

# Chenrezig Teaching

by Minya Tulku Rinpoche

*Buddhist Center Sampo, Helsinki, Finland*

*Feb 17, 2017*

*Translator Evelyne Leblois, edited*

## Beginning Prayers

I've been to many centers, but I have never been in any Zen Buddhist center so far. Since we are all of the same lineage, I'm really pleased to have this chance today. This Zen lineage in Chinese is called *chen dzong*, which means those who practice meditation, meditative concentration. And actually this particular lineage came to Tibet in the 8th or 9th century, but because the focus was so much on meditation, and not at all on study, it wasn't fit for Tibetans at the time, so they had to go back to China.

At that time the Zen teacher (Hasang Mahayana), when he had to leave Tibet and go back to China, said: "I'm going back, but actually one of my shoes is still in Tibet." So it means that the lineage will come back at some point.

This practice, which is the tradition of meditative concentration, is of course a Buddhist tradition, and there are in China two main lineages: one is called *lo gyu* and the other one *shang gyü*, and zen is coming down from this lo gyu tradition. Lo gyu means "the sudden lineage". It is from India.

So the lo gyu tradition was based mainly in South India and the shang gyü practice was mainly in Northern India, and it is the northern tradition that went to Tibet. In any case, all these traditions are Buddhist, and if we look at Chenrezig, he is a very important deity in China. In Chinese he is called Guanyin, which has become really important in Chinese Buddhist tradition. In Tibet of course Chenrezig is also very important, one of the main yidams. So, in both cases Chenrezig is like the main figure in Buddhist practice. This is why today we will explain the practice of Chenrezig; first the ngondro and then the main part of the practice. It will be of course a short explanation only.

In Tibet, if it is a great dharma king, somebody very well-known or a great practitioner, when somebody is great, he is an emanation of Chenrezig. And His Holiness Dalai Lama is an emanation of Chenrezig and Karmapa is also an emanation of Chenrezig. This shows how important Chenrezig is.

And in Tibet, when babies are born and start speaking their first words, it is said that they learn at the same time to say ama (mother) and to say mani (mantra) of Chenrezig. This is the case in Tibet, I'm not sure if it's the case abroad.

So, this practice is in two parts: the preliminary part and the main part. Let's look first at the preliminary part. There are as usual in the preliminaries the sections of common preliminaries and the particular preliminaries. Since we are here all Mahayana practitioners, **to keep the three vows**: Pratimoksha, Bodhisattva and Tantric vows, is something important, so I will explain them briefly.

## **The Three Excellences** (bodhicitta, view of emptiness and dedication)

Whatever we are doing, we may be receiving some explanation or practicing dharma, going to office or travelling, in all cases it is important to first engender bodhicitta.

And if we are starting to do anything for the benefit of others, of course we would engender the bodhicitta mind. But also when we are doing something for our own benefit: we may do some study, ordinary study or we may go to work. To start with, if we engender bodhicitta thinking that may this become beneficial to all sentient beings, then it will become beneficial. It will become beneficial to others ultimately and to ourselves now.

This vow of bodhicitta is very important. When we start by having this motivation of doing things for others, when we do things for others, automatically it becomes our own benefit as well. We don't have to wish particularly for our own benefit. When we do benefit for others it does our own benefit. All activity begins with the motivation.

*Rinpoche in English: **What is your dream, the motivation is like a dream inside.***

**The preliminary part is this motivation of bodhicitta** which ensures that the action “becomes a source of good for the future.” (Patrul Rinpoche) And then the **main part is the enhancing with the view of emptiness**. This basically means avoiding any conceptualisation. This enhances the view of the object, that is, all phenomena are empty, as well as the mind being free from elaboration. This understanding is like the real or the actual main part, which is focusing on result and only realized practitioners are capable of such insight. It is difficult for us at the moment, so what we do is something which is similar to it, and it is to always keep very focused; whether we are studying, working or whatever, being without distraction during the main part.

