

## **Instructions for 1<sup>st</sup> ngondro (or preliminary practice)**

### **Taking refuge and generating bodhicitta**

These are instructions from Geshe Pema Tshering.

They are instructions over 4 different days:

02062016. Additional explanations in 12062015 & 02202016 & 05212016.

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#### **02062016**

There are some students trying to accumulate 100,000 of the practices. So I'll will spend some time discussing this.

So there is this Indian Master known as Vasu-bandhu who composed a text called Treasury of Knowledge or Abhidharma(kasa). In the opening stanzas, he asked the question why do sentient beings, living beings, wander in cyclic existence? Is it because they enjoy doing so? The answer is they lack the wisdom discerning the dharma. Otherwise, they do not know what they should do, not do, what's (in)appropriate. As a result, they experience various kinds of sufferings and difficulties in samsara. Due to being devoid of wisdom, they continue to circle in cyclic existence without the means for obtaining liberation. For that reason, the Buddha taught the dharma, so they can develop their wisdom and apply antidotes and attain liberation.

This wisdom discerning Dharma, discerning phenomena isn't something that you either have or don't have. It's not the case some are born with it, and others aren't, and they'll never have it. It's not destined like some people have this view with respect to karma. It's my karma to have it, that's it; if I don't have the karma, there's nothing to do about it.

Right so, this kind of wisdom discerning phenomenon is something that can be developed through investigative analysis. In other words, you have to check how to things exist? You have to analyze the mode of existence or phenomena. The more you check, the clearer your mind becomes. The more you can understand how things exist in reality. Corresponding, ignorance will be reduced. Obscurations will be reduced.

To give you an example, if you think about young person around 10 years. If a youngish person doesn't try to learn, investigate how things exist, doesn't try to acquire new skills, then this person will remain ignorant. However, if this person engages in study and learning, then they will improve. We're not saying overnight, they'll be knowledgeable about everything, but day after day after day, they will be able to increase their knowledge, acquire more and more skills. Just think about children who go to school. They learn many things over time. It's not like they just read one book and they learn everything. It's the process of accumulation over time. There are differences in intellect. But in any case, everyone can increase knowledge by learning. If one tries to acquire new skills, one will see a corresponding improvement.

In the Dharma centres, we're trying to acquire good qualities. These good qualities are somewhat different. If you want to acquire a particular good quality, it's not the case you simply work on this good quality alone and do nothing else. Dharma practice needs to be done on the basis of accumulating merit and purifying negativities. For this reason, these preliminary practices (ngondro) are very important.

Now take the example of Lama Tsongkhapa. In general, he has always been very knowledgeable even from a young age. He exhibited exceptional wisdom. But still, he went to Central Tibet where he was able to perceive Manjushri and was able to receive teachings from Manjushri directly. Manjushri gave him teachings regarding the profound view, emptiness. These explanations were difficult. Lama Tsongkhapa reported to Manjushri he couldn't understand. Manjushri then advised him he should study more the great texts and on top of that, he needed to accumulate more merit and to undertake more purification practices, such as doing 100,000 mandala offerings, 100,000 prostrations and so on. Manjushri told him if he's able to follow his advice, he'd be able to realize emptiness quickly. So from this story, you can understand the importance of accumulating merit and purifying negativities. For us, who engage in the study of the Dharma, such practice is very important. We need to engage in accumulation of merit and purification of negativities to help us understand and achieve peace of mind.

Lama Tsongkhapa then went to the mountains to practice this advice of Manjushri. He took 8 disciples. They went to these rock caves (ogacholing???) and undertook extensive practices for accumulating merit and purifying negativities. He made 100,000 prostrations to each of the 35 buddhas in the confession practice and offered many mandalas and so on. Eventually, he was able to realize emptiness. You may be thinking, these things happen to people in the past, not people in modern times anymore. This is not the case. My own brother, he told me the effectiveness of purification practices and practices for accumulating merit. He said when he used to read a text, he used to find it so difficult. But after engaging in accumulation of merit and purification of negativities, when he read the text again, it was much easier. It wasn't as though he understood the text completely. But he found it much easier than before he undertook those practices. So the practices are very important.

