I have been requested to teach on Chenrezig practice. First, why it is important to chant in Tibetan is not because Tibetan is superior to other languages, but because I received the transmission in Tibetan, therefore, I am teaching and transmitting it in Tibetan. I cannot transmit it in other languages until I have some realisation of these practices. I have some realisation of course compared to some others, but I don’t have the full realisation, and therefore I don’t feel competent enough and ready to transmit the lineage in languages other than in the language I received it.

Also the Tibetan language is very sacred because of many great masters. Tibetan writing is based on Sanskrit and was created by Thönme Sambhota during the reign of the first Buddhist king of Tibet, which was a long time ago. Actually it was long before Guru
Padmasambhava came to Tibet, five generations before that. It was created based on Sanskrit so the direct transmission of the dharma has taken place from Sanskrit to Tibetan and that is continued up to today. Then there are certain parts of text that we still say in Sanskrit, but our Sanskrit is not very good, because it is Sanskrit with Tibetan tongue. Nevertheless we have to say it that way because that is how I have received the transmission of the lineage. For example, we say OM MANI PEMA HUNG. The proper pronunciation in Sanskrit is OM MANI PADME HUM, but I can't say it that way because I did not receive it that way. It would be contaminating the lineage of transmission that I have received. But of course, if you have received it in pure Sanskrit as OM MANI PADME HUM, then you should say it as pure Sanskrit OM MANI PADME HUM. These days some strange things happen, for example, some of our Tibetan monks go to Sanskrit Universities and when they come back they correct all of our mantras! OM BENZA SATO SAMAYA… that is how we have said it for the past 1500 years, that is how the lineage is transmitted and that is how many of our great masters attained enlightenment. But now these students who finish their five years of study getting a Shastri or Acharya title come back and fix it, they say OM VAJRASATTVA SAMAYA…

I respect Sanskrit of course, and a Sanskrit-speaker might think that we are saying it wrong and would like to fix it, but as far as the lineage of transmission is concerned, it doesn't work that way. So we have to continue this way, but when someone reaches the level of realisation like our great translators, like Marpa, like that level, then they can fix it and can transmit the blessing in that correct Sanskrit pronunciation. But not just by going to University and getting a Shastri degree. You have to attain the same realisation as the great masters who have attained the realisation through this
Tibetan pronunciation of Sanskrit. This can be fixed and has to be fixed, in India at least, because everybody in India who is saying these mantras will feel very uncomfortable, because they feel they are saying it wrong. In the West it doesn’t matter, they don’t feel that way, because they don’t know whether they are saying it right or wrong. It is like in China dhyān becomes chan and in Japan chan becomes zen. Now zen comes back to New Delhi and everybody is driving a zen, which is actually dhyān. So it is a little bit like that. If you don’t mind driving a zen then I don’t think you will mind saying OM MANI PEME HUNG instead of OM MANI PADME HUM.

Anyway, first we recite the refuge and bodhichitta prayer, which is a very simple melody. In Tibetan the chanting is always in a low tone, not a high tone, for both men and women. This way we can relax and continue the harmonious state and visualisation and everything; it’s much easier when we chant with low tone. A high tone is very good when we say devotional prayers to the guru, then you can be a little emotional and have a high tone and be overly melodious. But the basic practices should have a very simple and calm melody.

In the Buddha, dharma and the assembly of noble ones
I take refuge until enlightenment is reached
From the merit of practicing, giving etcetera
May I attain Buddhahood for the sake of all that lives.

The first two lines are refuge and the second two lines are bodhichitta. After that we recite the elaborated bodhichitta prayer, the ‘Four Immeasurable Thoughts’. These are limitless or immeasurable loving-kindness, limitless and immeasurable compassion, limitless and immeasurable joy and limitless and immeasurable impartiality.

May all beings have happiness and whatever causes happiness
May they be free from suffering and whatever causes suffering
May they never be separated from the pure happiness which is without suffering.
May they remain in great equanimity beyond attachment or aversion to things near and far.

Loving-kindness means, may all sentient beings be happy. Compassion means, may all sentient beings be free from suffering. Joy means, when all sentient beings are happy, you are happy instead of jealous. If others have a big house or a new car or a nice little shoe polishing place then we are happy. Limitless joy means: May all sentient beings always remain in happiness and with the causes and conditions of happiness. Impartiality means that this compassion, this joy and loving-kindness is impartial, not only for your friends and enemies or strangers, it is for everyone; for all sentient beings from heaven to hell. We are saying these Four Limitless Thoughts for all sentient beings. Otherwise it will be a limited thought. So it is a limitless thought because it is for all sentient beings.