And then the **last part is the dedication**. We dedicate virtuous and neutral activities. If we don't dedicate after having done something, it is said that the virtue will eventually evaporate like spit on a hot stone. For example, when we get angry, it is said that the virtue has an end there, but if we dedicate before the anger arises, it safeguards the virtue and it will continue having a positive effect afterwards. So, if we first have the motivation of bodhicitta, and then at the end we do the dedication, whatever we do is part of the Great Vehicle. So these Three Excellences, bodhicitta, view of emptiness and dedication, we need all the time: when we are practicing, studying, we need them whatever activity we are doing.

## **The Outer Preliminaries**

**The outer preliminaries as we know them are first the Precious Human Body, second the Impermanence of Life, third the Imperfection of Samsara and fourth the Karma, Cause and Effect.** And we need to turn our mind away from Samsara. We need to turn our mind away from the suffering of samsara, because if we don't, because we have clinging for samsara, whatever we do, whatever we think, will be just turning within samsara. And how do we turn our mind away from it? Solely reflecting on these ideas that turn the mind away from samsara this process will take place.

The first of these thoughts that turn the mind away from samsara is **the precious human body**. We can look how precious the human body is by looking at the causes, by looking at the numbers, there are different ways to approach this subject. We will not have time to go through them now. But if we are somebody who is looking for doing the benefit of beings, then we need the precious human body and this can only come about through previous causes. That means in previous life we have accomplished virtue, in previous life we have kept discipline. If we had not kept it and done many unvirtuous actions, we would not have the opportunity to get a precious human body.

And if we look by the numbers, then we can compare how many human beings are actually wishing to do the benefit of others and how many do not, and we see that who do not care are more in number than those who care about doing the benefit of others. We can also compare the number of human beings with the number of animals. There are much less human beings on Earth than animals. When look at the causes for obtaining a human body and reflect on the numbers of people, we understand that this is a rare opportunity that we have, to have this human body.

We have this precious human body with eighteen opportunities. Once we have found it, is it that we have found it once and for all and then we can keep it? No, it's not the case, it is not something that doesn't change, so, for sure after 50, 60 or 70 years we will change body. We cannot stay and maintain this body for more than that.

How do we meditate on **impermanence**? We can think of great beings like authentic beings of the past, who have done incredible great activities for the benefit of others. There is the Buddha and many more, all of them have passed away.

Then there is also the reflection on the uncertainty of the time and the inconstancies of that. Earlier we said for some people we can hope to stay for 60 or 70 years of time, but it can be 10 years for some people, some will remain only 20 – 30 years. Whether we will remain more, we don't know – we don't know when the time of death comes. Also we don't know those inconstancies. It can be that we are lucky and we have everything we need: good food, good drinks, but if we are unlucky it could be that we eat something that is poisonous, and die suddenly. So we don't know about those inconstancies. Since we don't know when and how, it is best to make good use of this human body right now.

And there are other reflections that we can do to reflect on impermanence of life, but we are not going through each of them now. Let's see what the third one is, **the mind that turns away from samsara**, it reflects on the defects of samsara. Of course we have this human body now, but it is not without suffering. Suffering is classified in three types: the all-pervasive suffering, the suffering of change and the suffering upon suffering. All beings in samsara go through, endure these three types of suffering.

What is the **all-pervasive suffering**? The all-pervasive suffering is about the container, i.e. the world, environment, which is the Truth of Origin. Also the content, the sentient beings in it, which are also the Truth of Origin. That means they are the cause of suffering to occur. In brief everything in this world is either the cause or the result for suffering.

And what do we mean by **the suffering of change**? For example, when we are happy at some time, then suddenly it does not remain, but some problems occur and it changes into suffering. This is when happiness changes into suffering.

And what is the **suffering of suffering**? This third type is for example when the previous suffering is not finished or is just finished and the next one is already there. Simple example: we have stomach ache and on top of it we have a headache. So it's like double suffering.

