

WHAT IS WONG KUR?

'A Western Psychological Orientation to Deity Yoga'

by

KARMA TENZING DORJE NAMGYAL RINPOCHE
the Canadian Born 26th Namgyal Tulku

&

'A Traditional Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhist View'

by

HIS HOLINESS the 41st SAKYA TRIZIN
the Head of the Sakya Order of Tibetan Buddhism

Compiled by the Sakya Shasanadhara, Karma Sangye Senge Gyaltzen
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Quebec

<wesley@namgyal.ca>

His Holiness
Sakya Trizin
HEAD OF THE SAKYAPA ORDER
OF TIBETAN BUDDHISM



192 RAJPUR ROAD
P. O. RAJPUR
DEHRA DUN U.P. INDIA

29 July, 1978.

VAJRAGHOSHANAM I

TO THE BUDDHIST COMMUNITY OF CANADA,

In inaugurating the Sakya Society of Canada, I wish especially to acknowledge the pioneering contribution of the Venerable Namgyal Rinpoche to the effective establishment of Tibetan Buddhism in Canada. Because of the Venerable Namgyal Rinpoche's long and intimate association with the teachers and teachings of all four Tibetan orders, including the Sakyapa, and his valuable insights acquired through his training as a Vajrayanist meditation master, I am pleased to appoint him a spiritual advisor of the Sakya Society of Canada. It is my anticipation that through the exemplary devotion and selfless guidance of its visiting abbot, the Venerable Deshung Rinpoche, and its two advisors--the Venerable Namgyal Rinpoche and Jetsun Kusho Chimé Dölkar--, the Sakya Society of Canada will rapidly grow into an assembly of true Bodhisattvas whose single purpose is to bring about the well-being and enlightenment of all living beings.

Further, I am pleased to appoint Wesley W. S. Knapp as my personal representative in Canada, in confirmation of my regard for, and full trust in, his genuine devotion to the principles of Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism which are the priceless treasure of the Sakya lineage. In order to enable him to accomplish his mission of accumulating, preserving and disseminating the teachings of our Order, I confer upon him the support of my own authority as the Sakyan patriarch and request all friends and devotees of the Holy Dharma to assist him in his work.

Inasmuch as Wesley W. S. Knapp has received the ordination of a lay precept-holder (Upasaka) and, over the years, many teaching and Tantric empowerments, I am confident that his efforts to teach, translate and publish Sakya doctrines will be enhanced throughout by the blessings of the Sakya Masters, resulting in much benefit for the Canadian Buddhist community.

Further, I appoint Angela M. Locilento as my personal representative in Canada and confer upon her also the support of my authority as Sakyan patriarch in her Dharmic task of receiving, preserving and disseminating the teachings of the Sakya Order. I request all friends and devotees of Buddhism to assist her in her studies, teachings and good works to uphold and further the doctrine of enlightenment in Canada.

His Holiness
Sakya Trizin
HEAD OF THE SAKYAPA ORDER
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192 RAJPUR ROAD
P O RAJPUR
DEHRA DUN U P INDIA

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Angela M. Locilento has received the ordination of a lay precept holder (Upasikā), together with many teaching and Tantric empowerments, and I repose in her my full trust that her every effort will be fruitful in making the Holy Dharma available to others, helping them also to gain a share in the blessings of virtue and final liberation.

In recognition of their genuine love for the Buddhadharma and their resolve to sustain it in this era of its world-wide decline, I confer upon both Wesley W.S. Knapp and Angela Locilento the title of SAKYA SHĀSANADHARA, 'Upholder of the Sakya Tradition'.

May the blessings of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha be with you all.



Sakya Trizin
SAKYA TRIZIN

Wongkur is the Tibetan Buddhist word for Vajrayana Tantric Initiation by a Vajra Guru. Its Sanskrit equivalent 'Abhiseka' means 'a sprinkling of power'. Wong is 'power' and Kur is 'to impart'. Wongkur translates as 'To Impart Power'.

The inner purpose of Tantric Initiation is essentially a transmission of spiritual power from Guru to disciple, which authorises and enables the disciple to begin the Deity Yoga meditation practise.

This text was compiled for the Auspicious Bestowal of the White Dzambala Wong Kur by Karma Tenzing Dorje Namgyal Rinpoche Saturday July 31, 1993 at 'Sakya Thubten Namgyal Ling Canada'.

May it aid those who are New to Wong Kur
and Benefit All Sentient Beings

This text comprises the Views of Namgyal Rinpoche and His Holiness Sakya Trizin, Head of the Sakya Order of Tibetan Buddhism, on the occasions of His 1978 visits to 'Sakya Thubten Namgyal Ling Canada', at the invitation of Lamas Wesley and Angelica Knapp - and to New York's 'Jetsun Sakya Centre for Buddhist Studies'. At that time His Holiness gave Wong Kurs to people wishing to enter the Path of Vajrayana Buddhism to practise meditation using Tibetan methods. Some who are interested in Vajrayana are still unsure of what a Wong Kur is, what they are receiving, what is traditionally done - and why - when encountering Lamas. So this is to clarify that...

His Holiness' comments were compiled by Ngawang Thubten Nyima.



Namgyal Rinpoche

Preface

Namgyal Rinpoche, a Luminary among Lamas, recommended the Sakya Lineage as, "...the most accessible for Westerners interested in Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhist Teachings, because it is led by the Sakya Khön family". A very early member of this family was among the first 7 Tibetan monks to be ordained by Guru Rinpoche - and the Lineage has been unbroken since then.

