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**Nectar of Beneficial Words for Beginners:
A General Guide for Practicing the Path of
the Preliminary and Main Practices**

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KHYENTSE VISION
PROJECT

This text includes Vajrayāna content. Please be aware that some Vajrayāna texts may only be fully understood and appreciated through receiving the necessary empowerments, transmissions, or practice instructions from a qualified teacher.

sngon 'gro dang dngos gzhi'i lam spyir 'jug pa'i zin bris las dang po pa la phan pa'i tshig gi bdud rtsi

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TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

Nectar of Beneficial Words for Beginners is a brief guide for beginner practitioners, introducing the entire path from the preliminary practices to the Great Perfection. It is divided into two main parts: a general section and a Vajrayāna section.

The first section consists of contemplations of (1) the freedoms and advantages of a human existence, (2) impermanence and death, (3) the defects of saṃsāra, and (4) karma, the law of cause and effect, followed by the practices of (5) taking refuge, and (6) arousing bodhicitta. These are framed as methods to overcome three kinds of attachment: attachment to happiness in this life, attachment to worldly pleasures, and attachment to seeking liberation for oneself alone.

The second section deals with Vajrayāna practice. It includes pithy instructions for the remaining three preliminary practices, which come within the scope of the Mantra Vehicle: meditation on Vajrasattva, maṇḍala offering, and guru yoga. It continues with a summary of the main practices of the generation and completion stages related to the four empowerments, linking them to the stages of the five paths of enlightenment according to Mantrayāna.

OUTLINE

I. TRAINING THE MIND IN THE THREE KINDS OF NONATTACHMENT

- A. Contemplating the Difficulties of Finding the Freedoms and Advantages
- B. Meditating on Impermanence and Death
- C. Recognition of the Defects of Saṃsāra
- D. Contemplating Karmic Causality
- E. Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels
- F. Arousing Bodhicitta

II. THE EXTRAORDINARY PRACTICE OF VAJRAYĀNA

- A. The Preliminaries
 - 1. Meditation and Recitation on Vajrasattva
 - 2. Building of the Maṇḍala
 - 3. Guru Yoga
- B. The Main Practice

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Nectar of Beneficial Words for Beginners

Namo gurubhyaḥ!

Individuals wishing to attain liberation and omniscience should train their minds in three types of nonattachment: not being attached to the happiness of this life, to the pleasures of saṃsāra, and to one's own individual spiritual goal. Then they should diligently train in the swift path, which is the profound path of Vajrayāna.

I. Training the Mind in the Three Kinds of Nonattachment

The first section on training the mind in the three kinds of nonattachment has six topics: (1) contemplating the difficulties ^[48] of finding the freedoms and advantages to establish the basis for reflecting on impermanence and death; (2) meditating on impermanence and death to counteract the clinging to this life as real; (3) recognizing the defects of saṃsāra in order to realize the hollowness of worldly pleasures; (4) contemplating karmic causality to not confuse what should be done and what should be abandoned; (5) taking refuge in the Three Jewels to turn the mind away from wrong paths; and (6) generating bodhicitta to distance oneself from the lower paths.

A. Contemplating the Difficulties of Finding the Freedoms and Advantages

In order to liberate ourselves and others from saṃsāra's ocean of suffering, it is necessary to perfectly practice the sacred Dharma. The only basis to practice Dharma is this human body endowed with the freedoms and advantages. When we contemplate that basis in detail, referring to its nature, its causes, and to numbers and analogy, we

will realize that although we have a human body in this life, it will be difficult to obtain one again in the future.

A human body free from the following eight disadvantages is described as free because it offers the opportunity to practice the Dharma; therefore, it is said to have freedom by its nature: (1, 2, and 3) being born in the three lower realms where there is no freedom due to the extreme burden of suffering upon suffering; (4) being born among the gods, who have no freedom due to their distraction by sense pleasures; (5) being born in a realm where no buddha has come; (6) being born among the uncivilized people in the borderlands where the Dharma has not spread, even though a buddha has appeared; (7) being born among those with wrong views, who do not believe in karmic cause and effect; and (8) being born with mental and verbal disabilities and being unable to understand the teachings of what to accept or reject. [49] If one is born in any of those states one is disadvantaged because one is deprived of the light of Dharma.

