

TRUE BUDDHA SCHOOL PRESENTS

The Four Preliminaries
Sadhana and Pith Instructions





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.

Vajrasattva Practice (of the Four Preliminaries)

Translated by Janny Chow, Luljeta Subasic,
Alice Yang, and others

First empty the mind. Next, visualize the Root Guru Living Buddha Lian-sheng appearing above your crown and radiating light on everyone present. Chant the Root Guru Heart Mantra 7 times. Pray to the Root Guru to empower you so that the practice will be auspicious. Visualize your parents, children, relatives, friends, and enemies join you in this practice.

Wake Up Call:

Clap twice, then cross hands and snap thumbs and middle fingers.

1. RECITE THE PURIFICATION MANTRAS

Speech Purification:

Om, syo-lee syo-lee, ma-ha syo-lee, syo-syo-lee, so-ha.

Body Purification:

Om, syo-do-lee, syo-do-lee, syo-mo-lee, syo-mo-lee, so-ha.

Mind Purification:

Om, wa-dzi-la-dam, ho ho hum.

Earth God Mantra:

Namo sam-man-do, moo-toh-nam, om, doo-loo doo-loo dei-wei, so-ha.

2. RECITE THE INVOCATION MANTRA

Om ah hum, so-ha. (3 times)

We sincerely invoke:

Namo Root Guru Living Buddha Lian-sheng

Namo Great White Padmakumara

Namo Lotus Light Unhindered Buddha

Namo the lineage gurus of True Buddha School

(In the place of this note, each local chapter may invoke the buddhas, bodhisattvas and dharma protectors enshrined at its altar accordingly. When practicing at home, one may invoke the deities present at one's shrine.)

Namo the Great Compassionate Lineage Root Gurus of True Buddha School, may all beings obtain happiness.

Namo the Five Buddhas and deities residing in the shrine, may all beings be liberated from suffering.

Namo all Buddhas of the Ten Directions and Three Times, may all beings live in joy and kindness.

Namo the Tripitaka and Twelve Sutras, may all beings forsake discrimination.

Namo all Sages and Sanghas of the Ten Directions and Three Times, may all beings attain true realization.

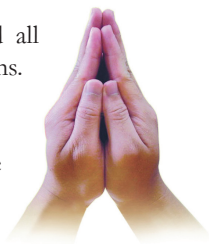
Namo Truly Realized Holy Red-Crown Vajra Master Lian-sheng, may all beings of the Six Realms of Samsara and I attain instant supreme realization and continue to take refuge in Lian-sheng's Buddha Land.

3. GREAT HOMAGE USING VISUALIZATION

Buddha Shrine Mudra

First homage to the Root Guru and all buddhas in all times and directions.
(using Buddha Shrine Mudra)

Visualize in the space before and above you the Root Guru, all past lineage gurus, the eight Personal Deities, all buddhas, bodhisattvas, and dharma protectors. They appear like multitudes of twinkling stars,



pervading the Empty Space. Touch the brow point (third-eye chakra) with the mudra and visualize the Root Guru emitting a white beam of light from his brow point to your brow point. Touch the throat with the mudra and visualize the Root Guru emitting a red beam of light from his throat to your throat. Touch the heart with the mudra and visualize the Root Guru emitting a blue beam of light from his heart to your heart. Touch the brow point again and then release the mudra. Visualize yourself prostrating fully on the floor to pay homage to the Root Guru and Buddhas in all times and directions.

Lotus Mudra

Second homage to all bodhisattvas. (using Lotus Mudra)

Employ the mudra and visualize as above to pay homage to all bodhisattvas and mahasattvas.



Vajra Mudra

Third homage to all dharma protectors. (using Vajra Mudra)

Employ the mudra and visualize as above to pay homage to all dharma protectors.



Equanimity Mudra

Fourth half-bow. (using Equanimity Mudra)

Bow and touch mudra against the brow point before releasing the mudra.



(For a detailed description of visualization of Great Homage, refer to A Complete and Detailed Exposition on the True Buddha Tantra.)

4. MANDALA OFFERING

Offering Mudra:

Interlace fingers (with hands back to back) so that

palms and fingers face upwards. Hook the index finger of the left hand over the middle finger of the right. Hook the index finger of the right hand over the middle finger of the left. Press the thumb of the left hand over the little finger of the right. Press the thumb of the right hand over the little finger of the left. Manipulate the ring fingers so that they stand vertically, back to back.