So there are these three types of suffering, which are endured by all the beings in samsara, and then there is a specific suffering for each type of being. Anyway, if we ask the question, where do all these sufferings come from, the answer is: they come from unvirtuous actions, they come from contaminated actions. The ten unvirtuous actions lead mainly to the state of hell being, yidak (hungry ghost, preta) or animal, and the ten virtuous actions lead mainly to the states of human being, demigod and god.

If we want to know what our precious life is like, we can just look at our body now, and we can find out. And if we want to know how it will be in our next life, then we can look at our present actions, because they depend on each other. **And this comes to the fourth point: the karma, cause and effect. Karma is accumulated through ten virtuous actions and their opposite, the ten non-virtuous actions.**

These four thoughts that turn the mind away from samsara are necessary to meditate on for somebody who wants to become a practitioner. If someone just wants to have good, successful life, they don't need it specifically. If someone is doing some practice just to relax the mind, you know, relaxed shine is very much used in the world to feel better and so on, in this case, for the worldly life it is not necessary to meditate on the four thoughts which turn the mind away from samsara. On the other hand, if one wants to become a practitioner and one wishes to go beyond samsara, then they are necessary.

## The Extraordinary Preliminaries

### 1. Taking Refuge

#### a. Taking Refuge in Buddha

Next we have the specific or particular preliminaries, and this is to take vows, to take refuge and engender bodhicitta.

**The first step is the refuge.** What do we take refuge in? We take refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. What does it mean to take refuge? It means to take protection from fear. What kind of fear we are talking about here? We are not afraid of an enemy, but we have fear of the suffering of samsara, the three types of suffering we saw. So we take refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha in order to get protection from that fear. This is the way of taking refuge in the context of Buddhism.

Then when we are going to take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, which are the Three Rare and Sublime Ones, we need to understand what they are: what does Buddha mean, what does Dharma mean, and what does Sangha mean. Let's first look at **Buddha**. Buddha means to be beyond both samsara and nirvana. Buddha has abandoned completely suffering and the cause of suffering. He is embodied by the two wisdoms, he doesn't have any of the two obscurations and he has gathered the two accumulations.

#### b. Taking Refuge in Dharma

Second, we look at **Dharma**. We need to understand the reason why we go for refuge to Buddha. This is because he has shown the excellent path. This path is the Dharma. Dharma has two big branches: **the dharma of scripture** and the **dharma of realization**. Let's first look at the dharma of scripture, these are the 84.000 texts and they are categorized into vinaya, sutra and abhidharma. **Vinaya** is the remedy for attachment and there are 21.000 scriptures. **Sutra** is the remedy for anger and there are here again 21.000 scriptures. And there is **abhidharma**, remedy for ignorance and again 21.000 scriptures. As a remedy for the three poisons together there are 21.000 scriptures of tantra, secret mantrayana. So when Atisha brought them, there were 84.000 scriptures. One of these bodies of scriptures is complete in order to show the base (ground), the path and the result for one specific individual to attain liberation.

It is said that of all these 84.000 scriptures only 15 %, more or less, is left nowadays. Some were burned, some left destroyed when Nalanda was destroyed, and so on. If these 84.000 are summarized, they can be divided into 12 categories of excellent speech. They can be summarized further into **Tripitaka**, which means the three, vinaya, sutra and abhidharma, which we just saw.

What is the content, what do they talk about, all these texts? The topic is the **three trainings**, which are the training in discipline, the training in samadhi and the training in wisdom. These three trainings are actually the dharma of realization. What is the **training in discipline**? Training in discipline is about guarding ones three doors, body, speech and mind. This is true for a practitioner of the sharavaka or pratyekabuddha style, it is true for bodhisattva and it is true for vajrayana practitioner, there is a need to guard one's body, speech and mind. This is all part of the practice of training in discipline.

The second one is the **training in samadhi** in order to tame our own mind. So, we can use the practice of shine, lhaktong, we can use the phases of creation and dissolution, it can be bodhicitta practice, they are all in order to tame our own mind. So this is part of the training in samadhi.

