

TIBETAN BUDDHISM CENTER FOR WORLD PEACE
San Antonio, Texas

Nagarjuna's *Precious Garland of Advice to a King*

Chapter I. Higher Rebirth and Highest Good
Session 7: Purifying Karma with Vajrasattva

Sunday, March 10, 2024

The following is based on on “*Practical Ethics and Profound Emptiness: A Commentary on Nagarjuna’s Precious Garland*” by Khensur Jampa Tegchok, from the commentary of Gyalsap Je, a principal disciple of Tsongkhapa; “*Nagarjuna’s Precious Garland, Buddhist Advice for Living and Liberation*”, analyzed, translated, and edited by Jeffrey Hopkins; and teachings by His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, Geshe Drakpa Gelek, Geshe Lobsang Nima, Gen Lamrimpa, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, Geshe Lhakdor, Ven. Passang Gelek, Ven. Robina Courtin, Ven. Thubten Chodron, Bhikshu Steve Carlier, B. Alan Wallace, and Alexander Berzin, with the guidance of Lobsang Nima.

**Links to mantras, Buddha-figures, and texts used in this series are at the end of this study guide.*

Vajrasattva, Vajrayana, and Vajradhara

1. The Vajrasattva-figure represents the Vajrayana or “Diamond Vehicle”, which developed out of Indian Mahayana Buddhism and is sometimes called the uncommon aspect of the Mahayana path. Vajrayana is alternately known as Mantrayana or Tantrayana, and all three refer to a merging, blending, or interweaving of the compassion and wisdom wings of Buddhism with powerful practices that employ the skillful use of mantras, rituals, imaginative visualization, and methods for controlling one’s subtle energies. Most of these practices are considered esoteric and are restricted to those who have received instruction and empowerment from qualified lineage holders of such practices. In “*Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*” Pabongka Rinpoche refers to Vajrayana lineage holders as the Lineage of Consecrated Practices. In other words, these practices are set apart from others and generally require an empowerment and specialized instruction. To successfully engage in them, one must have gained some experience of renunciation, bodhichitta, and a conviction in the view of emptiness.

2. Although there is a level of Vajrasattva practice that requires empowerment, the Vajrasattva mantra and visualization meditation may be practiced whether or not we have received an empowerment. In fact, the Vajrasattva mantra and visualization meditation is often one of the first practices taught to Buddhist practitioners by their teachers. In Tibetan Buddhism, the Vajrasattva mantra and visualization meditation is a necessary first step in Buddhist purification practice, working on the negative karmas and obstacles that are obscuring our Buddha-nature and causing our suffering. It is said that Vajrasattva is an emanation of Vajradhara, the primordial Buddha that exists as a potential capacity for development within us. In a sense, Vajradhara is the potential of our Buddha-nature that has been obscured by our afflictive emotions, self-grasping ignorance, and negative karma. It is said that when we attain the full omniscience of enlightenment, we will attain the state of Vajradhara. It can also be said that Vajrasattva is none other than our own Buddha-nature, visualized as a pure Bodhisattva at the highest level of realization prior to full enlightenment. In this way, Vajrasattva is a personal and

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effective meditational figure for us that transcends ego, self, and the illusory appearances of reality.

3. A foundational practice in Buddhism is the process of purifying obstacles, misconceptions, and negative karmas, as well as generating merit. Even generating merit is part of the purification practice itself. Visualization practices and mantras are particularly effective at purifying because they incorporate meditation that fully engages all of one's body (through breath and posture), speech (through mantra recitation), and mind (through imaginative visualization and conceptual thought). The purification of negativities and obstacles is the perfect kind of Buddhist healing practice because the Buddha taught that our defilements and negative karmas are the cause of all our suffering, including illness. Purification is therefore the ultimate remedy.

Vajrasattva-figure and mantra

1. The Sanskrit word *vajra* translates as “thunderbolt” or “diamond”. It is a legendary and ritualistic weapon, symbolizing the pure and indestructible properties of a diamond combined with the force and power of a thunderbolt. The name Vajrasattva means “Diamond Being” and alludes to the indestructible Buddha-nature hidden within our clear light consciousness that can be revealed through the force and power of compassionate, skillful action guided by wisdom realizing emptiness.

2. The Vajrasattva-figure is made of white light with one face and two hands. His face has a peaceful expression. In his right hand, close to his heart, he holds a *vajra*—a symbol of skillful means (Skt. *upaya*). This represents the method aspect of the path—the compassionate, skillful means which help us to remove all our afflictive emotions and negative behaviors that prevent our attainment of liberation. In his left hand beside his left hip he holds a *ghanta* or bell, a symbol of emptiness (Skt. *Shunyata*) and the perfection of wisdom. This represents the wisdom aspect of the path—the realization of emptiness and the removal of our cognitive obscurations that keep us from achieving the full omniscience of enlightenment. In this way, Vajrasattva embodies the union of compassion and wisdom in one figure. He is seated at the center of a blossoming lotus with his legs crossed in the full lotus position, indicating the perfect balance of compassion and wisdom.

