



Chenrezik
For the Benefit of All Beings

KHENPO KARTHAR RINPOCHE

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HRĪḤ calligraphy by His Holiness the 17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje

Seeds of Awakening is a collection of concise and clear practice instructions from highly qualified Buddhist masters, in English and Spanish.

Chenrezik: For the Benefit of All Beings

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Contents

Introduction

Biography of Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche

Teaching on the Practice of Chenrezik: *For the Benefit of All Beings as Vast as the Skies*

1. Taking Refuge and Engendering Bodhicitta
2. Meditation on the Form of the Deity
3. Mantra Repetition
4. Bringing the Practice into Your Experience
5. Dedication of Virtue and Aspiration Prayers
6. Benefits of the Practice

Questions and Answers

Glossary

Acknowledgments

Introduction

In July of 2013, students traveled from twelve countries around the world to Woodstock, New York, to attend the first ever Spanish-language retreat at the monastery of Karma Triyana Dharmachakra (KTD). For eight days, KTD's assembly hall resounded with the sound of Tibetan and Spanish, as Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche offered empowerment and instructions, and the sixty students gathered there engaged in practice sessions throughout the day. The teachings on Chenrezik presented in this book were those that Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche offered at that time.

Like the retreat itself, this book brings together the two major language communities of the continent in a space replete with the blessings of the Gyalwang Karmapa. It was first printed in bilingual edition, but for the convenience of practitioners has been separated into four ebook editions available on dharmaebooks.org — online Dharma library of His Holiness the Karmapa. (Chenrezik: For the Benefit of All Beings, Sādhana of Chenrezik, Chenrezik: Por el bien de los seres, Sādhana de

Introduction

Chenrezik). Chenrezik practice was also selected as the focus for this retreat by His Holiness himself, who had encouraged his Spanish-speaking disciples to organize a pilgrimagecum-retreat to KTD, his North American seat in Woodstock. It is also with his blessing that the present volume forms the first publication in this collection of bilingual texts, copublished by KTD Publications and Editorial Albricias, and named “Seeds of Awakening/Semillas del despertar” by His Holiness himself.

We dedicate this publication to his long life and to the flourishing of all his Dharma activities. May those activities benefit fully the speakers of all languages everywhere.

Biography of Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche

Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche has for many years engaged in extraordinary efforts to spread Buddhism throughout many countries in the East and West. Since by doing so he has truly caused the present and future happiness of many beings, he is worthy of praise. I therefore rejoice in this, and make the aspiration that every aspect of goodness may increase like the waxing moon.

The 17th Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorje

Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche is renowned and celebrated for his immeasurable devotion that knows no bounds, his unwavering steadfastness in fulfilling the commands of the Karmapa despite horrendous difficulties and obstacles, his attainment in *mahāmudrā*, his accomplishments in all monastic arts, his pure ethics and flawless morality, as a brilliant scholar, and as a skilled and inspiring teacher.

Rinpoche was born in Kham in eastern Tibet at sunrise on Mahākāla Day, the twenty-ninth day of the second month in the Year of the Wood Mouse. On this day, very early in the morning, immediately after Rinpoche's mother went to fetch water from the stream and carried the full vessel of water back by herself, Rinpoche was born without giving any pain to his mother. According to Tibetan tradition, all of these special circumstances indicate a very auspicious birth.

Rinpoche's father was a devoted *Mañjuśrī* practitioner who would go to sleep reciting the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti* and when he woke up he would simply continue with his recitation. When Rinpoche was quite young, his father taught him to read, write, and to study and memorize dharma texts.

At twelve he entered Thrangu Monastery in Tso-Ngen, eastern Tibet. For the next six years, Rinpoche studied and practiced at this monastery. When he was eighteen, he went to Tsurphu Monastery to visit the seat of His Holiness the 16th Karmapa. Since His Holiness was not yet old enough to give full ordination vows, Rinpoche received his gelong vows from the 11th Tai Situ Rinpoche at Palpung Monastery.

Rinpoche returned to Thrangu Monastery and participated in the annual *yarnay*. Soon after this, he joined the year-long *Vairocana* group retreat, which was special to Thrangu Monastery. By the end of that retreat, Rinpoche was very enthusiastic to participate in the traditional three-year retreat, which he began shortly thereafter.

After completing the three-year retreat, Rinpoche expressed the heartfelt wish to stay in retreat for the rest of his life, but the 8th Traleg Rinpoche strongly advised him to come out in order to receive transmissions from the 2nd Kongtrul Rinpoche and to join Thrangu Rinpoche and other lamas in the newly formed shedra at Thrangu Monastery. Traleg Rinpoche felt that Khenpo Rinpoche had attained insight and realization in his years of retreat and that this further education would be of great benefit to many students in the future. The 2nd Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche, the 8th Traleg Rinpoche, and His Holiness the 16th Karmapa are Khenpo Rinpoche's main teachers.

By the late 1950s the threat of the Chinese Communists was creating an increasingly dangerous situation for the Tibetan people. In 1958 Rinpoche left Thrangu Monastery along with Thrangu Rinpoche, Zuru Tulku Rinpoche, and the three-year-old 9th Traleg Rinpoche. With a few horses and some provisions,

the party began their long trek. After two weeks they realized they were surrounded by communist soldiers. They managed to escape and after two-and-a-half months they arrived at Tsurphu Monastery.

His Holiness the 16th Gyalwang Karmapa was aware of the dangers and told them they must leave immediately for Sikkim. he provided them with the necessary provisions, and in March 1959 the lamas left Tsurphu. The group quickly reached the border, then traveled to Buxador where a refugee camp was set up by the Indian government. Due to the heat and unhygienic conditions, disease spread rapidly through the camp, and by the eighth year of residing there, Rinpoche was seriously ill.

In 1967 Rinpoche went to Rumtek Monastery in Sikkim, the seat of His Holiness the Karmapa in India, where he taught before going to teach at Tilokpur, a nunnery in himachal Pradesh founded by His Holiness and Sister Palmo. Next Rinpoche traveled to Tashi Jong Monastery where he received the Dam Ngak Dzo empowerment, transmission, and teachings from Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, then on to Tashi Choling Monastery in Bhutan. Unfortunately, Rinpoche's health grew worse, leading to a long and serious hospital stay. On his return to Rumtek

in 1975 he received the title of Choje-Lama, “Superior Dharma Master,” from His Holiness the 16th Gyalwang Karmapa

For many years Rinpoche had been ill with tuberculosis and now he was close to dying. he asked His Holiness the 16th Karmapa if he could go back into retreat for the rest of his life. Instead, His Holiness requested that Rinpoche go to the United States as his representative to establish Karma Triyana Dharmachakra, His Holiness’s seat in North America. Initially unable to obtain a visa due to his illness, Rinpoche soon acquired a special type of visa that enabled him to enter the United States specifically to receive medical treatment for his tuberculosis. Rinpoche boarded an airplane in February 1976 to begin a different life as a teacher of the Dharma in a culture and environment far removed from his home in Tibet.

When Rinpoche arrived in New York City, he was greeted by Tenzin Chonyi and Lama Yeshe Losal. On his arrival, Rinpoche was taken to a hospital in New York where he spent one month receiving treatment. It would take another year for him to become strong and healthy.

Years later when His Holiness the 16th Karmapa visited the United States, Rinpoche thanked him for saving his life. His Holiness responded by telling Rinpoche that if he had stayed

in India he would surely have died. After his initial recovery, Rinpoche, along with Tenzin Chonyi, Lama Yeshe Losal, Lama Ganga, and Yeshe Namdak, moved into a house in Putnam County that had been offered by Dr. Shen. From there Rinpoche traveled to New York City every week to offer teachings at what was to become one of the first KTC (Karma Thegsum Choling) centers in the United States.

In 1977 the search began for a permanent site for the Gyalwang Karmapa's seat in America. His Holiness had told Khenpo Rinpoche that he should open the new center on the auspicious day of Saga Dawa in 1978. Early in this year they located a good property and purchased the Mead house located on a mountaintop in Woodstock, New York. The day Karma Triyana Dharmachakra opened was the very day, the fifteenth day of the fourth Tibetan month, May 25, 1978, that His Holiness the 16th Karmapa had commanded Rinpoche to do so.

Since that time Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche has been teaching extensively with a warmth and directness that communicates the compassionate wisdom of the [Kagyu](#) lineage. Abbot of KTD and retreat master of Karme Ling Three-Year Retreat Center, Rinpoche has innumerable devoted students whom he continues to teach and guide with infinite generosity, compassion, and

The Long Soliloquy

wisdom. After almost fifty years of spreading the Dharma outside Tibet, Rinpoche has a prolific body of work published in English, Spanish, and Chinese, including his biography, *Amrita of Eloquence*, a luminous portrait of the life of Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, written by Lama Karma Drodul at the request of Lodroe Nyima Rinpoche for Thrangu Monastery in East Tibet.

*Masters of this stature are becoming rarer than
a star in the midday summer sky.*

The 9th Traleg Kyabgön Rinpoche

Teaching on the Practice of Chenrezik:
*For the Benefit of All Beings as Vast
as the Skies*

(Click [here](#) to download ebook edition of the practice text)



1. Taking Refuge and Engendering Bodhicitta

Introduction

This is a presentation on the meditation and mantra repetition of the noble Great Compassionate One, Avalokiteśvara — the practice entitled *For the Benefit of All Beings as Vast as the Skies*, composed by the great accomplished master **Thangtong Gyalpo** (1385–1464 or 1361–1485). The text that I will be using is a brief commentary on this practice composed by the 15th Gyalwang Karmapa, **Khakhyap Dorje** (1871–1922).

The commentary begins with the following invocation:

SVASTI

Great compassion of all victors,

Avalokita manifesting as mudrā,

Whose enlightened activity is that of dredging the depths
of **samsara**:

I bow to you and my venerable protector, inseparable.

The total embodiment of the great enlightened compassion of all victorious buddhas manifests in the perception of others as a being with distinctive colors and attributes, or *mudrās*, and bears the name Avalokita in Sanskrit, or Chenrezik in Tibetan. His enlightened activity is such that, until the three realms of samsara have been utterly emptied of beings, he will ceaselessly act to ensure their benefit. He is here identified as being essentially inseparable from the spiritual teacher. That teacher can be conceived of either as one's own root guru, whoever that may be, or likewise as any one of the incarnations of the Gyalwang Karmapa. The commentator begins by expressing his reverence for this most venerable protector.

By virtue of his altruistic heart and enlightened activity, Avalokita is more extraordinary than all the victors of the three times. The reason for this is that until samsara, or cyclic existence, has been emptied, his efforts to benefit beings never cease. He does not remain absorbed in the exclusive peace of meditation; rather, throughout all time — the past, present, and future — he is constantly engaged in the enlightened activity of gradually guiding all beings of the six states along the path to liberation and omniscience. Moreover, it was prophetically indicated by the Kinsman of the Sun, Buddha Śākyamuni, that this great being would assume a special role in the snowy region of Tibet,

the land of the red-faced people — a region that would be exceptionally difficult to tame because its inhabitants had never before been guided spiritually. In spite of that challenge, the noble Great Compassionate One voluntarily accepted personal responsibility for taking the land of Tibet as his field of activity in guiding sentient beings.

And so it was that Avalokita or Chenrezik manifested in myriad ways throughout the snowy land of Tibet. Sometimes he appeared in the form of great kings; sometimes, as ministers or high-ranking government officials; sometimes, as great translators; sometimes, as master scholars; and sometimes, as *siddhas* (highly accomplished meditation masters). In short, he appeared in all manner of different forms and as different kinds of people — children, men, women. By whatever means necessary, he directly engaged in enlightened activity for the benefit of beings throughout Tibet, and thus the great power of his compassionate blessings was firmly established there.

As an indication of the great compassion of this exalted being, young children, barely old enough to speak, would spontaneously utter the sound of his unsurpassable, sublime six-syllable mantra — the king among secret mantras — even without having been taught it previously by their parents. Such occurrences

stood as clear evidence of the presence of the noble Avalokita's power and compassion. In the snowy region of Tibet, the Great Compassionate Lord became foremost in the hearts of the people — their special deity apart from whom there was no other.

In the past there have appeared many sublime, emanated beings who have brought to light innumerable sādhanas based on the noble Avalokita. Some of these are elaborate; others are more concise. From among them, the specific practice of concern here was bestowed by the lord among siddhas, Thangtong Gyalpo, who was, in reality, the noble Avalokita himself appearing in human form for the benefit of the Tibetan people. He composed the present *sādhana* of the noble Avalokita. Its Tibetan title, *Drodön Khakhyapma*, which can be interpreted as “pervasive benefit for beings,” has proven to be truly meaningful because wherever dharma centers have been established in various countries of our world, this practice has spread and been embraced by people, thereby bringing benefit to them and to their regions.

For those who are so fortunate as to undertake the practice of this meditation and mantra repetition, the structure of the practice itself will be explained in six parts. The first part is the preparation, which consists of taking refuge in the Three Jewels as sources of protection and engendering *bodhicitta*, the resolve to

free innumerable sentient beings from the suffering of samsara. Those two, refuge and bodhicitta, constitute the preliminaries. The second part is the main part of the practice, which in general comprises tranquility (*śamatha*) and insight (*vipaśyanā*). In this context, both of these are primarily represented by the visualization of the deity. The third part is the repetition of mantra. The fourth part is the subsequent practice of bringing the preceding elements into one's experience. The fifth part is the concluding dedication of virtue to the achievement of the consummate state of buddhahood. Finally the sixth part is a discussion of the benefits of doing the practice.

Taking refuge and engendering bodhicitta

The first part, taking refuge and engendering bodhicitta, is explained as follows. You begin by envisioning the space in front of you as a vast expanse filled with spheres of iridescent light of various sizes, different kinds of vividly colored flowers, and clouds. In the center of this expanse you visualize the noble Avalokita, whose awakened mind is identified as being essentially inseparable from that of your root guru. He is the all-inclusive embodiment of all sources of refuge and all victors who appear throughout the ten directions and the three times. He is the Three Jewels — Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. He is also the

Three Roots — the guru, the yidam deity, and the dharma protector. The guru is the source of blessings, the yidam deity is the source of spiritual attainments, and the dharma protector acts as the source of enlightened activity. With the confidence that Avalokita, the total embodiment of all six sources of refuge, is actually present in space before you, maintain this visualization without distraction.

