

INTRODUCTION TO THE EXTRAORDINARY INNER PRELIMINARY PRACTICES

We have now reached the extraordinary inner preliminary practices. Patrul Rinpoche begins with paying homage to his guru Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu by explaining his superior qualities. After that he goes on to briefly explain the main practices themselves.

*Crowned with the Three Jewels, the outer refuge,
He truly realized the Three Roots, the inner refuge;
He made manifest the Three Kayas, the ultimate refuge.
At the feet of my peerless guru, I bow down.*

The Three Jewels of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha comprise the outer refuge, and are the objects of refuge of all the vehicles of Buddhism. How do we take refuge in them? The Buddha is the one who shows us the path to liberation. The Dharma – the Buddha’s teaching – is the actual path itself. The practitioners of the Buddha’s teaching are called Sangha. They are our friends for the purpose of liberation. With tremendous faith and devotion we take refuge in these three outer refuges as the teacher, the path, and the companions. Just like Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu we should carry the Three Jewels like a crown upon our heads at all times and in all situations.

The inner objects of refuge are the Three Roots: the lama, the yidam and the dakini. The guru is the root of blessings; the yidam is the root of accomplishment; and the dakini is the root of enlightened activities. These three should be accomplished with body, speech, and mind. This is how Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu took the inner refuge.

The outer and inner objects of refuge can be called relative (*drang don*), or symbolic refuge. The ultimate refuge means the final refuge, and can be called the definitive refuge (*nges don*).

The Three Kayas constitute the absolute ultimate refuge. The essence, the expanse of emptiness, is the aspect of Dharmakaya. The nature is clarity, the aspect of Sambhogakaya. The compassionate responsiveness is the aspect of Nirmanakaya. These three – essence, nature and compassionate responsiveness – are the absolute ultimate objects of refuge and should be actualized in oneself. This is the manner of final refuge. Patrul Rinpoche’s root guru, Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu, recognized the primordial nature of his mind as the Three Kayas from the very beginning. Ordinary people do not do this, and are thus confused.

Praising these qualities of his root guru, Patrul Rinpoche concludes his prayer by saying, "At the feet of my peerless guru, I bow down."

After supplicating his root guru, Patrul Rinpoche goes on to provide an overview of the extraordinary inner preliminary practices

The second part, the extraordinary inner preliminary practices, covers the following:

1. Taking refuge – the cornerstone of all paths.
2. Arousing bodhicitta – the mind set on supreme enlightenment – of the Great Vehicle, the Mahayana.
3. Visualization and recitation of Vajrasattva to cleanse all unfavorable conditions of negativity.
4. Offering the mandala to accumulate favorable conditions.
5. Destroying the four demons¹ with one cut, the ascetics' method for accumulating merit.
6. Guru yoga, the ultimate method for arousing the wisdom realization in the mindstream.

Taking Refuge

Taking refuge is the cornerstone of whatever vehicle you want to practice. From the lower vehicles up to the highest level of Dzogpa Chenpo, the Great Perfection, the cornerstone is refuge. All our ritual practices, whether Sutra or Tantra, including both the outer and the inner tantras, must begin with the ground of refuge. Without taking refuge there is no way to practice the lower vehicle of the Sravakas or the higher vehicle of Dzogpa Chenpo. All vehicles and paths in Buddhism must be based on taking refuge.

Arousing Bodhicitta

The great vehicle practice of arousing bodhicitta is not contained in all the vehicles, but must be included in all aspects of the great vehicle, the Mahayana and Vajrayana. Both Tantra and Sutra fall within the great vehicle, which includes all paths from Prajnaparamita to Dzogpa Chenpo, and this vehicle cannot be practiced without embracing bodhicitta.

Even if someone is practicing Prajnaparamita, unless they embrace

¹ The four demons represent the obstacles to accomplishing the path.

bodhicitta, we cannot say that he or she is practicing the great vehicle. Without embracing bodhicitta, even someone practicing Trekchod or Tögal cannot be considered a practitioner of the great vehicle. This is true even though Dzogchen goes beyond the great vehicle, being the pinnacle of all vehicles. For Dzogchen practice, bodhicitta must be embraced. On the other hand, even if we do only one prostration, but embrace it with bodhicitta, we can consider this a practice of the great vehicle.

Whether one is practicing the lower vehicle or the greater vehicle is determined by whether or not bodhicitta is embraced. Practices of the great vehicle all must involve arousing bodhicitta.

Visualization and Recitation of Vajrasattva

The main obstacles to wisdom realization are obscurations arising from negative actions (*sdig sgrib*). The special realization of Dzogchen cannot arise for one who has negative obscurations, and so initially they must be cleansed.

Many methods can be used for such purification. The visualization and recitation of Vajrasattva is not the only practice for cleansing obscurations. Virtue of all kinds acts as an antidote to negativity. Whatever virtuous practice we do that is embraced with the four supports² complete becomes an antidote to negative obscuration. However, according to this text, the practice of Vajrasattva is the supreme, easiest, and fastest method for purifying all negativity, leaving none remaining.

As I already taught, without the four supports not all accumulated virtue can become the cause for purifying negativity. However, a practice that is truly embraced by arousing bodhicitta acts as an antidote to negativity, and it is not necessary to complete all four supports. Likewise, the highest view³ arising in the mind serves as an antidote to negativity, and the four supports need not be completed. In both these cases, the obscuration is completely purified, with nothing remaining. Other than these, no matter what merit you have accumulated, the four supports are required for this merit to become an antidote to obscuration. Without one of these three – arousing bodhicitta, the highest view, or the four supports – accumulated

2 The four supports are: 1) the object of confession, 2) the power of regret, 3) the power of vowing never to commit these faults again, and 4) the power of merit as an antidote.

3 The “highest view” generally refers to the view of Madhyamaka, Mahamudra, and Dzogchen.

virtue will not act as an antidote to negative obscuration.

If negative obscuration remains while merit is accumulated, the positive result of the accumulated merit is rebirth in an excellent body in a higher realm. The remaining negativity will cause rebirth in the three lower realms. A person who accumulates both merit and negativity will sometimes experience comfort and happiness in his body and mind, and will sometimes experience discomfort such as illness and harm from negative forces.

All accumulated merit thus is not an antidote to negative obscuration, but if the four supports are complete, any kind of merit – whether major or minor – acts as an antidote, and can cleanse all obscurations. Whatever virtuous actions you perform – prostrations, circumambulation, practicing generosity, and so on – become an antidote to negativity if the four supports are complete. Otherwise they will not. If the merit does not become the antidote to negativity, then both virtue and nonvirtue remain in the mindstream. Since karma, the cause and effect of action, is undeceiving and unfailing, sooner or later the result of unwanted unhappiness and suffering will occur.

When glorious Vajrasattva was on the path of learning, he aroused bodhicitta specifically for the purpose of cleansing the negativity of all sentient beings. Because of this, visualizing Vajrasattva and reciting his mantra is a more powerful method of purifying negativity than the practice of other deities. That is why the practice of Vajrasattva is included here.

Offering the Mandala

The positive circumstance of accumulating extremely great merit is necessary for the special wisdom realization to arise in our minds. If someone has not accumulated merit, the realization will never arise regardless of the efforts he makes.

To grow a sprout from a seed, negative conditions must be eliminated, and positive conditions such as fertilizer, water, warmth, and sunshine should be promoted. Simply clearing up the negative conditions is not enough for the sprout to grow; positive conditions are also required. Likewise, if the positive conditions are complete, but the negative conditions have not been eliminated, the sprout also will not grow. In the same way, for the wisdom realization to arise, we need to both eliminate negative conditions and accumulate extremely great positive merit. Simply accumulating merit will not bring about the wisdom realization in a mind obscured by negativity,

and simply purifying negativity without accumulating merit will not lead to the realization.

The seven branches are all methods for accumulating merit. These include paying homage, making offerings, cleansing negativity, rejoicing in the merit of others, supplicating the buddhas and bodhisattvas not to remain in the state of peace, and asking the buddhas and bodhisattvas to turn the wheel of Dharma. Finally, the root of all merit is dedicating the merit to all sentient beings for the purpose of achieving enlightenment.

Among these methods, the mandala offering is the easiest, enabling the accumulation of extremely great merit within a short time. Mandala offering is a special method for accumulating merit, and therefore is included here.

During the practice of mandala offering, we place heaps on the mandala plate to symbolize the objects being visualized and offered. The main thing is the visualization, and it must be firm. We visualize the golden ground, the four continents, the small continents, the seven precious objects, the wealth and prosperity of the realms of gods and humans, and so on. The shape, color, size, and contents should be visualized clearly, without being mixed up.

This visualization is not something difficult to obtain, unlike actual gold or wealth. Making offerings of gold, silver, and precious things accumulates great merit, but major effort and difficulty is required to acquire such wealth. No such difficulties of body and speech are required to offer the mandala. It can be accomplished solely by mental visualization, and the merit accumulated can be greater than offering actual gold and silver.

The teaching on the mandala offering explains how to place the heaps on the mandala plate, but this does not accumulate the merit. The main point is the form visualization, the actual understanding of what putting the heaps symbolizes. Only then can great merit be accumulated.

The Ascetic's Accumulation of Merit

“*Kusali*” refers to those who are free from worldly action. People with no wealth and prosperity to offer, who are not at all involved in worldly activities, accumulate merit by offering their own bodies through a special visualization. The practice is called “*Chod*,” which means “to cut.” This accumulates vast merit by destroying the four demons, the Maras, at a single stroke.

Guru Yoga

Guru Yoga is the ultimate method for bringing about the arising of the wisdom realization in our mindstream. The general methods for developing the wisdom realization are the outer preliminary practices, the four thoughts that turn the mind. The extraordinary inner preliminary practices, taking refuge and arousing bodhicitta, purifying negative obscurations through the visualization and recitation of Vajrasattva, making mandala offerings, and so on, are all also methods for bring forth the wisdom realization. However, the pinnacle of methods to cause wisdom realization to arise in our minds is guru yoga. There is nothing greater than this.

Without relying on guru yoga, the purification of negative obscurations and the accumulation of merit alone can never bring about the special wisdom realization. “Guru” means the one who personally gives us empowerments, explains the Tantra, and gives pith instructions. Guru yoga means one-pointedly supplicating that particular person. We cannot consider Lord Buddha or deities like Manjushri, Avalokiteshvara, Vajrapani, and so on as our guru.