A visual meditation that may be used with the Vajrasattva mantra

1. There are several ways this practice can be done. The following method was taught by Geshe Drakpa Gelek. Imagine Vajrasattva is seated in the center of a lotus on top of your head. His entire figure, including the lotus, is made of brilliant white light, emanating in all directions. If you have difficulty imagining the detail, you can simply imagine a ball of powerful, brilliant white light at the top of your head, and know that it is Vajrasattva. The feeling of Vajrasattva actually being seated on your head is more important than the clarity of the appearance in your imagination. Recognize that Vajrasattva represents your own innate capacity to reach the highest levels of Bodhisattva realizations.

2. Think that the clarity of your conscious continuum has been polluted by imprints of your negative karma: negative actions you've taken, negative words you've spoken, and negative thoughts you've had. The consequences of those negative thoughts, words, and actions is

physical and emotional suffering and harm—not only to yourself, but to others. This negative karma is polluting your clear light mind and obscuring your Buddha-nature. Imagine that a portion of the powerful white light from Vajrasattva goes to the base of your embodied being. As you say the mantra, imagine that the white light starts to fill your entire being from the bottom up. It fills all of the cells in your physical body, your nervous system, and all of your energetic winds—the *prana* that moves through your energetic system of channels and chakras—so that every part of you is gradually being cleansed of negative karma.

3. Imagine your negative karma takes the form of dark, energetic matter which is being dissolved and pushed upward by the white light. As you visualize the cleansing light moving upward through every part of your body and energetic being, continue to recite the mantra. Finally, imagine the white light pushes the remaining dark energy through the crown of your head and directly into Vajrasattva's powerful, brilliant white light at the top of your head where it is completely dissolved and extinguished.

4. Alternately, we can imagine all beings in the space around us, each with a Vajrasattva on his or her head, and each also being purified along with us.

The Hundred-Syllable Vajrasattva Mantra

1. The Tibetan pronunciation of the mantra differs from the original Sanskrit one. Some Tibetan masters instruct their non-Tibetan students to pronounce the mantra in the way that the Tibetans do; some recommend pronouncing it in the Sanskrit style. Below is the Tibetan pronunciation as it was orally transmitted by Geshe Drakpa Gelek and Geshe Lobsang Nima. Although there are several ways of explaining each phrase of the mantra, one way is:

OM BENZA-SATO SAMAYA MANU-PALAYA

The essence of my eternal reality (*Om*): the Diamond Being body of indestructible Buddha-nature (*Vajrasattva/Benza-Sato*), which is the assurance and support (*samaya manu-palaya*) for my innate capacity to purify and transform.

BENZA-SATO TENO-PERTHIKYA, DRIDRO MEY BHAWA,

May the qualities of the Diamond Being residing in me (*Vajrasattva/Benza-Sato*) remain close to me (*teno-perthikya*). May my stability (*dridro mey*) be born (*bhawa*) through eliminating negative karma,

SUTO-KYO-YO MEY BHAWA, SUPO-KYO-YO MEY BHAWA,

May my happiness (*suto-kyo-yo mey*) be born (*bhawa*) through attaining liberation.
May my joy (*supo-kyo-yo mey*) be born (*bhawa*) through attaining enlightenment,

ANU-RAKTO MEY BHAWA, SAWA SITI MEY TRA-YA-TSA,

May my loving protection (*anu-rakto mey*) be born (*bhawa*)
through the clear light awareness of emptiness.
May all spiritual power in me (*sawa siti mey*) be bestowed (*tra-ya-tsa*),

SARVA KAMA SUTSA MEY, TSE-TAM SHRI-YAM KURU HUNG,

May all karmic actions (*sarva kama*) be excellent in me (*sutsa mey*),

May my supreme mind (*tse-tam shri-yam*) arise (*kuru*)
through the true nature of my mind (*hung*), which is clear and aware,

HA HA HA HA, HOE

And the five pathways of consciousness that lead to enlightenment.

(*path of accumulation, path of preparation, path of seeing,*
path of meditation, path of no more learning)

BHA-GHA-WANA, SARVA TATHA-GATA BENZA, MA MEY MUN-ZHA

Buddha (*Bha-gha-wana*), and all the Ones Thus Gone (*sarva Tatha-gata*)

Who are diamond-strong (*Vajra/Benza*),

Do not let me lose (*ma mey mun-zha*) the clear light awareness of emptiness.

BENZA BHAWA MAHA, SAMAYA SATO, AH, HUNG, PHED

O Diamond-strong Great One, Vajrasattva (*Benza Bhawa Maha*), in union with your luminous
Vajra being's (*samaya sato*) body, speech (*ah*), and mind (*hung*), may the delusions and
sufferings of my body, speech, and mind be purified and stabilized (*phat*).

Adapted from a translation by Dr. Alexander Berzin

Compiled and edited by Tenzin Dhondup Sherab/Christopher Moroney

*Links to mantras and Buddha-figures used in this series:

[Chenrezig mantra](#)

[Chenrezig-figure](#)

[Manjushri mantra](#)

[Manjushri-figure](#)

[Manjushri prayer & mantra](#)

[Manjushri Heart Lotus](#)

[Shakyamuni Buddha mantra](#)

[Shakyamuni Buddha-figure](#)

[Vajrasattva mantra](#)

[Vajrasattva-figure](#)

[Precious Garland text translated by Jeffrey Hopkins](#)

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