Life Begins After Death

Fahai Lama

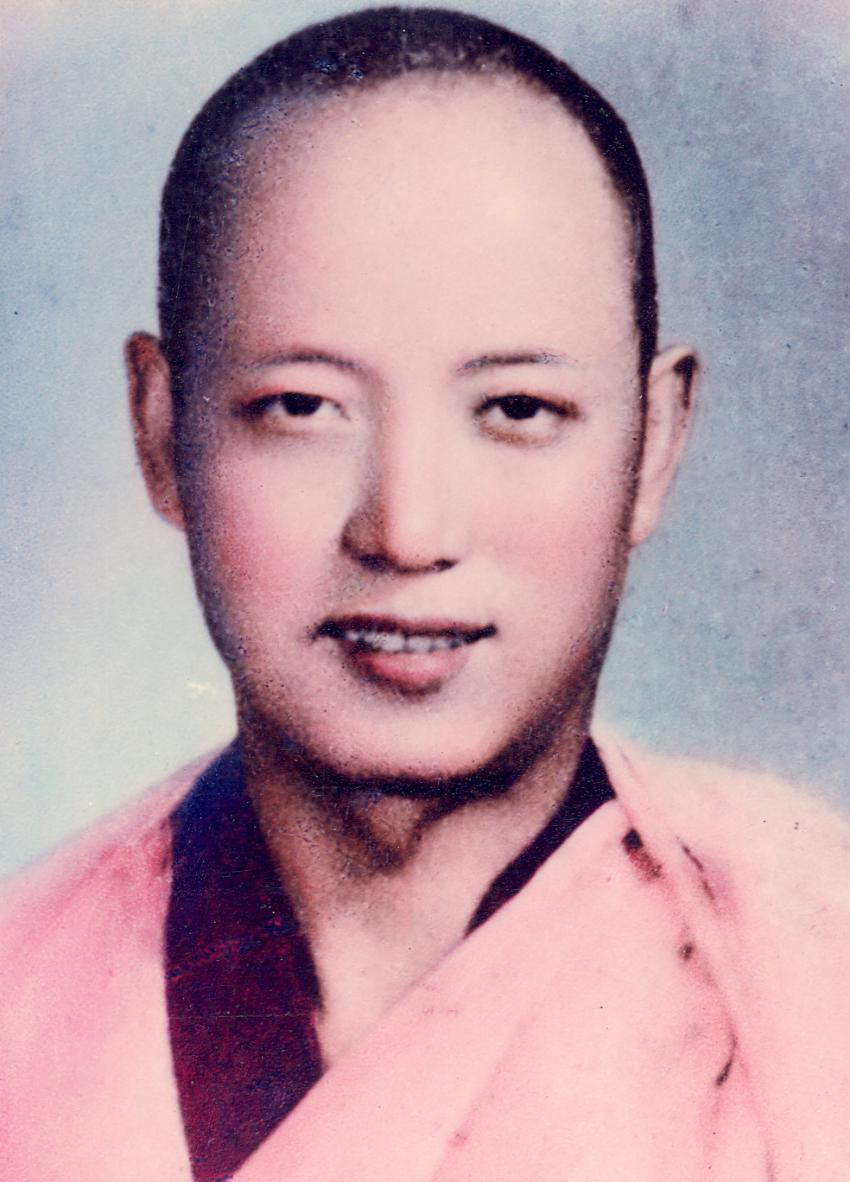


Image of 32-year-old Fahai Lama.



Image of Fahai Lama in his old age.

Table of Contents

**Chapter 1. The Four Practices of Mind Transformation**

1. Why it is difficult for modern people to achieve success.

* *Why were the* śītavana *known as “cold groves”?*
* *They no longer cared about anything in the world.*
* *In the present age, individuals who take meditation as the path are extremely rare.*

2. Life Begins After Death

* *Why is the* bardo *body unwilling to leave her own physical body?*
* *The soul reincarnates, with a single thought as the cause.*
* *The Principles Concerning the Ten Months of Gestation also Apply to the Ten Grounds of the Bodhisattva.*

3. Why we Become a Buddha in the Human Body

* *The kind of mind you have, depends on the kind of body you have*
* *What is the most suitable life form for “pure practice”?*

4. How to begin to practice, to be able to attain awakening.

* *“Is the mind buddha,” or “is bodhicitta buddha”?*
* *The four aids to penetration—One: refuge and bodhicitta.*
* *The four aids to penetration—Two: the Vajrasattva meditation for repentance.*
* *The four aids to penetration—Three: the maṇḍala offering.*
* *The four aids to penetration—Four: guru yoga.*

5. After the Maṇḍala Offering, your Merits will Increase

* *In the languages of India, maṇḍala means “conceiving”*
* *Ultimately, what does your mind “conceive”?*
* *Having offered one hundred thousand maṇḍalas, your merits become unmatched*

6. The Hundred Syllable Mantra Opens the Seventy-Two Thousand Channels

* *In order to purify the subtle channels, it is necessary to practice the hundred syllable mantra of Vajrasattva*
* *The fourfold set of channels in the human body: the illness channel, the affliction channel, the spirit channel, and the wisdom channel.*

7. The Importance of Full-Body Prostrations

* *It is possible to access the correct practice of Secret Mantra only upon the foundation of one hundred thousand prostrations.*
* *Why it said that the proper time to perform prostrations is after having performed one hundred thousand prostrations.*
* *Full-Body Prostrations and Vajra-Fist Physical Exercises use different approaches to achieve equally extraordinary results*.

**Chapter 2. Is *Amṛta* just a Fluid?**

8. The Necessity of Reading Signs in Secret Mantra

9. Once You Ingest the *Amṛta*, Your Mind Becomes the Mind of the Deity.

* *I arise as a particular buddha, depending on the initiation I receive.*
* *Lend me an ear, come a little closer.*
* *Someone asks: “Is* amṛta *just a fluid?”*

10. Is practice not done with the mind?

11. In tantric ritual, each verse has a distinctive and profound meaning.

* *One after another, gods of all levels descend on the seat.*
* *In Secret Mantra, rituals cannot be neglected, omitted, or replaced.*
* *A* koan *tells the tale of a missing verse in a ritual.*

12. The 3,600,000 Pores of His Skin Turned Green.

13. The Simplest, Subtlest, and Most Expedient Teaching for Taking Birth in the Pure Land.

14. The Stages of the Path to Awakening Are in Agreement with Things as They Are.

* *If you practice without relying on the path, on what grounds do you do so?*
* *The stages of morality, concentration, and wisdom are naturally established objective laws.*
* *The Root, Path, and Fruition are of the Nature of the Teachings on Awakening*
* *Each phase of entrance into, abiding in, and arising from concentration follows the inner order of things.*

15. An Understanding of Medical Science is Necessary to Train in Secret Mantra.

* *Principles of medical science in the Great Perfection.*
* *Understanding the four kinds of learning can bring your practice to a higher level.*

**Chapter 3. The Energy of Doubt Causes You to Take Rebirth as a Fox.**

16. Concepts are Invisible Energy Flows.

* *A Qigong master’s energy flow may be fatal.*
* *The energy flow generated by a single thought is more powerful than the energy flow of a Qigong master.*

17. The Energy of Doubt Causes You to Take Rebirth as a Fox.

* *The six destinies of rebirth in cyclic existence are transformations of energy.*
* *Thoughts are your master, for they guide you, they are your Guru.*

18. The eighty-four thousand delusional tendencies turn into a single lie.

19. Chanting the Scriptures may Extend Lifespan to One Hundred Years

20. The Supernatural Power of Secret Mantras Can Destroy the Four Obstacles

* *Possession has only two causes*
* *All obstacles can be classified into four types: outer obstacles, inner obstacles, secret obstacles, and innate obstacles.*
* *When chanting a mantra, you should repeat it at each energy wheel*

**Chapter 4. By Practicing that which Has Characteristics, You Attain the Wisdom that is Devoid of Characteristics.**

21. The Ultimate Origin of the Four Elements in Human Beings

* *The Four Elements Arise from the Mind of Clear Awareness*
* *The mind can intentionally reorganize the four elements.*

22. You Should Not Practice the Earth, Water, Fire, Wind, or Space Elements, You Should Practice the Mind

* *Nothing exists that is not in empty space. Such is the space element.*
* *Why is the earth element called “great”?*
* *Who created the “wind element”?*
* *Why is the water element called “great”?*
* *All life forms are inseparable from the fire element*
* *The mind only is the most extensive and the most boundless*

23. The Phenomenal World is Only a Representation

* *There is only one wisdom, yet according to the five levels, it can be distinguished into the five wisdoms*
* *What is the way to practice in order to manifest the five wisdoms?*
* *The five wisdoms and the five elements are both indispensable, just like the two wings of a bird.*

24. In Order to Attain Buddhahood, You Must First Become a Buddha in Your Physical Body

* *Why is the truth body located at the chest?*
* *Why is the enjoyment body located at the throat?*
* *Why is the transformation body located below the navel?*
* *In order to attain Buddhahood, the body is indispensable*

**Chapter Five. The single characteristic of the reality realm is the “gnosis” of realization**

25. Clearly, it’s just your own thinking

26. The place where thoughts fall away is the marvelous mind of nirvāṇa.

27. Delusion is reality, it is the insight of the wisdom of subsequent attainment

* *How should we practice after we emerge from meditation?*
* *The wisdom of subsequent attainment achieves the three indestructibles*
* *The cessation of thoughts occurs in three modes: “Cessation by arising, cessation by itself, and cessation by concentration”*

28. Those who know the mind of awareness call it buddha nature*.* Those who do not know the mind of awareness call it spiritual soul.

