

# A Guide to the Longchen Nyingtik Ngöndro Practices - Refuge Practice \*

Taking refuge in the Three Jewels is the foundation of all practices. By simply taking refuge you plant the seed of liberation within yourself. You distance yourself from all the negative actions you have accumulated and develop more and more positive actions. Taking refuge is the support for all vows, the source of all good qualities. Ultimately, it will lead you to the state of Buddhahood. And in the meanwhile it will secure you the protection of beneficent gods and the realisation of all you wish for; you will never part company from the blessing of the Three Jewels; you will be able to recollect your previous lives, find happiness and well-being in this present existence and in rebirths to come. Its benefits are said to be innumerable. In *The Seventy Stanzas on Refuge*, it is said: Indeed, anyone can take the vows, except those who have not taken refuge. Taking refuge is the indispensable basis for all the vows of the Pratimoksa, those of Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis, Sramanera and Sramanerika, lay practitioners and so on. It is essential to take a complete and authentic refuge vows before one could generate Bodhicitta, receive the empowerments of the Secret Mantrayana or other practices. There is no way to observe the Eight Preceptss for just one day without first taking refuge. It is the foundation for all vows and good qualities. To take refuge with a faith fully cognisant of the qualities of the Three Jewels unquestionably brings benefit. But even simply to hear the word "Buddha", or to create a connection, tenuous though it may be, with any representation of the Buddha's body, speech and mind can plant the seed of liberation, and in the end will lead to the state of nirvana.

The refuge practice should be carried out in meditation. Each session of the meditation practice includes three stages, the preliminaries, the main practice and the conclusion.

## 1 The Preliminaries

The preliminaries for each session are further divided into two parts: the preparation (for the preliminaries) and the actual practice of the preliminaries. Preparation for the preliminaries: Before each session, get yourself prepared and then sit down. Put aside all activities and

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\*A large extent of the description of the practises has been obtained directly from the excellent writings in "The words of my perfect teacher" by Patrul Rinpoche.

distractions. In meditation, determination like this can dispel obstructions caused by human and non-human factors.

The actual practice of the preliminaries: This includes three of the key points relating to body, speech and mind as well as the four thoughts that turn the mind from samsara, and then pray to your root Guru that you may attain the four empowerments.

Begin with the key points relating to body, speech and mind:

## **1.1 The key point relating to body - The seven-point posture of Vairochana**

1. Sit with your legs crossed in the vajra posture (lotus position) (If you are unable to sit in the full lotus position, it is also acceptable to sit in the half lotus position, or simply cross-legged)(Figure 1);
2. Form the Dhyani mudra with both hands (Place your right hand over your left hand with thumbs touching each other. Rest your hands about 4 fingers' below your navel. Leave a space of approximately a fist's width between your arms and ribs, and make sure your arms and ribs do not press against each other.);
3. Sit up straight like an arrow (Keep your spine as straight as a pile of coins);
4. Gently pull your shoulders back and relax;
5. Bend your neck forward slightly (your chin should be tucked in slightly toward the chest);
6. Mouth slightly opened (with the tip of your tongue touching your palate);
7. Eyes should be focused on the tip of your nose (or stare naturally downward at the space in front of you).



Figure 1: The seven-point posture of Vairochana

## 1.2 The key point relating to speech - Expelling the impure air

This should be exercised nine times, i.e. three times from your left nostril, then three times from the right one, and lastly three times from both nostrils simultaneously, hence the name "the negative air accumulated through the karma of body, speech and mind". This practice could cleanse your coarse afflictions before you start a container needs to be cleansed before it is filled with something clean).

The steps of the Nine Purification Breath are as follows (according to the Dzogchen Preliminary Practice of Longchen Nyintik in Yachen Monastery): Begin by forming the Vajra Fist (Figure 3) with your left hand and place it and press down on the femoral artery area of your left thigh; then form the three-pronged Vajra Mudra (Figure 2) with your right hand, press your right index finger against your right nostril, then inhale, hold your breath, and exhale with your left nostril. Repeat this three times. Each time you exhale, do it in a gradual manner: first slow, then fast, and slow it down again when you are about to finish it. Your exhalation should take the shape of a barley grain, which is thin at both ends while thick in the middle. Visualise that all negative karma of you and the infinity of beings, generated through anger and hatred since time without beginning, are expelled with your breath in the form of grey (dirty white) wind. For the next step, this time form the Vajra Fist with your right hand and place it and press down on the femoral artery area of your right thigh; then do a three-pronged Vajra Mudra with your left hand, press your left index finger against your left nostril, then inhale, hold your breath, and exhale with your right nostril. Repeat this three times (as instructed above). While doing this, visualise that you are expelling all negative karma of you and all sentient beings in the form of dark red wind through your breath, which is caused by attachment and desire ever since beginningless time. Lastly, form the Vajra Fist with both of your hands and place and press both hands

