

# Teachings on the Vajra Guru Mantra

By H.E. Garchen Rinpoche

March 10, 2020, Arizona, USA

Om Ah Hung. First, I would like to say “Tashi Delek” to all my Dharma friends around the world. We are very fortunate, for we are now within the month of miracles. The first through the fifteenth day of the first Tibetan month commemorate the time when, after having conquered the four māra-demons, the Lord Buddha performed various miracles. During this month, the effects of positive actions are said to be multiplied a hundred thousand times; thus, the first Tibetan month is very important.

During the age of degeneration, the Buddha Śhākyamuni appeared directly in the form of the Second Buddha, known as Guru Padmasambhava, or Guru Rinpoche. Nowadays, there are a thousand million further emanations of Guru Rinpoche—so there are countless emanations of Guru Rinpoche all around the world. This is how Lord Buddha appears to beings in the degenerate age.

During the degenerate age, sentient beings’ afflictions run unrestrained, which makes them difficult to tame. For this reason, Guru Rinpoche turned the wheel of the Secret Mantra and bestowed the teachings on self-liberation, which show how the afflictions are self-liberated without needing to be abandoned. In the *Seven Chapter Supplication* it says:

For the sake of sentient beings,  
you come riding the sunlight’s brilliant rays.

So Guru Rinpoche’s emanations have been sent down continuously, uninterrupted, appearing every day all over the world in as many forms as there are rays of the sun. His emanations protect beings whether they have faith in him or not, as the Buddha’s love is the same even for beings who do not have faith. If one has faith, though, the power of his

blessings is even greater, and it is even easier to feel the blessings. It is just a question of time. All of this is why our center holds a Guru Rinpoche retreat every year during the month of miracles.

Due to my travel schedule, I have not been able to attend this retreat every year. And this year, for the sake of protecting the health of the general public, and so that people don't have to endure many hardships, the Vajra Guru retreat will be conducted in your homes. Therefore, all of the centers have made plans to hold practice via the internet this year.

So in order to engage in the Vajra Guru retreat from our homes, and especially at Gar Monastery, we first engage in the practice of the *Heart-Essence of Great Bliss Mind-Accomplishment* (*thug-drub dechen nyingpo*). Although there are three thousand mind-accomplishment practices of the guru, it is said that by practicing just a single one of these within a single drubchen, the quintessence of all three thousand practices is included. If this is not properly understood, however, doubts can arise.

Sādhanas often say of themselves, “I am the principal one,” or “He is the principal one.” For example, in the *Heart-Essence of Great Bliss Mind-Accomplishment* (*thug-drub dechen nyingpo*), the small print says:

There are three thousand mind-accomplishment practices of me, Padmasambhava, but only this is the heart's blood of them all.

But since the practice called the *Dispeller of all Obstacles* (*bar-che kün sel*) also says the same thing about itself, some people get confused. They develop doubts and wonder: “So then, what is the quintessence of all supposed to be?”

But, really, it is not like that. What Guru Rinpoche is really saying is that, though there are many mind-accomplishment practices in the world, all mind-accomplishment practices are included within one practice—just as the Buddha said that within a single Buddha, all the buddhas of the three times are complete. A single Sangha member's form is the Sangha, his

speech is the holy Dharma, and his mind is the Buddha; thus, you have to see that the Three Jewels of the three times are complete within a single Sangha member. To know this is to understand the Buddhist view. Otherwise, through a lack of understanding, a mistaken understanding, or an incomplete understanding, you will label one as good and another as bad, or you will judge the practices, thinking: “This is the new tantric tradition (*sarma*) and that is the old tantric tradition (*nyingma*),” and so on. But such thinking causes your faith and abilities—as well as your potential to become liberated—to become constrained. The mind is either in bondage or it is free, and Whatever constrains you is bondage.” And when you are in bondage, your mind is not at ease.

Thoughts of “this is how it is” and “this is not how it is” will tie you down. Therefore, you should think: “The Buddha-dharma is one: all of the buddhas, including Guru Rinpoche and the Buddha Śhākyamuni, are the same. Moreover, all the buddhas of the three times are one in their endeavor to bring about the benefit and happiness of all sentient beings. There are no Three Jewels other than that.” Unbiased faith and an unbiased pure view will arise from such thinking. And the Buddha has already said that

All sentient beings are buddhas.