* *The single aspect of the reality realm is the “gnosis” of realization*
* *Awareness: Insight into the light of our fundamental awareness*
* *Give them back the “eight accomplishments”*
* *Besides the mind of awareness, there is no other way to practice*

29. Everyone has something they do not understand

* *The three levels of mind*
* *The four virtues of the marvelous mind of nirvāṇa*
* *The twofold causes and effects pertaining to common beings and noble beings*

30. What do you look at the world with?

* *Ultimately, does the eye sense faculty see form, or does the eye consciousness see form?*
* *According to the perspective of Secret Mantra, it is certain that one hears through the ear sense faculty*

**Chapter 6. Intelligent and straightforward, you become divine.**

31. In what way does “self grasping” see?

32. What kind of thing is salt?

33. Do you still feel haughty and proud for something?

* *The five hundred oceanlike concentrations*
* *Each channel has its matching ritual method, with a corresponding type of concentration*

34. Their minds resemble the barks of withered trees, their bodies, too, resemble the barks of withered trees

* *The minds of the gods of the Heaven of No Thought have absolutely no sphere of application, their luminous, material bodies are likewise nominally imputed*
* *Arhats not only have eliminated thought, they have also extinguished feeling*
* *Once they approach the end of their lives, they fall into the lower realms*

35. A particular preconceived notion will turn into a particular mistaken path

* *Since he can talk about twenty-five truths, he possesses the corresponding states*
* *The ninety-four classic scriptures of Hinduism comprise the world's most advanced elements of civilization*
* *Why are the Buddha’s teachings so chaotic, and lacking a uniform standard?*
* *The vision of a noble being is an unmistaken valid knowledge, it is called a direct valid knowledge of the nobles*

36. What did Nāgārjuna take to live to the age of seven hundred and twenty?

* *Common feats of non-Buddhists and Buddhists: 1) the manipulation of the fire element*
* *Common feats of non-Buddhists and Buddhists: 2) the manipulation of the water element*
* *Common feats of non-Buddhists and Buddhists: 3) the manipulation of the earth element*
* *Common feats of non-Buddhists and Buddhists: 4) perfecting the practice of the Great Garuḍa*
* *Common feats of non-Buddhists and Buddhists: 5) taking the elixir of long life*

**Chapter Seven. At ease, and lacking any doubts concerning all objective supports**

37. Prior to rebirth in the stages of insight, no matter the way you practice, it will all be to no effect

* *Evil spirits hold the essential views of evil spirits, animals hold the essential views of animals*
* *There is no view, meditation, and conduct that cannot be included in such essential views as those of all the respected teachers of the root lineage*
* *Die small, live small. Die big, live big.*
* *The essential view to attain the state of a buddha is seeing things as they are according to their nature—the embryo of the tathāgata*

38. Only through practice can you taste the inconceivable flavor of the dharma

* *Once you have the meditation of tranquility, you then have the prajñā generated through reflection*
* *Holding equally to saṃsāra and nirvāṇa is what we call meditative equipoise*
* *The indivisible union of compassion and wisdom is the essential point of meditation*

39. Becoming a buddha through the *dharmakāya*: Entering into the mother's warm, vast embrace

* *Only when the mind of the intermediate state of this life is severed, can the intermediate state of death be severed*
* *Someone will ask: “So, can I recite a mantra?”*

40. Attaining Buddhahood through the *saṃbhogakāya*: Taking rebirth in the Pure Lands of the Buddhas of the five directions.

41. The merits of the practice of the “hūṃ” syllable in the Great Perfection

42. The view of the Great Perfection is the view of spontaneous presence

* *Different measures will be adopted according to the actual situation.*
* *The four criteria of validity in the practice of the Great Perfection*

43. *Trekchö* and *Tögal* in the Great Perfection

* *The view of* trekchö *is the final view*
* *The name of the path is* tögal
* *Initially, practice* trekchö*, subsequently, practice* tögal
* *The indivisible union of* trekchö *and* tögal

44. Applying oneself on the “gnosis” of realization

* *The Great Seal’s view on “seeing our nature and becoming a buddha”*
* *If you meet with three conditions, you can become accomplished in this very body*

45. Being lazy in meditation, the ten fetters and the ten afflictions never cease

* *Being lazy in meditation, the ten fetters and the ten afflictions never cease*
* *Never search for noble individuals, only search for inherent nature*
* *The stage of subsequent attainment is of utmost importance*

**Chapter 1. The Four Practices of Mind Transformation**

“Human emotions are impermanent, but the love of a mind of great compassion is never extinguished.” – Fahai Lama

1. Why it is difficult for modern people to achieve success

*Why were the* śītavana *known as “cold groves”?*

Modern monasteries adopt the practice of *buddhānusmṛti*, and that of seven-day retreats, as their main way of practice. However, this was not the way of practice when Śākyamuni was alive. When the Blessed One was alive, monks and nuns dwelled in the *śītavana*, or “corpse groves,” also called “cold groves.” Why were these places known as “cold groves”? They were so called because these groves gave absolutely horrifying chills. These places were uninhabited, and when someone passed away in a household, the deceased person was thrown into the grove, where jackals, wolves, tigers, and leopards fed on her corpse. These abandoned places full of corpses were thus named “cold groves.”

Every year, various masters gathered to practice in the cold groves throughout India. These gatherings were known as “cold grove assemblies.” During the cold grove gatherings, corpses released a strong smell from morning until night. Wild dogs strolled around in all directions, biting and gnawing away the decaying flesh of the fragmented bodies. And eagles, flying down from the skies, fed on the eyes of the deceased.

At times, the body of a young, beautiful woman was sent to the *śītavana*. When she first arrived, she looked lovely. Her face and neck were smeared with fragrant powder, and her red cheeks shone in the evening light. On the first day, the body was not yet swollen. The corpse began to swell only three or four days later, when it became several times larger. White and yellow pus was slowly discharged from within the body, stinking and disgusting. Thousands of large worms then came out of the girl’s eyes, nostrils, mouth, and ears, wiggling across the infested body.

When the girl died, the whole family cried and sent her to the *śītavana*. After a few days, her family members, unable to let her go, returned to the *śītavana*, so that they could see her one last time. Yet, unexpectedly, the person who was once dear to them had now become horrible and frightening. They were so terrified, that that they ran away without ever looking back.

After six or seven days, hundreds of millions of worms had eaten the girl completely, leaving in place only a stinky skeleton. The skull had two dark, deep holes on top, and two sharp, parallel holes below. Further down, it had two rows of terrifying teeth, displayed on the skull as if they were grinning. In the original position of the breast, there remained the ribs, neatly arranged one by one. The sacrum, the ischium, and the spine, were connected to form a symmetrical, shaky arc-shaped skeleton, which differed in no way from a painted skeleton.

Yet, almost no skeleton exists that remains whole. The skeleton was soon eaten voraciously by all kids of beasts and raptors. Large and small bones, scattered all over the place by the thousands, had the shape of arcane numbers. Soon after, someone gathered the remaining bones together and burned them to ashes. Later, the remnants of the smashed bones weathered into dust and were carried away by the wind.

*They no longer cared about anything in the world.*

Such dumbfounding, horrifying, and heartbreaking scenes that monks and nuns saw were always in their minds. Their hearts became colder and colder. Eventually, this cold entered their bones. And they no longer thought about wealth and honor.

In this way, monks and nuns practiced in stages the nine aspects of the meditation on impurity: having meditated for a long time on the mottled discoloration of the corpse, the discharge of pus, the decay of rotten flesh, and then the infestation of millions of worms and maggots from the seven apertures and from their own body (the smallest were as thin as a sowing needle, while among the largest there were maggots as big as a toilet pit in a rural area), until their own bodies had become completely made of maggots, with nothing beyond them. Not only is this true for ourselves, all beings are just the same.

Oh! Monks and nuns no longer cared about anything in the world. What was there to long for? Stinky bones? Pus? Insects? Love between men and women was gone, too. Love was broken, and all afflictions were broken along with it. They no longer grasped to the concept of self, or to the concept of person, sentient being, and long life. Shortly after, they attained the four liberations of an Arhat, or “noble one.”

To practice the path, we must do so in a cold grove assembly. There, we have no home, no temple, and no concerns whatsoever. All we wear is a robe made of rags, and these rags are pieces of soiled cloth used to wrap a dead body, which someone had thrown away disgusted. These rags are soaked in all kinds of things, including pus and blood. Monks and nuns used to pick up these pieces of cloth and put them together one by one. Yet, they could not take too many. They were allowed to take only what was barely enough for them to use. They then washed the pieces of cloth and let them dry for a first time, and likewise for a second time, for a total of seven times, until they mended them into a single ragged robe.

The “eighteen ascetic objects” are eighteen objects such as knives, axes, and needles, which ascetics carried on them to mend their robes. While people shewed away from these robes, monks and nuns regarded them as treasures. In winter, the members of the ordained community mended their lower garments, one layer after another, until one robe weighed more than ten pounds.

In India, the ordained and lay members of the Saṃgha who practiced in the cold grove assemblies were not only one or two, but thousands. There were no monasteries then, and in the evening they all sat under big trees and stayed there through the night; only in the morning did they go into the villages and towns for the alms round.

Lay devotees huddled on the side of the road, carrying food on top of their heads, and respectfully poured it into the monk or the nun’s begging bowl. At the time of Śākyamuni Buddha, people were as tall as ten feet. The poorest families could only offer food in small amounts, therefore the members of the ordained community had no choice but to go to a second, and to a third family, to beg for alms. They only went back when they had filled an entire bowl, for they had to share the food with the monks who, being old and sick, were unable to go on the alms round independently. You see, there was nothing in this world to worry about, for nothing in their minds could worry them. Therefore, in that age, practitioners achieved the path quite easily.

