

THE PRACTICE OF
VAJRAKILAYA



Khenpo Namdrol

THE PRACTICE OF
VAJRAKĪLAYA

Oral teachings given by
Khenpo Namdrol Rinpoche

at
Kunzang Palyul Chöling
Poolesville, Maryland, USA
June 1995

Snow Lion Publications
Ithaca, New York

Snow Lion Publications
P.O. Box 6483
Ithaca, New York 14851 USA
Tel: 607-273-8519

Copyright © 1999 Tertön Sogyal Trust, licensed to Zam, 1997

Front Cover: Vajrakilaya thangka painted by Salga, from the collection of Sogyal Rinpoche
Photograph © Robert Pedersen

All rights reserved. No portion of this work may be reproduced by any means without written permission from the publisher.

Printed in Canada

ISBN 978-1-55939-103-0

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Khenpo Namdrol, Rinpoche, 1953-

The practice of Vajrakilaya : oral teachings / given by Khenpo Namdrol Rinpoche at Kunzang Palyul Chöling Poolesville, Maryland, USA June 1995.

p. cm.

ISBN 1-55939-103-0 (alk. paper)

1. Vajrakilaya (Buddhist deity)—Cult—China—Tibet.
2. Rñin-ma

BQ4890.V334T535 1999

294.3'420423--dc21

99-10883

CIP

Contents

Foreword by Sogyal Rinpoche	7
Introduction	17
1 The Origin of the Vajrakilaya Tantras	19
1.1 According to the Tantra Series	19
1.2 According to the Sādhana Series	26
2 The Origin of the Deity Vajrakilaya	31
2.1 The One to be Tamed	31
2.2 The Tamer	37
2.3 The Method of Taming	37
3 The Practice of Vajrakilaya	45
3.1 Vajrakilaya as Ground, Path and Fruition	45
3.2 The Generation of Vajrakilaya	48
3.3 The Visualization of the Palace	54
3.4 The Visualization of the Deities	55
3.5 The Supreme Sons of the Four Types	57
3.6 The Three Elements of Deity Generation	
Practice	59
3.7 Deity Visualization and Emptiness	61

3.8	Pure Recollection	62
3.9	The Five Empowerments of the Five Buddha Families	65
3.10	The Mantra Recitation	68
3.11	Explanation of the Mantra	69
3.12	Concluding Phase	71
	Afterword	73
	About this Book	75
	About Khenpo Namdrol	77
	Notes	81

Foreword

The practice of Vajrakilaya blazes at the very heart of the ancient Vajrayāna traditions of Tibet. The wrathful heruka Vajrakilaya is a yidam deity who embodies the enlightened activity of all the buddhas, manifesting in an intensely wrathful yet compassionate form in order to subjugate the delusion and negativity that can arise as obstacles to the practice of Dharma. In fact, the practice of Vajrakilaya is famous in the Tibetan Buddhism as an exceptionally powerful method to remove obstacles, destroy the forces hostile to compassion, and purify the spiritual pollution so prevalent in this age.

Throughout the history of the Dharma in Tibet, the greatest masters and siddhas of the Ancient or Nyingma tradition have engaged in the Vajrakilaya practice. It has passed from Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra, Trisong Detsen, Yeshe Tsogyal, and Dorje Dudjom, through great terma revealers such as Ratna Lingpa, Jikmé Lingpa, Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo, Dudjom Lingpa and Lerab Lingpa, down to the great teachers of the present day. Yet Vajrakilaya is practised by followers of all the Tibetan Buddhist traditions. It is a practice which has been central

to the Sakya school, handed down since the time of Khön Luyiwangpo, a disciple of Padmasambhava; it is practised in the Kagyü tradition, as well as the Gelukpa; and both the 13th Dalai Lama and His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama have treasured Vajrakilaya as their yidam deity.

Countless practitioners have attained realization through the power and blessing of Vajrakilaya. My own masters, especially Jamyang Khyentse Chökyi Lodrö, Dudjom Rinpoche and Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, were all great practitioners, holders and revealers of the transmission of Vajrakilaya. I remember well one golden August day in 1990, when Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, granting the empowerment of Vajrakilaya to over 1500 western Dharma practitioners in France, explained:

If you choose Vajrakilaya as your yidam deity, it is very easy to progress on the path, since all obstacles are naturally dispelled and you can achieve the supreme siddhi without any fault.

On the Mahāyāna level, Vajrakilaya is the Bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi, who promised to accompany any bodhisattva, like a shadow, from the path of accumulation up to the tenth bhūmi. And for that bodhisattva, he would clear all obstacles and gather all favourable conditions necessary for progressing along the path. Vajrakilaya is none other than Vajrāpaṇi manifesting as a yidam heruka—the one who clears away all hindrances on the path to enlightenment.

Khyentse Rinpoche spoke of the special link between the Vajrakilaya and Guru Padmasambhava:

Although he had accomplished other deities like Yangdak, Hayagrīva and Chemchok Heruka, when it came to repelling obstacles and difficulties, he would invariably turn to the practice of Vajrakilaya. For Guru Padmasambhava, whose renown shines throughout the world and is as familiar to us as the sun and moon, Vajrakilaya is the quintessential object of meditation.

The publication of this remarkable teaching on Vajrakilaya by Khenpo Namdrol brings me great joy; it will undoubtedly be of tremendous interest and inspiration to practitioners everywhere. Khenpo Namdrol has received teachings from many of the greatest Tibetan masters, such as Kyabjé Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, Kyabjé Penor Rinpoche, Kyabjé Khenpo Jigmey Phuntsok and Kyabjé Dodrupchen Rinpoche, and we owe him a great debt for the service he has given to the Nyingma tradition—especially for his work in establishing the Ngagyur Nyingma Institute in Bylakuppe, South India. Followers of the Nyingma tradition look to him as one of the most important khenpos in the Nyingma school.