Next you shift your attention to yourself and those who appear around you. Viewing yourself just as you are, male or female, you imagine that as the principal figure you are completely surrounded by a vast gathering of other beings. This gathering includes enemies who harm you, friends who help you, and strangers — those who have no particular influence on you. Indeed, all sentient beings of the six states — hell beings, pretas, animals, humans, asuras, and devas — are actually present with you. Moreover, you think that the three avenues — body, speech, and mind — of your being and those of all others in this vast assembly are aligned in the same way. As you bow to Avalokita, the bodies of all of you are pervaded by a feeling of respectful devotion. The same is true for your voices and your state of mind. You are fostering a total sense of appreciation and trust.

Having established that perspective, you recall the basic need common to you and all other beings — to be protected from the vast ocean of suffering in samsara. Guru Avalokita (and, by implication, all the aforementioned sources of refuge that he embodies) possesses the actual power and ability to afford you such protection from suffering. With a firm sense of confidence beyond all doubt, you regard him as the one who is truly capable of protecting you.

This act of taking refuge involves three related states of mind, the first of which is *trust*. This is the attitude of totally entrusting yourself without reservation to Guru Avalokita — placing your hopes entirely in him, knowing that he will ensure liberation from the suffering of samsara and realization of buddhahood. The second state of mind is *clear intention*, which consists of the thought, “I ask for your protection. Please protect all beings throughout space.” Thirdly, you should feel *confidence*, knowing that you are certain to be protected by him, as he is the ultimate source of refuge. With those three states of mind — trust, clear intention, and confidence — you take refuge while reciting the words of the text.

Until I reach enlightenment, I take refuge in the Buddha, in the Dharma, and the noble Sangha.

Through the merit of accomplishing the six perfections,
may I achieve awakening for the benefit of all sentient
beings.

Buddha, or buddhahood, comprises three kāyas: *dharmakāya*, *sambhogakāya*, and *nirmāṇakāya*. From the perspective of the natural state, the *dharmakāya* of buddhahood is the experience of primordially present, immutable reality. From the perspective of others, the compassionate energy of buddhahood manifests in the form of deities, complete with their distinctive attributes as well as the appearances of pure realms. That dimension of buddhahood is the *sambhogakāya*. By way of emanation, buddhas also appear in whatever forms are necessary to guide beings. These forms include material bodies of flesh and blood, whether they be human bodies or those of nonhuman beings such as animals or other creatures. Such manifestations of awakened beings represent the *nirmāṇakāya*.

Genuine Dharma comprises two aspects: Dharma in the form of scripture and transmitted teachings, and Dharma as the realization of those teachings. The former includes the 84,000 aggregates of teachings that were given by the Buddha. The latter is the outcome of the process of receiving those teachings and cultivating them in experience through practice. Thus realization

of Dharma is the state in which the qualities of an enlightened being have been actualized.

The Sangha, too, is understood at two levels. Generally speaking, those individuals who have assumed the vows of *prātimokṣa* (personal liberation), the vow of *bodhicitta* (the awakening mind), and *samaya* (tantric commitments), and who possess the qualities of scriptural Dharma as well as realization, represent the noble Sangha. On a much broader level, the community of practitioners and teachers constitutes the Sangha of ordinary individuals. It is represented especially by the teacher who personally gives direct practical guidance.

Thus you take refuge in the aforementioned sources of protection with the intention, “I take refuge in the Three Jewels from now until perfect awakening is achieved.” When taking refuge, normally the words are recited several times rather than just once. Moreover, they are recited an odd number of times rather than an even number of times — most commonly three times, or perhaps five, or seven; but not two, four, or six. One reason for this is that with each repetition of the words you are trying to clearly establish their meaning in your mind. If you recite the passage twice, reciting it once more serves to bring the first two repetitions into balance so that the interdependence

is harmonious and therefore conducive to your practice. The same would be true if you were to recite the passage five times, for instance, or seven, or twenty-one. On the other hand, if you were to recite the words only two times, without a third time to make an odd number, there would be some danger of negation due to an imbalance in the number of repetitions.

As explained, you repeat aloud the words of taking refuge as many times as desired. Having taken refuge, maintain the sense of conviction that from now on you and all other beings are actually under the protection of the noble Great Compassionate One. Such certainty is essential: unless you firmly believe that you are protected, your act of taking refuge will have little effect.

The next step is the development of bodhicitta, the awakening mind. Having visualized the presence of all six types of sentient beings before you while taking refuge, take them as your focus and reflect on their relationship to you. Throughout your beginningless history of past lives, there is no one among them who has not at some point been your mother, your father, or likewise your friend or caretaker. Every single being has supported and benefited you in the past by virtue of those relationships. So you begin by gratefully recognizing the tremendous kindness that all other beings have shown to you.

You then consider their existing situation. From the time of birth to the time of death, all these beings go about their individual lives driven by the deep desire to achieve well-being and to be free from suffering. There are no exceptions to this. As we can clearly observe, throughout the diversity of life in all its forms there is constant activity, busyness, and struggle — beings are always striving for something. What they are all striving for is the fulfillment of that basic twofold desire: to gain happiness and to avoid suffering, now and in the future.

Despite their efforts, however, they are never ultimately successful in achieving this aim. Throughout beginningless existence, beings have been in a state of fundamental confusion as to how to bring about the happiness and freedom from suffering that they so desire. The cause of happiness is virtue; the cause of suffering is negativity. Beings should, therefore, do what is virtuous in order to gain happiness and abandon negativity in order to be free from suffering. But the typical behavior of beings is such that their actions are in direct opposition to the achievement of what they want. They seek happiness, yet fail to develop its cause, virtue. They wish to avoid suffering, yet continue to perpetuate its cause, negativity. Once the karma of negative action has been established, it is utterly impossible that that cause will lead to happiness as a result. As the consequence of

their misguided actions, beings bring about their own suffering while failing to accumulate the virtue that would be the cause of their happiness. It is for this reason that beings undergo all the inconceivable pain and misery of samsara and especially the agonies of bad states of existence such as the hell realms or *preta* realms. And this is a pattern that never comes to an end: there is no respite from the oppression of suffering, no point at which beings — all of whom have been your kind parents — are finally released from this cycle of misery.

In relation to these beings, reflect on the fact that in this life you have obtained a human body. You have not merely obtained a human body, but you have also encountered the Buddhadharma, in which you have faith and devotion. Moreover, you are practicing Mahayana Dharma under the guidance of genuine spiritual teachers. Consider how fortunate you are to have this opportunity to bring benefit to beings who are oppressed by suffering. Think, “I must do whatever I can to bring all beings to the state of ultimate happiness — the state of unsurpassable, perfect, and complete buddhahood.” That intention is *aspiration bodhicitta* — the resolve to achieve perfect awakening for the benefit of all beings.

Although you give rise to this aspiration, you do not yet have the actual ability to establish all other beings in perfect buddhahood because you yourself have not yet achieved that state. This aim can only be fulfilled with the attainment of the qualities of liberation and all-knowing wisdom. Nevertheless you need to begin by forming this resolve to bring all beings to perfect awakening.

How is it that you will enable yourself to bring about the actual fulfillment of your aspiration? Through practicing this profound deity meditation and mantra repetition of the noble Avalokita, you will realize the sublime state of the Noble One. This practice is the means whereby you can accomplish that goal. Resolve your intention by thinking, “With such realization, as long as the three realms of samsara continue to persist, I will do whatever is necessary to emulate the noble actions and perfect liberation exemplified by Avalokita for the benefit of beings.” By generating this strong, heartfelt motivation, you aspire to become just like Avalokita, to achieve that same power and ability to help others. In the presence of Guru Avalokita, you affirm this great promise to achieve perfect buddhahood for the benefit of all beings. He bears witness to your act of engendering aspiration bodhicitta because his all-knowing gaze perceives your thoughts. He is directly aware of the noble intention that arises in your mind.

By virtue of doing the meditation and mantra repetition of this practice, *For the Benefit of All Beings as Vast as the Skies*, you generate tremendous merit. The purpose of that merit, however, needs to be specified. You develop such virtue with the express aim of helping other beings, not only in temporary terms but by ultimately bringing them all to the state of perfect buddhahood. Having determined your intention thus, you prepare to follow through with your commitment in practice, which is *implementation bodhicitta* — the engaged aspect of the awakening mind.

As explained above in the discussion of taking refuge, you recite the words of refuge and bodhicitta an odd number of times, such as three, five, or seven; but not an even number of times, such as two, four, or six. Thus resolve your state of mind as you begin the practice by way of taking refuge and engendering bodhicitta, so as to clarify your purpose.

Likewise, you should strive to develop your visualization with as much clarity as possible. Innumerable light rays radiate from the body of Guru Avalokita before you. These light rays strike all the beings of the six states you have visualized. In that very instant, the brilliant light rays purify them of all the negativity and obscurations they have accumulated throughout beginningless existence. Likewise, all the unimaginable suffering that

Taking Refuge and Engendering Bodhicitta

they endure comes to an end; as a result, they are imbued with a sense of well-being. You then think that noble Avalokita as the principal source of refuge as well as all the innumerable buddhas and bodhisattvas throughout the ten directions melt into light. This light then dissolves into you, blessing the continuum of your physical, verbal, and mental being.

That constitutes the first phase of the practice, taking refuge and generating bodhicitta. Strive to properly recite the words and develop the visualization.

2. Meditation on the Form of the Deity

We have completed the preparation, comprising taking refuge and engendering bodhicitta, including the accompanying visualization. Now we continue with the second part: meditation on the form of the deity.

In order to put deity meditation in context, we can consider it in terms of the *ground of being*. What we experience as the ordinary body is a manifestation of delusion — a misapprehension of the ground. Inherent within that same ground, however, are the *kāyas*, or “bodies,” of buddhahood itself: dharmakāya, sambhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya. In reality, these kāyas constitute the true nature of the body. All the perfect qualities of buddhahood are therefore intrinsic to the ground of being. It is in order to reveal those qualities that we practice deity meditation.

These qualities, moreover, are not in any way contrived. We might assume that in visualizing the form of the deity we are trying to newly invent something that we did not previously possess or newly acquire something from some source extraneous

to ourselves. Similarly, we might think that we are deliberately fabricating something that does not correspond to actual reality. But these would be misconceptions because the qualities of perfection are already innately present within the ground of each individual's being. It is those innate qualities — the heart qualities of noble awakened beings — that we aim to realize through deity meditation.

You begin by seeing yourself as you appear ordinarily, which is to say, from the perspective without realization of the natural state. You are completely surrounded by all other sentient beings, who are the object of your compassion, as I explained earlier in the discussion of refuge and bodhicitta. Continue to visualize them in the same manner as when taking refuge. Above the crown of your head and that of every other being there appears a great white lotus flower in full bloom. It has eight petals and is complete in every detail, including anthers in the center. Above the lotus there appears a perfect disk of white moonlight, like the full moon appearing vividly in the night sky. This disk of pure white moonlight is utterly pristine, free of any stain or flaw. Above it appears the syllable *HRĪḤ*. The *HRĪḤ* is totally white and lustrous with a pearlescent quality. It is a natural manifestation that completely embodies the enlightened compassion and ability of all victors. Visualize the white lotus, disk of moonlight,

and syllable *HRĪḤ* appearing above the crown of your head and those of all other beings.

You then visualize innumerable moonlike rays of light emanating from the *HRĪḤ* syllable, radiating outward into all the mandalas of the victorious buddhas and bodhisattvas who abide throughout the ten directions, without exception. The light rays manifest as immeasurably profuse offerings that bring tremendous pleasure to them. Furthermore, the light rays strike you and all other beings in the six states, removing all sickness and harmful spirits from each individual. They also purify the negativity of unwholesome actions accumulated throughout beginningless time, which would otherwise ripen and be experienced as suffering and obscurations. Such obscurations would prevent the achievement of liberation and the ultimate realization of all-knowing pristine awareness. The brilliant white radiance from the *HRĪḤ* floods all the realms inhabited by beings of the six states and instantaneously dispels their suffering: it fills the hell realms, bringing relief to all the beings tormented by unimaginable pain and agony there; it fills the realms of the pretas, satisfying their hunger and quenching their thirst. Likewise, the radiance fills the realms of animals and all other forms of life. With the removal of their suffering, they are left in a state of genuine well-being.

You then think that the blessings of all noble awakened beings — the buddhas and bodhisattvas — are gathered in the form of light rays, which dissolve back into the white *HRĪḤ* syllable above your crown and that of every other being. This causes the *HRĪḤ* to transform instantaneously into the noble and sublime Avalokita, or Chenrezik. His form is utterly white, like the brilliant glare of sunlight reflecting off the surface of snow. It is clear and radiant with iridescent light of five colors: white, red, blue, yellow, and green. This brilliant, five-colored iridescent light fills the pure realms of the innumerable buddhas and bodhisattvas throughout the ten directions, exhorting them to compassionately consider beings, and act for their benefit. The light rays also fill the realms of the six types of beings, dispelling their suffering and leaving them in a state of well-being.

Avalokita displays his great affection for you and for all beings with a radiant smile. So natural and genuine is his loving benevolence that it is comparable to the feeling a mother has for her only child. Throughout the past, present, and future, he is always gazing upon the realms of beings in a state of pervasive awareness with his benevolent and compassionate heart.

Avalokita has four arms. The palms of his first two hands are joined in the gesture of prayer at his heart. The second right

hand holds a white crystal mala; the second left hand holds a white lotus flower with eight petals and a stem. He wears an exquisite upper garment of white silk adorned with a golden design as well as silken streamers and a skirt of red silk. His various articles of jewelry include a diadem of gold from the [Jambu](#) River ornamented with fine clusters of divine jewels; earrings; short, medium, and long necklaces; armlets; bracelets; anklets; and an ornamental belt adorned with a series of small bells, the pleasant sound of which is clearly audible. His entire body is perfectly adorned with all of the aforementioned features. Over his left breast he wears the golden pelt of a [kṛṣṇasāra](#) antelope. Noble Avalokita's long locks are bound up in a topknot at the crown of his head, with the excess freely hanging down. At the peak of the topknot is the crowning presence of Buddha [Amitābha](#), the lord of Avalokita's family of awakened beings, appearing with the attire of a supreme nirmāṇakāya. Chenrezik, or Avalokita, has two legs; they are fully crossed in the [vajra](#) posture. He appears immersed in a backdrop of moonlight like the full disk of the moon, utterly pristine and flawless. He is the single, all-inclusive embodiment of all sublime sources of refuge who abide throughout the ten directions and appear throughout the three times: those who have appeared in the past, those who appear in the present, and those who will appear in the future

Meditation on the Form of the Deity

are all personified in the figure of Avalokita, appearing above the crown of your head and those of all other beings.

What I have just described is the creation phase, which refers to the process of developing the visualization of the deity. That will then serve as the basis for the ensuing part of the practice in which the mantra recitation becomes the focus.