There are four main preliminary practices, ngondro. The first one is the door for entering the Buddhist teachings. Refuge. The door for entering the Mahayana teachings, that is bodhicitta or the mind of enlightenment. These are counted as 1: refuge and bodhicitta.

The second preliminary practice is said to be the door for receiving blessings and that refers to Guru yoga, the teacher gives special blessings.

The third is the door for confessing misdeeds. The door of confessing misdeeds and purifying them. This can be done either through reciting the 100 syllable vajrasattva mantra or making prostrations to the 35 Buddhas in the confession practice, so you accumulate 100,000 of these practices, either one.

The fourth preliminary practice is the door for accumulating merit. This refers to the practice of offering mandalas.

Here, I will describe how you do this. First you visualize the merit field. This is the object to whom you go for refuge. If you want to visualize the merit field in elaborate way, you have to visualize a huge lotus flower with 6 levels of petals. In the centre of this lotus flower is a big throne. Seated on this big throne is the figure of Buddha Shakyamuni. He's the nature of your guru. But he appears as Buddha Shakyamuni.

You have to think on the first level of the petals surrounding the root guru are all the lineage gurus. The gurus the teachers from whom the teachings had been transmitted. You can think about the Indian scholars, the Indian gurus. So you have to think there are arranged in a circle on the first level of the lotus petals.

Now on the second level of these lotus petals you visualize the various deities. There are many many deities. You may not be able to visualize them in great detail with hands and so on. But just think all of them are there, on the second level of petals.

Third level: all the Buddhas are there. E.g. the 8 medicine Buddhas. The Lords of the 3 families, Vajrapani, (one), Manjushri. In case you can't think of them individually, just think all the Buddhas are there in a circle on the third level.

Fourth: the Bodhisattva Aryas, the Bodhisattvas who've achieved the grounds, the solitary realizers, etc.

Fifth: visualize the heroes and the dakinis of the 24 places. Think they are all in a circle on the fifth level.

Sixth: think that there are these Dharma protectors. If there's a Dharma protector on whom you usually rely, you can think this one is in front of the merit field and you can visualize the other Dharma protectors surrounding in a circle on the 6<sup>th</sup> level of the lotus petals.

Where is this merit field located? If you are sitting, you look straight ahead, you see the bottom of this huge lotus. If you raise your head slightly, you will see the remaining part of the lotus in the space in front of you.

After you have visualized this merit field, you have to visualize other beings. So visualize sitting in front of you, the people you can't get along with in this life, your so called enemies. On the right, you have your father. Your left, your mother. All living beings are there surrounding you.

I forgot to say: Setting the motivation: we should adjust our motivation when we begin the practice. We start by thinking, today, I sit on this cushion. Many years of my life have already passed. If I reflect on how these past years have gone, I'll see I haven't performed vast activities to benefit others. This is really a shame. So now I'm going to generate an altruistic motivation. I'm not doing this practice just for myself, but for the sake of all living beings. In the presence of the merit field, I'm going to do this. And then you start by visualizing the merit field.

Of course, if you've done well in the years that have passed. You can think: in the past years, I've actually done many recitations, prayers, practices, you know, many practices to benefit others. I've done well. So I've done well and let me do more, better. That can also be a thought you have.

Depending on the situation, you may find yourself in an unfavourable frame of mind when doing this. You may be busy at work, getting angry at a colleague. If you find yourself in this state, you have to do something to eliminate this kind of anger, to adjust the winds in the body.

