

## CHAPTER 4

# THE VAJRASATTVA MEDITATION WHICH PURIFIES ERRORS AND OBSCURATIONS

BY

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*This text was written some forty years ago by Chimed Rigdzin Lama Rinpoche while he was living in Bengal, India. As with other texts in this volume it deals with the relation between fantasy and actuality. Actuality, in this definition, is not the world we believe we encounter. In fact it is the given, that which endures when the constructs of imagination are no longer promoted. In contrast, the world of our ordinary experience with its hopes and fears, and ceaseless conceptual organisation, is a deluding fantasy arising from ignorance of the primordial ground.*

*All phenomena arise in interdependence and not even a single individual inherently existing appearance, whether seemingly internal or external, can be found anywhere at any time. It is exactly because our faults, errors, confusions and so on are devoid of inherent existence, that they can be quickly dissolved. The meditation of Vajrasattva, through its linking of the ordinary, the symbolic and the openness of direct presence, provides a means of dissolving all emotionally inflected reifications. These appearances and reactions which create so much pain and guilt have no self-substance and so are released into their own intrinsic purity when we stop believing in them and relying on them for our sense of self. The essence of the practice lies in opening to and abiding in the innate purity of everything that occurs. Defilement is an adventitious phantom which thrives on the misidentification of a self. The practice provides one of the many ways into the experience of awareness and emptiness, the non-duality which is the beginning of dzogchen.*

## THE TEXT

There are six aspects to this subject:

1. The *ground* on which errors are purified.
2. The *errors* which are to be purified.
3. The *method* by which errors are purified.
4. The *results* gained by purifying errors.
5. The *difficulties* experienced when errors are not purified.
6. The *benefits* of expiating errors.

### 1. THE GROUND OR BASIS ON WHICH ERRORS ARE PURIFIED

The original ground (*gZhi*) of primordial buddhahood, has always been present within the minds of all sentient beings. Just as the clear sky can be covered by clouds which appear suddenly, so that original presence can seem to be contaminated by manifold faulty dualistic notions. But just as the original presence of the sky is free from even the least fault or good quality such as clouds or sunshine, so mind's original presence is pure in itself since obscurations, false ideas and afflictions are merely adventitious.

So if one asked how does the ground abide? Well, it is absolutely pure, unchanging in the manner of a piece of coal which is intrinsically black and never becomes white.

### 2. THE ERRORS WHICH ARE TO BE PURIFIED

All sentient beings who exist in the six realms of the desire, form and formless dimensions are caught in the net of thoughts or defilements arising from the suddenly-occurring belief in duality. In all their lives throughout beginningless time up until now, they have developed the obscurations of karmic cause and effect arising from the ten unvirtuous actions, the five unlimited errors, the five similar errors, the four heavy errors, the eight wrong practices and all that is inherently wrong.

For example, just as verdigris can arise from the surface of a copper mirror, so the subtle traces of the obscuration arising from knowability rest on the ground of all and are neither the same as nor different from the ground.

Time, involvement, thought, object, classification and means of arising are the six ways by which karma is accumulated:

1. *Time*: during all our lifetimes in beginningless samsara up until now, many errors have been accumulated.
2. *Involvement*: errors and unvirtuous activity have been committed by each being, and they have encouraged others to do such things and been pleased by the bad actions committed by these others.

3. *Thought*: the varied thoughts arising from the five poisonous afflictions of assumption, attraction, aversion, pride and jealousy encourage many errors which then accumulate.
4. *Object*: errors are accumulated on the basis of one's connection with the excellent objects, (the Guru and the Three Jewels – Buddha, Dharma and Sangha) and with one's parents and other beings.
5. *Classification*: there are doctrinally defined lapses, self-defined lapses and conventional lapses.
6. *Means of arising*: the errors and obscurations arise via one's body, voice and mind.

### 3. THE METHOD BY WHICH ERRORS ARE PURIFIED

There are four aspects to this:

- A. The potency of the field of activity.
- B. The potency of effective application of antidotes.
- C. The potency of total renunciation.
- D. The potency of abandoning the return to error.