On the crown of myself and all beings present throughout
space, on a moon and white lotus,
Is a HRIḤ from which Chenrezik arises, radiating clear white
light suffused with the five colors.
His eyes gaze in compassion and his smile is loving.
Of his four arms, the first two are joined in a prayer
And the lower two hold a crystal rosary and white lotus.
He is arrayed in silks and jewel ornaments.
He wears an upper robe of doeskin, and his head ornament
is Amitābha, Buddha of Boundless Light.
His two feet are in vajra posture; a stainless moon is his
backrest.
He is the essential nature of all those in whom we take
refuge.

Meditation on the Form of the Deity

To review this visualization in brief as given in the practice text, above the crown of your head and those of all other beings throughout space there appears a great white lotus flower; above that, a disk of white moonlight like the full moon; and above that, the syllable *HRĪḤ*. Light rays radiate from the syllable *HRĪḤ*; they then return and are absorbed into the *HRĪḤ*, which transforms into the noble and sublime Avalokita, or Chenrezik.

His form is white, radiant with five-colored iridescent light. Smiling affectionately, he continuously gazes upon all beings with compassionate eyes. He has four arms. The palms of his first two hands are joined.

His second right hand holds a crystal mala; his second left hand, a white lotus flower. He is adorned with various silken garments and precious ornaments. His left breast is covered by a *kṛṣṇasāra* pelt adorned with a golden design. The protector Amitābha, lord of Avalokita's family of awakened beings, crowns his head. Avalokita is seated with his two legs fully crossed in the vajra posture, signifying that he never deviates from his altruistic aims. Flawless, he appears against a backdrop of stainless moonlight. Countless buddhas and bodhisattvas are unified within the single figure of the noble Avalokita: he is the complete, all-inclusive embodiment of all sources of refuge.

Meditation on the Form of the Deity

Recite the words at a relaxed pace, taking your time so as to allow for clear visualization of each aspect of the deity's form, beginning with his overall appearance and then building on that with each of the specific details and attributes. This is important because the visualization will be sustained throughout the ensuing phases of the practice. Develop the visualization as clearly as possible in every respect.

3. Mantra Repetition

Invoking the compassionate heart of the deity by way of prayer

Continuing to visualize the noble and sublime guru Chenrezik, think that as you recite you are praying to him in unison with all other beings. With a single-minded sense of complete trust beyond all doubt, think “You know what to do,” recognizing that he has the necessary knowledge and ability to lead you and all other beings to freedom from suffering. Knowing that you must rely on him in order to achieve such liberation, pray to him with the thought, “Please deliver me and all beings of the six states from samsaric existence, and guide us to the level of perfect omniscient awakening.”

Lord, not touched by any fault, white in color, whose head
a perfect buddha crowns,
Gazing compassionately on all beings, to you Chenrezik, I
prostrate.

Mantra Repetition

The commentary suggests that you might recite the foregoing prayer a hundred times, or twenty-one times, or seven times. In fact, there is no fixed number: you simply repeat this prayer as many times as you wish. It should be recited repeatedly until you are moved with a powerful sense of trust and devotion. Ideally it should be recited again and again to the point where a definite change in the quality of your perception takes place. Ordinary experience involves delusive states of mind such as self-fixation, fixation on true existence, and doubt. Through the sheer power of ardently repeating this prayer, you seek to bring about a transformation in your perception that goes beyond such limitations.

At this point in the liturgy, if there is sufficient time and you wish to do so, you may insert additional prayers as appropriate. Examples would include the *Praise to Avalokiteśvara* composed by the nun **Lakṣmī** and the *Lamenting Praise* composed by the master **Candrakīrti**. (c. 600–c. 650 CE). Such prayers and praises to Avalokiteśvara carry great blessings, so when you incorporate them here you bring their blessings into the practice. By doing so, they become a supplement that serves to enhance the power and quality of the practice overall. As suggested in Karmapa Khakhyap Dorje's commentary, other masters of our tradition have specified the inclusion of additional prayers composed by

great beings. For instance, the Lord of Refuge [Kalu Rinpoche](#) (1905-1989) as well as the 16th Karmapa [Rangjung Rikpe Dorje](#) (1924-1981) established the custom of using certain prayers at this point, including one form of the Seven Branch prayer. For this reason, throughout our community of affiliated Karma Kagyu centers, this practice is normally done with that same series of additional prayers.

With deep and clear faith I prostrate to noble and powerful
Chenrezik,
And to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten direc-
tions and three times.

The first of the seven branches is prostration. You regard as the objects of veneration the noble Avalokitesvara and all the countless victors and their bodhisattva children, both male and female, who abide throughout the ten directions and appear throughout the three times. Their state of awakening is such that they have perfectly realized all the qualities of enlightened body, speech, and mind. Seeing this with lucid wonderment, you prostrate to them in every respect, bowing with your body, praying with your speech, and feeling trust and devotion in your mind.

Mantra Repetition

I make offerings, both actual and imagined, of flowers,
incense, lights, perfume, food, music, and much else.
Assembly of Noble Ones, please accept them.

Next is the branch of making offerings. Bring to mind all the beautiful flowers that exist in this world as well as those found in the celestial realms; wafting clouds of incense; precious jewels, lamps, and other sources of light such as the sun and the moon; various fragrances and perfumes; all kinds of fine foods with hundreds of delicious flavors and utterly pure water endowed with eight perfect qualities; and music, so pleasing and captivating to the ear that suffering dissipates merely upon hearing it. You include in this gesture of offering all such things that exist throughout the realm of humanity and the realms of the devas — in short, anything and everything that is pleasing and desirable. This would include not only offerings that may actually be present but also anything you can think of that is worthy of being offered. Imagining each of these being multiplied in inconceivably vast, limitless quantities, you humbly ask Avalokita and all the buddhas and bodhisattvas to accept your offering. From their side as sublime awakened beings, they are free from fixation; they have no particular need or desire to obtain anything from you. Nevertheless from your side you ask them to

Mantra Repetition

kindly accept these offerings in consideration of beings' need to develop merit through practices such as this.

From beginningless time until now,
I confess all the ten unvirtuous acts
And the five actions of immediate consequences — all the
negative actions
I have committed while influenced by mental afflictions.

The next branch is the confession of negativity. Consider the fact that you and all other beings have accumulated tremendous negativity throughout beginningless past lives. Whether they be any of the ten unwholesome actions or the five actions of immediate consequence, all such instances of negativity have come about because you have acted under the influence of delusion and other mental afflictions. Taking into account all your physical, verbal, and mental negative karma, you sincerely confess it before all the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions so as to be free of that burden.

I rejoice in the merit of whatever virtue śrāvakas,
pratyekabuddhas, bodhisattvas,
And ordinary people have gathered throughout the three
times.

Mantra Repetition

You then rejoice in virtue. Think of śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas who achieve *arhatship* as the result of their training in virtue; think of bodhisattvas who realize the qualities of the ten levels of awakening. Likewise, reflect on whatever physical, verbal, and mental virtues ordinary beings possess. This includes the corruptible virtue that arises with the accumulation of merit, as well as the incorruptible virtue that arises with the development of wisdom. In brief, you bring to mind all the merit that is ever generated by all beings throughout all of time — the past, present, and future — and rejoice in appreciation of that goodness.

Please turn the wheel of the Dharma of the greater and
lesser vehicles

To meet the variety of motivations and different minds of
living beings.

Next is the branch of requesting that the wheel of the teachings be set in motion. Because beings are so diverse in their dispositions, abilities, and interests, an equally diverse range of approaches to spirituality is necessary in order to meet their individual needs. The teachings of buddhas are collectively described with the metaphor of the *dharmacakra*, or “wheel of Dharma,” which is represented by any of the various approaches to those teachings: greater, lesser, common, and so forth. You

Mantra Repetition

make the request that Dharma teachings be given in whatever ways are appropriate to address the needs of countless beings.

Until samsara is completely emptied,
I beseech you not to pass into [nirvana](#)
But to look with great compassion on all living beings
caught in an ocean of suffering.

In their state of awakening, buddhas may choose to enter nirvana, thus leaving behind the limitations of mundane existence altogether. With the next branch you address this possibility by making the express request that the buddhas should not enter nirvana as long as ordinary beings have not achieved the state of buddhahood and the three realms of samsara have not been totally emptied; rather, they should continue to remain and compassionately consider beings who are adrift in a vast ocean of suffering.

May whatever merit I have accumulated
become a cause for the enlightenment of all beings.
Not taking long, may I soon
become a magnificent guide for living beings.

All the virtue that has been generated by way of the preceding six branches is subsumed in the seventh branch, the dedication of merit. You make the aspiration, “May whatever merit I have accumulated through prostration, offering, and so forth serve as a cause for all beings to awaken to buddhahood; thereby, without delay, may I become identical to the noble Avalokita in achieving the glory of guiding beings along the path to liberation and omniscience.”

The great **siddha** Thangtong Gyalpo, composer of our sādhana, was, in a previous life, the monk **Pema Karpo**. As Pema Karpo, he composed a special prayer to the noble Avalokita — one that carries great blessings. I will now explain this prayer.

Lama Chenrezik, I supplicate you.

Yidam Chenrezik, I supplicate you.

Noble, supreme Chenrezik, I supplicate you.

refuge and protector, Chenrezik, I supplicate you.

Kind protector, Chenrezik, I supplicate you.

Buddha of Great Compassion, hold me in your compassion.

With the words “Lama Chenrezik, I supplicate you,” you supplicate the guru in the form of noble Chenrezik, who is the single, all-inclusive embodiment of all gurus. “Yidam Chenrezik,

I supplicate you”: again you supplicate Avalokita, now as the yidam. He is the single, all-encompassing embodiment of all the myriad manifestations of meditational deities. “Noble, supreme Chenrezik, I supplicate you”: again you supplicate Avalokita, who is noble and sublime in that he is the single, complete embodiment of all bodhisattvas who abide on the tenth level of awakening. “Refuge and protector, Chenrezik, I supplicate you”: Avalokita is the ultimate refuge in that he is the all-encompassing personification of all sources of refuge: whether they appear as gurus, deities, or bodhisattvas, he essentially embodies them all. He is also the ultimate protector of beings because he is capable of protecting them from suffering and ensuring that they will finally be liberated from samsara. “Kind protector, Chenrezik, I supplicate you”: While Chenrezik does indeed have the capacity to protect beings from suffering, that alone would not guarantee that they would be protected — tremendous love and compassion is also essential. Because Chenrezik embodies the qualities of benevolence and compassion for beings as well as the capacity to protect them from suffering, you pray to him as the loving protector. “Buddha of Great Compassion, hold me in your compassion”: with these words you invoke Avalokita’s noble heart, knowing that he is the total embodiment of the compassion, ability, and blessings of all buddhas.

Mantra Repetition

Innumerable beings have wandered in endless samsara and experienced unbearable suffering.

Protector, they have no other refuge than you.

Please bless them that they attain the omniscience that is awakening.

Throughout beginningless and endless samsara, beings are born into the three realms of existence, not merely once or twice but countless times. Powerless to help themselves, they are compelled to roam from one existence to another. As they do so, they experience intolerable suffering such as the unimaginable extremes of heat and cold in the hell realms and other states. As long as the negative karma that led to those consequences has yet to be exhausted, they are forced to endure such miseries. Avalokita is the refuge and protector who is capable of protecting beings from the suffering of existence. With the words “Protector, they have no other refuge than you,” you acknowledge that Avalokita alone is totally capable of affording protection from suffering because he is the complete embodiment of all sources of refuge — all gurus, deities, and awakened beings, without exception. Thus you ask Avalokita to grant his blessings in order to ensure that all beings in samsara ultimately achieve the omniscient state of buddhahood.

Mantra Repetition

With the foregoing as a general supplication, what follows is a supplication that addresses the particular sufferings of beings in specific states of existence.

Compelled by negative karma, gathered from beginningless
time,
Living beings, through the force of anger, are born as hell
beings
And experience the suffering of heat and cold.
Supreme deity, may they all be born in your presence.

Beings are compelled to roam in samsara due to the negative karma they have accumulated physically, verbally, and mentally throughout their beginningless history of lives. Because of that, and primarily because of intense anger, beings are born in the hell realms where they experience the intolerable agonies of extreme heat and cold. You pray to Avalokita, “Sublime deity, please ensure that the beings suffering in the hells are reborn in your presence.” To that end, you recite OM MAṆI PADME HŪM

Compelled by negative karma, gathered from beginningless
time,
Living beings, through the force of miserliness, are born in
the realm of hungry ghosts

Mantra Repetition

And experience the suffering of hunger and thirst.
May they all be born in your supreme realm, the **Potala**.

Because of negative karma accumulated throughout beginningless past existences, and primarily because of stinginess, beings are born as pretas, or anguished spirits. Once born in that form, as long as the obscuration of their negative karma has not been exhausted they are forced to endure unimaginable suffering due to intense hunger, thirst, and other kinds of privation. You pray that noble Avalokita grant his blessings that the pretas may be rescued from their states of misery and reborn in Potala, his sublime pure realm. To that end, you recite OM MANI PADME HUM.

Compelled by negative karma, gathered from beginningless time,
Living beings, through the force of bewilderment, are born as animals
And experience the suffering of dullness and stupidity.
Protector, may they all be born in your presence.

Because of immeasurable negative karma accumulated throughout their beginningless history of lives, and primarily because of delusion, beings are born as animals. Animals experience innumerable sufferings due to dullness and stupidity as well

Mantra Repetition

as powerlessness. You pray to Avalokita as the protector of all such beings: “May all animals be reborn in your presence: OM MAṆI PADME HŪM.”

Compelled by negative karma, gathered from beginningless time,
Living beings, through the force of desire, are born in the realm of humans
And experience the suffering of constant toil and poverty.
May they be born in the supreme pure land of Dewachen.

Because of boundless negative karma accumulated throughout their beginningless succession of past lives, and primarily because of greed and attachment to sense pleasures and wealth, beings are born as humans. Generally speaking, human beings endure birth, sickness, aging, and death — four great rivers of suffering. Moreover, they also experience the distress of encountering situations that they wish to avoid and the frustration of failing to achieve their aims. Human life is characterized by the endless struggle to survive and to succeed; yet, inevitably, there is failure and loss. All human beings suffer in these and other ways.

Furthermore, human existence holds tremendous potential — both for benefit and for harm. Having been born as human

Mantra Repetition

beings, if we are then fortunate enough to come into contact with authentic Dharma and to learn and practice it under the guidance of qualified spiritual teachers, this human form will serve as the best means for us to develop spiritually and ultimately awaken to buddhahood. On the other hand, the same human existence can be abused. Humans are especially capable of terrible violence and harm — far more so than other forms of life in samsara. With the knowledge that such destructive potential exists, implied in your supplication is the wish that all humans should use their lives only in the most meaningful and beneficial ways so as to gradually progress toward buddhahood. You pray to Avalokita that all humans should be reborn in the pure realm of *Sukhāvatī*, the Blissful. To that end, you recite OM MAṆI PADME HŪM.