In addition, there are the following factors: the five individual advantages, which include (1) obtaining a human birth as the basis; (2) being born in a central region where the Dharma has spread; (3) having the five sense faculties intact; (4) having uncorrupted action, such as not committing any of the acts of immediate retribution; and (5) having devotion to enter and engage in the Buddha's excellent teachings.

The five circumstantial advantages are that (1) a buddha has appeared in the world; (2) a buddha has taught the Dharma; (3) the teachings remain; (4) oneself and others follow those teachings; and (5) one has the material conditions to enable one to practice the Dharma. Since it is extremely rare for someone to have the freedoms and advantages fully complete with all their characteristics, such a human body is difficult to obtain by its *nature*.

Not only is it difficult to obtain a human body, but beings who commit negative actions, which are the cause for the lower realms, are extremely numerous and those who practice virtuous actions, which are the cause for the higher realms, are extremely few. Compared to those who simply have a human body, it is almost impossible to find a person who keeps their discipline pure, which is the cause of a human body without faults, endowed with the freedoms and advantages. Therefore, it is difficult to obtain in terms of its *causes*. [50]

The effects of causality are such that beings in the three lower realms are as limitless as the grains of sands on the earth and beings in the higher realms as sparse as the dust on top of a fingernail. Moreover, although the creatures that live in the depths of the ocean are proportionately few among all the beings of the three lower realms, we can see with our own eyes that they are countless, like the grains in a barrel of beer. The animals living scattered upon the earth hardly populate its mountain ranges, yet in a single patch of summer grass there live an endless number of beings. Compared to those numbers, it is almost impossible to become a god or a human being. To take the

comparison further, it is even more difficult to become a human at all and particularly difficult to obtain a human body with the capacity to practice the Dharma. Therefore, it is difficult to obtain from the point of view of *numbers*.

Furthermore, the scriptures say that the human body is even harder to obtain than it is for a blind turtle in a boundless great ocean, that only comes to the surface once every hundred years, to insert its neck even once into a wooden ox yoke, drifting around in all directions. Thus, it is difficult to obtain in terms of an *analogy*.

Although it is difficult to obtain, once it has been obtained, it possesses supreme great benefit. If we are skillful, our thoughts and actions can easily bring about happiness and well-being in this life, leading us to become a god or a human in the next life, attaining the nirvāṇa [51] of the foundational vehicle, and even unsurpassable enlightenment. The analogy of receiving a wish-fulfilling jewel in one's hand cannot illustrate so much as a miniscule fraction of an opportunity such as this. Thus, it is imperative to make use of this basis for Dharma practice by practicing the completely pure Dharma in every way possible.

B. Meditating on Impermanence and Death

It is necessary to practice Dharma with urgent, diligent effort. When we are overcome by laziness and procrastination, we should think that all conditioned phenomena in general are impermanent. More specifically, no one born in the realms of sentient beings can escape death and continue living. At this moment, nobody, including ourselves, is immune to death. Death comes suddenly, without consideration for who is young, old, or middle-aged. Therefore, the time of death is uncertain.

The body is fragile like a water bubble. The breath will disappear swiftly like autumn mist. The mind will be powerless as to where it will go, like a blind person roaming in an empty plain. We hope that things we have, such as food and clothing, will be beneficial for us, and yet they too can act as conditions for death.

The conditions for death are many. When the time comes, there is no way to prevent it. The conditions to sustain life are few. In brief, there is nothing but our fragile breath between this life and the next. Once it ceases, we will arrive at the next life. We do not know whether tomorrow or the next life will arrive first. Even if for the moment we possess substantial wealth and fame, [52] or the power of Indra, not even the minutest particle of it will follow us. Nothing will help except for the sublime Dharma.

This human life is as fleeting as the swift passage of the sun between the clouds. Without being attached to this life's happiness, comfort, and renown, decide to engage from today onward in the genuine Dharma and put it into practice to prepare for death.

C. Recognition of the Defects of Saṃsāra

If nothing came after death, it would not be so bad. Yet, until we have exhausted our karma and our afflictions, we are reborn powerlessly, again and again, based entirely on our actions and their results. We cannot escape saṃsāra, the cycle of miserable and pleasant rebirths.

