

TRUE BUDDHA SCHOOL PRESENTS

Getting to Know  
the Root Guru





Living Buddha Lian-sheng, Sheng-yen Lu

His Holiness Living Buddha Lian-sheng is the Root Guru of True Buddha School. He is referred to as Grand Master by his disciples, and he is regarded as the emanation of Amitabha Buddha.

As the lineage holder of the Nyingma, Kagyu, Sakya and Gelug schools of Tibetan Buddhism, Living Buddha Lian-sheng has attained the highest fruition in those schools including the Great Perfection, Mahamudra, Lamdre, and Yamantaka Sadhana.

Living Buddha Lian-sheng teaches both exoteric and esoteric Buddhism, and also incorporates elements of Zen and Taoism into his teachings. He emphasizes actual practice and encourages students to integrate his Buddhist teachings into their daily lives. The quintessence of his personal journey, his methods of cultivation and his realization are embodied in the True Buddha Tantra, which is an inspiring, practical, and powerful teaching that is well-suited for people in modern society. Living Buddha Lian-sheng leads a disciplined life which includes spiritual practice, teaching, writing, and painting. He is an excellent model for spiritual cultivators in this degenerated age.

As of today, over five million people have taken refuge in True Buddha School. With over 400 chapters worldwide, True Buddha School is recognized as a major Buddhist group today. Living Buddha Lian-sheng has written over 200 books in Chinese on topics ranging from Vajrayana Buddhism to Feng Shui, Zen Buddhism, and Taoism. Many of these books are now being translated into English and various other languages.

# Getting to Know the Root Guru

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## IN SEARCH OF THE LIGHT OF LIFE

Life is a path of continual search and growth. Many have stumbled in life and feel lost. Therefore, we yearn for a guide who will always be there to support us and to provide timely directions and guidance. We hope to meet a knowledgeable teacher who can impart teachings and solve problems for us. We hope to meet someone with lots of life experience who wants to pass on his or her knowledge, and/or share life experiences with us without hesitation. At the same time, we hope to select a good mentor to inspire, educate and nurture our children. We want to learn from a wise teacher, and follow in his or her footsteps to develop ourselves in our work, study or on a personal level. A great teacher is someone who guides and inspires students, a living role model, whose words or behavior/conduct can bring a positive impact to students over the course of time.

The pursuit of religion is no different from the path of life's learning experience. Many Buddhists vow to follow and take refuge in enlightened masters life after life. They expect their masters to lead them to the authentic Dharma, reaffirm their faith and help them to find the light of innate wisdom. That explains the importance of the Fourfold Refuge in Vajrayana Buddhism.

“Taking Refuge” includes the meanings of both “following” and “reliance.” It is the first step of practicing Buddhism for Buddhists. In Sutrayana Buddhism, taking refuge generally means the Threefold Refuge, i.e. taking refuge in the Three Jewels - Buddhas, Dharma and the Sangha. However, in Vajrayana Buddhism, the Root Guru is placed before the Three Jewels, which is why it is called the Fourfold Refuge. In the Fourfold Refuge, the Root Guru is listed first and is of the utmost importance in Vajrayana. The Root Guru is the embodiment

of all Buddhas, Dharma and Sanghas as well as the source of all the dharma lineages.

People in general may find it incomprehensible that practitioners regard the Root Guru with utmost reverence. This is because they do not understand that the Root Guru represents the most profound Vajrayana teachings. One must first learn the Vajrayana practices, then one will realize why the guru is regarded as a buddha in the Vajrayana tradition. Vajrayana practices are profound and inconceivable; therefore, they are also known as the secret teachings. Why does Vajrayana Buddhism teach us about achieving “buddhahood in this very body (in this life time)?” What is the essence of the teachings in these esoteric practices?

## THE ORIGINS OF VAJRAYANA BUDDHISM

Buddhism is classified into two schools, namely Sutrayana (Exoteric) and Vajrayana (Esoteric). When Shakyamuni Buddha was in the world, he propagated the Dharma for forty-nine years. He had expounded sutras on over three hundred occasions, which included Sutrayana and Vajrayana teachings.

