

The Sage Who Dispels Mind's Anguish

Advice from the Guru, the Gentle Protector Mañjuśrī, on the Means of Accomplishing the Yogas of Śamatha and Vipaśyanā

by Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche **Homage to the Guru Śākyamuni!**

When training in the yogas of śamatha and vipaśyanā by focusing on the body of the Teacher, Buddha, infuse your mind with precious bodhicitta—the wish to attain buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings—and think:

“At this time when I have obtained the support of the freedoms and riches and met the Tathāgata’s teachings, I will put aside all worldly activities which only bring about negative results. Although such practices as making offerings to the Tathāgata’s form and so on do generate immeasurable merit, these accumulations of merit based on material wealth are something that the Tathāgata advised mainly for householders. As something far superior, for renunciates, those following in his own footsteps, he praised discipline and genuine inward resting. In accordance with the Tathāgata’s words, therefore, I will practice these as much as I can.

“In particular, throughout the course of beginningless time, we have been disturbed day and night, without break, by all kinds of conceptual thoughts, rather like the stirring of wind, or clouds, or waves on the ocean, and have been brought low. Not only have we failed to accomplish a single remarkable quality, we are afflicted by all manner of suffering. Since that is so, I will now free myself however I can from the mire of these different conflicting thoughts, and, even if just for a single instant, focus on the Tathāgata’s body, which is of such great merit and significance. In so doing, I shall achieve the yogas of śamatha and vipaśyanā in the proper way.”

With an intense pledge of one-pointed yearning think: “Guru, Victorious Ones, and your descendants, I supplicate you: grant your blessings so that I may succeed!” Remove yourself, first of all, from hustle and bustle; in a place without impediments to meditative concentration, such as people moving about during the day or hubbub at night, sit on a comfortable seat in meditation posture. Then thoroughly mix your mindstream with the preliminary dharma.

Place in front of you, at whatever height and position is comfortable, a beautiful and pleasing image of the Tathāgata, the King of Śākyas, which has been drawn correctly by a skilled artist. With the power of aspiration recall the Tathāgata’s blessings and by reciting the Essence of Causation mantra consecrate the image. Having done this, place it at whatever distance is right for you to look at, neither too close nor too far away.

Look at the image with admiration as if it were the Tathāgata’s actual form, and think: “Like an udumbara flower, which appears in this world only every few hundred years, the Tathāgata, arises from the cause of boundless accumulations of merit and wisdom beyond imagining. Since the Tathāgata is fully adorned with the thirty-two excellent marks and eighty excellent signs, seeing him is without disharmony. In the world of gods, the extremely clear and steadfast noble rūpakāyas are seen in common by all the sentient beings of that world at that time. These rūpakāyas also teach the Dharma there, and they display all kinds of miracles. For the benefit of those to be tamed they also perform various actions including staying, departing, getting up, and sleeping, bringing immeasurable sentient

beings' sources of virtue to fruition. Our Teacher, Śākyamuni, Lion of the Śākyas, was born into the royal line of Śākyas and eventually attained enlightenment, after which he taught the Dharma to bodhisattvas, śrāvakas, and many other gatherings of beings at Vulture Peak and elsewhere." While keeping in mind these qualities and attributes, think, "This is what the Tathāgata's form is like in shape and appearance." The Tathāgata is the embodiment of discipline, of samādhi, supreme knowledge (shes rab), complete freedom, the gathering of the wisdom and seeing of complete liberation and so on; he is endowed with immaculate qualities that are beyond imagining and cannot be adequately conveyed even unto the very limits of space itself. He closely embraces us all with his great love. For our sake he underwent immeasurable hardships; as you should learn from the supportive teachings for the Treasury of Blessings, which tell, for instance, of how the Brahmin Samudrarāja generated bodhicitta. In such ways, for three immeasurable aeons by practicing the six pāramitās he gathered inconceivable and inexpressible accumulations of merit and wisdom, and was freed from all obscurations. By conquering the four māras he completely perfected all excellent qualities without exception, and having obtained the kāya of the great wisdom of omniscience he became the refuge, protector, and friend of all sentient beings until the end of time. The virtues of recalling this unsurpassable Bhagavān, the Transcendent Conqueror, paying homage to him, uttering his name, seeing his bodily form and resting the mind one-pointedly upon it and so on, no matter how small, will become the cause for supreme awakening. Think: "Since that is due to the power of the Tathāgata's past aspirations and inconceivable wisdom, how fortunate we are!" And generate great faith by recalling the Buddha.

Then, without your attention being too tightly or loosely focused, but in a leisurely manner, without letting your mindfulness and attentiveness decline, focus your mind continuously on the appearance of the Tathāgata's form. Distancing yourself from any thought other than the object of focus, settle your attention solely on the Buddha's form. Eventually you should focus one-pointedly without interruption as much as you can.

In short, practice progressively the nine methods of mental-abiding until you achieve the 'one-pointedness of a mind of the desire realm'.