Now if you find yourself in any kind of disturbed mind, then there is this breathing practice that you can do that takes place in 9 rounds. It can be done if you find yourself distracted and disturbed. The way as described in some texts. First, do 3 times, breathing, breathe in from your right nostril. Use your finger to press and block your left nostril. When you breathe from your left, you block your right to prevent the air from there. Breathe in, imagine receive all blessings of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. When breathe out from left, imagine expelling afflictions from mind: 3 poisons have been expelled. You repeat 3 times. Then switch to do the next 3. This time, you breathe in from the left, then breathe out through the right. That's the second set of 3 breaths. Then finally, in the last three, you breathe in from both nostrils and breathe out through both. When you do this 9 times of breathing, your mind will accompany your breath. Every time, I breathe in, I receive blessings of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas from the 10 directions. Think when I breathe out, afflictions expel. When you engage in this kind of reflection, you stop your mind from dwelling in the distraction, this anger, affliction, whatever it is. This is what you have to do to make your mind free from disturbance. After that, you begin the visualization of the merit field and so on.

That's the practice you should do when your mind is disturbed. But if it's not, you don't have to take time to do it. So, moving onto this visualization we've described earlier on, this merit field. In case you find this unclear, the central figure, and 6 levels, so on. If you find it a bit too complex, you can simplify by visualizing in the same location, Shakyamuni Buddha, who's in the nature of your root Guru (teacher) but he looks like Buddha Shakyamuni. The figures we've spoken about just imagine they (the figures in the 6 levels) are all surrounding the central figure. One big crowd.

So now you've done all these practices and visualized the merit field. Then you can recite the refuge prayer. This refuge prayer is the usual refuge and bodhicitta prayer. This can be recited in Tibetan because there might be some blessings from reciting the Tibetan. The reason is it was composed by this great master Atisha. Because of his special qualities, it's possible if you recite in Tibetan you may receive more blessings. But you can also recite in your own language so you understand it. That may also carry special significance. Fine if you do it. Effect may be same.

There's something I need to say to supplement the explanations given previously. When you visualize the merit field, you can also visualize the texts the individuals are teaching. E.g. in front of the Buddha, you can visualize a table or some kind of platform where the sutras of the Buddha are displayed. E.g. in the Tibetan language, the Buddha's words have been translated into scriptures amounting to over 100 volumes. You can imagine in front of this table in front of

the Buddha the texts are displayed. You should think these are not like paper books, made of material paper. Rather, they are the nature of LIGHT. This applies to all the other figures. You have your own teachers. They are teaching you particular subjects. In front of the teacher or guru, there's a table or platform where that text is displayed. You can think the same goes for the other figures, the bodhisattvas, the corresponding texts.

The most important thing in this practice is the VISUALIZATION while you recite the refuge formula. The language in which you recite the refuge formula isn't so crucial. If you can say the Tibetan, perhaps you get greater blessings. If you do it in your own language, perhaps there isn't too much difference. In any case, what matters is the visualization while you do the refuge formula.

You should think that due to your sincere request to the refuge objects, with strong faith and conviction, they are really pleased with you. You can visualize they all smile and you visualize first of all, white nectar flowing from them into your body. This white nectar is actually in the nature of the excellent qualities of their body. You think the negativities and obscurations are purified just like you have a very strong stream of water that is able to carry away dust, dirt and so on. This strong stream then enters your body and pushes out the negativities, obscurations through the soles of your feet, and the nectar itself absorbs into your body. You think I've attained the excellent qualities of BODY. This is the first part of the visualization.

When you think you have attained the blessings of the body, you should think my body has transformed, so it's not like my old body. Rather, it's transformed to the nature of LIGHT.

Next part of visualization. Due to the force of your single pointed faith and respect, the red nectar then flows from the figures in the merit field into your body. Think this red nectar is actually in the nature of the excellent qualities of their SPEECH. It appears like red nectar. This red coloured nectar enters your body think it fills your body. Here, it's like liquid filling a glass bottle. If there's dust in the bottle, the dust will float to the surface of the water. If you keep filling this bottle, this dust will rise to the top and if you continue filling, it will overflow and the dust will then be carried away by the water that flows out. So think this red nectar fills up your body in the same way. So any negativities of your speech rise to the surface and when this nectar overflows, it's expelled from your body. In that way, you think I've purified the negativities, obscurations of my speech, and through my red nectar, I've obtained all the blessings of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and my speech is different.

