

TIBETAN BUDDHISM CENTER FOR WORLD PEACE

San Antonio, Texas

Key Practices of the Path: The Lam Rim for Western Students and Practitioners

Preparing the Mind for Meditation

The Six Preparatory Practices in Guided Meditation Form

A set of six daily practices designed to prepare your mind for insight meditation and calm abiding meditation and to aid in the positive transformation of your outlook through analysis and focus.

I bow down in devotion, respect, and gratitude to the entire Lineage of Venerable Spiritual Masters.

Like a human chain that forms a rescue team from the shore into the sea to save someone who is being pulled away by a powerful undertow, the Lineage of Venerable Spiritual Masters reaches across space and time to rescue those who are being pulled into the sea of cyclic existence and its suffering by the powerful currents of ignorance, self-grasping egoism, afflictive emotions and their resulting karma.

May every sentient being take the hand of the living Spiritual Master who directly reaches out to them, and through the strength of that Master's connection to the unbroken chain of their Lineage, be brought surely and safely to the shore of Enlightenment.

The following daily meditation practice for western students is largely based on a longer, more elaborate Tibetan text entitled, *Jorchö, The Six Preparatory Practices Adorning the Buddha's Sublime Doctrine*, plus instructions given by Pabongka Rinpoche from *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*. Additionally, this practice synthesizes direct personal instructions given by my gurus, Geshe Drakpa Gelek, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, and Geshe Lobsang Nima, as well as direct and general instructions given by Ven. Passang Gelek, Lama Thubten Yeshe, Ven. Robina Courtin, Geshe Thubten Soepa, Gen Lamrimpa, Ven. Thubten Chödrön, Alexander Berzin, and Robert Thurman. It is both a complete daily recitation and meditation practice which contains all the essential preparations for subsequent higher practices. It may be used by practitioners at all levels—beginning, intermediate, and advanced.

This daily practice will help you to:

- 1) cultivate a connection between your heart and mind and the Guru-Buddha's heart and mind
- 2) cultivate a connection between your heart and mind and all sentient beings' hearts & minds
- 3) establish a foundation for analytical meditation and focusing meditation
- 4) prepare you for Tantric practices by visualizing the process of your own enlightenment
- 5) increase your positive force and potential (often referred to as merit)
- 6) purify your negative karma, develop your root virtues, and remove obstacles to the pathways of consciousness that will lead to your enlightenment.

These Six Preparatory Practices are designed to shape the mind so as to derive maximum benefit when meditating on each of the specific stages of the path to enlightenment, or *Lam Rim* topics, that were introduced to Tibet in the 11th century by the Indian Buddhist Master Atisha, and further developed in the 14th century by the great Tibetan monk, philosopher, and Tantric yogi, Tsongkhapa.

Before beginning, it is important to clarify the following terms in order to understand how the elements that form the framework of this meditation are defined:

Buddha

In the ancient Indian languages of Sanskrit and Pali, *buddha* means “awakened; enlightened; one who has achieved perfect knowledge of all that can be perceived or grasped by the mind.” The first syllable (*bud -*) refers to awakening from the deep sleep of ignorance, and implies the total eradication from one’s consciousness of everything that arises from that ignorance: all ego self-grasping, all fear, all craving desire, all neuroses, anxiety, depression, anger, jealousy, low self-esteem—in short, the utter uprooting of all afflictive emotions. The second syllable (*- dha*) refers to a mind that has blossomed like a lotus flower to the knowledge of all things, and implies the development to *perfection* of all the positive qualities: love, kindness, joy, compassion, wisdom, self-confidence, patience, generosity. A Buddha is not an all-powerful Creator God, nor a substitute for one, but has found from direct experience that afflictive, counterproductive states of mind are not central nor foundational to our nature; they are adventitious; they are not an essential part of who we are, and therefore can be removed. According to Mahayana Buddhist philosophy there are many beings who have achieved enlightenment, or Buddhahood. All have infinite awareness, understanding, and insight; all work for the benefit of sentient beings who have not yet awakened from the deep sleep of ignorance and are suffering the effects of their negative actions triggered by their afflictive emotions. For the purposes of this meditation, when the term “the Buddha” is used it refers to Shakyamuni Buddha, the historic Buddha of our current age who lived in ancient India circa the 5th century BCE.

Dharma

Dharma mainly refers to the combined path of method and wisdom we must study, understand, practice, and gradually realize in order to achieve total liberation from suffering and attain complete enlightenment. The literal meaning of the word *dharma* refers to something that holds one back from committing any form of harmful action (or negative karma) to oneself and others, enabling all forms of one’s virtuous actions (or positive karma) to take root and grow into the fully enlightened fruition of loving kindness, compassion, and omniscient wisdom. The Buddha’s entire teachings are considered Dharma.

Sangha

Sangha is a Sanskrit word meaning “assembly” or “community”. In current-day usage, *sangha* has different meanings on different levels, according to what kind of community the word is referring to. For the purposes of this meditation, *sangha* denotes the *arya sangha*, or noble sangha. These are Buddhist practitioners, lay or ordained, who have achieved very high levels of realization on the combined path of method and wisdom, resulting in their liberation from cyclic existence and its sufferings. In Mahayana Buddhism they are called *arya bodhisattvas*—“noble, awakened beings” who have resolved to attain Buddhahood for the benefit all sentient beings. They have not yet attained the complete enlightenment of Buddhahood due to subtle obscurations to omniscience which still must be removed from their minds through the path of meditation.