Place the Offering Mudra in front of the chest. After visualization, bring the mudra to touch upon the brow point before release.

Visualization:

Visualize the offerings at the altar multiply to first form a row, then multiply again to form a field, and multiply once more to fill all space. Dedicate this space-filling offering to the Root Guru, past lineage gurus, eight Personal Deities of True Buddha School, all buddhas in all times and directions, all bodhisattvas and mahasattvas, and all dharma protectors.

*(For a detailed description of visualization of Mandala Offering, refer to *A Complete and Detailed Exposition on the True Buddha Tantra*.)*

Recite the Offering Verse:

Mount Meru together with the Four Continents, sun and moon,

Transforms into precious treasures to offer to the Buddhas.

May the immeasurable merits arisen from these treasures

Quickly remove negative karma to realize buddhahood.

Recite the Offering Mantra:

Om, sa-er-wa, da-ta-ga-da, ee-da-mooh, gu-ru la-na, man-cha-la, kan, nee-lee- yeh, dah- yah-mee.

5. FOURFOLD REFUGE

Visualization:

Visualize the Root Guru, all past lineage gurus, all Buddhas, Dharma, and Sanghas merge into a great white light that empowers one.

Recite the Fourfold Refuge Mantra:

Namo Guru bei, Namō Buddha ye, Namō Dharma ye, Namō Sangha ye. (3 times)

*(For a detailed description of the Fourfold Refuge visualization and lineage empowerment, refer to *A Complete and Detailed Exposition on the True Buddha Tantra*.)*

6. ARMOR PROTECTION

Form the Vajra Mudra before the forehead.

Recite the mantra:

Om, bo ru lan ze lee. (7 times)

After recitation, bring the mudra to touch the brow point, then throat, heart, left shoulder, right shoulder, then back to the forehead. At the moment of releasing the mudra, visualize the Dharma Protector at one's shrine transform into four bodies that guard one in the front, behind, and to the right and left sides.

**7. RECITE THE HIGH KING AVALOKITESVARA
SUTRA**

Namo Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva,
Namō Buddhaya,
Namō Dharmaya,
Namō Sanghaya.

An affinity with the Pure Lands opens the Dharma Doors.

By engaging permanence, bliss, identity, and purity, one is blessed with the Dharma.

Namo Maha Prajna Paramita, a great spiritual mantra.

Namo Maha Prajna Paramita, a great wisdom mantra.

Namo Maha Prajna Paramita, a supreme mantra.

Namo Maha Prajna Paramita, an unequalled mantra.

Namo the Pure Light Secret Buddha,
 the Dharma Treasury Buddha,
 the Tranquil King Buddha with Lion's Roar and
 Divine Speed,
 the Sumeru Light King Buddha announced by
 Buddha,
 the Dharma Protector Buddha,
 the Vajra Treasury Roaming Lion Buddha,
 the Precious Victory Buddha,
 the Supernatural Power Buddha,
 the Medicine Crystal Light King Buddha,
 the Universal Light Merit Mountain King Buddha,
 the Merit Retaining Jewel King Buddha,
 the Seven Past Buddhas,
 the Future Thousand Buddhas of this fortunate
 eon,
 the Fifteen Hundred Buddhas,
 the Fifteen Thousand Buddhas,
 the Five Hundred Flower Victory Buddhas,
 the Ten Billion Vajra Treasury Buddhas,
 and the Fixed Light Buddha.
 The Buddhas of Six Directions:
 To the East the Precious Light Moon Palace
 Venerable Wonderful Voice King Buddha,
 To the South the Tree-Root Flower King Buddha,
 To the West the Spiritual Power Flower Blazing
 King Buddha,
 To the North the Moon Palace Purity Buddha,
 Above, the countless Vigor Jewel Crown Buddhas,
 Below, the Tranquil Moon Sound King Buddha.
 All the countless Buddhas,
 Many Jewels Buddhas,
 Shakyamuni Buddha,
 Maitreya Buddha,
 Akshobhya Buddha,
 Amitabha Buddha.
 All beings in the Central Realm,
 and those in the Pure Lands,
 while moving upon the Earth and through the
 Heavens,
 shower limitless compassion upon all beings,
 affording them equanimity and peace,
 that they might cultivate day and night.
 By constantly invoking this sutra,