They are only obscured by adventitious stains.

So all sentient beings already possess buddha-nature; thus, not a single real, ordinary sentient being exists. So what does the Secret Mantra say regarding this?

The Secret Mantra says,

The universe and beings are an infinite expanse of purity.

There is not the slightest difference between these words and the words of the Buddha. Everything is inherently pure on the ground: Dzogchen calls it “originally pure,” while Mahāmudrā refers to it as “primordially pure.” Either way, this purity is emptiness, and if you understand it, you understand the Buddhist view. Still, according to the relative truth,

even though things are pure, you need to abandon your own dualistic grasping at self and other. You still need to abandon your own afflictive emotions. And the demon of this self-grasping, of this holding on to a truly-existing self, is tamed by the altruistic mind. The purpose of all sādhanas is only this.

Although there is another [guru] sādhana from the Northern Treasures, the *Heart-Essence of Great Bliss Mind-Accomplishment* (*thug-drub dechen nyingpo*) that is practiced in our monastery is a terma of Lho Nüden Dorje. But, as was stated, even though there are many different guru sādhanas, all guru sādhanas are really sādhanas of one single guru. Therefore, you should think of the sādhanas like they are one guru wearing different clothes or different hats.

For this retreat, there is a new and important instruction. The Vidyādhara Nüden Dorje travelled in actuality to the Copper-colored Glorious Mountain Pure Land, and when he received teachings on the mind-accomplishment there, he heard the sound of a flute. And the sound of that flute is now played in all our Drikung monasteries. Later he told: “This is how I heard it at the Copper-colored Glorious Mountain.” We are now making recordings of the flute, but the hands of myself, an old man, are not very good. But in order for the lineage to not become interrupted, the flute playing has been recorded—though I’m not sure if I am playing it well. Regardless, the Vidyādhara Nüden Dorje said that the flute is played like this at the Copper-colored Glorious Mountain, and in this way, it was transmitted to the disciples. Likewise, it will be made available for everyone to hear. The name of the flute is the Copper-colored Glorious Mountain One, and nowadays, some of the newer monks play this flute, though they often don’t know its name, and they play it in all sorts of ways.

The Vajra Guru mantra also has a melody that is recited together with the flute playing. As for the Vajra Guru mantra melody in general, it is chanted in various distinct ways throughout the world. In any case, the mantra melody according this sādhana by Lho Nüden Dorje is as follows. So think that this is how the mantra is chanted at the Copper-colored Glorious Mountain Pure Land, though, since I’m already too old, my voice doesn’t come out that nicely. Sorry about that! But I will chant it to the best of my abilities.

Guru Rinpoche taught about the benefits of chanting the mantra in melody. It is said that,

It is more beneficial to chant the mantra slowly in melody  
than to recite many mantras quickly.

It is also said that,

Reciting mantras purely makes a hundred-fold difference.  
Reciting them in melody makes a hundred thousand-fold difference.

Thus, chanting it in melody multiplies the power of mantra. And why is its power multiplied? It is because to the extent that you focus on the meaning of each word in the mantra, that much greater will be the blessings that enter your mind-stream. Some people think about the numbers of mantras accumulated, and, of course, there is benefit from accumulating a number of mantras. However, it is said that,

The recitation should be neither too fast nor too slow,  
neither too strong nor too soft.

The elements of each syllable should be pronounced without deterioration.

So most important for mantra or any other recitation is that the elements of each syllable are pronounced without deterioration.

Pronouncing without deterioration has outer, inner, and secret qualities. The outer quality is that it is good for your physical health. By moving your tongue, stomach-related illnesses will be cured, and the circulation of your blood through your veins will be stimulated. This happens because, when you moving your tongue, your entire body, including your stomach, becomes stimulated. This is an outer quality of pure sound.

Regarding the inner quality, through chanting in melody, you contemplate the meaning of the recitation; therefore, you connect to the omniscient wisdom of all the buddhas. Further, you connect to their compassion, and you also reflect on their enlightened activities as you

chant. Thus, chanting makes a great difference to your giving rise to faith and devotion. So this is the inner quality of the melody.