Guru

Guru is a Sanskrit term for a “mentor, guide, expert, or master” of a certain type of knowledge or a particular level of accomplishment. *Guru* literally means “heavy”—heavy with good qualities. The Tibetan translation of the Sanskrit word *guru* is *lama*. *La* literally means that which is “higher” or “above”, and *ma* literally means “mother”. *Lama* can therefore be explained as one who looks down from a higher place (*la*) with the love that a mother (*ma*) has for her children. In traditional Mahayana Buddhism, a fully qualified guru (or lama) traces their lineage of teacher-to-student relationships all the way back to the Buddha. The guru is therefore considered to be a living representative or emissary of the Buddha to the student or disciple. The guru becomes a revered figure to the truth-seeker, serving as a counselor who helps mold values, shares experiential knowledge as much as literal knowledge, and serves

as an example and inspiration for the student's spiritual evolution. The guru ultimately becomes one's Venerable Spiritual Master and Friend, who helps one to discover the same potentialities in one's self that the guru has already realized.

Sentient Beings

In Buddhism, *sentient beings* is the terminology used to designate the totality of all living, conscious beings, creatures, or persons having physical and non-physical forms, who have not yet had a direct, non-conceptual realization of the actual nature of reality, and who comprise the object and the audience for the Buddha's teachings. In Tibetan, the term for sentient beings is *semchän*, which means "mind possessor" or "consciousness possessor". In Sanskrit, the various terms *jantu*, *bahu jana*, *jagat*, and *sattva* refer to the mass of living beings subject to delusion, suffering, and rebirth in various realms and levels of cyclic existence, or *samsara*. Sentient beings are by definition not enlightened beings. However, Mahayana Buddhism simultaneously teaches that sentient beings also contain Buddha-nature—the intrinsic potential to transcend the conditions of cyclic existence and attain enlightenment, thereby obtaining Buddhahood.

Cyclic Existence

Cyclic existence, or *samsara* (as it is called in Sanskrit and Pali), is the continual repetitive cycle of birth and death that arises from sentient beings' grasping and fixating on the notion of an inherently existing self and its experiences. Specifically, cyclic existence refers to the process of repeatedly cycling through one rebirth after another within six broad realms of existence (including the human realm), where each realm can be understood as a physical realm and/or a psychological state characterized by a particular type of suffering. Cyclic existence arises out of sentient beings' ignorance of the real nature of the self and phenomena, and is characterized by ego self-grasping, clinging desire, dissatisfaction, anxiety, delusion, and suffering. According to the Buddha, liberation from cyclic existence is possible by training in ethical discipline, meditative concentration, and wisdom that directly realizes the actual nature of the self and phenomena. Liberation from cyclic existence does not result in enlightenment, but it is a prerequisite for attaining it.

There are six practices that are part of this daily meditation:

I. CLEAN THE ROOM AND ARRANGE THE ALTAR OBJECTS

Sweep and clean the room thinking, "In order to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings I will sweep away the dirt of mental delusions and the obscurations to complete enlightenment of myself and all sentient beings."

Arrange the altar with representations of the Buddha's body, speech, and mind. At the center place a statue or picture of the Buddha to represent the body (*form aspect*); to the left a core Dharma teaching of the Buddha, such as *The Heart Sutra* or *The Four Noble Truths* to represent the speech (*method aspect*); to the right a bell and/or representation of a stupa to represent the mind (*wisdom aspect*).

II. ACQUIRE AND ARRANGE OFFERINGS ON THE ALTAR

Acquire honestly and arrange beautifully whatever offerings you can afford, such as flowers, candles, food, incense, water bowls, etc. For the benefit of your mind the offerings should be made with reverence, joy, and great respect. It does not benefit your mind to treat the offerings casually or offer them with a sense of compulsion. Think that this offering is being made for the attainment of enlightenment—yours and others'—to benefit all sentient beings.

Although prostrations are not part of the explicit instructions at this point in the text, it is customary and appropriate to face the altar and prostrate three times to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.

III. POSTURE & BREATH, TAKE REFUGE & GENERATE BODHICITTA

Posture. Sit in a comfortable position on a cushion or chair with your spine straight. If you can, sit in the following seven-point posture: (1) Sit cross-legged, if possible in the “vajra posture” with the left foot placed upon the right thigh and the right foot placed upon the left thigh. You can also sit in a chair with your feet on the floor. (2) Sit up straight with your chin tucked in, so your entire spine is aligned. (3) Place your hands resting below your navel in what is called the *dhyana mudra* with your right hand resting on top of the left, palms facing up and the thumb tips touching one another. You can also place your hands palms down on your knees. (4) Let the tip of your tongue gently touch the upper palate near the back of your front teeth. (5) Keep your arms relaxed, with the elbows off the ribs. (6) Open your eyelids slightly and gaze downward. (7) Breathe naturally through your nose.

Breath. In this posture spend a minute or so clearing your mind by single-pointedly focusing on your breath at the exact spot where it comes in and goes out of the nostrils. This will help direct your mind toward a neutral state.