one is liberated from the suffering of birth and death,
and freed from all the many kinds of suffering.
Namo the great wisdom Avalokitesvara,
the observant Avalokitesvara,
the noble Avalokitesvara,
the expansively-minded Avalokitesvara,
the Medicine King Bodhisattva,
the Supreme Medicine Bodhisattva,
Manjusri Bodhisattva,
Samantabhadra Bodhisattva,
Akasagarbha Bodhisattva,
Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva,
the billions of Clear Cool Treasure Mountain
Bodhisattvas,
the Universal Light Venerable King Tathagata
Bodhisattva.
Chanting this sutra continually,
the Seven World-Honored Buddhas recite this
mantra:

Lee-poh-lee-poh-deh, kyo-ho-kyo-ho-deh,
toh-loh-nee-deh, nee-ah-la-deh,
pee-lee-nee-deh, mo-ho-kya-deh,
jen-len-chen-deh, so-ha. (7 times)

8. RECITE THE REBIRTH MANTRA

Na-mo a-mi-doh-poh-ye, doh-ta-ga-doh-ye, doh-
deh-ye-ta, a-mi-lee-doh-poh-pee, a-mi-lee-doh seh-
dan-poh-pee, a-mi-lee-doh pek-ga-lan-deh, a-mi-
lee-doh pek-ga-lan-doh, ga-mee-nee, ka-ka-nah, zhi-
doh-ka-lee, so-ha. (7 times)

9. RECITE THE FOUR IMMEASURABLE VOWS

May all beings have happiness and the causes of
happiness; this is immeasurable loving-kindness.

May all beings be liberated from suffering and the
causes of suffering; this is immeasurable compassion.

May all beings be free of suffering and always stay
happy; this is immeasurable joy.

May all beings be free of grasping and aversion and practice equality; this is immeasurable equanimity.

Recite the Bodhicitta Verse:

Student “Lotus _____” shall take refuge in the Root Guru and Triple Jewels until reaching enlightenment. I will never recede on the path. May all my virtues be dedicated to all beings for their speedy enlightenment.

Recite the Bodhicitta Mantra:

Om, bo-dee-gee-da, be-dza, sa-ma-ya, ah-hum. (3 times)

Recite the Repentance Verse:

All my transgressions committed since time immemorial,
which originate in beginningless greed, hatred, and ignorance,
and which are manifest through my body, speech, and mind,
these I fully confess and repent of altogether. (3 times)

Recite the Repentance Mantra:

Om, be-dza, sa-ma-ya, soo-deh-ah. (108 times)

10. RECITE THE ROOT GURU HEART MANTRA

Om, guru, lian-sheng siddhi, hum. (108 times)

11. MUDRA AND VISUALIZATION

Vajrasattva Mudra:

The right hand makes a fist facing inward, with the thumb outside the fist. The left hand makes a fist facing outward, with the thumb inside the fist. Hold this mudra in front of the chest.

Visualization:

First empty the mind.

Chant the Emptiness Mantra:

Om, si-ba-wa, su-da, sa-er-wa, da-er-ma, si-ba-wa, su-do-hang. (3 times)

(1) Above an expanse of ocean is a stretch of clear sunny sky. A moon disc rises from the ocean into the sky. Inside the moon disc is the white Tibetan seed syllable “hum,” emitting great white light.

(2) The seed syllable inside the moon disc revolves and transforms into Vajrasattva. His body is white and he is adorned by a Five-Buddha Crown, celestial garments and ornaments. Sitting on a moon disc supported by an eight-petal lotus, Vajrasattva holds, against his heart, a vajra scepter in his right hand (in the Fierce Mudra) and by his left thigh, a vajra bell in his left hand (also in the Fierce Mudra). At the level of his heart is a recitation wheel containing the Hundred Syllable Mantra. This mantra surrounds his heart chakra, revolves, and radiates brilliant white light.



(3) This great white light arcs over and down, pouring through one’s crown and flooding one’s entire body. One’s whole body exhibits a great white light, and negative karma and thoughts are expelled as black smoke through all skin pores. One’s body becomes crystal clear, radiating light. One enters a state of joy in meditation.