After this we have the visualization of the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara. It is translated very clearly in English so I will go through it so that you get the understanding. On the crown of my and all sentient beings’ heads is a white lotus and moon—it means moon disc, not a round moon seat; Avalokiteshvara will have a very hard time sitting on it if it is a full round moon! So it is a flat crystal moon disc that is there to sit on. Then from the HRI [syllable], which is standing on the lotus, light radiates. HRI is a Sanskrit character (visualizing a Tibetan or Sanskrit character doesn’t matter, the Tibetan character is similar to the Sanskrit). So first a huge beautiful lotus facing up, then on top of the lotus is a huge crystal moon disc on top of which stands a white letter HRI which radiates light. HRI is like a sun and moon radiating all colours of light. Why I say moon is because if it is a sun only then just yellow light radiates. So all colours of light radiate in all directions, and wherever this light touches, all the sentient beings to whom this light touches, their suffering is abolished and their defilements are purified. Then that merit comes back to the HRI. Again the HRI radiates light to all directions and makes offerings to all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas of all directions. Because there are countless Buddhas and bodhisattvas, enlightened ones, it becomes an offering to them; whatever is the offering, it becomes offering and their blessing comes back and dissolves into
the HRI. Then the HRI transforms into four-arm Avalokiteshvara sitting on the lotus.

It is described here as, Chenrezig radiating white clear light of five colours gazing with compassionate eyes and a loving smile, with four arms two folded in prayer. He has four arms: the upper two are joined together in the namaskar mudra and holding a wish fulfilling gem; a beautiful gem which can fulfil the wishes of all sentient beings. Whatever they wish, by the blessing and power of this gem their wishes are fulfilled. So a wish fulfilling gem is held in the namaskar mudra with the upper two hands. The lower two holding a crystal rosary and white lotus.

Then, he is arrayed with jewels and silks, with a doeskin over his shoulder. This is an important symbol and many people in the West don’t understand this. They think that because you have to kill a deer to have a skin, how can a deerskin represent compassion? But in India we understand this, because many of our gods and goddesses have the deerskin representing compassion. A deer is a very peaceful animal and its skin represents the compassionate aspect of a bodhisattva, therefore a deerskin is here. It doesn’t mean we have to get a deerskin for ourselves to represent compassion, definitely not, but Avalokiteshvara has it here to represent peacefulness and compassion.

Amitabha is his head ornament. Amitabha is the Buddha of the Western Paradise. Actually Buddha Amitabha represents the purified defilements of a human being. Out of the six realms the human defilement is attachment. Purification of attachment is contentment. When attachment is transformed then that is wisdom and that wisdom manifests as Buddha Amitabha. That Buddha is on the crown of Avalokiteshvara, above him in space.

His two feet are in the vajra asana. Avalokiteshvara sits in the vajrasana, which is a cross-legged posture. Many translators translate it as ‘lotus-posture’, but I don’t understand where that comes from. Then it has to be ‘padmasana’. But it is not padmasana, it is vajrasana. A stainless moon supports his back. Again another crystal moon disc, identical to the one on which he is sitting, is also behind him. So he is sitting on a moon crystal disc which is white and shining and behind him is also a white and shining crystal moon disc, absolutely round.

Avalokiteshvara has a five-dhyani-Buddha crown, all the jewellery of a sambhogakaya Buddha. He is a bodhisattva, but he has this jewellery, which represents the six paramitas. So there are six main items of jewellery: for the hands, legs, neck, crown, head, ears, and as a belt, and each one represents one of the paramitas. A female manifestation of a deity will have only five ornaments because she represents the wisdom paramita herself. But all the male deities have six ornaments because a male deity does not represent wisdom. So Chenrezig has six ornaments. Vajravarahi will have only five out of the six ornaments, because she herself is a manifestation of wisdom.

Then you say, he is the essence of all sources of refuge. That is your visualisation. When you have this visualisation very clearly, you yourself are here, and your father and mother, your friends and enemies, all your relatives and close friends and all other sentient beings are there, behind you. Also those who are strangers to us right now, but who actually have been our mother, father, brother, sister, friend, enemy and stranger countless times, and to be honest, who have also been our lunch and dinner countless times. We have a very close relationship with every sentient being, they have been everything to us.