You can look at and focus upon the body in general, or, in order to obtain the noble Dharma and pacify dullness, focus particularly on the usnīsa, the crown on the Buddha's head, the limit of which is impossible to see. Alternatively, in order to obtain samādhi and pacify agitation, you can concentrate directly on the enlightened mind's glorious knot (which is at the Buddha's heart centre). Or, to accomplish great merit and gain happiness, you can concentrate on the appearance of the coil of hair between the Buddha's eyebrows, which is white as snow or conch and curls to the right. In order to make the great melodious sound of Dharma pervade the whole world and to benefit sentient beings by teaching the Dharma, fix your mind on the form of the throat, the source of the sixty qualities of melodious speech, at the conch of Dharma with its three lines and so on. Wherever it is you feel inclined to focus, concentrate your mind there unwaveringly.

When focusing your mind like this, at the very beginning it is like catching a snake; the mind is so wild and untamed that the first stage of meditation is called the experience of movement, like a waterfall. At this stage you have the impression that your mind is in constant motion. From the Sūtra Requested by Subāhu:

This mind is like lightning, wind, and clouds,
Like the waves of a giant ocean,
Cunning, indulging in everything it desires,
Moving, straying—I must certainly tame it.

Think: "Since all sentient beings have fallen under the sway of this completely distracted mind, I will

persevere without giving into laziness come what may! For if one perseveres there is nothing one cannot accomplish.” Then endeavour to maintain the focus for as long as you can.

By persevering in this way, discursive thoughts, which were so apparent and rough, wild and turbulent, will settle down slightly after a while. But there will still be the busyness of many different thoughts—a bubbling stream of restless mental activity. That is called the second meditation experience of ‘attainment, like a river flowing through a narrow canyon.’ The example is used because although a river running through a narrow canyon is still very turbulent and noisy, it is a little slower than a waterfall.

If you keep persevering and continue the practice, then you will feel that inwardly the mind’s thoughts are slowing down and you are able to remain with the object of focus. However, if you examine carefully you will see that you are still involved in a continuous stream of many subtle conceptual thoughts. This is the third experience, called the experience of ‘familiarisation, like a gently flowing stream.’ When you look at a stream from afar it seems to be still and you cannot tell that it is moving, but when you get up close you see that it is moving a little and rippling.

From this point on, if you don’t stop persevering, but keep on striving, you will have less hardship and suffering than before—so exert yourself continuously! By practicing like this, even the movement of subtle conceptual thoughts will be pacified and as long as you have the conditioning for the focus you will be able to remain as long as you like. Yet this does not mean that you are completely impervious to circumstances. This is the fourth meditation experience, called the experience of ‘stability, like an ocean free from waves’, since the mind abides and is stable.

Having reached this far, without having to undergo great hardships, the fifth meditation experience, ‘perfection, like a mountain’, will arise as long as you continue to familiarise yourself with this state over time. This is synonymous with effortless engagement (rtsol ba med pa’i ‘du byed). The mind naturally mixes with whatever you focus on and, without the need for any effort, remains steadily wherever you want; conceptual thoughts no longer have the power to shake the mind. This is the accomplishment of what is called the ‘one-pointedness of a mind of the desire realm’.

At this time, various experiences resulting from the mind’s abiding will also arise. When you have become familiar with this state, mind and body are said to become supple (shin tu sbyangs ba). As body and mind become workable in this way, whatever object of focus you settle the mind upon, even if you remain for several days, there is no sense at all of either the body or the mind being unable to cope; the body feels as light as cotton wool and the mind is pervaded by the bliss of vivid clarity.

This suppleness is rough and heavy at first and has a sense of solidity. But with familiarity the heaviness fades and there arises an unwavering śamatha that is extremely fine and clear, like a shadow, a mind of meditative concentration that is in accord with the main part of practice. This kind of meditation has the name “śamatha”, since it is a mind endowed with suppleness. It also corresponds to the aspect of the first meditative absorption’s capable preparatory stage (bsam gtan dang po’i nyer bsdogs mi lcogs med). There is nothing that this kind of meditative concentration is incapable of—be it meditation with a conceptual focus, or meditation without concepts, as in the meditations on emptiness and the like.

There are several ways of counting the stages of accomplishing śamatha, such as the four mental engagements or the six powers, but essentially they are all included in the following: the mind remains totally concentrated, with mindfulness and attentiveness, for as long as possible on the object of focus, and as you familiarise yourself with this the five meditation experiences (explained above) will arise. When you have accomplished śamatha in this way, the strength of the mind’s workability gives the body a gleaming complexion and makes it comfortable and strong. The mind too becomes clear and lucid and settles on any object of your choice. Body and mind are ‘saturated’ with immeasurable joy and bliss, the afflictions are reduced, and you have an experience concordant with the extraordinary joy

of inner solitude.

By the strength of the merit of practicing śamatha with this focus on the form of the Buddha, and through the Buddha's blessings, you will come to see the Buddha, either in actuality or in dreams. You will receive Dharma teachings and so on—all sorts of different excellent qualities will arise in your mind.