*In the present age, individuals who take meditation as the path are extremely rare*

In addition to the nine aspects of the meditation on impurity, different traditions have different ways to engage meditation. For example, the meditation on the appearance of an object is a type of visualization in Secret Mantra. In the Pure Land tradition, there are sixteen contemplations, beginning with the contemplation of the setting sun becoming like a massive, suspended drum, followed by the contemplation of water becoming ice and emerging into a transparent world made of lapis-lazuli. And further, rising above this precious soil of lapis-lazuli, the contemplation of numberless pavilions suspended in mid-air; and then the contemplation of the golden body of Amitābha, emitting rays of light in the ten directions as he proclaims the True Dharma. These contemplations are the stages of the path of meditation. They are the teachings of Secret Mantra in the Sutra traditions, and the doctrines of the Sutras in the traditions of Secret Mantra.

Whether it is the nine aspects of the meditation on impurity, the sixteen objects of contemplation in the Land of Bliss, the ten objects of application in the Flower Garland Sutra, or the contemplation methods in the generation and completion stages of Secret Mantra and in the Great Perfection, they all employ meditation as the path, meditation as the essence, and meditation as application. In the present age, however, individuals who take meditation as the path are extremely rare.

Eventually, the members of the ordained community began to build monasteries. They had precious things and property, so they feared others might steal them. They no longer knew how to practice the path. As a result, the building of monasteries and the accumulation of wealth became their path. The recitation of the *Diamond Sūtra* also became their path. As time went by, things became worse and worse.

Today, practitioners sleep under nylon bed-curtains and cover themselves with embroidered quilts. They wear robes of superior quality, and even apply facial cream made with pearl powder. But enough of this, for you all know this is the reason that, when the Bhagavan was alive, the monks and nuns who achieved the path were many, and the reason that now, in the period of the final dharma, those who achieve the path are few.

1. Life Begins after Death

*Why is the* bardo *body unwilling to leave her own physical body?*

In the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth of sentient beings, the first thought that arises in their minds at the moment of conception is known in Buddhism as *ālayavijñāna*, or “foundational consciousness” (commonly referred to as “soul”). This is the first thing to arise, and the last to leave the body after death. If the body of a deceased person is still slightly warm, it means that the foundational consciousness has not yet left her body, but if the body is thoroughly cold, the reason is that the consciousness has already left.

After a person dies, her sentient consciousness exits from one of the seven bodily orifices (the eyes, the nostrils, the ears, the tongue, the mouth, the anus, and the reproductive organ). Certain consciousnesses leave the body after one or two days, while others, unwilling to let go, remain in the body until the seventh day, when they must leave even against their will.

This is a very common situation.

Still others do not take rebirth until the second, third, or even the seventh period of seven days. At that point, the body will have reached a high level of decomposition. The body will have a disgusting smell and will be repulsive. In all events, the heart will not have yet decomposed. For, the sentient consciousness will still dwell inside the heart, unwilling to give up her body.

Certain sentient consciousnesses will have already found their future parents. Yet, unwilling to say farewell, they will be reluctant to leave their bodies. Even so, from the perspective of Secret Mantra, in no way a sentient consciousness can avoid reincarnation after seven periods of seven days.

Why is the body of the *bardo*, or “intermediate state,” unwilling to leave her own physical body? The reason is that, ever since she has come into the world, she has become attached to her physical body. Every day, she has spent time before the looking glass, admiring her delicate and graceful appearance. This is especially true for those women here who are unhappy when someone calls them “women,” while they want to be called “young ladies” instead. What does “young lady” mean? If we separate the two words “young” from “lady,” aren’t these also fine words by themselves? But if someone calls them “old lady” (or even worse, “wife”), that is no longer appealing to them.

These young ladies are not particularly happy when someone calls them “women.” They say: “I’ve never been a woman! I’ve been ordained since I was a young girl!”

Such is the love for one’s body. Some sentient consciousnesses leave their bodies, and see their relatives and friends cry out their names. Having talked to their relatives, they will not answer; having called her friends, they also will not answer; having addressed their husband or wife, still no one will pay attention to them.

“Well, I guess I must be dead.” Taken aback, she impatiently tries to break into her corpse from the mouth, yet without any success. She then tries to enter from the nostrils, yet also without success. In addition, she also tries to enter from the crown of the head toward the heart, yet still without success. Having burst into tears, and having lost her voice, she thus cries over her unexpected death, for she is now unable to get back into the body and reconvene with relatives and friends. Death has truly fell on her head in an unexpected way, having caught her off guard.

Having witnessed the separation of *yin* and *yang*, and of life and death, she (or he) cries together with her family from dawn to dusk. She keeps calling her relatives by name, to tell them that she is there, by their side. But they will never hear her voice again.

Two or three days later, she (or he) has completely lost hope. Swept away by the wind of karma, she is in spite of herself on the way to the *bardo*. Even though she might be separated from her future parents by a distance of thousands of miles, when a connection is made, at that very moment she (or he) will be able to quickly enter her mother’s womb.

*The soul reincarnates, with a single thought as the cause.*

The soul reincarnates, with a single thought as the cause. In general, entrance into a particular rebirth destiny depends on which predispositions become dominant during reincarnation. If she (or he) often thinks about the opposite sex, at the time of conception she will engage the seven emotions and the three thoughts—the seven emotions being the minds of attachment and clinging, the three thoughts being the minds of thirst, hatred, and malevolence—, and so, where will she (or he) tend to take rebirth? It will be in the destiny of hungry ghosts or in the destiny of hell beings.

Her (or his) future rebirth destiny is not the result of a punishment by Yama, the ruler of the world of the dead, who throws her into those destinies. In contrast, entrance into a particular destiny will be brought about by the power of her thoughts and habits. Similarly, when the end comes near, those who practice *buddhānusmṛti* by contemplating the Buddha’s name without interruption, will be able to take rebirth in the Western Pure Land. If, prior to taking rebirth, the mind of attachment becomes dominant, defiled impressions become active, and so one is naturally brought down by the work of defilements.

The hauling force of one’s habitual predispositions is extremely strong. It is not so for the forces of heaven and earth. And while there is no obstacle that the Jade Emperor and King Yama cannot conquer, their forces are not deep-rooted and powerful. Instead, it is this tenacious and powerful mind that sweeps him or her away. Her soul, her bardo body, is nothing but this single thought.

At the time of death, people have three types of attachment. First, the “attachment to the self” clings to the existence of a self; second, the “attachment to objects” clings to the objects possessed by the self; and third, the “attachment to the present life” is also called “attachment to incarnation,” for when a connection is made with one’s future parents, it is as though a flash of lightning illuminates the bodies of one’s future parents, and so, at the very moment when a *bardo* body perceives his or her parents having sexual intercourse, he or she will engender a mind of lust. Indeed, when he or she is searching for new parents, it will be like a woman pursuing a man, or like a man pursuing a woman.

At that very moment, he or she will have entered his or her mother’s womb.

So, where does life come from? It comes from attachment.

When you enter the womb, you are as big as a tiny amount of mucus, or like a tiny bud on a mulberry tree. Six hours later, you have grown to the size of a thumb. One day and one night later, you look like a fruit in your mother’s womb. Seven days later, you look like a bowl of silken bean curd. Two weeks later, like a block of condensed bean curd. Three weeks later, like a bar of dried bean curd. And four weeks later, you begin to grow a heart, which is the shoot of the mind of awakening, and which looks like a soy bean sprout.

There are two kinds of vital energy: ascending and descending vital energy. Ascending vital energy is located at the throat chakra, or “energy wheel,” and is in charge of eating, drinking, and speaking. Descending vital energy is located at the secret *chakra*, which controls the functions of discharging feces and urine and that of reproduction. Among the places of the ascending and descending vital energies, the first to develop are those of the descending kind. The reason is that the fetus has a mind craving for emotional love, but its body is unclean and, first of all, it has to excrete feces and urine. Therefore, the anus is the first to develop, and only afterward the eyes and the mouth. The development of life has its own causal and sequential orders of priority. This in fact is the principle of the generation stage.

In modern society, where technology is highly developed, premature newborns who are not full-term can survive in an incubator. Premature babies do not grow twenty-four or twenty-eight teeth, and so, if they have twenty teeth, it is already quite a good result. The baby is good-looking, but being premature, he or she has high blood pressure. Why? The reason is that he or she has not developed for a sufficient number of days.

As soon as the subtle *bardo* body has a single thought, it will be possible to quickly enter the mother’s womb. Now, the mother’s womb is extremely humid and moist. Once life is nourished inside in her womb for ten months, after birth, its life will be called a “first moist life.” When life ends, the sentient being enters yet another mother’s womb. Having been nourished for another ten months, after birth, its life will be called a “second moist life.” When the sentient being takes its seventh rebirth in the human realm, its life will be called a “seventh moist life.” There are seventy-seven rebirths in the human realm, and likewise there are seventy-seven in the celestial realms.

*The principles concerning the ten months of gestation apply to the ten grounds of the bodhisattva*

Everyone has a physical heart that is born from one’s parents. That physical heart is born with an innately radiant brilliance. In the six rebirth destinies of the three realms, the hearts of beings are all surrounded by a radiance of five colors. Still, the luminosity of human beings is the most resplendent, the most pristine, and the most consummate.