For example, even if you are not a meat eater, you are a vegetarian, in order for you to be able to eat rice many sentient beings died for you. Because if a farmer doesn’t use water to drown the ants in his field then you will not have rice to eat; the ants will eat it. Also if the farmers don’t spray—in the old days they sprayed lime, nowadays they spray poison, but nevertheless whatever they spray, they have to kill all the insects and bugs, and as the result of that we have nice juicy vegetables to eat. Otherwise they will be for the insects and bugs, we will not have them. So even if we are vegetarians we are not free from eating the product of death. Therefore, all of these sentient beings who are connected with us, positively, negatively, we have them all behind us like a sea of sentient beings, billions and billions of them stretching into limitless space. So we are chanting but
all of them are joining us, because we want all mother sentient beings to get the benefit. We don’t say father or brother sentient beings, we always say mother sentient beings, because they all have been our mother, countless times.

Now when we have this visualisation clear then we say a supplication or prayer, in Tibetan solwa depa. Sol is an honorific way of saying something to somebody, that is solwa. Depa means you are putting in the effort. When you ask somebody something that is one thing, but when you ask a higher being for something then we use the word solwa depa.

Here what you are saying is, Lord, not veiled by any fault, of white colour with the Perfect Buddha as your head jewel, you gaze compassionately on all beings, to you, Chenrezig, I prostrate. This is the solwa depa. White defines pureness. In India, on a special religious occasion everyone wears white. That is what the Tibetans say, I don’t know if it is true or not. It’s a cultural thing, but white represents pureness. If we are in a hurry we can say this prayer only once, otherwise we say it three times.

**Question:** What do the lotus and mala represent?

**Rinpoche:** The lotus represents bodhichitta, compassion, because a lotus is the most beautiful thing but it grows in the dirtiest place, a mud pool. Lotuses will not grow in a clean pool, you have to have a mud pool to grow lotuses. But a lotus is never stained by the mud; it is very clean and beautiful. That way, when you develop bodhichitta, you can be a defiled sentient being with lots of bad karma but at that moment you are transformed into sons and daughters of the Buddha. Therefore, the lotus represents the bodhichitta, compassion. The mala represents the method; method and wisdom are like male and female aspects, positive and negative, I think many people will understand this with the words *yin* and *yang*, although that is a Chinese thing. The mala represents method, because it is a method to count. And it is a crystal mala, the same as the crystal background and crystal seat.
Before the visualisation you can sit quietly for maybe five minutes so that you can calm down and relax. If you want during that time you can count your breathing and try to balance it. That is one method of Shamatha meditation, to calm down. If you count the breath then you count it twenty-one times. Breathing out, pausing out, breathing in and pausing in, is one. Pause by definition is not holding in and not holding out, just keeping it open, so pause. Breathe as slowly as possible and as completely as possible, but don’t make it uncomfortable. Don’t do it too slow or too long so that it becomes a struggle. Do it as comfortably and as long as possible, as even as possible and as complete as possible.

Then you say the visualisation prayer, slowly, and next the supplication prayer to Chenrezig, which you say three times.

Next is the Seven Branch Prayer. The seven branches are:

1. Prostration, salutation.
3. Confession of all of our negative deeds.
4. Rejoicing in all that is good: any Buddha attaining enlightenment, any Buddha teaching dharma, any sentient being doing anything good or anything that we did that is good, we rejoice in.
5. Any bodhisattva who attains Buddhahood right now we request to turn the wheel of dharma. For example, when Prince Siddhartha became Buddha Shakyamuni, he decided to be silent for seven weeks. At that time the king of the gods came down and made him an offering of the dharmachakra and conch shell. Also two magnificent unicorn deer came from the forest and sat next to the offering. That is what the dharmachakra with two deer we have represents, that event. So at the request of the king of the gods then Buddha manifested his teaching.

There are many sentient beings attaining Buddhahood in every moment, somewhere, and we are asking them to turn the wheel of dharma just as the king of gods did for Prince Siddhartha when he attained Buddhahood.

6. Any Buddha who wishes to enter into paranirvana, who wishes to die, we request to live long in order to help sentient beings. When Prince Siddhartha wished to enter into paranirvana then all of his disciples requested him to live long, to help sentient beings, continually. So the same thing we do for the other Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

7. The merit of all of that: offering, prostration etc, all of this merit including any other good merit that we have from beginningless time until now, all the good things we have done, we dedicate the merit of all of it for the benefit of all sentient beings to attain Buddhahood, or to be absolutely free with no limitation, to reach the absolute happiness, peace and joy, absolute harmony with no limitation.

The six syllables OM MANI PEMA HUNG represent the purification of the six defilements so that sentient beings of the six realms may be free from the sufferings of samsara; from the gods to hells, the six realms, from pride to anger, the six defilements. We are requesting Chenrezig’s blessing so that all sentient beings be free from the suffering of samsara because they will be free from all of the six defilements.

This is a specific prayer to Chenrezig based on the meaning of OM MANI PEMA HUNG.