The third training is the **training in wisdom**. This is to understand exactly how the phenomena of samsara and nirvana work. Thanks to the Tripitaka which explains, and the three trainings, which is what is explained; by following this we can from being ordinary beings become buddhas ourselves. This is why we take refuge in the Dharma and in the Sangha.

### c. Taking Refuge in Sangha

Third we look at taking refuge in the **Precious and Sublime Sangha**. The Precious and Sublime Sangha refer to an individual who has abandoned the coarse labelling obscuration. This is the strong tendency, based on wrong understanding, to impute a reality that is not truly existent. Because they have abandoned this, they are not ordinary beings, they are called **Noble Ones**. Thanks to their experience and their realization we can say that the dharma that they teach is valid. This is rare indeed and whoever has attained that level is indeed rare and sublime.

How do we know that the Buddha has valid cognition, that he is trustable? Because there is the dharma that he has taught, which we can still meet nowadays. And how do we know that dharma is valid and reasonable? It is because those who practice the dharma have realization. They have experienced it and gained this realization thanks to the dharma. So we see that this dharma is reasonable and valid.

## 2. The Training in Bodhicitta

The second step is the **training**. Just taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha won't be enough, we need to do something. What is it that we need to do? We need to engender the mind of bodhicitta and we need to train on the path of bodhicitta.

What is bodhicitta? As we know bodhicitta is two-fold: there is the aspirational bodhicitta and application bodhicitta. **What is bodhicitta in aspiration?** This is when we make the wish that we and all sentient beings may be free from suffering, and we commit to do something so that it happens, so that they may be free from suffering. And what is the training in this bodhicitta of aspiration? **The training is the Four Immeasurables.**

**And what is the bodhicitta in application?** That is not only the wish that we may do something in order to free all beings, but it is actually starting to do something, so that we are in a position to help all sentient beings. And **the training is that of the Six Paramitas.**

Bodhicitta can also be divided into relative bodhicitta and absolute bodhicitta. The relative bodhicitta is what we have just seen, the both aspects of bodhicitta in aspiration and application, aspiration being the commitment that I will bring all sentient beings into a state of freedom from suffering. Application is to actually do the benefit of sentient beings.

**What is absolute bodhicitta?** Absolute bodhicitta is the natural state of mind of the Noble Ones. It is the primordial wisdom of the Noble Ones. In this primordial wisdom of the Noble Ones all phenomena are understood as being emptiness. So there is nothing which is praised to be adopted, and nothing which is bad to be abandoned. It is said we can get the relative bodhicitta by taking a vow and by practicing, but the absolute bodhicitta can only come after having practiced for a long time.

## 3. Guru Yoga

That was the particular ngondro, the two bodhicittas that we have seen. And now, let's see the third extraordinary preliminary, it is the Guru Yoga. Why is it extraordinary? It is because it is said that our lama is very important. It is said to be more important to us particularly than the Buddha himself, because the Buddha left us with the dharma of scripture and of realization, but it is our own teacher who can introduce us to it. So, how do we do this part of preliminary? We

visualize the lama in front of us and then there are the letters OM, AH, HUNG, HO. There is OM at the forehead, AH at the throat, HUNG at the heart and HO at the navel. Through that we receive the four initiations.

### **The Main Part, Chenrezig Practice Instructions**

After having finished all these preliminaries we go on with the main part. Today the main part explanation is about the Chenrezig practice. Chenrezig is said to be the embodiment, the form itself of the compassion of all buddhas. It is the great compassion of all the buddhas. And Chenrezig's description in sutra and tantra slightly differs, but it doesn't matter, we can visualize Chenrezig with two hands, four hands, thousand hands, it's up to us.