The physical heart looks like a fist, yet it also looks like an upside-down lotus flower. During the day, when the buds open, it works, lives, and laughs. At night, when the buds join together, it falls asleep. There is a central channel in the heart, surrounded by four sides to the front, to the back, to the left, and to the right. The eight consciousnesses dwell in the central channel, where they collect into a drop of clear water. The five elements of earth, water, fire, air, and space take the colors of the five luminosities, surrounding the clear light of fundamental awareness, which is the size of a pore. The clear light of fundamental awareness dwells in the drop of clear water.

The pure drop is extremely small and invisible to the naked eye. Yet, it is clearly visible with divine sight. By reaching an elevated state of meditation, it will be possible to observe it directly with one’s own eyes. So, is the “drop of clear water” actually made of water? It is not, for the use of the term water here is only metaphorical.

Here, water stands for the mind of desire, which is capable of nurturing life. The clear light of fundamental wisdom dwells in such a humid and moist drop of pure water. It is surrounded by the five bright and colored lights of earth, water, fire, air, and space. Furthermore, the wisdom of fundamental awareness is of the essence of clear light.

The same principles concerning the ten months of gestation also apply to the ten grounds of the bodhisattva.

The principles concerning the ten months of gestation are (1) the teachings on life and death, (2) the teachings on the afflictions, and (3) the teachings on living beings. Those of the grounds of the bodhisattva are (1) the teachings on liberation, (2) the teachings on the *prajñāpāramitā*, or “Perfection of Wisdom,” and (3) the teachings on the *dharmakāya*, or Truth Body. Bodhisattvas on the ten grounds take the Three Refuges and the Five Vows, practice the ten virtuous actions, and avoid of the ten non-virtuous actions. You should not believe that wheel-turning sage kings inspires the ordained community of monks and nuns through the ten virtuous actions, for the ten virtuous actions are teachings for ordinary beings. The practice of the ten virtuous actions is also embraced by bodhisattvas of the ten grounds, yet here the fruition of the ten grounds is achieved in stages by taking the ten virtuous actions as the foundation for practice on the path.

In the ten grounds of the bodhisattva, it is as if on the *janmaja*, that is, the fourth stage of “generating virtues,” the bodhisattva enters the womb, and on the *kumārabhūta*, namely the eighth stage of the “true child,” the bodhisattvas is just like a child who is already born and is slowly growing up, while on the *yauvarājyia*, the ninth stage of the “Dharma prince,” and on the *abhiṣeka*, the tenth stage of the “crowning ritual,” the bodhisattva is finally like a prince who has already become an adult.

When desire weakens, so that we are no longer attracted to the opposite sex, we are then able to ascend to the stage of *srotāpanna*, or “stream enterer,” and to subsequently achieve the consummation of that stage. But how do we quench our desires? We do so through the four foundations of mindfulness: the contemplation of the body as impure, the contemplation of sensations as suffering, the contemplation of mind as impermanent, and the contemplation of phenomena as selfless.

In due time, not only will our physical bodies give off an unbearable smell, the bodies of others will also give off foul odors. How on earth will we arouse even a tiny bit of desire? If we continue to practice according to the teachings of the Four Noble Truths and the Four Seals of the Dharma, we will be able to approach the four aids to penetration, including heat, summit, acquiescence, and highest worldly dharmas. Eventually, we will have a direct realization of our own wisdom of the clear light of fundamental awareness.

1. Why We Become a Buddha in the Human Body

*The kind of mind you have, depends on the kind of body you have*

Rice grows in the fields. Apples grow on trees. And what about your roots of virtue? They simply grow in your body and in your mind. Your body is your field of merit. Your mind is your field of wisdom. We say that your roots of merit become ripe when your merit and wisdom gradually develop to fullness. We also say that your roots of virtue are in your own body.

The reason is, that there is a mind in your body, and that very mind is at the center of your body. So, what is it, ultimately, that relates your mind to your body?

The kind of mind that you have, depends on the kind of body that you have.

The Buddhist name of the Jade Emperor is Indra. He is endowed with the body of an emperor of gods. Naturally, his mind is unlike a human mind. Still, his mind is also unlike the mind of any of the gods of the Heaven of the Thirty-Three. In his mind, all he thinks is: “I am Indra!” Thus, his mind is simply Indra’s mind, it is the foremost mind of the heavenly realms.

Similarly, *asuras* might have a violent and aggressive mind.

Now, suppose that one takes rebirth in the body of a very wealthy human being. At all times, he or she will have the awareness: “I’m a millionaire.”

Instead, if you took the body of an Empress Dowager, you might be troubled by the thought: “My son is the Emperor, I am the Empress Dowager.”

And if you were a rickshaw boy, who has pulled a rickshaw for decades since childhood, the following thought might be engraved in your mind: “I’m someone who pulls rickshaws.”

Finally, if you take the body of a woman, you may always keep these words in your mind: “I’m a woman.” So, simply put, if you become ordained as a nun, your mind is then also the mind of a nun, for nuns are women.

A particular body, then, will produce particular perspectives and ways of thinking. And yet, lifetime after lifetime, everything, in the first place, is nothing but provisional, and in a state of constant change. The mind follows each and every transformation of the body. For, like the body, the mind, too, is a dependently arisen and provisional phenomenon, with absolutely no solid or concrete essence.

*What is the most suitable life form for “pure practice”?*

Some people say, “It is possible to practice purely by relying on the provisional!” Among all life forms in the Three Realms, what is the most suitable form for “pure practice”? It is the human body.

The human body is the rarest of all. Śākyamuni Buddha attained a human body, became a monk, practiced the path, and only then did he attain awakening. This is also true for all the buddhas of the ten directions and of the three times. Setting aside the human body, the other five kinds of beings in the six destines of rebirth cannot become buddhas.

Therefore, we talk about the four difficulties: the difficulty of obtaining a human body, the difficulty of being born in a central country, where the dharma is being taught, the difficulty of meeting a qualified teacher, and the difficulty of hearing the Buddha’s dharma. To be able to avoid meat, to recollect the buddha’s name, and to be in the company of virtuous individuals, is not something that we accomplish through little roots of virtue, scant merit, or a few causes and conditions. Rather, we need a great deal of virtue, merit, and causes and conditions from former lives.

Now, suppose that in the past I have built bridges, paved roads, and offered food to the buddhas and to the Saṃgha. When the causes and conditions ripened, I obtained a human body. The living beings of the six rebirth destinies all have different types of bodies. It may appear as if the causes of former lives differ in nature from the results of the present life. Still, they are the result of a different time and space, different life forms, and the transformation and ripening of different causes and conditions.

Roots of virtue are formless and immaterial. They are invisible to the eye. And yet, from the perspective of obtaining a human body, we can indeed infer their existence. And so if, during former lives, you did not plant roots of virtue, it will be extremely hard, in the present life, for you to obtain a human body. And even if you are reborn as a human being, you might take birth in a barbaric land, or under very poor conditions.

If you can own something as precious as a human body, you can then avoid killing, save lives, take refuge in the Three Jewels, and generate *bodhicitta*, the mind of awakening, in order to practice for the final liberation of all beings. Therefore, Śākyamuni Buddha was compelled to descend among humans from the Tuṣita heaven. Having become a renunciate at the age of nineteen, he then attained awakening on the eighth day of the twelfth lunar month of his twenty-ninth year. The human body was the main cause that also helped him become a buddha.

For this reason, there is a heart and mind in the human body. We are born as humans, and we are capable of understanding meanings. We can thus generate the mind that seeks to achieve happiness and to avoid suffering. You talk to him (her), explaining the four truths leading to the other shore: the suffering of cyclic existence, the origin of suffering, the path leading to the cessation of suffering, and the blissful realm where suffering is completely extinguished. He thinks about it a bit:

“Oh, it makes sense. It really makes sense.”

Having contemplated the Four Noble Truths, the [one thousand two hundred and fifty great Arhats were](http://www.baidu.com/link?url=HAzRu-U2xfwTc4MEDRCFpK1-dwHJ35vz0NFDPnRfeDF_m0dTSZxuZMoz3lFYEfG_&wd=&eqid=8d1c5809004a2d2b0000000557381d26) then capable of obtaining the unobstructed vision of reality.

But, you see, if I explain the Four Noble Truths of suffering, origin, cessation, and path, to a kitten, a puppy, or a lamb, our young pet friend will make a mewing noise, yet it will be unable to differentiate and analyze these instructions, and therefore to practice the Buddha’s dharma.

You say: “Amitābha! Come on, my friend, recite aloud!” The kitten, the puppy, or the lamb will hear, without understanding you.

Indeed, the physical bodies of living beings are different. Accordingly, their minds, too, are different.

In the Realm of Desire, the deeply moving melodies and sounds heard by the gods, including the forms that touch their eyes, are all forms that please both their minds and their senses. The gods are constantly accompanied by bliss, and indulge in enjoyments and recreation.

If you take rebirth in the realm of the gods, and address Indra, saying:

“Come over, and listen to the sūtras! If you recite the scriptures, you will be able to attain *samādhi*! Come on, let’s sit cross-legged and let’s meditate together!”

He will immediately shake hands in disapproval, saying: “I don’t have time! I don’t have time!”

If you take rebirth in the Realm of Form, in the heaven of the great Brahmā, and explain the teaching of the Four Noble Truths to the gods there, they will be unable to understand its meaning. Why? It is because “just as they engage reflection, they immediately enter concentration.” That is, as soon as they their thoughts become active, and, even for a short time, they wish to engage reflection, they will have already entered a deep state of concentration. Having that particular thought become active, they then enter a particular kind of concentration. Therefore, they are ultimately unable to consider the teachings of the Four Noble Truths.