#### A. THE POTENCY OF THE FIELD OF ACTIVITY

I imagine that in front of me are all my enemies and those who are angry with me. On my right side is my father and on my left my mother. At my back are troublesome demons. We are surrounded by all sentient beings, as many as would fill the sky.

In the sky just in front of the crown of my head, resting on cushions of lotus, sun and moon is the glorious lord Vajrasattva who encompasses the qualities of all the buddhas of the three times. He is white in colour, blazing with infinite light and splendour, like a snow mountain in the light of a million suns. He has one face and two hands. The right hand holds a vajra which symbolises the unchanging inseparability of awareness and emptiness. Against his thigh his left hand holds a silver bell which symbolises the union of appearance and emptiness. He sits with his left foot tucked in and his right foot slightly extended, in the posture of a bodhisattva.

Vajrasattva displays the nine peaceful aspects. These are that he is soft, pliable, capable of all possible movements, fluid, youthful looking, transparent, shining, relaxed and impressive. His body is beautifully adorned with the thirteen ornaments of the sambhogakaya. These are the crown of the five buddha families, earrings, short necklace, medium necklace to the level of the heart, long necklace to the navel, bracelets, anklets, jewelled belt, upper white silk bodice, multicoloured silk dhoti, yellow scarf/sash, multicoloured ribbon under the crown, and a long scarf draped over the shoulders.

Upon a moon disc in the centre of his heart is the white seed letter (  $\text{ॐ}$  ) which is the heart of his empty presence. Around it the hundred-syllable mantra revolves like a necklace of pearls. The mantra revolves to the right and emits countless rays of light. They rise up as offerings to

the pure realms and also descend to the six realms to remove all the suffering there. This brings benefit to oneself and to all others.

Then the rays of light gather back together and merge into the letter HUNG in his heart. A flow of liberating elixir descends from the mantra and emerges from the big toe of his right foot. Entering through the crown of my head and that of all sentient beings, it gradually fills our bodies. All the wrong deeds, obscurations and subtle karmic traces that we have accumulated since beginningless time arise as liquid coal dust and sooty water, and all sickness appear in the form of blood and pus. All demons and impure energies appear in the form of snakes and insects, scorpions, tadpoles and so forth.

All our obscurations and impurities appear as smoke and steam which then exit from our anuses and descend without resting on any of the nine realms below the earth's surface. Then they enter the open mouth of the lord of death, *Las Kyi gShin-rJe*, who has been appointed to this duty by all the buddhas of the three times. They also enter the mouths of all demons and troublemakers who thereby become happy and satisfied. All our outstanding debts are paid off and all troublesome claimants are satisfied. Untimely death, difficulties and obstacles are removed for myself and all sentient beings. All our hopes and wishes are fulfilled. We should believe that this has purified all the karma and obscuration of the lords of death, all troublemakers and all sickness.

In this way we are cleansed and purified by the stream of liberating elixir. Remaining in this way, one should avoid frivolous socialising and distractions, cease ordinary conversation and focus one-pointedly on recitation of the hundred-syllable mantra:

OM VAJRASATTVA SAMAYAM ANUPALAYA VAJRASATTVA TVENOPATISTHA DRIDHO ME BHAVA  
SUTOSYO ME BHAVA SUPOSYO ME BHAVA ANURAKTO ME BHAVA SARVA SIDDHIM ME  
PRAYACCHA SARVA KARMA SUCA ME CITTAM SREYAM KURU HUM HA HA HA HA HO BHAGAVAN  
SARVA TATHAGATA VAJRA MA ME MUNCA VAJRI BHAVA MAHASAMAYASATTVA AH

We can also use the letters of the mantra as a way of briefly stating how the ground arises on the ground itself as the original knowing of the openness of the original ground.

OM indicates the ground original condition of the inseparability of modality (sKu) and original knowing (Ye-Shes).