After doing this, continue to breathe naturally. Imagine a luminous clarity filling the entire space in front of you. Think of this luminous clarity as the pure, enlightened, conscious presence of the Buddha. As you breathe in slowly and deeply, feel that the Buddha’s consciousness is connecting with yours. As you breathe out feel that your consciousness is connecting with the Buddha’s. Do this several times.

Nine-round breath purification. Now as you breathe in full deep breaths, think that you are inhaling pure blissful energy from the Buddha. Imagine that this blissful energy enters through your right nostril if you are male, or your left nostril if you are female. As you exhale fully, imagine that all your impure attachment energy—clinging desire, emotional neediness, lust—exits through the opposite nostril, dissolves and completely disappears. Do this three times; blissful energy in, attachment energy out.

Now do the reverse: with full deep breaths, breathe in pure blissful energy through the left nostril if you are male, or your right nostril if you are female. As you exhale through the opposite nostril, think that all your impure aversion energy—anger, fear, self-loathing—exits, dissolves and completely disappears. Do this three times; blissful energy in, aversion energy out.

Finally, with full deep breaths, breathe in pure blissful energy through both nostrils, and as you exhale through both nostrils think that all your impure ignorance energy—confusion, misunderstanding, wrong views—exits through the crown of your head, dissolves and completely disappears. Do this three times; blissful energy in, ignorance energy out. In total this make nine rounds. Return to breathing naturally.

Take Refuge. Now imagine your Spiritual Teacher—your Guru—appears in front of you in the aspect of the Buddha, seated at the center of a variegated, multicolored lotus. If you do not yet have a personal relationship with a qualified Guru, think that the Buddha appearing to you is your Guru.

The Guru-Buddha before you represents the embodiment of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha in one being, emanating light rays brighter than the sun that extend in every direction. Imagine that you are surrounded by sentient life forms of infinite varieties throughout every realm of cyclic existence all appearing in human form, including your parents, family, loved ones, friends, enemies, and strangers. As you and the countless beings around you look to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha for a safe direction to take in life, the Guru-Buddha’s light rays enter your beings, purifying and removing all obstacles to receiving the Buddha’s enlightened inspiration and instruction. Imagine that you and the countless sentient beings around you chant “I go for refuge to the Buddha” three times slowly in the ancient Pali language that was spoken by Shakyamuni Buddha, while the Buddha’s light rays fill your beings:

“*Buddham sharanam gachami*” (3 times)

Next, all obstacles to practicing and realizing the Dharma are removed as you and all those around you chant “I go for refuge to the Dharma” three times in Pali, while the purifying light enters your beings:

“*Dhammam sharanam gachami*” (3 times)

Finally, the Buddha's light removes all obstacles to receiving the help and guidance of the Sangha as you and all sentient beings chant "I go for refuge to the Sangha" three times in Pali:

"Sangham sharanam gachami" (3 times)

Generate Bodhicitta. As you look upon the radiant Guru-Buddha before you, generate within yourself the aspiration of *bodhicitta*—the wish to attain Buddhahood for the sake of all beings—while thinking:

"May I gradually awaken my heart and mind to others until I completely perfect the qualities of loving kindness, compassion, and wisdom, so that I may attain enlightenment in order to benefit all beings."

With this thought, an identical Buddha emerges from the Guru-Buddha's heart, comes to the crown of your head, and facing in the same direction as you, absorbs into you. The Guru-Buddha's conscious awareness merges with your conscious awareness, and the nature of your awarenesses become the same, like water mixing with water. As this occurs, you are suddenly transformed into the enlightened being you have the innate potential to become. Imagine your body is now a Buddha's body of light, radiating rays of light brighter than the sun in all directions. Countless Buddhas emanate from you and dissolve into all the beings surrounding you, helping them to remove their obscurations and purify their negativities. Those with whom you have strong karmic connections transform into the buddhas they have the potential to become. They in turn are able to reach out in the same way and help others attain enlightenment. This grows exponentially until the entirety of sentient beings is enlightened and the environment is transformed into a pure land. Contemplate this for a few moments.

Now think: *"I am only imagining myself and all others transformed into Buddhas. Why hasn't this yet occurred?"* The reason for this lies in attachment and clinging to those who are perceived by your ego as being on your side, aversion and hostility to those who are perceived by your ego as being opposed to you, and indifference to everyone else.

Imagine how wonderful it would be if you and all sentient beings had happiness and its causes; were free from suffering and its causes; were never separated from the perfect joy that comes with complete liberation from suffering; and abided in equanimity, free from any feelings of attachment and hostility. With your hands pressed together at your heart, cultivate the following immeasurable prayer in the presence of the Guru-Buddha:

*"I will work to make this happen. I will cultivate the **immeasurable love** that works to bring all sentient beings happiness and its causes; I will cultivate the **immeasurable compassion** that works to free all sentient beings from suffering and its causes; I will cultivate the **immeasurable joy** that delights in the perfect happiness of all sentient beings; and I will cultivate the **immeasurable equanimity** that works to free all sentient beings from self-centered feelings of attachment towards some and hostility towards others. Humbly and earnestly I ask you, my Guru, and all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas: Through the transformative power of your blessings, please inspire me to accomplish this. May I attain complete Buddhahood as swiftly as possible for the sake of all sentient beings."*

Your vision of countless sentient beings transformed into Buddhas melts into light and dissolves into you, where you hold it securely within your heart. Purifying energy from the Guru-Buddha permeates your entire being. The Guru-Buddha moves toward you while becoming smaller and smaller, coming to the center of your forehead and dissolving inseparably into you. Your conscious awareness and the Guru-Buddha's conscious awareness blend and become of the same nature. Then imagine the arising of unchanging bliss within your entire being. Remain in this state of immutable bliss for a brief period.