I pray and I trust that the teachings presented here will reach and truly be of benefit to as many as possible. As the 'Summoning of Blessings' from the 'Deepest Heart Essence of Vajrakilaya,' a terma of Lerab Lingpa, says:

*In the practice places of India, of Nepal and Tibet,
Master Padmākara, you attained
The siddhis of the eight sugatas of Kagyé
And of Vajrakilaya; in the same way
Pour down your blessings on us here now,
Grant us the attainments, ordinary and supreme!*

Sogyal Rinpoche
Lerab Ling, June 1997



Photo courtesy of Rigpa Fellowship

Kyabjé Dudjom Rinpoche

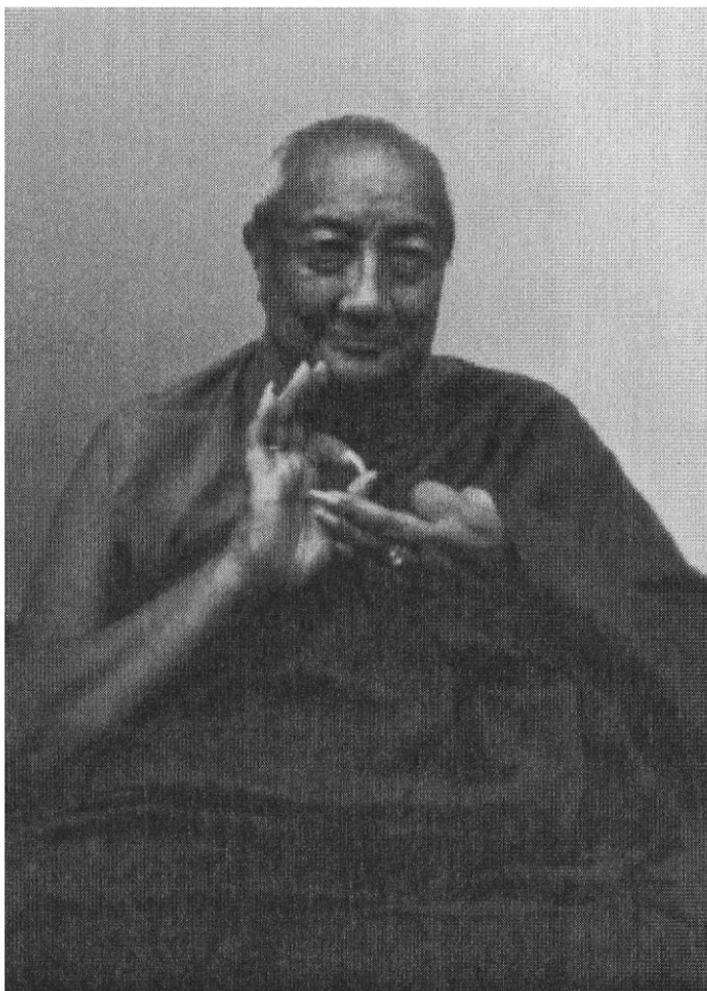


Photo courtesy of Rigpa Fellowship

Kyabje Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche



Photo courtesy of Pnror Rinpoche

Kyabjé Penor Rinpoche



Photo courtesy of Penor Rinpoche

Kyabjé Khenpo Jigmey Rinpoche



Photo courtesy of Rigpa Fellowship

Kyabjé Dodrupchen Rinpoche

AS YOU SET OUT TO READ these teachings, I would like to invite you, first and foremost, to arouse in your minds what is known as *bodhicitta*. Bodhicitta, literally 'enlightenment-mind', means that you are aspiring to attain the level of buddhahood in order to benefit all sentient beings, who are as limitless as space. Inspired by this motivation to become enlightened for the sake of others, you should receive these teachings of the secret mantra, and then practise them genuinely. This is how we understand bodhicitta.

Khenpo Namdrol Rinpoche



Vajrakilaya

Introduction

The subject matter of this book comes from the teachings of the vehicle of the unsurpassed secret mantra. In general, the tantric teachings of secret mantra, considered the most important teachings of Indian Buddhism, all essentially agree with regard to the highest realization of buddhahood, which is their ultimate fruition. However, there exists a variety of traditions, and this is due to the different modes of teaching and emphases employed by the Buddha for addressing different faculties and inclinations among the disciples needing to be trained. In particular, there came to be two different traditions of the tantric teachings in Tibet corresponding to the periods during which these teachings were translated. Those which were translated in the earlier period came to be known as the 'earlier propagation', or Nyingma, while those translated in the later period came to be known as the 'later propagation', or Sarma.

The Nyingma school of the earlier translations dates from the time of the Dharmarāja Songtsen Gampo and the great translator, and creator of the Tibetan language, Thönmi Sambhota. The propagation was begun with the

sūtras and *tantras* of Avalokiteśvara. From that time onwards, many Indian *paṇḍitas* (scholars), working with Tibetan *lotsawas* (translators), travelled to Tibet, where they introduced various *sūtras* and *tantras*. The end of the exclusive existence of the Nyingma school in Tibet occurred during the time of the learned *paṇḍita* Smṛtijñāna and the translator Rongzom Chözang. From this point onwards, the later translation or Sarma tradition of *sūtras* and *tantras* was to coexist with the Nyingma, following its founding in Tibet by, among others, the great scholar Lochen Rinchen Zangpo.

In the tantric system of the tradition of the earlier translations, the principal meditational deities are: the eight Herukas of Kagyé, the Gongdü and Phurba. The subject here is one of these three principal meditational deities, Phurba or Vajrakilaya, and I shall treat it in three parts: first the origin of the Vajrakilaya *tantras*, then the manner in which this deity came into existence, and finally how we practise Vajrakilaya.

1

The Origin of the Vajrakīlaya Tantras

There are two explanations given of the origins of the Vajrakīlaya tantras in our world according to the two divisions of the Mahāyoga vehicle to which the Vajrakīlaya traditions belong: the tantra series, or *Gyüdé*, and the accomplishment or *sādhana* series or *Drupdé*.

1.1 The Explanation According to the Tantra Series

The origin of the *Phurba* tantras in this world involved three methods: the initial mind-direct transmission of the victorious ones, the transmission through indication or signs of the vidyādharas, and finally the transmission of the yogins, which is by word of mouth.