Likewise, supplicating Guru Rinpoche is not guru yoga. During the guru yoga practice, we visualize Guru Rinpoche and recite his mantra, the Vajra Guru mantra. This is to generate the faith of seeing our root guru in the form of a buddha rather than an ordinary person. We visualize him or her as a buddha, Guru Rinpoche, or one of the yidam deities and recite their particular mantra. Our root guru is in fact inseparable from the buddhas. The qualities of abandonment and realization of our root guru and that of the buddhas, such as Manjushri and so on, are exactly the same. If we are seeing our root guru as Manjushri, we recite the mantra OM AH RA PA TSA NA DHIH. If we are visualizing him as Guru Rinpoche, we recite the Vajra Guru mantra. The mantras are the essence of the yidam deities.

With great faith and devotion to our guru as Guru Rinpoche, Manjushri, or Avalokiteshvara, we visualize their forms. In reality, guru yoga is supplicating our own root guru, meditating on our root guru, receiving the blessing of his body, speech and mind from his three places,⁴ and mingling his mind and qualities with our own. There is no other guru yoga than this at all. Separating our root guru from the other deities is not the practice of guru yoga, and neither is simply supplicating Guru Rinpoche or another deity.

4 The three places are the forehead, the throat and the heart.

1. TAKING REFUGE, THE CORNERSTONE OF ALL PATHS

Taking refuge is the cornerstone of all paths, and is explained in three parts: the different ways of taking refuge, the manner of taking refuge, and the precepts and benefits of taking refuge.

THE DIFFERENT WAYS OF TAKING REFUGE

First, I will teach on the different ways of taking refuge. In general, refuge opens the door for all the kinds of Buddhism. The initial entrance to Dharma is refuge. Without refuge, no one can practice Buddhism.

Faith

Faith is the entrance to refuge, and its main root. If you have faith in the Three Jewels, you can take refuge; without such faith, you cannot. As Patrul Rinpoche says:

At the outset, developing firm faith in your mindstream is crucial for taking refuge.

To take refuge you must first develop the firm and confident faith that the Three Jewels are completely undecieving. Firm faith means confident faith. Faith can be classified into three categories: clear faith, aspiring faith, and confident faith. Clear faith and aspiring faith are not completely firm, but confident faith will never change at all. Such unchangeable confident faith is the entrance to refuge and must be developed.

Clear faith

Visiting monasteries that have many representations of the body, speech, and mind of the buddhas, or meeting noble lamas, spiritual friends, and other supreme beings, or hearing about their qualities and personal histories, you instantly think of their immense compassion, a pure mind arises, and faith is born. This is called clear faith.

When we visit a monastery with many representations of Buddhas, we experience immense faith. Our minds become joyful, the hair on our bodies stands on end, tears well up in our eyes, and with the mouth we say, "I take refuge." This occurs naturally, and is the arising of clear faith. Similarly, encountering buddhas, noble bodhisattvas, one's own root guru and spiritual friends, and other supreme individuals leads to the same experiences of clear

faith. We automatically say, “You have great compassion. I take refuge in you.” We say these things because of the great joy that arises in our minds. This feeling of great joy is called clear faith.

Aspiring faith

Hearing about the suffering of samsara and the lower realms, and so on, the wish to be free from that suffering is born. Hearing of the happiness of liberation and the higher realms, the wish to attain these is born. Hearing about the benefits of virtue we want to accomplish it. Seeing the faults of nonvirtue, we want to avoid it. These thoughts are aspiring faith.

These kind of thoughts often arise when the outer preliminary practices are explained. The nature of samsara is generally suffering, and specific kinds of suffering are encountered wherever one is born within the six realms. None of these realms is beyond suffering. Overall, we want to be liberated from samsara, and in particular we want to be freed from the lower realms. We think we must avoid the three lower realms. This is called aspiring faith.

Hearing about the qualities of the higher realms and of the enlightened ones, and wanting to achieve these qualities, is also aspiring faith. When the teachings on the cause and effect of action, and the teachings on the benefits of virtue for this life and the next life are being explained, we want to accumulate merit. This can also be considered to be aspiring faith. When the faults of negativity – the suffering of this life and the next life – are explained, the thought that there is no other choice except to avoid all nonvirtue is aspiring faith as well. Aspiring faith arises for these reasons.

Confident faith

Understanding from the depths of our hearts the extraordinary qualities and blessings of the Three Jewels is confident faith. It is understanding that at all times and in all circumstances the Three Jewels are the undeceiving refuge.

Confident faith is superior to aspiring faith. Aspiring faith arises from minor causes: seeing the suffering of samsara and wanting to avoid it, seeing the benefits of virtue and wanting to accumulate it, seeing the higher realms and liberation and wanting to achieve them, and seeing the suffering of the lower realms and wanting to avoid it. These factors do not bring about confident faith.

To generate confident faith we must understand all the supreme qualities

of the Three Jewels, and that they are undeceiving. Recognizing that the Three Jewels have never deceived, that this has not happened in the past or present, and will not occur in the future, is called confident faith, a faith that is born of reason. Such faith is unchanging.

Understanding the extraordinary qualities and blessings of the Three Jewels, and supplicating them, their blessings will come. The special wisdom realization taking birth in our mindstream is the blessing of the Three Jewels. The cause – the arising of the paths of the higher and lower vehicles in our mindstreams – is the blessing of the Three Jewels, and the result of being born in the higher realms and achieving liberation is also the blessing of the Three Jewels. Understanding this develops faith in the undeceiving nature of the Three Jewels within the inner mind, and we think of the Three Jewels as the sole source of refuge for all times and all situations.

We should always keep the Three Jewels in our minds, and when we fall ill or are harmed by negative forces, we must supplicate the Three Jewels one-pointedly. We should develop confidence in our minds that the blessings, compassion and power of the Three Jewels will come to us. This can immediately eliminate the present illness and negative forces. We should completely rely upon the Three Jewels. From now until the achievement of enlightenment, we will sometimes suffer and sometimes experience happiness. When we are happy, we should have the confidence that this is the blessing of the Three Jewels.

Our nonvirtue could lead to birth in the lower three realms where we will suffer. At that time, if we supplicate one-pointedly to the Three Jewels, we will be able to escape from that suffering. We must develop in our minds the thought that when we are suffering we will never seek any support and refuge other than the Three Jewels. Whether we die or whatever we suffer, be it illness, heat, or anything else, we should have no doubt that the blessing of the Three Jewels is undeceiving and by supplicating them we can escape from the suffering.

We must think, “During times of happiness or of suffering, I will never take refuge elsewhere than in the Three Jewels.” Confident faith is the total trust that the Three Jewels alone are the only source of refuge.

Sometimes when we are ill, we rely on the Three Jewels and supplicate them, but also think we should take medicine to cure our illness. Seeking other kinds of support like this will never bring about confident faith. If we really had confident faith, when we became ill we would not rely on medicine or other remedies or methods. Confident faith is never seeking

other kinds of refuge. Orgyen Rinpoche said:

*With the total trust of confident faith, blessings can enter you;
If the mind is free from doubt, whatever you wish will be accomplished.*

If we truly had confident faith, all illness would be eliminated by the blessing of the Three Jewels, we would always escape harm from negative forces, and we would be free from all unwanted experiences. The blessings of the Three Jewels enter into those with confident faith. Having some, but not total confident faith, people may take refuge in the Three Jewels as well as in medicine, divination, and astrology when they become ill. With truly confident faith, we would expect the Three Jewels to clear all obstacles, both temporary and ultimate. That we do not look only to the Three Jewels is a sign of lack of faith. Whatever action we begin, we must start with full confidence. In that case, everything that we want will be achieved. One who has doubts will be unable to fully accomplish his wishes.

The benefits of faith

People with faith have the quality of virtue. Without faith, positive virtuous action will not take place. Faith is like a seed for developing all positive qualities of the path and the result. If there is no faith it is as though that seed had been burned. A burned seed will never sprout, even if given water and fertilizer. Likewise, if we lack confident faith in the Three Jewels, the fruit of prostrations, circumambulation, recitation and so on will never ripen. As the sutras teach:

*In people who do not have faith
Positive qualities will not arise;
From a seed which has been burned
Green sprouts will never come.*

If you are lacking faith, no matter what effort you put into your Dharma activities, whether you are staying in retreat, practicing recitations, or carrying out other virtue, you will never achieve the result. Thus it is said that faith is the most important of the seven noble riches. These seven are: faith, discipline, modesty, generosity, learning, a liberated mindstream, and wisdom. Likewise, the precious wheel is the greatest of the seven royal possessions of the universal monarch.⁵ Those with the precious wheel of

⁵ These are the precious wheel, the precious jewel, the precious queen, the precious householder, the precious elephant, the precious horse, and the precious general.

faith always engage in virtuous activity continuously, day and night, without a break. They never become involved in nonvirtuous activity.

*The precious wheel of faith
Day and night travels along the road of virtue.*

Faith is the most supreme of all the riches of the noble ones. Like a treasure, it is the source of inexhaustible qualities of positive virtue. For one with faith the qualities of virtue automatically arise at all times and in all situations, making faith an inexhaustible treasure.

Like legs, faith carries us along the path to liberation. When travelling somewhere, we need legs to continue on our way. Likewise, we need faith to progress along the path to the state of liberation. With faith, we have legs for this journey; lacking faith, we do not.

Like arms, faith gathers all positive virtue into our minds. We use our arms to gather ordinary wealth and resources. Faith is what gathers all the positive virtues. For one with faith, positive virtues automatically accumulate. Therefore:

*Faith is the greatest wealth and treasure, the best of legs;
Like arms, it is the root of gathering virtue.*

Although the compassion and blessings of the Three Jewels are inconceivable, their entry into our mindstreams depends entirely on faith and devotion.

The Three Jewels have immense compassion, blessings and power, sufficient to liberate at once all three realms of sentient beings,⁶ without leaving a single being behind. Although the buddhas have these tremendous qualities, they must reach the sentient beings. Faith and devotion on the path are the means through which the compassion, blessings, and power reach us. With faith and devotion, the compassion, blessings, and power of the Three Jewels can enter into us and liberate us. We become their disciples. If we are not diligent in accumulating positive virtue, the power of the Three Jewels makes no difference. Without faith, diligence, and the accumulation of virtue, the blessings of the Three Jewels cannot enter into our minds, and we will continue to suffer in samsara, unable to escape.