As for the secret quality of BENDZA GURU PEMA SIDDHI HUNG, the two words “Secret Mantra” are very meaningful. And what is the secret quality? “BENDZA” means vajra. Regarding the meaning of vajra, this is not a vajra made of brass or gold—rather, it is the ultimate vajra that is emptiness. And as for PEMA SIDDHI HUNG, what does PEMA, or lotus, represent? It symbolizes that, though the lotus grows from mud, inside it remains untarnished by the mud. In the same way, though yogins live in saṃsāra, they remain untarnished by saṃsāric attachment. They are free from attachment; thus the lotus is a symbol of being free from attachment. So taken all together it means: “Ultimate vajra that is emptiness, please grant the siddhi of freedom from clinging and attachment!”

The ultimate attachment is the attachment to the self. This is the self that grasps at its own inherent existence, thinking: “I exist.” Why are we attached to this “I?” It is because of our dualistic perception of self and other. The actual nature of mind is like space, in which there is no duality—this is the ultimate truth. So why is there a duality? It arises due to the dualistic perception of self and other, due to the grasping at a concrete existence and to conceptual structures. In the *Samantabhadra Prayer* it says that our many coarse and subtle imprints grow stronger day and night: this is what creates saṃsāra. The outer world is created by collective karma, while the inner sentient beings in the six realms of saṃsāra are created by the personal karma of individual beings. So sentient beings are manifestations of their own afflictive emotions.

Lord Jigten Sumgön said,

Cause and effect is the natural expression  
of moment-by-moment thoughts.

What is cause and effect? The ultimate vajra is emptiness, which is the ultimate protection from cause. And what is the ultimate vajra that is emptiness? “Vajra” means that it can

destroy everything: it destroys everything, but nothing can destroy it. “Emptiness” means devoid of self-grasping, devoid of self and other. To understand that self and other are non-dual—this is emptiness. We can talk about outer emptiness, inner emptiness, the eighteen emptinesses, but if you don’t empty self-grasping, you haven’t been able to empty anything.

Once you empty self-grasping, there will be no others: others will naturally disappear. The mind becomes like space, and no one can move or change space. Space is unobstructed within itself; from itself, there is nothing not embraced by space, by emptiness. Thus,

Ultimate vajra—emptiness—destroy dualistic attachment!

Please help me to be able to destroy dualistic attachment!

Lastly, SIDDHI HUNG means “Grant your blessings.” So this is the meaning of the Vajra Guru mantra, and this meaning is very profound.

This is the meaning of secret mantra BENDZA GURU PEMA SIDDHI HUNG. In terms of the words BENDZA GURU: BENDZA is the vajra, and GURU is the lama. And what is the connection between the guru and the vajra? The body of the guru is human, but this here is referring to the guru’s mind. And the guru’s mind is emptiness. It is said that if there is no dualistic grasping at self and other, this is emptiness. And when you realize emptiness, you understand that within the mind, self and other are non-dual. This is the realization of emptiness, and emptiness is the ultimate guru. So the actual guru is the vajra, the mind.

The body is the lama. The body of the lama is the *nirmāṇakāya*, the speech of the lama is the *saṃbhogakāya*—since he shows the meaning of Secret Mantra—and the mind is the *dharmakāya*, which means that the guru’s mind and the mind of you, the disciple, are devoid of self and other. Lord Jigten Sumgön said that to recognize this is to see that the guru, your own mind, and the Buddha are one. He said,

I, a yogin, realized that the guru, my mind, and Buddha are identical.

Thus, I have no need for fabricated devotion.

But until you understand this, until you know that the guru and your own mind are indivisible, you have to walk the path of fabricated devotion.

Regarding the knowledge that the guru and your own mind are indivisible, when you see: “There are no self and other,” then you also realize that you and the guru are indivisible. But until you understand this, according to the relative truth, you have to sustain a continuum of love and compassion. Therefore, whichever practice you engage in, it should have the nature of love and compassion, since love and compassion are like the sun, and self-grasping, which is like ice, has to melt.

How does this work? Self-grasping is like ice, and the buddhas are like an ocean; so, the ice has to melt. Think about it: is ice water, or is it stone? Lord Buddha said that in the beginning,

Sentient beings are actually buddhas.

They are only obscured by adventitious stains.

