.

Bless me to realise that everything is Dharmakaya.

Precious lama, I pray to you.

Bless me that my mind become one with yours.

Bless me to achieve clear appearance in the great yoga, the unified body.

Bless me to know adversity as siddhi and see all that appears as the dharmakaya.

*Bless me that the afflicted appears as wisdom,
and gain mastery over the wheel of ornaments,
the inexhaustible body, speech, mind, qualities,
and activity of the perfect buddha, the great and glorious Karmapa.*

May the teachings of the Practice Lineage flourish!

May the world have the good fortune of happiness!

One night, lonely and afflicted,
I prayed to you, Karmapa:

'It's said that you are Avalokiteshvara,
and when I look at your heart I know this is true

I have long known Avalokita
as the one who has always been there for me,
appearing in the most difficult times

And so I turn to you, and I call out -

I pray you will give me refuge!

Look upon me with your compassion!

I am on the outside now, and I am calling to you!

Hear me!...

{Like that, I opened my heart, and I cried out, again and again}

And a Great Love welcomed me,
and gave me Safety and Peace...

The Guru Yoga Which Continually Waters the Seedlings of the Four Bodies of the Buddha, translated by Freda Bedi

This Prayer-Puja was written by He who is called His Holiness Rangjung Rikpi Dorje, the Sixteenth Karmapa, at the request of Namgyal Dorje, the late Head of the Bir Settlement in the Kangra Valley in India. It was written in Tibet itself in the eighth month of the Earth Dog Year.

Namo:

At this time of the Dark Age
when men are undisciplined and hard to control,
before the great Lama, the saviour of all,
I bow with the utmost devotion.

That the night-flowering lotus,
the Kumudini of the mind
may open in followers with aptitude, auspicious vessels,
and nectar drops of the moon fall upon it.

First the preparatory or basic Dharma has to be thought about carefully.

Give up all actions of body, voice and mind that harm others, and keep the vow that you will benefit others.

Both of these must first be accomplished. Then comes the fundamental meditation, the real practice.

All is in the voidness

The Puja and Sadhana

From the Divine Play, the leela of the Dharmadhatu,
the sphere that is unborn, away from extremes, and completely fearless,

emerges in the sky before us a cloud of offerings
just as the Bodhisattva Kuntuzangpo, the All-Good, made them,
vast as an ocean.

And on a lion throne, charming to the heart, is a lotus and moon disc
In the flash we call to our Lama to be seated on it
He who is the Three Roots, all concentrated
in one supremely holy form
in which the activities of the Jinas is manifest.

Peaceful, smiling, with the radiance of the autumn moon,
he is wearing the black Vajra Crown, whose very sight brings liberation -
bordered with lines of gold, made of the hair of one hundred thousand
dakinis, the Heavenly Mothers of Space.

Two-armed, symbolic of the union of wisdom and means,
holding the vajra and bell,
wrapped in the three Dharma robes
(He is) sitting in the Vajra asana (the lotus pose)
never stirring from the mood of the great bliss, the Maha Ananda.

Adorned with the signs of a Buddha, and the attributes of the Enlightened
Ones, He is sitting in a glory of light.

{Keep your mind firm, wholly undistracted. Then think, addressing the
lama}

"You know all my troubles and I am praying to you with my whole heart."

My Lama, greatly merciful one, in whom I always take refuge,
I am beseeching you
By your blessing, remove the fog of delusion,
the clouds of ignorance, of myself and us all
Calm this mind in the gloom of its delusion.

Show me, I beg of you, the unborn light-void
 May it arise in me.

{Repeat this as many times as you can}

From the Three Sacred Letters OM AH HUM on the body of the Lama
 the white red and blue rays of light stream out
 singly, and then all together.

They are absorbed in the Three sacred places
 in my body

The four initiations have been fulfilled,
 All impurities in our knowledge are washed away
 and the bad tendencies that spoil the equanimity of our mind
 are completely removed.

The essential body of liberation is born.

Remain in that meditation that arises naturally,
 spontaneous, complete.

KARMAPA CHENNO

{untranslatable, but meaning: *O my Guru, you who know everything, look
 towards me. Keep me in your mind*}

{Say this mantra many times}

The lama's body, voice and mind and my body, voice and mind are one and
 indivisible. Consciously think of them as one. Lose consciousness of self
 and lama, be away from duality and this idea of mixing.

Remain in the state away from extremes, without thought, in deep meditation. After that all virtues and good qualities will increasingly arise in you.

The Prayer of Sharing the Merit, which may be followed by Tashi (auspicious) Prayers

By this act of merit, may the sins and failing of all beings
a multitude, vast as the heavens,
and all bad tendencies accumulated since beginningless time,
be ended.

May all our illusions of the permanence of everything, all wrong ideas,
to the very last one,
be cleared away.

That natural Dharmadhatu, unmade (by man),
the voidness permeating all, in everything -
may I understand its essence to be the same
as the essence of my own mind.

By these sincere prayers of mine, like an ocean,
may we be protected against harm.