VAJRASATTVA SAMAYAM indicates that the ground original condition of inseparability is Vajrasattva's primordial commitment to the emptiness of all of samsara and nirvana.

ANUPALAYA indicates that I will truly hold to awakening in the self-occurring great enlightenment of the primordial actuality which is the truth of Vajrasattva who abides as the original actual presence.

VAJRASATTVA TVENOPATISTHA indicates that with this authentic experience one should not search far and wide for Vajrasattva since from the very beginning one has always remained

with him, without any actual separation.

**DRIDHO ME BHAVA** What is called 'I' or 'self' is the mind's self-confusion, for mind is not an object that can be examined. However, when observed with authentic intellect which is the self-manifestation of wisdom, then the primal original position of the basic ground, the heart of enlightenment, is authentically experienced, or is clearly seen, or is how one's mind abides.

**SUTOSYO ME BHAVA** The impure, confused state of mind known as 'I' binds together (i.e. reifies) all the basic elements of existence (skandhas, dhatus, ayutana). When karma and obscurations are purified just as iron is gradually turned to gold in alchemy, Vajrasattva becomes very happy.

**SUPOSYO ME BHAVA** With that purity, gradually all the many objects perceived by the mind from the state of 'I' are sealed as the self-expression of the original knowing. And thus all possible appearances are experienced as the pure infinitude of the buddhas' modes and dimensions and one's own face is happily displayed to oneself.

**ANURAKTO ME BHAVA** All sentient beings, those who identify themselves as 'I', have gone under the power of the confusion of reification. May we truly connect with and receive your blessing of the effective power and ability to end our self revealing faults and then empty all the three worlds of samsara.

**SARVA SIDDHIM ME PRAYACCHA** Please grant me the general attainments of the pacification of the eight and sixteen fears within the state of awareness. And also please grant me the supreme attainment of gaining the level of four vidyadharas (vipak, ayush, mahamudra, sahaja – the highest levels of tantric attainment).

**SARVA KARMA SUCA ME CITTAM SREYAM KURU** Gaining both these attainments and gaining power over birth and death, by a great wave of activity may I be able to bring virtue and happiness to the hearts and minds of all sentient beings.

**HUM** indicates the vajra, the unchanging actuality of the mind of all the buddhas.

**HA HA HA HA HO** indicates that the vajra of that unchanging mind has the potential of the five modes (open, display, manifest, ultimate and integrated) and the five original knowings (infinite, mirror-like, equality, accurate perception, accomplishing).

**BHAGAVAN SARVA TATHAGATA** Regarding that unchanging actual truth of the mind, it is the presence of the true simplicity of all the buddhas of the various families and so it is the symbol of the open mode (dharmakaya) of the buddhas.

**VAJRA MA ME MUNCA** This symbolises the display mode (sambhogakaya) quality of all the buddhas.

**VAJRI BHAVA MAHA** indicates the ceaseless flow of benefit for others which is the compassionate manifest mode (nirmanakaya) of all the buddhas.

SAMAYASATTVA In this way, with a clear understanding of the ultimate meaning of the secret key points of the way of intrinsic perfection, at this very moment I become a great being (Mahasattva) possessing the adamant confidence of freedom from fear.

AH indicates the original openness, the ground of all that appears: unborn, free of coming and going, going out or coming in.

These hundred letters represent the forty-two peaceful deities and the fifty-eight wrathful deities, and are the essence of the hundred families of the peaceful and wrathful ones. In essence they belong to the single family of Vajrasattva whose heart mantra is composed of these hundred letters.

Thus, both the visualisation of the deity and the recitation of the mantra form the actual antidote which purifies the karma, afflictions and obscurations of all sentient beings. The sound of the mantra arises as the spontaneous manifestation of the compassion of all the buddhas of the three times. It washes like purifying water. It burns like flaming fire which cleanses and purifies. It drives out dirt like the wind and has the qualities of everything purificatory.