This family orientation is helpful for Western students, many of whom are also families! The Head of the family is His Holiness the 41st Sakya Trizin who is an Emanation of Manjusri Wisdom, just as His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama is an Emanation of Chenrezi Compassion. H.H. Sakya Trizin recognised Namgyal Rinpoche, honoured by Tibetans and Westerners, as a Non-Sectarian Master of all the Tibetan Lineages.

Namgyal Rinpoche was born and raised in Toronto, Canada on October 11th 1931 to parents of Irish-Scottish descent, who named him Leslie George Dawson. On leaving a Christian Seminary College due to a 'crisis of conscience' he became actively involved with Socialism and the Peace Movement. A trip to Russia as part of a Canadian Youth Delegation disillusioned him with politics when he encountered the Soviet version of Socialism.

He then travelled to England where he undertook formal studies in the Western Mystery Transcendence Teachings while he stayed with a Rosicrucian couple, and also pursued his interest in the sciences and arts - especially music, healing, modern psychology and metaphysics. As an Adept of the Western Mysteries and Buddha Dharma he later stated that one of his main purposes in this life was to create a 'bridge' for the Eastern teachings to come to the West and the Western teachings to go to the East.

In 1958 he met a Burmese Buddhist Meditation Master, Sayadaw U Thila Wanta, in London and travelled with him to Bodh Gaya in India, the place of the Buddha's Enlightenment, where he received the novice ordination of a Buddhist monk. He then travelled on to Burma where he received the full ordination as a Bhikkhu and was given the name Ananda Bodhi. After exploring intensive meditation practices in Burma, Thailand and Sri Lanka for 5 years Venerable Ananda Bodhi's Awakening was acknowledged with the title 'Samatha-Vipassana-Kammathan-Acariya' - meaning teacher of both the calm and insight meditation practice - and he was given the red belt of a meditation master.

Invited by the English Buddhist Community to teach meditation, he returned to England in 1962 and while there founded several retreat centres, including Johnston House in Scotland, which eventually

became the first Tibetan centre in the West, re-named as 'Samye Ling'. He returned to Canada in 1965 and a year later, with a group of students, established the Dharma Centre of Canada in Toronto, Canada's largest city. They also established the first Western Meditation Retreat Centre in rural Canada, near Kinmount, North of Toronto.

For the next five years, Rinpoche taught mostly in Toronto - and conducted deep meditation retreats for his students at the Kinmount Retreat Centre. During this period he also travelled all over the world, often accompanied by over 100 of his students, for retreats and explorations at planetary energy centres.

In the late sixties and early seventies, during visits to the principal Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhist monasteries in India and Sikkim, he met H.H. the Dalai Lama, H.H. the 16th. Karmapa, H.H. the 41st. Sakya Trizin, H.H. Dudjom Rinpoche and the heads of the major Buddhist Lineages of Tibet.

H.H. the Karmapa, on their first encounter, immediately recognized Rinpoche as a Tulku Emanation of Lama Mipham Namgyal, one of the great 'Non-Sectarian' [Rimay in Tibetan] intellects of the previous century - the first Westerner to be so acknowledged publicly. [Tulku is Tibetan for one who has evolved to the point of conscious re-birth]. He was then Enthroned as a Vajra Acariya - Tantric Master and Initiator - with the Dharma name Karma Tenzing Dorje Namgyal and the title of Rinpoche [Precious Awakened Resource] by Karmapa.

Namgyal Rinpoche was unique in his ability to elucidate and transmit the traditional meditation practices of Buddhism and Western Forms of Unfoldment - communicating and manifesting the Path of Awakening in Traditional and Universal modes according to beings' interests and proclivities. He travelled extensively throughout the world giving teaching - frequently at centres established by his students in Canada, United States, Guatemala, Britain, Ireland, France, Germany, Switzerland, Japan, New Zealand and Australia. His love of travel and over 40 years of teaching - which after the early years meant mainly by flying - finally took its toll on his health, which was first affected by tuberculosis when he was a young man in the East. On October 22, 2003 - the last day of a Dzogchen Meditation

Retreat at one of his favourite places in Switzerland - he told the meditators, "There is nothing else to say". He returned to the small private cottage on a lake where was staying and, in a final demonstration of impermanence, he manifested the passing away...

The Namgyal.ca Archive

Namgyal Rinpoche Consecrated Lama Angelica and I as a Lama [Teaching] Couple in his Non-Sectarian 'Space Lineage' after we had studied with him and the Tibetans for ten years. We also received the Genyen Lama Couple Ordination from H.E. (the previous) Kalu Rinpoche - Head of the Shangpa Kargyu Lineage and Guru to H.H. Gyalwa Karmapa 16 - and from H.H. Sakya Trizin in His personal Lineage.

In 1991 Namgyal Rinpoche authorized us to record and disseminate his Teachings, which are the foundation of the Namgyal.ca Archive. We are currently working to transcribe and edit hundreds of audios of Rinpoche's teachings and also to translate them into French. (Canada has two official languages).

Our teaching and practice centre, 'Sakya Thubten Namgyal Ling Canada' - 'The Place of Great Victory of All the Sakyan Sages Teachings' - was established in 1978 at Green River near Toronto, (where Namgyal Rinpoche was Enthroned according to the instructions of Gyalwa Karmapa 16), under the Auspices of His Holiness the 41st Sakya Trizin. The centre also received the Blessing of Namgyal Rinpoche, who used it as his main teaching base for the Toronto area during the last decade or so of his life.

In 2015, again with the Blessings of His Holiness Sakyapa's Auspicious 'Mo' - a Tibetan form of prophecy - we moved ourselves and the centre to the Laurentian Mountains about an hour's drive North of Montreal, in Canada's French speaking province of Quebec - about 7 K from the village of Val-David.

