

Receiving an Empowerment

Empowerment is a ceremony in which a lama transmits to students the inner meaning of the Vajrayana (the third or “diamond” vehicle of the Buddhist path) or the authorization to do a particular Vajrayana practice after further instruction. The level depends on the preparedness of the student.

From Dharma Paths by **Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche** vajrasatva p1, karma chagme I, p 173

Initiation, Empowerment or *wangkur*

A characteristic feature of Vajrayana Buddhism is the requisite ritual for participating in the worship, service and practice (Skt.: *sadhana*) of a deity or bodhisattva. This is the process by which a lama with experience in the particular practice confers on others the description, explanation, visualization and order of the practice, along with appropriate offerings and specific mantras. It is more than the sum of its parts though; *it is a lineage transmission of blessing and energy.*

The empowerment or initiation *grants permission, bestows help with, and gives access to*, the benefits of a tantric practice. It can be short or long, and complex or very simple. It normally includes the *wang* (Skt. *abhisheka*) which is the actual consecration or dedication of the student to the practice-deity, the *lung* which is the oral transmission -- a recitation of the procedural text or manual (sometimes in a condensed or speedily-read version,) and the *tri* or instructions on how to do the practice. In special cases, a brief ritual-touching of the student with the text, accompanied by recitation of the associated mantra is sufficient.

www.khandro.net

(In) the uncommon tradition of the vajrayana, the transmission of the practice is done using three processes called the empowerment, which ripens; the instruction, which frees; and the reading transmission, which supports. The function of empowerment, the formal ceremony or ritual of empowerment, is to introduce you to the practice and to the process of visualization and so forth, which will make up the practice. The function of the instruction, which frees, is to give you complete access to the practice by means of telling you literally how to do it—what you do with your body, what you say with your speech, and what you think with your mind. The function of the reading transmission, which supports, is to transmit the blessing of the transmission, the *lung*.

Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche, *The Medicine Buddha Sadhana*, Shenpen Ösel v. 4

Once we have been prepared through hearing and understanding the teachings, the transmission of the teachings takes place through empowerment or initiation. The transmission of an empowerment takes place on different levels, depending on the preparedness or ripeness of the student.

(In the) empowerment of upaya or skillful means, after receiving the unbroken transmission of the empowerment into a particular practice, they are instructed in how to work with the practice. Each empowerment is related to a particular deity or embodiment of enlightened mind. The practice connected with the deity is known as a *sadhana*. The *sadhana* involves working with the mandala of the particular deity, visualizing the deity and reciting mantras. The practices are related to various aspects of our psychological makeup, from both the neurotic and enlightened points of view. The different *sadhanas* are directed toward transforming different aspects of our negative patterns. By working with such profound skillful means, the most open, diligent, and intelligent students are able to attain the awakened state of mind in one lifetime.

...What we receive is the empowerment of skillful means. This is also known as the blessing empowerment, because it connects us with the sacredness of the method and the sacredness that is actually our nature from the vajrayana point of view. There is a meeting of the two, and when we work with that, there is a gradual warming. The blessing empowerment transmits the authorization to do the sadhana of a certain deity. From the vajrayana point of view, the deity of the sadhana is also the fruition. Therefore, when the method is presented to us, the fruition is in some sense also presented to us. We are provided with all the prerequisites and with the inspiration that comes from the profound method. We are now able to practice that method and identify ourselves with the sanity of the practice, which involves a kind of mirror-image state of uplifted mind. This is why it is extremely important to receive the blessing empowerment, even though the immediate simultaneous realization does not happen.

Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, Dharma Paths, pp. 258-263.

Lineage, Empowerments, and Samayas

While many Buddhist teachers -- Tibetan, Chinese, Japanese and others -- visit America in any given year, it is important for a student to make a commitment to a particular **lineage** and set of teachers. Otherwise, the student's practice will lack focus, and the student will not make satisfactory progress along the path. When you have the opportunity to take empowerments or teachings from lamas of other lineages, it is always best to ask your own lama for advice. When you take an empowerment or a teaching from a teacher, you forge a bond (called **samaya** in Tibetan) with that teacher and his or her lineage. The teacher may then expect you to maintain that connection by visiting him or her often or by taking further teachings with them or visiting their monasteries, etc. When you take a teaching or empowerment from a lineage master, you become part of that teacher's lineage -- the "next in line," so to speak, in that lineage. You then bear a responsibility to keep that lineage going.

That is why it is important to be very careful when choosing teachers and empowerments. It is not like choosing an evening's entertainment -- it is choosing a direction for your spiritual path.