Imagine that your entire body within and without is like a crystal container being washed with water so that all dirt and dust is removed as you recite that hundred-syllable mantra and the short mantra (OM VAJRA SATTVA HUNG) for as long as you can. Then imagine that everything dissolves into light and then melts into you. You then melt into light and dissolve into Vajrasattva on the crown of your head. He then dissolves into his heart essence HUNG (ॐ). The ॐ dissolves into the ॐ. Then the ॐ dissolves into the ॐ. Then the ॐ dissolves into the ॐ. And the ॐ dissolves into ॐ. Then ॐ dissolves into ॐ. Then the ॐ vanishes like an insubstantial rainbow. Abide in mind as it is, emptiness free of conceptualisation.

Finally, recite the dedication of merit and the prayers of aspiration according to your custom.

Regarding the signs that one's errors and obscurations have been purified: To actually experience or to have the feeling in a dream, however it might be, that one's body is being washed or that rain is falling, purifying the stains from one's body. Experiencing insects, worms, pus, rotten blood coming out of one's body, or sooty water, shining oil or steam emerging. Experiencing one's flesh falling away and then being restored, or coming out from a swamp or pond. Experiencing light radiating from one's body, or sweet smelling elixir issuing from one's body or environment. Experiencing oneself flying in the sky or wearing white clothes. If one has these experiences it is a sign that one's errors and obscurations have been purified. So one must practise strongly until one gains these signs.

#### *B. THE POTENCY OF THE EFFECTIVE APPLICATION OF THE ANTIDOTES*

It is important to be diligent in practising expiation and purification whether it be according to the *TANTRA OF STAINLESS EXPIATION* which occurs in the *TANTRA OF THE UNLOADED ELEPHANT* found in the open tradition (bKa'-Ma) of the victorious perfectly enlightened one, or according to the *SUPREME MODE OF ORIGINAL KNOWING* or other such texts occurring in the profound treasures of Guru Padma Sambhava.

In general, it is important to practise virtue with one's body, voice and mind, to encourage others to practise virtue, and to be diligent in abandoning unvirtue.

In particular, one should be diligent in practising both the developing and perfecting systems. Moreover, by abiding evenly in the unartificial manner of the great perfection, this ultimate practice has the power to completely eradicate the causal ignorance of belief in a reified self which is the root of all that occurs in the three worlds of samsara. This is like holding up a lamp in a dark room, and so the supreme teachings should be practised with diligence.

Furthermore, one should be energetic in the methods of expiating error that are found in many different practices such as making holy statues, books and stupas, showing respect to the sangha, and being generous to the poor.

### C. THE POTENCY OF TOTAL RENUNCIATION

If you were to eat food that had been mixed with poison and then realised what you had done, you would experience a great fear that you were going to die from the poison. In similar fashion, when you remember the causal erroneous and unvirtuous actions you have done, a great fear of the consequences should arise in your mind. You should think as follows:

*"In all my lives during this beginningless samsara I have been a wrong-doer who has accumulated many, many errors. This is true and definite. In front of those virtuous ones who are without error, I feel ashamed and these virtuous ones also experience me as a shameful person. So with great guilt and remorse I fully confess and expiate my errors. The result of the errors I have performed in the past is certain to be suffering – and I will have to experience it. Knowing this I must quickly confess and make vows to be pure.*

*Not trying to hide these errors or keep them secret within my mind, I will confess everything before my guru, the buddha, the dharma, and sangha and all that gives me unfailing refuge. Without hiding or keeping secret all the errors I have done in the past, those I do now, and any that I might think to do in the future, I reveal everything. I and all sentient beings are ignorant and confused and it is certain that we will experience difficulties due to the actions we have carried out in our confusion. For the errors we have accumulated, we ask you holy ones to grant forgiveness. All these accumulated errors are actually illusory so please accept our expiating confession and quickly purify our errors and obscurations."*

Pray like this repeatedly from your heart and make prayers of aspiration.

