

Integrating Ngondro into your Daily Meditation



A very busy Dagri Rinpoche sat down with contributor Katy Fradet to discuss how to integrate Ngondro or “Preliminary Practices” into a daily session of meditation. Katy met him in his small house, local-Indian-style, surrounded by a beautiful and peaceful garden at Sera Monastery where she could hear the birds singing at sunset while Rinpoche spoke.

Katy Fradet: What is the purpose of doing Ngondro practices, for instance doing 100,000 prostrations, mandala offerings, etc.?

Dagri Rinpoche: The purpose of Ngondro practice is to accumulate merit, which is the cause for the main meditation practice to be successful. If you want to eat a delicious meal, first you have to prepare it, you have to cook it well!

KF: How does one organize a session of Ngondro?

DR: Ngondro practice can be combined with the **six preparatory practices** to be done in a main session of meditation:

First Preparatory Practice – Preparing the Meditation Space & Visualization of the Buddhas

First chose a place for your meditation and clean it well. This helps the mind to be at ease. Traditionally, the retreat place was preferably settled high in the mountain, where the air is pure. In any case, it should be a clean and inspiring place. Then select some representation of the body, speech, and mind of the buddhas. This is not indispensable but still strongly recommended, as the mere viewing of a representation (statue, painting, etc.) of the buddhas and bodhisattvas purifies negative karma, accumulates vast merits and produces imprints to achieve buddhahood in the future. Most importantly, if we generate the feeling that the buddhas are really here in front of us and we visualize nectar and rays of light, white and red, pouring down from their three doors of body, speech, and mind and absorbing into our body, speech, and mind, it purifies uncountable past negativities: physical, verbal, and mental. This is a very powerful practice to do when done with strong faith. Then we visualize that the buddhas actually dissolve into ourselves.

Second Preparatory Practice – Making Offerings

The second preparation is the practice of offering, which can be done with material substances or visualized ones. The purpose of this practice is to accumulate merit. In regards to material substances, these days flowers are easily accessible and they are a great object of offering as they



please the eye and produce the karma to obtain beauty in the future. If we chose to offer water, it has to be pure (drinkable). There are two types of offerings: the mundane or normal ones (material), and the supreme ones which are “based on samadhi,” or concentration; as you visualize them, you see them as innumerable, filling unlimited space.

Third Preparatory Practice – Body Position & Taking Refuge

Take the position for meditation, which is called “the position of Vairochana, in seven points.” The purpose of this position is to get rid of the physical obstacles to meditation. You can find a detailed explanation in the Lam-Rim. Basically

speaking, you should look at your back and keep your spine straight and relaxed at the same time. Crossing the legs helps to get good balance and support. You have to find the proper position to feel comfortable, to avoid pain in the knees, in the back, etc. So relax, with a straight spine; that will help the winds to move properly in the body's channels, supporting the visualizations in your meditation.

Then you can take refuge, which is the main practice in this third preparation: "I take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha." Refuge or protection is something we look for very often in our daily life, like looking for shadow against the heat of the sun, a house to protect us from the bad weather, all kinds of temporary refuge. However, there is only one definitive refuge: buddhahood – the ultimate refuge from suffering. To obtain it, we seek refuge in the three jewels. It is a supreme refuge for any kind of sentient being, for all of us, as the buddhas are unbiased in their determination to help all beings without exception. You can consider yourself a Buddhist if you feel that buddhas are really present and if you are confident in their power to free you definitively from suffering; and not only you but all other beings. If you feel this intensely, strongly, this is the real, actual taking refuge.

In this third preparatory practice, we should think of our guru as a buddha and feel that all the buddhas are present with him in front of us. The cause for us to receive their blessings is our aspiration. Even if a buddha will manifest in front of us, if we don't 'open up' we won't receive his blessings! And even if the object of our faith is not a real buddha, if we consider it as a buddha we will definitively receive his blessing!