The *lineage of the mind-direct transmission* began with the dharmakāya Samantabhadra. When Samantabhadra expresses himself as the Form Body or *rūpakāya*, he becomes “the sixth lineage teacher Samantabhadra”, who pervades the other five lineages. This “expression”

is in fact nothing other than the self-expression of the Buddha, within the Akaniṣṭha pure realm. His retinue appears separately as the five male and female buddhas and bodhisattvas, but from an absolute point of view they remain as one single continuity with the mind of the Buddha. On those occasions when the sixth lineage teacher Samantabhadra teaches Dharma to this retinue, it is not through such means as words or sounds. Instead, teacher and retinue simply abide together within a single enlightened purpose without any divisions, and this is termed “teaching the Dharma”. The content of these teachings is exclusively the unsurpassed secret mantra, and never the sūtras or lower tantras. The retinue—primarily the bodhisattvas Mañjuśrī, Avalokiteśvara, Vajrapāṇi, and the five *sambhogakāya* buddhas—may appear from one point of view to be other than the teacher, yet their appearance in fact is merely provisional in order to elicit the teaching of the Dharma, and ultimately they are only the expression of the enlightened mind. Out of all the unsurpassed secret mantras, the eighteen tantras of Mahāyoga and the 6,400,000 verses of the Great Perfection tantras of Dzogpachenpo are taught by the teacher Samantabhadra in the Akaniṣṭha pure realm in this way.

The eighteen tantras of Mahāyoga can be correlated to the five-fold set of the enlightened body, speech, mind, noble qualities and activity of the Buddha. Each category is sub-divided into three, and correlated to the enlightened body, speech and mind, so that for the enlightened body, for example, there is a triad of the enlightened body of the enlightened body, the enlightened body of the enlightened speech, and the enlightened body of the enlightened mind. This same pattern is reproduced in the other four categories: speech, mind, noble qualities and activity. The resulting fifteen categories correspond to

the first fifteen tantras, while the remaining three tantras are termed "general tantras"¹, which are also divided to correspond with the triad of the enlightened body, speech and mind.

The Vajrakilaya tantra belongs to the enlightened mind sub-category of the enlightened activity category, or, in other words, "the enlightened activity of the enlightened mind"². This tantra is called the *Vidyottama Tantra*, and has one hundred thousand sections, all on the subject of Vajrakilaya. The famous *Guhya garbha Tantra* is, on the other hand, classified as "the general tantra of the enlightened mind"³.

Now, we will turn to the second transmission, the *symbolic or sign transmission of the vidyādhara*s. In general, the bodhisattvas Mañjuśrī, Vajrapāṇi and Avalokiteśvara are responsible for disseminating the teachings of the unsurpassed tantras from the highest pure realm of Akaniṣṭha into the ordinary world system. This they do in two ways, one for human beings, and one for non-human beings. Mañjuśrī went to the realm of the gods to teach the gods, and particularly the god Drakden Chok Kyong⁴. Avalokiteśvara went into the realm of the *nāga* serpent spirits, where he gave teachings primarily to the king of the *nāgas*, King Jokpo Nakpo⁵, along with many others. Vajrapāṇi principally taught the teachings to the yakṣa Kuntuzangpo⁶, along with his retinue, in the *yakṣa* realm. This transmission takes place solely through the display of symbols and signs, rather than discourse, and as a result, the entire group of listeners in each realm attain enlightenment together. This is a brief summary of how the lineage was propagated in the realms of non-human beings.

For both humans and non-humans, the way the tantras were first propagated in this world is as follows.

Twenty-eight years after Lord Buddha Śākyamuni passed into nirvāṇa, five holy individuals of very special backgrounds, from five different classes of sentient beings, convened through their miraculous power on the peak of Mount Malaya. The peak is inaccessible by any other means. Of these five, one was the king of the gods, Drakden Chok Kyong, one was the nāga King Jokpo, one was the yakṣa Karda Dong⁷, one was the *rakṣasa* Lodrö Tapden⁸, and one was a human being called Drimé Drakpa⁹.

These five knew that, since the Buddha had passed into nirvāṇa, the teaching was in decline, and so they prayed to the Buddhas of the Ten Directions, lamenting from the depths of their hearts. All the buddhas then came together in the form of Vajrapāṇi, who appeared to the five and brought them all the teachings directly from the pure realm of Akaniṣṭha. Having collected every category and class of tantra to be found in the Akaniṣṭha pure realm, he transmitted them to these five holy sages through symbolic indications. Lodrö Tapden wrote all these teachings down on gold paper using lapis lazuli ink, and then hid them in space as a treasure. There were seven different “thoughts” behind his actions¹⁰: the sublime basis for the letters was gold paper; the sublime agent for writing them was molten lapis lazuli; the sublime vessel to contain them was a chest made of five precious materials; the sublime location was the sky which is beyond destruction; the sublime protectors were the wisdom *dākinīs*; the sublime master of the teachings was King Ja; and the sublime upholders of the lineage were his disciples, the fortunate ones who would maintain the tradition.

Subsequently, the blessings of this transmission and concealment manifested directly in the third lineage, the *oral transmission lineage of individuals*. This began

when King Ja, the king of Zahor at the time, witnessed the miracle of the scriptures of the eighteen Mahāyoga tantras descending onto the roof of his palace, along with a cubit-sized image of Vajrapāṇi. It seems that these tantras were probably the ones written down by Lodrö Tapden. At the same time, King Ja also had seven very auspicious dreams. He then prayed to the image of Vajrapāṇi, and so naturally came to realize the meaning of the chapter entitled *The Chapter of Seeing Vajrasattva's Face*¹¹, from the Mahāyoga tantras. When he subsequently evoked Vajrasattva in contemplation, Vajrasattva actually appeared to him and blessed King Ja's body, speech and mind with his own enlightened body, speech and mind, thereby granting him the tantric transmissions.

King Ja gave these teachings to Kukkurāja, who transmitted them to King Indrabodhi¹², who passed them on to Siṃharāja, who in turn transmitted them to the princess Gomadevi. Each one of these masters had hundreds of thousands of disciples who accomplished the teachings they received. All of them, without exception, achieved the state of deathlessness: without even needing to leave their bodies behind, they simply took to space and passed directly into the pure realms as vidyādhara, accomplishing the highest level of realization.