For the third part of the visualization, you visualize blue light. Due to your faith and respect in the objects of refuge, blue light, better to think of it as light than nectar, comes to your HEART. Here, think this blue light is in the nature of the excellent qualities of MIND of these refuge objects. But it has appearance of blue light. Then you visualize at your heart is this glob of darkness. It represents your mental obscurations, the difficulties you experience when you are studying. It's this dark glob at the centre of your chest. You think this blue light comes from the merit field and strikes at this glob of darkness in the centre of your chest. The darkness is immediately dispelled. Just like you're in a dark place, light dispels darkness. Think it dispels ignorance, mental suffering and so on. Through this absorption of the blue light, you obtain

blessings of mind of all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Think I've acquired all the excellent qualities of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

Now so once you've decided to begin the accumulation of 100,000, then you have to do so in a way that's uninterrupted. You can't take a break of a day and stop reciting and continue the next day. You have to do it without interruption in order for it to contribute to the final count of 100,000 recitations. You have to be realistic about the numbers you do daily. E.g. in the first session, you should not try to do too many like thousands because you have to maintain at least that number. If you do thousands that day, and if you're busy or sick the next day, you'll be stuck because you have to maintain the same number every day. You have to maintain at least that number every day. You'll struggle to try to maintain that count.

After you've performed the number of refuge formulas you aim to do that day or session, you should do dedication. Dedication prayers are important. If you have some text, where the dedication you can just recite that. If you don't have any text to do a formal recitation, the thing is MENTALLY, directing the virtue, not just for me so you recover from a sickness or long life. You need to think of all living beings. By this virtue I've created, may all living beings benefit and receive wellbeing and receive Buddhahood and you should think if you have some set prayer, you can read from a book or some kind of prayer and recite that prayer as well.

So it's said that there are 2 important activities. One at the beginning and one at the end. These are the 2 most important things to note. At beginning, you need to have good motivation. At the end, you need to have a good dedication. Why important good motivation at the beginning? Motivation is like a vessel for keeping food. If you have a bad vessel, no matter how good the food is, the food will be wasted. The vessel will be dirty, it'll become poisonous. You can't enjoy the good food put into this vessel. For example, you put very good food into the dirty vessel, you won't feel easy eating it. Or the vessel contains poison, you'll kill yourself eating that food. If we have a bad motivation, a perverse motivation for initiating an activity, that's like having a poisonous vessel for putting food. A good motivation is very important.

So at the end, dedication is very important. Now dedication is like a lock, like you have a house. You have a lock to the door of the house. If you have something really valuable and you leave it in a house, you want to ensure you lock the door of the house. If you don't, a thief may come in and steal your valuables. You'll lose your valuables. Dedication is like the lock to the house. Because if you don't dedicate your virtues properly, there's a danger if you get angry, your virtues will go away. When you dedicate your virtues properly, you're like locking your virtue until you need to use it. It's sitting there safe.

That completes my explanation. If something not clear, let's take questions.

Question 1: Clarify when you said we need to maintain the same number each day, does this mean if I do 100 today, I need to do at least 100 tomorrow to keep the count contributing toward 100,000? I.e. if I do say 99 tomorrow, I need to start recounting from 0?

Answer 1: the deciding number is the number on the FIRST DAY. If you do 10 on the first day, you have to do at least 10. If you don't make any commitment to accumulate a certain number, it doesn't matter.

Question 2: What if you can't remember the number you did on the first day?

Answer 2: Try to do more, not less.

Question 3: Do you need to do minimum 10 a day?

Answer 3: From Question 1, the minimum number is the number you did on the first day.

Question 4: Are you supposed to visualize body, speech, mind 10 minutes each or 10 minutes each for white, red, blue?