Having superior faith and devotion, you will receive equally superior compassion and blessings from your teacher and the Three Jewels.

Having moderate faith and devotion, you will receive moderate

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The form realm, the formless realm and the desire realm.

compassion and blessings from your teacher and the Three Jewels. Having minor faith and devotion, you will receive only minor compassion and blessings from your teacher and the Three Jewels. With no faith and devotion at all, you will receive nothing.

As an example from the past, Jetsun Milarepa achieved the level of unification with Vajradhara in one lifetime and one body. This resulted from having the greatest degree of faith and devotion in his mindstream. Lacking that kind of supreme faith and devotion, but still having moderate faith and devotion, in the next life we will be born in a good situation, and will attain liberation. If our devotion to the Three Jewels is only minor, the result will be freedom from negative circumstances, illness, and harm from negative forces in this life. In the next life we will merely escape from the three lower realms, with no result of omniscience or liberation. For one who has no faith at all, the compassion and blessings of the Three Jewels can never come.

Lacking faith, even if you meet the Buddha in person and he accepts you as a disciple there will be no benefit.

For the Buddha's compassion and blessings to reach us, we must have faith. Without faith, even if we met the Buddha, he would be completely unable to benefit us. Patrul Rinpoche has already recounted the story of Sunaksatra. He served as Lord Buddha's personal attendant, but nevertheless had no faith in him. The Buddha's blessings could not touch him, and after his death, he was reborn as a hungry ghost. The same was true for the Buddha's cousin Devadatta. He knew the actual Buddha, but had not the tiniest faith in him. In front of the Buddha the earth opened up and he fell into the hell of ceaseless torment.

If you have faith and devotion within your mind and supplicate the Buddha, he is there bestowing his blessings, even now.

Buddha Shakyamuni entered nirvana about 2500 years ago, but if you have the highest degree of faith in him, he is right before you, even these days. He is not merely abiding there; he is blessing you, taking care of you. The Buddha's compassion is not near or far. It is said:

*The Buddha is in front
Of whoever thinks of him with faith,
And will bestow empowerments and blessings.*

The Buddha will actually remain in front of anyone who visualizes with devotion that the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions are there

before him. We are like blind people and cannot see the real body, but this does not mean that the body is not there. Although we cannot see him in actuality, the Buddha can come before us, bless us in person, and bestow empowerments. He will cause the special wisdom realization and the path of liberation to arise, as well all the paths of omniscience.

Likewise, Guru Rinpoche, the great master of Orgyen says:

*For men and women with faith in me,
I, Padmasambhava, have never gone anywhere, and sleep by their door.
My life has no death.
Each person with faith has a Padmasambhava in front of him.*

Guru Rinpoche attained the level of an immortal vidyadhara, a knowledge holder. He is beyond all birth, death, and aging. In front of a hundred people with faith will be a hundred Guru Rinpoches. If a hundred thousand faithful disciples gather, at a single time there will be a hundred thousand Guru Rinpoches. We do not believe that Guru Rinpoche is living here; we think he departed for the country of the rakshasas in the southwest. This is not the case, however. Guru Rinpoche has not gone anywhere. He remains in front of any person with faith. Because we are like the blind, we cannot see him personally.

The power of faith

For someone who has confident faith, the compassion and blessings of the Buddha can be present anywhere, not only in human beings, but also in nonliving things.

It is said that an old woman with faith became enlightened by a dog's tooth. In the past there lived an old woman and her son, a trader who often travelled to India on business. The old mother said, "Bodh Gaya in India is the place where the perfectly enlightened Buddha came from. Bring me something special from India I can use as a support for my prostrations." Although she asked many times, the son forgot and didn't bring anything.

Once, as he was preparing to travel again to India, she said, "This time if you do not bring me a support for my prostrations, I will kill myself in front of you." The son went to India, finished his business, and returned home, again forgetting. He remembered her words as he was nearing their house.

"Now what can I do? I haven't brought my mother anything for her

prostrations. If I arrive home empty-handed she'll kill herself."

Looking to the left and right, he saw the skull of a dog off to the side. He pulled out one of the teeth and wrapped it in silk. Reaching home, he gave it to his mother. "This is a canine tooth of the Buddha. You can use it as a support for your prayers."

Believing that the dog's tooth was actually the tooth of the Buddha, she generated great faith in it, making prostrations and offerings to it all the time. Many *ringsel*⁷ came from that dog's tooth, and when the old woman died she was surrounded by a canopy of rainbow light, along with other signs of accomplishment.

The dog's tooth had no blessings, but because of the power of the old woman's great faith, she believed it actually was the tooth of the Buddha. As a result, the Buddha's blessings entered the dog's tooth and it became no different from an actual tooth of the Buddha.

In another story, in Kongpo province lived a simple man who came to be called Jowo Ben. He went to see the great Jowo Rinpoche in Lhasa. When he arrived before the statue, there was no temple keeper or anyone else around. Seeing the food offerings and butter lamps, he thought that Jowo Rinpoche must be dipping pieces of the food offerings in the butter of the lamps and eating them, and that the lamps were burning to keep the butter from hardening.

"I should also eat, just as Jowo does," he thought. Taking a piece of the food offering, he dipped it into the butter and ate some. He looked at the Jowo's face. "You keep smiling even when the dogs take the ritual offerings. Even when the wind blows the butter lamps, you still smile. You're an excellent lama. I will leave my boots with you. Please keep them for me while I walk around you." Taking off his boots, he put them in front of the statue.⁸

When he went to make his circumambulations, the temple keeper came back. As he was about to throw out the boots, Jowo Rinpoche spoke. "Kongpo Ben left those with me. Don't toss them out."

Later Ben returned and took his boots. "You are what is called a good lama," he said. "Next year, come to our place. I'll kill an old pig, and cook its flesh. With some old barley, I'll brew some beer. I'll be waiting for you."

7 Ringsel are tiny round pearl-like objects that emerge from the relics of realized masters.

8 Eating the offerings and putting his boots in front of the Jowo would normally be seriously sacrilegious acts.

“I’ll come,” said the Jowo.

Ben returned home and told his wife, “I’ve invited Jowo Rinpoche to visit us. I’m not sure when he is coming, so don’t forget to watch for him.

A year passed and one day when Ben’s wife went to fetch water she clearly saw the reflection of Jowo’s image in the river. She immediately rushed home and said, “There is something in the river. I wonder if it’s the guest you invited.”

Ben ran quickly and saw Jowo Rinpoche shining in the river. “Jowo must have fallen into the water,” he thought, and jumped in. Grabbing at the Jowo’s image, he found he could actually take hold of it and bring it with him.

As they were going toward Ben’s home, they reached a large boulder by the path. “I do not enter the homes of laypeople,” the Jowo said. Not wanting to proceed further, he dissolved into the stone.

This place, where the Jowo appeared on its own, is called the Rock Jowo, and the water where the image of the Jowo appeared is called the Water Jowo. Even today it is said that their blessing is equal to the Jowo in Lhasa and everyone does prostrations and makes offerings there.

Once again, it was due to the power of Ben’s firm faith that the compassion of the Buddha entered him.

The signs of compassion and blessings entering into nonliving things are the relics coming from the dog’s tooth, Buddha’s blessing entering the water so the image of the Jowo appeared in the river, and the blessing entering the stone so the actual body of the Buddha naturally appeared. This is the result of the old woman and Jowo Ben having confident and unshakable faith in their mindstreams. Such confident and unshakable faith enables the blessings of the Buddha to enter into nonliving things and come to us. Similarly, the Buddha’s compassion and blessings can enter human beings and bless them. The root of blessing depends upon faith.

Ben ate butter from the butter lamps and food from the offerings, taking the property offered to an object of worship. While this is considered one of the five secondary sins of immediate retribution, he did not accumulate this nonvirtue. Because of his confident faith, eating the butter and offering cakes caused blessings to enter into him. Ben also put his boots in front of the Jowo, another highly inappropriate act, which would normally accumulate nonvirtue. However, his confident faith made this too a cause

for accumulating merit. The root cause was his firm faith.

Patrul Rinpoche continues:

More than that, actually realizing the absolute truth of the natural state also depends on faith alone.

We think that bringing forth the Dzogchen realization of the meaning of the natural state depends upon relying on an excellent lama, and striving diligently in meditation. We don't understand that the special wisdom realization of the meaning of the natural state depends on the faith and devotion of seeing our root guru as an actual buddha.

Without faith and devotion, even seeing one's guru as an actual buddha will not bring about the special wisdom realization, regardless of whatever efforts one might make. However, one who has strong faith and devotion, and sees his root guru as an actual buddha, will receive the blessing even if the guru does not have the quality of wisdom realization. If the lama does have the quality of realization, there is of course no doubt about receiving the blessing. In both cases the disciple experiences the wisdom realization because of the guru's blessing entering into his mindstream.

For example, had the old woman seen the dog's tooth merely as a dog's tooth, no ringsel would have appeared, and she would not have manifested a canopy of rainbow light when she died. The object itself was the tooth of a dog, not the Buddha's tooth, but since she had the confident faith that it was a tooth of the real Buddha, it functioned exactly in the same way as the Buddha's tooth, manifesting ringsel, causing the special wisdom realization to arise, and bringing about the rainbow canopy at the time of death.

If we have the faith and devotion of seeing our guru as the same as the Buddha, it makes no difference whether he actually has a buddha's qualities or not. The guru will function as an actual buddha in causing the wisdom realization to arise. Whether a disciple sees his guru as a buddha or not makes no difference to the guru, neither increasing nor decreasing his qualities. Likewise the guru's qualities will not decrease if the disciple loses faith in him. Arousing faith in order to bring forth the special wisdom realization is solely the act of the disciple. Lacking faith and devotion, the disciple will accumulate great negativity. Many unpleasant things will occur during this lifetime, and he will remain in samsara during his future lifetimes. This all results from the disciple's own actions.

We may wonder about the guru yoga teachings on seeing the guru as an actual buddha. It is the nature of things that the special wisdom realization

will arise for disciple who has the faith to see the guru as a real buddha. It is also natural that without such faith the realization will not come about. We need the special wisdom realization to arise, and seeing the guru as an actual buddha is the crucial cause and condition for this to occur. That is why the guru yoga teachings repeat over and over that we must see the guru as an actual buddha.