In time, these teachings came to the great Orgyen Khenpo Padmasambhava, the extraordinary master Vimalamitra, and the great master Śīlamañju, each one of whom received and transmitted all eighteen classes of the Mahāyoga tantras. According to Jamgön Kongtrul, Padmasambhava also received these teachings directly from King Ja himself. All of these masters became one with the wisdom mind of the yidam deity, in the essence of the integration of space and wisdom¹³, thereby attaining the level of vidyādhara.

Now with regard to these three lineages, if we consider the Vajrakilaya tantras alone, according to the teaching of Lobpön Langlab¹⁴ there are some thirty-seven “self-sufficient volumes” on the phurba cycle, and sixteen more concise, shorter volumes. The meaning of “self-sufficient” here is that these tantras contain the entire range of relevant topics, without needing to be supplemented by any other tantric sources. The Mahāyoga tantras are inconceivably numerous, and the corpus of eighteen represents those which have been principally transmitted in this world of ours. Out of this vast range of Mahāyoga tantras, Vajrakilaya belongs, as we saw, to the cycle of enlightened activity.

Guru Padmasambhava received the authorizing mandate¹⁵ to become the main lineage holder of this Vajrakilaya Tantra, along with all its tantras, scriptures and precepts¹⁶. When we look at the great Vajra Guru Padmasambhava from the point of view of definitive truth, he is originally and primordially enlightened, and indivisible from Vajrakilaya, from whom he has never been separate. However, for the benefit of living beings needing to be trained, he went through the actions of practicing Vajrakilaya, experiencing direct visions of Vajrakilaya as an external presence, receiving the teachings of the Vajrakilaya Tantra from the deity himself, being introduced to space and wisdom through Vajrakilaya’s enlightened mind, and finally coming to know all objects of knowledge without impediment. In this way, he received the entire transmission of Vajrakilaya directly from Vajrakilaya himself. However, to maintain the gradual transmission of the lineage, he also received the empowerment and transmission of the tantra from the vajra master Prabhāhasti.

Guru Padmasambhava was invited to Tibet by King Trisong Detsen, and he was still on the road to central Tibet, when he was obliged, there and then, to manifest

as Vajrakilaya to subjugate the intractable gods and demons of the country and bind them by oath. He compelled them to act thereafter as supporters of the propagation of the Dharma in Tibet. Once he had arrived in central Tibet, he blessed the site where the king had been trying to build Tibet's first buddhist temple, and so finally, Samyé monastery was able to be constructed. The first instructions he then gave to his twenty-five heart disciples were teachings of the unsurpassed secret mantrayāna on Vajrakilaya practice, to enable them to remove obstacles to their practice of Buddhadharma. To some he gave concise teachings, and to others expansive ones, but all concerned the practice of Vajrakilaya.

This is how there came to be three traditions which stemmed from Padmasambhava's original transmission of the Vajrakilaya instructions. They are referred to as "The Tradition of the King" (Trisong Detsen), "The Tradition of Jomo" (his Tibetan consort, Yeshe Tsogyal), and "The Tradition of Nanam" (Nanam Dorje Dudjom, one of the twenty-five disciples). The names of these traditions refer to the individual through whom Padmasambhava originally transmitted the particular Vajrakilaya teaching. If we relate these three traditions to the terma treasures in which they were subsequently revealed in Tibet, "The Tradition of the King" was revealed by Jikmé Lingpa in his Vajrakilaya treasure revelation. "The Tradition of Jomo" is found in the treasure buried by Yeshe Tsogyal and later discovered by Ratna Lingpa. Finally, the Vajrakilaya termas discovered by the treasure revealer Tertön Lerab Lingpa belong to "The Tradition of Nanam". In fact they were buried by Nanam Dorje Dudjom, who later reincarnated as Lerab Lingpa and rediscovered them. So the Gur Khukma¹⁷ Vajrakilaya treasure of Khenpo Jigmey Phuntsok also belongs to this tradition of Nanam Dorje Dudjom. This is how these three traditions, all of which

are valid and all of which belong to the treasure tradition, stem from those initial teachings on Vajrakilaya conferred by Padmasambhava in Tibet. As *termas*, they were buried, to be discovered later by the *tertöns* at the appropriate time and in accordance with the indications given in the prophecies.

This completes our account of the origin of the Vajrakilaya tantras in this world according to the Tantra Series.

1.2 The Explanation According to the Sādhana Series

In the Akaniṣṭha pure realm, the primordial Buddha Samantabhadra manifested as the eight Heruka teachers, who remained inseparable from the Buddha. They taught the teachings of the *sādhana*s of Kagyé¹⁸ to a perfectly pure retinue of buddhas and bodhisattvas who were no different from them, by means of “vajra words”, meaning through their wisdom mind¹⁹ or beyond words. The “Keeper of the Secrets”, known as Vajradharma, then compiled all of these enlightened transmissions and miraculously wrote them down in script, placing them inside a jewelled casket which he took to the Deché Tsekpa Stūpa²⁰. In the presence of the great *ḍākinī* Lékyi Wangmo²¹, and an ocean of other *ḍākinīs*, they were buried as a treasure inside the holy stūpa (the site of which is in present day India), and the *ḍākinīs* themselves were appointed as their guardian.

Subsequently, the eight great vajra masters—Hūṃkara, Mañjuśrimitra, Nāgārjuna, Padmasambhava, Dhanasaṃskṛta, Vimalamitra, Rambuguhya and Śāntigarbha—all convened at the appropriate time in the terrifying charnel ground known as the Cool Grove²², and together became absorbed in a state of one-pointed contemplation. As a result, the treasure

caskets inside the stūpa containing the eight Heruka transmissions began to emit rays of light, and countless rainbows and other astonishing signs appeared to the masters gathered there. Then, the ḍākinis and powerful spirits, who were circumambulating the stūpa in their role as guardians of the treasure, became visible to them on account of the master's clairvoyance. The masters realized that all of this indicated the presence in the stūpa of instructions that could either devastate the entire world through wrathful mantras, or grant the highest satisfaction, both in terms of mundane goals and ultimate enlightenment. By focusing their wisdom, they realized that the time had come to give consecrated substances²³ such as tormā, rakta, medicinal substances and so on, to the spirits and ḍākinis, and bind them with an oath, in order to bring them under the power of the teachings. So the ḍākinis approached them and asked what commands they required them to fulfil. The vajra masters replied that they were required to bring out the treasure caskets that were contained within the great stūpa, and to hand these caskets over to them.