The gods of the Formless Realm already lack a physical body. They also lack a mental consciousness. Therefore, they abide in the four formless concentrations. If you teach them the Four Noble Truths, they not only are unable to reflect on the instructions, they are also unable to understand them, not to mention the fact that they may be unwilling to listen. It is impossible to generate the *prajñāpāramitā* from within the four formless concentrations. It is therefore impossible to genuinely attain liberation.

Thus, the human body is the very foundation for practice on the path. The awareness inside the human body is also the foundation of the path. For this reason, in the traditions of Tantra we become a buddha in the present body, and in the Sūtra traditions the buddha is our very mind, whereas in the Pure Land, we become buddha by practicing recollection of the Buddha. Ultimately, we become a buddha in the present, or at a future time.

In contrast, we know that in the Three Realms, the five destinies other than humans are not ideal places for practice. To attain perfect awakening, we must certainly obtain a human body. Only the human body is the fittest to engage practice. Only with a human body can we understand, and even see for ourselves, the origin of all things.

1. How to Begin to Practice, to Be Able to Attain Awakening.

*“Is the mind buddha,” or “is bodhicitta buddha”?*

Two thousand and five hundred years ago, the teacher of humans, Śākyamuni Buddha, sat under the noble bodhi tree. In the early morning of the eighth day of the twelfth lunar month, as he witnessed the rising of Venus, he attained perfect and complete awakening. Subsequently, he contemplated all sentient beings in the realm of reality with eyes of unobstructed, pure wisdom. Having emitted a long sigh, he said,

“Marvelous! Marvelous! There is no sentient being who is not endowed with the Tathāgata's wisdom. Yet, because of the clinging in their minds, they are unable to see the intrinsic nature of things in a clear way, just as they are. If only they could abandon delusion, their knowledge of all, their knowledge of nature, and their unobstructed knowledge, would then naturally become manifest ...”

According to the tradition of Secret Mantra, at the time when Śākyamuni Buddha attained awakening, a mantra spontaneously came forth from his heart:

“Oṃ, citta svāha!”

Citta means “mind.” So, the meaning of this mantra is:

“Oṃ, the mind is buddha!”

Put another way, the mind is already a buddha, and the buddha is mind; there is no buddha other than the mind, and there is no mind other than the buddha. The only difference between buddhas and sentient beings, then, entails the difference between mental delusion and awakening. In one instant of delusion, we are common beings. In one instant of awakening, we all are buddhas.

At that very moment, the five Tathāgatas including Akṣobhya from the East, Ratnasaṃbhava from the South, Amitābha from the West, Amoghasiddhi from the North, and Vairocana at the center, along with an incalculable number of buddhas, devas, nāgas, yakṣas, gandharvas, asuras, garuḍas, kiṃnaras, and mahoragas, gathered together in the sky above Śākyamuni, and, holding a jeweled vessel, conferred initiation upon the Blessed One.

Having heard Śākyamuni’s words, the Buddhas of the five directions addressed the Blessed One, saying in unison:

“Son of good family, Oṃ, bodhicitta svāha!”

What this means is, “Son of good family, there is no fault in saying that the mind is buddha, and that the buddha is just the mind.” And yet, *bodhicitta*, to the exclusion of everything else, is the buddha!

Hence, the ultimate question, “is the mind Buddha,” or “is bodhicitta Buddha”? This assertion implicates two levels of truth, the relative and the absolute. If our mind is buddha, must we still practice the path?

*Bodhicitta* is the short name for *anuttarasamyaksaṃbodhicitta*, meaning “the aspiration for supreme, perfect awakening.” From the perspective of absolute truth, the nature of the mind is pure and undefiled, just like a lotus flower. It is then an ultimate reality that is non-arising and non-ceasing.

However, from the perspective of relative truth, in order to become a buddha for the sake of all beings, it is still necessary to generate the precious aspiration for awakening. Human emotions are impermanent, and yet the love of a mind endowed with great compassion is unceasing. Only when wisdom and compassion, which are part of the nature of our minds from the very beginning, become fully developed, are we then called perfectly awakened buddhas.

Having heard the words of the Five Tathāgatas, Śākyamuni Buddha thus repeated the mantra, saying:

“Oṃ, *bodhicitta* svāha!”

Just as Śākyamuni Buddha repeated the mantra, his mind became fully open, for he achieved understanding. He then immediately attained the supreme, immutable fruition of Buddhahood.

*The four aids to penetration—One: refuge and* bodhicitta*.*

Now, since “bodhicitta is buddha,” where, then, do we begin to practice?

The practices of Supreme Yoga Tantra include the preliminary practices and the actual practices. The preliminary practices, or aids to penetration, are also known as the four practices for thought transformation. They are the foundation of Buddhahood.

The first aid to penetration includes refuge and the generation of *bodhicitta*. We take refuge in the Guru, in the Buddha, in the Dharma, and in the Saṃgha. However, in the Sūtra traditions, we only take refuge in the Three Jewels. Why, then, in the Vajrayāna, do we also take refuge in the Guru, or “master”? If you lack the guidance of a qualified master, you would perhaps not even hear the names of the Three Jewels: Buddha, Dharma, and Saṃgha.

The *vajra* is a symbol of immovability and indestructibility, emblematic of something never turning back and changing. The guide who confers the empowerments, and who passes down on you the teachings of the preliminary and actual practices, is your *vajra* master.

Perhaps, we all understand the reason that we must take refuge in the Buddha Jewel and in the Dharma Jewel. Still, we do not understand why we must also take refuge in the Saṃgha Jewel. It is because the Saṃgha Jewel is entirely proficient in everything that concerns the Buddha and the Dharma Jewel. The Buddha’s teachings and instructions, which the Saṃgha Jewel upholds, and the unmistaken path leading to awakening, which the Saṃgha Jewel follows, are what we call the Dharma Jewel. It is only through the Dharma Jewel that you attain the Buddha Jewel. Thus, both the Buddha Jewel and the Dharma Jewel come from the Saṃgha Jewel. For this reason, then, we must also take refuge in the Saṃgha Jewel.

The material supports of the Three Jewels of Buddha, Dharma, and Saṃgha are, respectively, Śākyamuni Buddha, the one thousand two hundred fifty great Arhats, and the scriptures contained in the twelve divisions of the Buddhist Tripiṭaka.

As for our nature, it is intrinsically endowed with the Three Jewels of Buddha, Dharma, and Saṃgha. Therefore, our nature is called Natural Three Jewels. When we take refuge in the Three Jewels, the objects to which we go for refuge—the Three Jewels of Buddha, Dharma, and Saṃgha—and the mind that goes for refuge, become one single entity, returning to their original nature, which is nondual. At this time, your intrinsically awakened mind is the Buddha Jewel; your intrinsic, profound essence, transcending all language, thinking, and concepts, is called the Dharma Jewel; the union of the Buddha Jewel and the Dharma Jewel, then, is the Saṃgha Jewel.

It is necessary to recite the refuge and the *bodhicitta* formulas one hundred thousand times. Each time we recite the formulas, you plant the roots of virtue deriving from refuge and *bodhicitta* in the field that is your consciousness. Yet, what if you do not reach one hundred thousand recitations? Do you still plant roots of virtue? Indeed, you do, but they will not be solid. Certainly, you must plant the instructions, and the aspirations, of refuge and *bodhicitta*, deep into your heart, for they are the seeds of Buddhahood.

The cause of *bodhicitta* is the mind of great compassion. It is the direct cause of Buddhahood, as well as the foundation of wisdom. Being the mind of supreme and perfect awakening, it is beyond the confusion and unawakening of common beings, and beyond the mistaken knowledge and false awakening of the non-Buddhists. *Bodhicitta* and wisdom are both learned through direct inspiration by the buddhas, they are obtained from the Three Jewels. Therefore, once we take refuge, we must keep training in the Buddha’s teachings.

After you take refuge, only the supreme *bodhicitta* is the mind that aspires to attain awakening for the sake of sentient beings. If you do not take refuge, even though you might avoid meat and recollect the Buddha, or if you avoid killing and nurture life, this is merely the practice of the ten virtuous deeds. It is the cause for rebirth in the destinies of humans and gods. Still, it is impossible to achieve genuine awakening even by the instructions of a Wheel Turning King.

Only when you generate the precious *bodhicitta* can you truly attain awakening. If you do not do so, you have no reason whatsoever to become a buddha. The single root of Buddhahood is then the mind that strives to attain awakening for the welfare of all sentient beings. Among the four aids to penetration, only *bodhicitta* consists of the correct path, whereas the other practices such as the confession practice and the maṇḍala offering are mere supports. Without *bodhicitta*, would you take the pain of removing karmic obstacles through confession? Would you even offer a maṇḍala to accumulate merit?

Thus, we must generate *bodhicitta* on all three levels of practice, namely the foundation, the path, and the fruition stages.

In terms of the foundation, the nature of the mind has always been spontaneously present and complete in itself, and perfectly endowed with the virtues of the three bodies. This nature was not given to you by the Buddha. Moreover, you did not acquire it through your own efforts. In contrast, your nature is originally endowed with the knowledge of the complete and perfect qualities realized by a buddha. It is not something that you must look for outside yourself. This is what we call *bodhicitta* from the perspective of the foundation.

In terms of the path, you are naturally endowed with *bodhicitta*, for your intrinsic nature is that of a buddha. However, if you do not practice the path, you will be unable to attain the fruition of *bodhicitta*. Therefore, you must practice repentance, accumulate vast merits, and develop a mind-to-mind relationship with your Guru. This is *bodhicitta* from the perspective of the path.