After achieving enlightenment, Shakyamuni Buddha, appearing in the dharma body as Mahavairocana Buddha (Vairocana Tathagata) expounded the *Mahavairocana Sutra*, detailing the esoteric practices to Vajrasattva and the others in the Vajradhatu Palace. Subsequently, he preached the *Vajrasekhara Sutra* at the Mantra Palace. Six hundred years later, Nagarjuna Bodhisattva opened the Iron Tower and met Vajrasattva who taught him the esoteric teachings from both the Diamond Realm Mandala and Womb Mandala. Since then, the Tantra teachings began to spread. It is the origin of Vajrayana Buddhism, and Vajrasattva became the patriarch and started the esoteric lineage. Eventually, Buddhism was divided into two main schools, Sutrayana and Vajrayana. The Sutrayana teachings are easy to understand while the Vajrayana teachings belong to the inner secret doctrines of realization from within.



## THE INVALUABLE VAJRAYANA PRACTICES

Due to the inexplicable secrecy, the secret of Vajrayana practices have never been widely revealed to the general public. In the past, Vajrayana practitioners typically had to sell all their belongings, crossing mountains and oceans in the course of searching for an enlightened master. Even when a master is found, they still would not be given the valuable teachings without first being observed and tested for their suitability and affinity.

Vajrayana teachings were orally transmitted on a one on one basis, yet the teachings have survived to this day owing to the remarkable validity surrounding the esoteric practices.

Vajrayana teachings cover both worldly and transcendental practices, including expedient and ultimate means, covering the paths to liberation and enlightenment. Also, they contain subtle and complete wisdom, and the secrets of Highest Yoga Tantra. The rituals of esoteric practices, designed in accordance to the natural capacity of the individuals, are structured in systematic progression. Practitioners begin with the Deity Yoga, Guru Yoga and the Dakini Practices (Generation Stage), and then advance to the cultivation of the mind through the practice of the winds (qi), channel and drops which transform the gross physical elements into pure light, pure mind, pure energy and ultimately leading one to the attainment of buddhahood (Completion Stage).

The attainment of buddhahood in this lifetime and the accomplishment of the rainbow body are the ultimate manifestations of invaluable Vajrayana practices. According to the scriptures, “Vajrayana practitioners purify the three karmas of body, speech and mind through three secret Dharma gates. With the blessings from the body, speech and mind of the Buddha, the practitioner merge as one with the Buddha, and instantly enters into the Dharma realm and attains buddhahood.” According to the *Recitation Manual for the Cultivation of the Five Mysteries of Vajrasattva, from the Vajrasekhara Sutra*: “In Vajrayana, owing to the divine power of blessings,

the practitioner will instantly attain immeasurable Samayas and Dharani gates.” Starting from Nagarjuna Bodisattva there were many accomplished practitioners reflecting this truth. Stories such as these were frequently recorded in other Vajrayana scriptures and biographies.

In summary, Vajrayana not only emphasizes the doctrines, but also on actual experiences where the body and mind, the spiritual and material are merged into one. Through Vajrayana practices, practitioners activate the vital forces of the physical body which resonate with the four elements (Earth, Water, Fire and Wind) in the universe, giving rise to true spiritual power. In Vajrayana, it is called “Dharma Power.” Equipped with such power, Vajrayana practitioners can invoke deities, radiate light, offer protection to others and spiritually transform themselves. They are able to assist sentient beings, satisfy their needs and realize their wishes. They can transcend suffering and worries, and liberate themselves from the pain of rebirth, old age, sickness and death.

