

Basic Concepts of Practising Tantra

In general, the practice of Tantra or Vajrayana includes the practice of the three vehicles of Buddhism: Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana. First, the foundation of practicing Hinayana is to first receive the precepts of liberation, which are not to harm sentient beings. There are two categories of liberation precepts, namely householder and monastics. Householders can follow the ten precepts (for life) or the eight precepts (for one day). Monastic precepts are the fourfold precepts comprising of śramaṇera (novice male monastic), śramaṇerika (novice female monastic), bhikṣu (fully ordained male monastic) and bhikṣuṇī (fully ordained female monastic). One of these precepts is taken as the foundation precept. Therefore, one learns the four noble truths and twelve links of dependent origination and completes the four stages and four fruits of the arhat path.

Second, the foundation of the practice of Mahayana Exoteric Buddhism is to receive the bodhisattva precepts that benefit all beings, to have a mind of altruism, and to permanently abandon harming others and the causes of harming others. This is the precept of the Hinayana. In addition to this precept, there is the precept of accomplishing benefit for others and the causes of benefit for others. This means to make the vow of bodhicitta and to practice bodhicitta. Therefore, one should study the Four Noble Truths, the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination, and the Six Perfections, and practice the realization of the Five Paths and the Ten Stages.

Third, the foundation of the practice of Mahayana Tantra is to observe the precept of not harming sentient beings, to add the precept of benefiting sentient beings, and to add the vows, also known as samaya. Therefore, one should study the Four Noble Truths, the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination, the Six Perfections, the graduated path, the complete path, and the Great Perfection. The Great Perfection is a unique and supreme method of the Nyingma school, and one should also practice the actual methods of the Great Perfection. This starts with the Four Preliminaries Practices (Ngondro), followed by the practices of wind, channels, and vital points, the Great Perfection Dzogchen (Todgal) and the Great Perfection (Drekchöd) means.

During the course of these practices, one must observe the pure precepts and the corresponding actions. For example, on the basis of the precepts of the Hinayana and the Bodhisattva, one should receive the vows of samaya. The vows of samaya in the tantras are the most supreme. For example, during the six periods of the day and night, one should visualize the external world of objects as the pure land of the mandala of a particular deity, and the internal world of phenomena as the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in the mandala. In other words, one should visualize one's dwelling place as a pure land, and all beings or fellow practitioners as Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. This will help to refine one's pure mind. In addition, one should visualize one's teacher as the embodiment of all the Buddhas. One must have a pure and sincere mind of devotion to one's teacher as the true Buddha. One must also maintain pure behaviour and a pure mind towards fellow practitioners. If one violates the vows, one will fall into the Vajra Hell and never be able to escape. If one is able to receive the pure vows of samaya, one will attain enlightenment in the present body, and even without practice, one will be able to attain enlightenment within sixteen lifetimes.

In the study of the Four Preliminary Practices, it is necessary to understand the principles of the Four Noble Truths, which are the knowledge of suffering, the cessation of

suffering, the path to the cessation of suffering, and the attainment of the state of cessation. This will give rise to the basic mind of renunciation of samsara and aspiration for nirvana. Therefore, it is important to understand that the Three Jewels of the world beyond samsara can save oneself from the ocean of samsara. One should then take refuge in the Three Jewels, generate the bodhicitta, practice the six pāramitās of the bodhisattva, accumulate merit and purify obscuration. Merit can be divided into two types: merit of virtue and merit of wisdom. Merit of virtue is cultivated through practices such as offering mandalas, the practice of giving one's body, and offering flowers. Merit of wisdom is cultivated through the practice of the true nature of reality. To attain enlightenment, one must cultivate the wisdom of the true nature, which is the emptiness of all phenomena. However, it is impossible to attain the wisdom of the true nature through worldly means. Merely cultivating merit of virtue will result in human or heavenly happiness, which is impermanent and will eventually cease. To purify obscuration, one should practice Vajrasattva, make prostrations, and practice the completion stage of various deities, as well as other methods of purification. When practicing various methods, it is important to have a foundation. This foundation is the essential possession of faith and a pure mind. However, beginners may not be able to achieve firm faith due to the various afflictions of samsara. Therefore, it is necessary to rely on the blessings of the guru, who is the embodiment of all the Buddhas. This is why one should practice guru yoga.

After establishing a foundation in these preliminary practices, it is necessary to cultivate meditation. Meditation can be divided into two types: worldly meditation and transcendental meditation. Worldly meditation refers to concentration meditation, which is the practice of maintaining focus and clarity of mind without distraction or dullness. In this state, one cultivates ease of body and mind without thoughts, reaching the first jhana stage. Transcendental meditation is the practice of further cultivating the emptiness of self and phenomena on the basis of worldly meditation.

On the basis of this meditation practice, the channels and vital points or those who have strong faith can directly practice the Great Perfection. The actual practice of the Tibetan Buddhism Nyingma Palyul Lineage is to complete the sequential cultivation of the Great Perfection in nine years.

First year: Find a qualified guru from the same tradition and learn the oral transmission of the four preliminary practices. The four preliminary practices are refuge, bodhicitta, mandala offering, Vajrasattva, and prostrations. The practitioner needs to complete these practices 110,000 times. Then, practice the guru yoga, 100,000 repetitions of the seven-line invocation to Guru Rinpoche, and 1,000,000 repetitions of the mantra of Guru Rinpoche. Finally, practice the first stage of the secret tantra, the generation stage, such as the generation stage of Avalokiteshvara. These practices are to be practiced for a lifetime or until enlightenment.

Second year: the practitioner will receive the secret empowerment and wisdom empowerment of the complete stage of the secret tantra, which includes the practice of the three elements of wind, channels, and vital points. The practitioner will practice the Vajra wind, which is a powerful energy that can be used to open the channels. When the channels are open, the vital points can descend into the upper body and spread to the entire body. This will cause the body and mind to experience warmth and joy. Ultimately, the practitioner will achieve the great wisdom of emptiness and bliss, which is the ultimate accomplishment of tantra. This is

a challenging but rewarding path to spiritual realization. It is important to find a qualified guru to guide the practitioner through this path.

Third year: Practise the highest tantric practice, the Great Perfection, including the stage of cutting through and the stage of sudden transcendence.

Fourth year: Practise the Dharmakaya method of the "Secret Essence of the Three Bodies of Meditation".

Fifth year: Practice the Sambhogakaya method of the "Secret Essence of the Three Bodies of Meditation".

Sixth year: Practise the Nirmanakaya method of the "Secret Essence of the Three Bodies of Meditation".

Seventh, eighth, and ninth years: Practise the black retreat yoga, the sound purification yoga, the flower retreat yoga, the dream yoga, and the Pure Land method. The practices of the seventh to ninth years are considered secret practices. In the nine-year curriculum, each stage of practice must be based on the previous stage. The most important of these practices is the third year's teaching of cutting through, when the guru guides the disciple's root nature directly to the nature of mind. After that, each practice must be cultivated in conjunction with awareness.

This is the transmission teaching of the actual practice of the Great Perfection truth order in accordance to the Nyingma Palyul Lhatse Lineage. Auspicious!

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