Answer 4: Not necessary. Possible you do a whole session white nectar. Also, within a session, you can do all 3. The time doesn't need to be equally divided. You can do a longer period for the white nectar, a shorter period and just a short while for the blue light in the same session. Timing isn't so important.

Question 5: Are the white nectar, red nectar, and blue light supposed to enter my body through the Crown, throat, and heart respectively?

Answer 5: yes, you can visualize white entering Crown, red entering from throat, and blue light striking at the heart. These three parts don't have to be divided equally in terms of time. Say one is physically unwell, one can visualize more of the white nectar to purify the negativities of the body. If one has intense mental suffering, one can spend more time visualizing the blue light striking one's heart. Think the sufferings and obscurations of living beings around you purified, the living beings sick like me, as I visualize it purifying me, I visualize it purifying their sicknesses. You can be flexible. So if you are suffering physically more than mentally, you can spend more time doing the white nectar visualization. It would be more beneficial that way.

Question 6: At the close of each session, are you supposed to visualize a lotus seat at your heart, Shakyamuni Buddha entering from your Crown and sitting on the lotus, and the lotus closing?

Answer 6: Yes, you have to conclude the session in that way. Just now, I haven't had the time to absorb the merit field. After you've done all your recitations, at the end of session, you absorb the merit field. You visualize they absorb from the edges to the centre and then you're left with the central figure of the Buddha. You then think this figure of the Buddha comes to the Crown of your head. At it comes to the Crown of the head, it turns to face the front so when it reaches

the top of your head, then you visualize the lotus and the throne vanishing, and then just the Buddha figure facing the same direction as you, on top of your head, and it comes to your heart, where there's this open lotus flower. He becomes seated. The lotus petals then close up. Then next session you visualize the merit field as before.

Question: Geshela says there may be special effects from reciting in Tibetan. Is that because of the sound? So if you recite it wrongly, is there demerit?

Answer: the reason why Geshela says for this particular prayer, you might receive greater blessings if you recite Tibetan, the reason is this particular formula was spoken in Tibetan. Master Atisha taught it in Tibetan. You get the exact thing. When it's been translated into English, the meaning may be accurate but the order of the words, syntax, may be different. The sounds are different. For this particular stanza, perhaps it's better to recite in Tibetan.

Let's say you don't recite it exactly, maybe make some mistakes, you make the incorrect pronunciations. You won't create demerit. But it's less powerful.

Question: when you recite, does it matter how quickly you say it? Sometimes when you say it quickly, it seems like you're mindlessly saying it?

Answer: you can recite it quickly if you want, but you must make sure the words are complete, not like you're skipping the words or swallowing certain sounds. You have to make sure every word is recited.

**12062015**

Question 2: Clarifying questions re Taking Refuge

Answer: Yes, can recite in English. What matters is visualization, what you do in your mind.

You don't have to visualize a separate Guru in front of the Buddha. Visualize the Buddha and think the Guru has the aspects of the Buddha.

From where you sit, you visualize the Buddha is at the level higher than you and so if you raise your head slightly, it is at the level of your eyebrows the midpoint. Think the Buddha is at your level. Think the Buddha is facing you. When you do the absorption, make request, think the Buddha comes to your Crown and by then, he should be turned to face the same

So it's really rays, from the Buddha's Crown, throat, and heart to mine as white, red, and blue light.

There are 2 ways to visualize this purifying process. First, from Crown of the Buddha, white nectar comes to your Crown. It has a physical appearance of nectar but its nature is the excellent qualities of the Buddha. Think by this nectar striking you, all the negativities are purified, all obscurations are purified. You can think the negativities of desirable activities are purified just by striking you or entering you. Or you can think they are flushed out through the soles of your feet. You shouldn't think the nectar is flushed out. The nectar fills your body and it's the negativities that are flushed out. Moving on to the speech, the red nectar comes to you but has the excellent qualities of the Buddha's speech and purifies your misdeeds of speech. Think flush or just by strike, they get purified. Similarly, with the mind, this blue nectar comes, having excellent qualities of the Buddha's speech, and by striking the heart's area, having all negative karma of mind, all gone or flushed through soles of feet.