I pray to you Lama Chenrezig
I pray to you Yidam Chenrezig
I pray to you Noble Chenrezig, Supreme Chenrezig
I pray to you our Protector, Chenrezig
I pray to you Lord of Love, Chenrezig

Buddha of Great Compassion hold me fast in your compassion. From time without beginning beings have wandered in samsara undergoing unendurable suffering. They have no other protector than you. Please bless them that they achieve the Omniscient State of Buddhahood.

When chanting breathing is extremely important, if you don’t know where to breathe then you will never get the melody right. In this melody it is, Sol-wa deb-so la-ma, then you breathe. Then, Chen-re-zig, sol-wa deb-so yi-dam Chen-re-zig – then you breathe. Sol-wa deb-so pa so Chen-re-zig – again you breathe – sol-wa deb-so chab-gön Chen-re-zig. So four sentences and one melody.

If you have a long breath there is no problem, but
have short breath due to having TB when I was nine years old, so my breathing is very short and I have to breathe many times. But for the chanting, where to breathe is very important.

After the prayer to Chenrezig and the specific prayers related to the six realms then the visualisation continues—you have the basic visualisation already there, so now the visualisation continues, and it is mentioned here very clearly:

*By having prayed like this one pointedly, the body of the Noble One radiates light. This purifies illusory perceptions of impure karmic manifestations. The outer vessel becomes the realm of Dewachen, the body, speech and mind of beings within it become the body, speech and mind of Chenrezig. Appearance, sound and mental perceptions become none other than void.*

Then is the recitation of the mantra. Your prayer is that Chenrezig radiates light in all directions like the sun. It purifies and transforms all the outer realm as the Pure Land and inner sentient beings as Chenrezig. Thinking of this then you recite the mantra.

Of the six syllables OM MANI PEME HUNG, *om* represents the gods, *ma* the asuras, *ni* the humans, *pe* the animals, *me* the pretas and *hung* the hell realm. The compassion of Chenrezig is to liberate sentient beings from the god realms, sentient beings from the asura realms, sentient beings from the human realms, sentient beings from the animal realms, sentient beings from the preta realms and sentient beings from the hell realms, and liberate them to the realisation of Avalokiteshvara. That is the meaning of OM MANI PEME HUNG.

Sometimes we say OM MANI PEME HUNG HRI; *hri* is the heart syllable of Chenrezig. Normally we call OM MANI PEME HUNG the six-syllable mantra, but OM MANI PEME HUNG HRI is a seven-syllable mantra, not six.

When chanting OM MANI PEME HUNG, chanting it four times completes one simple melody. The first one is a salutation, submission, devotion and second one is offering: I offer all that is there, all of my merit, all of my wisdom, everything. The third one is receiving the blessing of Avalokiteshvara and then fourth is to dedicate this blessing and merit for the benefit of all sentient beings. So letting go, make offering, receive blessing and giving it to all sentient beings, then the whole process is finished. Then you begin again. To each one you should give feeling. But you are not trying to exhibit how well you can sing here, you try to sing it from your heart as an offering, as a blessing, as a dedication. So this is a very important part.

You should recite this as a melody for maybe half a mala or a full mala and then you recite about ten malas, one thousand mantras very softly, without saying it aloud, without singing it, just saying OM MANI PEME HUNG. At that time you think, by the blessing of Avalokiteshvara, the compassion, wisdom and power is manifesting in the form of light in all directions and it transforms all the universe into a pure realm of Avalokiteshvara and it transforms all sentient beings into the embodiment of compassion, Avalokiteshvara.

You count the recitations on your mala and when you complete one hundred million recitations we call it one conch shell. I know many old people who when finished this grew a new tooth. A tooth of conch shell; very white and beautiful teeth they grow. I have seen this. There is nothing great about growing new teeth but it is very symbolic.

Tibetans say mani tung for one hundred million mantras. Prayer wheels also have one hundred million OM MANI PEME HUNG mantras inside, we call it tung-khor, tung-prayer wheel [tung is 100,000,000, khor is wheel]. We also use other mantras for the tung-kor. Prayer wheels have the bottom of the prayer wheel made out of bamboo, then a thick conch shell, cut from a white conch shell, is glued on the handle. There is a whole in the middle and the central metal piece goes through the hole but the bamboo touches the conch shell so that when you are turning the prayer wheel clockwise, the bamboo cuts the conch shell. We believe that when it cuts right through you have done the equivalent to one hundred million OM MANI PEME HUNG mantras. Then people take that conch shell out, put it on a string and wear it. Then they do another one, finish it and put it on the string. Some people have a necklace of them. Some even have quite a few of them. Once they have 108 on a string they put that aside and make a new one. We also use this as a blessing, as a protection, people wear it as a blessing and for protection, raksha.
These are the cultural or traditional aspects. Of course we don’t use thin shells but white conch shells which are like a tooth, they are very thick. So this is our tradition.