Sentient beings born in the three lower realms are tormented by the intense burden of enduring long periods of unbearable suffering. Hell beings suffer from heat, cold, and being cut up. Hungry ghosts suffer from hunger, thirst, and impoverishment. Animals suffer from stupidity, voicelessness, and exploitation. Even when we attain a higher rebirth, as humans we have countless primary and secondary forms of suffering such as birth, old age, sickness, and death. The asuras cannot relax their bodies and minds even for a moment due to fighting and quarrelling out of jealousy. The lower gods [53] are subject to the suffering of change, increasingly tormented by the preliminary signs of impending death and transmigration. The higher gods are subject to all-pervasive suffering, since they fall to lower existences when the impelling force of their conditioned virtue is exhausted, as their minds are tainted by wrong views.

In brief, we should generate a fierce attitude of renunciation knowing that, wherever we are born, whether in the higher or lower realms of saṃsāra, just as the nature of fire is nothing but heat, they are nothing but the places, companions, and necessities for the three types of suffering.

D. Contemplating Karmic Causality

It is necessary to have conviction in actions and their results, and not be confused as to what should be done and what should not be done. That is the gateway to liberation from saṃsāra. Although the workings of cause and effect are in general beyond our intellectual understanding, they can be condensed into three types of actions: unvirtuous, virtuous, and neutral.

First, the ten types of unvirtuous actions of body, speech, and mind are: (1) taking life, even that of insects, the smallest living beings; (2) taking what is not given—taking another's property, by force or stealth; (3) sexual misconduct—engaging with inappropriate sexual partners; (4) lying—deceiving others with speech that distorts the truth; [54] (5) harsh words—words that cause another mental distress; (6) sowing discord—speech that divides friends; (7) worthless chatter—any speech other than the three aforementioned types that gives rise to negative emotions, such as jokes; (8) covetousness—the desire to obtain another's possessions of any kind for oneself; (9) malicious intent—having thoughts like, “How wonderful it would be if my enemies were harmed!”; and (10) wrong view—the notion that, even on the relative level, karmic cause and effect does not exist. The *fully ripened effect* is to take rebirth respectively in one of the three lower realms, depending on whether the impulses were strong, middling, and weaker, or were due to anger, desire, or ignorance.

Actions similar to the cause come into effect even for beings in the higher realms. After the fully ripened effect is exhausted, the propensity toward killing, for instance, and its habitual tendencies reawakens. Further endless causes for suffering are karmic predispositions leading to *experiences similar to the cause*, such as: (1) shortened lifespan due to killing; (2) poverty due to taking what is not given; (3) one's partner going with rivals due to sexual misconduct; (4) others not believing one's words due to lying; (5) separation from loved ones due to sowing discord; (6) hearing unpleasant things due to harsh speech; (7) one's words not being taken seriously due to idle gossip; (8) one's hopes being destroyed due to covetousness; (9) being ugly due to malicious intent; and [55] (10) mistaken views arising in one's mind due to wrong views. The *conditioning effect* results in an external environment resembling our actions of killing and so on. It is said,

A gloomy place full of hail and rain,
Dusty and foul smelling,
With barren seasons and saline soil,
With bitter, small fruits, or none at all.

The ten virtuous karmic actions such as giving up killing have their own respective effects: (1) fully ripened effects include birth in one of the three higher realms according to one's strong, middling, or weaker motivation; (2) actions similar to the cause are taking pleasure in virtuous actions that are the cause for higher more pleasurable rebirths; (3) experiences similar to the cause are to have long life, wealth, and so on; and (4) the conditioning effect is to be born in places of great splendor. These, then, are the opposite of the effects of unvirtue.

As for neutral karmic actions, such as walking, moving around, lying down, or sitting, as they are neither virtuous nor unvirtuous, their effects cannot produce any kind of happiness or suffering.

Thus, with every thought and act, even at the risk of one's life, one should abandon unvirtue, which is the cause of suffering, and practice even the smallest virtues as much as possible, since they are the cause of happiness. One should be skilled in the methods to transform even neutral actions into virtuous ones with every thought and act.

E. Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels

Take, for example, criminals confined to prison, [56] tortured by all sorts of punishment and condemned to certain execution. They would call out to those with power to protect them as if they were calling out to their own father or mother. Likewise, all of us who have merely been born in the three higher realms due to conditioned forms of virtue are unable to escape the fundamental nature of suffering. Therefore, we need to go for refuge by relying on a source of refuge with the power to protect us from the suffering of saṃsāra in all its forms.