One of the caskets was made of silver and it contained all the teachings of the *Tantra of the Enlightened Mind Manifestation of Yangdak Heruka*; the ḍākinis brought this out and handed it over to the vajra master Hūṃkara. Then they brought out an iron casket containing all the teachings on the *Tantra of the Enlightened Body Manifestation of Mañjuśrī*, which they gave to Mañjuśrimitra. A copper casket containing the teachings of the *Tantra of the Enlightened Speech of Padma* was given to Nāgārjuna.²⁴ A turquoise casket containing the teachings of the *Tantra of the Phurba—Vajrakilaya—* was given to the vajra master Padmasambhava. A gold casket containing the *Teachings of Chemchok Heruka* was given to Vimalamitra. A rhinoceros horn casket containing instructions for accomplishing the teachings of the

Tantra of the Mamos was given to Dhanasaṃskṛta. An agate casket, inside which lay the teachings of the *Tantra of Offering and Praise for Worldly Deities* was handed to Rambuguhya. Finally, a zi stone casket containing the teachings of the *Tantra of Wrathful Mantras* was brought out and given to Śāntigarbha. There was one additional casket made from five different precious materials and studded with precious gems, within which were eight divisions corresponding to the eight Kagyé. Unlike the other teachings, which were for the separate practice of each individual deity, these teachings were for the joint integrated practice of all eight simultaneously. This casket was put in the center of the eight vajra masters, without being given to any one in particular. The teachings that came from this chest were the *Kagyé Deshek Düpa*: "The Gathering of the Sugatas of Kagyé".

When each one of these vajra masters had received his particular chest, he opened it and extracted the teachings. However, none of them were able to open the final casket containing the eight-sectioned *Kagyé Deshek Düpa*, so for seven days the vajra masters dwelt together in meditative equipoise, and prayed one-pointedly to the ḍākinis to assist them. As a result, when the seven days had elapsed, the seal of the last casket sprang free and the lid opened of its own accord. This is how they were able to extract the teachings of *Kagyé Deshek Düpa*.

Another historical account records how, since this receptacle could not be opened by the eight vajra masters, it was placed back inside the Deché Tsekpā stūpa and buried once again. Then at a later date Guru Padmasambhava returned to open the seal and reveal it. When he extracted the *Kagyé Deshek Düpa* from the casket, the ḍākinis guarding the treasure asked

Padmasambhava to practice these teachings and transmit them to others. According to yet another account, the Vajrakilaya teachings were brought out and passed by the ḍākinis into the hands of the vajra master Prabhāhasti, who then later transmitted them to Guru Padmasambhava. However, the casket of five precious substances containing the *Kagyé Deshek Düpa* was given directly by the ḍākinis to the Vajra Guru Padmasambhava.

This concludes the explanation of how the Vajrakilaya tantras came into our world. In Tibet, Vajrakilaya was practised by all schools—Nyingma, Sakya, Kagyü and Gelug—but the tantras and lineages of Vajrakilaya had their origins solely in the Nyingma tradition.

2

The Origin of the Deity Vajrakīlaya

This brings us to a discussion of how Vajrakīlaya, the deity of enlightened activity, originated in this world. His origin, in the sense of his first manifestation to those needing to be trained, has three aspects: the one to be tamed, the tamer, and the way in which the taming takes place.

2.1 The One to be Tamed

Generally speaking “those needing to be tamed” refers to all sentient beings, but the particular being we will discuss here is the rudra known as “Black Liberation”²⁵. Now, in general there are three ways of explaining rudras. The first identifies them as the wrathful herukas in the Akaniṣṭha pure realm, who appear standing on top of the bodies of different beings in order to subjugate them. However, these are in fact sambhogakāya manifestations, despite having the name “rudra” applied to them. The second is as emanations

emitted by buddhas and bodhisattvas, *nirmāṇakāya* manifestations who appear in the “fields” of those needing training, in accordance with that particular field. In addition to emanations like Śākyamuni, there are also those who are outwardly disruptive, such as the disorderly monks emanated by Śākyamuni so that their transgressions could be used as examples of how not to act, and so become the basis for the rules of monastic discipline. However, they too are essentially pure emanations. These two types of *rudra* can therefore actually become objects of refuge and they are not relevant here. It is the third type that are relevant; I shall explain this type as it is presented, in very similar fashion, within two tantras: *The Nirvāṇa Tantra of Vajrakīlaya*²⁶ and *The Root Tantra of the Wrathful Vajra*²⁷.

The third type of *rudra* is essentially negative, and is a tangible being, reborn in a malignant form as a result of broken tantric commitments in previous lives. Such a *rudra* is usually accompanied by a retinue of other malignant beings, and as a group their main activity is to cause obstacles to the propagation of the teachings of the secret *mantrayāna*. This is why practitioners of the unsurpassed secret mantras perform a practice called “Slaying Rudra”²⁸, *Rudra Dralwa*, prior to embarking on any important practice, such as a great accomplishment ceremony, or *drupchen*²⁹. Through this practice of slaying and liberating the *rudra*, both the *rudra* and its retinue are naturally liberated, so ensuring that they cannot create obstacles. Then our practice of secret mantra will be free from any malignant force, and auspicious circumstances will be securely established from the very outset.