Once you have accomplished śamatha in this way, begin the practice of vipaśyanā. How should you do so? When first practicing śamatha, you rest the mind using an image of the Buddha's form as a support. Even when not using such a support as the focus, the Buddha's form can still arise as a mental object on which you rest the mind. When, having practiced in whichever way you wish, you finally accomplish śamatha, the Buddha's body appears vividly even without any support as the characteristic form of samādhi.

At first this form shines vividly and steadily as an object of the mind, like a reflection in a mirror. Then, as you familiarise yourself with it more and more, it manifests as an object of your senses as well, like something that is actually present. If you continue to familiarise yourself with it yet further, the image you are focusing on becomes perceptible even to others' senses in the same way. So, it is said that the first clarity appears as a mental object; the second as an object of the senses; and the third as an object of touch, as is taught in all the Early Translations' textbooks on approach and accomplishment.

When you accomplish just the first level of clarity, from then on you should practice vipaśyanā. Consider the way the form of the Buddha endowed with the marks and signs—beautiful, delightful, vivid, and steadfast—now appears as a mental object as if actually present. This is just the appearance of habitual imprints in your own mind: it has not come from anywhere, nor does it go anywhere. When examined it is void: it is not found anywhere at all, inside or out. It depends on the mind and appears entirely as a result of the mere interdependent arising of habit. The mind to which it appears too, when examined, is not found anywhere, inside or out; since it is devoid of any basis or root, what need is there to speak of what appears to it? This appearance, therefore, does not possess even the slightest trace of any true nature.

In the same way, the appearance of buddhas in the world is due to the power of the interdependent arising of sources of virtue based on beings' pure intentions, together with the buddhas' great aspirations made in the past; just as when someone's reflection appears in a clean mirror. Although in worldly beings' domain of experience it does indeed appear undecieving, the Tathāgata does not have any ordinary aggregates, elements or sense-sources—not even to the slightest degree—since he is the utterly unfathomable wisdom kāya equal to the dharmadhātu, the basic space of phenomena. In the Sūtra of the Ornament of the Appearances of Wisdom it says:

The Tathāgata, by inexhaustible virtue,
Is a reflection of dharmas;
Since there is no thusness (tathātā), there is also no Tathāgata.
In all worlds he appears only as a reflection.

Also, from the Samādhi in which the Present Buddha Abides Directly:

Buddhas are analysed by bodhisattvas.
Mind as well is completely pure, naturally luminous,
Stainless, not merged with conceptual thoughts.

Whoever knows this will attain supreme awakening, buddhahood.

We must examine this with supreme knowledge and understand it.

Having understood this, just as it is with the Tathāgata, we will see that all the phenomena of appearance and existence that are contained within the aggregates, elements, and sense-sources also appear in the world and are experienced as they are through the force of interdependent origination. Yet

all these phenomena are no more than mere appearances coming about due to the interdependent arising of their individual causes and conditions. And when they are properly examined, we don't find even so much as a single atom's worth of true nature. Just as with magical illusions and appearances during a dream, in reality there is no going or coming, arising or ceasing and so forth at all.

Nevertheless, childish ordinary beings, who cling to appearances as existing the way they appear and who have forsaken individual analysis, cling to arising and ceasing and the rest as existent. It is as if a person with cataracts has no notion that the falling hairs which affect their vision should be removed. Throughout beginningless time our minds have been tainted by the 'cataracts' of ignorance, as a result of which we do not know how things genuinely are.

Those who have realised the way things genuinely are, meanwhile, do not need to be rid of appearances, because they can see that although things appear, they are not real at all. Having seen this, they realise that all phenomena are naturally and primordially unborn. The Sūtra Requested by

Anavatapta says:

Whatever was born from conditions was not born;

It is essentially devoid of birth.

Whatever relies on conditions is empty, it is taught.

Whoever knows emptiness is careful.

Also, in the Mother of the Victorious Ones, the Prajñāpāramitā, it says:

All phenomena are like illusions and dreams.

Nirvāṇa as well is like an illusion and dream.

If there is any dharma superior to nirvāṇa, it too is illusory and dreamlike.

Furthermore, from the King of Samādhi Sūtra:

Just like mirages, cities of gandharvas,

Like magical illusions, like dreams,

Conceptual meditation is essentially empty.

Understand all phenomena to be like this.

And in the Root Knowledge of the Middle Way it is taught:

Like a dream, like a magical display,

Like a city of gandharvas, just so—

Both arising and dwelling and, likewise,

Destruction—all were taught to be like this.

No matter how the Buddha's body appears to the mind, therefore, all acts of focusing on it are non-existent from the beginning. And all phenomena are the same, ourselves included. Whatever is one's own nature, is the nature of the Buddha. Whatever is the nature of the Buddha, that is also the nature of all phenomena. From the Sūtra of the Ornament of the Appearances of Wisdom:

Permanently unborn phenomena are the Tathāgata.

All phenomena are like the Sugata.

Those with childish minds who grasp at characteristics

Interact with phenomena that do not exist throughout all worlds.

From the Condensed Prajñāpāramitā:

Understand all sentient beings to be like oneself.

Understand all phenomena to be like sentient beings.