#### D. THE POTENCY OF ABANDONING THE RETURN TO ERROR

*“From this time on even if my life is at stake, I will not do anything erroneous or unvirtuous.”* It is most important to make a strong commitment to hold firm to this decision.

We must pray again and again to our guru and to the Three Jewels until we have a clear aspiration not to repeat the unvirtuous deeds that were previously done. We should continue this until even the habits of wanting to perform them no longer occur even in our dreams.

If one genuinely confesses using the expiating power of those four potent antidotes, then one's errors and lapses, both great and small, will be purified and will not be repeated – all the texts agree on this. But if one does not clearly decide not to do these things in future, then even if one fully applies the first three antidotes listed above, one's errors will be difficult to clear. The knowledge that one has now that all errors can be expiated by confession is very powerful and helpful, but if one were to use it perversely and hypocritically to justify and make light of errors one makes in the future, then any such errors would be impossible to purify. Therefore wise, intelligent people make use of all four expiatory antidotes to clear all the errors they have committed and do not commit more errors in future, and so they avoid trouble. If they should do something very bad then the potency of expiation via the four potent antidotes will diminish in its effect. If foolish people commit even small errors, then due to not knowing how to expiate them, these small errors will always accompany them and they will have to deal with an accumulated mountain of errors.

#### 4. THE RESULTS GAINED FROM PURIFYING ERRORS

Hidden in the mud at the bottom of the ocean is a jewel, and if that jewel is recovered, washed, dried and then polished, it appears as the wish-fulfilling gem. Similarly, hidden within the adventitious obscurations of the afflictions<sup>1</sup> and the cognisables<sup>2</sup> is the primordial ground, the actuality of the heart of enlightenment. The method by which it is liberated<sup>3</sup> in its own place is through the four potent antidotes. If you do this essential practice with determination then by its power you will understand the process of your mind which is the basis for awakening to original knowing. With this understanding will continue to develop and even the subtlest obscurations will be purified. Your good qualities will increase and all obstacles on the path to buddhahood will be pacified. Traversing the ten stages and the five ways, you will attain the primordial security.

#### 5. THE DIFFICULTIES EXPERIENCED WHEN ERRORS ARE NOT PURIFIED

Generally speaking, the behaviour of ordinary beings contains many causal unvirtuous actions so that it seems to them that the errors are too normal and trifling even to consider how they

might start to build up. However, they do gradually accumulate, just as great oceans are formed by the accumulation of tiny drops of water. Thus one accumulates a mass of errors which cause one to revolve round and round in samsara, descending ever further till one moves only in the three lowest realms of animals, hungry ghosts and hells. From there it is very hard to rise to the three upper realms, let alone to gain liberation.

## 6. THE BENEFITS OF EXPIATING ERRORS

At the moment we live under the power of our former carelessness due to which we accumulated our mistakes and errors. However now and in the future, with the power of being careful, we can make fully expiating confession so that even if we have committed the grave five limitless errors, we will still be freed – this has been taught by the Buddha. For this the examples of Ananda, Angulimala, Sudarshana and Nanda are often given.

In accordance with this explanation, intelligent people who have little previous dharma practice, or who have had little hope of gaining significant meditation experience or clarity, should take as their first dharma pursuit this practice of purifying errors. Then their intrinsic qualities will automatically appear, as when rust is removed from an iron mirror. So it is very important to keep this effective method in mind and practise it.

## NOTES

1. *The obscuration of the afflictions refers to the deluding power of immersion in stupidity, attraction and aversion and all their derivative afflictions.*
2. *The obscuration of the cognisables, or that which is knowable, refers to the deluding power of identification with, and reliance on, concepts. This leads to the experience of living in a world constituted out of the seemingly 'real' entities that one had developed as pseudo-facts through one's own mental activity.*
3. *It is liberated from obscurations which have never actually obscured it, just as the clouds have never actually obscured the sky. Primordially free and pure, it pervades all beings. Yet for them, in their ignorance it is like an essence inside them that has to be freed from ensnaring defilements.*