For the practice itself we follow the usual structure of the sadhana. First there is the refuge, then bodhicitta, we visualize the refuge field, and then we continue as usual in the sadhanas. When we come to the meditation of Chenrezig himself, there are different ways or approaches. Sometimes to start with Chenrezig is visualized in front in the sky. This is called generation in front, in the space in front. Another way is that we visualize ourselves directly as Chenrezig, and this is called self-visualization. And a third way is that first Chenrezig is visualized in front in the sky and then we receive the blessing from Chenrezig in front. He then dissolves into us and we ourselves become Chenrezig, this is a third way to practice. They are connected with outer and inner tantras, but whatever way we do is okay. There are also different descriptions and steps according to different termas, directly in front, directly oneself, etc. We may just follow our tradition, it may be a tradition according to geluk, sakya, kagyü, nyingma or zen buddhist, whatever, we just follow the procedure, which is done according to the tradition that we follow.

### **Five Aspects of Enlightenment**

The way we meditate Chenrezig is according to **the five aspects of enlightenment**. These five aspects of enlightenment are quite important. I think it's very useful if we understand them. It will be useful for the future, whatever deity we are practicing, so today I will take time to explain what these five aspects of enlightenment are.

**The first one of these five is the aspect of enlightenment of emptiness.** What does it mean? It means that all phenomena of the perceiver and perceived are empty. What is perceived means all the objects, the perceiver means the subject. It means that all phenomena are included within these two. So, all phenomena are empty. We imagine that they disappear. In the beginning it is difficult to understand what emptiness means, so what we can do is to imagine that everything disappears in the sky, in space. So, everything has dissolved into emptiness, into space, and then from that expanse of space something appears. What appears is a white lotus with eight petals, and then moon and sun (discs).

**The second one was called the aspect of enlightenment of the sun and lotus and it can include moon as well. The third one is called the aspect of enlightenment of the speech, the seed syllable.** In the practice on Chenrezig the seed syllable will be HRIH. It is white and it appears on top of lotus, moon and sun. The seed syllable varies according to practice we are doing. If it was Vajrasattva practice, it would be white HUNG, if it was another deity for example Drolma, it would be a green TAM, and so on.

From the seed syllable rays of light emanate and they gather from the environment all the desirables, offer them to sentient beings, make an offering to buddhas and bodhisattvas etc. After that these rays gather back into the seed syllable and the seed syllable transforms into the hand implement of the deity that we are meditating on. In case of Chenrezig it would be the white mala or the white lotus flower that he holds. This is different according to each deity. This is called **the aspect of enlightenment of the hand implement. That was the fourth** aspect of enlightenment.

**For the fifth aspect of enlightenment there are two ways.** Either the light rays go again out from the hand implement and gather back, or it can be that they become directly the deity that we are practicing. In our case it is Chenrezig. He is

white with two or four hands and it can also be thousand hands, whichever form we are practicing. Also sometimes Chenrezig has different colors; we have to follow our practice (text). And this process is becoming Chenrezig all at once. And then we visualize our whole body appearing like this all of a sudden. But of course in the beginning it is not easy to visualize and see it properly all complete. So what we need to do to help us to visualize is that we take a thangka or picture or a statue of Chenrezig, one that is very clear and looks good. Then we look at it with our eyes. Then we close our eyes and try to remember it, visualize it. Then we open our eyes again and look, then close again and go through this process to visualize clearly. Then also if the whole picture doesn't come we can start with visualizing the head for example very clearly, then little downwards and then the rest of the body. Then the hand implements and so on.

So we go through this development stage or creation stage of practice and we need to keep the **three aspects of clarity, purity and stability**. Clarity means that we visualize Chenrezig clearly. Purity [means it is empty]. Stability means it is not that sometimes we see it and sometimes not, it's stable.

### Three Steps into Mastery

There is also a **three-step process into mastery**. It's called mastery of the three objects. The first one we visualize in our mind and the second stage is when we can actually see the deity before our own eyes. And the third stage is when we are even able to touch the deity with our hands. This is the mastery of the three objects, the objects being first the mind, then the eyes and then the hands.

### Visualization

Then we visualize like this Chenrezig in the celestial palace, it can be Potala, with all his entourage etc. So everything becomes this and through this process everything becomes pure, we purify everything.

The reason why we do this visualization phase, creation phase, is because nowadays what we do, we have very strong clinging to things as being truly existent, and we think this is good, this is bad, this is impure etc. So, this practice of the creation phase will cut through this kind of clinging to things as truly existent.