Compelled by negative karma, gathered from beginningless
time,

Living beings, through the force of jealousy, are born in the
realm of demigods

And experience the suffering of fighting and quarreling.

May they be born in your realm, the Potala.

Because of measureless negativity accumulated throughout beginningless time, and primarily because of jealousy, beings are

Mantra Repetition

born as asuras, or jealous gods. There is no peace or happiness among the asuras: from birth until death, they experience nothing but conflict, fighting, and violence throughout their lives. You pray to Chenrezik: “May the asuras be reborn in your pure realm, Potala: OM MAṆI PADME HŪM.”

Compelled by negative karma, gathered from beginningless time,
Living beings, through the force of pride, are born in the realm of gods
and experience the suffering of change and downfall.
May they all be born in your realm, the Potala.

Because of tremendous negative karma accumulated throughout beginningless time, and primarily because of pride, beings are born in the realms of devas, or gods. Generally speaking, the devas’ existence is a state of great comfort and pleasure. But it is not a state of freedom from suffering, because these beings inevitably undergo the agony of death and downfall. As the devas approach the end of their very long lives, through their clairvoyance they become aware of their impending death and can actually see the lower states of existence into which they are about to plunge; yet they are completely powerless to avert their demise. So severe is the extreme shift from divine luxury

Mantra Repetition

to imminent death and downfall that the devas' experience of mental anguish is even worse than the torments experienced by beings in lower states such as the hells. You pray to Avalokita: "May the devas be reborn in the pure realm of Potala." To that end, you recite OM MAṆI PADME HŪM.

Thus the foregoing passages constitute a prayer for all beings of the six states to be guided to the pure realms.

Through all my existences, may my deeds equal Chenrezik's.

In this way, may all beings be liberated from the impure
realms, and

May the perfect sound of your six-syllable mantra pervade
the ten directions.

By the power of supplicating you, Most Noble and Perfect
One, may all those who will be my disciples

Take seriously the causes and effects of karma and
diligently practice virtuous acts.

May they take up the Dharma for the good of all.

As the practitioner supplicating Chenrezik, you continue by making further aspirations in the next passage: "In this and all future lives, may I liberate beings from impure realms of existence by virtue of deeds that are like those of noble Avalokita, who frees

beings from their suffering. May the means to accomplish this — my practice of the sublime six-syllable mantra, the manifestation of Avalokita's enlightened speech — spread throughout the ten directions. Through the power of my supplicating you, noble and sublime Avalokita, may all beings of the six states — those to be guided as my students — gain conviction in the reality of karma and the relationship between actions and their results. Based on that, may they make conscientious, ethically informed choices by striving in the ten wholesome actions and abandoning the ten unwholesome actions. For the benefit of beings, may we thus possess authentic Dharma." With that aspiration, we conclude the prayer to Avalokita that was composed by the monk Pema Karpo.

The practice of deity yoga based on the radiation and absorption of light rays

By having prayed like this one-pointedly, light rays radiating from noble Chenrezik purify the appearances of delusion.

The outer world of the environment becomes the Pure Land of Bliss.

The body, speech, and mind of beings, the inner world, become the body, speech, and mind of Chenrezik.

Mantra Repetition

All appearance, sound, and awareness are inseparable from emptiness.

In this phase of the practice, the ordinary appearances of impure realms are to be transformed by the radiance of Chenrezik's form, resulting in the pure manifestations of enlightened body, speech, and mind.

In response to your single-minded supplication, the awakened heart of the noble Great Compassionate One is invoked. This causes countless rays of white light imbued with five colors to radiate from his body, visualized above the crown of your head and those of all other beings. Of the five colors, white is predominant, which signifies the purity of Chenrezik's nature as the ultimate embodiment of great love and compassion. The brilliant light rays strike your body and those of all other beings of the six states, instantaneously purifying you of all forms of negativity that have accumulated in your continuum of being throughout beginningless time. The way in which this happens is analogous to how darkness is instantaneously dispelled by simply turning on a light.

Of the various kinds of negative actions, five are considered to be the worst in that they have immediate and severe karmic

consequences. These actions are the following: killing one's father, killing one's mother, killing an [arhat](#), causing a buddha to bleed with malicious intent, and causing a serious schism in the sangha.

There are also ten general kinds of *unwholesome actions*. Three of these are physical: killing, which is the act of terminating a sentient being's life; stealing, which means to take what is not given; and sexual misconduct, or unchaste behavior. There are four verbal types of unwholesome actions. Lying, or speaking untruthfully, would include any instance of blatantly trying to deceive and thus harm one's spiritual teachers or others in general. Divisive talk refers to any mean-spirited attempt to deliberately cause discord among others who have a harmonious relationship. Harsh words, or abusive words, refers to speaking with a hateful or malicious attitude in a way that is damaging to another's feelings. Idle chatter is pointless talk that may not be overtly harmful in the way the first three verbal actions are but is nonetheless unwholesome in that it is not beneficial. There are also three unwholesome actions that are mental in nature. Covetousness is greed that is focused on that which others possess; it is the sense of wanting for oneself the material wealth, prosperity, or fame that belongs to them. Ill will, or harmful intention, refers to any hateful wish for harm to come to another,

whether in verbal, physical, or mental ways. Finally, wrong views refer to any of various gross misconceptions, such as denial of the possibility or benefits of liberation from samsara, or denial of the fact that unwholesome actions are negative and should be avoided because they lead to suffering.

Thus there are ten kinds of unwholesome actions.

These actions, as defined above, and any actions similar to them, are considered to be negative. The reason why they are considered negative or unwholesome is that, once the karma of these actions is accumulated in the individual's continuum of being, it is certain to ripen and be experienced as suffering. The certainty of unpleasant consequences resulting from such actions is due to the fact that accumulated negative karma is nondissipating.

Obscurations constitute another aspect of negativity. They include five general kinds of disturbing emotions: desire for sense pleasures or wealth, anger toward others, delusion in relation to the nature of things, pride in seeing oneself as being superior to others, and jealousy in resenting those who are perceived to be in a position superior to one's own. These mental afflictions, as well as actions that stem from them, are to be relinquished.

This includes all instances of negativity as indicated in terms of the precepts of moral discipline, whether those of prātimokṣa, bodhicitta, or samaya. Included likewise are any actions that may not be specified in terms of precepts but would nevertheless be considered negative — moral indiscretions or actions that are in one way or another unwholesome. All of the above constitute obscurations in that they obstruct the achievement of the well-being of higher states of existence and prevent progress on the path that culminates in actual liberation from existence altogether.

Downfalls are a category of negative actions that relate to the three levels of vows: prātimokṣa, bodhicitta, and samaya. Once any one or more of these vows have been assumed, you are obligated to do your best to honor those commitments. Failure to do so can sometimes happen because of a lack of respect for the vows, that is to say, a lack of appreciation for their purpose, which is to serve as a guiding support that keeps you oriented toward liberation and awakening. Sometimes even while you have respect for the vows, you might not properly observe them because of distraction or sheer negligence. In either case, such moral shortcomings may constitute downfalls. They are considered downfalls because if nothing is done to rectify them they will cause you to fall down into lower states of existence. If this

should happen it would be a temporary setback — temporary in that once your karmic situation is rectified and you emerge from those unfortunate states you can eventually continue to progress toward liberation and awakening. Nevertheless as long as you remain in unfortunate states your progress is severely delayed because you have no opportunity to engage in virtue.

In terms of moral conduct, lesser faults can also be incurred. This happens when you contravene minor points of the training. Although these problems may not be severe enough to cause you to fall into lower states, they will nevertheless delay your achievement of ultimate awakening. As long as you still have incidental faults, it will take you that much longer to awaken to buddhahood.

In brief, we have negativity and obscurations, which derive from impurity and bad karma, and moral faults and downfalls, which are caused by mental afflictions. Bringing these into the context of the visualization, you think that all such negativity, obscurations, faults, and downfalls are instantaneously purified by the light rays that radiate from the body of noble Avalokita, striking you and all other beings. The brilliant light purifies all cognitive obscurations as well. Cognitive obscurations consist in the habit of delusion, developed throughout beginningless

time, where *delusion* refers to “dualistic perception.” It is the misperception of there being a truly existent distinction between self and other, or between the apprehending subject and apprehended object in one’s experience.

You then think that you and all beings are blessed by the noble Avalokita such that your ordinary body, speech, and mind become completely inseparable from his enlightened body, speech, and mind. In that way, your appearance becomes totally vivid as you take on the form of the Noble One, like a rainbow in your empty manifestation. The brilliant radiance completely fills all the realms of the six states of existence throughout space, effecting a profound, all-pervasive transformation of phenomenal appearances. The entire external environment of the world — the objective side of appearances — becomes the completely pure realm of *Akaniṣṭha Sukhāvatī*, the Unsurpassed Realm of Bliss.

This extraordinary realm is devoid of even the names of mundane material entities such as earth, rocks, and mountains; rather, its features have the nature of precious substances and rays and spheres of rainbow light. The inhabitants of the world — the six types of sentient beings — are all released from their respective sufferings as hell-beings, pretas, animals, and others; their bodies are vividly transformed into the enlightened body of the

Mantra Repetition

noble Great Compassionate One. All the ordinary sounds that beings produce as well as the sounds of the inanimate elements of the world become the naturally manifesting resonance of the six-syllable secret mantra. All thoughts and occurrences that arise within the mind are purified of their delusional aspect and are revealed to be the enlightened mind of the Noble One as awareness and emptiness, inseparable. Thus you experience appearances in their pure aspect as the manifestation of the enlightened body of Avalokita as well as his pure realm, all sound as the sound of secret mantra, and all mental events as naked, empty awareness manifesting as the enlightened mind. In that way, you regard the appearances of your body, speech, and mind as well as those of all other beings as being inseparable from the manifestation of the enlightened body, speech, and mind of the noble Great Compassionate One.

With that perception, you rest in meditative absorption in the great, all-pervasive state beyond concepts, free from apprehension or fixation, and prepare to recite the six-syllable mantra.

In response to your single-minded, unhesitating supplication to noble Avalokita, brilliant rays of five-colored iridescent light radiate from his body. As I explained earlier, the light rays purify you and all other beings of impure karmic perceptions and de-

Mantra Repetition

cluded consciousnesses. The rays of light reveal the external world to be the Blissful Pure Realm, while the body, speech, and mind of all beings who inhabit that realm become inseparable from the enlightened body, speech, and mind of Avalokiteśvara. This means that you perceive all appearances as divine appearances, all sounds as the resonance of mantra, and all thoughts and events that arise in the mind as the manifestation of empty awareness. All three of these aspects of manifestation — appearance, sound, and thought — are inseparable from their emptiness.

Having recited the foregoing and clearly imagined the details of the visualization described above, you come to the repetition of the sixsyllable mantra, OM MAṆI PADME HŪM. The mantra repetition is to be done as the main part of the practice session. The mantra itself is very simple, comprising just six syllables: OM, MA, ṆI, PAD, ME, HŪM. Because it is so short, it is easy to remember. And once you learn it you can freely recite it at any time, so it is an especially convenient mantra to incorporate into your ongoing practice. Moreover, because it is imbued with tremendous meaning and beneficial qualities, the six-syllable mantra is unsurpassable in its greatness — it is the king among secret mantras.

Mantra Repetition

The profound significance of the six-syllable secret mantra is connected to noble Avalokita's status as the total embodiment of the power of the wisdom of all buddhas. The six-syllable secret mantra is itself the distillation of the power and capability inherent in Avalokita's compassion and in the full range of his enlightened activity. The six syllables, in other words, are the concise expression of Avalokita's magnificence and of his capacity to bring beings to the state of liberation and omniscience.

The first syllable of the six is OM. The white syllable OM manifests from the inherent energy of the five aspects of the wisdom of the Noble One; it is the complete embodiment of the qualities of that wisdom. From among the six transcendent virtues, it has the nature of the *transcendent virtue of meditation*. OM purifies oneself and others of the mental affliction of pride as a cause of suffering; it also purifies the resultant suffering that is produced by that affliction — general suffering and the particular suffering of transference and downfall experienced by the devas. This syllable is inseparable from the enlightened body and altruistic activity of *Indraśakra*, the sage associated with the *deva* realm. It is the formal manifestation of the *intrinsic radiance of the wisdom of sameness* — one of the five aspects of wisdom. It guides beings of the six states to the southern pure realm of *Śrīmat*, the Glori-

ous, and brings about the attainment of the enlightened body of Buddha **Ratnasambhava**. Such are the power and blessings of the syllable OM.

The next syllable, MA, is green. This syllable manifests from the energy of the Noble One's unceasing, boundless love and compassion for all beings; it represents the enlightened activity that transpires through his benevolence. It has the nature of the *transcendent virtue of patience*, or forbearance. It purifies the mental affliction of jealousy as a cause of suffering; it also purifies the general resultant suffering that is produced by jealousy and the particular suffering of fighting and conflict that characterizes the realm of the asuras. It is inseparable from the enlightened body and activity of Vemacitra, the sage associated with the asuras. From among the five aspects of wisdom, MA is the formal manifestation of the *intrinsic radiance of wisdom as ensured fulfillment*. It guides beings of the six states to the northern pure realm of **Karmaprasiddhi**, the realm of Total Fulfillment, and enables achievement of the enlightened body of Buddha **Amoghasiddhi**.

The third syllable, NI, is yellow. It arises through the energy of the Noble One's tremendous compassion — compassion that is effortless in that it involves no contrived action and all-encompassing in that it extends to all beings impartially. It is vajra-

like in that it is the unchanging timeless awareness that totally encompasses enlightened body, speech, mind, and activity. It is the syllable that reverses the samsara of sentient beings into the expanse of nirvana. From among the six transcendent virtues, it has the nature of the *transcendent virtue of moral discipline*. It purifies the defilement of dualistic unawareness as a cause of suffering; it also purifies the general resultant suffering that is produced by that unawareness and, in particular, the four great rivers of suffering that characterize human existence: birth, aging, sickness, and death. The syllable 𑖦 is inseparable from the enlightened body and activity of Śākyamuni, the sage of the human realm. It is the formal manifestation of the *inherent radiance of self-existing timeless awareness*. It guides beings of the six states to the completely pure realm of **Akaniṣṭha Dharmadhātu**, the Unsurpassed Realm of the Basic Space of Phenomena, and it brings about the attainment of the enlightened body of the sixth buddha, Buddha **Vajradhara**.