Taking refuge has so many benefits that we cannot enumerate all of them now but you can study them in the *Pramanavartika* (*Compendium on valid cognition*, by Dharmakirti).



Depiction of a refuge merit field.

Fourth Preparatory Practice – Visualization of the Merit Field

To visualize the merit field carefully is very important. You should feel the presence of not only one but all the buddhas in the space in front of you and make offerings to them.

Fifth Preparatory Practice – Seven Limbs Practice

Then recite the seven limbs prayer¹, the purpose of which is to accumulate merit. This practice is of great benefit. Visualize all of the buddhas in front of you or take only one buddha as representing all of

¹ The Seven Limbs are: Prostration, Offering, Confession, Rejoicing, Request of the Gurus to Turn the Wheel of the Teachings, Request of the Gurus to Remain, and Dedication. The meditator visualizes performing each limb in front of the merit field or a specific Buddha.

them, for example, Avalokiteshvara, as your main object of visualization, feeling that all are included with him. You offer this prayer to him in this way.

Intercession of Ngondro – Motivation & Practice

It is now the time to do your Ngondro accumulation. I will mention only one of them – the accumulation of prostrations – as the procedure is the same for all of them. With a representation of the buddhas on your altar in front of you, feel that all of them are present; multiplying your visualization in this way generates the proper motivation.

Now, starting the Ngondro, remember your purpose, to increase your accumulation of merit: then start to do the prostrations, the full prostrations, using all of your body. Think that all sentient beings are with you doing prostrations and recite the mantra at the time that you are prostrating ... then do it one hundred thousand times! You can combine it with the practice of Confession to the Thirty-Five Buddhas, a really efficient practice to purify past negativities and obtain realizations very quickly. Je Tsongkhapa did this practice (3.5 million



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prostrations) to swiftly obtain the unbiased wisdom-realizing emptiness. So with this practice we can get rid of our negative karma, meaning that we might (at worst) experience a slightly negative result from a past negative karma instead of the full ripening of it as a major suffering. That is why prostration practice is so beneficial! Add to that, it also strengthens your body!

You should not do this kind of practice intensely for only a few days. It is much better to do a little bit regularly, on a daily basis. For example, when combined with the Confession to the Thirty-Five Buddhas, you can prostrate while reciting the thirty-five names of the buddhas three times each (about one hundred prostrations in total). It is so efficient for both accumulation and purification. And consider that the human body is the best for this kind of practice!

By the way, there are 'side effects' from the Ngondro practice! For example, you will start to feel more peaceful, you won't let yourself get disturbed so much by negative and distracting thoughts, or by grosser levels of delusion like anger, etc. By practicing the Ngondro, no more stress and a relaxed, peaceful state of mind are guaranteed!

Sixth Preparatory Practice – Prayers of Aspiration and Supplication to the Buddhas

Next comes the recitation of prayers of aspiration and supplication to the Buddhas, which can be done with the prayer called "The Foundation of All Good Qualities" (see page 26) or the "Lam-rim prayer" (from verse 84 on) from the Lama Chöpa/Guru Puja. However, recitation is not enough, we should also take time to contemplate and integrate the meaning of it in our heart. Then, after praying in this way in front of the merit field for a while, visualize that all of the buddhas present in the space dissolve into you, giving you their blessings.

Main Practice – Begin the Actual Meditation

Now you can start your main practice, the actual meditation, for instance on bodhichitta or emptiness. With a good foundation based on the Ngondro, you will actualize these two main points easily. If your Ngondro is of good quality, your practice will go smoothly, with easy achievement. You will get rid of any obstacles to entering the path of buddhahood, go through the paths of accumulation and preparation with their respective

