

~From the Archives of Teachings by Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche~

TEACHINGS ON THE PRELIMINARY PRACTICES (NGÖNDRO)

Rinpoche sent the following teaching for those gathered to do the preliminary practices (ngöndro) at Dorje Ling in Portland, Oregon, on May 12, 2013.

Part I

The Qualities of the Buddha's Enlightened Body

Thank you, everyone, for coming to practice ngöndro. Ngöndro is not small! We should never make the mistake of thinking that it is something trivial, or that it is something we don't need to think long and hard about.

When you are thinking about ngöndro, the first section of the main practice is refuge. When you say "I take refuge" –and everyone says "I take refuge" again and again!–you have to consider what it is you are taking refuge in. Don't just say, "I take refuge in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha," without thinking about it. Or if you're doing another practice, such as a sadhana practice, don't just repeat the words by rote: "I take refuge in Vajrasattva" or Vajrakilaya or Tara or what have you. Whatever practice you are doing, you should know *what* is the object of refuge and *why* it is the object of refuge. Why not take refuge in something else?

We take refuge in certain objects and not others because of their qualities. Therefore, to understand why they are the objects of refuge means to understand their qualities. To learn about the Buddha as our object of refuge, we can break down the explanations of his qualities and categorize them in different ways to make them easier to understand and remember. In a very simple way, we can say, "The Buddha has extraordinary qualities of body, speech, and mind." By breaking them down in this way, first we can think about the qualities of the Buddha's wisdom body, then those of his wisdom speech, and then of his wisdom mind. It is useful and important to know the qualities of the Buddha's enlightened body, speech, and

*This material is being made available as a free download by Vimala Treasures. © 2013, 2024 Vimala
~Translated and edited by Shashi Reitz~*

mind because then you appreciate how precious it is to be making a connection to those qualities through doing the practice. You can understand how, by doing the practice and making that connection, you are purifying your own ordinary impure body, speech, and mind and invoking or bringing forth the natural qualities of enlightened body, speech, and mind that you already possess as your buddhanature.

So, for example, say you do a single prostration and recite, "I take refuge in the Buddha." If you have some understanding of what you are taking refuge in, as you prostrate you will naturally be aware: "I am taking refuge in the Buddha, whose body has such and such qualities, whose speech has such and such qualities, and whose mind has such and such qualities." With the awareness of those qualities filling your mind, you will take refuge sincerely and your heart will be warmed by strong faith. You will know why you are taking refuge and you will know with certainty that this object of refuge is trustworthy. You will see clearly how this is the most important, most precious object of refuge that you could have.

When your mind is focused, energized, and inspired with faith, then your practice is much more profound and, therefore, the results will come much more swiftly. Knowing something of the qualities of Buddha's body, speech, and mind, then regarding the blessings of his body, for example, you will be aware: "Here I am, taking refuge in Buddha's enlightened body, which means that I am purifying the obscurations of my own impure body and bringing forth the qualities of wisdom from itself." There are many, many accounts of the seemingly miraculous experiences of disciples who practiced diligently with great focus and great faith toward the qualities of wisdom body and received blessings in their own bodies as a result, such as the very sick being able to cure themselves. There are also accounts such as great masters doing longevity practice and beginning to show signs of reversing the aging process. Their white hair becomes black again and they grow a new set of teeth and so forth. There are wonderful, incredible stories.

But these seeming miracles are possible because they are the qualities of wisdom body that are beginning to show themselves. This is due to these practitioners having purified their own body and their habit of impure form to the point that the enlightened qualities of the Buddha's body, which are always present, cannot help but make themselves evident.

Without any understanding of the qualities of enlightened body, we won't recognize that, as we are practicing and taking refuge in the Buddha, we are connecting with his wisdom form, the power of which can overcome any physical negativity, cure any sickness, and dispel any physical suffering in the world. We have no way to know this remarkable fact, or be able to train in recalling it, unless we understand the qualities of the Buddha's enlightened body. When we look at our own physical forms, they have so many faults and deficiencies, discomforts, and complaints. These are all signs of our grasping to our impure form. It is this grasping to impure form that holds us and traps us in this experience of a gross, impure body. If we are able to purify our obscurations related to our body, then we will no longer have this relationship with our body as being an impure form and it will naturally become a more and more refined manifestation.

There are accounts of the magnificent physical presence of some of the great masters who live in our time—you can even see photos of some of them and get a sense of it for yourself. Of course, throughout history there have been many such masters. There are so many stories of a disciple seeing a lama, for the first time especially, and being struck by the splendor of their physical form. It will be as though the lama's form were made of light or as though their body were shining. The student is just so taken by it or inspired by it, the quality of the lama's physical form and the blessing of their wisdom presence is so powerful. That is the quality of enlightened form.

We'll meet how many thousands of ordinary people and not have that sense—just another person with another ordinary body like ours. But sometimes you will have a moment

of faith or see more clearly and have that experience of seeing the qualities of enlightened body, even if just for a moment.

If you take refuge in the Buddha's enlightened body, you are purifying your own impure body. You are also clearing away negative karma and obstacles that might be arising for you physically. Here it doesn't matter which deity you are practicing or which section of the ngöndro you do—whether you have Guru Rinpoche as the principal deity in the field of refuge or whether it is a lama, or whether in sadhana practice it is Vajrasattva or Vajrakilaya or whoever. These are all perfect Buddhas and, therefore, their quality of enlightened form, its power and blessing, is the same. It is the same with the power of the Buddha's speech and mind—any buddha's.

This is why it is useful to learn about the qualities of enlightened body, speech, and mind. Understanding them immediately deepens and strengthens our faith. It also gives us a sense of what our own buddhanature is and what it will look like when those qualities begin to emerge as we purify our obscurations on the path. That is the whole process of practice. That is exactly as described by those who have traversed the path.

~ teaching continues in Part 2...