Not conceptualising things as either unborn or born—

This is the practice of the supreme Prajñāpāramitā.

And from the Root Knowledge of the Middle Way:

Whoever forms mental constructs about Buddha,

Who is beyond constructs and inexhaustible,

Will be brought down by their constructs.

They will not see the Tathāgata. Whatever is the nature of the Tathāgata,

That is the nature of these wanderers.

The Tathāgata is without self-nature.

These wanderers also lack self-nature.

In the natural state, the ultimate nature, all phenomena are perfectly equal in the dharmadhātu, the basic space of phenomena, that is beyond all the webs of mental constructs, such as the notions of being born, unborn, and so on. From the Sūtra Requested by Sāgaramati (Ocean of Intelligence):

This dharma is stainless, pure, virtuous, naturally luminous;

Like the sky, equal, and primordially unarisen.

Unborn, unarisen, without abiding, and without ceasing—

This is the victorious ones' stainless, unwavering seal.

From the Avataṃsaka Sūtra:

Fine and crystalline, the path of great sages,

Non-conceptual, not the conceived, difficult to look at.

Naturally peaceful, without ceasing, without arising,

It is realised by the wise who clearly understand.

Empty of essence, peaceful, devoid of suffering,

Free from the continuum, equal nirvāṇa,

Free from centre and extremes, inexpressible,

Free throughout the three times, like the sky.

From the Sūtra Spoken in the Presence of Noble Rāhula:

Inconceivable, inexpressible, the Prajñāpāramitā,

Unborn, unceasing, the nature of space,

Object of the wisdom of individual self-awareness—

To the mother of the victorious ones of the three times, I prostrate!

The protector Nāgārjuna taught:

Not known from other, peaceful, and

Not elaborated by elaborations,

Free from concepts, devoid of plurality—

That is the definition of suchness.

Accordingly, the yogi who resolves thusness—that which is beyond all expressions, elaborations, and objects of focus—at first by means of the samādhi that realises all phenomena to be like illusions rests in equanimity on the Tathāgata's illusory body. He or she should look at the body of the Tathāgata and then when listening to Dharma and so forth train in the manifestations of illusory objects of experience. If the yogi then rests in inexpressible equanimity, the emptiness that is to be individually recognised, in that manner he or she will attain the patience towards the dharma that is concordant with dharma. And owing to that there is no doubt that before long the yogi will attain in actuality the wisdom of the path of seeing. This is clearly explained in the pith instructions for taking into experience the meaning of the Samādhi in which the Present Buddha Abides Directly and the Same Arrangement Samādhi. Even those who are not able to practice like this should engage in the yoga of continually recalling the Teacher, Lord of the Sages, as is taught in the Treasury of Blessings. Bring to mind the visualisation for taking refuge and generating bodhicitta, and with a firm and confident pledge recite the following three times:

In the Buddha, the Dharma, and the supreme assembly

I take refuge until enlightenment.

By the merit of performing this sādhana and so forth

May I attain buddhahood for the benefit of beings.

After meditating on the four abodes of Brahma, from the illusory state of the unity of emptiness and interdependently-arisen appearances say:

Ah

Like the illusory display of the unity of unborn emptiness... etc.

Actualise the visualisation as it is described in the Treasury of Blessings chant text. Thinking that the Buddha is present in person, practice with longing and steady faith that by which the bodhisattvas, those expert in skilful means, gather together the accumulations of many aeons in a single instant of mind: the condensed key point that accumulates, purifies, and increases, the seven branches of homage, and the rest. To avoid squandering your hopes, supplicate the Buddha with confidence and make aspirations for the desired aims as taught in the root text.

Then, with one-pointed faith bow down to the buddha bhagavāns with as many bodies as there are motes of dust in the universe and make offerings with all appropriate gifts. With the one-pointed aspiration of thinking, “Until obtaining unsurpassable enlightenment, I and all sentient beings go for refuge!” recite the Buddha’s names with, “Guru, Teacher, Transcendent Conqueror...”, as many times as you can.

Finally, by reciting the dhāraṇī mantra (gzungs) in the manner of invoking the Tathāgata’s enlightened mindstream. Consider that light-rays shine out from the Tathāgata’s body and fill the entire expanse of space. Imagine that by dissolving into you and all sentient beings all obscurations and suffering are cleared away and you come to possess every happiness. All the excellent qualities of the Mahāyāna path, such as faith, dhāraṇī, samādhi, courage, supreme knowledge, and wisdom and the like, arise properly in your mindstream. You become someone with the fortune of attaining enlightenment, from the level of a non-returner up until final, unsurpassable great awakening. Recite the mantra as many times as you can.

From the Jewel Mound Sūtra’s eleventh, “Radiating Light” chapter:

Now, by the causes and conditions
Of inconceivable virtuous actions
I have completely abandoned all delusion
And accomplished manifold light-rays.

And:

By the power of non-doing
Lights of infinite colours stream out,
Fulfilling the hopes
Of those aspiring accordingly.