IV. VISUALIZE THE MERIT FIELD

Imagine the object of your blissful awareness is limitless, clear space that surrounds you in every direction. As if a reflection of your mind is projected into that clear emptiness, imagine you are standing in a gorgeous green meadow that sparkles like jewels all around you. In the sky before you the Guru-Buddha emerges like a rainbow. Brilliant in color, the Guru-Buddha is seated at the center of a variegated

lotus and radiates slender beams of light of five stainless colors—blue, white, red, green, and yellow. These beams of light energy extend in all directions like rays of multicolored sunshine. As you breathe in, feel the energies of these stainless colors absorbing into you, connecting with and purifying the same subtle energies that exist in you. As you breathe out, feel that your purified subtle energies reach out and connect with the Guru-Buddha in the sky before you.

Stretching out on either side of you imagine yourself at various stages of your life—from your earliest memories of childhood to your adolescent and teenage years, young adult, and so on up to the present. As you take a few moments to observe these aspects of your personal past, notice the range of thoughts and emotions that arise in you. Without dwelling on any of these thoughts and emotions, simply recognize them as contributing to who you are right now. Your actual past no longer exists, but the thoughts, emotional energies, and related actions you have taken in the past have resulted in a flow of habitual propensities and karmic imprints in your mind-stream and subtle energy body that you continuously carry with you—like programming—into your present consciousness and form.

In the same way, you have amassed strong karmic imprints and habitual propensities from your past *lifetimes*. Though you may not remember those lifetimes, you are carrying the subtle imprints of programming from them into the consciousness and form of *this* lifetime. Imagine now all the conscious life forms you have had the experience of being since beginningless time in cyclic existence. They stretch out behind you and your present life, as numerous and vast as the atoms of the universe. Visualize all of them appearing in human form with minds that can comprehend the Dharma. These countless lifetimes, along with your present lifetime, represent your entire experience of cyclic existence that has brought you to this very moment.

As you breathe in and out feel that your entire experience of beginningless existence breathes in and out with you, making a deep and strong connection with the purifying energies of the Guru-Buddha in the sky before you.

You and your beginningless history of existence are representative of all sentient beings. Like you, all sentient beings have struggled for lasting happiness, but have experienced disappointment and suffering over and over again. With this clear recognition, generate a feeling of connection to them, as well as compassion for them and yourself.

In every worldly realm and every period of time there are enlightened beings abiding in every direction who are working to benefit you and all sentient beings. Your Guru who is in the aspect of the Buddha before you is the representative of these enlightened beings for you and holds their lineage. Now, as you look upon the Guru-Buddha, all of these transcendent enlightened beings—however many and wherever they exist—emerge from the Guru-Buddha, magnificently filling the sky, seated on luminous clouds in front of you. Slightly below and in front of the Guru-Buddha are the Spiritual Masters and Teachers with whom you have had beneficial connections in the past, seated on clouds and appearing to you in the glorified form of highly realized Bodhisattvas.

V. OFFER THE SEVEN-LIMB PUJA AND WORLD MANDALA

1) *Homage and Prostration.* As you look upon the Buddhas in the merit field before you, think of the great compassion that causes them to emanate innumerable kinds of bodies and forms simultaneously throughout infinite realms to help liberate you and all beings from suffering; think of the far-reaching effect of their speech and the boundless levels of beneficial communication these magnificent beings are able to express; think of the purity of their infinite awareness, understanding, and insight that can help you and every sentient being in ways that are specific and appropriate to each one of you. As all the aspects of your beginningless existence stand in reverent awe before this brilliant host of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, praise them in your mind with the following words:

*To all you powerful, fearless and noble wisdom beings—
Buddhas of the past, present, and future who are found in every direction of the universe,*

*I pay homage to each and every one of you
With purified body, speech, and mind.*

With great joy and gratitude you and your entire beginningless existence prostrate before them three times.

2) Offering. Now offer the beings in the merit field your experiences of the most beautiful objects of your sensory awareness: fragrant flowers, soft breezes, exquisite music, the pleasure of companionship, breathtaking landscapes, the vast and starry cosmos—whatever objects of your physical and mental senses that elicit pure, wonderful feelings in you. Imagine that you and your entire beginningless existence offer oceans of clouds of these blissful experiences, wave after wave, sending them all to the enlightened and holy beings in the sky.

Mentally transform these offerings into clouds of shining positive energy, luminous like rainbows. Imbue this glowing pure energy with four supreme offerings: your intentions to 1) uphold the Dharma; 2) utilize your Dharma studies by putting them into practice; 3) develop root virtues through your practice; and 4) awaken and develop *bodhicitta*—the wish and intention to attain complete enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. There can be no better offerings than these four. Feel that your Gurus, Spiritual Teachers, and all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are well pleased with everything you have offered.