The principal cause for being reborn as a *rudra* is allowing the secret mantra *samaya* to deteriorate, and here I would like to recount the story of the origin of a certain

such rudra. The age in which we live now is called "The Aeon of Excellent Fortune"³⁰. Twelve thousand and six "great aeons" ago, there was an aeon named Kunkö³¹—Complete Array—and a world system called Manifest Joy³². It was the age in which the teachings were propagated in this world system by the teacher Buddha Akṣobhya, just as they are propagated in this era by the teacher Buddha Śākyamuni. At that time, then, there lived a monk named Thubka Shyönnu³³ who was teaching the secret mantrayāna. Next door to him lived a wealthy family called Keukaya³⁴, in which there was one son called Black Liberation, who had a servant named Denpak. At one point, Black Liberation went with his servant to visit Thubka Shyönnu, and with great respect they posed him this question: "Is there a path to liberation where you enjoy everything, just as you feel like? We heard that there was one, but is that really true?" The monk replied, "Oh, yes, it's true all right. Such a teaching does exist."

Black Liberation and his servant were overjoyed, and they both took ordination and joined the path of Dharma. Black Liberation kept on requesting Thubka Shyönnu to give them the instructions that would allow someone to utilize and enjoy the objects of desire in order to achieve liberation. So the monk taught them that if someone has realized the fundamental nature of reality, then even if they kill, steal, lie, commit adultery or engage in sexual misconduct, they can still achieve liberation. From the worldly point of view, of course, these are non-virtues which will cause you to be bound to saṃsāra, but if you have realized the fundamental nature of mind, then, even if you commit such actions, liberation can be attained. However, Black Liberation was not so bright, and when he heard this teaching, he failed to understand that you have to realize the nature

of mind before being able to behave in such a way. Instead, he misunderstood the teaching to mean that by simply killing, stealing and so on, a person could achieve liberation. Although he was the son of the leader of the community, his mind had the potential to accumulate very negative non-virtue. But his servant Denpak was much sharper, and had the kind of capacity and keenness of sensibility to realize the inner meaning of secret mantra, and the correct way of practising the esoteric path. Although outwardly he was only a servant, inwardly he became a pure practitioner of secret mantra.

So Black Liberation and Denpak found that their respective views and conduct contradicted one another, and they kept on getting into conflict and debate. Finally, they went to ask their teacher about their disagreements and disputes. When they asked Thubka Shyönnu who was right with regard to the view and conduct, he replied that Denpak was right and Black Liberation was wrong. Black Liberation became very angry with his teacher and flew into a fit of rage. He felt that the least their teacher could have said was that they were both right or they were both wrong, but to say that one was right and the other wrong was completely unacceptable. His anger caused him to develop an incorrect view of his teacher.

Now Black Liberation's father was the ruler of the village and, encouraged by his son, he seized the servant Denpak and the monk Thubka Shyönnu, humiliated them publicly, and then exiled them from the community. This left Black Liberation, who had a completely incorrect understanding of the unsurpassed secret path, thinking that he could engage in union and in slaying whenever he pleased. So he ventured out into the charnel grounds, and began eating human flesh

and flaying the skin and wearing it as clothing. The wild inhabitants of the charnel grounds—carnivorous beasts, wild boars, flesh-eating birds, and the like—became his retinue, whom he led in killing all who got in his way. He summoned a great number of prostitutes, whom he raped and tortured. This went on for a long time, with the result that he accumulated a tremendous amount of negative karma.

So when Black Liberation died, he was immediately reborn in the Vajra Hell. Only those who have broken their secret mantra samaya take rebirth in that particular hell. Black Liberation's negative karma ripened and as it ran its course, gradually became exhausted. As it did so, he slowly began to move in and out of the hell realms each time he was reborn. He went from the Vajra Hell into the eight hot hells, and then he would alternate between rebirth in one of the eight hot and then one of the eight cold hells. This went on for twelve thousand great *kalpas*. It is the nature of karma that it eventually plays itself out, whether it is virtuous or non-virtuous. And so it was that when his ripening karma for being born in the hell realms was exhausted, he was finally able to take rebirth as a *preta*, and for six great kalpas he experienced the suffering of the pretas. After the karma for being born as a *preta* had ripened and was exhausted, he was then reborn as a *rakṣasa* or cannibal demon³⁵ in the form of "Rudra, Black Liberation". He became a powerful *rakṣasa* because previously, during his apprenticeship with Thubka Shyönnu, he had visualized himself constantly as different wrathful deities from the secret mantrayāna and recited their wrathful mantras. Though what he was doing was not authentic "generation stage" tantric practice, still it had generated powerful karma. So he became the controller of the twelve lower levels of the form realm and the

desire realm. He was such an all-powerful ruler that there was not a single being in any of those realms who could inflict any harm on him, and yet all the while he was busy killing them, eating them, and doing them all the harm he could. This is the history of Rudra, and completes the account of “the one to be tamed”.

It is generally said that if you know the origins and history of worldly gods and demons, they will no longer be able to harm you. The same holds true for a rudra: you are beyond their malignant effects once you understand the history of their origins and development. That is why I have gone into some detail regarding the origins and history of this rudra.

In general, a rudra focuses specifically on trying to harm those who are practicing the unsurpassed secret mantra; they are his main targets. Now, the kind of beings that create obstacles for the teachings and practitioners of the secret mantrayāna are usually called *damsi*³⁶, and are basically those who have, in the past, allowed their tantric samayas to deteriorate. The foremost among these are the rudras, while the lesser ones are reborn as their retinue. This kind of rudra, along with its retinue, needs to be subjugated, but to try to subjugate a rudra like this via peaceful means would be quite fruitless. The vehicles based on the sūtras do not teach any methods viable for subjugating beings such as these, and so their subjugation cannot be addressed in the context of the sūtrayāna. However, on the path of the unsurpassed secret mantra, when there is a being that needs to be subjugated, there are a variety of methods offered to perform this subjugation. In general, secret mantra is characterized by a plurality of methods that fit just about any situation. The particular method that is used to subjugate rudras is called *dralwa* or “liberating”.