Vajrayana practitioners cultivate the vital forces of their physical body, transforming the “visible” into the “invisible”; “bliss” to “emptiness” and “joy” to “emptiness.” It involves different stages and each stage has its own significance and oral pith instructions. The Guru transmits teachings according to the natural capacity of sentient beings. Without the corresponding wisdom the disciples will not be able to grasp the essence of the teachings even with the directions from their spiritual guru. Besides, the Vajrayana practices of “Mantra, Mudra and Visualization” advance a cultivator to profound spiritual realms beyond verbal and written descriptions, where the actual spiritual responses cannot be judged by simple rationales. In all, the realm of Vajrayana teachings is not easy to comprehend from a worldly perspective and this is why transmissions of the teachings have been limited. Hence it is called the secret teachings.





## THE ROOT GURU IS THE KEY TO ALL VAJRAYANA SPIRITUAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

When we realize how distinctive and precious the Vajrayana teachings really are, it would come as no surprise to anyone that Vajrayana Buddhism places extreme importance on the Root Guru, who solely preserves and transmits the Buddha's teachings. With great importance placed on the lineage, the Root Guru inherits and transmits the Vajrayana teachings from the lineage gurus, for he is the living embodiment of the spiritual powers and merits of all buddhas, bodhisattvas and lineage gurus. Such is the case of the mandalas of Diamond Realm and Womb Realm (Vajradhatu and Garbhadhatu) where the Root Guru alone holds the key to all accomplishments within the two realms.

Hence, the root of all spiritual attainments lies solely with one's reliance on the spiritual guru. The Root Guru is likened to the trunk of a tree, and all spiritual attainments and realizations are likened to the leaves or fruits, derived from the tree trunk. In many thangkas, it is not uncommon to find lineage gurus seated on top of a buddha or bodhisattva. Through the discreet selection of disciples, the Root Guru enables the teachings of Vajrayana Buddhism to pass down from generation to generation. It is through the grace of the Root Guru that Vajrayana practitioners are able to access the teachings, and it is through the Root Guru and the Three Jewels that they are delivered.

## INVOKING THE POWER OF BLESSINGS THROUGH STRONG FAITH

The Guru Yoga is thus the most fundamental and precious practice in Vajrayana Buddhism. If the heart of a Vajrayana practitioner is always in union with his guru, the power of blessings from the transmission lineage will never be disrupted. If a disciple regards his guru as a buddha, then he will be bestowed with the buddha's blessing. However, if he regards his guru as an ordinary person, then the blessing received will be ordinary. It all depends on his faith and perception of the spiritual master.

No matter the religion, faith is still the key to its door. The *Avatamsaka Sutra* (also called the *Flower Adornment Sutra*) reveals that “Faith is the mother of all merits.” Intense visualization is itself a power. Vajrayana Buddhism is also called the school of mind power. Mind power enables a practitioner to realize his wishes. Vajrayana Buddhism is a school of teaching that actualizes mind power into fruition.

When you regard your guru as a buddha and respect him wholeheartedly, you would surely cherish his teachings and practices. Your highest regard for the guru as a buddha will induce abundant blessings from him. The power of his blessings will be eminently reinforced by your strong belief. The correlation is palpable.

Having strong faith in your guru will not only generate great power from his blessing, but also merits from the buddhas and bodhisattvas. You will obtain good responses from the practices taught by your guru. The grace from the Three Jewels will be bestowed to you too. — *Living Buddha Lian-sheng*.

The Root Guru is Vajradhara himself, and the very source of all blessings. All accomplishments are impossible without the Guru’s blessings. Vajrayana practitioners visualize the Root Guru on top of their heads and beseech the Guru’s blessings, whose light radiates and purifies their bad karma. Many Vajrayana disciples place the portraits and statues of their Root Guru on their altars as aid for the visualization practices. In Tibet, as most of the people are nomadic, they would paint their master on a piece of cloth (thangka), making it easier for them to carry around and worship.

Whether it is the statue of a buddha or the Root Guru, the real meaning lies in “complete absorption of the mind.” When one can focus the mind singularly, eradicating all discursive thoughts, it is called “inner cultivation.” To speed up the spiritual union with the guru, disciples practice visualizations using his image. Likewise, the act of focusing on the image of the Guru encourages the practitioners to constantly think of their guru, inspiring them to observe the precepts and practice more diligently.