From a single ray of light two colours shine out, and so on. Thus, there are immeasurably different kinds of light-rays, all radiating: the light-rays Shining Clean Cloud, and Pristine Eyes, Pristine Ears, ...etc., up to Pristine Mind. Similarly, there are Pristine Form, etc., up to Pristine Phenomena; Pristine Earth, etc., up to Pristine Space; Pristine Aggregates, etc.; Pristine Truth etc.; Pristine Courage etc.; and those named after colours such as White, Yellow, etc.; as well as Supreme Excellent Quality, Nāga’s Splendour, Elephant’s Splendour, Prosperous Lion, Prosperous Supreme Nāga etc.; Tamed Nāga, Tamed Yaksa, etc.; Vajra Strength, Empty etc.; and Completely Pure Past Virtue, each arising individually.

The light-ray called Dharmatā makes ten million buddhafiels quake. The one called Taming Māras terrifies the māras. Holding in mind the name of the light-ray called Merit Victory-Banner overcomes harm. Holding in mind the name of the one called Mighty Victory-Banner overcomes enemies. Holding in mind the name of the one called Completely Pacifying Victory-Banner overcomes desire, and so on. Merely holding these names in mind is enough to overcome all faults, including sexual misconduct, corrupt discipline, and the like. Moreover, taking the name of any of the light-rays is also enough to perfect discipline, samādhi and so forth and annihilate all the afflictions such as delusion. Similarly, happiness is obtained, one is freed from anguish, transcends all mental constructs, and gives birth to excellent qualities such as knowing the three times.

Each light-ray, such as Sorrow-Free, has as well a retinue of eight thousand billion. In such ways it is said that by means of the different light-rays the Tathāgata has, the number of which goes beyond the

count of particles in the buddhafi elds, sentient beings are brought to fruition and their individual hopes are fulfilled completely.

In the bodhisattva piṭaka it also says:

The buddhas' infinite light,
A web of light beyond imagining,
Pervades an infinite ocean
Of buddhafi elds in all directions.

Furthermore, you should also consider the meaning of what is taught in the Avataṃsaka Sūtra and the "Excellent Splendour" chapter of the Precious Palm Tree Sūtra and similar texts.

In this context as well, by putting into practice in whatever way is appropriate the yogas of śamatha and vipaśyanā as taught above, you will accomplish something that is at least an approximation of genuine śamatha and vipaśyanā.

During a session, make maṇḍala offerings, praises and supplications, and dedicate the virtue and make different aspirations in whichever way is suitable. There is no need to request the Buddha to come and dissolve, since wherever you visualise the Buddha's body, he is there; in the space-like kāya of equanimity there is no coming, going, arising, or decreasing. You can recall the Buddha in any place or time.

In the breaks between sessions exert yourself in the sources of virtue as much as you can, by reading different sūtras, or doing prostrations, making offerings, circumambulating, and so forth. Even if you are unable to do any of these, recall the Buddha as much as you can and bring to mind repeatedly the concepts of impermanence, suffering, emptiness, and selflessness, as well as the concept of nirvāṇa, or peace.

When lying down, continue your practice for as long as you are not overwhelmed by sleep. When you do fall asleep visualise light radiating out from the Buddha's body and pervading everywhere, and meditate on the concept of light. From the dharma text known as the Completely Certain Meaning:

Bhikṣus, if you wonder how one attains the wisdom of seeing by training thoroughly in samādhi meditation, bhikṣus, the bhikṣu thoroughly takes hold of the concept of light and so on.... Bhikṣus, it is like this: for example, during the last spring moon the sky is cloudless, and on a cloudless day the sun's form appears completely pure, completely white, and luminous; it is not dark. Bhikṣus, likewise the bhikṣu thoroughly takes hold of the concept of light. He keeps it perfectly in mind. He perfectly encounters it. He perfectly realises it. Having truly abided in the concept of the sun and meditated on its light in the mind, just as in the day so also in the night, just as in the night so also in the day, just as early on so also late, just as late so also early on, just as below so also above, just as above so also below. Like that, with mind free from all divisions and cycles truly abiding in the concept of the sun he meditates on its light in the mind. If you cultivate this samādhi meditation at all times and deeply familiarise yourself with it, you will obtain the wisdom of seeing!

Likewise, constantly endeavour as much as you can in the practice of recollecting the Lord of Sages, and with sincere intentions dedicate all sources of virtue for the sake of unsurpassable perfect awakening. When you exert yourself in that way — resting in equanimity in the manner of the illusory relative and the absolute free from elaborations — your practice of śamatha and vipaśyanā will lead to the attainment of the extraordinary qualities of the path, such as seeing the Buddha, hearing the Dharma, and so forth. Even those who practice a mere semblance of this will gain all kinds of blessings and accomplishments. Wonderful signs, such as seeing the Tathāgata in dreams, will also arise. Moreover, with regard to good and bad signs in dreams, the Sūtra Called Accomplishing the Fourth Noble One says:

The Youthful Mañjuśrī said to the devaputra Bhadvika: "The four dreams of dusty obscurations are as follows: seeing a moon-disk inside a dusty well; seeing a moon-disk at

the bottom of a dirty pond or well; seeing a moon-disk in a sky obscured by large clouds; and seeing a moon-disk in a sky shrouded by smoke and clouds of dust.