2.2 The Tamer

Returning to the story of Rudra Black Liberation, it was at this point that, at the urging of the Heruka of enlightened activity³⁷, the Buddhas of the Three Times in the Akaniṣṭha pure realm came to realize that here was a disastrous situation, and an extremely disruptive being. They convened a special meeting to discuss exactly how to deal with the rudra who was responsible. Realizing that he could not be dealt with effectively by peaceful means, they agreed that the circumstances demanded a special wrathful manifestation. So, through their great compassion, these supreme buddhas emanated countless wrathful deities, such as Hayagriva, the "Glorious Horse-Necked One"³⁸, to overcome Rudra for the sake of all living beings. This is what some accounts tell us, but here I will explain the account given in the Vajrakilaya tantras, which describes how the tamer of Rudra Black Liberation was none other than Vajrakilaya.

2.3 The Method of Taming

Generally speaking, it is understood to be an invariable and definite fact that when the buddhas and deities manifest, these manifestations, in terms of their own essence, are exclusively pure. However, when they display their Form Bodies³⁹, or *rūpakāya*, within the various fields of living beings needing to be tamed, these manifestations are quite variable and indeterminate in terms of how they are experienced by those living beings. There are different peaceful and wrathful manifestations, different constellations of major and minor marks, and different deities such as the Kagyé deities, Vajrakilaya, Gongdü, and so on. In general, all these manifestations of the Form Bodies are the expression

of the buddhas' enlightened awareness, manifesting directly out of the expanse of reality, the dharmadhātu. Yet when they interact with various living beings, these manifestations appear in a huge variety of ways to match the individual perspectives held by these beings, and so they are at times extremely pleasing, and at other times extremely disruptive.

For example, in the Nyingma tradition, the buddhas manifest in each of the six realms of existence in the forms that correspond to the beings in those realms. In the hell realm, they manifest in the form of the king of hell, Yamāntaka, to tame hell beings; in the hungry ghost realm, they manifest as the king of hungry ghosts, Blazing Mouth⁴⁰; in the animal realm, they manifest as the lion; in the human realm, as Śākyamuni; in the demi-god realm, they manifest as the king of demi-gods, Thakzangri⁴¹; and in the god realm, they manifest as Indra, lord of the gods. However, in terms of practice, we generally visualize all of these six emanations in a pleasing form similar to the Buddha Śākyamuni, since this is what we are accustomed to as human beings. This is why *thangka* painters generally represent them in this manner, rather than in the forms that they actually adopt and appear in to the beings of each realm, for instance as a hell being in the hells. Take two examples. When we meditate on the assembly of the one hundred peaceful and wrathful deities, these six buddhas appear within that maṇḍala as nirmāṇakāya buddhas, in human form. Again, in the Namchö⁴² treasure tradition, Avalokiteśvara alone manifests in a wide variety of forms, not simply in the familiar one with four arms, holding the lotus and so on. So in the tantras it is said that the buddhas' form manifestations are indeterminate and cannot be precisely defined, since they appear in accordance with

the perspectives and dispositions of the beings needing to be tamed.

In this particular instance, the wisdom mind of all the buddhas combined to manifest another form identical to Rudra Black Liberation, in order to tame him. In the form of this rudra that they had emanated, they engaged in sexual union with his female consort, Krodhīśvari, who thought all along this was her own Rudra. As a result of their union, the bindu of the buddhas' rudra emanation, in the form of a HŪM, came to rest on top of the white lunar maṇḍala in her womb. In addition, this emanated rudra subjugated the ten attendant Protectors of the Directions⁴³, who acted as Rudra's bodyguards, and brought them under his power. Then he simply vanished by dissolving into the expanse of reality.

Subsequently, the ten Protectors of the Directions and their female consorts began having offspring, which displayed ominous signs, such as being born with pig's heads and bear's heads. Then Krodhīśvari, impregnated by the HŪM that the emanation had left inside her, gave birth to Vajrakilaya. He emerged from her womb with three faces, six arms, and indestructible vajra wings, and at once began to proclaim "Kilaya" over and over again.

When the real Rudra saw all of this, and in particular Vajrakilaya emerging from his consort's womb, he became terror-stricken and fell unconscious, as did all the other members of his retinue. As they lost consciousness, they all started vomiting blood. When he revived, Rudra summoned his retinue and they all lamented in loud voices. Then Rudra manifested in a form just like Vajrakilaya himself, with three faces and six arms, and assembled troops of demons that showered weapons on Vajrakilaya. In response, Vajrakilaya manifested in

a form with nine heads and eighteen arms, while from every single pore in his body he began emanating miniature *kilayas* with their own nine heads and eighteen arms. They burst out in every direction, all uttering wrathful mantras, and finally the real Rudra and his retinue were left speechless, in defeat.

However, Rudra then came at him yet again in a new form, with nine heads and eighteen arms. In response, Vajrakilaya manifested a form with a thousand heads and arms, along with countless eyes, while still continuing to emanate the miniature nine-headed Vajrakilayas from the pores of his skin. In addition, he emanated ten male and female Wrathful Herukas⁴⁴, who suppressed the ten Protectors of the Directions by standing on top of them. Then the sound of the mantra HASA YA RA HRI TANAYA resounded and emerged from the crown of Vajrakilaya's head, entered the crown of Rudra's head, and dissolved into him. The potency of this mantra was such that Rudra was separated from all the gods who had been helping him, and he was left quite alone and without assistance. Meanwhile, Vajrakilaya continued to emanate five other types of mantras from his body, each one entering the corresponding point of Rudra's body. One type of mantra pulled Rudra's life-force⁴⁵ from its usual residence outside the body (each being is thought to have a special place in the environment in which his or her life-force resides), and dissolved it into his physical body. Another type of mantra brought the power of harming him into his own body, and yet another drove him insane. With a mantra charged with the potency to tear Rudra into pieces, Vajrakilaya seized Rudra's own main hand implement, his *khaṭvāṅga* trident, and with it he pierced Rudra's body, and chopped it into pieces. Then, along with a mantra which gathered these bodily parts

together and offered them up to Vajrakilaya's mouth, Vajrakilaya uttered "AH LA LA HO", and swallowed all the pieces of the corpse, without blinking an eye.

In fact these six mantras are the same mantras used in the practice of Vajrakilaya when we engage in the "liberation" of demonic forces, and this is how they first originated.