As you are reciting OM MANI PEMA HUNG, Avalokiteshvara manifests multicoloured light in all directions, just like the sun, and wherever this light touches, the outer realm transforms into the pure Sukavati realm, and sentient beings, as the light touches them, they transform into the embodiment of compassion, the embodiment of Avalokiteshvara. Their body manifests as Avalokiteshvara, their speech manifests as OM MANI PEMA HUNG, the sound of great compassion and their mind transforms into the limitless compassion and wisdom of Avalokiteshvara. This is the visualisation or the kind of mental concentration that you maintain during the recitation, gently, harmoniously, in a comfortable way. Meditation should never be done in a stiff or rigid way, meditation should always be done in a relaxed, harmonious and calm-abiding way.

When counting the mantras, the way you hold the mala really doesn’t matter. But try to keep it with respect, relative definition of respect. After that you have the conclusion of the visualisation. When you finish the recitation, the chanting master might hit the bell and everybody sits quietly for a little while. At this time you dissolve the Chenrezig/Avalokiteshvara visualisation into you, all sentient beings, everyone, to you. In this non-dualistic state there is no Chenrezig up there and no you down here, it is all the non-dualistic state. So try to remain in this non-dualistic state of great unity and great luminosity, which is not just a dark nothing, it is everything. In this state of great harmony and unity, the non-dualistic state, you try to remain as long as possible. If you have thoughts coming, which will be guaranteed, just let them come and let them go. If you don’t try to stop your thoughts and don’t try to follow your thoughts, then they become less. It is like with naughty children around you. If you tell them don’t do this, don’t do that, they will do everything. But if you just sit there like a great grandpa, nothing will happen. They just run around making noise and try to pull your nose and hair, but after some time they leave you alone. It is the same when thoughts come and all of this, instead of fighting them just let them come and let them go. So try to maintain this harmonious state, one with the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, that is the absorption.

When you want to end this, then you have the final chanting.

Everyone’s body including my own appears in the form of the Noble One’s body.
All sound is the sound of his mantra.
All that arises in the mind is the great expanse of wisdom.

By this act of virtue may I quickly reach the level of Chenrezig and then establish all beings, leaving no remainder on that level.

So you come out of the state of samadhi and everything that you see is blessed and is the manifestation of Sukavati, the Pure Land of Avalokiteshvara, and all sentient beings are the manifestations of Avalokiteshvara. All sounds are OM MANI PEMA HUNG, even a motorcycle
going by, it is *rpm mani pemé hung*. Everything is the manifestation of *om mani pemé hung*. Try to maintain that and then dedicate the merit of that for the benefit of all sentient beings.

So the first sentences are about all appearance as the mandala of Chenrezig’s Pure Land, and the last four sentences are the dedication. With that the Chenrezig practice is complete.

**Amitabha**

After the Chenrezig practice it is quite traditional to say the Amitabha Pure Land Prayer. The long Amitabha Pure Land prayer is pretty long, but we chant the short one at the end of the long one. It is quite customary to say, and very short.

This is a prayer that all sentient beings be born in the Pure Land of Amitabha. Actually there are five main Pure Lands and one is Amitabha’s, which is the West Pure Land. Why it is said so many times by us is because out of the five dhyani Buddhas Amitabha represents attachment. Attachment is the [main] human defilement. Out of the six realms the human realms’ [main] defilements are greed and attachment. So we pray for the blessing of Buddha to purify our karma that is created by our greed, attachment and grasping so that we reach the realisation of Amitabha, which is the same as the realisation of the other Buddhas, but the symbolic meaning of the five dhyani Buddhas. We have the five Buddha-crown, ornamentally. There is the middle, east, south, west and north, but the five dhyani Buddhas are represented in one line on the crown. Actually there is the central Buddha with the front always being east. But it has nothing to do with where the sun comes from; the front is your east. Right is your south, back is your west and left is your north. So Amitabha represents west here.

**E MA HO**

*Wonderful Buddha of Limitless Light to His right the Lord of Great Compassion and to His left the Bodhisattva of great power. Surrounded by Buddhas and Bodhisattvas measureless in number, joy and happiness without limit is the land called*
Dewachen. May I be born there as soon as I pass from this life, without taking birth anywhere else in the meantime. Having been born there may I see Amitabha’s face. May the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the ten directions give their blessing that this wish expressed in this prayer be accomplished without hindrance.