“Moreover, the four dreams that correspond to karmic obscurations are: falling into an abyss from a huge precipice; approaching an undulating road; approaching a narrow road; and seeing polluted places and many frightening things.

“The four dreams that correspond to the obscurations of the afflictions are: being upset by fierce poison; hearing the sound of mostly ferocious wild animals; staying in a fraud’s home; and seeing one’s own body as filthy and wearing stained clothes.

“The four dreams that correspond to achieving the power of retention are: seeing a place full of all sorts of precious treasures; seeing a pond totally filled with blooming lotus flowers; finding a set of white clothes; and seeing a deity holding a parasol above the crown of one’s head.

“The four dreams that correspond to obtaining samādhi are: seeing a lovely girl adorned with fine jewellery offering scattered flowers; seeing a flock of white and grey geese in the sky hooting and then flying off; seeing the Tathāgata place his hand, beautified by many lights, on the top of one’s head; and seeing the Tathāgata sitting in a lotus flower in meditative concentration.

“The four dreams that correspond to seeing the Tathāgata are: seeing a moon-disk rising; seeing a sun-disk rising; seeing a blossoming lotus flower; and seeing Lord Brahmā in an extremely peaceful posture.

“The four dreams that correspond to the bodhisattva’s own qualities are: seeing a large sāla tree filled with all sorts of leaves, flowers, and fruits; seeing a bronze vessel filled with gold; seeing the face of the sky filled with parasols, victory-banners, and standards; and seeing a great cakravartin king.

“The four dreams that correspond to taming the māras are: seeing a great athlete defeating all other athletes, hoisting a standard, and going; seeing a great hero win a battle and leave; seeing someone being empowered as king; and seeing oneself in Bodhgaya taming the māras.

“The four dreams that correspond to the signs of a non-returner are: a white skull being tied on one’s head; making unstinting offerings; sitting on a large dharma seat; and seeing the Tathāgata staying in Bodhgaya and teaching the dharma.

“The four dreams that correspond to obtaining the essence of enlightenment are: seeing a vase; seeing a chicken encircled by Indian jays; witnessing all the trees rising up, bowing down, and making prostrations wherever you go; and seeing a vast golden light.”

Having also understood the good and bad signs of dreams as described, rely on the skilful means for clearing away faults and accomplishing excellent qualities. In [Buddha Vairocana’s] Chōkyi Gyamo it is taught that:

Signs of true purification through remorse are seeing the Buddha come, rub his hand on the crown of one’s head, and lights radiating out; and seeing flowers and so on.

In other sūtras it is also said that if you see lotus flowers in dreams your aim has been accomplished. From the Liberation Sūtra:

The dream signs of having purified negative actions are wanting to cross an enormous river and then going over a bridge, being washed, and rain falling on your body. These are all signs of complete purification. Joining and sitting in a row of many ordained saṅgha members, and entering a stūpa or temple and seeing all the images of the buddhas and bodhisattvas are signs of following in the footsteps of the Buddha and Dharma. If you dream of finding fruit and eating it, you will actualise the accomplishment of the fruits of excellent qualities in this life.

It is taught that just one such dream marks the purification of one of the five evil deeds of immediate

fruition, while five such dreams indicates the purification of all five evil deeds. This should also be understood according to the dreams chapter of the Jewel Mound Sūtra and other such texts.

Although there are many different bodhisattva practices for the time of death, including the eleven concepts taught in the sūtras, the crucial point is taught and contained in the Noble Wisdom of Passing Sūtra. There it is taught that at the time of death bodhisattvas meditate on the wisdom of passing as follows: whenever you think, “I am dying!” visualise the Guru, Lord of Sages, on the crown of your head and generate intense faith. Then think: “It is not only me: all sentient beings are subject to the law of death, no-one is exempt. Although we have repeatedly undergone countless births and deaths here in samsāra, we have only ever known the suffering of death and all these births have been entirely devoid of meaning. But now I will make sure that this present death of mine is meaningful!”

Having contemplated in this way, reflect that there is not a single conditioned phenomenon included within the internal or the external, or the past, present, or future, that is immune to impermanence, the nature of arising and ceasing, even for a single instant. Within the category of the conditioned there are those things whose continuum ceases after a short time, such as water bubbles and bolts of lightning, and there are also those whose continuum ceases after a much longer period of time, such as the realms of this world. But whether they abide for a long time or a short time, all conditioned things must cease in the end; there is not one that is unchanging. The entire world of the ‘vessel’ and its ‘contents’—the environment and its inhabitants—will also disintegrate, and if even the Tathāgata, the Transcendent Conqueror, demonstrated death in the manner of passing into nirvāṇa, what need is there to speak of the likes of us? As the Tathāgata said, “Everything conditioned is impermanent.”