Accessing the Namgyal.ca Archive

If there is a particular aspect of Rinpoche's Teachings you would like to explore; or, if you have notes and recordings of Rinpoche's

teachings, art-works or stories of his etc - or any translating, 'site-tech', audio/video editing and/or transcribing skills etc, that you are willing to share with the Archive - email: wesley@namgyal.ca

If you wish to read more of Namgyal Rinpoche's Teachings you may apply to join the Facebook Group at:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/namgyalrinpoche/>

where you can private message me.

Or, you may go to the new website, currently 'under construction'

<https://www.namgyal.ca/blog/>

Wesley Knapp, the compiler...

What is Wong Kur - An Introduction

by

Karma Tenzing Dorje Namgyal Rinpoche

1. THE TIBETAN TEACHING.

In Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism, Wong Kur - initiation/transmission/empowerment - is the spring from which all blessings flow. Therefore, for the student of Vajrayana [the Diamond Vehicle], a correct understanding of the theory of Wong Kur and a good attitude toward its practice are important. The uniqueness of the Tibetan system lies in two factors - The conscious understanding, based on experience, of the structure and content of the human psyche and - The systematic way in which it teaches its unfoldment.

Unfoldment here means the progressive experience and understanding of depth consciousness by the student - leading ultimately to the 'mastery or mistressy' of the processes of consciousness - by the conscious mind.

The unfoldment of the individual consists essentially of the same process in the individual psyche as that which is continuously taking place in the species - the progressive complexification of the human cortex at the expense of the diencephalon, and progressive mastery over the unconscious processes of nature. What is possible for the individual in terms of awakening is exactly that process by which humanity develops over centuries in terms of evolution. And that condition - which the species is striving to attain - may be realized by any individual in their own being, through the conscious experience and correct understanding of the unconscious mind.

In the depth of the psyche lie all possibilities, in a state of unrealized potential. In every being there exists the possibility of experiencing transcendental consciousness, which - when the students are ready - the Teacher can make accessible to them in the Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhist System by the practice of Wong Kur.

2. WONG KUR IN THEORY

You should regard Wong Kur as an event in which the Lama sows the seed of transcendental consciousness in the depth of the student. The seed will lie in the unconscious until the student brings it to realization in the practice of meditation. To receive the seed [vibration] only the physical presence of the student at Wong Kur is necessary. They may experience the vibration as strength or healing. In this respect Wong Kur is a blessing. Or they may not be aware of its effect at the time. But, the seed as an aspect of transcendental consciousness has been sown and remains in the depth for its eventual unfoldment.

In addition to the seeding of the vibration, Wong Kur also includes the bestowal of the mantram by the Lama and the permission to practice meditation on the radiant form of the deity by the use of mantram. At the same time the Lama may also give the text [Tibetan - sadhana] which the student will use subsequently in meditation. Work on the sadhana represents activating the principle seeded in Wong Kur, and it is by meditation and following the text that the student works toward the bringing to consciousness realization of the principle.

Generally the sadhana consists of the description of the deity. Also, instructions on how to create the image in the mind and some of the keys in the form of visual symbols are given, by which the full realization of the vibration may be attained. There are often invocations and prayers to prepare the mind for meditation and in many ways the sadhana follows the course of the original Wong Kur.

Realization, in part or in full, may be attained simultaneously during Wong Kur, although this is exceptional. Mostly, realization is the result of strenuously repeated meditations following the instructions given in the sadhana.

Wong Kur is, in addition to the bestowals by the Lama, a form of teaching in which full use is made of a rich panoply of symbols. Some are familiar from everyday life and some are symbols known only by the depth. These symbols are received by all the senses - sight, hearing, touch, taste, smell and, by the mind. Wong Kur is complex, involving, interesting, skilful, flowing and beautiful - the full experience of which penetrates past the filter of the verbalizing mind to awaken the depth.

3. A WORD ABOUT DEITIES

In Tibetan Tantra extensive use is made of deities, which are symbolic expressions of aspects of transcendental consciousness. They are generally similar to human forms; with colour, dress, adornments, gestures and expressions appropriate to that aspect of consciousness of which they are the symbolic expression. The student acquires experience of a particular state of consciousness by receiving the Wong Kur of the deity and working with the sadhana. In meditation visualize the deity in space in front of one, roughly at first, then complete with all ornaments and symbols. Then, by following the instructions for the meditation, the meditator performs various acts of mind with the symbols, which are intended to induce a realization of that vibration or principle.

The performance outlined in the sadhana is basically a description of a spontaneous meditation experience - which can arise, without effort, in the mind - even without the experience of the Wong Kur. This is very rare, although adepts are able to realize the visualizations completely during the course of Wong Kur, thus being guided by the Lama in the realization of the deity. In the usual practice of meditation, the result of repeatedly following the outline given in the sadhana is that the visualizations, at first laboriously created by mental effort, become as it were, autonomous living beings - 'spontaneously acting out' a personal drama with the meditator during a moment of supreme clarity and insight.

In that moment the mind of the meditator opens to levels of consciousness which have been dormant in the unconscious realms of the psyche since the beginning. And which - aroused by the initiation - have been activated and brought to realization by the practice of meditation on the symbols and mantram bestowed in Wong Kur.

4. THE STRUCTURE OF WONG KUR.

There are three main parts to Wong Kur. The first is the 'Preparation by the Lama' which takes about the same length of time as the empowerment itself. The Lama in meditation, unfolds the entire text

of the Wong Kur, with complete realization of all the visualizations, and consecrates the temple (or place of bestowal) for the ceremony. The students then enter to perform certain preparations for cleansing, purification and preparation of mind.