Having the faith in the guru as an actual buddha does not make him into one. Nor does the nature of the guru who is a real buddha change or decline if the disciple sees him as an ordinary person. The faith of seeing the guru as an actual buddha is for the benefit of the disciple himself.

The crucial importance of faith is explained not only in the tantras of Dzogpa Chenpo, but also in the sutras. Patrul Rinpoche quotes:

O Sariputra, absolute truth is realized only by faith.

The absolute truth refers to the dharmata nature, the mode of abiding (*chos kyi gna lugs*). Someone who has aroused faith in the spiritual teacher can realize the absolute truth.

Through the power of developing extraordinary faith, the blessing of the lama and the Three Jewels will enter your mindstream. The correct understanding will arise in the mind and you will see the genuine reality of the natural state as it really is. At that time you will experience an even more extraordinary and irreversible faith and confidence in your guru and the Three Jewels. Realization of the natural state and confident faith are supports for one another.

Extraordinary faith means, in Dzogchen terms, seeing the guru as a buddha. When that kind of faith arises, the blessing of the guru and the Three Jewels immediately enters into us, like a spark catches dry grass when flint strikes metal. The guru's blessing is simply the wisdom realization arising in the disciple's mindstream. The entering of the guru's blessing brings no special feeling in the disciple's mind or body but is indicated by an increase in the disciple's qualities of abandonment and realization. A decrease in the qualities of abandonment and realization indicates that the guru's blessing is being lost.

If you have the faith of seeing the guru as a real buddha, the guru's blessing will enter into you, correct understanding will develop in your mindstream, and with this correct understanding you will realize the absolute nature. The means for realizing the absolute nature is this correct understanding. When it arises, the nature can be seen. Seeing the absolute

nature, your confidence and faith in the lama and the Three Jewels grow greater than before. If you have the faith and devotion of seeing the guru as a real buddha, your practice has reached the highest level, and your faith and confidence have become irreversible. Lacking this kind of faith, you may think that your practice is high, but in fact this is not authentic practice. You can determine the level of your practice through the quality of your faith in the guru.

Realization of the absolute nature and confident faith support each other. Confident faith means seeing the guru as an actual buddha from deep within, not only by words of the mouth. Faith leads to seeing the absolute nature, and seeing the absolute nature increases faith. Both the faith and the realization continue to improve, just as adding wood to a fire makes it blaze further, so it can burn even more wood and continue growing. This is Patrul Rinpoche's own uncontrived realization.

Patrul Rinpoche next gives an example from the life of Jetsun Milarepa.

Just as Dagpo Rinpoche was about to leave Jetsun Milarepa, he asked him when he should begin to gather disciples. The Jetsun answered, "One day, unlike now, you will have a realization that clearly sees the essence of your mind. At that time, you will have the unshakable faith that sees me, the old father, as an actual buddha. That is when you can begin to gather disciples."

Seeing the essence of your mind means seeing the real nature of your mind nakedly. That is called realization. Seeing your teacher as an actual buddha, your faith in him becomes unshakable. At the same time you can see the absolute nature, and your realization increases.

The entering of the blessings and compassion of the lama and the Three Jewels into our mindstream depends solely upon our faith and devotion.

A student once asked master Jowo Atisa, "Jowo, give me your blessing!"

"Careless child," the master replied, "give me your devotion."

Thus, a mind of total and unchanging trust, developed out of extraordinary faith and devotion, is indispensable. It opens the door to taking refuge.

Motivation

For taking refuge with this kind of faith, three kinds of motivation are

identified.

The refuge of lesser beings

Being afraid and terrified of the suffering of the three lower realms – the hell realms, the hungry ghost realm and the animal realm – lesser beings take refuge for the sole purpose of achieving the happiness of the upper realms of gods and humans.

Such individuals have confident faith, but a very limited motivation. They can understand the vast suffering of the lower three realms. They want to be free from these realms and to achieve the relative happiness, wealth and prosperity of the upper realms of gods, humans, and demigods. They recognize the Three Jewels as an authentic refuge, and take refuge in them. It is a complete form of refuge, but is the refuge of lesser beings.

The refuge of middling beings

Knowing that there is no freedom from suffering no matter where they are reborn within the realms of samsara, higher or lower, middling beings take refuge in the Three Jewels for the sole purpose of escaping from the suffering of samsara and achieving the state of peaceful nirvana.

This classification of taking refuge in the manner of the lesser beings, the middling beings, or the great beings is based upon motivation. Think carefully about how we take refuge. It is quite similar to the lesser beings. We are not now experiencing the suffering of beings in the three lower realms, but we do actually suffer from physical illness, mental suffering, and many other undesirable circumstances. Most of us take refuge in the Three Jewels to escape from these difficulties, both for ourselves and for those who are close to us. We are seeking a better situation, taking refuge for our own benefit, so our refuge falls into the category of lesser beings.

We think we are practicing the Mahayana, and within the Mahayana, that we are practicing Dzogchen. We are quite mistaken as long as we are actually taking refuge merely to escape from undesirable circumstances, and to achieve something better. This kind of thinking about refuge is strong. We recite the refuge prayer of the higher vehicle, but our motivation is probably much lower.

If we were taking refuge as middling beings, uncontrived renunciation should arise in our minds. Understanding the nature of suffering of all six realms of samsara and wishing to escape from that suffering, we should

automatically experience uncontrived renunciation and a wish for the peace of nirvana. This is the middling way of going for refuge.

Uncontrived renunciation means we must be free from desire for all six realms, but this is very difficult. We see the happiness, riches and benefits of the human realm and automatically feel desire and attachment. We should have the renunciation of desiring to escape from samsara, but we do not. We are strongly attached to samsara's comfort and happiness, wealth and prosperity, status and reputation, and so on. As long as desire and attachment remain, there is no renunciation, and without uncontrived renunciation, our refuge will be in the category of the lesser beings, not the middling or the greater beings.

The outer preliminary practices explain renunciation. We must reflect upon these teachings again and again in order to develop uncontrived renunciation and come within the category of middling refuge. That is why the outer preliminaries of the four thoughts that change the mind are taught before beginning the discussion of refuge.

When we experience illness, we want to recover immediately. We need not think about whether we are suffering or not. On the other hand, we are automatically attached to form, sound, smell, taste, wealth and prosperity, and the like. We do not feel that their nature is suffering, that these are worldly dharmas, and that we need to abandon them. We must practice a contrived contemplation to come to understand that their true nature is suffering. Seeing a beautiful form, we are immediately attached to it; hearing pleasant words, we immediately become attached to them. When we are attached to worldly dharmas in this way, uncontrived renunciation will never arise.

To go for refuge as a middling being, we must understand that the nature of all worldly dharmas is suffering, and we must want to be free from them. Desiring to escape from all the realms of samsara, the intention to achieve the state of peace and liberation will arise. Only in this case will the characteristics of the refuge of middling beings be complete.

The refuge of great beings

Seeing all sentient beings in the great ocean of samsara's infinite suffering experiencing an inconceivable number and variety of miseries, great beings take refuge in order to establish all of them in the unsurpassable and omniscient state of complete and perfect buddhahood.

Great beings realize that suffering is the same for themselves and for all other beings. They see that all beings in samsara are suffering, and desire that others as well as themselves escape from this agony. They seek not simply peace and liberation but the highest level of omniscience and perfect buddhahood, and wish to bring all beings to this state. This is the motivation for the refuge of great beings.

We think that we are practicing the level of the Dzogchen vehicle. In that case we must develop in our minds the refuge of the great beings that is in accord with that vehicle. This refuge is motivated by the wish that all beings, as far as space pervades, completely escape samsara, and achieve unsurpassable and omniscient buddhahood. Such a thought of benefitting others should arise automatically.

Initially, this practice must be contrived; our strong habit of benefitting ourselves keeps this thought from arising automatically from the very beginning. Without such practice, we cannot get beyond the refuge of the lesser being, despite believing we are practicing Dzogchen.

Among the three types of motivation, at this point we should go for refuge with the thought of the great being that wishes to establish all sentient beings pervading space in the state of perfect buddhahood.

The happiness of gods and humans appears to be nothing other than happiness, but in reality it does not transcend suffering.

We cannot see the gods and demi-gods. The teachings of the Buddha and the commentaries of the scholars – the sutras and the sastras – describe their happiness, wealth and prosperity. Unable to see these realms for ourselves, we must trust in these teachings. We can actually see only the happiness of the human realm. According to the worldly dharma of humans, acquiring great wealth and prosperity, high status, praise, and good reputation are considered to be happiness. These are worldly considerations. People without wealth think they are suffering severely.

Reflecting deeply, we come to understand that although these worldly concerns may appear to bring happiness, in fact they are not happiness but are suffering. We are attached to that suffering as happiness. Patrul Rinpoche has already taught on the defects of samsara. He taught that great wealth and prosperity is actually suffering. Initially, the wealth is perceived as happiness, but due to its origin, great suffering will result. Among the three types of suffering, this is the suffering of compoundedness.

Riches and prosperity are garnered through agriculture and farming, and

various kinds of business. We accumulate grave negativity from farming, bringing great harm to animals. Patrul Rinpoche has explained that for one grain of barley many thousands of living beings are killed. When we seek prosperity through business, all the nonvirtues except for wrong views and sexual misconduct are involved. This has all been taught already.

Prosperity does not come automatically, and however it is accumulated suffering will result. Happiness will never result from nonvirtuous actions. The only difference is whether the suffering comes sooner or later. Cause and effect are undeceiving. Results sometimes ripen quickly, as when actions done early in life ripen later in the same lifetime. Others may ripen only after many hundreds of kalpas. The manner of ripening is inconceivable. Only omniscient wisdom can see this. It is said that even bodhisattvas on the tenth level cannot see the minor details of the ripening of cause and effect.

Worldly happiness – praise, prosperity, status, whatever it may be – is achieved only from nonvirtuous actions, never from virtuous actions. Therefore, although it seems to be happiness, ultimately it is not beyond suffering. Wealth and prosperity can be gained through the virtuous action of generosity, but this is not how they are generally gathered. We seek prosperity in different ways, through agriculture, business, and deceit. However much wealth we have, that is the amount of negativity we have accumulated.