If we do a good practice of the creation phase, at some point we see everything is pure, there will be nothing impure anymore. No impure environment, everything will be like a palace and so on; no impure beings and also no impure sounds, there will be all sounds of the mantra.

And so, whether we are doing the creation phase in front or the self-visualization, there is the next step, which is that inside of the deity there is the yeshe sempa (Tibetan) / jnanasattva (Sanskrit) / wisdom deity. In the case of Chenrezig this will be a small Tamdrin (Tibetan) / Hayagriva (Sanskrit) in the heart of Chenrezig: Hayagriva appears on a small lotus and small moon. Or for different deities it can be a different wisdom deity.

And then, the next step is the samadhisattva. Inside the wisdom deity there is again at his heart level a small lotus and a small moon, and then the seed syllable HRIH. Around the seed syllable HRIH there is the mani-mantra, which is turning clockwise to right. We visualize that and at the same time we recite the mani-mantra and from the visualization of the small mantra light rays go above and below. And if we are not able to visualize the wisdom deity, we can visualize directly in Chenrezig's heart lotus, moon and the seed syllable HRIH and the mantra around. There are also different ways to recite the mantra. We can recite the mantra with a loud voice or mentally, whatever we prefer.

At the end of the session we imagine that the whole environment and everything dissolves into the noble Chenrezig. If we have visualized the samadhisattva, it dissolves into the wisdom deity. If not, we go directly to the next step. Then the wisdom deity including the mantra around dissolves into the letter HRIH. Then the HRIH dissolves into the small AH,

which is part of the written Tibetan letter, and the small AH into the vowel on top. And then there is on top of the letter nada, a little sign, and this also completely dissolves into the expanse of space, which is emptiness, and we remain in that state.

As we have seen that we do this visualization practice in order to get rid of the things as impure, then when we see at some point: everything is pure, then we may attach to everything is pure. Therefore we do the dissolution phase, which is what we have just seen: the entire environment dissolving into Chenrezig, Chenrezig slowly, slowly dissolving into HRIH and the HRIH dissolving into the expanse of space. These two work together, and when we do this practice again and again, the two phases, at some point we get the view, which is the union of the development and the dissolution phase, and we practice the union of development and dissolution.

At the end of the dissolution stage we are without focus. When thoughts arise and the thoughts could be an obstacle, then immediately we visualize again the whole body of Chenrezig, as it was before. As we visualize like this Chenrezig as before, then all the appearances that we have are the enlightened body of Chenrezig. All the sounds that we hear are the enlightened speech of Chenrezig, and all the thoughts that occur are the enlightened mind of Chenrezig. And then we go on with this to our daily work; it maybe that we need to prepare some food, do some cleaning or whatever.

The reason why we do that is because we need to get to a point where we practice the meditation and post meditation in union. If we keep separating all the time meditation time and post meditation time, it will be difficult to attain buddhahood. If we do like explained, slowly we will be able to practice the meditation and post meditation in union, not separated.

That was the Chenrezig teaching. So we can practice in this way and make good use of human life. Nowadays it is difficult to offer realization all at once, so it takes some effort. And also it is important to rely on a good lama to get proper instructions. To find a good lama it is important to analyze properly, this is our responsibility. Nowadays everybody says they are god, so it's up to us to analyze and check out whether a lama and his instructions are good or not. If we then find one and practice properly, then for sure we will get the results of our practice. Are there any questions?

**Question:** About the three parts, in the middle we focus and at the end there is the dedication. You said something about the focus being the relative method and then there was the absolute method. I didn't understand the absolute method.

**Answer:** These are the three excellences, the second one being the main part without focus. The actual practice is that we remain one-pointedly in the view of emptiness. This is not possible at our level. So what we do in our case, if we are listening to teachings, it would be to listen properly and not be distracted. And if we are doing meditation, then it would be to be focused on the meditation. This is how we can do something, which is close to this main part without focus.

Dedication prayers

