



Venerable Chöje Lama Phuntsok

Noble Chenrezig

As explained in the instructions entitled “Yidam Deities in Vajrayana,” Noble Chenrezig is a Sambhogakaya manifestation in body, speech, and mind of supreme enlightenment that appears for the benefit and welfare of all living beings. He is a Bodhisattva and the embodiment of the great loving kindness and compassion of all Buddhas.

Engaging in practices without generating and developing loving kindness and compassion isn’t the sign of a Mahayana and Vajrayana disciple, seeing the aspiration and endeavour to generate and increase ones love and compassion are central in both vehicles. Love and compassion are synonymous with Bodhicitta (“the awakened mind of enlightenment”), i.e., Bodhicitta is the core of Mahayana and Vajrayana. A Bodhisattva is someone who has wisdom, loving kindness, and compassion. An individual who doesn’t have wisdom, love, and compassion isn’t a Bodhisattva.

Compassion is a disposition, an attitude, and the prayer, “May I and all living beings be free from suffering and the causes of suffering” is the heart-felt expression of ones sincere and great compassion in that one not only prays for oneself but in that ones prayer embraces all sentient beings. It’s easy having compassion for ourselves and we don’t fear any hardships when striving to attain freedom from suffering that we experience. Having sincere and deep compassion for all sentient beings, though, isn’t as easy as one might suppose.

The ability to love is the prerequisite for having a loving and kind heart. Sincere love is also a disposition, and the prayer, “May I and all living beings have happiness and its causes” is the deep and heart-felt expression of ones great love in that one not only prays for oneself but in that ones prayer embraces all sentient beings.

There is a sequence to having Bodhicitta, as taught in the instructions on the Four Immeasurables. The prerequisite for having sincere and upright love for others is the ability to rejoice when anyone - including oneself - experiences happiness and well-being. Without rendering lip-service only, the ability to rejoice when others experience happiness and prosperity isn't that easy. In order to truly feel joy when one sees or learns that others are doing well, one needs to have an attitude that is free from wishing anyone harm and one also needs to clearly appreciate and acknowledge that there is no difference between anyone, i.e., one shouldn't think that one is better and more privileged than anyone else. If one has the pure attitude that is free from arrogant and malicious thoughts and if one refrains from acting in an unwholesome manner but engages in wholesome activities, then one will be able to rejoice about one's own prosperity as well as about that of others.

What is the pure attitude? Without ever being reluctant or hesitating when an opportunity presents itself, the wish and willingness to help and benefit others as best as one possibly can. What is the sign that one has the pure attitude? For example, if one goes to a place where a great number of large and small birds have gathered with the intention to feed them, one isn't afraid when they all dash to peck at the grain that one holds in one's hands for them. Not being fearful in such a situation and wishing to benefit the birds are signs of having a pure intention. Birds sense whether one wants to help or harm them - they come flying real fast when they sense that one wants to feed them. Other living beings react in the same manner. People, too, assemble around those who are benevolent and avoid those persons who aren't. When the pure attitude becomes a habit, then one will have great strength, which is the characteristic of having an altruistic mind.

When one has the pure attitude towards all living beings without exception, then one will naturally have the wish that they be free of present and future suffering. When one sincerely wishes that all living beings be free from suffering and its causes, then compassion has arisen in one's mind. When compassion has arisen in one's mind, then it's important to increase it, which is accomplished by engaging in the practice of Noble Chenrezig.

One engages in the practice of meditating Chenrezig by first supplicating him - the One who is the embodiment of immeasurable compassion. There are various liturgies, some are very long, others middle-length, and yet others are short. It's advisable practicing the short text if one doesn't have much time.

Vajrayana meditation liturgies are divided into three sections: the introduction, the main body of practice, and the conclusion. They are called "the three pure aspects." The introduction commences the practice and consists of taking refuge and giving rise to Bodhicitta. The central body of the liturgy consists of the meditation practice. And every liturgy concludes with dedicating the merit of any virtue one has been able to create through one's practice for the benefit of all living beings.

Giving rise to the pure motivation consists of reciting the preliminary prayers of taking refuge and generating Bodhicitta, which are part of every meditation practice. The "Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayers" are summarized in the four lines that you are acquainted with and that we pray with fervent devotion:

སངས་རྒྱལ་ཚེས་དང་ཚོགས་ཀྱི་མཚོག་རྣམས་ལ། །
 བྱང་ལྷུབ་པར་དུ་བདག་ནི་སྐྱབས་སུ་མཚི། །
 བདག་གིས་སྤྱིན་སོགས་བགྱིས་པའི་བསོད་ནམས་ཀྱིས། །
 འགྲོ་ལ་ཕན་སྲིད་སངས་རྒྱལ་འགྲུབ་པར་ཤོག། །

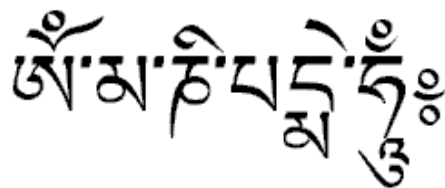
*“Until I reach enlightenment, I take refuge in the Buddha,
 In the Dharma, and in the noble Sangha.
 By the merit accumulated from giving and the others
 May I achieve Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings.”*

It isn't necessary to receive the empowerment of Chenrezig, but one must receive the lung ("the reading transmission") if one wishes to practice his Sadhana ("liturgy"). Let me just mention that the central section of the liturgy is imagining Chenrezig as taught in the text.