So, what are the objects of refuge? Only the guru and the three precious jewels are the objects of refuge. Who is the person taking refuge? It is oneself leading all sentient beings. How does one go for refuge? With one-pointed focus, totally abandoning all other hope, thinking, “From now until I attain enlightenment, whatever occurs, whether joy or sorrow, good or bad, only you care for me!” That is the way to train in going for refuge.

Remember the Three Jewels at all times and go for refuge. Never abandon the Three Jewels under any circumstances. You should know for sure that it is no use searching for refuge or hope elsewhere.

F. Arousing Bodhicitta

Just as the eastern limit of space is immeasurable, space in all directions is immeasurable. Throughout all [57] of that space exist the realms of sentient beings. During our countless rebirths, each one of those beings has been a parent to us. Likewise, their every action protected us from all types of harm. They held us with love, raised us through acts of kindness, and have always been kind to us, benefiting us with all their ability. So, what kind of benefit would it be if we were to leave all of them suffering in saṃsāra and only liberate ourselves? For that reason, since it is clear that they wish for happiness and do not wish for suffering, first think, “I will work for their happiness and free them from suffering,” with a supreme mind of loving kindness, compassion, and pure intention. Then, in order to achieve that, resolve to attain the state of perfect buddhahood for their benefit.

Furthermore, since karma does not arise without causes and conditions, establish a foundation in the principal factor for all causes and conditions—that of completely pure moral discipline. Purify your mind through listening, contemplation, and meditation. In particular think, “By relying on renunciation, bodhicitta, correct view, and the profound methods of vajra yoga, I will actualize the level of union in this very life.” Apply this all the time as your intention and practice. As it says in the *Heart Essence of the Great Perfection*,

Impermanence and suffering are purified with bodhicitta.

In the Precious Instructions tradition, the foundation is established with the preliminary practice [58] of the three visions. In the tradition of the Stages of the Path of Enlightenment, there are the mind trainings for the three types of individuals. For Mahāmudrā and related traditions, there are the four mind-changings together with refuge and bodhicitta. This completes the teachings on the two lower vehicles and the general stages of the path.

II. The Extraordinary Practice of Vajrayāna

The second section is the extraordinary practice of the Vajrayāna. *The Vajra Peak Tantra* states,

Maturation and the path of liberation is the teaching relied on by the buddhas and bodhisattvas.

To sum up the process of maturation and liberation, with their various aspects, first, the mind stream is matured through the bestowal of unsurpassable extraordinary empowerment, the four unmistakable empowerments at the time of the cause. Then, to engage in the path, there are two parts: the preliminary practices and the main practice.

The first of these has three parts: (1) meditation and recitation on Vajrasattva to purify negative deeds and obscurations; (2) building of the maṇḍala, which is the method to accumulate merit; and (3) guru yoga to swiftly receive the blessings.

A. The Preliminaries

1. MEDITATION AND RECITATION ON VAJRASATTVA

Negative actions and obscurations are conditions that obstruct the arising of experience and realization during the main practice. Although there are countless methods for purifying those negative actions and obscurations, the ultimate method is the meditation and recitation of Vajrasattva. For this, there are four powers: (1) the power of support consists of the support of another, by meditating on the extraordinary objects of refuge, and the support of oneself, by meditating on bodhicitta; (2) the power of regret is the generation of intense regret for previously accumulated negative actions and downfalls that come from not realizing that all sentient beings are ultimately by nature endowed with completely pure buddha essence; [59] (3) the power of resolution is this thought, “From today onward, I will not commit negative actions even at the cost of my life”; and (4) the power of action as an antidote is to practice meditations and recitations that are the antidote to past karma, meditating on the yogic practice of the guru Vajrasattva, reciting his profound secret mantra, cleansing through the visualization of the flow of nectar, and special visualizations such as burning with the fire of wisdom. Persevere in these until the signs of the purification of misdeeds arise and never separate from the practice of this yoga.

2. BUILDING OF THE MAṆḌALA

The accumulation of merit provides the favorable conditions for experience and realization to arise. Although the techniques for producing it are countless, the extraordinary method to accumulate merit that unites sūtra and mantra is the practice of the maṇḍala. It is briefly explained here.