Tibetan hum syllable

12. RECITE THE HUNDRED SYLLABLE MANTRA

Om, be-dza, sah-do sa-ma-ya, ma-nu bah-la-ya, be-dza sah-do deh-nu-pah-deh-cha, zhe-jo mi-bah-wa, soo-do ka-yu mi-bah-wa, soo-poo ka-yu mi-bah-wa, an-nu-la-do mi-bah-wa, sa-er-wa, sid-di, mi-bu-la-ya-cha, sa-er-wa, ka-er-ma, soo-cha-mi, ji-ta-moo, see-li-yam, gu-ru hum, ha-ha-ha-ha-hoh, bah-ga-wan,

sa-er-wa, da-ta-ga-ta, be-dza, ma-mee mun-cha, be-dzi-ba-wa, ma-ha sa-ma-ya, sah-do-ah, hum, pei. (21 or 49 times)

13. ENTERING SAMADHI

Visualization of Entering of the Deity into Oneself:

(1) Visualize Vajrasattva sitting on top of one's crown opening.

(2) Inside one's body, the lotus at the heart chakra opens up. On the lotus is a moon disc. In the moon disc is the "hum" seed syllable of Vajrasattva. Visualize this seed syllable emitting white light.

(3) Visualize Vajrasattva (atop one's crown) transform into a pearl of light, the size of a grain of rice. He travels through the crown opening to descend down the central channel until reaching and resting on the heart chakra lotus.

(4) Vajrasattva (sitting on the heart chakra lotus) gradually enlarges, until becoming exactly the same size as one. Visualize oneself as Vajrasattva. There is no difference between the two.

14. EMERGING FROM SAMADHI AND DEDICATION

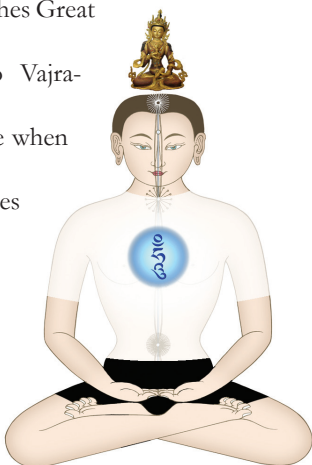
Living Buddha Lian-sheng teaches Great Tantric Practice,

Vajrasattva transforming into Vajra-Heart,

An authentic spiritual response when the two merge into one,
Eradicating negative hindrances to attain purity.

15. CHANT THE PRINCIPAL HEART MANTRAS

Om, ah-mee-deh-wah-seh.
(Amitabha Buddha Heart Mantra)



Om, mani padme hum.
(Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva Heart Mantra)

Om, pun-lah-moh lin-toh-lin, so-ha.
(Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva Mantra that Removes
Fixed Karma)

Om, ha ha ha, wei sam-mo-yeh, so-ha.
(Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva Heart Mantra)

Om, dze-lee dzu-lee, zhun-tee, so-ha.
(Maha Cundi Bodhisattva Heart Mantra)

Om, jum-bah-lah, chan-lan chah-nah-yeh, so-ha.
(Yellow Jambhala Heart Mantra)

Om ah hum, be-dza, gu-ru, beh-ma, sid-dhi, hum,
seh.
(Guru Padmasambhava Heart Mantra)

Om ah hum, gu-ru-bei, ah-ha-sa-sa-ma-ha, lian-
sheng sid-dhi hum.
(Padmakumara Bodhisattva Heart Mantra)

Deh-yah-tah, om, beh-ka-dzee-yah, beh-ka-dzee-
yah, ma-ha beh-ka-dzee-yah, la-dza-sah-mo-kyah-
doh-heh, so-ha.
(Medicine Buddha Heart Mantra)

16. RECITE THE BUDDHA'S NAME

Namo the 36 trillion 119 thousand and 500 Amitabha
Buddhas. (3 times)

17. DEDICATION

May all who uphold the name of Amitabha Buddha
Be born together in the Pure Land of His Western
Paradise.

Repaying the Fourfold Generosity from above,
And aiding those who suffer in the Three Paths
below.

Upon seeing the Buddha,

May I be liberated from the cycle of birth and death,
And may I develop the qualities of buddhahood,
And thus free all who suffer.

I, _____ (your name), dedicate the merits of this practice to the Root Guru. May the Root Guru always be healthy, remain in Samsara, never enter Nirvana, and forever turn the Dharma Wheel. May everyone be healthy, free of hindrances, strong in cultivation, and may all circumstances become auspicious.