down on the femoral artery area of both your thighs respectively, then inhale, hold your breath, and exhale three time with both nostrils, meanwhile visualise that all the negative karma of you and the infinity of beings, accumulated since beginningless time because of ignorance, is exhaled through your breath in the form of dark brown wind.



Figure 2: Vajra Mudra



Figure 3: Vajra Fist

### 1.3 The key point relating to mind - Generating Bodhichitta

Before you start this session, check your motivation: "Am I practising with the hope of seeking shelter and relief from suffering of illness in this present life, or am I motivated by worldly concerns like fame, benefits and compliment?" If any of these applies to you, you should discard this thought as you do to poisons. Correct your attitude also if you are not driven by any specific motivation. Practitioners bearing this attitude, which is the attitude of a lesser motivation, have not attuned to the right path yet. Those who practice with the aim of attainment for themselves, have the middling motivation, which should not be followed either. While the greater motivation is to make aspirations like this before they practice: "I am practising for the sake of all sentient beings. May they be relieved from suffering and the causes of suffering, so that they can attain Buddhahood."

Then the four thoughts that turn the mind from samsara: contemplate upon the "Precious Human Existence", "Impermanence", "The sufferings and defects of samsara" and "The infallibility of the law of cause-and-effect" to give rise to true renunciation and the wish to seek liberation.

Next, pray to your root Guru. Visualise a white, full-blown, thousand-petal lotus in the space one elbow above your head. On the blossoming white stamen of this lotus, is a lion-throne covered by thick silken cushion, where your glorious root Guru, Padmasambhava, solemnly sits. Pray to him with fervent gratitude and devotion, and visualise that you attain the four empowerments: Firstly, start by visualising that the syllable "Ohm (ॐ)" between the Guru's eyebrows, transparent and shining like crystal, emanates rays of light which penetrate the crown of your head (or alternatively visualise the light enter between your eyebrows as according to Rinpoche's oral instruction) purifying you of the effects of the three harmful physical actions- taking life, taking what is not given and sexual misconduct,

and purify all obscurations of your channels, from which the body develops. The blessings of Vajra body enters into you, and you now attain the vase empowerment. Then the syllable "Ah(ཨ)" , blazing like a red lotus in the Guru's throat, emanates rays of light which enter your throat, purifying you of the effects of the four harmful verbal actions - lying, sowing discord, harsh words and worthless chatter, and purifying all obscurations of your energies, from which speech develops. The blessings of Vajra speech enters into you, and you now attain the secret empowerment. Then the deep blue syllable "Hum(ཧུམ)" in the Guru's heart emanates rays of light which penetrate your heart, purifying you all obscurations (karmic and conceptual) of your essence, from which mental processes develop. The blessings of Vajra mind enters into you, and you now attain the wisdom empowerment. Then from the white "Ohm(ཨོ)" between the Guru's eyebrows, the red "Ah(ཨ)" in the Guru's throat and the blue "Hum(ཧུམ)" in the Guru's heart, rays of light are emanated and they then penetrate respectively the crown of your head, your throat, and your heart, purifying all the karmic and conceptual obscurations the ground of all, which is what underlies body, speech and mind. The blessings of Vajra primordial wisdom enter into you, and you now attain the word empowerment. Finally, all the Buddhas and lineage teachers, together with Guru Padmasambhava and the assembly of deities around him, dissolve into light and merge into your root Guru, who emanates innumerable rays of light and then becomes a brilliant blue energy dropdrop descends, until it reaches your heart and merges completely with your mind. Free your mind from grasping to anything and rest in this state.

Begin reciting the "the Excellent Path to Omniscience: the Dzogchen Preliminary Practice of Longchen Nyintik". Start from the very beginning until you reach "2. Taking Refuge", where you contemplate the meaning of this teaching while reciting.