Seen from the perspective of the three lower realms, the human realm can be considered pleasant, a happy realm. This happiness is not true happiness, however. Since the suffering is minor, we call it happiness, but throughout samsara nothing can be considered happiness in itself. Not even a needle-tip of happiness can be found within samsara. Human happiness is not permanent, and after we have exhausted the happiness of the human realm, we must fall to the lower realms. Therefore Patrul Rinpoche asks:

Why seek the happiness of the higher realms if it lasts no more than a moment?

Seriously consider that prosperity, praise and so on last only briefly, like dew on grass. For small pleasure, we accumulate huge negativity. The result of negativity is remaining for many kalpas in the suffering of the lower realms, without our negative karma declining. The prosperity accumulated through such great negativity can be enjoyed for no more than one lifetime. Even if we live for a long time, our life span can be only about ninety years.

Many people use for only a month or a year wealth gathered through great negative action. Even to earn one thousand rupees, we can accumulate negativity that will result in many kalpas of suffering in lower realms, without the negativity being completely eliminated. Thus, there is no reason to aspire to worldly happiness, the comfort of the higher realms. The benefit of such happiness lasts only for a moment.

We think that the individual in this life and the individual in the next life are different, but this is not the case. Mind is what experiences happiness and suffering. The mind that experiences suffering and happiness never ends. Whether in this life or the next, our own individual mindstream is the same. We think that if we achieve comfort in this life, we need not care about the next life, but this is deluded thinking. After death, we leave the body behind, but our mind continues into the intermediate state of the bardo, where it experiences immense suffering. After completing the life span of the intermediate state, we again take birth and undergo the suffering of the realm we have been born into.

The opportunity to experience happiness in this life lasts no more than a moment, and for this purpose we accumulate inconceivable negativity. We take life, take what has not been given, engage in sexual misconduct, lie, engage in divisive speech, speak harsh words, and in these ways accumulate grave negativity for a mere moment of happiness. We do not need such minor happiness.

Even were we to achieve the level of peace and liberation of the sravakas and pratyekabuddhas for ourselves, if we do not strive to benefit all sentient beings, who have been our parents from beginningless time and who are floundering in the ocean of samsara's suffering, this would not be proper.

Those who achieve the level of the sravakas and pratyekabuddhas escape from endless samsara. They reach the level of peace and liberation. The gross aggregates of arhats with no remainder discontinue, and they are free from all the suffering of samsara. They remain in their individual states of peace and liberation without benefitting other beings. Only the level of perfect buddhahood can effortlessly benefit other beings, even while remaining in the state of peace.

After attaining buddhahood, one is liberated from all samsaric suffering and remains without wavering in peace and liberation, spontaneously and effortlessly able to benefit countless sentient beings. This is how we should take refuge, the way a great being takes refuge. Going for refuge for the

benefit of all sentient beings carries immeasurable benefit and uncountable merit. The Jewel Garland⁹ states:

*As there are infinite realms of sentient beings,
The wish to benefit is also infinite.*

Thus, when going for refuge we must carefully contemplate whether we are taking refuge as a lesser being, a middling being, or a greater being. From the very beginning we should not practice incorrectly, taking refuge as a lesser or middling type of being while seeking the view and special realization of Dzogpa Chenpo. The view and realization will never come in this way. If you want the view, meditation, and conduct of the Mahayana or Dzogchen to arise in your mindstream, you must lay the foundation stone of the refuge according to the Mahayana from the very beginning.

In building a house, you must construct the foundation according to how large you want the house to be. If the foundation is too small, then later you will not be able to construct a larger house if you want to do so. In the same way, from the initial time of taking refuge, it is crucial to take refuge according to the way of a great being. As I said before, when reciting the refuge prayers you must examine yourself carefully. We have the habit of benefitting ourselves, but do not have the habit of benefitting others. The thought of benefitting others will only come with effort. If the thought of benefitting others does not arise, then the motivation of the Mahayana will never come.

At the beginning, middle and end of each session of practicing refuge, you must examine your motivation for taking refuge. You must avoid taking refuge as a lesser being or as a middling being, knowing that such refuge is not in accordance with the main part of practice. If your practice of refuge is that of a great being, you should continue practicing in that way.

THE MANNER OF TAKING REFUGE

In the general common vehicle we take refuge in the Buddha as the teacher, the Dharma as the path, and the Sangha as the companions. Refuge refers to a commitment. Taking refuge in the Buddha means that we are committing ourselves to him as the teacher who shows us the path to liberation. Taking refuge in the Dharma means that we are committing ourselves to the teaching of the Buddha as the path to liberation. Taking refuge in the Sangha means that we are committing ourselves to the practitioners of the

Buddha's teaching as our companions on the path.

In the teaching of the general extraordinary Secret Mantrayana, we take refuge in the Three Roots. We take refuge in the guru by offering our three doors of body, speech and mind to him or her. We take refuge in the yidam by always keeping the yidams as the support for practice and accomplishment. We take refuge in the dakini or the dharma protector as a companion for practicing Dharma. This is called the extraordinary inner refuge.

According to the special superior method of the Vajra Essence, the highest Secret Mantra, we take refuge in the channels, the wind energies, and the essential drops.¹⁰ The channels, the wind energies, and the essential drops within our bodies are impure. The channels support our bodies, the wind energies support our speech, and the essential drops support our minds. These impure channels, wind energies, and essential drops naturally contain the pure channels, wind energies, and essential drops.

Although the impure channels, wind energies, and essential drops are in nature the pure channels, wind energies, and essential drops, the pure channels do not manifest. Only the impure channels, wind energies and essential drops manifest, and therefore the impure body, speech and mind appear. When the pure channels, wind energies, and essential drops are brought forth, the three kayas appear. This can be called the manifestation of the essence of the body, speech, and mind of all the buddhas. We must understand that we are taking refuge in the pure channels, wind energies, and essential drops.

We take refuge in them in the following way. We must use the pure channels to be the support for the essence of the Nirmanakaya; train the pure wind energies to be the essence of the Samboghakaya; and purify the essential drops to be the essence of the Dharmakaya. This is the swift path of taking refuge.

Patrul Rinpoche describes the final meaning of refuge as follows:

The ultimate and undeceiving refuge in the indestructible natural state is based on the primordial wisdom inherent in the object of refuge. The wisdom's essence is emptiness, its nature is luminous clarity, and its compassionate responsiveness is all-pervasive. Taking refuge in this means realizing in one's own mindstream, with total confidence, the great inseparability of these three aspects of primordial wisdom.

10 nadi, prana, bindu (Skt); tsa, rlung, tige (Tib).

The Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha are the refuge of symbolic, conventional truth. Lama, yidam, and dakini, and channels, winds, and drops are also a symbolic refuge. Essence, nature, and compassionate responsiveness is the refuge of ultimate truth. “Undeceiving” refers to the undeceiving quality of the natural state.

When we visualize the refuge tree, Guru Rinpoche is in the center, the lineage gurus are above, the buddhas of the three times are in front, the bodhisattvas are to the right, the noble sravakas are to the left, and the texts of the Buddha’s teachings are behind. Dakinis and dharma protectors surround them all. These are the objects of refuge appearing as center and periphery. In essence, they are a single wisdom. All are the non-dual wisdom mind of our root guru appearing as Guru Rinpoche, and nothing else. They appear in the center, above, behind, right, left, and so on, but we should understand that they all derive from the single wisdom mind of our own root guru.

What is the wisdom mind of that refuge? The essence is the emptiness of the Dharmakaya; the nature is the clarity of the Samboghakaya; and the all-pervasive compassionate responsiveness is the Nirmanakaya. The essence, nature, and compassion constitute the wisdom mind of our own root guru, his non-conceptual exalted wisdom. This is the source of all refuge deities. When we take refuge, the object of refuge is our root guru. In meditation, we visualize him in the form of Guru Rinpoche, but in fact he is our root guru, the person who bestows empowerment upon us, explains Tantra to us, and gives us the pith instructions.

Again, the essence, nature, and compassion are inseparable from our root guru’s non-conceptual exalted wisdom, and constitute the nondual wisdom of the deities. To take refuge in such an object, we practice actualizing it. This wisdom must be accomplished in our mindstream. Taking refuge in this case means with total confidence realizing in one’s own mindstream the great inseparability of the three aspects of primordial wisdom. “Total confidence” means understanding that there is no further refuge than this. It refers to making a final decision.

Actual practice of refuge

Khen Rinpoche wishes the teaching on the actual visualization practice for taking refuge to remain restricted. These will be made available for qualified practitioners at a later time, along with the teachings on

practicing Vajrasattva, Mandala offering, Kusali Chod , and Guru Yoga.

PRECEPTS AND THE BENEFITS OF TAKING REFUGE

The precepts for taking refuge

The three points of training for taking refuge are three things to abandon, three to be done, and three supplementary precepts.

The three things to abandon

After taking refuge in the Buddha, do not bow down to worldly deities still caught in samsara.

“Do not bow down” means do not go for refuge. Simply bowing down does not break the refuge vows. We do bow to some with worldly existence, such as our gurus, even though they are not yet liberated. We are not bowing down for the sake of ultimate refuge or final liberation, however.

Not bowing to worldly deities means not taking them as our final refuge. Non-Buddhists take refuge in worldly gods like Shiva and Vishnu for their final liberation. Whether they go for refuge in these gods or not makes no difference because the gods themselves are not liberated from worldly existence. These gods are not free from samsaric suffering, and neither are other local gods, lords of the land, or the various powerful worldly gods and spirits, so one should not take refuge in them, make offerings or prostrate to them.

Since those who remain caught in worldly existence cannot bring about the liberation of others, we should not pay homage or make offerings to them for our future liberation and attainment of the level of omniscience. Doing so will bring us to the lower realms.

After taking refuge in the Dharma, abandon harming sentient beings. Do not act to harm or injure others even in dreams. As much as you are able, make vigorous efforts to protect them.

Once we have taken refuge in the Dharma, we no longer engage in any activities that will harm other beings. If we harm beings, there is no Dharma. The essence of all the Dharma of Sutra and Tantra is avoiding harm to beings. Therefore, after taking refuge in Buddhadharm, all kinds of harmful activities must be abandoned, even in dreams. Killing and harming sentient beings in dreams is nonvirtuous, so protect yourself against this.

After taking refuge in the Sangha, do not become friends with non-Buddhist heretics.