## PROMOTION OF “TAKING REFUGE IN SELF-NATURE” — LIVING BUDDHA LIAN-SHENG

The Vajrayana tradition of seeing the Root Guru as a buddha derives from the fact that the Root Guru not only represents the precious esoteric practices, but he is the source of all blessings and grace. The blessings and grace from the Root Guru and the Three Jewels can only be invoked by the strong faith and thoughts of practitioners. This knowledge and view of the Root Guru should be held by every Vajrayana practitioner in its right perspective. However, Living Buddha Lian-sheng ultimately points out that taking refuge in its truest sense is to take refuge in one’s own self-nature.

“Illuminating the light of self-nature illuminates the light of Dharma” was the final instruction left by the Buddha to Ananda upon entering Nirvana over two thousand years ago. As we chant the Threefold Refuge, “Take refuge in the Buddha,” “Take refuge in the Dharma,” “Take refuge in the Sangha,” we are actually taking refuge in the self-nature. All the Right Faith and Right Dharma transmitted by the Buddha arise from the self-nature within us. For the Vajrayana practitioner, the culmination of cultivation is to radiate light from within. The light from the inner self is thus called the “Illumination of Self Light.” When this light shines upon the universe throughout all times, it is known as the “Illumination of Dharma Light.”

According to Living Buddha Lian-sheng, practicing Buddhism starts with taking refuge. To take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha; respect the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha and Guru. Whether it is the Threefold Refuge or the Fourfold Refuge, the ultimate goal of taking refuge is to “realize yourself.” It is called “taking refuge in self,” and also called the “Illuminating self light.” It is the utmost realization of the Buddha’s teachings.

I wish all my disciples are able to light their inner light. Everyone has an illuminating self. May everyone take refuge in the self-nature and become their own master. This is my deepest wish!

— *Living Buddha Lian-sheng*

## DISCOURSE ON THE VAJRAYANA TRADITION OF “SEEING ONE'S GURU AS A BUDDHA”

Let us talk about the reasons behind “Seeing one’s guru as a buddha.” In Vajrayana Buddhism, disciples have to look upon their guru as a buddha. The *Vajrapani Bodhisattva Empowerment Sutra* states, “How should all the Vajrayana disciples regard their guru? Vajrapani Bodhisattva replied that the guru has to be seen as a buddha, as a bhagavan.” Bhagavan (World Honored One) means buddha. You have to see your guru as a buddha.

Here is a story from Tibet. It tells of a Vajrayana disciple called Lobsang Jigme who took refuge in a Vajrayana lama (note: lama is the Tibetan word for guru). He was handsome, and his lama also praised him, but one disciple did not accept this. He said Jigme was a good-looking person, and was praised by his lama, so the lama might appoint him as the Dharma heir. The other disciples were so jealous that they tried to harm Jigme.

Once, they came to a cliff. One disciple challenged Jigme to jump off the cliff and said, “You have gained the most blessings from the lama, so are you brave enough to jump off the cliff?” Jigme was aware of seeing his lama as a buddha and believed a buddha would surely keep him from any harm. So he took the leap and jumped. Upon jumping, his lama robe was caught on a branch from a tree that extended just near the cliff. He thus survived the jump and was convinced it was his lama who extended his hand to grab his clothes. His faith in his lama was drastically reinforced.

Once there was a fire. A house was caught on fire trapping some kids. One disciple said to Jigme, “With our lama’s blessings, you would be able to enter the house without being burned.” He believed this to be true and dashed into the burning house trying to save the children. Aside from being brave Jigme was physically strong, and despite the danger involved, he was able to save everyone from the fire. His confidence in his lama was further strengthened.