We say the main prayer three times, and then the mantra called ‘wish fulfilling mantra’, TEYATA PENTSA DRI-YA AWA BOD-HA NA YE SOHA. So any wish that we make, at the end, we say this mantra, which is meant for fulfilling our wish. Our wish is the Amitabha Pure Land prayer, so at the end there is the wish fulfilling mantra. Then there is the dedication part of this:

Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of all directions, be gracious to me. I rejoice in the two merits accumulated by myself and others. Whatever merits I have accumulated in the three times, I offer to the Triple Gem (Buddha, Dharma and Sangha). May the teachings of the Buddha flourish. I dedicate the merit to all sentient beings. May all sentient beings attain Enlightenment. May the essence of all virtues arise in me.

By purifying the two defilements and attaining the merits, may I have long life without sickness, and may my spiritual practice increase. In this lifetime; may I attain the ten Bhumis. At the time of the dissolution of my body, may I be born at once in Dewachen. After having been born and having awakened as the lotus blooms, At that very moment, may I attain enlightenment, and in doing so may I liberate all sentient beings by virtue of my miraculous powers.

So that is the Amitabha prayer, and then we say the regular dedication prayer, which is:

By this merit may beings gain Omniscience and defeat dualistic ego-clinging. Thus may they be liberated from this world which is like an ocean disturbed by the waves of birth, old age, sickness and death.

This means, because of this merit may I reach the realisation of the Omniscient One, that means Buddhahood, and may I liberate all sentient beings from the suffering of samsara; the four rivers of the suffering of samsara: birth, old age, sickness and death. Sentient beings are going in circles of birth, old age, sickness and death, birth, old age, sickness and death, again and again and again. This ocean of samsara is also not very quiet, it is turbulent: birth, old age, sickness and death are not smooth, it is up and down, so many times. So we wish to liberate all sentient beings from the suffering of samsara, which is the continuation of birth, old age, sickness and death. Then the last four sentences, the final dedication:

I dedicate all this merit that I may follow in the footsteps of the heroic Manjushri who knows the truth of the essential nature of things, and of Kuntuzangpo too. Through this virtue, may all beings gather the accumulations of merits and awareness; may they obtain the two Supreme Kayas which arises from merit and awareness.

Often people get the melody of the Amitabha prayer a little bit mixed up, because it’s four sentences, one melody. Emaho doesn’t count, that’s not a sentence. The melody is a little bit like our four fingers: the first sentence is little bit lower, the second one a little bit higher, then the third a little bit lower, and the last one is low, and finishes. So it’s a four-sentence melody. Any questions?

**Question**: About the language. It is good to chant in Tibetan, but is there a possibility to make a compromise if one is not too familiar with the text and one needs to understand what one says. So is there a compromise that one can do it in English or whatever language and then in Tibetan?

**Rinpoche**: You can do that at home or you can do it separately, but as a group it should be done in Tibetan, because I still don’t feel I have the ability to transmit the same blessing that I have received from my guru in Tibetan language into English language. I don’t have that ability or realisation. So I feel it is little bit hypocritical for me to say that because I can speak in
English then I can also transmit the lineage in English. I don't have that sort of realisation, honestly. But once it is there, it will be. But there will be certain parts of the prayer that can be more appropriate to translate and certain parts will not be appropriate, even after some time. For example OM MANI PHEME HUNG we still say in Sanskrit, not in Tibetan. TE-YATA PENTS A DRI-YA AWA BOD-HA NA-YE SO-HA we also say in Sanskrit and not in Tibetan. At the beginning of the Amitabha prayer, Emaho, that is Sanskrit, that's not Tibetan. So many parts of the prayers and recitations, even after about 1500 years after we still say in Sanskrit, although our Sanskrit is not perfect. Then from Tibetan to English needs more than that, but it will be quite easy. For example, this text, to get the meaning in Tibetan, it is just three or four pages. You can study the meaning of those words and get familiar with it. To get right will be quite easy, because you are only learning these pages, you are not learning the whole Tibetan language.

For us to say, Om ben-za sa-to sa-ma-ya, ma-nu pa-la-ya, ben-za sa-to te-no-pa, ti-tra dri-to me-bha-va… I really have no idea exactly what each word means but I said it 110,000 times when I was 18 years old, and I'm very happy with it. There are very long mantras in Sanskrit which we say a lot and the precise meanings we don't know, but it's okay with us because we have full faith in it. To learn Sanskrit is very difficult because it is a very advanced language but to learn the Tibetan words like Dor-je Chang chen Te-lo Naro dang, Marpa Mila chö je Gampopa, Du sum she cha kun chen Karmapa and “I prostrate to you” is very easy to learn.