3) Confession. Now open your heart to the wisdom beings in the merit field. Feel the enlightened love and compassion they have toward you and the omniscient awareness they have of you and your situation. In their presence, acknowledge the harm and suffering you have brought upon yourself and others through all the negative actions you have ever engaged in.

The Buddha has found from direct experience that all negative actions and the suffering they cause arise from a misconception of reality. According to the Buddha, since beginningless time we have continued to be profoundly ignorant of the nature of reality. Out of this ignorance, an utterly wrong view continually arises about how everything—including the self—exists in a state of separateness. The ego self-grasping that arises from this *ignorance* is the source of all our afflictive states of mind. Our neediness, craving, desire, lust, clinging, grasping, and manipulative behavior all fall into the category of what the Buddha calls *attachment*. When our attachment is thwarted and we don't get what we want, afflictive states of mind occur that fall into the category of what the Buddha calls *aversion*: anger, frustration, fear, attack, blame, arrogance, jealousy, self-doubt, self-loathing, guilt, and depression. All of our negative karmic actions involve unhealthy mixtures of these three poisons: *ignorance*, *attachment*, and *aversion*.

If we fully understood the subtlety of the natural karmic laws of cause and effect, we would avoid committing even the smallest harm. Our negative actions generally have no good qualities at all, but they do have the property that they can be purified. The great spiritual masters say there is no negative action that *cannot* be purified. Think about that, and make the determination now to purify these actions by taking opposing actions that will nullify their consequences. In order to remove the seeds of our negative actions before they can grow into our full-blown suffering, the Buddha instructs us to apply four opponent powers. An easy way to remember these is to think of them as the four R's: *regret*, *reliance*, *remedy*, and *resolve*.

The opponent power of regret. Suppose three people have unwittingly ingested the same poison. One of them dies, one becomes extremely ill, and one has not yet suffered any ill effects. This last person will have powerful regret down to their bones that comprehends the emergency of the situation they are in, immediately taking whatever action they can to get the poison out of their system. They will be determined to never make the mistake of ingesting that poison, or anything like it, ever again.

Because of our primordial ignorance, we sentient beings throughout our collective histories over beginningless time have all unwittingly accumulated the same seeds of negative actions, which resemble the poison. These harmful actions have propelled us into the situation we currently experience—a cyclic

existence of birth, aging, temporary happiness, dissatisfaction, sickness, temporary suffering, and death. The only way we can liberate ourselves from this self-perpetuating cycle of captivity is to see it for what it is and *do* something about it. Like the person who ingested poison in the metaphor, we use the opponent power of regret that comprehends the danger of what we are doing to *ourselves* as well as others. For our own sake and others' it is essential that we refuse to follow, obey, or recognize the ruinous wrong views and habits of delusional self-grasping that continue to hold us captive. This goes to the very heart of what the Buddha calls renunciation, and regret is an essential part of the process.

Without justifying, or blaming, or feeling guilty, take a moment now to recall an action you have done that has been disturbing to your peace of mind. Recognize that this action of body, speech, or mind arose due to one or more of the following three reasons: (1) you felt you needed a particular object of your desire and manipulated ways to get it in order to be satisfied—which resulted in an action of afflictive attachment; or (2) something or someone disturbed or threatened either you or that which you consider to be yours, causing a situation to occur in a way you didn't like, which triggered frustration, anger, or anxiety, and resulted in an action of afflictive aversion; or (3) you engaged in an action of body, speech, or mind without an attentive regard for that action's potential for harm—which led to an adverse result due to afflictive ignorance.

Understand that this action you took under the influence of attachment, aversion, ignorance, or a combination of them, is functioning like a poison in your psyche. Left unchecked and unattended, the active subtle karmic imprints or seeds of this poisonous action are adhering to the continuum of your subtle energy body and consciousness, conditioning you to establish habitual patterns of similar harmful behavior that will sooner or later result in a personal experience of physical or emotional suffering related to the disturbing action you engaged in. Recall the person in the metaphor who unwittingly ingested poison. That person is all of us. With the enlightened beings in the merit field before you and your entire beginningless history as witnesses, develop powerful regret down to the core of your being that recognizes the poisonous nature of your negative actions' imprints on your consciousness and form. Determine now to take the necessary actions to purify your mind-stream and subtle energies of this poison.

The opponent power of reliance. It is important to recognize exactly who or what we are relying on for purification when we acknowledge our negative actions. Because our consciousness and subtle energy body accumulate the seed-like imprints of a negative action in relation to a particular basis, the purification of that negative karma relies on that same basis, just as when we fall on the ground we rely on the ground to get up again. So, as we commit negative actions in relation to either enlightened beings or sentient beings, we rely on them as the basis for purifying those negative actions.