## 2 The Main Practice

Visualise the field of merit in the presence of which you will take refuge (Figure 4): Consider that the place where you are is a Buddhafield, beautiful and pleasant, made of all sorts of precious substances. The ground is as smooth as the surface of a mirror, without hills, valleys or irregularities. In the middle, in front of you, grows a wish-fulfilling tree with five great branches spreading from its trunk. Its perfect leaves, flowers and fruits stretch so far to the east, south, west and north that they fill the entire sky, and every branch and twig is laden with a multitude of entrancing jewels and bells of many kinds.





Figure 4: Refuge Field

On the central branch is a jewelled throne upheld by eight great lions. Seated upon the throne, on a seat consisting of a multi-coloured lotus, a sun and a moon, is your own glorious root Guru, incomparable source of compassion, embodiment of all past, present and future Buddhas, appearing in the form of the great Vajradhara Guru of Oddiyana. His body is of a compelling white colour with a rosy gleam. He has one face, two arms and two legs, and is seated in the royal posture. In his right hand he holds a golden five-pronged vajra with the threatening gesture. In his left hand, which rests in the gesture of meditation, he holds a skull-cup containing a vase filled with the ambrosia of deathless wisdom. The lid of the vase is topped by a wish-fulfilling tree. He wears a brocade cloak, monastic robes and a long sleeved tunic, and on his head the lotus hat. Seated in union with him is his consort, the white Dakini Yeshe Tsogyal, holding a hooked knife and a skull cup. Visualise him like this in the space before you, facing toward you. Above his head are all the lamas of the lineage, seated one above the other, each not quite touching the one below. The teachers of the general tantra transmission are innumerable, but here we visualize particularly the main figures of the Heart-essence lineage of the Great Perfection: Samantabhadra, the dharmakaya; Vajrasattva, the sambhogakaya; Garab Dorje, the nirmanakaya; the master Manjusrimitra; Guru Shri Singha; the learned Jnanasutra; the great Pandita, Vimalamitra; Padmasambhava of Oddiyana and his three closest disciples, Dharma King Trisongdetsen, the great translator Vairotsana and Dakini Yeshe Tsogyal; the omniscient Longchen Rabjampa; and Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa. Each of them should be visualised with their own particular ornaments and attributes. They are all surrounded by an inconceivable multitude of yidam deities of the four sections of tantra and by dakas and dakinis.

On the front branch is the Buddha, the Conqueror Sakyamuni, surrounded by the thousand and two perfect Buddhas of this Good Kalpa as well as all the other Buddhas of the past, present and future and of the ten directions. All of them are in the supreme nirmanakaya form, garbed in monastic robes, bearing all the thirty- two major marks of Buddhahood- the crown protuberance, the wheels marked on the soles of the feet and so on- and the eighty minor signs. They are seated in the Vajra posture. Some are white, some yellow, some red, some green and some blue. Inconceivable rays of light stream forth from their bodies. On the right-hand branch visualise the eight great Close Sons, headed by the Bodhisattva Protectors of the Three Families- Manjushri, Vajrapani and Avalokiteshvara- and surrounded by the whole noble sangha of Bodhisattvas. They are white, yellow, red, green and blue. They all wear the thirteen ornaments of the sambhogakaya, and are standing with both feet together. On the left-hand branch visualise the two principal srivakas, Sariputra and Maudgalyayana, surrounded by the noble sangha of sravakas and pratyekabuddhas. All are white in colour, and dressed in the three monastic robes. They too are standing, holding their staffs and alms-bowls in their hands. On the rear branch visualise the Jewel of the Dharma in the form of piles of books. Topmost of them, encased in a lattice of lights, are the six million four hundred thousand Tantras of the Great Perfection, the label of each volume facing towards you. All these books appear very clearly and distinctly, and resonate with the spontaneous melody of the vowels and consonants. Between the branches are all

the glorious Dharma-protectors, both the wisdom protectors and the protectors constrained by the effect of their past actions. The male protectors all face outwards; their activity is to prevent outer obstacles from coming in, protecting us from hindrances and conditions unfavourable to practising the Dharma and attaining enlightenment. The female protectors all face inwards; their activity is to keep inner accomplishments from leaking out. Think of all these figures of refuge, with their immeasurable qualities of knowledge, love and power, leading you as your only great guide.