“Not understanding the nature of conditioned things like this, being averse to separation and death and delighting in gathering and birth, sentient beings remain in samsāra, circling around again and again. Yet I shall take my own death when it comes as a teacher, a virtuous spiritual friend, and will realise from the depth of my heart how all conditioned things are impermanent! I will decide on this with certainty!” Think earnestly like this at the time of death: “In all future lifetimes too until I attain the essence of awakening, by understanding everything conditioned to be impermanent may I not become attached to conditioned objects of experience! Guru, Lord of Sages, victorious ones and your heirs, I supplicate you! Grant your blessings that it may be so!”

Then, as it is said in the Mahāyāna sūtra, the Noble Wisdom of Passing:

Since all phenomena are naturally pure,
Meditate on the concept of non-entities.
Fully endowed with bodhicitta,
Meditate on the concept of great compassion.
Since the nature is unseeable luminosity,
Meditate on not being attached to anything at all.
Mind is the cause for the arising of wisdom.
Do not search for buddha elsewhere.

First consider how the principle illustrated by one’s own death applies throughout the infinite reaches of space. Focus on all sentient beings, who cling to impermanent conditioned things as permanent and to painful samsāra as pleasure, and experience death and endless varieties of suffering. Generating a mind of great compassion, think: “In order to free them from the sufferings of birth, old age, sickness, and death and lead them to unsurpassable perfect awakening, may I become the protector of the three worlds, a buddha, a transcendent conqueror, and free all sentient beings from their endless suffering!” Then meditate on the concept of great compassion endowed with bodhicitta.

Similarly, when you examine all phenomena, as exemplified by this death, you find that they are by nature void, and yet, by conceptualising, through the force of mere imputation, we create happiness and suffering, benefit and harm. If these phenomena really existed, there would be no so-called death and suffering at all! Think: “All phenomena are unreal!” Decide that this is the case, and reflect.

Likewise, all these phenomena, including death, have no established identity whatsoever, yet like

illusory appearances their expression is completely unobstructed. When analysed, they cannot be expressed in terms of the extremes of existence or non-existence. They are naturally non-conceptual and luminous. Therefore, one's own mind that does not abide as any entity or non-conceptual thing whatsoever is primordially luminous; in the state of present direct awareness all the phenomena of samsāra and nirvāṇa are totally equal. Decide, therefore, that the enlightened mind of the Teacher, Lord of Sages, and your own mind are indivisible within the nature of mind, the state of self-existing wakefulness. If without getting distracted from that state you come to possess confidence and develop certainty in it, that is the realisation of the true nature of your own mind. Other than that there is no so-called 'buddha' whatsoever.

In that state there is neither death nor birth. Death and the like are mere concepts; in the truth of the innate nature of mind free from concepts, birth and death are not established in any way. If you were to pass away while resting evenly in such a state, you would be reborn in a buddhafiield without experiencing the deluded appearances of the intermediate state.

If you do not have that level of confidence however, but still remember only the Guru, Lord of Sages, at the time of death and throughout the intermediate state, without forgetting, then that will be enough to lead you to a pure realm. Moreover, no matter what terror and suffering you face in this life, if you remember the Buddha you will certainly be liberated from any trouble. Whatever happiness and excellent fortune you enjoy, know it to be the great kindness of the Buddha, and, visualising the sources of pleasure as an offering-cloud of Samantabhadra, present them to the Buddha.

Constantly reflect on the meaning of the three liberations and the six pāramitās and other topics the Buddha taught. With great compassion for all sentient beings generate the mind of supreme enlightenment and train as much as you can in the conduct of the bodhisattvas. Recalling the Teacher like this is extremely important, for it is by recalling the Buddha that we first set out on all the bodhisattva paths. It thus has immeasurable benefit, as it generates all the excellent qualities of the path.

These days, when everyone believes their own school's tenets to be the most important, only a few people pay much attention to the Teacher, the Lord of Sages. But anyone who has embraced these teachings and yet still has no notion of faith in the Teacher as supreme must surely lack intelligence. Why? Because it is solely due to the Teacher's compassion in demonstrating his enlightened deeds in this place and time for us wandering beings of the degenerate age that the teachings have appeared—and that means not only the three pitakas, but all the teachings, up to and including those of secret mantra Vajrayāna, the path that can bring about the unified state of no-more learning in one short lifetime in this degenerate age. It is also solely due to his compassion that there are beings who hold these teachings, those who have entered the teachings of sūtra and mantra, the saṅgha of noble beings. If the Teacher had not radiated the light of the teachings here in this realm at this time, we would not hear even so much as the sound of the Three Jewels. What need to speak then of practicing the paths of sūtra and mantra? Therefore, whichever tradition we practice, whether it is from the New Schools or the Old School, to have the intense faith that holds the Teacher as especially important is indispensable at all times. We must therefore be especially devoted to the Teacher and persevere in this form of yoga! Some others may think, "Even if it is not the Teacher, Lord of Sages, but the Buddha in another form, as a renunciate free from attachment, for example, or a peaceful or wrathful vidam and so on, what difference does it make as long as we feel devotion?" Essentially there is no difference, since all Buddhas are the wisdom kāya, perfect equality, and there is no distinction in their qualities of abandonment and realisation. Yet from the perspective of the relative level of mere appearances it is due to the Teacher's compassion that the visualisations and recitations of the vidam deities of the different schools in all their peaceful and wrathful forms and the paths and trainings emerged in the first place.