**Question:** I have read from a book that when saying the six syllables, for each syllable there is a colour.

**Rinpoche:** Yes, you can visualize that also, if you do it elaborately. Each syllable has a colour and if you want to visualize that way there is a more elaborate visualisation. You can also have mantra chakra visualisation in the heart of Chenrezig: Hri in the middle and then OM MANI PHEME HUNG as a mantra chakra. There are so many things like that. In that context you visualise each mantra as a different colour or you visualise all the mantras white in colour, it depends on which text.

**Question:** What is Kundalini?

**Rinpoche:** Kundalini is a very serious business. This physical body with a spine, head and limbs, everything that a fully matured human body is supposed to have, Kundalini is its potential of experiencing the great non-dualistic joy, this ability. All have it, male and female. But Kundalini practice is reserved for a person who is totally dedicated for it. Kundalini practice cannot be done like a weekend retreat or just ‘let's try it’ kind of practice. First of all, whether your Kundalini can be awakened or not, or you recognize it or not, is one thing, you might not, then maybe nothing happens. But if it happens then it will not stop, and if you live an ordinary life it will drive you mad. It will cause you tremendous problems and it can practically make you mad. You won't be able to take it. Therefore Kundalini practice is reserved for somebody who lives a yogic life and who is totally, totally dedicated for it. Then step by step Kundalini practice is introduced. It is the ultimate of the relative body—it is not the ultimate of the ultimate mind, it is physical. So it is the ultimate of the relative body, and the ability to experience the ultimate harmony and ultimate unity and ultimate non-dualism in the form of bliss and joy. This is a very sacred practice and it is an extremely secret practice. Why is it secret? Because it is very, very dangerous. Once you wake the Kundalini you cannot stop it.

For example with myself, I know all about it, I have done all the practices to understand it, but I have never myself done the practice of Kundalini to awaken the Kundalini energy because I am not living that kind of life. But for somebody who already has practiced Kundalini, and who is a practitioner of Kundalini, to introduce Kundalini and make them experience their Kundalini is not very difficult. But then, after that, then what? What kind of life are you going to live? If you are going to live a regular ordinary life, then you will have trouble. It is a very sacred thing, but I don't know how to awaken people's Kundalini. I only know what it is all about intellectually and from the texts, from the abhisheka. But technically I don't know how to do it, for which I am very grateful, because then I will not be responsible for anybody's uncontrollable state of something which is wonderful. But even if it is wonderful and a good thing, if you can't control it then it is difficult, it becomes very bad actually. So
you have to live a yogic life in order to practice Kundalini.

There is the next level to that, which is a breathing practice. There are quite a few breathing practices, visualisation and deity practices which we do in a three year retreat, and physical exercises. It is not 100% for that, but it is to develop a certain aspect of it, so that you will be able to reach the non-dualistic state and stability, more like, the simplest way to describe this will be like developing chi in new age terms, you know the common word used these days; developing chi, this energy, and developing a sort of heat and joy and bliss. So that kind of state you can reach through some practice that we do, which all the lamas do in the three years’ retreat and I myself also have done those practices. These are not dangerous like that, they are just concentration and breathing and meditation. It is to centralize yourself. It is like, if you have a very good central column, then any kind of things attached to it can have forces. By moving other things the center will not wobble. That way this is a *tsa lung* practice which we do normally. But then those totally dedicated and totally involved yogis, they will do Kundalini practice, but they will be very few.

**Question:** Does the number six have any particular significance in Tibetan?
**Rinpoche:** There are six realms and six defilements.

**Same Student:** And six paramitas, but why not ten, twenty?

**Rinpoche:** We have ten paramitas too, but the ten are an elaboration of the sixth paramita. The sixth wisdom paramita is further elaborated into, method, strength, aspiration and primordial wisdom. But when we say six paramitas, the wisdom paramita includes everything.

I don't think there is a simple numerical significance for six. We also have eight auspicious signs, five senses, Four Noble Truths, Three Roots and Three Jewels that makes six. Each number has significance but in its own way. For us twelve has a very big astrological and mathematical significance: 12 x 5 is 60, we have five elements and twelve animals that put together make one century for us. The Tibetan astrological century is
a sixty year cycle, not a hundred year cycle. In sixty years everything repeats.

For example, fire-dragon, you will only have one every sixty years. If you are a fire-dragon person you cannot find another person with fire-dragon unless you are born in the same year or 60 years earlier or 60 years later. I’m a wood-horse and I can never find another wood-horse person who is not 60 years older or 60 years younger than me. So this repeats every 60 years and we call that *rabjung*: each 60 years we describe as one *rabjung*, then two *rabjung* etc. In Tibetan we are in the seventeenth *rabjung* now.