Imagine that your father in this lifetime is with you on your right and your mother on your left. In front of you, gathered together in an immense crowd covering the surface of the earth, are all beings of the three worlds and the six realms of existence, the first row consisting of all adversaries who detest you and all obstacle makers who harm you. All these beings with you are standing up, with the palms of their hands joined. Expressing respect with your body, do prostrations. Expressing respect with your speech, recite the refuge-prayer. Expressing respect with your mind, cultivate the following thought: "Guru and Three Jewels, whatever happens to me, favourable or unfavourable, pleasant or painful, good or bad, whatever sickness and suffering befall me, I have no other refuge nor protection than you. You are my only protector, my only guide, my only shelter and my only hope. From now on until I reach the very heart of enlightenment, I place all my trust and faith in you. I shall neither seek my father's counsel, nor ask my mother's advice, nor decide on my own. It is you, my Guru and the Three Jewels, that I take as my support. It is to you that I make my offerings. I pledge myself to you alone. I have no other refuge, no other hope than you!" With this burning conviction, recite the Refuge Verses from "the Excellent Path to Omniscience: the Dzogchen Preliminary Practice of Longchen Nyintik":



**könchok sum ngö deshek tsawa sum**

In the Three Jewels, and their essence, the sugatas, in the three roots: lama, yidam, and khandro,

**tsa lung tiklé rangshyin changchub sem**

In the channels, inner air, and tiklés, and their nature, the bodhicitta,

**ngowo rangshyin tukjé kyilkhör la**

In the maṇḍala of essence, nature, and compassion,

**changchub nyingpö bardu kyab su chi**

I take refuge until enlightenment is fully realized.

(You may also recite the refuge verses common to all vehicles:

I take refuge in the Teacher.

I take refuge in the Buddha.

I take refuge in the Dharma.

I take refuge in the Sangha.

Or recite this fourfold refuge in Tibetan pronunciation:

Lama La Kyab Su Chö,

Sangye La Kyab Su Chö,

Chö La Kyab Su Chö,

Gedun La Kyab Su Chö.)

Say this as many times as possible in each session. Until you have said it at least one hundred thousand times.

### 3 The Conclusion

When it is time to conclude the session, visualise that innumerable rays of light stream out from the lineage teachers and Buddhas of ten directions in the refuge field. The rays dissolve into the heart centre of your root Guru, and the Guru then emanates innumerable rays of light, which becomes a brilliant blue energy drop; this blue drop slowly descends from the crown of your head and reaches the centre of your heart. Rest as long as you can in this state that you and your root Guru are inseparable. This is the ultimate way of taking refuge. In the end, finish reciting the rest part of the "the Excellent Path to Omniscience: the Dzogchen Preliminary Practice of Longchen Nyingtik" following the Refuge Practice. Dedicate the merits of this session, and make aspirations with pure intentions for the infinity of beings.

**At the close of the session**, examine your mind and see if you have fulfilled our previous aspirations. If you have, and positive discursive thoughts arise in you, which makes you overwhelmingly happy, at this moment you should overcome this thinking by reminding yourself: Is it really good to cheer over such a small merit? I'll see what's going to happen

to me in my next session. Try to eliminate your pride in this way; but if you fail to live up to your aspirations made before this session of practice, you become distracted and feeling disappointed and frustrated, believing that you won't achieve anything, when this happens you should instead cheer yourself up and encourage yourself: What is there to be so disappointed about? If I'm not confused in the very beginning, I should have become a Buddha already. Now that I've been distracted in this session, I swear over my death that I won't be lost under the influence of confusion for the next one.

In all situations during sessions, when you eat, sleep, walk or sit, remember the deities of the refuge constantly. When you walk, visualise the deities in space above your right shoulder and imagine that you are circumambulating them; when you sit, visualise them above your head and pray to them; when you eat, visualise the deities in your throat and offer them the first mouthful or sip of what you eat or drink; when you sleep, visualise the deities in your heart. This practice is essential to dissolve delusions (dreams) into clear light. Whatever you are doing, do not part from a clear mental image of the refuge deities. Entrust yourself with total confidence to the Three Jewels and devote yourself entirely to taking refuge. A proper session of the Refuge Practice should be conducted as above in this lineage. It is very important that for every session, except for the unfinished ones, be sure to apply the three supreme methods- the preliminaries, the main practice and the conclusion to it.