Cleanse the maṇḍala with precious substances, anointing and moistening it with perfumed water. Place on it a heap of flowers. Think that its cause arises from our body

and wealth, together with an ocean of virtue; its nature is the beautiful arrangement of the four continents together with Mount Meru, adorned [60] with inconceivable extraordinary forms of wealth; its recipients pervade all of space; and its duration will continue until all saṃsāra is empty. Offer it without hesitation to the guru and the Three Jewels, viewing it as the perfection of the two accumulations for ourselves and all sentient beings.

3. GURU YOGA

The realization of our ultimate nature is nothing other than the actualization of coemergent wisdom. That depends solely on the guru's blessings and on our devotion to be able to receive those blessings. Therefore, gain certainty and confidence that the true nature of the guru who directly shows us the path is equal to the Buddha in terms of abandonment and realization, and surpasses the Buddha in terms of kindness. Furthermore, the primary cause for the accomplishment of buddhahood is the *sugatagarbha*, free of conceptual elaborations. The facilitating condition is the Buddha's blessings and the primary cause to receive those blessings in our own mind stream is devotion.

As the actual Buddha is no longer present, the Buddha who appears to us is the fully qualified guru. Similarly, the guru's speech, which transfers knowledge of the Dharma to the minds of disciples, is the teaching of the Buddha. Without that teaching of the Buddha, the stream of the Buddha's teachings would have been interrupted the year after our guide the Buddha passed into parinirvāṇa—and who would want that to happen? [61] Therefore, the Buddha's wisdom is passed on to recipients who can then transmit it to their disciples, establishing the knowledge of the Dharma in their mind stream. However, if the Buddha's wisdom was not passed down in this way, we would be unable to utter even a single word of the Dharma. Thus, since that guru's speech is the Buddha's speech, who else's body and mind are worthy to be the Buddha's awakened body and mind?

If you nonetheless do not perceive the guru's utterly perfect major and minor marks, think, "It is the fault of my intellect, like a person with jaundice seeing a white conch as yellow!" and develop certainty that the guru is the Buddha in person. Not only is that the case, but due to our karma and negative emotions, we were not able to meet the actual Buddha in person and hear him speak. Therefore, since it is the guru who performs the Buddha's activities in their entirety, generate confidence that the guru is kinder by far.

At the time of the empowerment of the causal moment, the guru's aggregates, elements, and sense bases manifest as the deities of the three seats of completeness. Visualize the guru as a deity such as Vajradhara according to the pointing-out instructions. Alternatively, it is also acceptable to meditate on the guru's actual form.

Visualize the deities as a crowd, in rows, or as the single jewel embodying all the deities according to the appropriate tradition.

Think of the guru as a real buddha, whose awakened body possesses the majestic splendor of the marks and signs, whose awakened speech is the melodious resounding of the Dharma, [62] whose awakened mind is the indivisibility of the profound and luminous, which is the nature of the primordial wisdom of great bliss, and whose qualities and activities bless your mind stream. Pray to the guru with flowing tears of devotion, receive the four empowerments, and rest the mind in suchness.

B. The Main Practice

In the main practice, the object of purification on the Mantrayāna path, suffering, is simply clinging to ordinary appearances. In order to bless mere appearances as the deity, the generation stage and completion stage transform the thoughts of clinging to appearances into primordial wisdom.

The entire path of the two stages can be summarized as follows. In the beginning, by perfecting the generation stage, the path of the vase empowerment, one reaches the Mantrayāna's greater path of accumulation. That is further enhanced by the path of the secret empowerment with the practices of the winds and inner heat, through which one attains the *heat and peak stages of the path of application*. On the path of the wisdom-knowledge empowerment, the imagined mudrā or actual mudrā is the immediate cause that generates coemergent example wisdom, the stages of *forbearance* and *supreme phenomenon*. Finally, the path of the fourth empowerment is the direct realization of absolute wisdom, which is the primordial purity of the Great Perfection on the *first ground on the path of seeing*. By meditating on that in combination with the vajra chains of the manifestations of awareness, the remaining grounds are traversed [63] like a magical display. Finally, all appearances of conditioned phenomena are exhausted in the expanse of utterly pure luminosity. Then, through the body of great transference, the state of unity of the path of *no more learning*, one acts for the benefit of all beings throughout space.

The definitive numbers, the definitive stages, the order, the key points on how to meditate, and other details should be understood from the authentic oral explanations of a learned and accomplished vajra master. Such explanations are for those who are capable of accomplishing each path right to the end. They are beyond the scope of practitioners who merely have aspiration, for whom it is of great importance to analyze with fine discrimination, step by step, what is correct and incorrect.