But even though sentient beings are buddhas, they still suffer in their various forms within the six realms of *samsāra*. They are like ice, and ice is like stone. Think about this well. Ice is like stone. If you hit someone over the head with it, they will bleed, right?

How did beings become like this, like ice or stone? It is due to the dualistic perception of self and other—mainly, due to thinking that “I exist”—that we are in bondage. So when we talk about there being no self, don’t say about someone else that “Well, he has self-grasping, he has afflictive emotions.” Instead, you should recognize your own self-grasping—because when your sense of a self has collapsed, at that point you can also melt others. For example, if you melt a block of ice with hot water, that hot water can melt all blocks of ice.

Otherwise, you might find fault with sentient beings, thinking: “Oh, these sentient beings of the degenerate age are so afflicted.” A person who perceives sentient beings is perceiving a duality between self and others: such a person has not understood that sentient beings do

not actually exist. This person cannot melt others, as only someone who understands that self and other are not dual is able to melt all sentient beings.

So the body is the *nirmāṇakāya*, the speech is the *saṃbhogakāya*, and the mind is the *dharmakāya*; and within the guru's mind there is no dualistic grasping. Thus, when you realize this non-duality, this is the *svabhavikakāya*: “Oh, this is my mind and nothing else.”

Je Jamgön Kongtrül Rinpoche said:

My own mind is Buddha, but I never realize this.

Discursive thoughts are *dharmakāya*, but I do not realize this.

This is the unfabricated, innate natural state, but I cannot keep to this.

This is how things really are in their natural state, but I have no conviction in this.

The way things really are in their natural state is Samantabhadra, is the *dharmakāya*, is Vajradhara. When you understand this, you understand that the Vajra Guru mantra is the heart-essence of all mantras. It is that precious. So then you chant it in melody.

In general, there are secret mantras and there are retainer, or *dhāraṇī*, mantras. This is a secret mantra, so you have to think that by reciting this one mantra, you are reciting all mantras, that by practicing one deity, you are practicing all deities, and that by following one guru, you are following all gurus. So chant the mantra in melody, the mantra melody that the Vidyādhara Nüden Dorje actually heard when he went to the Copper-colored Glorious Mountain. He said that this is the melody he heard at the Copper-colored Glorious Mountain, and though I don't have a good voice, since my Dharma friends have great love for me, I, an old man, shall teach you this melody today. And as you chant the melody, imagine that the entire space is pervaded by Buddha and that all beings in the universe are *ḍākas* and *ḍākiṇīs*: all men are *ḍākas* and all women are *ḍākiṇīs*. All men are Avalokiteśvara and all women are Tārā—think in this way.

The Buddha said that “Beings are only obscured by adventitious stains.” Thus, think that all sentient beings possess the cause of buddhahood: then there will be no division. Chant the mantra within a state of “pure sights, sounds, and thoughts,” as the old tantric tradition calls it.

[Rinpoche recites the mantra here.]

So now, in your own home, wherever you are in the world, engage in the mantra recitation for however much time you have, whether it is for five minutes, ten minutes, or just for a moment. Think that the universe is filled with ḍākas, ḍākiṅīs, buddhas, and bodhisattvas, and that he, the heart-essence of them all—their regent Guru Rinpoche—is dwelling in large form in space. If you have faith in the Buddha Śhākyamuni, know that there is not the slightest difference between the Buddha Śhākyamuni and Guru Rinpoche: only their outer form is different. Regarding their inner mind it is said,

All buddhas are one  
within the expanse of primordial awareness.

Jigten Sumgön said that,

On the level of buddhahood,  
there is no division between the two truths.

All buddhas are the same. And it is the same regarding gurus: only their outer bodies are separate. Their inner mind—a mind of only wishing to benefit others, a mind of bodhicitta—is the same. *The Seven Chapters Supplication to Guru Rinpoche*, which is widely-known, speaks about these pure sights, sounds, and thoughts:

Outer and inner, the universe and all beings—all things—whilst seeing them,  
although they appear, remain without grasping at a self.  
This freedom from a subject-object duality is the very form of the deity,  
luminous and empty.

I supplicate to this guru—the self-liberation of desire!

Do this toward all that you hear:

all sounds, grasped as sweet or harsh, whilst hearing them,  
remain empty without after-thought.