The second part consists of the 'Luung' [Tibetan] - which is a brief history of the wong, the Transmission Lineage, the authorisation to read/study and recite the text - and reference is made to the sacred books where the text may be found. The benefits and accomplishments that can be obtained by its practice are also enumerated.

The third part is the 'Heart of Wong Kur - the Bestowal by the Lama'. The Lama leads the students in certain preparations and bestows the vibration on each one in turn. By this Bestowal the Lama imparts the vibration [or vibrations, if the empowerment contains more than one Initiation]: by Touch; by reciting the deity's Mantram; by verbal description of the Visualization with use of an image; and Explanation of all the forms by which the principle is symbolized. At the end the students make an offering to the Lama and leave.

5. THE PRACTICE OF WONG KUR

Although to be initiated one need only be touched by the Lama in meditation with the intent to bestow the initiation, by the correct practice of Wong Kur students may greatly assist the Lama and augment their own realization. It is most important to be tranquil and in as clear a state as possible. The mind should be calm, alert and free of discursive thought. You should bathe before a Wong Kur, [at least cleanse the five things; the face, mouth, hands and feet]. Dress simply in clean, organic fabrics. Remove energy blockers like glasses and jewellery etc when receiving from the Lama. The neck should be exposed and the top of the chest below the throat should be capable of being exposed.

Observe a fast if the Wong so requires - and in any case eat lightly beforehand. Enter an 'open to receive' meditative state of mind. Perform at least one Mala [Sanskrit - rosary] of the [previously received at some time] long Vajrasattva Purification Mantram. If never received, use the short form - 'OM VAJRASATTVA HUM'.

Before entering the 'Place of Initiation' take off all unnecessary outer clothing and remove footwear. From the door attendant, receive some of the Saffron water previously consecrated by the Lama during the preparation phase - in the right hand - and use it to rinse the mouth. Spit this out into the supplied receptacle. Then receive some more and use it to 'wash' and consciously purify the 'chakra' energy centres; at the crown of the head, throat and heart. Take some of the offering grains of rice at the door and sit down quietly in rows, leaving an aisle for the Lama to enter. Do not sit between the Lama's throne and the shrine bearing the gTorma [Tibetan] - the symbolically shaped food offering representing the 'body' of the deity, which is consecrated by the Lama during the Preparation phase. As soon as the Lama enters stand - and when the Lama sits, offer three prostrations and then sit down.

During Wong Kur, let the mind be calm but aware - the senses alert and sensitive. Do not talk or, in any way, unnecessarily distract other beings or attract attention to yourself. Keep the body relaxed and comfortable, with the spine straight. Be mindful of all the movements of the Lama and look at all the symbols as they are used. Be receptive to every sound, gesture, symbol, taste and colour - keeping the eyes generally open - especially when receiving. It is not necessary to remember all that happens but allow each sense impression to be completely received, believing that you are receiving everything perfectly, and remain in the ever present.

Wong Kur is an event of exceptional rarity and of supreme value. Thus, one should take the opportunity to receive from the Lama with earnestness and allow the Lama to bestow the symbols effortlessly. In the bestowal move quickly to a position close by the Lama and be aware of the Lama's movements. Assist by making the body accessible to the Lama's actions. Keep the eyes open unless otherwise instructed. Then withdraw to allow another to take your place by the Lama. Be mindful of the whole area and the movement of others in it, and allow unobstructed access to the Lama.

Notwithstanding its complexity, Wong Kur is a joyful, spontaneous event and Tibetans are surprised by the apparent seriousness of Western students at Wong Kur. There is no need for an outward show of piety or reserve. In all things be natural - be in the flow of giving, sharing and receiving. However, it must be remembered that the Lama has spent hours in preparation for the Wong Kur, has

become the deity and is giving of their own energy in meditation. Realization by the student depends upon no less than being in a complete union with the Lama. For the Lama's sake, for the sake of all others in the place and for your own sake, avoid any form of behaviour which obstructs the flow of events, hinders concentrated awareness or attracts attention.

Do not come in an agitated state of mind. Do not rush in to grab the best seat. Do not obstruct the movement of others. Do not talk unless it is right to do so. Do not draw attention to yourself. Do not distract the Lama's meditation.

Do not come unprepared - remember to bring and make an offering from your own being to the Lama at the end of a Wongkur. It is traditional to offer at least an uplifted mind-state and a white khata - silk scarf, (or your best approximation). White in this context is the symbol of your purified, highest aspiration and a floating silk – the lightest of fabrics - when unfolded with an upward, gentle, throwing motion, is symbolic of your aspiration and energy for the path. It is also a recognition and appreciation of the energy that the Lama has offered to you.

After the Wong you should retire from the area to allow the Lama to perform the concluding rituals without distraction. Check that you heard the mantram properly, and (if you wish to meditate upon the deity) enquire whether the instructions concerning the meditation practice and the text (the sadhana) are available. When you do the meditation, it should be done regularly, (preferably every day) in a quiet place before an altar or an image of the Buddha - or the specific deity from the Wong, if you have one.

In daily life, cultivate an awareness of and respond to the sufferings of others. Search out and clear your own delusions. Place your trust in the Buddhas...

[*During the day maintain the Anuttarayoga Tantra awareness that all thoughts are the mind of the deity, that all speech is the mantram of the deity and, that all forms - are the body of the deity.

[See Four Classes of Tantra below by HH Sakya Trizin - Compiler].

6. SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT OFFERINGS [by the compiler]

Generosity is the fundamental, primary practice to open the heart. The Lamas, who give of themselves in Wong Kur, don't have 'income from jobs' to support their efforts and are supported in life by donations. If you wish to help the Lama to continue to travel, teach and do their good works, place cash in an envelope and offer it with a khata, a white silk scarf or an approximation at the end of the Wong. Also, any other sense offerings you wish to make, such as flowers - symbol of a fragrant, flowering consciousness, that will bear fruit. In the Buddha's time food, clothing, shelter and medicines were the traditional offerings - to which in our age, we might add 'transportation & communication expenses' etc - along with an enquiry to the Lama about any special projects which they are sponsoring which might benefit from your support!



His Holiness 41st Sakya Trizin

On Receiving Initiation Into the Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhist Path
by
H.H. the 41st Sakya Trizin

Explanation of Terms

The Sanskrit term 'Vajrayana' refers to a system of teachings and methods of practice directed toward the attainment of Enlightenment. The Buddha Shakyamuni taught that Enlightenment is the supreme goal for all sentient beings. It is a state of freedom from all causes of suffering and dissatisfaction, and is the realization of limitless compassion, wisdom, and power. In India, during the first millennium of our era, the philosophical and ethical teachings of Mahayana Buddhism were integrated with a 'Tantric' tradition of profound methods of spiritual realization to produce Vajrayana Buddhism. This reached its height in India with the appearance of such great yogis as Virupa and Naropa, whose tantric teachings were carefully preserved by their disciples. These teachings were transmitted from master to disciple in various 'teaching lineages'. When these teachings reached Tibet, four major traditions of Tibetan Buddhism sprang from the various Indian teaching lineages.

One of these traditions is the Sakyapa Tradition, whose principal teaching lineages go back to Virupa and Naropa. The original teachings have been handed down within the Sakyapa Order to the present day by means of an unbroken chain of masters and disciples.

The Tibetan term 'Lama' refers to any person who, after many years of study and practice of the Tibetan Buddhist teachings, has acquired philosophical understanding and spiritual realization, and who is respected as a teacher by one or more disciples. Thus a Tibetan monk who does not have any special attainments is not a Lama. A Lama need not be a monk. The Vajrayana Path is open to all and married persons are not barred from receiving any of the tantric teachings. Among the Head Lamas of the Sakyapa Order some, (such as the founder, Sachen Kung Nyingpo) have been married and some, (such as the illustrious Sakya Pandita) have lived celibate lives

as monks. [*H.H. the 41st Sakya Trizin is married with children and grandchildren - compiler]

The Sanskrit term 'Guru' refers to a person of great spiritual attainment and authority. It was translated into Tibetan as 'Lama'. Among Westerners the term 'Guru' is usually used to refer to a personal teacher, either one's own or someone else's. In this case the term may be translated as 'preceptor' - the person who gives you the precepts for correct study and practice. In Tibetan Buddhism, devotion to the Lama who is your Guru is very important and it is necessary for spiritual attainment.

It is taught in Tibetan Buddhism that the minds of sentient beings are, in their pure nature, not any different from the mind of the Buddha. It is the purpose of tantric practice to realize this - and you should seek as your Guru a Lama who has themselves realized this. Having found such a Lama, you should cultivate devotion to him or her so that you can recognize more clearly the Buddha nature as it is manifest in them. By these means you are led to realize the pure nature of your own mind also, as the mind of the Buddha.

The Tibetan term 'Wong' literally means 'Empowerment'. It may also be translated as transmission, initiation or consecration (Sanskrit: 'abhisekka'). It refers to a ceremony in which Lamas, on the basis of their own spiritual attainments and understanding of the proper rituals, place disciples in contact with a particular tantric deity (or deities) and empowers those disciples to visualize the deity, recite the mantra, and seek to realize the non-duality between their own mind and the mind of the deity. Much happens during a wong and everything that happens has its special meaning - and is not just for ceremonial decoration.

It is not so easy to say what tantric deities are. There are (or appear to be) many, and there are many different purposes for meditating upon the various deities. Among tantric deities are the Bodhisattvas - Manjusri, Avalokiteshvara (Tibetan: 'Chenresi') and Vajrapani. These are the Bodhisattvas of Wisdom, Compassion and Power, respectively. There are five Dhyani Buddhas - Amitabha, Vairocana, Akshobhya, Ratnasambhava and Amoghasiddhi. Each of these is a manifestation of one of the five 'Transcendental Knowledges'.

There are also protecting deities such as Mahakala, dakinis such as Vajrayogini and wealth deities such Zambala and Vaishravana. The

higher yidams, (Deities representing one's own personal insights and connections with the Teaching) - such as Hevajra and Kalachakra - are completely enlightened or, in other words, are Enlightenment in deity-form. The ignorant regard the deities as beings who are external to their own minds. Those of greater understanding regard the deities as within their minds. Those of highest understanding realize the true nature of their own minds and the true nature of the deities to be non-dual.

It is not particularly important to attain an intellectual understanding of what the deities are. What is important is to follow the path which is open to those who undertake tantric meditation. It is taught that all things are illusory, and thus so are the deities. But it is our nature to run after illusions. What distinguishes the wise from others is that they are careful which illusions they run after - and they choose those most likely to lead them beyond illusion and its attendant sufferings.

The Four Classes of Tantra

There are four classes of tantric literature, teachings and practices - Kriya, Caryā, Yoga and Anuttarayoga Tantras. The first three together constitute the 'lower tantras', and the fourth is the 'higher tantra'. There are wongs at all four levels of tantra, and each wong empowers you to perform a specific meditation practice belonging to one of the four classes of tantra.