If one is afflicted by harms by (non)humans, and one's unwell, one can think those harms take the form of unattractive beings like snakes, scorpions and they leave the pores of your body. In particular, if you are specifically trying to purify sickness, you just need to visualize white nectar. You don't have to do the other types of nectar. This is a kind of action called the pacifying activity.

After you performed, you think the nectar fills your whole body and your body experiences bliss and you're pervaded by bliss. At the end of the session, you think all the beings around you have come under the care of the 3 jewels and have taken refuge.

You can visualize the om, ah, hung, but it's not so crucial.

Before you recite, you set intention. Visualize merit field.

When visualize Buddha dissolve into heart? Let's say you've visualized the elaborate merit field. When doing the 1<sup>st</sup> of the 3 recitations, visualize they absorb into the central figure of the Buddha. Second, visualize it comes to your Crown. Third, it absorbs into you.

Sufficient dedicate 4 lines. Main thing is meaning. Reflect on the meaning of the dedication. So not with a selfish dedication: reputation, gain, and so on. You should not be thinking of only the people you are attached to: your family, friends. You should think of all living beings. Finally, you should have this thought of attaining Buddhahood for all beings.

If you don't recite any of the words, but you bear in mind these points, that's a good dedication.

His explanation was given in the context of a retreat. To accumulate 100,000. To be counted as a retreat, you need to recite a certain number daily without interruption. You don't break the continuity. Ge she la's advice is when start on retreat, don't start with too many recitations. You don't start with 1000 on the first day, then the next day you are very busy, and you recite just 100, that's not permitted in a retreat.

**02202016**

About the ngondro (the first ngondro – taking refuge and generating bodhicitta)

Question 1: number one says taking common refuge, and number two says taking uncommon refuge. What's the difference?

So there are two ways of talking about common and uncommon refuge. E.g. from the sutra vehicle, common refuge would be Hinayana refuge, or refuge of the individual vehicle, whereas uncommon refuge would be the Mahayana refuge, or universal vehicle. Within the sutra context, Hinayana refuge is common, Mahayana is uncommon. But if you expand to tantra, the refuge in the sutra vehicle would be common refuge, whereas the refuge in the tantric refuge would be uncommon refuge.

So Geshela is aware you're accumulating these refuge for your practice. So in the context of reciting this refuge formula, first of all, you talk about going for refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha in the first two lines. Next 2 lines are to attain Buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings. We can interpret the first 2 lines as common refuge. This act of going for refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha is in the Hinayana and Mahayana. Whether personal liberation or full enlightenment, you go for common refuge. In the next 2 lines, you talk about going for enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings. If you're going for refuge motivated by that thought, then that makes your refuge uncommon.

In the first 2 lines, you say I go for refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha until I attain enlightenment, the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are identified as the objects of your refuge. You're committing to go for refuge to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha until enlightenment. There are 3 types.

First is hearer. Sravaka. This is Hinayana. Second is the solitary realizer's enlightenment or Pratyeka Buddha's enlightenment. If you want enlightenment, you want the Mahayana of the Great Vehicle. This is accompanied by bodhicitta, so you can benefit all sentient beings. This is what makes your refuge Mahayana.

The other type of explanation takes place in the context of tantra. In the wider context of tantra, the refuge you perform in the sutra vehicle would be common refuge. Uncommon refuge would be refuge in tantra. In this context, the merit field is different. So you'd have to visualize the tantric mandalas for the deities. You'd have to bring to mind the supporting mandala and you go for refuge. At this point in time, there's maybe not so much need to explain in detail what this means.

Question 2: I was told not to rock from side to side, forward and backward, i.e. sway when chanting. Is that true?