In terms of the fruition, is it still necessary, then, to take refuge in the Three Jewels? After all, I am already a Buddha Jewel. “Oṃ, *bodhicitta* svāha!” For, indeed, *bodhicitta* is buddha. Still, on the level of fruition, you must take refuge in the Three Jewels and generate *bodhicitta*. In addition, here the objects of refuge are different altogether. Accordingly, because the objects of refuge are different, the mind that goes for refuge also is different.

So, do you have *bodhicitta*? Of course, you do. But if you have not generated *bodhicitta* already, you must do so. And how do you generate the supreme *bodhicitta*? You generate *bodhicitta* according to the ritual instructions of Secret Mantra. First, your Guru reads the instructions. Then, in repeating his words, you generate the aspiration for awakening. The overall sense of the instructions is, “Just like all buddhas have generated in the past the supreme aspiration for awakening, avoiding non-virtue and practicing virtue, I will also generate the supreme aspiration for awakening, avoiding non-virtue and practicing virtue.”

If you were to ask, “My Guru recited the instructions, and I, too, have repeated them. In this way, I generated *bodhicitta*. Is this correct?”

“It is correct,” I would say.

Your Guru might then remark, “It is correct,” for everything you said above.

*The four aids to penetration—Two: the Vajrasattva meditation for repentance.*

“I generated *bodhicitta*, so am I a buddha?”

“You are indeed a buddha.”

“So, have I attained Buddhahood?”

“You’re nearly there.”

“Why am I almost there?”

“You have taken refuge, and you have generated *bodhicitta*. However, since time without beginning, have you not performed any negative actions? Have you not performed any at all, with your mind?”

“I have performed some.”

“Have you not performed any at all, with your speech?”

“I have performed some.”

“And have you not performed any at all, with your body?”

“I have.”

All of your past deeds come from beginningless craving, aversion, and ignorance. Having taken refuge, and having generated *bodhicitta*, you must still repent for the negative actions that you have performed since beginningless time. The second of the four aids to penetration thus involves the recitation of the hundred syllable mantra of Vajrasattva.

“Is it then possible, in paying homage to the Buddha, to repent for karmic obstacles?”

It is indeed possible to remove karmic obstacles in paying homage to the Buddha. But in Secret Mantra, that is, in the Vajrayāna, we find the ultimate confession method—the hundred syllable mantra of Vajrasattva—the king of repentance. In Secret Mantra, the Śākyamuni of the Sūtra traditions is called Vajrasattva. The heart mantra of Vajrasattva is capable of burning down the ignorance and obstacles that we have accumulated since time without beginning.

“How many times must we recite the mantra?”

“One hundred thousand.”

*The four aids to penetration—Three: the maṇḍala offering.*

“Once I have completed the hundred thousand recitations, my actions of body have been purified, my actions of speech are within a hair’s breadth to that goal, and my actions of mind, too, have been purified. I will then be completely purified, in mind and in body, is that correct? I took refuge, I generated *bodhicitta*, I have repented for my karmic obstacles. Can I now become a buddha?”

“You’re nearly there.”

“What’s missing now?”

“To attain Buddhahood, you must still accumulate vast, limitless merit. Do you have any merit at all?”

“I didn’t consider this point, that is, that I must have merit.”

The Vajrayāna features a supreme, excellent method for accumulating merit, namely, the maṇḍala offering. Rice stands for the eight auspicious symbols, which represent authority, long life, renown, and victory, and for the staggering fortune of a Wheel Turning King, including the Seven Treasures, and an incalculable number of worlds made of four continents, suns and moons, and Sumeru mountains.

This entire collection of items is offered on a table to the Guru and to the Three Jewels. Within the short time of two hours, you can very quickly complete the necessary accumulation of merit of three great cosmic ages.

If you wish to attain Buddhahood quickly, you will need vast and extensive merits. And the method to complete this accumulation is the maṇḍala offering.

“How many times should I offer the maṇḍala?”

“One hundred thousand.”

*The four aids to penetration—Four: Guru yoga.*

“I am now done offering several hundred thousand! I took refuge and generated *bodhicitta* one hundred thousand times, I recited the Vajrasattva mantra one hundred thousand times, and I offered the maṇḍala one hundred thousand times. Can I now become a buddha?”

“You’re still nearly there.”

“What’s missing now?”

“Your mind and the mind of your Guru are not yet joined together.”

All buddhas abide to the same truth, which is communicated from mind to mind. All buddhas only appear in the world as a result of the greatest of all causes. They do so in order to reveal the buddha-vision.

You should become one with your Guru. To this end, you should bow down your head with respect, join the palms of your hands together in front of your chest, and visualize the three syllables “Oṃ, Ah, Hūṃ.” The “Oṃ” syllable is made of a while light, the “Ah” of a red light, and the “Hūṃ” of a blue light. The three syllables, emitted respectively from the forehead, the throat, and the chest of your Guru, enter your own forehead, throat, and chest, washing away the negative actions of mind, speech, and body that you have accumulated throughout countless cosmic ages. You thus attain the pure qualities of body, speech, and wisdom of your Guru.

While you pay homage, in showing your heartfelt admiration, you express the following wish with fervor:

“The Guru is the Buddha and the Dharma,

The teacher is endowed with the qualities of Vajradhāra,

Only the teacher knows everything that needs to be done,

Therefore, I bow down before the supreme Guru.”

When you perform prostrations, you should be like Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva. In a former lifetime, as he sought to rescue his mother, he looked up in the sky and saw a manifestation of the Buddha. He then immediately shed copious tears and bowed down to the ground. However, after throwing your five limbs to the ground in prostration, you should also quickly get up. In fact, when you perform prostrations, your vital energies of body, speech, and mind, usually decrease, therefore, as soon as you bow down, you must immediately lift yourself up.

“How many prostrations should be performed in this way?”

“One hundred thousand.”

“Can we become a buddha, then?”

These are only preliminary practices. You still need to engage the actual practices, cultivating the Perfection of Wisdom. The Buddha, who is the most honored among two-legged beings, said that both accumulations of merit and wisdom must be brought to completion. In addition, the tradition of Secret Mantra features four classes of tantra, including Action, Performance, Yoga, and Supreme Yoga. Among these four, the Supreme Yoga class features the generation stage and the completion stage, through which you can realize the space-like, boundless realm of the *dharmakāya* in this very lifetime.

5. After the Maṇḍala Offering, your Merits will Increase

*In the languages of India, maṇḍala means “conceiving”*

The base of the maṇḍala represents the world. It represents an inconceivable number of Sumeru mountains, an inconceivable number of four continents, and an inconceivable number of trichiliocosms. The grains of rice and precious stones used for the maṇḍala offering, symbolize all kinds of precious stones including gold, silver, and jade, the fine delicacies, the abodes of celestial beings, the suns, the moons, and the stars comprised in one great trichiliocosm. All these objects are valued by people as objects of prosperity and beauty. Everything that people are reluctant to let go of is thus included in the base of the maṇḍala.

So, what is the meaning of the word maṇḍala? In the languages of India, maṇḍala means “conceiving.”

In the Sūtra traditions, consciousness divides into eight kinds. Setting aside the six sensory consciousness, including the visual, the auditory, the olfactory, the gustatory, the tactile, and the mental consciousness, there is a seventh consciousness named *manovijñāna*, meaning “afflicted mentality,” and an eighth, the *ālayavijñāna*, meaning “storehouse consciousness.” In Chinese translation, the seventh, *mano* consciousness, is rendered by the sinograph *siliang*, which means “conceiving,” for it never stops conceiving, having no rest time from morning until night.

The referent of the sinograph *si* is the subject; the referent of the sinograph *liang* is the object. Again, *si* is the perceiving subject, also referred to as the subjective part; *liang* is the perceived object, also referred to as the objective part. Joined together, both are referred to as *mano*. The meaning of *mano*, then, is that of *siliang*, or “conceiving.”

The word pronounced *mano* is in a language of southern India. There is a different pronunciation of the same term however in northern India, that is, “maṇḍala.” In Secret Mantra, in the context of the maṇḍala offering, “maṇḍala” thus means *siliang*, that is, “conceiving.” There are outer maṇḍalas, inner maṇḍalas, and secret maṇḍalas. In the context of the outer maṇḍalas, we offer all of the objects that we cherish the most to the Guru and to the Three Jewels.

*Ultimately, what does your mind “conceive”?*

To begin, you recite the formula one hundred thousand times. As you chant the formula, you wipe the base of the maṇḍalas with your right hand.

First, you must purify the self-existing *vajra* base, and only then, as you visualize the great trichiliocosm, you perform the offering ritual, chanting the formula:

   “Oṃ vajra bhumi ah hūṃ!”

   As you recite “Oṃ vajra bhumi ah hūṃ,” you then visualize the base of the maṇḍala as the range of iron mountains encircling the world system. The outer range of iron mountains then encircles the central king of mountains, the lofty Mount Sumeru. To the east of Mount Sumeru is the continent of Pūrvavideha, to the south the continent of Jambudvīpa, to the north is the continent of Aparagodānīya, and to the west the continent of Uttarakuru. Subsequently, you visualize the mountain of jewels, the wish-fulfilling tree, the harvest that needs no sowing, and the wish-fulfilling cow, which produces unceasing milk, and from which the quintessential ghee is drawn.

When Kangkar Rinpoche was born, his family was extremely poor, with only the walls of the household standing. To have another child meant to have another mouth to feed. The family members became extremely concerned, thinking: “How will we get enough milk!” No one imagined that, soon afterwards, the cow that belonged to household would also give birth to a calf. As a result, there was a steady flow of cow’s milk. The more milk they drew, the more inexhaustible it became. The whole family was overjoyed, for not only did the calf, the child, and everyone else in the family have enough to eat and drink, but copious amounts of butter were also extracted from it, taken to the city market, and sold for money.