When I share the merit of this ocean of enlightenment that arises
the sharer and the thing shared become a limitless ocean,
away from extremes,
the very pit of existence is stirred to the depths.

It arises spontaneously, that Dharmadhatu, covering all
the radiant light void
Towards the realization of this, the unborn,
may our footsteps go.

The liberation, the fruit, the real enlightenment -
of this,
May the realization come, really
May we reach the attainment of the four bodies of the Lama.

Mangalam. May all that is good arise. *Geho.*

Sadhu sadhu sadhu

This prayer and sadhana was translated in the Dharma Chakra Centre "the Monastery Wreathed in a Thousand Rays of Rainbow Lights" before the beginning of the Retreat of the Rains, in Rumtek, Sikkim, in the year of the Iron Pig, 1971. It is offered in devotion to His Holiness the Gyalwa Karmapa by his pupils and translators, the Anila Karma Khechog Palmo, the Lama Tengah Rinpoche, Vajra Lobpon of Rumtek, and Ayang Rinpoche of Bylekuppe in Mysore, South India.

A Guru Yoga of Padmasambhava

{Adapted from the teachings of Dudjom Rinpoche and Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche}

Consider that in the sky before you your kind root lama appears in the form of Guru Padmasambhava, actually present there before you.

Pray to him fervently, thinking,

The embodiment of all the buddhas of the ten directions and three times, incomparable root lama, I pray to you from the depths of my heart...

In this life and in the next, and in the bardo states, guide me with compassion, without ever parting, and grant me your blessings, continuously at all times...

Then recite The Seven Line Prayer and the Vajra Guru mantra as many times as possible in order to invoke his wisdom mind.

HUNG

UR-GYEN YUL-GYI NUB-JANG SAHM
 PE-MA GAY-SAR DONG-PO LAH
 YAM-SEN CHO-GYI NU-DRUB NYAY
 PE-MA JUNG-NAY ZHAY-SU DRAH
 KHOR-DU KHAN-DRO MANG-PO KOR
 KAY-KEE JAY-SU DAG-DRUB KEE
 JIN-G LAB-CHIR SHENG-SU SOL
 GU-RU PE-MA SID-DHI HUNG

Hūṃ. In the north-west of the land of Oḍḍiyāna
 In the heart of a lotus flower,
 Endowed with the most marvellous attainments,
 You are renowned as the 'Lotus-born',
 Surrounded by many hosts of ḍākinīs.

Following in your footsteps,
 I pray to you: Come, inspire me with your blessing!
 guru pema siddhi hung

OM AH HUNG BENZRA GURU PEMA SIDDHI HUNG...

Then, consider that rays of light emanate from the three syllables at the Guru's three centers and dissolve into you, purifying obscurations and granting empowerments...

Visualize seed syllables made of light in Guru Padmasambhava's three centers. At his forehead is a white OM, at his throat is a red AH, and at his heart center is a blue HUM.

Visualize a strong white light, like a shooting star, coming from the syllable OM in Guru Padmasambhava's forehead and entering your forehead. It brings the blessings of the vajra body and removes your body obscurations...

Red light, as powerful as lightning, comes from the syllable AH in his throat and enters your throat, conveying the blessings of vajra speech, which remove the obscurations of your speech...

A piercing blue light from the syllable HUM at his heart enters your heart and you receive the blessings of vajra mind, so that your mental obscurations are removed...

With this you should feel that all the subtle obscurations of your body, speech, and mind are gone and that you fully receive the blessings of Guru Padmasambhava...

Again, give rise to intense devotion and pray...

Consider that at this, the teacher's face joyfully breaks into a smile, his eyes filled with love and compassion, and he comes onto the crown of your head, where he immediately melts into light, dissolving upward from his throne and downward from the hair on his head to become a ball of light at the level of his heart...

This passes through the crown opening on your head and dissolves into the middle of your heart...

The teacher melts into the essence of great bliss, becoming a sphere of light an inch in size, which dissolves into the middle of my heart: my mind becomes inseparable from the teacher's mind...

Remain in evenness for as long as you can, in the natural, innate state of luminosity beyond mind - awareness-emptiness, the nature of the absolute teacher...

Buddha of the three times, Guru Rinpoche,
Master of all siddhi, abiding in great bliss
manifest your power now to dispel all that is adverse
May we all receive your blessings
For myself and for all others,
May all outer, inner, and secret obstacles be pacified,
and may all our wishes be spontaneously fulfilled.

May all illness, and obstructing forces,
and all that stands between us and the magnificence of the higher realms
and definitive goodness be pacified...

And we may all effortlessly gain everything favorable...

May the blessings of the root and lineage teachers fill our hearts...
May the Celestial Buddhas and Bodhisattvas be with us all at all times...
For myself and for all others, may the Dharma Protectors and Guardians
dispel all obstacles...
May we all enjoy auspicious goodness...
and accomplish our path...

* * *

From *Guru Rinpoche - An Anthology*, of essays, poetry and prayers, and
teachings on Padmasambhava