May all supplications be completely fulfilled.
May all hindrances be removed. Wun!

(For a detailed description of dedication, refer to A Complete and Detailed Exposition on the True Buddha Tantra.)

18. RECITE THE HUNDRED SYLLABLE MANTRA

Om, be-dza, sah-do sa-ma-ya, ma-nu bah-la-ya, be-dza sah-do deh-nu-pah-deh-cha, zhe-jo mi-bah-wa, soo-do ka-yu mi-bah-wa, soo-poo ka-yu mi-bah-wa, an-nu-la-do mi-bah-wa, sa-er-wa, sid-di, mi-bu-la-ya-cha, sa-er-wa, ka-er-ma, soo-cha-mi, ji-ta-moo, see-li-yam, gu-ru hum, ha-ha-ha-ha-hoh, bah-ga-wan, sa-er-wa, da-ta-ga-ta, be-dza, ma-mee mun-cha, be-dzi-ba-wa, ma-ha sa-ma-ya, sah-do-ah, hum, pei. (3 times)

19. GREAT HOMAGE USING VISUALIZATION

(SAME AS STEP 3)

20. RECITE THE COMPLETION MANTRA

Om, bu lin. (3 times)

Om Mani Padme Hum.

Dismissal:

Clap twice, then cross hands and snap thumbs and middle fingers.

End of Practice:

May all endeavors be auspicious.



TEACHINGS ON THE FOUR PRELIMINARIES BY
LIVING BUDDHA LIAN-SHENG

The Importance of the Four Preliminaries

*From Living Buddha Lian-sheng's book 107:
Pearls of Wisdom*

Translated by Jack Liu
Edited by Janny Chow
Proofread by Renée Cordsen, Jackie Ho

“Which practice is the most important?”

“The Four Preliminaries,” I replied.

“Why?”

“Because the Four Preliminaries are the foundation of Vajrayana. If the foundation is not firm, nothing can be built upon it.”

As we practice Vajrayana, we need to first build a foundation. The name “Preliminary Practices”

already indicates that it comes first.

Let me explain:

1. Fourfold Refuge
2. Great Homage
3. Mandala Offering
4. Vajrasattva Practice

The Fourfold Refuge can enhance spiritual conviction. The Great Homage can eliminate negativities. The Great Offering can increase blessings and wisdom, and the Vajrasattva Practice allows one to repent for one's transgressions.

To practice Vajrayana, blessings and wisdom are the two most important provisions that one must have. If these two provisions are not sufficient, then one's spiritual conviction will falter, obstacles will develop, and one will lose the capability to engage in Vajrayana practices.

The Vajrayana scriptures say, "Attempting to attain buddhahood without the two provisions is the same as trying to extract oil by cooking sand."

Many people have practiced Vajrayana for many years. The more they practiced, the more obstacles they experienced. In the end they even gave up. This is very ironic because it indicates that their foundation of the Four Preliminaries was not solid. They did not attain any success in the Four Preliminaries. If they had reached spiritual union, they would have never given up.

Do not slight the Four Preliminaries. Enhancing spiritual conviction, eliminating negativities, increasing blessings and wisdom, and repenting for one's offenses are all very important.

Therefore, we must diligently and earnestly practice the Four Preliminaries until we successfully perfect them.

Teaching the Four Preliminaries

From Living Buddha Lian-sheng's book 123:

Comet and Red Maple

Translated by Jack Liu

Edited by Jason Yu, Janny Chow

Proofread by Renée Cordsen, Jackie Ho

Every new disciple should start with the Four Preliminaries. This is the most basic practice of Vajrayana.

The Four Preliminaries of the True Buddha Tantra are: the Great Homage, the Mandala Offering, the Fourfold Refuge, and the Vajrasattva Practice.

I always repeat that new disciples should practice the Great Homage one-hundred thousand times, perform the Mandala Offering one-hundred thousand times, recite the Fourfold Refuge Mantra one-hundred thousand times, and cultivate the Vajrasattva Practice until attaining spiritual union.

“Spiritual union” means that the mind becomes one with Vajrasattva.

Vajrayana cultivation must be done in stages, one gradual step at a time. There are no shortcuts. Before engaging in a higher level practice, one must first receive the empowerment from the Root Guru or an acharya.

For every practice, the cultivator must first reach spiritual union before proceeding to the next level.