Although this explanation of how to undertake the paths of the preliminary practices and the main practice is brief, may it be of great benefit not just for beginners, but for those whose understanding is initially very weak.

Sarva maṅgalam.

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gsang ba rnal 'byor chen po'i rgyud rdo rje rtse mo. In *Derge Kangyur*, vol. 84, 287–550.

GLOSSARY

abandonment and realization

སྤངས་རྟོགས། • *spangs rtogs*

The qualities of a buddha, having abandoned the gross and subtle obscurations and realized the two kinds of knowledge, knowing everything and knowing the true nature of everything.

actual mudrā

དངོས་ཀྱི་ཕྱག་རྒྱ། • *dnegos kyi phyag rgya*

Physical consort.

actual wisdom

དོན་གྱི་ཡེ་ཤེས། • *don gyi ye shes*

The wisdom of true realization, introduced directly through the fourth, or word, empowerment.

advantages

འབྱོར་བ། འབྱོར་པ། • *'byor ba, 'byor pa*

The enabling factors for a person to practice the dharma.

afflictions

ཉོན་མོངས། • *nyon mongs* • kleśa

Sometimes translated as “poisons” or “negative emotions,” they are attachment, aversion, ignorance, pride, and jealousy.

bodhicitta

བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས། • *byang chub sems*

The intention to obtain buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings and its application.

body of great transference

འཕོ་བ་ཆེན་པོའི་སྐུ། • *'pho ba chen po'i sku*

The enlightened manifestation of the ultimate level of the Great Perfection.

buddha essence

སངས་རྒྱལ་གྱི་སྙིང་པོ། • *sangs rgyas kyi snying po* • tathāgatarbha

The inherent potential for enlightenment, already present in unenlightened beings, often translated less literally as “buddha nature”.

coemergent wisdom

ལྷན་ཅིག་སྐྱེས་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས། • *lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes* • sahajajñāna

The wisdom that is the unity of bliss and emptiness.

completion stage

རྫོགས་རིམ། • *rdzogs rim* • saṃpannakrama

The second of the two stages of tantric practice focused on the dissolution of the visualized tantric maṇḍala and its deities, and on the yogic practices of the channels, wind, and essences.

conditioned phenomena

འདུས་བྱས། • *'dus byas* • saṃskṛta

Refers to all phenomena produced by causes and conditions.

example wisdom

དཔེ་ཡེ་ཤེས། • *dpe yi ye shes*

The wisdom attained through the third empowerment and is used to introduce the actual wisdom (*don gyi ye shes*) of the fourth empowerment.

first ground on the path of seeing

མཐོང་ལམ་ས་དང་པོ། • *mtshong lam sa dang po*

The third of the five paths, which is the attainment of the first ground (*bhūmi*).

five paths

ལམ་ལྔ། • *lam lnga* • pañcamārga

Stages on the path of the bodhisattva. They are the path of accumulation, the path of joining, the path of vision, the path of meditation, and the path of no more learning.

forbearance

བཟོད་པ། • *bzod pa*

The third part of the path of application (the second of the five paths).

four empowerments

དབང་བཞི། • *dbang bzhi*

The vase, secret, wisdom-knowledge, and precious word empowerment.

fourth empowerment

དབང་བཞི་པ། • *dbang bzhi pa*

The fourth empowerment, the “word” empowerment, involves the pointing out of ultimate reality, emptiness, or pristine awareness. It purifies the three bodies into the essence body.

freedom

དལ། དལ་བ། • *dal, dal ba*

Having the freedom to practice the Dharma by not being born in one of the eight states without that opportunity.

generation stage

བསྐྱེད་རིམ། • *bskyed rim* • utpattikrama

The first of the two stages of Vajrayāna practice in which one transforms one's ordinary perceptions through the visualization of the maṇḍala and deities and recitation of mantras.

great perfection

རྫོགས་པ་ཆེན་པོ། • *rdzogs pa chen po*

The nature of awareness, which is the innate state of perfect enlightenment latent in the mind. More broadly, it refers to the associated system of teachings, theories, and practices.

greater path of accumulation

ཆོགས་ལམ་ཆེན་པོ། • *tsbogs lam chen po* • mahāsambhāramārga

The highest level of the path of accumulation (first of the five paths).

guru yoga

བླ་མ་ནི་རྣམ་འབྱེད། • *bla ma'i rnal 'byor*

“Union with the guru” through which the practitioner unites their mind stream with the body, speech, and mind of the guru.