And also there is one star that we call *karma mindruk*. It is very important star, it comes and it goes, but somehow it is the main star to occupy the sky throughout the night. *Karma mindruk* is a very important group of stars [*karma* means star, *druk* means six].

**Question**: Why do we have to do breathing practice and develop breath control?

**Rinpoche**: We have so many kinds of breathing practices. In basic practices we focus on the breathing, because by making our breathing balanced then we become balanced. For example, people who breathe in quickly and hold in for long time, then breathe out quickly and breathe in and hold for a long time, are very explosive and uptight. Then people who breathe out, hold out for a long time and then breathe in quickly, become very tired people. They have no energy and they get tired very easily. Those people who breathe evenly are even, physically and mentally. Therefore in Shinay practice we try to breathe as slowly and as evenly as possible, as completely as possible, both inhale and exhale and then try to keep a good pause in between each exhalation and inhalation; a good pause, not closed. This way our emotions and physical uptightness or laziness, these things will be levelled. That is a double benefit, because the other side is that you are concentrating on breathing so your mind is concentrating on one thing and can’t concentrate on another thing. So instead of trying not to think of other things, you are thinking of one thing, very clearly, and focusing on it and counting it. Your concentration goes on that so that you develop an ability to concentrate on one thing without being dispersed into many other thoughts and then becoming discursive and neurotic. This way it has a double benefit.

Then there are other meditations which are deep breathing and holding the breath, but breathing in the lungs, normally. These kinds of practices are tantric practices, which I can’t talk too much about here. Doing this kind of practice you can walk miles and miles without getting tired. You can do this breathing practice, you chant and you practice, and everything is very clear because you don’t get tired.

There is another practice where you hold the breath, but that is very dangerous if it is not done properly. It has to be done properly with exercises and many preliminary practices. People have told me that they have met masters in Tibet, during their lifetime, who can hold their breath and breathe only three times a day. That means they are holding their breath for four hours without any difficulty. There was one master during the time of my teacher, who is now 83—when he was a child there was a master who lived on the east side of the Yangtse River in Tibet. He would fly to the western side of the Yangtse River, on the mountain, (it was a gorge,) and sit there in the sun and then fly back to the eastern side for the evening. There was another master who lived on a mountain and all the birds there would sit on him. He had no clothes so the birds were his clothes. When people went near they flew away, but when the people left the birds all came back. These kinds of people were there in previous generations, people still living today. These kinds of things are through *tsa lung* practice. But it is not for us just to try for a weekend.

**Question**: In Tibet are there Hinayana and Mahayana practitioners?

**Rinpoche**: Not exactly like that, because every Tibetan is Vajrayana. There is no Hinayana and Mahayana in Tibet, everyone is Vajrayana. But then how much real Vajrayana they are, who knows? It depends on the individual. Vajrayana is the whole thing and then as you are practicing it, if you are practicing it under a lineage and purely then there is no problem, because you are practicing Vajrayana, but you are emphasizing what you need to emphasize. For example, you don’t jump into the Pacific Ocean before you know how to swim. You don’t jump into the highest Vajrayana level...
like Kundalini right away, then you are asking for trouble, and wasting your time and energy actually. It's like throwing your life away. Therefore going step by step is very important.

But going step by step is also in the Vajrayana. We have the preliminary practices like the four thoughts: precious human life, death and impermanence, karma, cause and result and the suffering of samsara. You contemplate them. Then we do prostrations and Vajrasattva for purification, each one of them 110,000 times. Then we do mandala offering and guru yoga 110,000 times. After that we do guru yoga of Marpa, guru yoga of Milarepa, guru yoga of Gampopa. Then we do the practice of our protectors Mahakala and Mahakali. We visualise them, we do their ritual, we recite their mantras. After that then we do the practice of our main deity Vajravarahi; Vajravarahi outer practice and then the agni, then the inner practice, and the agni and then the secret practice, and the agni. After that then we receive the six Yogas of Naropa and at that time we also do the practice of Chakrasamvara.

These are our main practices. So step by step. Here I’m talking about very serious practitioners who do the three years three months’ solitary retreat. That's what they do there. Some people do this outside, but they can't do it in three years and three months. It will take them maybe ten or twenty years.

So it is not dangerous if you are doing it properly. But if without any preliminary practice, without going through those step by step practices, just jumping straight into the Six Yogas or Kundalini practice, then it is very dangerous. You should not do that. Just like anything in life, if you want to swim in the Atlantic Ocean, fine, but first you should learn how to swim in a swimming pool. But the Atlantic Ocean and a swimming pool are both water. Similarly the preliminary practices and the actual very high practices are both Vajrayana.

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