On another occasion, and this is a very famous story, Jigme, his lama (guru) and other disciples came



to a river. The current was very swift so they decided to take a boat across the river. The jealous disciple again said to Jigme, “With the blessings from our lama, you don’t need the boat. You can walk across the river.” Since he was with the lama, he approached him and asked for his blessings, saying “Lama, you are a buddha and I carry your blessings with me. I know I can cross the river with your blessings even though the currents are very strong.” The lama thought to himself, “Jigme is faithful but he is not smart. Since he insists on walking across the river, then let him go!” The lama nodded his head and all the other disciples were anxiously waiting to see what would happen next.

Jigme focused his attention on the other side of the river without looking at the river and the rapid currents. He charged ahead and actually dashed across the river as if it was land. The lama and other disciples were all astounded by his feat. The power arose from his deep faith in his lama, which was further enhanced by the blessings from the buddhas and bodhisattvas, thus resulting in his miraculous feat.

The lama started to feel that his own blessings were incredibly powerful. He thought to himself, “If Jigme can cross the river by chanting my name, then I can do it too.” He was the lama after all, and

if Jigme could do it by chanting his name, then how could he not be able to do it? Why wait for the boat to come back to cross the river? So this lama thought that he could walk across the river without the boat too. In the end, he was swept away by the currents while crossing the river and was never seen again.

This story reveals that faith is power. When the faith of a guru is weaker than that of his disciple, then the disciple can achieve enlightenment by his own faith. However, when the guru possesses strong faith, he can inspire the same kind of confidence in his disciples. If a disciple does not have confidence in his master, no power will be generated no matter how powerful the master is.

When a disciple has unyielding faith in his guru, he can attain spiritual realization even if his guru is powerless. This is truly marvellous, for it demonstrates that faith alone is power, as explained through this story from Tibet. The disciple's profound faith in his guru gave rise to tremendous power. In contrast, the guru's faith was relatively weak.

When a disciple esteems his guru as a buddha, he will receive blessings from all buddhas. However if he regards his guru as an ordinary person, the guru's blessings will not produce any benefits. It is important to remember this.

When you have faith in your guru and you are treating him like a buddha, you will benefit greatly and acquire abundant blessings from his practices. On the other hand, you will find faults with him if you regard your guru as an ordinary person. How can you hope to gain any spiritual attainment from the guru's teachings while constantly criticizing him? Therefore, no power will be generated in all your spiritual endeavours.

So is it said: "See your guru as a buddha and you will think of his merits. As a result, you will attain enlightenment with the blessings from the Three Jewels. However, if you consider your guru as an ordinary person, then you shall find faults with him and disrespect his teachings. As a result, your spiritual attainments will be hindered."

Om Mani Padme Hum

# How to Take Refuge in H.H. Living Buddha Lian-sheng

Translated by Janny Chow  
Proofread by Jackie Ho

## THE IMPORTANCE OF TAKING REFUGE AND RECEIVING EMPOWERMENTS

Some people believe that it is not necessary for a Buddhist to take refuge in a vajra master as long as he maintains good thoughts, chants the Buddha's name, and pays homage to the Buddha. However, in order to truly practice Buddhism, one needs to go beyond such superficial practices and engage in the "cultivation of the mind." "Cultivation of the mind" is a long term training process that requires the guidance of a genuine vajra master. By taking refuge in a vajra master, one will obtain the blessing and energy of the lineage transmission, which are the keys to a successful practice.

In Vajrayana Buddhism, the refuge empowerment has great merits. Within an instant, an ordinary person is elevated to become a Buddhist disciple. The refuge empowerment signifies the great compassion of the Buddhas, who bestow a Mind-seal upon one. It also establishes the connection between one and the dharma, allowing one to progress from an initiate to an acharya. After one completes the ritual of refuge empowerment, one formally enters into the role of a "potential Buddha" who cultivates to reach Perfect Enlightenment.

Also, in Vajrayana Buddhism, one must first receive an empowerment from a vajra master before one can practice a particular sadhana. Without the lineage empowerment from the guru or a vajra master, one will absolutely not be able to experience "spiritual union" with the buddha, bodhisattva, or deity of the respective sadhana practice.