Once again, imagine you are looking upon the radiant Guru-Buddha surrounded by countless Buddhas in the merit field before you, and address them with the following thoughts:

“All you powerful, fearless, and noble Buddhas of the past, present, and future—please hear me. Enveloped in the darkness of ignorance, I have unwittingly been caught in an iron-like net of self-grasping egoism. Driven by the delusional needs and desires of a perceived inherently existing “I,” my consciousness and form have been conditioned and shaped by compulsive, habitual negative propensities, strongly binding negative karma to me, which is so hard to undo. As a result, I have been born and reborn in a boundless cyclic existence of repeated dissatisfaction, grasping to get what the perceived inherent “I” wants and suffering what the perceived inherent “I” doesn't want.

Now in your presence, I earnestly ask for your guidance. Help me traverse the path to enlightenment and complete happiness for the sake of all sentient beings. I will faithfully follow your guidance, I will put your instructions into practice, and I will rely on you with every step I take. Please bless and protect me, and may your blessings and protection be with me and every sentient being always.”

The wisdom beings in the merit field hear you and it is their purpose and intention to help you.

Now turn your thoughts to all sentient beings—friends, enemies, strangers—humans and non-humans. Usually we feel compassion for those we perceive to be innocent victims and aversion toward those we

perceive to be malicious perpetrators. This is an unstable view based in ignorance. *All* sentient beings since beginningless time have been both perpetrators and victims over and over again. No matter who or what they are, or the harm they may or may not have done to others or yourself—or you to them, as sentient beings they have become overpowered by ego self-grasping and karmic conditioning, just as you have. Just like you, they want to be happy and don't want to suffer. Just like you, ignorance and confusion about the nature of reality has blinded them with delusional, mistaken views about how the self and phenomena exist. They have been trapped in the suffering ocean of cyclic existence like you have. Many have lost their way completely and are drowning in the depths of its darkness. Their unspoken call for help is the same as yours. Remember the very reason for becoming enlightened is to help *all* sentient beings uncover their own potential for enlightenment and to achieve it. This will bring true and lasting happiness to them and you. For this reason, with a courageous heart bring all sentient beings to mind as you think the following:

“May the awakening aspiration to develop unbiased, other-centered great compassion and loving kindness toward every sentient being take root and begin to grow in me. May this aspiration increasingly grow stronger with wisdom, motivating me with enthusiasm and perseverance to reach the fruition of complete enlightenment, so I can actively and meaningfully help all sentient beings achieve their potential for supreme happiness.”

From the basis of this awakening aspiration of bodhicitta, pathways of consciousness will develop in you that will ultimately lead to great compassion, profound wisdom, and the fruition of complete Buddhahood.

As we work with these two powerful bases of reliance—enlightened beings and sentient beings—the two wings of wisdom and compassion will become stronger and stronger in us, enabling us to achieve higher and higher levels of realization that will lead us toward an unimaginably beautiful destiny of wisdom, love, and bliss.

The opponent power of the remedy. This opponent power refers to the actual means or opposing force by which we can purify our mind-stream and subtle energy body of the poisonous karmic imprints or seeds that have taken root because of our regrettable negative actions.

Any virtuous action of body, speech, or mind done in relation to enlightened beings and sentient beings for the purpose of purifying some negative action we have done in relation to them is an example of this opponent power. This includes actions such as reciting confession sutras, mantras, making prostrations and offerings, and meditating on emptiness. If you engage in some virtuous act—even reciting a simple prayer a number of times in order to purify some negative action, this action then becomes the application of the remedy.

In addition, the profound wisdom of the omniscient mind of Shakyamuni Buddha has given us ten powerful remedies—three actions of body, four of speech, and three of mind—that can be immediately practiced at our current level of understanding and ability on a daily basis. The far-reaching power and purifying force of these remedial actions should not be underestimated. As we habituate ourselves over time to the following ten actions of body, speech, and mind, we will remove the obstacles that are blocking our realization of love, happiness, and insight. They are:

(1) *Save and protect the lives of others.* Do this when you can—even with the smallest insect. This will help purify your mind-stream and subtle energies of the poisonous imprints that have resulted from killing or having physically harmed another being in the past. (2) *Be generous and unselfishly giving.* This will purify the karmic imprints of stealing, being stingy, or having taken what does not belong to you. (3) *Be harmless in your sexual conduct.* This will help purify the poisonous karmic imprints of sexual misconduct.

(4) *Speak honestly to others.* Always do this in a way that is helpful and kind. This will purify the ruinous karmic imprints of deceitful, manipulative lying. (5) *Use agreeable, inclusive speech.* This purifies the negative karmic imprints of creating discord through divisive speech. (6) *Speak with supportive and encouraging words.* This purifies the poisonous imprints of speaking with harsh and

insulting words. (7) *Speak with purpose and mindfulness*. This purifies the negative imprints of endless idle talk and chatter that has no meaningful purpose or value.

(8) *Develop an appreciative mind*. Take pleasure in others' good fortune, circumstances, and qualities—this will purify the poisonous karmic imprints of having a jealous, covetous mind. (9) *Develop the intention to always be of help*. This purifies the poisonous karmic imprints of intending harm. (10) *Meditate on the correct views of emptiness, dependent arising, and karma*. This will purify the poisonous imprints of ignorance and the ego's delusional wrong views. Ultimately, this last one is the most important of the ten actions, because all of our suffering arises from our mistaken views of how we exist and the nature of reality.

Taken as a whole, these essential remedial actions of body, speech and mind are referred to as the ten virtuous actions, which function as the antidote to what are called the ten non-virtuous actions.