The Vinaya Sutra, the teaching on discipline, teaches in general that those who have taken novice vows or vows of full ordination should not sleep under the same roof with non-Buddhists. We consider as Sangha those who follow the Buddha's teachings. These are our Dharma friends. We should not take as friends people who lack faith in the Buddha and his teachings, who criticize our teachers or the Dharma in general, or who denigrate the Secret Mantrayana. "Do not take as friends" means not to rely on them. For the purpose of drawing non-Buddhists onto the Buddhist path, we must befriend them, talk to them, and spend time with them.

The three things to adopt

After taking refuge in the Buddha, make offerings to and venerate even a broken representation of the Buddha's body. Raise it above your head and put it in a clean place. Develop the faith and pure perception that sees it as the actual Jewel of the Buddha.

We must pay respect even to broken pieces of a statue representing the Buddha's body, not to mention the Buddha himself. A broken statue contains the Buddha's blessing, and is in reality the Jewel of the Buddha. Perceiving in this way, the fragment will have the same blessings as does Buddha himself.

After taking refuge in the Dharma, arouse devotion even to a scrap of paper containing letters of the teachings of the Buddha. Raise it above your head and consider it the actual Jewel of the Dharma.

We must have devotion and respect even for a single letter of the Dharma teachings, not to mention Dharma books themselves. We often consider the Tibetan letters to be precious, and venerate them, without caring as much about English, Nepali or other scripts that we do not perceive as Dharma letters. That is a mistake. These days Buddha's teachings are written in many languages. It nowhere says that only Tibetan letters deserve respect. Any letter in any language should be raised above our heads and treated as the Jewel of the Dharma.

After taking refuge in the Sangha, consider whatever represents it as the Jewel of the Sangha, even a fragment of red or yellow cloth. Revere it, make offerings to it, raise it above your head, put it in a clean place, and see it with faith and pure vision.

Sangha primarily refers to ordained individuals, and their clothes

are blessed when they take vows. Not only do we revere the precious Sangha, but we should have respect for even a scrap of their clothing. We should perceive the cloth as the Jewel of the Sangha because it carries the blessing.

The three supplementary precepts

You should see your guru, the spiritual friend who teaches you right now what to adopt and what to avoid, as the actual Jewel of the Buddha. Do not even step over his shadow, and strive to serve and respect him.

Our lama is the person who teaches us the negative actions to be abandoned and the positive actions to be adopted, as well as teaching Sutra and Tantra, and view, meditation, and conduct. We should perceive him or her as the actual Jewel of the Buddha. Once you see him in this way, if you step over his shadow, you accumulate the same negativity as if you had stepped over the Buddha's shadow. Serve and respect him with this attitude.

You should consider whatever instructions your supreme guru bestows as the actual Jewel of the Dharma. Adopt whatever he says and do not disobey even a single point.

Think that every word that comes from your teacher's mouth is the Buddha's teaching, and consider it as the path to omniscience. The guru not only gives instructions in accordance with the Dharma, but also about worldly concerns. All should be taken as the path to enlightenment. As we saw above, Marpa Lotsawa instructed Jetsun Milarepa to build houses, cause hailstorms, create black magic, and so on. This does not seem to accord with Dharma; these actions appear to be worse than general worldly activities. Milarepa, however, obeyed all of his lama's instructions, considering them the true Dharma. In this way, he attained the level of union with Vajradhara in a single lifetime.

People may think that worldly work for the lama could be an obstacle to their Dharma practice, but with the attitude that some things your lama instructs you to do are in accord with Dharma, and others are not, you will never progress. You could stay in retreat or could study for one or two years without making any progress, because of not seeing the lama as an actual Buddha and his instructions as actual Dharma.

Up to the present, no example can be found of someone who fully obeyed his guru's instructions as the true Dharma and saw his guru as the Buddha in person, and yet was not liberated and remained in samsara. On the other

hand, many examples are given of disciples becoming liberated through practicing in such a way. Biographies of great lamas never record that they obeyed half of their guru's instructions and ignored the other half.

Thinking you perceive your guru as the Buddha, but not taking his words as the Dharma, reveals that you are not really seeing him as the Buddha. When your guru gives you an instruction, even an apparently worldly instruction, do not disregard the least aspect of what he has told you to do.

You should consider your guru's retinue, his students and your spiritual companions who are maintaining pure conduct, as the actual Jewel of the Sangha. Respect them with body, speech and mind, and do not displease them for even an instant.

“Maintaining pure conduct” refers to those whose conduct and view are similar to your own.

In particular, in Secret Mantra Vajrayana, the guru is the main object of refuge. His body is the Sangha, his speech the Dharma, and his mind the Buddha. Understanding that he is the condensed essence of the Three Jewels, see all his activities as excellent, rely on him with full confidence, and exert yourself in supplicating him constantly.

See the guru's body as the body of the actual Buddha; hear the guru's speech as the true Dharma; and recognize his mind as the true Buddha. The guru himself is the essence of all buddhas. There are no other Three Jewels than the guru. Perceiving in this way, you see all of his activities as enlightened, whether they appear as worldly or Dharma activities. Offer your entire body, speech, and mind to your root guru, and supplicate with confidence. This is the ultimate practice of guru yoga.

If you displease your teacher with your body, speech, and mind, you are abandoning the entire refuge, so with great courage and determination from deep within your heart, strive to use all methods to please him at all times and in all situations. Carrying out the activities of your three doors without discipline displeases your guru. Since the guru is actually the true object of refuge, this is like abandoning all the objects of refuge.

Whatever arises for you, be it happiness or sorrow, good or bad, sickness or suffering, rely solely on the Jewel of the Guru. You must understand that all happiness comes from the compassion of the Three Jewels. It is said that everything pleasant and virtuous in this world, even the subtle scent of a cool breeze when the weather is hot, is the compassionate blessing of the Buddha. Likewise, a moment of

virtuous thinking results only from the inconceivable power of the Buddha's blessings.

In all situations, verbally recite, physically act and mentally think, "Guru, I rely only upon you!" Merely reciting these words but not acting upon them, however, means you do not have total confidence in your lama. When you experience happiness you should recognize that your comfort is due to the compassion of your lama; do not consider it as a result of your own power or success. Remember the kindness of the Three Jewels in this way. "It is said" here means that Lord Buddha himself has said this.

Patrul Rinpoche quotes Shantideva:

*Just as a flash of lightning illuminates in an instant
The dark blackness of a cloudy night,
Likewise, rarely, through the Buddha's power,
Virtuous thoughts briefly rise up in the world.*

Lightning illuminates the darkness of night; at the very moment it flashes we experience clarity. In the same way, even though you have negative thoughts or are engaged in negative actions, due to the power of the Buddha's compassion, virtuous thoughts, thoughts of renunciation and faith, pure vision, and so on sometimes arise.

Recognize the Buddha's compassion in whatever benefits you and brings you joy.

Whenever you experience sickness, suffering, obstacles caused by demonic forces, and so on, do nothing but supplicate the Three Jewels. Do not rely on any other methods to counteract these problems. If you must be treated medically or through a healing ritual, recognize these as the enlightened activity of the Three Jewels.

Practice like this. There is nothing that the Three Jewels cannot take care of. Medical treatment and rituals may benefit for a while, and are also the compassion of the Three Jewels. Understand that Buddha's wisdom appears as happiness and benefit.

By recognizing everything that appears as the manifestation of the Three Jewels, train in faith and pure perception. When you are travelling somewhere, for work or another reason, pay homage to the Buddha and the Jewels of that direction, and then go.

Always, in all situations, practice taking refuge, reciting either the above quoted text from the Heart Essence:

*(In the Sugatas of the Three Roots, the true Three Jewels,
In the bodhicitta, nature of the channels, energies and essences
And in the mandala of the essential nature, natural expression
and compassion,
I take refuge until I reach the heart of enlightenment.)*

or the prayer known as the fourfold refuge, which is common to all vehicles:

*I take refuge in the Guru.
I take refuge in the Buddha.
I take refuge in the Dharma.
I take refuge in the Sangha.*

Proclaim the praise of refuge to others and establish them in the refuge practice. Entrust yourself and others to the Three Jewels both for this and future lives, and diligently practice refuge.

When going to sleep, visualize in the center of your heart the assembled deities of the field of merit as described above, and fall asleep with your mind focused upon them. If you cannot do that, think that your teacher and the Three Jewels, full of love and compassion for you, are actually sitting by your pillow. Generate faith and pure perception, and fall asleep without losing your recollection of the Three Jewels.

When eating or drinking, visualize the Three Jewels in your throat and offer them the taste of what you eat or drink. If you cannot do that, offer them the first part of your food and drink, thinking respectfully, "I offer this to the Three Jewels."

When you have new clothes, before you wear them for the first time, raise them toward the sky and think you are offering them to the Three Jewels. Then put them on with the thought that the Three Jewels have given them to you.

Whenever you see something in the outer world that pleases your mind or that you find desirable, think that you are offering it with devotion to the Three Jewels: flower-filled parks, unpolluted streams, beautiful houses, pleasant forests, extensive wealth and possessions, men and women who are good-looking and well-adorned, and so on.

When drawing water, first say, "I offer this water to the Three Jewels," and toss a few drops upward before filling your container.

Whatever is desirable and pleasant in your present life – comfort, happiness, good reputation, profit, and the like – is the compassion of the Three Jewels. Thinking, “I offer this to the Three Jewels,” generate devotion and pure perception.

Make an offering to the Three Jewels of whatever roots of virtue you accomplish, such as prostrations, offerings, meditation on deities, recitation of mantras, and dedicate this to the benefit of sentient beings.

You can offer the Three Jewels all the merit you have accumulated throughout the three times. Offerings need not only be material things. Offering merit is the highest method of pleasing the Three Jewels, and thus accumulates great virtue.

Make offerings to the Three Jewels as much as possible, on full and new moon days, during in the six periods of the day and so on. Never fail to make offerings at the special times consecrated to the Three Jewels.

The eighth day, the tenth day, the twenty-fifth day, and the twenty-ninth day are specially blessed days. The six periods are three times during the day and three during the night.

At all times and in all situations, whatever occurs, whether happiness or sorrow, never forget to take refuge in the Three Jewels. Acting like this, exert yourself until you remember to take refuge even in dreams when you feel afraid. Then you will remember in the intermediate state, the bardo, as well.