Answer: I myself think there's not a big problem with swaying when you're reciting. Some people sway from left to right, or front to back and so on. However, it shouldn't be a sign of disrespect. Ideally, you're up right. You shouldn't be lying down, doing your recitations.

Because you're visualizing objects of refuge. If you're lying down, there's a risk you may be showing disrespect. Personally, I don't think it's such a big fault.

It may be difficult for us to sit straight all the time when reciting. We may get pain in the spine, waist. So it's important for you to do it in a way that makes you feel comfortable physically. If you're exhausted from work, you can lean back on your sofa and do your recitations. If you're tired, there's no fault. But if you're just flippant, that's not good.

Question 3: Verses 5, 6, 7 talks about prostrating to the middle way. Am I supposed to that when reciting that?

It's not necessary for you to stand up and do prostrations at this point, because there are 3 types of prostrations – of body, speech, and mind. The fact you're reciting these verses of prostration are itself prostration of speech. Prostration of mind means you're reflecting on the meaning of what you're reciting, and you're bringing to mind what you're reciting. If you're able to e.g. generate this kind of confidence and respect, then that's mental prostration. There are these phrases that are found in several of these great texts. In Nagarjuna's "Fundamental Wisdom", there's praise for Buddha teaching dependent arising, free from production, cessation, and so on, that's one of the three praises. There's a second praise from Maitreya's Ornament of clear realization. It says I prostrate to the hearers, solitary realizers, Buddhas, and so on. There's a praise from Dharmakirti's Commentary on the "Compendium on valid cognition". If you know, you generate the sense of confidence and respect. But there's a way to do the body prostrations without having to physically do them. You can put your palms together and bend forward, as if bowing. So that would constitute a prostration as well.

In the first praise I mentioned, this expression of worship, you're probably referring to stanzas 5, 6, 7, there's a expression of worship by Nagarjuna on the Treatise to Middle Way. He says many teachers have come, but your teaching, Buddha, is really extraordinary. It's different from what others have taught. You taught dependent arising that's free from the 8 kinds of phenomena, such as cessation, production, and so on. So the author is expressing his admiration for the Buddha. So be reciting that, you're generating respect for the Buddha.

The next stanza of prostration is actually the expression of worship from the Ornament of clear realization. Here, prostration is made to the mothers, and this then is a reference to the three exalted knowers. Three exalted consciousness: knower of bases, knower of paths, and exalted knower of all aspects. The third is found in the Buddha, Arya being. Admiration is expressed for the continuum of the hearer Arya beings, the solitary realizer beings, and the Mahayana Aryas. Prostration is made to these excellent qualities, or what are called the mothers.

The third stanza of prostration is an expression of worship for the Buddha's body, speech, and mind. In terms of the Buddha's mind, he has attained realizations, such that he's completely free from karma and afflictions. While ordinary beings like us are bound by karma and afflictions, he's free. In terms of his body, he has a profound and vast body. He's attained this view realizing emptiness and true cessation, free from the two types of obscurations. His speech is

like the sunlight that's able to dispel darkness, because if somebody practices the teachings taught by the Buddha and practices accordingly, they're able to eliminate ignorance in their mental continuum. Anyone who practices the Buddha's teachings has that ability. While you recite on these stanzas, remember the meaning, reflect upon the meaning, the mental prostrations, verbally, you're reciting, and you're doing so respectfully with your body bowed, palms folded, that's body prostrations, so all 3 types of prostrations are complete.

**05212016**

### **Ngondro – Preliminary practice – First one = Taking refuge and generating bodhicitta**

Let's stop the text. I'd like to talk about how to do the refuge – 100,000. In general, it's a very excellent practice to do. Not easily to accumulate it of the refuge prayer. But it's good to accumulate merit. If you want to start the practice today, it's very good. How do you do? What's most important is the visualization of the merit field. Then you have to visualize the descending nectar, light and so on. That purifies negativities and so on, on top of that, there's the recitation where you repeat the refuge prayer and so on.

You know what you're supposed to recite. It's important for you to pay attention to the merit field and visualizing nectar and light descending.