Heart Essence of the Great Perfection

རྫོགས་པ་ཆེན་པོ་སྙིང་ཐིག། • *rdzogs pa chen po snying thig*

Profound transmission of the Great Perfection from Vimalamitra to King Trisong Detsen and later transmitted by Longchen Rabjam.

heat and peak stages of the path of application

སྟོར་ལམ་ཐོད་དང་ཕྱེ་མོ། • *sbyor lam drod dang rtse mo*

The first and second part of the path of application (the second of the five paths).

hungry ghost

ཡི་དྲགས། • *yi dwags* • preta

A class of sentient beings who constantly suffer from hunger and thirst, one of the six realms of rebirth.

imagined mudrā

ཡིད་ཀྱི་ཕྱག་རྒྱ། • *yid kyi phyag rgya*

A mental, or visualized, consort.

Indra

དབང་ཕྱུག། • *dbang phyug* • īśvara

Literally “lord,” a name for the supreme deity to whom the creation of the universe is attributed. However, in Buddhism even the gods are not considered to be immortal. Even someone with enormous powers is unable to avoid death.

inner heat

གཏུམ་མོ། • *gtum mo* • caṇḍālī

Practice of blissful heat cultivated in the completion stage through controlling the inner wind energy.

karma

ལས། • *las*

Meaning literally “action.” The power of physical, verbal, and mental actions to ripen as subsequent experiences and forms of rebirth. Often the formula “action and result” (*las ’bras*) is used.

liberation

ཐར་པ། • *thar pa* • mokṣa

In its most general sense, this term refers to the state of freedom from suffering and cyclic existence. In this text it refers particularly to the state of an arhat, individual liberation from saṃsāra, rather than seeking perfect buddhahood for the sake of all beings, the goal of the bodhisattva.

luminosity

འོད་གསལ་བ། • *’od gsal ba* • prabhāsvaratā

Literally “clear light,” often referring to the fundamental nature of the mind. An important part of the completion stage yogas.

Mahāmudrā

ཕྱག་ཆེན། • *phyag chen*

Literally “great seal,” meditations to gradually or suddenly reveal the nature of the mind.

main practice

དངོས་གཞི། • *ngos gzhi*

The main part of the practice following the preliminaries. In this text, the practices of the generation and completion stage.

major and minor marks

མཚན་དཔེ། • *mtshan dpe* • lakṣaṇa vyañjanāni

The thirty-two major and eighty minor marks of excellence that characterize the perfect physical form of a nirmāṇakāya or saṃbhogakāya buddha. A universal ruler is also said to possess a resemblance of these marks.

maṇḍala

མཛེལ། • *maN+Dala*

A maṇḍala (*dkyil ’khor*) is the ideal divine universe in deity yoga. Also, it is the symbolic material representation of the universe used as an offering.

Mantrayāna path

སྔགས་ལས། • *sngags lam*

Equivalent of Vajrayāna. The tantric path, employing mantras.

Mount Meru

རི་རབ། • *ri rab*

Mountain at the center of the traditional world system of ancient India, surrounded by the four continents, of which our world, Jambudvīpa, is one.

nirvāṇa

ཐུང་འདས། • *myang 'das*

Literally “beyond sorrow,” the state free from suffering and rebirth. Although this term can describe the enlightenment of the Buddha, it can also refer to the individual liberation of the arhats as distinct from the ultimate state of buddhahood.

no more learning

མི་སྒྲོབ་པ། • *mi slob pa*

The fifth of the five paths; a state of complete realization where there is nothing to be learned.

omniscience

ཐམས་ཅད་མཁྱེན་པ། • *thams cad mkhyen pa* • *sarvajña*

The all-knowing state of complete buddhahood.