The ultimate remedy is the Dharma. Listen to the Dharma, study the Dharma, practice the Dharma, and meditate on the Dharma, until the Dharma becomes a powerful habitual propensity in your mind-stream, determining and regulating every action of your body, speech, and mind.

The opponent power of resolve. The Tibetan master Tsongkhapa states that the power of resolve means to actually restrain yourself from the ten non-virtuous actions: *killing, stealing, sexual misconduct; lying, divisive speech, harsh words, idle talk; covetousness, harmful intent, and wrong views*. In the *Sun Essence Sutra* the Buddha says that having the resolve to restrain from these non-virtuous physical, verbal, and mental actions will destroy *all* karma, afflictions, and obscurations to the Dharma teachings.

The resolve to not commit a negative action again must be extremely firm. Moreover, the development of this resolve is linked to, and depends upon, the first opponent power of regret. In *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, the revered Tibetan lama Pabongka Rinpoche presents a way of gradually training in the power of resolve. The chronic, compulsive harmful actions we are in danger of doing, such as using harsh words or lying, also threaten to give the lie to our resolve to never do these things again. This is the essence of addictive behavior. If we don't resolve to exercise restraint, the four opponent powers will not be complete. At the outset, we should abandon to the very root the things we can abandon to their very root. There will still be some things we can give up for maybe a month; others we can give up for only a week. But if we decide *each day* we can stop doing some of these things, we will then stop doing things that we *can* stop for that day. Perhaps the next week we will be able to stop doing these things for two days. The point of training in this way is so that we can break the continuity of our strong habitual addiction to negative actions gradually over time. This is a particularly skillful means, and a practical instruction given to Pabongka Rinpoche by his own guru.

4) Rejoicing. The fourth of the seven limbs is rejoicing. Rejoicing is a bodhisattva's practice, and if it is done well, there is no better way to build up our accumulations of merit and root virtues. There are two ways to meditate on this limb: rejoicing over your own virtue, and rejoicing over the virtue of others.

Rejoicing over your own virtue entails two steps. The first step is to infer from the conditions of your present life that you must have done something good in your *past* lives, because out of all the conscious life forms that exist in all the realms of all the worlds throughout the universe of universes, here you are with a human rebirth. Not only do you have a reasonably good human body and brain, but look at the favorable conditions you now have for Dharma practice that make your current human life extraordinarily meaningful. Think over and over again, "In my rebirths before this one I must have upheld my ethics, practiced generosity, patience, and enthusiastically worked at developing my good qualities." Because you had the clarity in a previous life about how to do something meaningful for yourself, your present life is this magnificent, optimum, precious human rebirth. Rejoice in that! By observing your behavior now, you will be able to infer what your next rebirth will be like.

The next step in rejoicing over your own virtues is to rejoice over the virtues of your *present* life. Recall all the virtuous things you have personally done: any prayers and practices; any generosity; any service you've done or help you've given; any skills or talents you have developed that have benefitted others;

and any ethics you have upheld. Rejoice over these things without a sense of arrogance. When we rejoice over our own virtues in this way, we enhance our existing merit. If we increase our virtues we will receive everything from optimum rebirths as humans to our enlightenment.

The second way to meditate on this limb is to rejoice over the virtues of others. This means rejoicing over the virtues of your enemies, friends, and strangers; or over the virtues of the Buddhas, your Gurus, Bodhisattvas, and spiritual practitioners, and over the deeds of any past spiritual masters and saints who have benefited others with the lives they lived. But to do this properly, our rejoicing must be that of a bodhisattva—done with the desire to be of benefit.

Bring to mind any conscious being other than yourself—human or otherwise. This could be a being you know and have interacted with; or a being you know of, but have never had any personal interactions with; or a being you don't know at all and for whom you have only a peripheral awareness. This could be an individual you think of as an enemy, a friend, or a stranger. In short, this being could be anyone from a Buddha, to a politician, to your mother, or to a mouse. It's your choice.

Bring this conscious being clearly to your mind, as if they were directly in front of you. Focus on how this being is like you in that they wish only for happiness and have no wish for suffering. Realize that your actual enemy is your own untamed anger, hatred, and fear born of ignorance; that the most powerful friend you have for positive transformation is your own loving kindness, compassion, and wisdom; and that the greatest stranger to your true nature is your own self-grasping ego that ignorantly thinks it somehow exists independently and separately from everything else. Look upon the being before you with the wish that all beings may have happiness and complete liberation from the sufferings of cyclic existence; that all beings' virtuous qualities have no decline but increase forever; and that the precious awakened mind of enlightenment not yet born in all beings, arises, grows, never declines, and increases forever. Rejoice in all of the virtuous qualities you can recognize in the being you've brought to mind and rejoice in the unlimited positive potential that exists intrinsically within the very nature of their consciousness. Finally, feel gratitude toward this being for providing you with the actual basis that enables you to awaken your loving kindness, your compassion, your wisdom, and your aspiration to become enlightened for the benefit of all beings.

If we do this meditation frequently over time with many different kinds of beings, we'll notice how our view of other living beings begins to change. When we rejoice over the virtues of others we develop and increase our merit. Nothing would make our Gurus, the Buddhas, and the Bodhisattvas happier than to see us increase our merit and root virtues in this way.