Therefore, to practice the True Buddha Tantra as transmitted by His Holiness Living Buddha Lian-sheng Sheng-yen Lu, one must first take refuge in him and receive the specific empowerment for

each sadhana from him or from an authorized True Buddha School vajra master.

### WHY SHOULD ONE TAKE REFUGE IN HIS HOLINESS LIVING BUDDHA LIAN-SHENG?

- H.H. Living Buddha Lian-sheng is a sage who has attained total liberation from fears and emotional afflictions.

- He is a great miracle worker who is able to relieve others of their suffering.

- He is a sage whose compassion and vows to provide salvation encompasses all beings.

- He is an enlightened being who understands all aspects of theories and practices within the vast domain of Buddhadharma, and he can give one the most effective and skillful guidance.

Those who have not taken refuge may want to first commit themselves to the chanting of the Padmakumara Heart Mantra. The chanting of the Padmakumara Heart Mantra may help one to gain spiritual insight, and one may then decide to take refuge later. The short version of Padmakumara Heart Mantra is: “Om, gu-ru lian-sheng sid-dhi hum.” The long version is: “Om ah hum, gu-ru-bei, ah-ha-sa-sa-ma-ha, lian-sheng sid-dhi hum.”

### PREREQUISITES TO TAKING REFUGE IN TRUE BUDDHA SCHOOL

Taking refuge is an important undertaking in life. It is a commitment to spiritual cultivation and an





aspiration to live a more reasonable and more noble life. One should have full confidence and faith in the successful outcome of one's practice.

One should get to know Living Buddha Lian-sheng through his writings and teachings and have sincere reverence in him.

Anyone, regardless of one's religion, can take refuge in True Buddha School and study the True Buddha Tantra.

## HOW TO TAKE REFUGE IN H.H. LIVING BUDDHA LIAN-SHENG

### 1) In person

Make an appointment ahead of time to visit the True Buddha Quarter in Redmond, Washington, USA or to travel to the location where His Holiness will be teaching the dharma to receive a direct empowerment from him.

### 2) By "Remote Empowerment"

It is not often possible for someone who lives far away to take refuge in person. Students who desire to take refuge can, on the first or fifteenth of any lunar month, at 7:00 a.m., while facing the direction of the rising sun, recite the Fourfold Refuge Mantra three times: "Namo Guru bei, Namo Buddha ye, Namo Dharma ye, Namo Sangha ye. Seeking Living Buddha Lian-sheng's guidance, I am taking refuge in the True Buddha" and prostrate three times.

On the first or fifteenth of every lunar month,



His Holiness performs a ceremony of “remote empowerment” at the True Buddha Quarter to give the empowerment to all students who could not journey there in person.

A student who takes refuge from a distance after performing the rites at home, only needs to send a letter to the True Buddha Quarter stating one’s intent to seek refuge, along with one’s name, address, age, and an offering in any amount to the Buddhas. Upon receiving the letter, His Holiness will send a certificate, a picture of the guru, and a note stating the level of practice that one should begin with.

3) Through local chapters of True Buddha School.

Contact nearby local chapters of True Buddha School to request assistance in taking refuge.

**Address of the True Buddha Quarter:**

Living Buddha Lian-sheng Sheng-yen Lu  
17102 NE 40th Ct.  
Redmond, WA 98052-5479  
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**Address of True Buddha Foundation:**

True Buddha Foundation  
17102 NE 40th Ct.  
Redmond, WA 98052-5479  
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Tel: (425)885-7573  
Fax: (425)883-2173

**Address of True Buddha School Temple in Redmond:**

Ling Shen Ching Tze Temple  
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- Purple Lotus Society of  
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[www.tbts.org](http://www.tbts.org) (True Buddha Translation Teams Website)

[www.usdaden.com](http://www.usdaden.com) (US Daden Culture Website)

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