Precious Instructions

གསུང་རག་རིན་པོ་ཆེ། • *gsung ngag rin po che*

A synonym for the Lamdre (Path and Fruit) tradition.

preliminary

སྔོན་འགྲོ། • *sngon 'gro*

The preliminary practices that form the foundation for the main practices of the generation and completion stages.

primordial purity

ཀ་དག། • *ka dag*

An expression of the Great Perfection. The true nature of mind is timeless, primordially pure awareness, never stained by ignorance.

primordial wisdom

ཡེ་ཤེས། • *ye shes* • *jñāna*

This term refers to the innate wisdom temporarily obscured by mental obscurations, but fully manifest in realized beings.

samsāra

འཁོར་བ། • *'khor ba*

The state of cyclic existence, conditioned by afflicted mental states and past actions, characterized by suffering in a continuous cycle of life, death, and rebirth.

secret empowerment

གསང་དབང་། • *gsang dbang*

The secret empowerment purifies the speech and wind energies (*rlung*) and sows the seed for attaining the enjoyment body (*sambhogakāya*).

Stages of the Path of Enlightenment

བྱང་ཆུབ་ལམ་གྱི་རིམ་པ། • *byang chub lam gyi rim pa* • bodhipathakrama

Tradition of mind training to progress toward enlightenment according to three types of individuals with inferior, middling, and superior motivation: the tradition of preliminary practices following Atiśa’s seminal eponymous text. This approach is associated with the Kadam school.

suchness

དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད། • *de kho na nyid*

The ultimate nature of things, the way things are in reality as opposed to the way they appear to beings who are not awakened.

sugatagarbha

བདེ་བར་གཤེགས་པའི་སྤྲིང་པོ། • *bde bar gshags pa'i snying po*

“Essence of the bliss-gone ones.” The buddha nature, present in all beings, which is the fundamental basis to be able to attain enlightenment. Synonym of tathāgatagarbha.

supreme phenomenon

ཚོས་མཚོག། • *chos mchog*

The fourth part of the path of application (the second of the five paths).

Three Jewels

དཀོན་མཚོག་གསུམ། • *dkon mchog gsum* • triratna

The “three rare and precious ones,” referring to the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha.

three types of nonattachment

མ་ཆགས་པ་གསུམ། • *ma chags pa gsum*

Nonattachment to the happiness of this life, and the pleasures of saṃsāra, and exclusive concern for one’s own liberation.

three types of suffering

སྤུག་བསྐྱེལ་གསུམ། • *sdug bsngal gsum* • triduhkhata

The suffering of suffering, the suffering of change, and the all-pervading suffering of conditioned existence.

vajra chains of the manifestations of awareness

རིག་གཤམ་དོན་ལུ་གྱུད། • *rig gdangs rdo rje lu gu rgyud*

Manifestation of the spontaneous presence (*lhun grub*) aspect of awareness in the practice of the Great Perfection.

Vajra Peak Tantra

དོན་རྩེ་མོ། • *rdo rje rtse mo* • vajraśekhara

The *Vajraśekaratantra* (*rgyud rdo rje rtse mo*) is an explanatory tantra related to the *Sarvatathāgata-tattvasaṃgraha* (*The Compendium of Principles of All Tathāgatas*), a seminal Yoga Tantra that was influential in Tibet and East Asia.

vajra yoga

རྫོགས་ལཱ་འབྲེན། • *rdo rje'i rnal 'byor*

The four vajra yogas are the vajra yogas of purity (*viśuddha*), dharma, mantra, and form (*saṁsthāna*).

Vajradhara

རྫོགས་འཇང་། • *rdo rje 'chang*

Literally “vajra holder,” the name of the dharmakāya buddha in the New Translation schools.

Vajrasattva

རྫོགས་སེམས་དཔལ། • *rdo rje sems dpa'*

Saṃbhogakāya buddha who embodies all the five or hundred buddha families. He is also a support for purification practices.

Vajrayāna

རྫོགས་ཐེག་པ། • *rdo rje theg pa*

The “Adamantine Vehicle,” practices taking the result as the path. Synonymous with “Secret Mantra” (*gsang sngags*).

vase empowerment

བུམ་དབང་། • *bum dbang*

The vase empowerment uses consecrated water to purify the body and the subtle channels (*rtsa*). It allows one to meditate on the form of the deity and sows the seed of the body of manifestation (*nirmāṇakāya*).

wind

རླུང་། • *rlung* • *prāṇa*

Refers to the wind energies that travel in the subtle channels in the body and are channeled in the tantric practice of the completion stage with characteristics.

wisdom-knowledge empowerment

ཤེར་དབང་། • *sher dbang*

The knowledge wisdom (*prajñājñāna*) empowerment purifies the mind and the essences, and sows the seed to attain the truth body (*dharmakāya*).