The differences among the four classes, as regards practice, can be explained as follows. In Kriya Tantra you are very low and the deity is very high, and you make offerings in order to receive the blessings of the deity. Here the deity is regarded as completely other than the practitioner, as a king is far above his subjects.

In Caryā Tantra you and the deity are essentially on the same level, like friends, but you still regard the deity as separate from yourself. As before, you seek the blessings of the deity so as to realize Enlightenment yourself.

At the level of Yoga Tantra you yourself become the deity, but only during actual meditation on the deity. In meditation at this level you first create yourself in the form of the deity, and then you invoke the Transcendental Wisdom Aspect (the real nature) of the deity. This is

then absorbed into yourself, so that you become not different from the deity. But at the end of the meditation, the Transcendental Wisdom Aspect [the deity] leaves you, and you make offerings to the deity as if it were a separate being - after which the deity leaves. So even at the level of Yoga Tantra you still think of yourself and the deity as separate for most of the time.

But in Anuttarayoga Tantra you become the deity completely, you realize your true nature as not different from the deity. At this level of meditation, the deity does not become separate from you at the end of the mediation session. You remain as the deity throughout all your daily activities.

Christian devotion is perhaps a kind of Kriya Tantra practice (if we ignore the underlying doctrinal differences), for in Kriya Tantra you think of yourself as very low in comparison with the Deity who is very high. It is not necessary to begin Vajrayana at the level of Kriya Tantra; some people may be able to begin at the level of Anuttarayoga Tantra. But for most people it is best to begin with Kriya, Carya or Yoga Tantra practices.

Classifications of Wongs

Each wong also belongs to one of these four classes of tantra. Wongs belonging to the lower tantras (Kriya, Carya and Yoga) are termed 'lower' wongs; Anuttarayoga Tantra wongs are 'higher' wongs. For some deities, such as Tara, there are wongs at all levels of tantra, whereas for others (such as Hevajra) there are only higher wongs. In all higher wongs, and in some lower wongs, the disciple is admitted to the mandala of the deity and is introduced to the deity directly.

Most wongs given by Lamas in North America at the present time are Carya or Yoga Tantra wongs, such as the usual wongs for Avalokiteshvara (Chenresi), Green Tara and Manjusri. Higher wongs are not commonly given, for the following reasons. A wong is normally given only to one who intends to pursue the corresponding practice. Anuttarayoga Tantra practices are generally complicated and difficult (lower tantric practices are not so difficult). It is dangerous to embark on the higher tantric practices without a firm

foundation in the practice and theory of Mahayana Buddhism (this means the development of wisdom and compassion).

In addition to the classification of wongs as 'higher and 'lower, wongs may also be classified as 'major' and 'minor'. Major wongs are much more complicated than minor wongs. Many require two days - and some major wongs take five days to give. The usual Chenresi wongs are minor wongs - but there is also a major Chenresi wong at the level of Anuttarayoga Tantra (this is known as the 'Gyalpo lug' wong, in the Nyingmapa and Sakyapa traditions).

Also, there are minor higher wongs and major lower wongs. There are minor higher wongs for all the Anuttarayoga Tantra deities - such as Hevajra, Kalachakra, Vajrakilaya and Vajrayogini. And there is a major lower wong for the yoga Tantra deity known as 'Kunrig' (a form of Vairocana with four faces).

Occasionally you may receive a 'Lung' from a Lama. A lung (pronounced 'loong') is not a wong, it is a kind of authorization to study or recite a particular text. There are some simple meditation practices which can be performed without a wong (e.g. meditations upon Amitabha and upon Vajrasattva) But to perform these meditations you should first receive the lung for the text in which the meditation practice is set out.

About the Wong Itself

A wong always involves several different consecrations; the number and nature of these depends on the kind of wong. A major wong may have four consecrations, some of which are again subdivided into several more consecrations.

A minor wong generally has three consecrations, one each for Body, Speech and Mind. These are the 'three doors' through which we act (and thus create karma). To purify our actions we must purify each of these three doors. Actually they are already pure, though we may not realize this. The goal of Tantra is to purify all our actions of Body, Speech and Mind by removing our moral and mental defilements, so that our actions become not different from those of a Buddha.

Receiving a wong is like the planting of a seed. Later, with the right conditions, this seed will sprout and grow into Buddhahood. During

the wong each of the three doors is blessed individually. Thus there is a Body Consecration, a Speech Consecration and a Mind Consecration.

The specific empowerments conferred by these three consecrations are as follows: The Body Consecration purifies all your defilements of body, and empowers you to visualize yourself in the form of the deity (for example, to visualize yourself as Chenresi, with one face, four arms, holding a rosary, a lotus, etc.). The Speech Consecration purifies all your defilements of voice and empowers you to recite the mantram of the deity. The Mind Consecration purifies all your mental defilements, and empowers you to realize the non-duality between your own mind and the mind of the deity (in which state the ordinary dichotomy of subject and object is transcended.)

Taken together, these consecrations empower you to perform a specific meditation practice in which (amongst other things) you visualize yourself in the form of the deity, recite the mantra, and allow any thought of a distinction between yourself and the deity to slip away. Of course, this is not so easy to do, but by such practices you seek to realize your true nature as not different from Buddhahood itself.