It is advisable to recite the Sadhana in your language and not in Tibetan so that you understand the meaning well. Dogmatic people think that Chenrezig is restricted to Tibet and needs to be imagined by reciting the Sadhana in the Tibetan language, which is not so. Let me say that it's important to recite the liturgy as nicely as possible. If one recites it slowly and as beautifully as possible, then it helps one open more easily and enhances ones devotion and respect, which is the purpose of practice. A sign of having deep confidence and devotion in 'Phagpa Chenrezig is that one sings softly, like a little child happily saying "Mama" and not screaming in despair when it sees its mother. If we accomplish the three aspects of practice - which are folding our hands in deep reverence, singing the prayer softly and gently, and integrating the meaning in our hearts - then sincere faith and devotion will have been born in us. Another sign of having true devotion in Chenrezig is that tears come to our eyes when we meditate the Sadhana and contemplate his limitless qualities. There are many reasons why people cry, for instance, out of anger or out of greed. Becoming aware of Chenrezig's immeasurable qualities can also cause us to cry.

When one practices meditation, one is cautious to sit in a good posture, if possible in the lotus posture. It's important to sit with a very straight back, because then ones subtle channels, winds, and vital essences will not be obstructed or disturbed and as a result thoughts will not arise. The cushion one sits on should be nice - not too high and not too low, not too soft and not too hard. If ones body sits comfortably, then ones mind will be able to calm down too. There is the saying, "The body dwells on the cushion and the mind dwells on the body." It is a fact that if one sits uncomfortably, then one moves around until ones right or left knee don't hurt anymore. As long as ones body isn't calm and at ease, ones mind will be restless and will jump around.

Having created Yidam Chenrezig in ones mind and having recited the prayers of the main body of the Sadhana with heart-felt trust and devotion, one imagines that he emits light to all sentient beings and purifies every delusive appearance. One is not only confident but sees that the world becomes transformed into Sukhavati, the "Land of Great Bliss," and that all sentient beings' body, speech, and mind - including ones own - are inseparable with Chenrezig's pure body, speech, and mind. One lets ones mind rest in the realm of pure appearances, pure sounds, and pure pristine awareness that are not separate from emptiness while one-pointedly reciting his mantra. 'Phagpa Chenrezig's mantra is:

The image shows the Tibetan script of the mantra 'Om Mani Pema Hung'. The characters are written in a traditional, flowing style. The first character is 'Om' (ཨོ), followed by 'Ma' (མ་), 'Ni' (ཎི་), 'Pe' (པཎེ་), 'Ma' (མ་), and 'Hung' (ཧུང་). The final character is a decorative flourish with a small circle at the end.

/ OM MANI PEMA HUNG //

There are four ways to recite Chenrezig's mantra and the one way is not better than the other. The first is called "reciting with the voice," which means speaking every syllable clearly and so that it is heard. The second is called "reciting with the help of the mind," which means not speaking the mantra but repeating it only in ones mind. A third way is reflecting the meaning in which case one doesn't recite the syllables but contemplates the meaning. A fourth way to focus ones attention on the mantra is reciting the mantra in conjunction with the three phases of ones breathing, which are inhaling, holding ones breath a moment, and exhaling. It can be disturbing to practice in the company of people who recite the mantra loudly. Therefore it would be better to recite the mantra silently in ones mind when one practices together with others.

Noble Chenrezig's mantra consists of six syllables that represent his Buddha activities. He is called "the Lord of Great Compassion," because his Buddha activities are continuously directed at freeing all living beings from suffering and its causes. Therefore, each syllable of his mantra stands for freeing beings who suffer in one of the six realms of conditioned existence. The white syllable OM stands for freeing beings from the realm of the gods; the green syllable MA stands for freeing beings from the realm of the jealous gods; the yellow syllable NI for freeing beings from the realm of human beings; the blue syllable PE for freeing beings living in the animal realm; the red syllable MA for freeing beings born in the realm of the hungry ghosts; and the black syllable HUNG for freeing beings living in the hell realm.