This empty sound, with no beginning and no end,  
is the speech of the victorious ones.

I supplicate to this empty sound, the speech of all the buddhas!

Do this toward all that stirs in the mind:

whatever thoughts and afflictive emotions of the five poisons arise,  
do not invite them, do not chase after them,  
do not let mind fabricate and contrive:

simply allowing them to settle in the state of their own arising,  
is liberation into the dharmakāya.

I supplicate to this guru—the natural liberation of intrinsic awareness!

The Four Applications of Mindfulness, taught in the Sūtra Path, have a great connection to this as well. The first application is “Do not grasp at your body,” which is the application of mindfulness of the body. Then, “Do not conceptualize what you see. Do not grasp at the sounds you hear,” which is the application of mindfulness to feelings. Then it says, “In your mind, do not follow your thoughts,” which is the application of mindfulness of the mind. Then there is the application of mindfulness of phenomena, which is the mindfulness that all phenomena of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are created by thoughts.

Confusion concerning the concepts of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa occur due to the discursive mind. When you rest evenly within these four applications of mindfulness, “All objects that appear as outer are pure.” So do not think at all about outer appearing objects; then, when you look at your mind, whatever appears will appear like a reflection in a mirror. This is the mirror-like wisdom. It says in the *Seven Chapters Supplication to Guru Rinpoche*:

May the inner grasping mind be liberated.

When this happens, whatever appears in a mirror will not stain or harm the mirror. For example, as long as a yogin doesn't grasp at sound, merely hearing something does not harm him. Further, if he sees people and he does not grasp at them, there is no harm. And what is the method for non-grasping? Look at your mind: whatever appears to your mind appears like in a mirror. And as you keep looking at the clear and empty mind directly, appearances will naturally appear as if lacking any inherent existence within the primordial vajra expanse. Therefore, since appearances do not inherently exist, holding them to be truly existing is confusion.

So having understood cause and effect, reflect again and again upon the impermanence of all compounded things. Do not knowingly hold on to the true existence of something that doesn't actually exist. The moment you think of something, remember: "This does not inherently exist. This is just like an illusion. Though I can see it now, the next moment it is gone." When you understand the illusory nature of things, you will be able to recognize your own luminosity in the bardo; then the mind will abide in its natural state, like space. So you will recognize luminosity in the bardo if you do not grasp at any outer forms or sounds, and instead you continue to look within, at your mind—the mind that is clear and empty like space.

As I mentioned before, the scriptures and reasoning refer to this as the view of the Middle Way, which means that when you meditate, there is nothing really to meditate upon. What is the view of the Middle Way? When you look at the nature of your mind, what is your mind? There is only one single awareness that knows the nature of mind, so if you always remain within this single awareness, it becomes like space. This is what it means to be present in the actual nature of mind: it is to remain mindfully present in the true and pure nature of your mind. This is what we call "meditation." It doesn't mean to assume an outer composure of meditation all the time, but rather to always remain within the true face of the pure natural state of mind. Then, naturally, you will naturally not freeze, and the ice will melt. Thus, it says: "I supplicate to this guru—the natural liberation of intrinsic awareness!"

In the *Seven Chapters Supplication to Guru Rinpoche*, it then says:

By the self-recognition of luminosity in the bardo,  
may the compassion of all the sugatas bless me with self-liberation.

Everyone first needs to liberate themselves; only once you have liberated yourself can you liberate others. Liberation means to become liberated from dualistic grasping, or the thought that self and other exist. This thinking is false, since there is no self and other in the mind. Only in bodies is there a duality: it is like one tree with many branches, wherein the branches are like the phenomena of saṃsāra. Think in this way.

In the above quote, “the self-recognition of luminosity” refers to pure sights, sounds, and thoughts. All appearances are the deity, and all sound is mantra. Empty appearances are the deity, empty sounds are mantra, and empty awareness is the vajra of the mind. When outer sounds and forms become empty, awareness becomes empty: empty awareness, the vajra of mind.