The four consecrations received during a major wong for a higher deity have a similar purpose, although the specific empowerments conferred are for more profound types of meditation. The first consecration of a major wong is termed the 'Vase Consecration', which itself may be sub-divided into six consecrations: Vase, Crown, Vajra, Bell, Name and (again) Vase Consecrations. In some lower wongs there is also a short Vase Consecration as part of the Body Consecration. If a wong includes a Vase Consecration then there will be a ritual Vase (the flask with peacock feathers in it) amongst the Lama's ritual objects. The liquid in this flask will have been blessed before the wong by the Lama, and during the wong the Lama (or assistant) will place the flask on your head and give you some of the nectar from the flask to drink. This makes the Body Consecration firm in you.

Whenever a Lama gives a wong they must perform certain preparatory rituals before it (known as 'the preparation') and certain concluding rituals after it. The preparation for major wongs is lengthy and complicated. First the Lama has to perform the long meditation

upon the deity of the wong; during this creating themselves as the deity. Then they must invoke the deity again and make offerings, create the deity in the flask (for the Vase Consecration), and finally, perform the self-consecration (that is, give the wong to themselves again before giving it to the disciples). The preparation for a minor wong is similar, although not as lengthy: first a short self-creation, then the front-creation with offerings, and finally the vase-creation (if required).

Because the preparation requires a lot of visualization and recitation of mantras by the Lama, it is customarily performed by the Lama before the disciples are admitted to the temple (or the place where the wong is to be given). Strictly speaking, disciples should not be present during the preparation or the concluding rituals, because their presence can be a source of distraction for the Lama. If you are present during the preparation then you should be quiet and inconspicuous.

In addition to the rituals concerned directly with the deity of the wong, the Lama has other things to do during the preparation. One of these is to clear the area of all obstacles and evil spirits which might disturb the wong. After these are driven out, the Lama has to protect the area by setting up a 'Vajra Tent' to shelter those taking the wong from disturbance by unwanted influences.

Just as there are teaching lineages, in which a particular teaching is handed on from master to disciple, so also there are 'initiation lineages', in which a particular empowerment is handed on. Among the different sects there are different views concerning the qualifications which a Lama must have in order to give a particular wong.

The Sakyapa view is that a Lama is qualified to give a particular wong if (a) they have received that wong and (b) successfully performed a major meditation retreat belonging to the same class of tantra as the wong (so that, for example, a Lama who has successfully completed a long retreat on any Anuttarayoga Tantra deity is then able to give any Anuttarayoga Tantra wong which they themselves have received). In consequence, it may happen that a Lama who has performed many Anuttarayoga Tantra meditation retreats is yet not qualified to give a Kriya Tantra wong because they have not performed a Kriya Tantra retreat.)

What to Do in the Wong

You should prepare yourself for a wong as if you were going to receive consecration from the Buddha himself (as, in a sense, you are). During the preparation ritual before the wong the Lama creates them self as the deity. Throughout the wong you should think of the Lama as not different from the deity, and visualize the Lama in the form of the deity. For example, if you are receiving a Manjusri wong then you should constantly imagine the Lama in the form of Manjusri and believe that it is Manjusri Himself who is conferring the empowerment upon you. The consecration is more effective if you cultivate a firm belief that you are receiving the wong from the deity itself.

Before entering the area where the wong is to be given you should remove your shoes and wash your mouth with water. Then upon entering the presence of the Lama you should make three prostrations toward the Lama - or the shrine if the Lama is not present yet - and then take your seat on the floor. It is best to make three full prostrations. Before each one place the palms of your hands together at the forehead, throat, and heart - these three places represent the three doors of Body, Speech and Mind. If for physical or mental reasons you cannot make full prostrations, then it is sufficient to bow three times in the direction of the Lama (as an expression of homage).

It is best to sit cross-legged, but if you are prevented by physical causes then it is permissible to use a stool or a chair, (provided, of course, that your seat is lower than the Lama's). If, when sitting cross-legged, your legs or back begin to ache then change position unobtrusively. You should not lie on the floor or sit with your legs stretched out toward the Lama. All this holds not just for wongs, but for any occasion when you enter the presence of a Lama and remain there for a teaching, or a private audience, etc.

Before the wong begins, the monk who is assisting the Lama will usually give you a small amount of rice, which you should keep handy. This rice is for use in the mandala offering which occurs shortly after the beginning of the wong. As there are always at least two mandala offerings during a wong (one at the beginning and one

toward the end), you may care to save some rice for the final mandala offering.

While waiting for the wong to begin, instead of looking around at everyone else you should reflect on your reason for being there. At the beginning of all wongs and meditation sessions it is important to cultivate the right attitude - which is as follows: Sentient beings suffer under conditions of dissatisfaction and sorrow caused by moral defilements (passion) and mental defilements (delusion). Although you may recognize this condition of universal suffering, you cannot do much about it because you are as bound up in passion and delusion as everyone else. Only by attaining the wisdom, compassion and power of the Buddhas can you rescue yourself and others from this condition. And so for the sake of all sentient beings - who are no different from yourself - you are receiving this consecration.

A wong always has two parts, the preparation and the main part. In the preparation you first perform the mandala offering to the Guru, whom you visualize in the form of the deity, surrounded by Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. The mandala offering begins when the person who is assisting the Lama makes three prostrations toward the Lama and begins to heap rice upon a silver mandala plate. While this is happening you may perform the mandala offering mudra, but this is not necessary. (In the mudra, the two ring fingers pointing upward symbolize the axis of the cosmos according to the ancient Indian cosmology.) Whether or not you perform the mudra, you should imagine that in offering this rice, you are really offering the whole universe, with millions of worlds containing all good things. You are offering this to the Lama to request the empowerment to be bestowed upon you.