Lama Kathy Wesley, Step by Step: A Summary of the Karma Kagyu Tibetan Buddhist Path as Taught in America

Most tantrayana or vajrarana visualization and mantra practices require that an initiation and subsequent authorization and instruction be given by a qualified lama before the sadhana, or ritual practice, can begin. However, a few practices, those that were given publicly by Lord Buddha Shakyamuni, do not fall under such restrictions. Very definitely, all the practices given in the Sutras have the full blessing of the Buddha and therefore can be practiced if one has the aspiration to do so. Such practices include those of the noble Chenrezig and of the mother of the buddhas, Green Tara. Naturally, whenever it is possible for you to take the vajrayana initiation of Chenrezig or Green Tara, you are encouraged to do so... it will deepen your practice and strengthen your connection with your tsway lama and with [the deity].

Kyabje Kalu Rinpoche, Gently Whispered (New York: Station Hill, 1994)

In taking an empowerment like this, or any empowerment for that matter, it is very important to start with a positive motivation and maintain it throughout. In Buddhist terminology, the word translated as "motivation" actually means intention or aim. This is what His Holiness (the Dalai Lama) has been focusing on so strongly in the preparatory teachings: the motivation or aim is bodhichitta. We are focusing on enlightenment, the state in which all the limitations that we might have are removed - disturbing emotions, disturbing attitudes, and all the junk - and all our potentials are fully realized to be able to help others. With bodhichitta, our hearts are set with the intention and aim: "I *really* want to achieve this and I want to achieve this in order to help others as much as is possible!"

Alexander Berzin, Explanatory Talk at the Bloomington Kalachakra Initiation, 1999

Empowerments and Deity Meditations

All deities share these three aspects of the essential nature—which we also call mahamudra or dzogchen—and all practitioners who practice deity meditation with sufficient diligence and perseverance will come to realize this very same nature—the body, speech, and mind of the deity—in themselves as they become the deity.

At the same time, each deity has its own particular relative blessing. If one meditates on Chenrezig, ultimately one will realize mahamudra or dzogchen, and attain buddhahood. But in the short run, one will experience a strengthening of one's loving kindness and compassion. If one meditates on Green Tara, ultimately one will attain enlightenment, but in the short run, one will experience freedom from fear and mental paralysis, the increased ability to accomplish one's objectives, and an increase in active compassion. If one meditates on Manjushri, in the end one will attain enlightenment, but in the short run one will experience an increase in intelligence, insight, and wisdom. If one meditates on the Medicine Buddha, one will eventually attain enlightenment, but in the meantime one will experience an increase in healing powers both for oneself and others and a decrease in physical and mental illness and suffering. Whether or not we have a very strong motive to attain buddhahood, we all desire these sorts of relative objectives, so deity meditation provides tremendous incentive for the practice of dharma.

And yet deity meditation is just another version of shamatha and vipashyana. When one meditates on the form, the attire and other attributes, the entourage and environment, and the internal mandala of a deity, and when one recites the deity's mantra, one is practicing shamatha; and when one realizes that all that one is meditating on is mere empty appearance, one is practicing vipashyana. But because meditation on the deity and on the union of the deity and one's own root lama instantly connects one with the empty clear light nature—which is the essence of the deity, the guru, and the lineage, as well as being one's own essential nature—the power of this form of shamatha to purify the mind of the practitioner of the mental obscurations blocking his or her insight is immeasurably greater than that of ordinary tranquillity meditation on mundane objects like the breath or a flower or a candle flame. And since the forms upon which one is meditating are mere mental fabrications, their emptiness is more immediately apparent than, say, the emptiness of something like the Jefferson Memorial or the Washington Monument.

This is all possible because of the special quality of the vajrayana, which takes enlightenment as the path, rather than seeing it merely as a goal. Through the three processes of abhisheka, which ripens the mental continuum; oral transmission, which supports one's practice; and the teachings, which liberate, one is connected directly to the enlightened state transmitted by the guru and the lineage. Thereafter, when one practices or merely brings to mind those teachings, one is instantly reconnected with that compassionate primordial awareness, and this constant reconnecting then becomes one's path, bringing with it the rapid purification of mental defilements and the rapid accumulation of merit and wisdom. The recognition of this connection is the uncovering of one's own wisdom. If it goes unrecognized, it still exists in the practitioner's mental continuum as a seed, which will gradually ripen according to conditions.

Lama Tashi Namgyal, Introduction, Shenpen Ösel v. 4

"Various medicines have various types of strength or power. Water has a power to wet things and clean things. Fire has a power to burn. When we put water in a field it helps to grow flowers or crops. All phenomena have a particular power associated with them. Through the power of interdependence, when we ask for the blessing, blessing comes as a particular type of power. One receives that power, the blessing, and one's defilements and obscurations are purified and dispelled. "

~ Yongey [Mingyur Dorje](#) Rinpoche