The next syllable, PAD, is blue. This syllable manifests through the inherent energy of the unbiased compassion and boundless impartiality of the noble Great Compassionate One; it represents the enlightened body. From among the six transcendent virtues, it has the nature of the transcendent perfection of knowledge.

It purifies the causal affliction of delusion; it also purifies the general resultant suffering produced by that affliction and, in particular, the countless sufferings experienced by animals such as those of dullness and stupidity as well as enslavement by human beings. PAD is inseparable from the enlightened body and activity of **Sthirasimha**, the sage who appears for the benefit of animals. From among the five aspects of wisdom, this syllable is the formal manifestation of the intrinsic radiance of wisdom as the basic space of phenomena. It leads beings of the six states to the central pure realm of **Ghanavyūha**, the Densely Arrayed, and brings about the achievement of the enlightened body of Buddha Vairocana.

The next syllable, ME, is red. ME manifests as the dynamic expression of the Noble One's boundless, empathetic joy and compassion, which extend equally to all beings; it is the syllable of enlightened speech. From among the six transcendent virtues, it has the nature of the *transcendent virtue of giving*. It purifies greed as well as stinginess, which derives from greed — both of which are causes of suffering. Likewise, it purifies the general resultant suffering that is produced by these disturbing emotions; it also purifies the particular sufferings of hunger and thirst experienced by pretas. The syllable ME is inseparable from the enlightened body and activity of **Jvālāmukha**, the sage associ-

ated with the preta realm. It is the formal manifestation of the *intrinsic radiance of discerning wisdom* — one of the five aspects of wisdom. It brings beings of the six states to the western pure realm of Sukhāvatī, the Blissful, and ensures the attainment of the enlightened body of Buddha Amitābha.

The sixth syllable, HŪṂ, is black. This syllable manifests through the inherent energy of the noble Avalokita's boundless compassion — compassion that regards all beings with the same caring affection that a mother feels for her only child. HŪṂ represents the enlightened mind. From among the six transcendent virtues, it has the nature of the *transcendent perfection of knowledge*, by which the ultimate nature of things is realized. It purifies the causal state of dualistic fixation on self and other as well as the anger that beings experience based on that misapprehension. It also purifies the general resultant suffering that is produced by these afflictions; in particular, it purifies the agonies of extreme heat and cold that beings experience in the hell realms. The syllable HŪṂ is inseparable from the enlightened body and activity of Dharmarāja, the sage associated with the hell realms. It is the formal manifestation of the *intrinsic radiance of mirror-like wisdom*. It leads beings of the six states to the eastern pure

realm of **Abhirati**, the realm of Manifest Joy, and brings about attainment of the enlightened body of Buddha Akṣobhya.

Thus the six-syllable mantra completely encompasses the power of Avalokita's boundless enlightened activity — the activity of dredging the depths of samsara in order to extricate beings of the six types from their respective states of suffering. This six-syllable mantra — the supreme king among secret mantras — is to be repeated as many times as possible as the main part of your practice session. There is good reason for devoting such focused attention to repetition of the six-syllable mantra. In the Himalayan region, the great siddha **Karma Pakshi** (1206–1283) engaged in vast and inconceivable enlightened activity for the benefit of beings in the degenerate era — activity that, for the most part, was based on this six-syllable mantra. Devoted Tibetan practitioners of the six syllables would commonly accumulate vast numbers of repetitions: three hundred million, five hundred million, seven hundred million, or more. Consequently, all manner of special qualities and extraordinary signs would arise in the lives of such individuals, as evidenced in innumerable accounts. For these reasons, the six-syllable mantra became, by and large, the most widely known form of practice throughout the greater Tibetan and Himalayan region. Its relevance, however, is not limited to that part of the world: in degenerate times of

conflict and upheaval, when beings throughout the world suffer from exceptionally turbulent emotions, if the six-syllable mantra is taken as one's main practice, it will yield tremendous power to alleviate adverse conditions, being a special method imbued with all the extraordinary qualities and profound significance described above.

Returning to the context of your practice session, once you have recited the mantra a sufficient number of times or your time has run out, you then continue with the ensuing dissolution stage. Thus far, you have sustained the clear visualization of the body of Guru Avalokita as being actually present above your head, while the light rays from his body have revealed all that appears and exists to be the forms of Avalokita and his pure realm. Now, at the dissolution stage, the entire environment of that pure realm melts into light and dissolves into guru Avalokita above your crown. He in turn melts into light and dissolves into you. Finally, you dissolve into light and then rest in empty lucidity. The experience of empty lucidity at this point is such that you remain free of the *threefold frame of reference*, which means that you do not conceive of anything in terms of past, present, or future. In fact, you completely let go of any apprehension of yourself as distinct from other, or visualizing the form of the deity, or repeating the mantra. Simply let go of any conceptual

Mantra Repetition

constructs such as notions of existence versus nonexistence, being versus not-being, or empty versus nonempty. Remain free of any and all such conceptual reference points. In this state, appearance, sound, and awareness are experienced as being inseparable from their emptiness. It is a state of freedom from any distinction between observed object and observing mind. This great, all-encompassing, eternally changeless state — the basic space of phenomena, or *dharmadhātu* — is the awakened heart of the Noble One himself. Rest evenly in meditative absorption for as long as possible within this state. This experience of remaining absorbed in the true nature of the mind, or the suchness of the mind, constitutes the final *completion phase*. It is the experience of the immutable, intrinsic nature of the mind as it is — ultimate reality beyond all conceptual constructs or elaborations. While we speak in terms of “resting evenly,” or “evenly placing the mind,” understand that no substantial entities are involved: it is not as though you are placing something to rest somewhere; rather, what the use of such words and concepts entails is the direct experience of that which they refer to — the nondual natural state.

4. Bringing the Practice into Your Experience

The fourth part in the overall structure of the commentary describes the subsequent phase of bringing the practice into your experience. At this point, you emerge from the preceding state of meditative absorption and continue in the following manner. All substantial entities that appear as self and other — what would otherwise be ordinary phenomena consisting of the five basic elements, including the features of the natural environment such as the ground, stones, and mountains — are regarded as being the enlightened body of the noble Great Compassionate One. The way in which you foster this perception, however, differs from how it was cultivated earlier. You began the practice with the creation phase, in which you developed a clear visualization of the form of the deity with all its various details. In contrast, at this point you do not visualize the environment and its inhabitants in the form of the Great Compassionate One. Rather, you simply rest in the confidence of knowing that they are, in reality, the manifestation of the Great Compassionate One, without visualizing anything in particular. Similarly, you regard all sounds — those produced by living, animate beings

as well as those that arise from the inanimate elements such as wind, water, and fire — as being the melodic sound of the Noble One's enlightened speech as the six-syllable mantra. Likewise, you regard all thoughts and events that arise in your mind as being the enlightened mind of the Noble One — the native state of dharmakāya as awareness and emptiness beyond all elaboration.

With that perception, you continue to remain in meditative awareness subsequent to your session of practice. Throughout all activities and behaviors, whether you are moving about, lying down, sitting, or speaking, remain free of conceptual fixation based on ordinary perception. As you do so, foster absorption in the threefold awareness in which you experience all appearances as being the deity, all sounds as being his mantra, and all thoughts as being his awakened mind. Thus the practice is to allow your ongoing phenomenal experience to be informed by the threefold awareness of all things as being, in reality, the pure manifestations of enlightened body, speech, and mind. This is succinctly expressed in the next passage that you recite:

The bodies of myself and others appear in the form of
Chenrezik;
All sound is the melody of his six-syllable mantra;
All remembrance and thought is the great expanse of primordial wisdom.

5. Dedication of Virtue and Aspiration Prayers

We have gone through the practice of postmeditative awareness, which brings us to the fifth part of the commentary, the conclusion that consists in the dedication of virtue to awakening and aspiration prayers.

Through virtue of this practice, may I swiftly achieve the level of powerful Chenrezik.

On this same level may I then place every being, not one left behind.

As represented by your completion of the foregoing deity meditation and mantra repetition, you dedicate whatever sources of virtue that have ever been generated in your continuum of being throughout your beginningless past to the benefit of all sentient beings equally. You make this dedication with the aspiration that the unsurpassable accumulation of merit that comes from doing so will ensure that you attain, as quickly as possible, the consummate state of being essentially equal to noble Avalokiteśvara. You further aspire that by virtue of that achievement you will gain

Dedication of Virtue and Aspiration Prayers

the power that enables you to establish all beings throughout space, without a single exception, in the state equal to that of the noble and sublime Great Compassionate One — the state of perfect and complete awakening.

With all the merit of this meditation and repetition, may I
and every being to whom I am connected,
As soon as these imperfect bodies are left behind, be born
miraculously in the pure land of bliss.

As explained above, recite the words with recollection, awareness, and clarity.

At this point, you should freely include any additional pure aspiration prayers as desired, which is the normal way of concluding practices such as this. The specific aspiration prayers can vary depending on what is available to you and what you wish to include. In any case, the more aspirations you make at the end, the better, because such aspirations enhance the benefit of the practice.

Ideally, the practice should be done with thorough contemplation of the full significance of the six-syllable mantra as described in detail above, recalling each syllable's associated function, buddha, pure realm, and so forth. For some individuals, however, it may

not be feasible to meditate on every layer of meaning inherent in the practice. Those practitioners can take a somewhat simplified approach to the same practice in the following manner.

You begin with the preparation by taking refuge and engendering bodhicitta as explained above. Then, continuing with the main part, you single-mindedly focus your attention on the visualization in which you supplicate the noble and sublime Avalokita above the crown of your head, thinking that he is actually present, appearing as in the formal description given in the text. Pray to him a number of times with the thought “Guru Avalokita, think of me.”

You then continue with the recitation of OM MAṆI PADME HŪM, which is here explained with an alternative interpretation: The first syllable, OM, is the syllable that embodies the five aspects of pristine wisdom, each of which is associated with one of five kāyas. The next two syllables constitute the word MAṆI, which means “jewel.” The following two syllables constitute the word PADME, which means “holding the lotus.” Thus MAṆI PADME can be understood as “Jewel Holder of the Lotus,” which is an epithet for the noble Avalokita. The last syllable, HŪM, signifies the enlightened activity of protecting beings of the six states from suffering. According to that interpretation, you pray to Avalokita

with the thought, “Jewel Holder of the Lotus, embodiment of the five kāyas and five aspects of wisdom, please protect all beings of the six states from suffering,” and recite the six-syllable mantra as many times as possible.

Following that, Guru Avalokita, deeply pleased, melts into light and dissolves into you. At that point, think with confidence beyond all doubt “The wisdom of the Noble One has now entered my physical, verbal, and mental being.” Finally, conclude with dedication and aspiration prayers.

By doing the practice even at that level of understanding, it is certain that you will gain all the benefits that are described in the final section below. The author, Karmapa Khakhyap Dorje, thus encourages everyone to do this practice with appreciation and enthusiasm. This is significant in light of the fact that although some practitioners may be especially knowledgeable and capable of handling more lengthy and elaborate forms of practice, not all of us can do so. Some of us may be disinclined toward extensive learning, in which case we might feel somewhat inadequate in the face of the challenges of practice, and thus doubt our ability. But according to Khakhyap Dorje, there is no reason to harbor such doubts because even if we take a simpler approach to the practice, such as that described above, we will accumulate the

Dedication of Virtue and Aspiration Prayers

same tremendous merit that others might achieve with a more elaborate approach.

6. Benefits of the Practice

We have completed the explanation of all the parts of the practice, beginning with the process of taking refuge and developing bodhicitta, followed by the main elements of the practice, deity meditation and mantra repetition. At this point, we might ask: what is the overall significance of the practice, and what are the benefits of doing it? This question needs to be addressed because, in order to approach the practice with the right perspective, we need to understand not only the principles on which it is based but also the benefits that will be obtained by virtue of our efforts to do it. Based on that knowledge, we can then engage in well-informed practice.

Thus the sixth part of the commentary is a description of the benefits of the practice. It states that the benefits of this practice — the deity meditation and mantra repetition of the noble Avalokita — are, in fact, immeasurable: they are so tremendous that no words can serve to fully convey their scope. Nevertheless for the sake of providing some idea of what those benefits are, the following description is given.

First, the benefits of visualizing and recalling the form of the deity are indicated. The deity can be visualized in various ways. For instance, he can appear above the crown of your head, or you yourself can appear as the deity. However conceived, the significance of bringing to mind the form of the deity is stated in the root *tantra Padmajala*, or Lotus Net: “The gathering of all buddhas in a single visualized mandala of the enlightened body is the form of the protector Avalokita.” The mandala referred to is the manifestation of Avalokita’s form as generated in the process of visualization, that form being the embodiment of all awakened beings. “To meditate on or recall that form, moreover, effects the purification of all negativity including the five actions of immediate consequence.” Even the worst karma will be eliminated when a person merely brings to mind the appearance of the noble Great Compassionate One.

As to the benefits of repeating the six syllables — the king among secret mantras — we should understand that there is no distinction in terms of gender: whether one is male or female, the potential benefits of this mantra are exactly the same. The flawless words of our teacher, Śākyamuni — the victorious and completely perfect Buddha — were bequeathed as a great legacy for the people of Tibet by the *mahāguru, Padmākara*. He preserved this gift of the Buddha’s words by way of concealing

it in the form of treasure. Of the many such hidden treasure doctrines, some were destined to later be discovered by the vidyādhāra **Jatsön Nyingpo**, an emanated treasure revealer of indisputable legitimacy. The following description comes from those treasures that were revealed by him.

“The six-syllable mantra OM MAṆI PADME HŪM is the complete embodiment of the enlightened awareness of all buddhas.” Thus the ultimate realization of all awakened beings is represented by this mantra. “It is the essence that subsumes all 84,000 aggregates of dharma. It is the heart of the five families of awakened beings and of all masters of secrets. In fact, each of its six syllables constitutes a pith instruction that stands alone as a condensation of the aforementioned 84,000 collections of dharma. It is the source from which arise all sugatas and all qualities of perfection. It is the root of all spiritual attainments, including all forms of benefit and happiness”—the happiness of samsara as well as the true peace of nirvana. “It serves as the great path that leads to higher realms and liberation.” Thus by means of the six syllables sentient beings can achieve the well-being of humans and devas; beyond that, as *śrāvakas*, *pratyekabuddhas*, or *bodhisattvas* they can achieve liberation from samsara.