This empowerment is worth more than anything material which you could offer, so even if you gave the whole universe (as you are doing symbolically) this would still not be enough in return for what the Lama is giving you. When the person assisting the Lama concludes the chanting of the mandala offering verses, they will throw some rice in the air. At this point you should also throw some rice forward and up into the air with a flick movement of the hand beginning at the heart - these offerings are from your heart.

During the preparation you have to recite certain prayers, such as requesting prayers. The Lama will recite these in Tibetan and you

should repeat them after the Lama as best you can. It is customary to place your hands together at the heart when reciting prayers, as an expression of devotion (to the Buddhas, etc). During the preparation you have to recite the Seven-fold Prayer. This has two forms, the Tantric Seven-fold Prayer and the Mahayana Seven-fold Prayer.

In its Tantric form the Seven-fold Prayer has the following parts: Firstly, you confess all your sinful and deluded actions which you have performed during your countless past lives. Secondly, you rejoice in all the virtuous deeds performed by the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and by all sentient beings. Thirdly, you promise to hold the Absolute Bodhicitta, which is the realization of the Ultimate Truth - 'emptiness'. Fourthly, you take Refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha from this time forth until you attain Enlightenment. Fifthly and sixthly, you promise to hold the Relative Bodhicitta, which is (a) the desire to attain Enlightenment for the sake of rescuing all sentient beings from their sufferings - the Wishing Bodhicitta and (b) the resolve to take all steps necessary for attaining Enlightenment for this purpose - the Entering Bodhicitta. Finally, you dedicate any merit produced by all these good actions to the welfare of all sentient beings.

The Mahayana Seven-fold Prayer is similar to the Tantric form. Firstly, you make prostrations to the Buddhas by body, speech and mind. Secondly, you make offerings to Them of all good things, in abundance. Thirdly, you confess all past mistaken actions. Fourthly, you rejoice in all virtuous deeds. Fifthly and sixthly, you request the Buddhas to turn the Wheel of Dharma (give Teaching) for the benefit of sentient beings suffering in delusion and you beseech the Buddhas not to enter the final Nirvana until all sentient beings have been saved. Finally, you dedicate the merit.

Throughout the wong there are visualizations to be performed. These are normally explained by the Lama at the appropriate time. The visualizations during the main part of the wong are more complicated than those of the preparation. During the main part you may have to visualize, for example, deities emerging from the Lama's heart - and Tibetan letters appearing at certain places on the Lama's body and on your own body.

The main part of a lower wong consists of the Body, Speech and Mind Consecrations as described earlier. Usually at the beginning of

each of these you visualize light issuing from the Lama's heart and shining upon yourself and all other sentient beings, purifying them of all defilements. During the Body consecration you visualize yourself in the form of the deity, according to the instruction of the Lama. This Body Consecration is made firm in you when incense is wafted about by the monk assisting the Lama. During the Speech Consecration, you usually have to visualize the mantra of the deity (in Tibetan letters) emerging from the heart of the Lama and entering your own heart. The Lama then recites the mantra, which you repeat a certain number of times (usually 3, 7, 21 or 108 times).

During the Mind Consecration you visualize the seed-syllable of the deity in your heart (this is a radiant Tibetan letter standing on a sun-disc or moon-disc), and by concentrating on this seed-syllable (which is the essence of the deity's mind) you try to realize the non-duality of your own mind and that of the Lama and the deity. The visualizations to be performed during major wongs are lengthy and complicated in comparison with those of minor wongs.

In Tantric meditation, visualization is very important; it is one of the main tools employed in the transformation of one's ordinary deluded mind into the Buddha-mind. It is useful (although not absolutely necessary) to possess a vivid imagination, such as artists and young children have. Sooner or later, the socially-implanted categories of normal seeing, feeling and thinking have to be transcended - unless you prefer to remain stuck in the mud of delusion.

The wong is concluded by various prayers and a final mandala offering of thanks to the Lama for bestowing the empowerment. It may then be necessary to file past the Lama to receive any special blessings, such as the placing of the vajra, flask, etc. on top of the head. At this point, it is appropriate to offer white scarves (symbolising purity of mind and intent) along with any other offerings to the Lama. If the mandala of the deity has been constructed then you should look into it and offer homage to the deity at its centre.

Offerings

When the earliest Tibetans went to India to seek tantric teachings they took with them large quantities of gold to offer to their Gurus. Several times they might have converted all their possessions into gold to offer. In those days both masters and disciples knew the value

of the teachings. Traditionally, in Tibet, a Lama would give a wong only when requested to. The person requesting the wong would certainly offer a substantial gift (gold, horses, new copies of the Tibetan canon, etc.), and everyone attending the wong would also make offerings to the Lama.

In the West, the more 'expensive' something is the more it is valued and since some disciples tend to offer very little - to their own detriment - some Lamas charge a fixed amount for a wong. Since this comes close to the commercialization of something which should not be commercialized - the transmission of spiritual empowerment - His Holiness Sakya Trizin prefers that it not be done. His Holiness prefers the traditional custom of giving the wong without charge and allowing the disciples to offer whatever they wish at the end.

[If there is a 'fee' it is usually a 'suggested amount'... Traditionally, no-one is prevented from receiving the teachings due to lack of funds - compiler]

This work is dedicated to Non-Sectarian Namgyal Rinpoche and the many Glorious Lamas he introduced us to - especially His Holiness Sakya Trizin and His Eminence the previous Kalu Rinpoche - Who, like Namgyal Rinpoche, Blessed Angelica and myself with the Lama Couple Genyen Teaching Consecration into their lineages. May all beings transcend the subjugation to suffering and continually evolve into ever higher states of realization...