When Kangkar Rinpoche was born, many auspicious signs and omens appeared in the sky and on earth. Still, this auspicious sign only was the most sublime and rarest! Later, rumors spread about this event at the Kangkar monastery, which confirmed that the toddler was the reincarnation of a reincarnated master from the monastery. As a result, the child was taken to the monastery, where he was formally enthroned.

Setting aside the last four verses, lazy people do not recite any other part of the ritual. It is indeed lazy, to be a nun! At the end of the offering, you then take the basis of the maṇḍala and all other items, wrap them up in cloth, and put them back into the shrine. Among the most precious offering items, there is gold, silver, sandalwood, pearls, agate, coral, and other precious stones.

Thus, the outer maṇḍala consists of (1) worldly treasures such as gold, silver, enamel, pearls, agate, crystal, lapis lazuli, amber, ruby, and chalcedony; (2) the seven precious things of a Wheel-Turning Monarch, including a wheel, an elephant, a horse, a wish-granting gem, a woman, a treasurer, and a counselor; (3) and the eight auspicious symbols, including the white conch shell, the wheel, the parasol, the victory banner, the lotus, the treasure vase, the pair of golden fish, and the endless knot, representing the incomparable power of the Buddha’s teachings; all these items are then offered to the precious teacher and to the Three Jewels.

And so, why is it called the offering of a “maṇḍala”? What, ultimately, does your mind conceive? It visualizes the offering of such precious, rare, and auspicious things. By performing one hundred thousand offerings, your merits will increase day and night.

*Having offered one hundred thousand maṇḍalas, your merits become unmatched*

If you perform offerings with your physical body, you will obtain material wealth, long life, freedom from illness, and your body will be adorned by excellent characteristics. If, on the other hand, you perform offerings with your mind, you will be conscientious, you will have a vast learning, and you will unlock the door to wisdom. By means of the maṇḍala offering, both your body and mind will obtain inconceivable roots of merit.

To begin, you learn the Tibetan text for the maṇḍala ritual, and only then do you offer the maṇḍala one hundred thousand times. If the pace of your recitation is fast, in two hours you might be able to perform three hundred offerings. Yet, if your pace is slow, your mind is extremely calm, and if the items to be offered and the object of the offering are visualized in a clear way, as if they were right before your eyes, then in two hours you will be able to offer about one hundred maṇḍalas. Still, there are individuals who, having entered a state of concentration, will only be able to perform ten maṇḍala offerings over the two hours.

Between the late Tang and the early Song dynasty in China, there was in Tibet a sage, whose name was Tiqie. Although he had a high degree of realization, this sage often found himself in dire poverty. During the New Year’s festivities, the people around him had an abundance of all kinds of foods, including chicken, ducks, pork, beef, and fish. Yet, he was extremely poor. He had no better option than wipe their bowls clean, and perform an offering of three bowls of clear water. Others burned incense as an offering to the Buddha. But he had no incense to burn. He also had no incense burner. His only option was to plant a blade of grass into the soil, then look up in the sky, and pray with a sincere mind: “I prostrate before the loving and compassionate teacher and the Three Jewels. Beyond this tiny offering, your disciple has nothing whatsoever, still he hopes that the teacher and the Three Jewels will forgive him for this …”

Later, his teacher told him: “You should perform the maṇḍala offering. After you offer the maṇḍala, your merit will increase greatly.”

He completed one hundred thousand offerings of the maṇḍala, after which he never ceased performing the ritual for the rest of his life. Because his merits increased, his lifespan also increased, and, as a result, he lived to the age of three or four hundred years.

In Tibet, there is a tradition according to which, during the practice of the six-syllable mantra, the practice of the maṇḍala offering is also performed at the same time. In this tradition, practitioners have profound and extensive merits, which in turn make their lifespan longer.

According to the practices of Secret Mantra, before the *vajra* teacher explains a scripture or a commentary, the disciple must first offer a maṇḍala. With a white scarf in his or her hands, the disciple holds the base of a maṇḍala made with fine materials. Standing before the throne of the vajra teacher, he or she then chants the ritual of the maṇḍala offering with a polite and moving rhythm, beseeching the teacher to turn the wheel of the dharma.

Once the teacher has completed the transmission of the instructions, the disciple must also offer a maṇḍala. He or she must do so to express the deep gratitude for the teacher’s generosity in bestowing the instructions.

This, then, is the outer maṇḍala. Once the practice of the outer maṇḍala is completed, it is also necessary to practice the inner and the secret maṇḍala.

After someone performs this maṇḍala offering one hundred thousand times, the merits of such a person will be unmatched. Common people will be unable to tell the difference, for they will keep the old look. A skinny person will still look skinny. An overweight person will still look overweight. The gods, however, will perceive the glowing radiance emitting from this person’s whole body. Across the Three Realms, humans and gods will pay respect to him or her, bowing down by prostrating their heads to his or her feet.

What is the reason for this? It is that prior to the maṇḍala offering, the practitioner will have taken refuge, generated *bodhicitta*, and repented for karmic obstacles. As a result, his or her body, speech, mind, and obstacles, will be completely purified. On the basis of his or her purified body and mind, he or she has then offered with a sincere attitude all the most beautiful, the most auspicious, and most precious things of the world to the teacher and to the Three Jewels.

Having respectfully offered the maṇḍala one hundred thousand times, his or her body and mind will have become increasingly pure and bright, even bearing a radiant glow. In the state of clear light, the pure vision of liberation naturally arises in his or her mind, leading eventually to communication with buddhas from mind to mind.

6. The Hundred Syllable Mantra Opens the Seventy-Two Thousand Channels

*In order to purify the subtle channels, it is necessary to practice the hundred syllable mantra of Vajrasattva*

In the Sūtra traditions, this very mind is already a buddha. In Secret Mantra, however, one becomes a buddha in this very body. Hence, it is the body that is taken as the root of the path. In the human body, there are numerous subtle channels, as well as white and red drops endowed with the space-like qualities of the pure and unborn *dharmakāya* buddhas, the perfect enjoyments of the *saṃbhogakāya* buddhas, and the thousand million *koṭis* of *nirmāṇakāya* buddhas.

The human body has seventy-two thousand subtle channels. The main channels are the left, the right, and the central channel. In addition to the three main channels, the human body also has the four *cakras*, or channel “wheels,” that is, the crown *cakra*, the throat *cakra*, the heart *cakra*, and the navel *cakra*. Taken together, channels and *cakras* are called the three channels and the four *cakras*. In order to become a buddha in this very body, it is thus necessary to train in the knowledge of the three channels and the four *cakras*. If we abide to the pith instructions of the *vajra* master concerning the three channels and the four *cakras*, we easily achieve the resulting attainments.

In order to purify the subtle channels, it is first necessary to practice the hundred syllable mantra of Vajrasattva. During the recitation of the hundred syllable mantra, we focus our attention on the corresponding places of the body. We focus on the crown of our head when we recite the first of the hundred syllables “Oṃ,” on the place between the eyebrows when we recite “Vajra,” on the tip of our nose when we recite “sattva,” between our lips when we recite “anupalaya,” and so on until the hundred syllables cover our entire body. In other words, we recite the hundred syllables and we simultaneously envision them in their respective places. This is the inner method of the hundred syllable mantra of Vajrasattva.

During the practice, your mouth recites the hundred syllables, your mind ties to the corresponding places, and your body manifests as the solemn and graceful appearance of Vajrasattva. Thus, body, speech, and mind focus on their respective objects simultaneously. After one hundred thousand recitations, the channels connected by the nodes in your body will naturally loosen up and become supple, opening up just like a snake sheds its skin.

The more recitations you perform, the more your lifespan increases. Why? In the one and same sentence, the pronunciation and the meaning of each word differs one from the other, for the inner power, function, and influence of each is indeed very different.

The secret method of the hundred syllable mantra is to restore the red and clear drops named “bodhicittas” to the appropriate *cakras*. For, these clear drops can easily ascend inside the central channel. In this manner, the knotted and tangled channels will become gradually purified and will spontaneously open up. The reason that magical powers, concentration, and the wisdom of awakening are unable to manifest is that your channels are impure. Indeed, your channels are the channels of a common being!

So, how do the channels of common beings differ from the channels of noble beings? The channels of common beings are conditioned by wealth and property, sexual desire, fame and renown, fine foods and sleep; they are polluted by visual forms, pleasant sounds, fragrant smells, gustatory forms, and tactile forms, all of which block them up with filth and dirt. The channels become so tightly bound together that it is hard to restore them to their original state.

The channels of noble beings, instead, are soft and supple, open and unobstructed. Noble beings in fact avoid the aforementioned five kinds of desires that arise from the six sense objects. For this reason, they are regarded as the rulers of all. With the same compassion for all living beings, only bodhisattvas are thus capable of single-heartedly taking refuge in the Three Jewels of Buddha, Dharma, and Saṃgha, generating the mind that seeks to attain the ultimate state of omniscience for the welfare of all living beings.

Because of their noble intentions and unselfish ambitions, bodhisattvas lack the slightest desire and craving for any wealth and property, sexual desire, fame and renown, fine foods and sleep. Therefore, their energy is pure, and so are their channels. When the subtle channels are purified, then, unlimited magical powers, meditative absorptions, and eloquent wisdom spring forth without obstruction.

*The fourfold set of channels in the human body: the illness channel, the affliction channel, the spirit channel, and the wisdom channel.*

The first is the illness channel. When you begin chanting the hundred syllable mantra, you are unable to eat and sleep. Your mind becomes upset and you feel uncomfortable. This is the work of the illness channel. Eventually, as you go on in your recitation your appetite returns, your complexion gets ruddy and radiant, and you gain a presence of mind. This is a sign that the illness channel is clearing up.