5) *Requesting the wheel of Dharma to be turned.* The fifth of the seven limbs is requesting the wheel of Dharma to be turned. This means that we are asking our Gurus and all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas to continue to teach and transmit the Dharma until all sentient beings have attained complete enlightenment. Visualize a thousand-spoked wheel of golden light representing the entire teachings of the Buddha, that brightly illuminates the sparkling meadow and environment that surrounds you. Offer this wheel of Dharma to all of the beings in the merit field as you and your entire beginningless existence make this request of them. The wisdom beings in the merit field agree to turn the wheel of Dharma. This request purifies the non-virtues of abandoning the Dharma.

6) *Petitioning the merit field to remain until cyclic existence ends.* The sixth of the seven limbs is petitioning all of the beings in the merit field to stay until cyclic existence comes to an end. Imagine your entire being makes this earnest request for the benefit and joy of all beings, and that the beings in the merit field consent to stay. Requesting your Gurus to live long and remain with you in this way purifies the negativities of disturbing their minds.

7) *Dedication.* The last of the seven limbs is the dedication of one's merit. It is vital to do this. We are dedicating our root virtues so that they will not run out. We are dedicating them to our complete

enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Just as a drop of water poured into a great ocean will not disappear until the ocean runs dry, so too will virtue dedicated to complete enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings remain until the enlightenment of all sentient beings is attained. Our root virtues are like the drop of water; the root virtues of the victorious beings in the merit field are like the ocean. We mix our root virtues with theirs when we dedicate them, so these virtues will remain securely with them until we and all sentient beings have reached the complete happiness of liberation and enlightenment. We also make the wish that others' root virtues be protected in the same way. Make the dedication with the following thoughts:

*Whatever small amount of virtue I have accumulated
From prostrations, offering, confession,
Rejoicing, requests, and petitions,
And whatever virtues others have accumulated
Through their beneficial actions,
I dedicate them all to the Great Enlightenment
For the benefit of all sentient beings.*

*It is only through the kindness of my Gurus
That I have met the peerless teachings of the Buddha.
Thus, I dedicate all merit so that all sentient beings in the future
May be guided by kind and holy Gurus.*

Offer the World Mandala. Now make an offering of a World Mandala to the Guru-Buddha and all the beings in the merit field. Imagine a universe in which all consciousnesses and appearances are completely purified and functioning in a perfectly balanced system of interdependence. Visualize this in the form of a beautiful circular mandala that is placed before the Guru-Buddha in the merit field. Imagine you and your entire beginningless existence chant the following mantra as you offer the mandala to all the beings in the merit field:

*Sa zhi pö ki juk shing me tok tram
Ri rab ling zhi nyi de gyen pa di
Sang gye zhing du mig te ül war gi
Dro kün nam dak zhing la chö par shok*

The World Mandala melts into light and dissolves into the heart of the Guru-Buddha as you say:

Idam guru ratna mandalakam niryatayami

Your countless past lifetimes, along with the aspects of your present lifetime dissolve back into you. All the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in the merit field melt into light and dissolve into the Guru-Buddha.

VI. SUPPLICATION TO THE GURU-BUDDHA

As you once again stand in the sparkling green meadow make the following supplication to the radiant Guru-Buddha in the sky before you:

*I take refuge in the Guru-Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.
Please bless my mind-stream. May all wrong thoughts which
hinder progress on the path to enlightenment cease
And not generate further in the mind-streams of myself and others.*

*May we easily develop in our mind-streams every sort of
Right thought that helps us progress on the path.
Please bless us so all internal and external hindrances to
Realizations on the path are completely pacified.*

*Magnificent, precious root Guru,
Please stay in the lotus of my heart.
Care for me with great compassion,
And bestow the means for realizations
of body, speech, and mind.*

Light comes from the Guru-Buddha, purifying you so that your body becomes like clear light. You feel that all external and internal obstacles in this life and your past lives are pacified. The Guru-Buddha becomes smaller and smaller while coming to the crown of your head and, facing in the same direction as you, enters into you at your crown. The Guru-Buddha descends to your heart where there is an open lotus of light, and sits upon it. The lotus closes and holds the Guru-Buddha very securely within its light. You hold and keep within you always these purifying practices of the Buddha in the form of your Spiritual Guru seated within the lotus at your heart.

As a closing to these preparatory practices, the following words of encouragement and advice to western students from His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama are offered:

NEVER GIVE UP

No matter what is going on
Never give up.
Develop the heart.
Be compassionate,
Not just to your friends
But to everyone.
Be compassionate.
Work for peace
In your heart and in the world,
Work for peace.
And I say again,
Never give up.
No matter what is happening,
No matter what is going on around you,
Never give up.

H.H. The XIVth Dalai Lama

With this guided meditation I have strived to the best of my ability to present the essence of the traditional Six Preparatory Practices as taught to me by my esteemed gurus and spiritual teachers. However, their vast knowledge is difficult to grasp by an ignorant being with karmic obscurations like myself. Any errors are entirely my own and not due to the tireless and loving effort of my wonderful teachers. It is only through their kindness that I have met with

the flawless teachings of the Buddha. May all beings in the future be met by such kind and holy gurus!

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