If you have a habit of praying to the Three Jewels whenever you experience any suffering or happiness during the day, you can supplicate in the same way when you suffer in a dream. Without remembering to supplicate during the day, you will not be able to do so during the night. Not remembering during the dream state, you won't remember to supplicate at the time of the bardo of death. By cultivating this habitual tendency during the day time, you will remember to supplicate Guru Rinpoche, your lama, or the Three Jewels when dreaming and during the bardo of death. They are the same. When you remember to supplicate them in the bardo, they can actually guide you on the path of liberation.

The time of bardo is more powerful than the present. At the time of death, we can go either to liberation or to the hell realms, whichever is appropriate. The Three Jewels, our root guru, or Guru Rinpoche can guide us in whatever direction we wish to go. If we simply supplicate them, or

even just think of them, they can immediately guide us to liberation. On the other hand, if at the time of death a negative thought such as attachment or hatred arises, we can immediately tumble into the lower realms. During our ordinary lifetime, we are not so easily led up and down.

In short, you must place your trust only in the Three Jewels and must never abandon the refuge even if it costs your life.

In the past in India, some heretics captured a Buddhist lay practitioner and said, "If you give up taking refuge in the Three Jewels, we will not kill you. Otherwise we will."

He replied, "Only with words could I renounce taking refuge. From my heart I cannot." So they killed him.

We should also be like that. If we abandon taking refuge in the Three Jewels, no matter how profound the practices we undertake may be, we are no longer within the Buddhist community. It is said that refuge is what makes the difference between a Buddhist and a non-Buddhist.

Those who take refuge in the pure objects of the Three Jewels are called "insiders" or Buddhists, and those who take refuge in impure worldly objects are called "outsiders" or non-Buddhists. We can distinguish between Buddhists and non-Buddhists by the objects of their refuge.

While there are heretics who are careful about nonvirtue, meditate on deities, practice with the channels and energies and so on, and obtain the ordinary accomplishments, because they don't know to take refuge in the Three Jewels, they are not on the path to liberation and will not be liberated from samsara.

Non-Buddhists can display magic and even fly in the sky through meditating on their gods and training on the channels, winds and energies. These are not superior accomplishments, however, but are only the general accomplishments.

Of the entire ocean of Sutra and Tantra teachings, there was not one that Jowo Atisa did not know or had not read. Among them all, however, he considered the refuge a major key point of such primary importance that it was the one thing he taught all his disciples, becoming renowned as the "Pandita of Refuge."

So, from the moment of entering the path of liberation and becoming a Buddhist, you must practice taking refuge along with its precepts, and never abandon them even at the cost of your life. As a sutra says:

*Whoever takes refuge in the Buddha
Is a true lay follower,
And should no longer seek refuge
In any other deity.
One who takes refuge in the sacred Dharma
Should be free of harmful thoughts.
One who takes refuge in the Sangha
Should not be friends with heretics.*

Nowadays, some people boast of following the Three Jewels without having the slightest respect for their representations. They think of images of the Buddha or books of his teachings as ordinary wealth to be sold or pawned. This is called “living by holding the Three Jewels to ransom” and is a very serious misdeed.

Some people think that representations of the Three Jewels are a part of their wealth and sell them as they sell gold, silver, and jewels. They don't realize that this is our refuge in which we should have faith and devotion, and to which we should make offerings. They make their livelihood through dealing in statues and paintings of the Three Jewels. This is a heavy nonvirtue. Those who act in this way are not actual followers of the Three Jewels.

Moreover, unless you are analyzing its proportions to correct it, mentioning the ugly aspects of a drawing or statue of the Buddha or otherwise criticizing it is a grave error and should not be done.

If we point out a fault in a representation of the Three Jewels, this is an indication that we lack faith and devotion and carries serious nonvirtue. When pictures are being drawn or statues being made, however, there is no negativity in criticizing them for the purpose of correcting them.

According to the sutras, images of the Three Jewels are considered to be the Nirmanakaya of the Buddha, and thus actual buddhas. Our mistake is in devaluing them. All the statues, pictures and thankas are real buddhas so we must have faith in them and make offerings to them, as we do to other buddhas. Thus, pointing out their faults is the same as criticizing the Buddha and carries a great weight of negativity.

Putting books of the scriptures down on the floor, walking over them, moistening your fingers with saliva to turn the pages and other disrespectful behavior are all also serious mistakes.

Placing a Dharma text on the ground or on our seat shows a lack of

faith, devotion and respect. Even to put down a cup we look for a table or a plate. For the lama's cup, we look for a better table or plate, showing our respect. We must have devotion and respect for the books and letters of the Buddha's teachings. We do not think like this, however. It is Tibetan culture to lick our fingers when turning the pages of a book. We turn the pages black within one month! Our saliva and the dirt from our hands are not precious things. Without recognizing this negativity, we accumulate great nonvirtue through these aspects of our everyday activities.

Patrul Rinpoche has extracted these teachings directly from the sutras and tantras. He makes them easy to understand. Coming from the perfect Buddha and the words of the scholars, these are Patrul Rinpoche's specific instructions, completely unmistakable. Having confidence in Lord Buddha, Patrul Rinpoche, and their lineages, we must act accordingly. These points of behavior are quite clear. When explaining the essence of the Prajnaparamita or the Great Perfection, many things are difficult to understand, but there are no difficult points here. We must be extremely careful about these things. Otherwise we will accumulate great negativity.

The Buddha himself said:

*At the end of five hundred years
I will abide in the form of letters.
Believe they are the same as me
And treat them with respect.*

If the Buddha can benefit beings by appearing as a person with the major and minor marks, he will appear in that way. If he can benefit beings in the form of a letter, he will appear as a letter. There is no certainty about how the Buddha will manifest to benefit beings. Buddhas manifest in innumerable and inconceivable ways. When Buddha Shakyamuni was entering parivivirvana, he said that during the era of degeneration he would manifest in the form of letters to benefit people. "At that time, see all the letters as a form of myself," he said. "You must have the same faith and devotion towards the scriptures as you now have for me." Thus, all the texts of the sutras, tantras, teachings, commentaries, and the three trainings are manifestations of the Buddha. You must have the same faith and devotion toward them as toward the Buddha himself.

It is commonly said that images should not be placed on top of scriptures. Among all the representations of the Buddha's body, speech, and mind, the representation of his speech teaches us what

behavior to adopt and what to avoid, and ensures the continuity of his doctrine. Thus it is taught that the texts are not at all different from the Buddha himself, and are particularly sacred.

Although texts and statues are both manifestations of the Buddha, books and texts benefit us more than statues, so even worldly people say that statues should not be placed on top of books. No matter how much time we spend with a statue, we will not learn what to do and what not to do, what is meritorious and what is nonvirtuous. We will not learn about the five paths and ten bhumis, or the ground, the path, and the fruit. We cannot learn these things from a statue.

Whether we read the books ourselves, or have them explained by a special teacher, we can study the view, meditation and conduct, how to behave and so on. This is what we need to understand, and our understanding can be enhanced with the help of books. For this reason, among the three types of representations of the Three Jewels, books are the most beneficial to us. Dharma books are not only actual buddhas, but they also serve us with great kindness. We should have more faith and devotion to them.

In addition, these days most people do not consider a vajra and bell as being beyond ordinary objects, as representations of the Three Jewels. The vajra symbolizes the Buddha's mind, the five wisdoms and so on. The bell has the image of a face that according to the outer tantras is Vairocana and, according to higher tantras, is Vajradhatvishvari, an image of the Buddha's body. The bell also bears the actual letters of the seed-syllables of the eight consorts, and in addition itself symbolizes the Buddha's speech, the sound of the Dharma. Thus, vajra and bell have the complete characteristics of representations of the Buddha's body, speech and mind. In particular, they contain the mandalas of the Secret Mantra Vajrayana thoroughly complete, and are extraordinary samaya objects. To disrespect them is therefore a serious misdeed. Always honor and venerate them.

Vajras and bells are required for Secret Mantrayana rituals, and practitioners must always have them. They symbolize the union of method and wisdom, and holding the vajra and bell while practicing actualizes the essence of method and wisdom. Vajra and bell are extraordinary samaya objects, especially important for special ritual practices where the samaya substances must be complete. For these reasons, great negative karma is accumulated from putting vajras and bells on seats or other lower places.

The benefits of taking refuge

Taking refuge in the Three Jewels is the foundation of all Dharma. Simply taking refuge plants the seed of liberation, distances you from your accumulated negative actions and increases your positive virtues. Refuge is the support for all vows, and the source of all good qualities. In the short term, you will be protected by benevolent gods, and will accomplish what you wish for. You will never be separated from the appearances of the Three Jewels and will remember them throughout your lifetimes. In this and future lives you will be happy, and ultimately you will achieve the state of buddhahood. The benefits are said to be uncountable.

Even without understanding view, meditation, and conduct, development stage and completion stage, simply thinking of and reciting the refuge prayer from the bottom of your heart sows the seed of liberation in your mindstream. Vows are required for any kind of Dharma practice, whether Sutra or Mantra, and refuge is the foundation for all other vows, as well as the basis for all good qualities of the path and result. The different kinds of vows are the vows of individual liberation, the vows of bodhicitta, and the samaya vows of Mantrayana. The lowest of the vows of individual liberation are the one-day vows, and even for these, one must first take refuge.

As Patrul Rinpoche states, those who practice refuge will be supported by the protectors. Although people may propitiate the protectors for worldly benefits, this is not their purpose. They are for protecting Dharma. In the past Guru Rinpoche commanded certain gods and spirits to protect the Dharma, and they came to be called “protectors.” The Buddhist protectors never made the commitment to promote worldly activities such as bringing victory in a war, supporting business, and the like. Non-Buddhist or worldly protectors may do so.

Overall, the Buddhist protectors promote the Dharma, protecting those who are practicing and accumulating merit. People who take the Three Jewels as a pure object of refuge, and who are properly engaged in learning, contemplation, and meditation, do not need to offer tormas and other things to the protectors. The protectors automatically support them because they have already made the commitment to protect those who are properly practicing the Dharma. They did not promise that they would give protection if they were offered tormas but not otherwise. Offering torma to protector deities is a commitment of yogic practitioners, but not a requirement of the protectors.

The Seventy Verses on Refuge state:

*Anyone can take the vows
Except those who have not taken refuge.*

All the vows of individual liberation, those of a lay practitioner, a novice, a monk, and so are based upon having taken refuge. Before generating bodhicitta, receiving Secret Mantra Vajrayana empowerments and all other practices, one must take refuge in a complete and authentic way. Even a one-day practice of mending vows and purifying breaches cannot be undertaken without first taking refuge. It is the support for all vows and good qualities.