“Someone who merely hears this six-syllable mantra one time — this mantra that is the essence of all Dharma and sublime enlightened speech — will attain the level of irreversibility.” In other words, never simply regressing into cyclic existence, they will be assured of always progressing toward buddhahood. “They will thus become a great guide who delivers beings from the ocean of existence. If an insect or animal on the verge of dying hears the sound of this six-syllable mantra, they will thereby be released from that lowly body and achieve rebirth in Sukhāvatī, the Blissful Realm. Someone who merely thinks of this sixsyllable mantra, even without saying it aloud, will, in a way similar to how the sun shines brilliantly on the surface of snow, be purified of all negativity and obscurations — bad karma that has been accumulated throughout past lives without beginning. Having been purified, they will be reborn in the Blissful Realm. To come into contact with this mantra in whatever way ensures the receipt of empowerment by innumerable buddhas and bodhisattvas of the five families of awakened beings. To meditate on this mantra even once serves as learning, reflection, and meditation. In brief, by virtue of the six syllables, all phenomenal experience will manifest as dharmakāya and the great treasury of enlightened activity for the welfare of beings will be revealed.”

Elsewhere, we find the following: “Noble sons and noble daughters, you could, for instance, quantify **Mount Meru**, the king among mountains, by taking its measurement with a scale but you could not quantify the merit that comes from reciting the six-syllable mantra one time. You could take the lightest Benares muslin to the surface of a mountain of solid rock and wiping it once every hundred years you could wear away the rock entirely, but you could not quantify the merit that comes from reciting the six-syllable mantra one time. Likewise, you could drain the vast ocean drop by drop, but you could not exhaust the merit that comes from reciting the six-syllable mantra one time. You could count each of the tiniest of particles in the snowy region of Tibet or each of the leaves in a great forest, but you could not measure the amount of merit that comes from reciting the six-syllable mantra one time. Likewise, if a building a hundred leagues in size were completely filled with tiny sesame seeds and you were to remove one seed a day, even then you could eventually empty that building entirely, but you could not measure the amount of merit that comes from reciting the six-syllable mantra one time. Likewise, you could count each drop of rain that falls in the course of twelve months, but you could not measure the amount of merit that comes from reciting the six-syllable mantra one time.

“It is like this, noble children: Although it is not necessary to go on and on describing this at great length, you could measure the amount of merit that comes from serving and honoring ten million tathāgatas — perfect, completely awakened buddhas like me — but you could not measure the amount of merit that comes from reciting the six-syllable mantra one time. The avenues to birth in the six states, too, are cut off by reciting the six-syllable mantra, OM MAṆI PADME HŪṢ. The paths and levels of the six transcendent virtues, too, are covered by reciting the six-syllable mantra, OM MAṆI PADME HŪṢ. Whatever defilements of karma, mental afflictions, traces, and dispositions have been accumulated in the individual’s being, these, too, are purified by reciting the six-syllable mantra. The pure realms of the dharmakāya, sambhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya, too, are developed by the individual who recites this mantra; they become capable of guiding others to those realms, and they obtain merit and qualities in abundance.

“Noble children, listen! By virtue of the blessings of all victorious buddhas, this quintessential heart mantra” — the six-syllable mantra that is their enlightened speech — “is the source of all benefit and happiness in the world without exception.” The sublime six-syllable mantra “is the root of all spiritual attainments without exception,” both ultimate and common. The sublime

six-syllable mantra “is the stairway that leads to the higher realms of devas and humans. The sublime six-syllable mantra is the gatekeeper that obstructs the way to the lower realms” of the hells, pretas, and animals. The sublime six-syllable mantra “serves as the ship that delivers beings from the beginningless ocean of suffering” in the three realms of samsara. Because of the beginningless obscuration of fundamental unawareness, ordinary beings have not realized the wisdom of buddhahood that knows the nature of all things as well as their diversity. Like the light of a torch illuminating a dark place, the sublime six-syllable mantra dispels beings’ obscurations, revealing their innate *sugatagarbha* as dharmakāya, or awareness-emptiness as mahāmudrā. Beings are overwhelmed by the five poisonous mental states — the disturbing emotions of greed, anger, delusion, pride, and jealousy. The sublime six-syllable mantra is the great hero that, unsullied by such mental afflictions, is capable of defeating them in the very instant of their arising. The sublime six-syllable mantra “is the great conflagration that easily burns away the negativity” that leads to birth in bad states and the obscurations that prevent liberation and omniscience. The sublime six-syllable mantra “is like a hammer that crushes all suffering,” without exception. Frontier beings are those who live in degenerate times, have the worst afflictions, and are the

most difficult to tame and lead to buddhahood. The sublime six-syllable mantra “is the best remedy for taming such beings. It is the spiritual inheritance of the snowy land of Tibet. The sublime six-syllable mantra is the pith that unifies the essence of all the many sutras, tantras, and śāstras as well as learning, reflection, and meditation as a whole.”

Therefore the sublime six-syllable mantra “is like a precious king, standing alone as a single all-sufficient method”: with it, beings can achieve liberation from samsara and the omniscient state of perfect buddhahood.

Knowing that hearing, understanding, and contemplating its meaning will bring freedom from the affliction and suffering of existence and ultimately realization of perfect awakening itself, those who are intelligent and wise should always recite the six-syllable mantra.

As suggested by the foregoing, the power and benefits of the six-syllable mantra have been spoken of extensively in the words of the Buddha and in the treasure teachings of the great treasure revealers. So numerous are the occurrences of this mantra in the literature that they cannot all be enumerated.

If you recite the sublime six-syllable mantra even once with genuine faith, you are certain to experience all the benefits described above. So do not squander the three avenues of your being — your body, speech, and mind — by leaving them in a state of mediocrity. Embrace this means of developing tremendous virtue that is easy and free of hardship, yet extraordinarily meaningful. Make a commitment to always practice the six-syllable mantra; recite it as much as possible every day without fail. For instance, you could recite the mantra ten thousand times a day, or a hundred times a day. Do this in order to ensure that your human life will be truly meaningful.

In our past history of existences, we have not taken so many births as human beings. Because we have not encountered such Dharma as this and thus have not had the opportunity to practice it, we have suffered. Apart from the occasional birth in higher realms, we have been compelled to go from one unfortunate state to another, again and again. This time, because of our merit and fortunate karma, not only have we been born as human beings, we also have the ideal opportunity to engage in the practice of the noble Great Compassionate One and his enlightened speech in the form of the six-syllable mantra. Moreover, as our sublime guide, Avalokita directly appears to us according to our individual karmic dispositions, manifesting in diverse ways

throughout the world. However he might appear to us, the fact that we now have this most fortunate opportunity to receive the profound teachings of the *dharmacakra* and to recite the sublime six-syllable mantra is due, not only to the enlightened activity of the Buddha, but also the power of our own previous accumulation of merit as individuals. For these reasons, Karmapa Khakhyap Dorje exhorts us to wholeheartedly practice this unsurpassable means of achieving certain awakening.

The commentary concludes with the author's colophon:

Noble One, with the lifeline of your compassion, please
rescue beings from the ocean of existence;

Grant us the assurance of Mount Potala — the land of total
freedom, ultimate bliss, and liberation.

In this prayer to the noble Great Compassionate One, the lifeline of compassion takes the form of the six-syllable mantra garland, OM MAṆI PADME HŪM. He extends this saving grace to sentient beings throughout the three realms of existence who are drowning in a vast ocean of suffering. If those beings should come into contact with that lifeline, they can take hold of it and be rescued. To be rescued is to be brought to the pure realm of Mount Potala — the realm of complete liberation, freedom

Benefits of the Practice

from suffering, hardship, and fear, and the experience of lasting bliss and well-being. The author concludes by supplicating the protector Avalokita: “Grant us the assurance of knowing that you will rescue us from the suffering of existence and deliver us to the safety and bliss of your pure realm, Mount Potala.”

This completes the presentation of our commentary on *For the Benefit of All Beings as Vast as the Skies*.

Questions and Answers

QUESTION: When the light rays are purifying the different realms, it feels very close and effective if I connect with the specific *kleśa* for each realm, mainly in the forms of humans and animals. But if I try to imagine the forms of hell beings or devas, it becomes somewhat more abstract. Should I still try to imagine the different forms, or mainly focus on the *kleśas* themselves?

RINPOCHE: Even if you were to try to conceive of the specific physical forms of all the beings in each of the six realms, you would not be able to do so. You would not know how each being physically appears, so that approach may not be useful. What may be more useful is to know that each of the six realms manifests as a result of one of the six main *kleśas*, or mental afflictions, predominating. Therefore the physical embodiment of each type of being as well as the kind of suffering they experience and the appearances of their respective environments are a reflection of their own karmic perception. As suggested in the prayer that describes each of the six realms, when you recite the six-syllable mantra you can think that the power of

the mantra and visualization purifies the primary kleśa of the beings in each of the six states and thereby frees them from suffering. As to how those beings are to be visualized during the mantra repetition, the easiest method is to do as indicated in the instructions on the practice: imagine all beings, regardless of their respective ordinary forms, as appearing in the same form — that of Avalokita.

QUESTION: Rinpoche, could you please tell us when in the practice we should join our hands in the mudrā of prayer?

RINPOCHE: In this practice you join your palms in the gesture of prayer, also known as the *añjali mudrā*, at several points. First, you join your palms while taking refuge and engendering bodhicitta, later, during the Seven Branches, and then again, while praying to Avalokita.

QUESTION: In some thangkas, you can see that Avalokita is in a snowy place, surrounded by snowy mountains. Should we try to visualize like this? Or should we just visualize him in an infinite expanse?

RINPOCHE: In general, it is good to visualize the sun, the moon, the clouds, and other background elements as depicted in the traditional thangkas, or paintings. But you certainly do

not have to visualize all those details. In bringing to mind the appearance of the deity, the most important quality is that it should be as magnificent as possible. You visualize that he appears in the most exquisite form you can imagine.

QUESTION: How can we use this practice to become more compassionate in our daily life? How can we convert it into active compassion?

RINPOCHE: In order to develop our compassion to its fullest potential, we need the practice of Avalokita. Generally speaking, it is good for us to cultivate compassion, and ordinarily we can do so to some degree. But unless we also meditate on Avalokita and recite OM MANI PADME HUM, our compassion will be lacking in its power. The practice of visualizing Avalokita and repeating the six-syllable mantra is a means to develop the quality and strength of our compassion for other beings. As our compassion develops, so too will our capacity to help others in achieving both temporary and ultimate benefit and well-being. By compassionately reciting OM MANI PADME HUM with the sincere aspiration, “May all beings be free from suffering and hardship; may they be happy,” we are promoting their ultimate well-being. Of the various methods that we could use, this is the most effective means to that end.

QUESTION: Is the power of reciting the mantra the same whether done in the context of the *sādhana* or done outside that context?

RINPOCHE: If you do the full form of the *sādhana* practice, including deity visualization as well as mantra recitation, I think the merit of both elements probably combine to produce that much more merit. But this is not to say that the power of the mantra is somehow less if you simply recite it as you go about your daily activities. In fact, just reciting the mantra in the informal context of your ongoing everyday experience is inconceivable in its potential benefit.

QUESTION: As a follower of the *Geluk* lineage, is it fine to do this practice while still having a connection to the *Geluk* lineage?

RINPOCHE: Of course, it is fine for you to do this practice. We need to understand that *Chenrezik* is not unique to any particular school of Tibetan Buddhism. It is not the case that his practice belongs only to the *Sakya*, or *Geluk*, *Kagyu*, or *Nyingma*. He is the special deity of the snowy land of Tibet as a whole, without distinction. This was reflected in the fact that countless emanations of *Avalokita* or *Chenrezik* have appeared in Tibet as kings, translators, scholars, and others.

Moreover, I should point out that in the Miktsema — a prayer to Lord Tsongkhapa (1357-1419), founder of the Geluk school — Lord Tsongkhapa himself is described as being “the great treasury of nonreferential compassion, Avalokita” as well as “the master of stainless knowledge, Mañjuśrī” and “the Lord of Secrets, who conquers all the forces of *Māra*.” Thus he is considered to be the manifestation of not only the enlightened body as Avalokita but also enlightened speech as Mañjuśrī and enlightened awareness as *Vajrapāṇi*.

QUESTION: Since I do not know Tibetan, I try to memorize the chant, and I read the words in Spanish. Right now I am trying to place my devotion in the words; I am not doing the visualization much. Is that all right to do in the beginning?

RINPOCHE: Of course, that is perfectly fine. In fact, that is an excellent approach. Since you are beginning by focusing on developing your understanding of what the words mean, that will better enable you to concentrate more fully on the visualization later. The course of your practice will be that much better because it is grounded in your clear understanding of the meaning.

QUESTION: When we are making the request to Chenrezik, we make the request to him as the lama and as the yidam. What does it mean for Chenrezik to be a yidam, and what is a yidam?

RINPOCHE: As you stated, in the words of the prayer in the text, Chenrezik is the lama and the *yidam*. Ordinarily our understanding of what the word yidam means might primarily consist in the notion of an image that is separate from ourselves — an image as depicted in the iconography of deities, with various colors, a peaceful or wrathful demeanor, and other specific attributes. The true significance of the word yidam, however, lies in the bond that is formed between your mind and the deity. The yidam is the deity to whom your mind is inextricably linked until you achieve the consummate state of buddhahood, the deity you meditate on with single-minded confidence, the deity to whom you absolutely entrust yourself under all circumstances, including the experience of suffering, hardship, and sickness. That deity represents the actual meaning of the word yidam. Most of us tend to conceive of a yidam deity as being an image that appears with certain colors and attributes, and especially one separate from ourselves. That is actually a misconception. The security of the bond between your mind and the deity is such that, until you awaken to buddhahood, you personally rely on that deity throughout your experience, especially when

Questions and Answers

facing suffering and hardship. Your practice is based on that unchanging bond of commitment to the deity. That is the true significance of the yidam.

Glossary

Sanskrit terms that have now entered the English language are listed with the standard spelling as they appear in English dictionaries, with their Sanskrit spelling (including diacritics) indicated in parenthesis.

ABHIRATI (Skt., Tib. *mngon-par dga'-ba*) The eastern buddha field of Abhirati (“Manifest Joy”) is the pure realm over which Buddha Akṣobhya presides.

AKANIṢṬHA DHARMADHĀTU (Skt., Tib. ‘*og-min chos-kyi-dbyings*) The buddha field of Akaniṣṭha Dharmadhātu (“Ultimate Expanse of Phenomena”) is the pure realm over which Buddha Vajradhara presides.

AKANIṢṬHA SUKHĀVATĪ (Skt., Tib. ‘*og-min bde-ba-can*) Akaniṣṭha Sukhāvatī (“Highest Bliss”) is a synonym for the western pure realm more commonly referred to simply as Sukhāvatī.