Therefore, just as the source of all the water in the world is Lake Mānasarovar, all appearances of the greater and lesser teachings of the practices of the paths of sūtra and mantra are certainly a result of this

Teacher's compassion. Just as when you supplicate your own root guru you receive more blessings than by supplicating other gurus, because of the power of your connection, supplicating the Teacher, Lord of Sages, brings swifter blessings than supplicating any other buddha.

You might then wonder, "Well, does that mean I should focus solely on the Lord of Sages, and stop supplicating other buddhas?" But it is not like that: understand that whichever yidam you might supplicate is no different in reality from the Teacher, Lord of Sages, since it is taught that all buddhas are equal in the dharmakāya. You must understand this point. Think: "The supreme Teacher, manifesting different bodily appearances as this and that yidam deity, showed himself to be a refuge and friend to us all, the wandering beings of this degenerate age." If you nevertheless separate the Teacher and your yidam, and, giving up on the Teacher, believe the yidam to be somehow separate, this will make it difficult for accomplishments to arise.

Similarly, in the tradition of unsurpassable secret mantra, the guru who is the vajra master is in essence inseparable from all the buddhas of the three times. The guru's manifestation is of even greater kindness than the buddhas of the three times, since without the guru, even though the buddhas of the three times are present, you will not receive blessings and accomplishments. This means that even if you make an offering to just a single pore of the guru's body it is much more noble than making offerings to the buddhas of the three times. All the vajra tantra scriptures state repeatedly that simply by succeeding in pleasing the guru, you will please all the buddhas of the three times and receive their blessings. For these reasons, the guru is known as the complete embodiment of the Three Jewels, or as the Fourth Jewel. Understand, therefore, that the guru is more powerful than the buddhas of past, present and future.

You might wonder if there is anything superior to guru yoga and such practices. The answer is that there certainly is not. Although in the tradition of secret mantra there is no practice for entering the door of blessings, no dharma superior to the profound path of guru yoga, the guru who teaches us the secret mantra is in fact an emanation of the Teacher, the Lord of Sages. In the section of sūtras about nirvāṇa it is said:

Do not despair, Ānanda.

Do not lament, Ānanda.

In the future,

I will manifest as virtuous spiritual friends

And act for your own and others' benefit.

Since they have practiced the paths of sūtra and mantra that were taught out of the compassion of the Teacher, the Lord of Sages, the gurus are also offspring born from Śākyamuni's speech. The guru endowed with experience and realisation is the heart-son (or heart-daughter) who has received the blessings of the relative and absolute bodhicitta of the Teacher's enlightened mindstream. This means that whatever guru yoga you practice, you must understand the guru to be inseparable from the Teacher, Lord of Sages. Not only that, you must understand that the guru is not separate from whichever yidam you meditate on. The guru and yidam are not separate from each other; nor are they separate from all the buddhas of the three times. In those who have concepts of high and low, or adopting and abandoning with regard to the buddhas, accomplishments will not arise.

Acknowledge the great kindness of the Teacher of the past and be supremely devoted to him. Having understood the gurus, yidams and so on to be inseparable from Śākyamuni, whichever yoga of visualisation and recitation you practice, be it the guru or yidam, it is certain that you will gain great accomplishments.

When you visualise and recite based on the practice of recollecting the Lord of Sages, then, you must visualise and recite with the devotion of understanding that not only the sublime gurus who teach the Dharma of sūtra and mantra, but all the Three Jewels of the three times too are actually embodied within the Buddha. Although here in the context of sūtra, merely recollecting the Buddha is considered most important, it is also quite alright to meditate on the Buddha as being indivisible from the guru. Yet

this is not absolutely necessary, because simply recalling the Buddha will accomplish the aim.

When reciting the Buddha's names, Buddha is called 'Guru, Teacher', because Buddha is the guru of the three worlds. That is why it is an appropriate name for the Buddha, but if you understand it as a sign that the Buddha is indivisible from whichever guru you have faith in that is also alright.

In any case, even if you practice in the manner of guru yoga in which the guru himself, the source of the unsurpassable secret mantra tradition, is in the form of the Lord of Sages, do as explained above. Since the guru him- or herself is the essential embodiment of all the buddhas, then whichever buddha you meditate on, and in whichever form, there is no contradiction. It is in the nature of things that blessings too will arise in accordance with your own devotion.

This was adapted from the White Lotus, the supportive teaching for the Treasury of Blessings, the instructions of the Gentle Protector (Mañjuśrī), Mipham Rinpoche, without corrupting either the words or the meaning. It is said that it is very good for those who do not know how to practice Mahāmudrā and Dzogchen to practice in accord with these teachings. This was heard [by Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche] from Rigdzin Tekchok (Vidyādhara of the Supreme Vehicle), a direct disciple of the omniscient guru. May virtue and excellence flourish!