There is a saying in Vajrayana:

“If you attain spiritual union in one practice, then you will attain spiritual union in all practices.”

Also:

“Master one practice, and you will master all practices.”

Therefore, we should not look down upon the Four Preliminaries. To put it simply, if you do not attain spiritual union in the Four Preliminaries, then it will not be easy to attain spiritual union in the other practices. On the other hand, if you have attained spiritual union in the Four Preliminaries, then it will be easy to attain spiritual union in the other practices.

It is true that there are both basic and profound Vajrayana teachings. The basic ones are like superficial vibrations, while the profound ones are

like vibrations that occur deep within. This idea is very similar to the teachings of the Consciousness-Only School. On the surface, there is the consciousness of eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. Then there are also the deeper consciousness of Manas, Alaya, and Amala.

The content and domain covered by Vajrayana practices are extensive and wide-reaching. The thought processes one has when engaging in the external activities of a sadhana also affect the inner consciousness.

It is true that the consciousness hidden deep inside is important. However, that which takes place on the outside is just as significant. It can thus be said that the internal and external are the same; they are linked together and are inseparable.

The Great Homage, Mandala Offering, Fourfold Refuge, and Vajrasattva Practice are combined in a subtle, yet perfect manner, to help one reach a deeper dimension in one's consciousness during the preliminary practices. From there it develops and multiplies, and upon attaining spiritual union in one practice following another, you will enter into the midst of supreme Buddha wisdom.

The Four Preliminaries are not trivial. The Vajrasattva Practice and the Hundred Syllable Mantra (also called the Vajrasattva Mantra) are among the most important teachings of Vajrayana. The Hundred Syllable Mantra is equal to the *Heart Sutra*. The principal deity of the Vajrasattva Practice is Vajrapani Bodhisattva, also known as Vajrasattva, the founder of Vajrayana Buddhism. He is the Prince of Dharma who represents the power of the Five Dhyani Buddhas of Vajrayana. Achieving spiritual union with the Vajrasattva Practice will provide continuous realizations and lead to the deepest spiritual union and ultimate enlightenment.

“Only by engaging in actual practice can one progress to profundity.”

“One drop of water is equal to an entire ocean.”

“One grain of sand is equal to an entire mountain.”

To put it another way, the Four Preliminaries

are like the foundations of a vajra pagoda. If the foundation is not solid, then no vajra pagoda can exist. By emphasizing the Four Preliminaries, Vajrayana practitioners will eventually build up their vajra pagoda.

In cultivating Vajrayana practices: do not seek shortcuts, do not practice in a disorderly way, and do not jump or skip stages.

Practice diligently and steadfastly and one day you will attain spiritual union.

This is how all great adepts have practiced.

The Levels of Mahamudra

From Living Buddha Lian-sheng's book 55:

The Mahamudra Guide Book

Translated by Jack Liu

Edited by Janny Chow

Proofread by Renée Cordsen, Jackie Ho

In Vajrayana Buddhism, the highest level of teaching in the Kagyu Sect is Mahamudra. However, before starting the practice of Mahamudra, one must have accomplished a solid foundation with the initial level teachings. Within Tibetan Buddhism, disciples are sometimes first required to study the Sutric teachings for twelve years before they are considered to be qualified to study Tantra. Mahamudra is the highest level of teaching within the Kagyu Sect. People must follow the levels step by step in order to avoid pitfalls.

I believe people who want to practice Vajrayana need to first seek refuge in a vajra acharya to receive the lineage transmission. The lineage of all my students comes from the Grand Master of Ling Xian True Buddha School. After receiving this lineage transmission, students may start practicing Vajrayana. In the future, more than two hundred vajra acharyas and living Buddhas will emerge from my lineage.

Before practicing Mahamudra, students need

to first practice the Four Preliminaries. The Four Preliminaries provide the foundation for all subsequent practices, just like the foundation of a building, and they include:

1. Fourfold Refuge
2. Mandala Offering
3. Great Homage
4. Vajrasattva Practice

In *The Art of Meditation*, I explained how to practice the Four Preliminaries. Beginners may follow this book and cultivate each practice one at a time, or all four practices at once, depending on how much time is available.

Some people ask me how long students need to practice the Four Preliminaries for.