AKṢOBHYA (Skt., Tib. *mi-bskyod-pa/ mi-'khrugs-pa*) Akṣobhya (“Unshakable”) is the buddha who presides over the eastern pure

realm of Abhirati. He is commonly depicted as being blue and seated in crosslegged posture, sometimes with a vajra as the attribute symbolizing the Vajra family of awakened beings.

AMITĀBHA (Skt., Tib. *snang-ba mtha'-yas/ 'od-dpag-med*) Amitābha (“Boundless Light”) is the buddha who presides over the western pure realm of Sukhāvatī. He is commonly depicted as being red and seated in cross-legged posture, sometimes with a lotus as the attribute symbolizing the Padma (“Lotus”) family of awakened beings.

AMOGHASIDDHI (Skt., Tib. *don-yod grub-pa*) Amoghasiddhi (“Fulfillment”) is the buddha who presides over the northern pure realm of Karmaprasiddhi. He is commonly depicted as being green and seated in cross-legged posture, sometimes with a crossed-vajra as the attribute symbolizing the Karma (“Action”) family of awakened beings.

AÑJALI MUDRĀ (Skt., Tib. *thal-sbyar phyag-rgya*) Ritual hand gesture in which the palms are joined in front of one’s heart.

ARHAT (Skt., Tib. *dgra-bcom-pa*) An arhat (“one who has prevailed over the enemy”) is an individual who has realized the permanent cessation of the causes of suffering and rebirth and thus achieved release from samsara. The attainment of individual

nirvana and the attendant arhat status is the aim of both the *śrāvaka* and the *pratyekabuddha* paths; such attainment, however, is still not the realization of perfect buddhahood, which can only be achieved as the consummation of further spiritual development on the bodhisattva path.

ARHATSHIP The status of being an arhat.

ASPIRATION BODHICITTA (Tib. *smon-pa sems-bskyed*) The mere intention to achieve perfect buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings, as distinct from the ensuing process of taking action to realize that motivation in practice. See *bodhicitta*.

ASURA (Skt., Tib. *lha-ma-yin*) Of six general types of sentient beings, the asuras (“antigods”) represent one of the three higher states in samsara, intermediate in status between devas and humans. Their existence is characterized by constant fighting and conflict, motivated by intense resentment of the devas’ superior prosperity. In terms of mental afflictions, rebirth as an asura may be caused by a predominance of jealousy in former lives.

BODHICITTA (Skt., Tib. *byang-chub-kyi sems*) Bodhicitta (“awakening mind” or “spirit of enlightenment”) is the altruistic intention to achieve perfect buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings and the process of developing that motivation through

the practice of virtue. As the principal element that defines the spiritual path of a bodhisattva, it entails cultivation of the qualities of love, compassion, and nondual wisdom, as well as training in the six transcendent virtues (*pāramitā*): generosity, moral discipline, patience, diligence, meditation, and knowledge.

CANDRAKĪRTI (Skt., Tib. *zla-ba grags-pa*, flourished in the seventh century) Candrakīrti. (“Illustrious Moon”) was an Indian Buddhist scholar especially celebrated in the later Tibetan tradition. A prolific author, his works include a devotional praise to Avalokiteśvara as well as numerous philosophical commentaries. In particular, he is regarded as one of the principal exponents of the Prāsaṅgika (“Consequence”) subschool of Madhyamaka (“Middle Way”) thought.

DEVA (Skt., Tib. *lha*) Of six general types of sentient beings, the devas (“gods”) represent the highest of three favorable states in saṃsāra. Their existence is characterized by abundant prosperity and an extremely long lifespan. In terms of mental afflictions, rebirth as a deva may be caused by a predominance of pride in former lives.

DHARMACAKRA (Skt., Tib. *chos-kyi 'khor-lo*) The turning of the dharmacakra (“wheel of Dharma”) is a metaphor that

refers to the Buddha's presentation of any of three major cycles of teachings; by extension, it can also refer to any instance of such dharma being presented formally by a Buddhist teacher.

DHARMADHĀTU (Skt., Tib. *chos-dbyings*) Dharmadhātu (“dharma expanse”) is the basic space from which all phenomena manifest; it is synonymous with emptiness as pervasive, ultimate reality. In the pure view of an awakened being, this expanse is fully realized as timeless awareness or wisdom (*jñāna*); from the same perspective, it is also called “dharmakāya.”

DHARMAKĀYA (Skt., Tib. *chos-sku*) Dharmakāya (“enlightened body of reality”) is one of three (or more) kāyas that represent various aspects of the fruition state of buddhahood. It is a formless *kāya*, described as the essential emptiness of the mind in its unborn, luminous, primordial purity. Realization of it results in the manifestation of the enlightened qualities and wisdom inherent to it and thus constitutes the consummate form of benefit for oneself.

DHARMARĀJA (Skt., Tib. *chos-kyi rgyal-po*) The *nirmāṇakāya* sage (muni) whose enlightened activity is associated with the hell realms.

GELUK (Tib. *dge-lugs*) Of the four main schools of Tibetan Buddhism, the Geluk (“Way of Virtue”) school was the last to emerge. Founded by TSONGKAPA LOSANG DRAKPA (1357–1419) it evolved out of the earlier Kadam tradition of Lord Atiśa (d. 1054). Historically, it was this school that became principally associated with the institution of the Dalai Lamas. The Geluk approach is based on the principle of the Gradual Path, or Lamrim (*lam-rim*), emphasizing progressive, rigorous training in monastic discipline, philosophical study, and dialectical debate.

GHANAVYŪHA (Skt., Tib. *stug-po bkod-pa*) The central buddha field of Ghanavyūha (“Densely Arrayed”) is the pure realm over which Buddha Vairocana presides.

IMPLEMENTATION BODHICITTA (Tib. *jug-pa sems-bskyed*) The process of actively training in virtue in order to realize the altruistic intention to achieve perfect buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings, as distinct from that basic motivation alone. See *bodhicitta*.

INDRAŚAKRA (Skt., Tib. *dbang-po brgya-byin*) The nirmaṇakāya sage (*muni*) whose enlightened activity is associated with the deva realms.

JAMBU RIVER A legendary river that takes its name from the sound of fruit falling from the Jambu tree into its waters. The fabled Jambu River gold is said to come from the *nāgas* (serpentine water spirits) who consume the fruit.

JATSÖN NYINGPO (Tib. *ja'-tshon snying-po*, 1585–1656) An important treasure-revealer, or *tertön* (*gter-ston*), of the Nyingma tradition, Jatsön Nyingpo (“Rainbow Essence”) discovered a number of concealed treasure teachings, the best known of which is the Embodiment of the Sublime Jewels (*dkon-mchog spyi-'dus*) cycle.

JVĀLĀMUKHA (Skt., Tib. *kha-'bar-ma*) The *nirṇāṇakāya* sage (*muni*) whose enlightened activity is associated with the *preta* realm.

KAGYU (Tib. *bka'-brgyud*) The Kagyu (“Lineage of Oral Instruction”) school is one of the four main schools of Tibetan Buddhism. It originated with such Indian masters as Tilopa (988–1069) and Maitripa (flourished in the eleventh century). From Gampopa (1079–1153), a subsequent Tibetan master of the lineage, descended numerous subschools, including the Drigung, Drukpa, and Karma Kagyu. The Kagyu tradition emphasizes practice; its main features include the system of Mahāmudrā

(“Great Seal”) and advanced yogic practices such as the Six Dharmas of Nāropa (*nāro chos-drug*).

KALU RINPOCHE (Tib. *kar-lu rin-po-che*, 1905–1989) Kalu Rinpoche, also known as Karma Rangjung Künkyap (*karma rang-byung kunkhyab*), was one of the first eminent Tibetan masters to travel and teach extensively throughout the world subsequent to the communist Chinese takeover of Tibet in the late 1950s. He established numerous centers internationally, including the first center in the West dedicated to the traditional three-year retreat program of his lineages, the Karma Kagyu and Shangpa Kagyu.

KARMA PAKSHI (Skt. *karma*, and Mongolian *pakshi*, 1206–1283) Karma Pakshi was the 2nd Gyalwang Karmapa, head of the Karma Kagyu school. He was a highly realized master renowned for his miraculous powers as well as for his role in providing spiritual guidance to the Mongol emperor Möngke Khan (1209–1259). Among his numerous accomplishments, he is known for popularizing the practice of Avalokiteśvara’s six-syllable mantra OM MAṆI PADME HŪM in Tibet.

KARMAPRASIDDHI (Skt., Tib. *las-rab rdzogs-pa*) The northern buddha field of Karmaprasiddhi (“Fulfillment of Activity”) is the pure realm over which Buddha Amoghasiddhi presides.

KĀYA (Skt., Tib. *sku*) Kāya (“enlightened body”) refers to any of various aspects of the manifestation of buddhahood, including physical embodiment. A common enumeration of kāyas is the trikāya (“three bodies”): dharmakāya, sambhogakāya, and nirmāṇakāya. See the three individual entries.

KHAKHYAP DORJE (Tib. *mkha’-khyab rdo-rje*, 1871–1922) Khakhyap Dorje was the 15th Gyalwang Karmapa, head of the Karma Kagyu school. Like many of his eminent contemporaries, he was known for earnestly seeking out teachings and transmissions from masters of all lineages. He was the author of many works, including the short practical commentary on which the present book is based, *Continuous Rain of Benefit for Beings: Brief Notes on All-Pervasive Benefit for Beings, the Meditation and Mantra Repetition of the Noble and Sublime Avalokita* (*‘phags-mchog spyan-ras-gzigs-kyi bsgom-bzlas ‘gro-don mkha’-khyab-ma’i zin-bris nyung-bsdus ‘gro-don char-rgyun*).

KLEŚA (Skt., Tib. *nyon-mongs*) Along with karma, kleśa (“mental afflictions”) constitute the cause of suffering and rebirth in samsara. Various enumerations of afflictions are given in the teachings; one sixfold listing comprises desire, anger, delusion, pride, jealousy, and stinginess. Each of the aforementioned afflictions is connected with rebirth in one of six states of existence

in samsara. All systems of Buddhist practice are concerned with eliminating or transcending such disturbing emotions by means of various methods.

KṚṢṢASĀRA (Skt.) An ungulate species native to the Indian subcontinent (probably the blackbuck or Indian antelope). The kṛṣṣasāra is traditionally considered to have a gentle, sympathetic disposition; hence, in Buddhist iconography this animal, or its pelt, symbolizes the quality of compassion.

LAKṢMĪ (Skt., Tib. *dpal-mo*, flourished in the tenth to eleventh centuries) An accomplished master, Lakṣmī is best known as the originator of the practice of nyungnay (*smjung-gnas*), the purificatory fast and sādhana of Avalokiteśvara. Believed to have been the daughter of Indrabhūti, King of Oḍḍiyāna, she renounced her life as a princess and became a bhikṣuṇī, or nun. Enduring extreme hardship and suffering due to leprosy, she ultimately cured herself of her disease by virtue of her perseverance in the practice of Avalokiteśvara.

MAHĀGURU (Skt.) An honorific that refers to a spiritual master of eminent distinction.

MAHĀMUDRĀ (Skt., Tib. *phyag-rgya chen-po*) A term that refers to the true nature of the mind, mahāmudrā means “great

seal,” indicating the ultimate reality that encompasses all phenomenal manifestation and experience. As a complete system of practice presented in terms of ground, path, and fruition (or view, meditation, and action), it is the distinctive approach of the Kagyu school; it is also part of the Geluk tradition.

MAÑJUŚRĪ (Skt., Tib. *‘jam-dpal*) As a tantric meditational deity, Mañjuśrī (“Glorious Gentle One”) is considered to be the embodiment of the enlightened knowledge and wisdom of all buddhas. He is most commonly depicted with a peaceful demeanor, seated in a cross-legged posture holding a sword and a book.

MĀRA (Skt., Tib. *bdud*) In accounts of Buddha Śākyamuni’s life, Māra is the personification of an antagonistic force who repeatedly attempts to thwart his awakening and enlightened activity. Understood in a more generalized sense, māras essentially represent anything that constitute a hindrance or obstacle to the attainment of liberation and buddhahood. The fourfold enumeration of māras comprises: 1) the mind-body aggregates, 2) mental afflictions, 3) the “divine child” (referring to the mundane tendency to seek leisure and gratification) and, 4) ordinary death.

MOUNT MERU (Tib. *ri-rab*) Mount Meru is the central axis of the world in traditional Indian cosmology. Buddhist literature describes its colossal geometric form as being tiered and tapered, its flat top and base wider than its center. It is surrounded by a vast array that includes four major land masses (the southern one of which, Jambudvīpa, is the realm we inhabit), lesser land masses, and an alternating series of concentric ring-shaped oceans and mountain ranges.

NIRMĀṆAKĀYA (Skt., Tib. *sprul-sku*) Nirmāṇakāya (“enlightened body of emanation”) is one of three (or more) kāyas that represent various aspects of the fruition state of buddhahood. It can refer to buddhas who appear in human form (such as Śākyamuni), crafted supports or images of buddhas, or other manifestations of enlightened activity, including nonhuman and inanimate entities. As one of the formal kāyas, perceptible to ordinary sentient beings, it constitutes a means of ensuring consummate benefit for others through enlightened activity.

NIRVANA (Skt. *nirvāṇa*, Tib. *mya-ngan-las ‘das-pa*) Nirvana (“state beyond suffering”) is the state of peace gained by virtue of realizing the permanent cessation of the causes of suffering and rebirth; thus, it is liberation from samsara — the goal common to all Buddhist paths in general. In more specific terms,

achievement of individual nirvana is the aim of both the śrāvaka and the pratyekabuddha paths. With the culmination of the bodhisattva path, a perfect buddha experiences “nonabiding nirvana”—the ultimate state of liberation that is limited neither to saṃsāra nor to the isolated, personal nirvana of śrāvaka and pratyekabuddha arhats.

NYINGMA (Tib. *nying-ma*) The Nyingma (“Ancient”) school is the oldest of the four main schools of Tibetan Buddhism. Its origins are traced back to the great Indian masters Padmasambhava, Vimālamitra, Śāntarakṣita, and others who brought Buddhism in its tantric form to Tibet during the eighth century. The Nyingma tradition tends to emphasize tantra and esoteric teachings, including those associated with treasure revealers, or tertöns (*gter-ston*), as well as Mahāsandhi, or Dzokchen (“Great Perfection”)—the highest of its nine progressive levels.