Generally speaking, Westerners don't believe in the suffering experienced in the six realms of conditioned existence, but this will change. The six realms of conditioned existence are related to the three kinds of suffering that living beings experience. The three kinds of suffering are: the suffering of suffering, the suffering of change, and all-pervading suffering. Suffering of suffering is the immense suffering that is heaped upon extreme suffering and pain that is experienced by beings living in the hell, hungry ghost, and animal realms. Suffering of change is the suffering that human beings mainly experience when things change; since nothing lasts, happiness and well-being unavoidably and inevitably change into suffering when spent and lost. All-pervading suffering, which also marks conditioned existence and is more subtle than the other two, is the suffering that jealous gods and gods mainly experience. One would think gods and jealous gods only experience joy and good luck, but there is a little thorn to it.

Human beings also experience the three different kinds of suffering. Some human beings experience more suffering of suffering than others, while some humans experience more suffering of change. There are also people who experience suffering that seems to be luck.

When concentrating one's attention on Chenrezig and while reciting his mantra, one wishes all sentient beings freedom from the three kinds of suffering and their causes. This sincere wish is an expression of compassion and therefore meditating Chenrezig and reciting his mantra enhances and increases one's compassion. If one doesn't know the meaning of his mantra that is Sanskrit, one might doubt whether it is beneficial. Therefore it's important to know the meaning of his mantra and to cultivate and increase one's wish that every living being be free from suffering and its causes. This is how one develops and increases one's compassion. When one's compassion has become immeasurable, then one will have accomplished the purpose of meditating Chenrezig.

We cannot see the immense suffering that beings trapped in the hell and hungry ghost realms go through. But our world - which is a small globe that doesn't inhabit as many beings as those living in other planes of the universe - presents enough examples of how horrifically hell and hungry ghost beings suffer. There are people and animals living in regions of our world where there isn't enough food and water for everyone, so many of them die of hunger and thirst. There are people and animals living in other regions of our world where there are many earthquakes, floods, or fires, so many of them lose everything or they are killed. There are also people who lose their job from one day to the next and experience extreme problems by struggling to supply their family with daily needs. Furthermore, there are individuals who live in a constant strain of good luck but suffer immensely when they die. It would be very important to look around in the world and to develop deep empathy for all those people and animals who suffer.

A practitioner is free to recite Chenrezig's mantra either 100 times or 200 times while engaging in the Sadhana. Afterwards, one naturally rests one's mind in the state free from what is called "the three circles," which are subject, object, and action. This concludes the main body of the practice. The sacred aspect of dedication follows and concludes the formal session.

The dedication is carried out so that a practitioner integrates the formal practice in daily life, which is the time referred to as "post-meditation." The aim of meditation is for a practitioner to see all phenomena, himself or herself as well as all living beings, as the pure manifestation of Chenrezig during post-meditation. A successful practitioner furthermore experiences all sounds as the sound of Chenrezig's mantra and realizes that all thoughts that arise are a manifestation of the vast expanse of primordial wisdom-awareness. What benefit does this bring? Upholding the pure view in daily life is very beneficial in that all negative thoughts and emotions that everyone has are gradually purified.

The actual dedication consists of wishing and praying that any good one has been able to accomplish in the past and by having meditated the Sadhana of Chenrezig be the cause for all living beings without exception to attain his state.

One can recite the mantra during daily activities, e.g., while cleaning or while driving, especially while driving. Tibetans have their prayer-wheels and you have your steering-wheel. Actually, a prayer-wheel is an aid that serves as a reminder - a steering-wheel can serve as a reminder too. Thank you very much.

Dedication

Through this goodness may omniscience be attained
And thereby may every enemy (mental defilement) be overcome.
May beings be liberated from the ocean of samsara
That is troubled by waves of birth, old age, sickness, and death.

By this virtue may I quickly attain the state of Guru Buddha and then
Lead every being without exception to that very state!
May precious and supreme Bodhicitta that has not been generated now be so,
And may precious Bodhicitta that has already been never decline, but continuously increase!

May the life of the Glorious Lama remain steadfast and firm.
May peace and happiness fully arise for beings as limitless in number as space is vast in its extent.
Having accumulated merit and purified negativities,
May I and all living beings without exception
Swiftly establish the levels and grounds of Buddhahood.



Photo of Most Venerable Chöje Lama Phuntsok taken at his birthday celebration in Taiwan this year courtesy of Lekshey Ling in Taiwan. With sincere gratitude to Madhavi Maren Simoneit for making the recording of the teachings presented at Theksum Tashi Chöling in Hamburg in October 2008 available to us. On this occasion we wish to thank Hans Billing, who is webmaster of Karma Chang Chub Choephel Ling in Heidelberg, and to Josef and Nina Kerklau, who are in charge of the center and the website of Karma Sherab Ling in Münster, for their immense contributions. Translated into English by Gaby Hollmann, mainly in reliance on the German translation of the Tibetan kindly offered by Rosemarie Fuchs, who we also wish to thank very much. Copyright Lekshey Ling Institute as well as Theksum Tashi Chöling, 2008.