



The Preliminary Practices

Path of Liberation I: Refuge, bodhichitta and the four thoughts

Level requirements

- 180 hours of formal practice
- Two weekend retreats (with 6+ hours of practice each day)

How To Structure a Session of Practice

For the first year of practice in the Path of Liberation, the general structure for a session of ngondro is to spend about two-thirds of each session chanting the liturgy and alternating between periods of contemplation and resting in open awareness, and the final third of each session accumulating prostrations and repeating the prayer of refuge and bodhichitta. Within this general structure, you can be flexible and spend more time resting some days and more time contemplating on others. In each session, however, you should try to spend some time contemplating, some resting, and some doing prostrations.

Sample Thirty Minute Practice Session

- 3 minutes ~ Opening chants and ngondro liturgy
- 15 minutes ~ Contemplation on daily topic and resting in open awareness (alternating)
- 10 minutes ~ Prostrations while reciting refuge and bodhichitta prayer
- 2 minutes ~ Dedication prayers and closing chants

Sample One Hour Practice Session

- 5 minutes ~ Opening chants and ngondro liturgy, resting in open awareness
- 30 minutes ~ Contemplation on daily topic and resting in open awareness (alternating)
- 20 minutes ~ Prostrations while reciting refuge and bodhichitta prayer
- 5 minutes ~ Dedication prayers and closing chants, resting in open awareness

Notes on *Nectar of the Simple Yogi* for Path of Liberation I meditators

Preparing for the session:

- Begin by correcting your posture, then pause for a few moments to let your mind open and relax.
- Perform the nine-fold breathing exercise (if you have received the transmission to do so).
- Take a few moments to arouse bodhichitta, thinking to yourself, "I am now going to practice the preliminaries to help all beings recognize their true nature and become buddhas."

The Four Thoughts

- To begin the preliminary practices, start by chanting the liturgy that begins on page two with the line *DEL JOR RIN CHEN NYÉ KA JIK PAR LA* (the text in italics does not need to be chanted)
- You may chant in Tibetan, English, or both. If you chant both, chant the Tibetan first, followed by the English.
- As you chant the lines on the four thoughts, chant slowly and briefly pause after each line to contemplate the topic presented.
- If you are actively working with the four thoughts, pause after you reach the line that pertains to the topic you are contemplating and commence your daily contemplation, alternating periods of contemplation and resting in open awareness.
- When you are finished contemplating, continue chanting the liturgy.

Refuge and Bodhichitta

- Begin chanting the refuge liturgy, beginning on page 3 with the line *DÜN DU TSO Ü JÖN SHING YEL GA NGA*.
- As you chant the first five lines of the liturgy, try to sense the presence of the sources of refuge. You can visualize them clearly if you are able, but the most important point is to feel as though you are in their presence.

- Repeat the longer refuge prayer three times (the lines that begin "DAK SOK KHA NYAM..." at the top of page 4, and end on page 5 with, "...CHEN DEN NAM LA KYAP SU CHI.").
- Repeat the bodhichitta liturgy one time (from the middle of page 5 with the words "CHOK CHU DÜ SUM ZHUK PA YI...", through the middle of page 8, ending with "...DRO KÜN NYA NGEN DÉ LA GÖ.").
- If you are focusing on arousing bodhichitta, pause after you have recited these lines and commence your daily contemplation, alternating periods of contemplation and resting in open awareness.
- When you are finished contemplating, you may stand and offer prostrations while reciting the four line prayer of refuge and bodhichitta ("SANG GYÉ CHÖ DANG TSOK KYI CHOK NAM LA...").
- When you are done offering prostrations, chant the four immeasurables liturgy on page 10 and then dissolve the visualization. Then recite the last line on Page 10 "KYAP YÜL Ö ZHU RANG TIM JIN LAP GYUR" and dissolve the visualization. Begin by letting all the objects of refuge dissolve into Vajradhara. Vajradhara then melts into light and dissolves into you. Having merged inseparably with the enlightened mind of the guru, rest once again in open awareness.