PADMĀKARA (Skt., Tib. *padma 'byung-gnas*) Also known as Padmasambhava (“Lotus-born”) and, to Tibetans, as Guru Rinpoche (“Precious Guru”), Padmākara is the great Indian tantric master from Oḍḍiyāna who was one of the principal figures in the early dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet during the eighth century. Renowned for his miraculous powers, he is especially revered by followers of the Nyingma school as being a

second Buddha. He is famous for concealing numerous teachings as secret treasures to be discovered in the future by karmically destined treasure-revealers, or tertöns (*gter-ston*).

PEMA KARPO (Tib. *padma dkar-po*) A bhikṣu, or monk, who was an earlier incarnation of Thangtong Gyalpo (flourished fourteenth–fifteenth century), the composer of the Avalokita sādhana All-Pervasive Benefit for Beings (*‘gro-don mkha’-khyab-ma*). Pema Karpo composed a prayer to Avalokita that is often incorporated into the aforementioned practice.

POTALA (shortened form of Skt. *potalaka*) The southern realm of Mount Potalaka, otherwise known simply as Potala, is the abode of Chenrezik.

PRĀTIMOKṢA (Skt., Tib. *so-sor thar-pa*) The prātimokṣa (“personal liberation”) is one of three general levels of vows that define moral discipline in Tibetan Buddhism. Primarily concerned with physical and verbal conduct, it is divided into seven or eight levels of precepts that pertain to specific kinds of individuals, including male, female, lay, and monastic. Prātimokṣa discipline is considered to be the indispensable foundation not only for the attainment of liberation in general but also for any other

commitments that may be assumed in the course of the path, including those of bodhicitta and of samaya.

PRATYEKABUDDHA (Skt., Tib. *rang-rgyal/ rang sangs-rgyas*)

The pratyekabuddha aspires to the attainment of nirvana and arhatship — the common aim of both the śrāvaka and pratyekabuddha paths. In addition to training in the practices central to the śrāvaka approach, the pratyekabuddha arhat achieves the cessation of the causes of suffering and rebirth especially as the result of contemplating the twelve links of dependent origination and without reliance on a teacher in that lifetime. It is in the sense of the latter that the individual independently awakens; hence, pratyekabuddha means “self-buddha.”

PRETA (Skt., Tib. *yi-dvags*) Of six general types of sentient beings, the pretas (“anguished spirits”) represent one of the three

lower states in samsara, intermediate in degree of suffering between animals and hell beings. Their existence is characterized by interminable hunger, thirst, and privation, as well as other sufferings such as extreme heat, cold, fear, and the threat of violence. In terms of mental afflictions, rebirth as a preta may be caused by a predominance of stinginess or greed in former lives.

RANGJUNG RIKPE DORJE (Tib. *rang-byung rig-pa'i rdo-rje*, 1924–1981) Rangjung Rikpe Dorje was the 16th Gyalwang Karmapa, head of the Karma Kagyu school. He played an instrumental role in preserving and transmitting lineage teachings and practices during and subsequent to the communist Chinese takeover of Tibet in the late 1950s. A seminal figure in bringing Tibetan Buddhism to the world outside Tibet, he traveled to Western countries several times in the later years of his life, giving blessings and teachings to thousands of students and founding numerous centers.

RATNASAMBHAVA (Skt., Tib. *rin-chen 'byung-ldan*) Ratnasambhava (“Source of Richness”) is the buddha who presides over the southern pure realm of Śrīmat. He is commonly depicted as being yellow and seated in cross-legged posture, sometimes with a jewel as the attribute symbolizing the Ratna (“Jewel”) family of awakened beings.

SĀDHANA (Skt., Tib. *sgrub-thabs*) In the context of tantra, *sādhana* (“means of accomplishment”) refers to any practice derived from tantric scripture that constitutes a complete method for the meditative realization of a given deity. The structure of such practices includes both the creation phase (Skt. *utpattikrama*, Tib. *bskyed rim*) and the completion phase

(Skt. *sampannakrama*, Tib. *rdzogs rim*) and generally involves the techniques of visualization and recitation.

SAKYA (Tib. *sa-skya*) The Sakya (“Pale Earth”) school is one of the four main schools of Tibetan Buddhism. Its origins trace back to the Indian master Virūpa and his Tibetan disciple Drokmi Lotsāwa Śākya Yeshe in the eleventh century. Drokmi Lotsāwa’s disciple Khön Könchok Gyalpo (1034–1102) is regarded as the founder of the Sakya school; it was further developed by the five great Sakya masters who followed him. A distinctive feature of this tradition is that its leadership is customarily maintained and transmitted through familial lineages. The main system of the Sakya school, Path and Fruit, or Lamdre (*lam-‘bras*), is closely connected to the Hevajra Tantra.

ŚĀKYAMUNI (Skt., Tib. *śākya thub-pa*) The *nirmāṇakāya* sage (*muni*) whose enlightened activity is associated with the human realm.

ŚAMATHA (Skt., Tib. *zhi-gnas*) Śamatha (“tranquility” or “calm abiding”) is a meditative state characterized by stable attention and freedom from distraction. As one of two general types of Buddhist meditation, it is the complement to *vipaśyana*, or insight. The mental stability gained from the practice of tranquility is

the necessary basis for the further development of penetrating insight — the only means by which mental afflictions and their latent potentials can be completely eradicated.

SAMAYA (Skt., Tib. *dam-tshig*) Of three general levels of vows that define moral discipline in Tibetan Buddhism, samaya (“commitment”) refers to the particulars of conduct in tantric practice. While numerous specific commitments are given in detailed presentations, the concept of samaya is also commonly understood in a broader sense to refer to the personal, spiritual bond that is formed between teacher and student, and among students as fellow practitioners.

SAMBHOGAKĀYA (Skt., Tib. *longs-spyod rdzogs-pa'i sku*) Sambhogakāya (“enlightened body of perfect enjoyment”) is one of three (or more) kāyas that represent various aspects of the fruition state of buddhahood. It can be identified as the compassionate energy of buddhas manifesting in the form of awakened deities with distinctive attributes and the pure realms in which they abide. Although perceptible only to buddhas and highly realized bodhisattvas, as one of the formal kāyas it constitutes a means of ensuring consummate benefit for others through enlightened activity.

SAMSARA (Skt., Tib. *‘khor-ba*) The state of suffering and compulsive rebirth in conditioned existence that all ordinary sentient beings experience. Samsara (“cyclic existence”) is perpetuated by the individual’s karma and mental afflictions, and it entails suffering as the inevitable result of those causes. Such cyclic existence is described as broadly encompassing three realms, namely, the desire realm (*kāmadhātu*), form realm (*rūpadhātu*), and formless realm (*ārūpyadhātu*). In more specific terms, these are divided into six distinct realms or states experienced by six types of beings: devas, asuras, humans, animals, pretas, and hell beings. Samsara is contrasted against nirvana — a state of peace beyond suffering and compulsive rebirth.

ŚĀSTRA (Skt., Tib. *bstan-bcos*) The treatises of the Tibetan Buddhist canon. Written by scholarly authorities of Buddhist lineages, śāstras in the form of root texts on such topics as abhidharma (phenomenology) and pramāṇa (logic and epistemology) constitute the foundation of monastic curricular studies; commentarial treatises serve to further elucidate the intention of such root texts and that of the Buddha as originally expressed in the sūtras and tantras. Other kinds of treatises may deal with various subjects, such as specific branches of Indo-Tibetan classical knowledge.

SIDDHA (Skt., Tib. *grub-thob*) A spiritually accomplished master, especially one whose attainments are the result of tantric practice.

ŚRĀVAKA (Skt., Tib. *nyan-thos/ thos-sgrog*) The śrāvaka aspires to the attainment of nirvana and arhatship, the common aim of both the śrāvaka and pratyekabuddha paths. The śrāvaka arhat achieves the cessation of the causes of suffering and rebirth as the result of austere training in monastic discipline and contemplation of the Four Noble Truths and related teachings. Historically, such disciples would listen and directly receive teachings from their masters, then advise others accordingly; hence, śrāvaka means “listener,” or “one who proclaims what has been heard.”

ŚRĪMAT (Skt., Tib. *dpal-dang ldan-pa*) The southern buddha-field of Śrīmat (“Glorious”) is the pure realm over which Buddha Ratnasambhava presides.

STHIRASIṂHA (Skt., Tib. *senge rab-brtan*) The nirmāṇakāya sage (*muni*) whose enlightened activity is associated with the animal realm.

SUGATA (Skt., Tib. *bde-bar gshegs-pa*) A synonym for buddha, sugata (“one who has reached the state of bliss”) denotes a completely awakened individual who has perfectly realized the ultimate state of well-being.

SUGATAGARBHA (Skt., Tib. *bde-gshegs snying-po*) Sugatagarbha (“buddha nature”) is the innate potential for perfect awakening inherent in every sentient being. It is described as the intrinsically pure, ever-present ground of all experience: in its temporarily obscured state, it constitutes the basis of samsara; once purified of obscuring factors, it is revealed to be nirvana. Thus, it is the necessary causal basis that makes possible the achievement of buddhahood with all of its kāyas, wisdoms, and enlightened qualities, which manifest as the result of removing from it adventitious obscurations and defilements (including karma and mental afflictions) by virtue of the practice of the path.

SUKHĀVATĪ (Skt., Tib. *bde-ba-can*) The western buddha field of Sukhāvatī (“Blissful”) is the pure realm over which Buddha Amitābha presides.

SUTRA (Skt. *sūtra*, Tib. *mdo*) One of the main genres in the Tibetan Buddhist canon, sūtras are the discourses that are considered to be the original words of the Buddha, representing the scriptural source of the non-tantric Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna teachings. While individual sūtras vary greatly in length and deal with a broad range of subjects (such as moral discipline, meditation, and knowledge), formal elements common to most sūtras include an opening narrative that establishes the setting

of the discourse followed by question-and-answer dialogue between the Buddha and other individuals.

TANTRA (Skt., Tib. *rgyud*) One of the main genres in the Tibetan Buddhist canon, tantras represent the scriptural source of the Vajrayāna teachings. The word tantra (“continuum”) also serves as a synonym for the Secret Mantra, or Vajrayāna, approach to practice. Like the sūtras, the tantras are generally considered to be the words of the Buddha, as delivered by way of dialogues involving his various manifestations. In form, the tantras are characterized by some elements that are typical of the sūtras. Their content, however, differs in being concerned with specific maṇḍalas of deities and related practical methods; furthermore, they often involve the use of symbolic code language and deal with esoteric knowledge and principles not addressed in the sūtras.

TATHĀGATA (Skt., Tib. *de-bzhin gshegs-pa*) A synonym for buddha, tathāgata (“one who has reached the state of suchness”) denotes a completely awakened individual who has perfectly realized the suchness of reality.

THANGKA (Tib. *thang-ka*) Traditional Tibetan scroll painting used as a medium for the depiction of awakened beings, medi-

tational deities, and tantric maṇḍalas. Once such images (or likewise those in other media, such as cast metal statues) have been ritually consecrated, they are considered to be supports for spiritual practice that are invested with the permanent presence of the actual deity.

THANGTONG GYALPO (Tib. *thang-stong rgyal-po*, flourished fourteenth to fifteenth century) A celebrated siddha of diverse skills and accomplishments, Thangtong Gyalpo (“King of the Empty Plain”) is famous for designing and constructing numerous iron-chain suspension bridges throughout the Himalayan region. Regarded as the founder of Tibetan folk opera, he was also the composer of All-Pervasive Benefit for Beings (*gro-don mkha’-khyab-ma*), the widely-practiced Avalokita sādhana on which the present book is based.

TSONGKAPA LOSANG DRAKPA (Tib. *tsong-kha-pa blo-bzang grags-pa*, 1357–1419) Also known as Je Rinpoche (“Precious Lord”), Tsongkapa was the founder of the Geluk school of Tibetan Buddhism. A highly accomplished master, author, and scholar of prodigious stature, he is known for his uncommon interpretations of Buddhist tenet systems. Based on the earlier Kadam tradition of Lord Atiśa (d. 1054), he systematized the gradual, rigorous approach of the Geluk school in which such elements as

monastic discipline, philosophical study, and dialectical debate came to be emphasized.

VAIROCANA (Skt., Tib. *rnam-par snang-mdzad*) Vairocana (“Illuminator”) is the buddha who presides over the central pure realm of Ghanavyūha. He is commonly depicted as being white and seated in cross-legged posture, sometimes with a wheel as the attribute symbolizing the Tathāgata (“Buddha”) family of awakened beings.

VAJRA (Skt., Tib. *rdo-rje*) Traditionally the weapon of Śakra, or Indra, ruler of the devas, the vajra is a symbolic attribute and tantric ritual implement that represents power, constancy, stability, changelessness, and indestructibility, especially as qualities inherent to the ultimate nature of the mind.

VAJRADHARA (Skt., Tib. *rdo-rje 'chang*) Buddha Vajradhara (“Vajraholder”) represents dharmakāya as the primordially awakened state; he is sometimes identified as the “sixth buddha” in that he embodies the buddhas of the five families of awakened beings. He presides over the pure realm of Akaniṣṭha Dharmadhātu. In his sambhogakāya aspect, he is commonly depicted as being blue, seated in cross-legged posture, and holding a vajra and a bell.

VAJRAPĀṆĪ (Skt., Tib. *phyag-na rdo-rje*) As a tantric meditational deity, Vajrapāṇi (“Vajra-holder”) is considered to be the embodiment of the enlightened energy and capability of all buddhas. He is most commonly depicted with wrathful attributes, standing and holding a vajra.

VEMACHITRA (Skt. *Vemacitra*, Tib. *thag-bzang-ris*) The *nirmāṇakāya* sage (*muni*) whose enlightened activity is associated with the asura realm.

VIDYĀDHARA (Skt., Tib. *rig-'dzin*) A *vidyādhara* (“holder of awareness”) is an accomplished master of tantric practice.

VIPAŚYANA (Skt., Tib. *lhag-mthong*) *Vipaśyana* (“penetrative insight”) is a state of meditative awareness in which absolute reality (or the true nature of a given object of contemplation) is directly experienced. As one of two general types of Buddhist meditation, it is the complement to *śamatha*, or tranquility. Insight is indispensable to the goal of completely eradicating mental afflictions and their latent potentials, as tranquility alone cannot accomplish this; yet such insight can only arise on the basis of the mental stability gained through the cultivation of tranquility.

YIDAM (Tib. *yi-dam*, Skt. *iṣṭadevatā*) Tantric meditational deity, especially one with whom an inseparable bond is formed in the practitioner's mind until the achievement of buddhahood. In order to fully engage in the practice of a given deity, it is considered necessary to first receive from an authentic lineage holder the relevant empowerment, or initiation (*abhiṣeka*); the reading transmission (*āgama*); and practical instruction.

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