My response is this:

As with any teaching, as soon as one attains spiritual union one may move on to the next level. Some masters strictly mandate that one must practice one-hundred thousand or two-hundred thousand times. This is just a general guideline because every individual is different. For someone who has a profound level of comprehension, once spiritual union is reached, one can proceed to the next level. One does not have to strictly follow a set number of practices.

Therefore, I say:

The time spent on each practice and the time needed to cultivate each level are flexible. Some people have practiced two-hundred thousand times but still have not attained spiritual union. In this case, one must continue to practice until spiritual union is reached.

The Dharma Power of the Four Preliminaries

From Living Buddha Lian-sheng's book 167:

Listening to the Inner Voice

Translated by Jack Liu



Edited by Jason Yu, Janny Chow
Proofread by Renée Cordsen, Jackie Ho

I always say, “The Four Preliminaries are very important.”

Some disciples are doubtful and say:

“The Four Preliminaries are elementary. Why are they so important?”

Please listen carefully to my inner voice:

“If there is no foundation, then it will be impossible to build any higher. Hence, they are critical.”

Their importance is this:

- Great Homage - Overcomes our arrogance.
- Fourfold Refuge - Brings forth Bodhicitta and eliminates negative karma.
- Mandala Offering - Accumulates merit.
- Vajrasattva Practice - Repents and purifies karmic transgressions.

Any Vajrayana teachings such as the Root Guru Yoga, Personal Deity Yoga, Dharma Protector Practices, Highest Yoga Tantra, Great Perfection, Mahamudra, Lamdre, or Yamantaka Practices are all based on the Four Preliminaries.

One thing all disciples need to remember is this:

“Practicing with a sincere and diligent heart will lead to enlightenment.”

The original name of the *Great Sun Sutra* is “*Sutra of Mahavairocana’s Buddhahood through Magical Transformation.*” The essential point of this sutra is that magical transformations occur and lead one to enlightenment.

When disciples of Vajrayana follow the Four Preliminaries, it will result in the purification of body, speech, and mind. When the sentient beings’ three conditions (action, word, and thought) are identical to the Three Secrets (body, speech, and mind) of the Tathagata, there will be union and the two will be inseparable. Magical transformations will occur and enlightenment will be realized.

The most inconceivable thing about Vajrayana is this: there is no difference between the dharmakaya of the Buddha and sentient beings. This is an

extremely vital secret.

The Great Homage is the purification of body, the Fourfold Refuge is the purification of speech, and the Vajrasattva Practice is the purification of mind. Is this not true?

When the three purifications are attained, it is tantamount to receiving “magical transformation blessings” from the buddhas. With their empowerment, one’s mind will become expansive and whole. The great unhindered compassion will emerge, and one will be liberated from suffering and experience an increase in one’s lifespan. After arriving at the goal of one’s cultivation, one will attain mastery over life and death, and quickly transcend to the higher realm.

Vajrayana mantras are “able to uphold good” and “able to block evil.” Therefore, they are “dharanis.”

The Four Preliminaries are the essential Vajrayana teachings. A solid foundation in addition to diligent practice, will enable disciples to quickly transcend to a higher realm. With the blessings from the buddhas and by magical transformations, one will finally become a Buddha. If the Four Preliminaries are not important, then which practices are?

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:

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Address of True Buddha Foundation:

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Address of True Buddha School Temple in Redmond:

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www.tbts.org (True Buddha Translation Teams Website)

www.usdaden.com (US Daden Culture Website)

www.dadencharity.org (Daden Book Charity)

TRUE BUDDHA TRANSLATION TEAMS (TBTTs)

True Buddha Translation Teams (TBTTs) was formed in 2008. We are a group of volunteers operating under the True Buddha Foundation (TBF) of True Buddha School (TBS).

Our mission is to propagate the Dharma teachings of His Holiness Living Buddha Lian-sheng to every corner of the world with accurate, fluent, and profound translations in multiple languages, so that everyone can practice and attain enlightenment.

Our goal is to continually translate and publish Living Buddha Lian-sheng's books, Dharma talks, and articles, as well as booklets that introduce TBS and provide basic knowledge about Buddhism. We hope to engage our readers and bring them closer to Living Buddha Lian-sheng, his Dharma teachings and TBS.

US DADEN CULTURE (USDD)

US Daden Culture brings Living Buddha Lian-sheng's esoteric dharmateachings to the English speaking world through the publication of his translated books which have attracted millions of readers worldwide.

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