Awareness (*rik*) means to clearly know your own mind. And clear awareness is what knows itself. Within this nature, self and other, saṃsāra and nirvāṇa—none of it truly exists; it is all empty. This is referred to as “the naked primordial wisdom of empty awareness.” Many billions of buddhas are one and the same within primordial wisdom. Thus, it is said that “Within the expanse of primordial wisdom, all the buddhas are one.” This is the vajra of mind: empty awareness. “Within the expanse of primordial wisdom, all the buddhas are one”—this is the meaning of primordial wisdom.

Je Milarepa said,

I do not see consciousness. I see primordial wisdom.

Once he understood consciousness, he said,

I do not see sentient beings. I see buddhas.

How did Milarepa see sentient beings as buddhas? There is no one who doesn't have a consciousness, and since one has consciousness, when one has understood the essence of consciousness, this *is* Buddha. This is the one that creates all happiness and suffering. He is the one who can throw it all away. This is important, Dharma friends.

Next, meditate for however much time you have, even if it is only for five or ten minutes. There is no separate retreat of body and speech; you can practice at any time, day or night. At night, meditate—even if you only sit up and meditate for one minute. This is the vajra of mind: empty awareness. After the mantra recitation, meditate on the indivisibility of the guru's mind and your own. As Lord Jigten Sumgön said,

I, a yogin, realized that the guru, my mind, and Buddha are identical.  
Thus, I have no need for fabricated devotion.

So please meditate in this way, Dharma friends.

Many people want to come here, but they cannot due to the current measures the country has put in place for the well-being of the people. And actually, this is better. It is the body that comes to this place, but it is not good to consider the body as most important. You must consider the mind as most important, because it is with our minds that we see forms and we hear sounds. The mind is actually just like electric energy. Even though there are a hundred phones, they are powered by the same electric energy; likewise, if in your mind you think of one another with love and compassion, you have established a connection between each other. This is love and trust, and the essence of faith is love and trust. If you have them, there is no distance. Then we will never separate—not in this life, the next life, or in the bardo.

There is nowhere to go where there is no space: this is how it is. Thus, “Bless me that I may never be separate from the guru!” When you realize the nature of mind, you cannot separate from the guru, even if you want to. In the Yamāntaka practice it says:

I prostrate from within a state that is without meeting and parting—  
the ultimate prostration.

The natural expression of primordial wisdom is my offering.

Those of you who practice Yamāntaka, remember the meaning of these words clearly and engage in practice. Actually, now is the best opportunity for practice, and it is also a way for us to cultivate compassion for sentient beings. Many people in this world are losing their wealth and are experiencing various kinds of suffering in the world now.

Therefore, think about the suffering in the world and give rise to compassion. Now is when we have to cultivate compassion. Through taking your own suffering as an example, really think about beings' suffering; think that this kind of suffering is being experienced all over the world. Don't just think about your own suffering.

Through the holy Dharma we can transform all faults into positive qualities. And now, temporarily, we can transform the epidemic disease into a positive quality by thinking: "This is an incredible opportunity to practice, an incredible opportunity to cultivate compassion." School students have an opportunity to study and acquire more learning, and you yourself have an opportunity to stay at home as well. If you think of this as an excellent opportunity, your mind will become happy. And when the inner mind becomes happy, outer illnesses will be healed. So in this way, everyone engage in the practice of the Vajra Guru mantra retreat. You should think that our minds are together, as the mind is non-dual. Thus, "I prostrate from within a state that is without meeting and parting—the ultimate prostration." If you know that we are without meeting and parting, you know that the guru and your own mind are one.

Also, you should buy many prayer wheels. The virtues of body, speech, and mind are complete within you while you are spinning a prayer wheel. It is a continuous offering to the buddhas, a continuous attainment of siddhis for yourself, and a continuous purification of sentient beings' obscurations. These are the three continuations.

Guru Rinpoche said:

This samādhi is profound.

In this world, it is not something that has originated,  
it is not something that originates now,  
and it is not something that will originate in some future.

Further, the benefits of visualizing the mantra wheel also arise from spinning a prayer wheel. It combines the virtues of body, speech, and mind into one, and is easy to do but very meaningful. Thus, there is nothing more important than spinning a prayer wheel. This is my heart advice. The liberation-by-seeing is also a great protection—it is a supreme protection. Also, use the cream from the Gyanagma prayer wheel, and please eat the Mani blessing pills. Many Tashi Delek!

*Translated by Ina Bieler and edited by Dan Clarke in March 2020.*