2 main methods to visualize merit field. First way is visualize many figures. Centre is Buddha Shakyamuni, but think of them as a living being. but don't think there's this Buddha who's a solid statue. Think of as a living being. central figure is encircled by many other figures. First is various Gurus and then after that, on the outside you have all the deities. On the outside, the Buddhas, and after that, the Bodhisattvas, the Dakinis and Protectors. So this way you should visualize a central figure encircled by various figures.

Second is simpler. Just visualize Buddha Shakyamuni and he encompasses all the objects of refuge – all the other figures of refuge. So it's complete.

Begin by visualizing this merit field in front of you. The level is such that when you look straight ahead, the throne is kind of at your eye level. That way, you should visualize the level of this merit field. And then as you recite the refuge formula, you should visualize light is emitted from the heart of the Buddha. It comes in the form of a pipe or tube and then this pipe or tube then comes to the crown of your head. Through this tube of light / pipe, you receive all the blessings of the enlightened body. It washes away all sicknesses, misdeeds associated with the body. Your body becomes completely transparent and clear.

First visualization is purify all negativities of body. Think this light from Buddha is white and flushes out sickness and negativity of body. Second is receive blessings of speech from Buddha. Think from Buddha's throat, pipe of red light comes to your own throat, this tube of red light your entire body is filled with the blessings of enlightened speech. This red light is a bit like red fluid that fills your body all the way to the crown of your head. All your negativities of speech, obscurations with respect to speech are completely washed away.

Third visualization. Receiving blessings of mind. This time from heart of Buddha, tube of blue light comes to your heart. This blue light then dispels all darkness of ignorance, mental obscurations and so on. In the same way if dark room, bring on light, then the darkness is dispelled. Same way this light from Buddha completely dispels all darkness of ignorance, destroys your mental obscurations. If we explain this extensively, we'll run out of time. That's the visualization to do when you do refuge prayers. If we have time we can recite one or two later.

When you start on the first day, track how many you do. Subsequently, you should make sure you recite more than this initial number. Not fewer than the first day's count. Gradually, you'll be able to hit the 100,000 mark.

Do so in an unbroken way. Can't break for a single day. Must do something every day. Say you start with 10 or 25. You need to maintain that at least on a daily basis. You can do one session or 2 sessions but you need to do so so you can maintain it on a daily basis. If you e.g. suffer from kind of physical ailment, then you can emphasize visualization of blessing from body over the other kinds of visualization. You should do so until you accumulate.

Similarly if you experience mental suffering you can emphasize visualization of receiving blessings of enlightened mind. After you've performed all your recitations of the session you need to absorb the merit field you've visualized. If in the beginning you visualized the extensive merit field, think those figures and thrones absorb toward the Buddha and his throne, respectively, so you only end up with 1 figure on 1 throne. Then you can think this throne and the Buddha comes to you. Then stops at your Crown. The throne transforms into a lotus and the Buddha turns to face the same direction as you face. They absorb into you and arrive at your heart, centre of your chest. You can think the lotus flower then closes. The Buddha's seated in there and the lotus is completely radiant.

In certain instructions they also say there's a heavy Vajra placed on top of this closed lotus. Whether or not that's necessary I'm not sure but you can visualize it.

This lotus is very bright and then you can think there's a celestial mansion of a deity there.

So what do you do on the second day? You can visualize the same before, but remember there's this Buddha at the lotus at your heart. After you've visualized the merit field in front of you, think the Buddha emerges and absorbs into the Buddha you've visualized in front of you. Rest of procedures are same.

Whenever you eat food, drink tea, think you offer all of it to the Buddha who's dwelling in your heart. In that way, your activities of eating and drinking won't incur negativities and they'll enable you to create virtue.

If you find yourself in a situation where you feel tempted to create a negative serious action, you think there's a Buddha abiding in my heart. That kind of mindfulness can prevent you from engaging in any negative action. So that's all today.