Not to mention the value of taking refuge with a faith that understands the qualities of the Three Jewels, just simply hearing the word “Buddha” or making any connection – however small – with any representation of the Buddha’s body, speech and mind can plant the seed of liberation in your mindstream and finally lead to the state beyond suffering. The Vinaya contains the story of a dog who chased a pig around a stupa, and teaches that this planted the seed of enlightenment in their minds.

We have the tradition of reciting the Buddha’s name and mantra into the ears of animals. This doesn’t mean that the animals have faith in the Buddha. Animals are ignorant. But simply hearing the Buddha’s name and mantra creates the seed for liberation in their mindstreams. This is the benefit that results. I don’t need to say anything about the power of making a connection with one’s body, speech, and mind with faith; even with no faith, actions like circumambulation and so on can lead to liberation. After the seed of liberation is sown in the mindstream, enlightenment will be achieved sooner or later, just as a seed planted in the ground will eventually grow, unless it is somehow spoiled. Patrul Rinpoche provides many more examples.

Another story tells how three people attained buddhahood because of one clay *tsa-tsa*.

One day a man saw a *tsa-tsa* by the road. Thinking that it could be destroyed by rain if left as it was, he covered it with an old leather shoe sole that had been thrown away nearby.

Another person thought that since the shoe sole was something very impure it should not be covering the *tsa-tsa*, and so he removed it.

As the result of their good intentions, both the one who covered the *tsa tsa* and the one who took the cover off inherited kingdoms in

their next lives.

*He who with a pure intention
Placed a shoe upon the Buddha's head
And he who then uncovered it
Both inherited kingdoms.*

The *tsa-tsa* is a manifestation of the Buddha, and for it there is no difference between the purity or impurity of the shoe. Whatever appears is a pure appearance. Because of our minds of dualistic grasping, which see pure and impure, clean and unclean, if we put something impure on a representation of the Three Jewels we will accumulate negativity. If we offer something clean and pure, we will accumulate merit. In this case, despite the uncleanliness of the shoe sole, because of his perfectly pure intention, the man accumulated merit.

The person who first molded the *tsa-tsa*, the one who covered it, and the one who finally uncovered it – all three obtained the result of the happiness of higher realms, kingdoms and so forth, as a temporary circumstance. Since they had sown the seed of ultimate liberation, stage by stage they progressed toward buddhahood.

Going for refuge distances you from the accumulation of negative actions. Taking refuge in the Three Jewels with heartfelt and intense faith diminishes and exhausts even evil karma accumulated in the past. And from then on, the compassionate blessings of the Three Jewels turn all your thoughts to virtue, so that you no longer act badly.

It is said that although King Ajatasatru killed his father, because he later took refuge in the Three Jewels he suffered in the hell realm for only seven days and was then freed.

Killing one's father is a sin of immediate retribution, for which one must remain in hell for many kalpas, or at least one intermediate kalpa. Because King Ajatasatru had killed his father he had to take birth in the hell realm, but since taken refuge in the Three Jewels, he suffered there for only one week.

Devadatta had committed three of the crimes of immediate retribution, and was burned by the fires of hell while still alive. Just then he gained confidence in the Buddha's teaching and cried out, "From deep in my bones I take refuge in the Buddha!" The Buddha said that due to these words he would become the pratyekabuddha

Rupachen, the “One with Bones.”

Through the kindness of a lama or spiritual friend we have now heard the sacred Dharma and have developed some slight intention to accomplish virtue and abandon non-virtue. If we now strive from the bottom of our hearts to take refuge in the Three Jewels, our mindstreams will be blessed. All the good qualities of the path, such as faith, pure perception, disillusionment with samsara and the determination to leave it, confidence in cause and effect and so on will develop and increase.

Otherwise, if we are indifferent to taking refuge in the lama and the Three Jewels, and supplicating them, no matter how strong our disillusionment and determination to be free from samsara are right now, appearances are so skillful in misleading, mind so childlike, and thoughts so clever at deceit that even the present virtue we undertake could become nonvirtue. Thus we must realize that nothing is better than taking refuge for cutting off the stream of negative actions from now onward.

If your faith in the Three Jewels declines and you are not supplicating them, your present thoughts of renunciation and weariness with samsara will also decrease. We can see that some people who were considered good Dharma practitioners early in their lives, later engage in business, deceive others, and generally behave worse than ordinary negative people. This is the result of indifference to the Three Jewels, neglecting to arouse faith and make supplications. It comes from being fooled by worldly appearances, which are skillful in imposing themselves, skillful in deceit. Mind is gullible, like a child, and does not think properly. Like rabbits, we may jump up on hearing a single sharp sound, without thinking. Our thoughts move very quickly, and immediately deceive us. Thoughts which are presently virtuous can easily turn to nonvirtue. Refuge is the greatest method for turning nonvirtuous thoughts into virtuous ones.

I am teaching you this and you are studying it so sometimes you might have the thought, “All worldly things are meaningless; I must become a genuine practitioner.” But if you neglect to supplicate the guru and the Three Jewels, neglect your study and contemplation, after a year or so your virtuous thoughts will no longer increase and may decline. With diligence in refuge, such a decline will never occur.

Moreover, the teachings say, “Demons especially hate those who practice diligently,” and “The more profound the Dharma, the more intense the evil demons.”

In this time of degeneration, people who meditate on the profound meaning and who engage in powerful virtue are deceived by the allure of ordinary life and discouraged by family and friends. They experience difficult situations like sickness and interference from negative forces, and their minds are full of doubt and conceptual thoughts. Such obstacles to Dharma practice come in many forms, and destroy their accumulated virtue. The antidote to these problems is to strive to take refuge in the Three Jewels from the bottom of your heart. All obstacles to your practice will manifest as favorable conditions and your virtue will increase more and more.

When we are practicing Dharma and become ill or are afflicted by harm from obstructing negative forces, we consider this an obstacle to our practice. However, if our friends, relatives or parents ask us sweetly to leave retreat and join them in some kind of business venture or other worldly activity, we may abandon our retreat and our practice. This is a greater hindrance than those created by demonic forces, and is itself caused by demons. There is no greater obstacle than this, but we do not consider it that way. We feel our family is really kind and is giving us the proper advice. Compared to the problems posed by our families, the difficulties caused by demonic forces are quite small.

Some who consider themselves great practitioners develop a great attachment to wealth and prosperity when these manifest. This is an example of the deception caused by the worldly appearances of this life. We are attached to beautiful forms and sweet sounds, and are never satisfied, no matter how much wealth we acquire. We always think we need more and more. This is the greatest obstacle of demonic forces, but we do not understand it properly. Accumulating wealth, we feel clever, believing it came through our own power. We don't think that we have acquired a new obstacle to Dharma practice. This is called skillful deceit. Doubt about the Dharma grows in our mind, and thoughts contrary to the Dharma increase. Attraction to worldly goals are the most powerful obstacles.

These days, saying they are protecting themselves for a year against illness and loss, people invite some lamas and their disciples – those without the necessary empowerment or reading transmission, and who have not practiced the basic recitation – to open a mandala for wrathful practice. Not practicing development and completion stages, they simply widen their eyes like saucers and generate overwhelming anger toward an effigy of dough. They shout “Come! Come! Kill! Kill! Ya! Ya! Hit! Hit!” arousing coarse sensations in all

who hear them, and they perform only “red offerings” of flesh and blood.

Examined well, these ceremonies are as Jetsun Mila says: “Inviting wisdom deities to safeguard worldly beings is like taking a king off his throne to do the work of a sweeper.”

According to Padampa Sangye, “Constructing a Secret Mantra mandala in the village goat-pen, they claim it is an antidote!”

With practices like this the Secret Mantrayana strays into primitive Bon, a serious fault. People who perform liberation rituals should have no personal interest. Only if they are acting for the vast benefit of the teachings and beings is it permitted to liberate enemies and obstacle makers who commit the ten evil deeds. When the liberation practice is done with the real anger of attachment to one side or another, it will not have the power to liberate those it is aimed at and creates the cause for birth in hell for those performing it.

Without practicing development and completion stage, and not keeping samaya, simply making “red offerings” of meat and blood does not bring realization of the wisdom deities or the Dharma protectors. Malicious gods and demons will assemble to enjoy the offerings and tormas. While they might appear to produce some immediate benefit, in the end there will be many undesirable results.

Instead, entrust yourself to the Three Jewels. Invite lamas and monks with peaceful and controlled minds to accumulate a hundred thousand recitations of the refuge prayer. There is no protection better than this because you are sheltered by the Three Jewels. During this lifetime, nothing undesirable will occur and all your desires and wishes will naturally be fulfilled. Benevolent gods will protect you, and the malevolent demons and obstacle makers will have no power to come near.

Once someone caught a thief and beat him with a stick, reciting a line of refuge with each blow. “I take refuge in the Buddha,” and so on. Establishing this in the thief’s mind, he let him go.

With the words of the refuge prayer distinct and clear in his mind, inseparable from his sharp pain, the thief stayed the night under a bridge. A large group of spirits approached the bridge, but then they shouted, “There is someone here taking refuge in the Three Jewels!” and ran off shrieking.

Nothing is better for clearing up this life’s difficulties than sincerely

taking refuge in the Three Jewels. Moreover, in future lives you will attain the level of liberation and omniscience. The benefits of taking refuge are inconceivable.

The “Immaculate Sutra” says:

*If the merit of taking refuge
Had material form,
Even filling the entire realm of space,
There would still be some remaining.*

And in the “Condensed Prajnaparamita:”

*If the merit of taking refuge had material form
Even the three worlds would be too small a vessel.
How could the treasure of water stored in the great ocean
Be measured by the handful?*

Moreover, the “Sutra of the Heart of the Sun” says:

*Any being who takes the Buddha as his refuge
Cannot be killed by ten million demons.
Even if his vows are broken or his mind disturbed,
He will certainly go beyond rebirth.*

As it is taught, refuge has uncountable benefits. It is the foundation for all Dharma, so you must make earnest efforts in it.

*While I follow the triple refuge, my confidence is poor.
While I've been instructed in the three fold training, my vows are
fading away.
Bless me and those like me who have no heart
To have firm and irreversible faith.*