Concluding Activities

- Skipping Vajrasattva, mandala, and guru yoga, move forward in the text to the dedication and aspiration prayers on page 26-28.
- Chant these prayers and aspirations one time each. If you chant other dedications, aspirations, long-life prayers, etc..., you may insert them here.
- When you are done chanting, relax and rest in open awareness.
- Conclude by performing the "shaking HA" exercise (if you have received the transmission to do so).

Daily Topics for Contemplation

The topics that you will contemplate during the first year of the Path of Liberation are broken into two main categories: the four thoughts and bodhichitta. You should focus on each category for roughly half of your sessions during this level of practice. What follows presents the individual topics, how many sessions you should devote to each topic, and references to *Words of My Perfect Teacher* and *A Guide to Words of My Perfect Teacher*, which are the main sources of information for these contemplations.

Phase I: The Four Thoughts (180 thirty-minute sessions)¹

- Forty-five sessions on the precious human life (*Words: 19-38; Guide: 39-54*)
- Forty-five sessions on impermanence (*Words: 39-60; Guide: 55-61*)
- Forty-five sessions on karma (*Words: 101-132; Guide: 67-86*)
- Forty-five sessions on the defects of samsara (*Words: 61-100; Guide: 62-66*)

Phase II: The Four Immeasurables and Bodhichitta (180 thirty-minute sessions)

- Forty sessions on the four immeasurables
 - Ten sessions on immeasurable love (*Words: 198-201; Guide: 145-147*)
 - Ten sessions on immeasurable compassion (*Words: 201-212; Guide: 148-150*)
 - Ten sessions on immeasurable joy (*Words: 213-218; Guide: 150-151*)
 - Ten sessions on immeasurable equanimity (*Words: 196-198; Guide: 137-145*)
- Twenty sessions on the essence and types of bodhichitta (*Words: 218-219; Guide: 151-155*)
- Twenty sessions on considering others equal to oneself (*Words: 222-223; Guide: 165-168*)
- Twenty sessions on exchanging self and other (*Words: 223-228; Guide: 169-177*)
- Twenty sessions on considering others more important than oneself (*Words: 228-234; Guide: 177-181*)
- Sixty sessions on the six paramitas

¹ Thirty minutes refers to the total length of the session, not the length of time that you spend contemplating. The time spent alternating between contemplation and resting in open awareness may fluctuate from session to session, but should generally comprise one-half to two-thirds of any given session.

- Ten sessions on generosity (*Words: 234-238; Guide: 184-187*)
- Ten sessions on ethical conduct (*Words: 238-240; Guide: 187-192*)
- Ten sessions on patience (*Words: 240-245; Guide: 192-193*)
- Ten sessions on joyful effort (*Words: 245-248; Guide: 193-196*)
- Ten sessions on concentration (*Words: 248-251; Guide: 196-204*)
- Ten sessions on knowledge (*Words: 251-262; Guide: 204-219*)

Essential Readings

- *The Torch of Certainty* by Jamgon Kongtrül
- *Words of My Perfect Teacher* by Patrul Rinpoche
- *A Guide to the Words of My Perfect Teacher* by Khenpo Ngawang Pelzang

Other Works on the Preliminary Practices

- *A Cascading Waterfall of Nectar* by Thinley Norbu
- *The Dzogchen: Innermost Essence Preliminary Practice* by Tulku Thondup
- *Entrance to the Great Perfection* by Jigmé Lingpa et al.
- *The Excellent Path to Enlightenment* by Dilgo Khyentsé Rinpoche
- *Great Perfection: Outer and Inner Preliminaries* by Dzogchen Rinpoche
- *Guru Yoga* by Dilgo Khyentsé Rinpoche
- *Illuminating the Path* by Khenchen Palden Sherab Rinpoche and Khenpo Tsewang Dongyal Rinpoche
- *Ngondro Commentary* by Tulku Chagdud and Jane Tromge