The second is the affliction channel. If you do not practice the path, you are not troubled by afflictions, and yet as soon as you start to practice, wild thoughts will assail you. There was once an old woman, who used to tell me: “Oh, Master! When I don’t chant I am not deluded and have no afflictions; but as soon as I start chanting, that’s when trouble starts, and I dare not speak a single word any longer!”

I said: “Tell me the story.”

“I'd talk and think about things that I never talked and thought about, I'd get so scared that I dared not go on with the recitation, what does it all mean?”

I then replied: “Your affliction channel has opened. You should not be afraid, madam, because if you just do your recitation, in three years from now, your delusions will naturally and slowly disappear. This is the occurrence of karmic obstructions. When karmic obstructions occur, they do not occur in small quantity, on the contrary, it is as if you turn a somersault that is eighteen thousand leagues long, for karmic obstacles from countless cosmic ages ago can still recur into the present lifetime. So, madam, please do not think you have made a mistake. Right when you stop being afraid, the recitation itself will destroy these karmic obstructions. In addition, when monks and nuns bump into karmic obstructions, they get into much bigger trouble! They have all kinds of karmic obstructions.”

Another time, someone came over for a medical check. When I felt this person’s calf, the channels and nodes were so tangled together that they curled up into a ball.

“Ouch! Your waist is hurting.”

“Today I came over exactly to have my kidneys checked!”

I then said: “Your stomach is hurting.”

“Ouch! I came over to have you check my stomach!”

So, they said: “Master! You really are a super doctor! You know what the problem is right after checking, this is far more amazing than taking X-rays!”

I said: “Yes, the channels in this person’s body are all tangled up together, this is why the sicknesses are many.”

Some people do their practices well, and still do not get sick. But if your mind becomes upset and you feel uncomfortable every day, this is because your affliction channels have become all tangled together. All you need to do is open up the affliction channels, the afflictions will then vanish with no trace.

The third is the spirit channel. It so happens, in certain moments, that the gods descend from the heavens, that goblins come into sight, that the Eight Immortals cross the oceans, or that the heroine He Xiangu pays you a visit. At these times, things get so hectic that you’re unable to do anything else. This is the spirit channel that has opened up. You should not be afraid, for things will slowly get better.

Practitioners often experience these four sets of channels: the illness channel, the affliction channel, and the wisdom channel. Being sick is like the key that unlocks a treasure house. It can help you open up all secret doors one after another. Eventually, when you open the innermost door, you find a glaring golden light shining forth from an unmeasurable hall of incomparable glory.

Therefore, practitioners are not afraid of getting sick, for through sickness they can clear up a large amount of negative actions from past lives. You cannot attain liberation when your karmic obstructions, afflictive tendencies, and harmful obstructions have not yet been purified.

Thus, when the three sets of channels including the illness, the afflictive, and the spirit channels have already opened, only then will you open up the wisdom channel. The wisdom channel is the central channel. Once the energy winds enter the central channel, your limitless skills such as magical powers, meditative absorptions, wisdom and eloquence will all become manifest.

The manifestation of these skills however is not something that just happens in a finger snap. In contrast, it is something that unfolds gradually, step after step. For, even when the blocked channels are open, there are smaller channels that have knots and that are blocked, and these smaller channels have still smaller ones, in layer upon layer for an infinite number of channels.

Whether it is the illness channel, the affliction channel, the spirit channel, or the wisdom channel, once the knotted channels have been opened, at that very moment, the knots at the heart are opened accordingly, and one is then capable of attaining the state of an Arhat.

Hence, it is necessary to recite the hundred syllable mantra of Vajrasattva. In Secret Mantra, Śākyamuni Buddha is also referred to in fact as the buddha Vajrasattva. Śākyamuni Buddha purified his illness, affliction, spirit, and wisdom channels by the recitation of the hundred syllable mantra, and in this way became a buddha in his very lifetime.

7. The Reason Why Full-Body Prostrations Are Extremely Important

*It is possible to access the correct practice of Secret Mantra only upon the foundation of one hundred thousand prostrations.*

You were asked to practice the four aids to penetration, and you hardly practiced them correctly. Yet still, after all the trouble you took to perform one hundred thousand full-body prostrations, you thought this would be good enough, and that you would never perform one again.

“Oh, Master, I did one hundred thousand prostrations for you! I am done practicing the aids to penetration!”

Your master then instructs you, saying that, having completed the hundred thousand prostrations, your ribs, and bumps and hollows inside your spine are not yet hurting. For this reason, this time is the right time to perform full-body prostrations.

When doing physical exercises, and in particular, when doing stance training, you first do the horse stance. Through squats in the horse stance, people can attain special training for the functionality of their core organs, improving endurance, waist and leg strength, and balance ability. In this manner, they can burst out an extraordinary energy when doing front-flips in mid-air. Similarly, you will be able to access the correct practice of Secret Mantra only upon the foundation of one hundred thousand prostrations.

In Inner China there used to be a monk who, even when meeting his old master Huiding, pretended to be always unhappy. Most monks would greet him, and still, he would be humming and hawing, turning his head left and right, and not greeting them back. To the disciples who took refuge under him, he explained:

“I have indeed completed the practice of the four aids to penetration, I have taken refuge and generated *bodhicitta* one hundred thousand times, I have performed one hundred thousand prostrations, I have performed one hundred thousand recitations of the hundred syllable mantra, I have practiced one hundred thousand maṇḍala offerings, and the accumulation of merit of those who have practiced the four aids to penetration is remarkably extensive! I dare not return a greeting to anyone. If I were to greet anyone back, this person would certainly lose his or her accumulation!”

Having heard about his reasons, someone asked him: “How much, actually, does your merit amount to, for practicing the four aids to penetration?”  
“My accumulation of merits is remarkably extensive! It is hard to measure, even to the limits of the space of the realm of reality!”

“Why, then, have you become so skinny, that we still haven’t seen you grow the thirty-two major marks and the eighty minor marks of the body of a buddha?”

“That’s not what I mean!”

“What do you mean, then? Why don’t you greet people back?”

The monk’s tongue became tangled up. He was left speechless.

The merits of the aids to penetration are praised as inconceivable in order to engender courage in the practitioners, and to inspire zeal, determination, and faith in them so that they engage in the practice. Because this monk wrongly believed these merits to be real, and grasped onto them as truly existent, he could not avoid generating the pride of someone who regards oneself a world above others.

*Why it said that the proper time to perform prostrations is after performing one hundred thousand prostrations.*

On the highway of practice, the most frightening things are undesirable deviations from the path.

As you access the correct practice of Secret Mantra, you should visualize a five-colored “ah” letter symbolizing the five elements at the crown *chakra*, at the throat *chakra*, at the heart *chakra*, and at the navel *chakra*. At that time, the clear drops rise and fall within the three channels and the four *chakras*, while the energy winds circle back and forth along the channel pathways. Take the case of someone who has recently generated *bodhicitta*. If this person places excessive focus in one point during visualization, this might lead to blockages in the energy channels, which might then trigger physical and mental illness and cause the arising of obstacles such as afflictions and negative emotions.

When non-Buddhist practitioners meditate, the true *qi* of the inner body circulates in the two channels named *ren* and *du*, following the course of the twelve meridian channels. Unexpectedly, the meditator might grow a big sore in his or her back. After the sore becomes infected, yellow fluid begins to run. It might be treated for a long time, yet it will not heal, which makes the non-Buddhists practitioner angry and afraid, for he or she tries to find an explanation yet is unable to find one.

In Secret Mantra, there are detailed explanations concerning the side-effects of winds, channels, and drops and the methods to treat their deviations. In addition, Secret Mantra skillfully applies techniques such as full-body prostrations, *vajra-fist* physical exercises, and the treasure vase breathing practice, taking the winds, channels, and drops and adjusting them to the most suitable positions. In this way, not only side-effects hardly occur, it will be like having a rocket that helps one fly, which, in turn, helps one continue and deepen the practice.

*Full-Body Prostrations and* Vajra*-Fist Physical Exercises use different approaches to achieve equally extraordinary results.*

Full-body prostrations are an important means through which knots are opened by stretching and contracting the channels over the entire body. The bending and stretching of the spine and the central channel is the means for the winds and drops to gain direct access into the central channel. Setting aside full-body prostrations, *vajra-fist* physical exercises also occupy a prominent position in Secret Mantra.

The Six Yogas of Naropa contain the quintessence of all physical exercises. Other sets of subsidiary physical exercises, such as the set of twenty, the set of thirty-six, and the set of one hundred and eight exercises, cannot be compared favorably with the actual Six Yogas of Naropa.

When training in *vajra*-fist exercises, it is necessary to put into practice the treasure vase breathing technique. Or else, half of the results of the practice will be lost. The *vajra*-fist physical exercises can cause the red and white *bodhicitta* to flow into the channels through the knots that are decaying and necrotic, while at the same time healing and nourishing them, and finally causing them to rejuvenate.

Sitting for a long time in meditation can easily cause chronic diseases due to imbalances in wind and blood circulation. Through the six key positions of stretching, turning, and spinning, the Six Yogas of Naropa open up each and every knot in the channel pathways. This not only removes diseases such as rheumatisms, but also helps the generation of *gtum mo*, or “inner heat,” and of mutual resonance with the buddhas and bodhisattvas. Thus, full-body prostrations and *vajra*-fist exercises use different approaches to achieve equally extraordinary results.

Accordingly, from the Vajrayāna perspective of Secret Mantra, full-body prostrations are very, or rather, exceedingly, important.