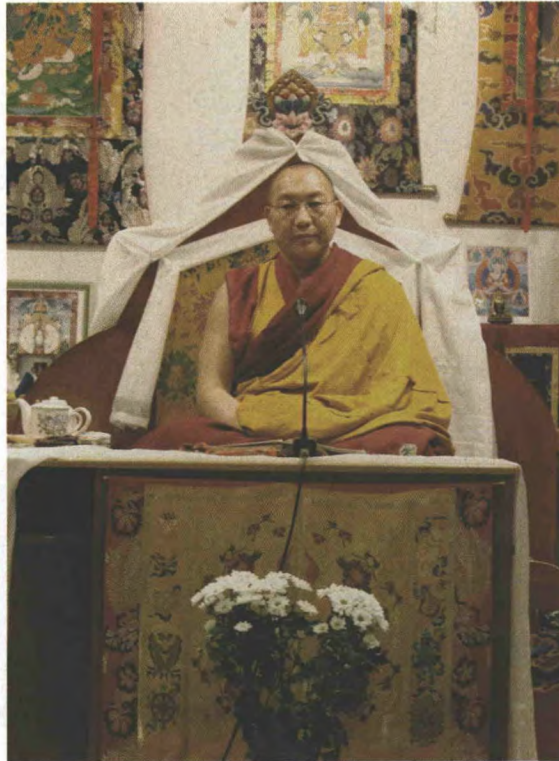
realizations until you get to the last moment of an ordinary being called “supreme dharma”; then you will enter the paths of vision and meditation, when you realize emptiness directly and abide in this experience in meditative absorption: that is the most powerful way to purify negativity. But it is not something easy to obtain! It requires so much merit, which can be accumulated with the Ngondro practice combined with a motivation of bodhichitta!

Conclusion of Meditation - Dedication

Then at the end of the session comes the dedication, as important as the motivation. It helps to ‘empower’/ give power to the virtue accumulated during the practice. Dedication is like when you drive a car. Virtue is like the vehicle, and the dedication is like the steering wheel that directs the car in the desired direction. Even if the car is really good, if the driver uses the steering wheel in a wrong way he won’t get to his planned destination. So, while practicing the Ngondro, the dedication prayers are really important. We should recall all sentient beings and our wish to become enlightened for their benefit and dedicate the virtue to this purpose. Then we can recite formal prayers of dedication.

Now, for all of you who are working a lot and don’t have so much time, I advise you to take a little time early in the morning, or in the evening if you prefer, to do some (formal) practices and use the rest of your (busy) day to think about Dharma and accumulate some merit. Some great practices can be done in a short time, like offering some water bowls or a light offering; done with a proper motivation they become very powerful. To conclude, rejoice in the great benefits of the practice! ❁

Dagri Rinpoche, Thubten Lhundrub Tenpe Gyalsen, is the fifth holder of this name, though his lineage can be traced to the time of Buddha Shakyamuni as one of the sixteen Arbats, the ‘Elder Serbuwa’. He is also recognized as the incarnation of the Indian Dharma king Chandrabhadra and the great teacher Serlingpa. His previous incarnation, Dagri Rinpoche Lobsang Lungrig



Dagri Rinpoche

Gyatso Wangyel, was known to be close to the young Fourteenth Dalai Lama, and was the tutor (of studies) of Lama Yeshe, amongst other famous disciples.

A Geshe Lharampa, expertly trained in both sutra and tantra, Rinpoche divides his time between teaching abroad and spending time in deeper studies of classical texts and personal retreats in Dharamsala. His program of teachings for 2007 included Europe (end of April, for three months), and the United States (in August, for one month), mainly in FPMT centers.

For an extensive commentary on Nongdro practice by Lama Zopa Rinpoche, check out “Ganden Lha Gyema,” available online from www.fpmt.org/shop

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Interview and translation done by Katy Fradet. Katy completed the Lotsawa Rinchen Zangpo Translator Programme (LRZTP) in 2002. She has translated in Spanish at FPMT centers. She is now working in Thosamling Nunnery in Dharamsala as well as for Khen Rinpoche Geshe Lobsang Tsephel and is studying Buddhist philosophy (Abhisamayalamkara from Maitreya).