Then Vajrakilaya dispersed all the members of Rudra's retinue who belonged to the class of demons. Since he had now successfully subjugated Rudra, the buddhas of the past, present and future offered praise to Vajrakilaya, in the melody of the rakṣasas⁴⁶. Then, with their terrifying neighing, the Vajra horses—Hayagriva and so on—humiliated⁴⁷ Rudra and his retinue once and for all.

Rudra had been consumed by Vajrakilaya, and through the blessing of being held in Vajrakilaya's stomach, he recalled all the forms in which he had been reborn over innumerable lifetimes—the twelve thousand great kalpas of rebirths in hell, and the six great kalpas of rebirths as a preta. So he came to realize that this suffering was due to having let his tantric commitments degenerate, and finally he understood the inexorable karmic law of cause and effect governing virtue and negativity. At this, he lamented, crying out many words of remorse and confession. These words were subsequently arranged in the form of precepts, which today are used in the rite of confession called *The Lamentations and Confession of Rudra*⁴⁸.

Then Rudra emerged from Vajrakilaya's "secret place"—his anus—and, keeping Rudra in front of him, Vajrakilaya intimidated him even further with his threatening presence and bearing. Next, each member of his eight-fold retinue, the eight classes of gods and demons, confessed and took off their heads as an offering

to Vajrakilaya. At this juncture, terrified and intimidated, Rudra pleaded, "So meagre has your compassion been for me that you have expelled me through your lower orifice. But now I am your servant, and from this point on, I request that you show me the appropriate respect. If I transgress your orders, then let me burn in hell! I offer you my mother, sister and female servants as your willing subjects, to be at your command. I understand that I cannot be a principal member of the blazing wrathful maṇḍala, and so do not deserve any part of the primary offering in the Ganacakra feast. However, please allow me to reside on the periphery of the maṇḍala, and grant me the leftovers that have been spat back by the vajra master."

With these words, Rudra offered his body to Vajrakilaya as a "seat" below his feet, focused his ears on Vajrakilaya's transmission of the pacifying teachings, and with his mind constantly regretted and confessed all the negative karma he had accumulated. Rudra's retinue also act as cushions for Vajrakilaya's retinue; for example the ten Protectors of the Directions, lying face down intertwined with their female counterparts lying on their backs, are the seats of the ten Wrathful Ones. They too listened to Vajrakilaya transmit the teachings, since they were now included within the maṇḍala. As for Rudra's residence, which was built of skulls, Vajrakilaya blessed it to become the divine palace of his own maṇḍala. This then is the origin of the entire assembly of the deities of Vajrakilaya, as regards the residences and the beings residing within them.

The reason Rudra had the good fortune to meet Vajrakilaya, and to be treated in this way, was because he had made contact with the secret mantra teachings many lifetimes before, when he received instructions from the monk Thubka Shyönnu. Though Rudra is now,

as Mahākāla, a protector of the teachings of the one thousand and two buddhas of this fortunate aeon, there is a prophecy that in the future he will become a buddha himself in the subterranean world system.

So this is the explanation of how, at this particular point in time, Rudra was completely liberated by Vajrakilaya. However, it is only one account, and in fact there are always many more rudras, who come from the rebirths of individuals unable to keep their tantric commitments. They are reborn as malignant forces, who create obstacles for secret mantra practitioners, and interfere with the keeping of pure tantric samayas. When Guru Rinpoche first granted the secret mantra teachings to his twenty-five principal disciples in Tibet, he gave them this transmission of Vajrakilaya, since he realized they would experience obstacles to their practice of the secret mantrayāna from such malignant forces. Practitioners like us now, by practicing Vajrakilaya, will no longer be afflicted by this *damsi* class of harm-doers, with all their attempts to create obstacles to the practice of secret mantra and to the observance of pure tantric samayas.

3

The Practice of Vajrakīlaya

3.1 Vajrakīlaya as Ground, Path and Fruition

(i) The *ground* Vajrakīlaya should be understood as the primordially unborn nature of the mind, free from all discursive elaboration, within which all the buddha bodies and primordial wisdoms are spontaneously and integrally present.

(ii) The *path* Vajrakīlaya is the vivid visualization of those three buddha bodies and five primordial wisdoms, present within the ground, in the form of Vajrakīlaya and his retinue of deities, here depending on the integration of skilful means and insight⁴⁹. There are four aspects to the path Vajrakīlaya:

1. The wisdom awareness Phurba⁵⁰.
2. The enlightened mind Phurba⁵¹, here referring to the wisdom of the completion stage.
3. The immeasurable compassion Phurba⁵².
4. The substantial Phurba⁵³, which is the actual ritual item we call phurba.

1. The *wisdom awareness Phurba* is the coming to the fore of self-arising wisdom⁵⁴, which is the indivisible union of space and *rigpa* awareness. This means that in our practice, this wisdom phurba must seal all the phenomena of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, so that, through its penetration, all distorted appearances are ultimately eradicated and we attain the dharmakāya of non-dual wisdom.

2. The *enlightened mind Phurba* relates to the path of mantra, which in Mahāyoga generally consists of the path of insight⁵⁵, and the path of skillful means⁵⁶. Here we are concerned with the latter: when the upper gateway of the winds and the lower gateway of the bindus are unified within the completion stage practice, the innate wisdom of great bliss emerges⁵⁷. This is the “bodhicitta” or enlightened-mind referred to. This phurba of the enlightened-mind seals our impure experiences of channels, winds and bindus, thereby penetrating and eradicating them. In this way, the pure sambhogakāya, the principal lords of the maṇḍalas of male and female deities, comes to the fore.

3. The *immeasurable compassion Phurba* refers to the great compassion that never abandons a single sentient being. The phurba of immeasurable compassion seals all the six kinds of sentient beings, so that all the sites of cyclic existence are penetrated and eradicated, whereby we attain the nirmāṇakāya.

4. The *substantial Phurba* refers to the phurba we use as the support for our visualization⁵⁸, the actual ritual dagger arranged on our shrine along with a painting or statue of the deity Vajrakilaya. If we are able to, it is best to create the entire maṇḍala of wood and clay, portraying each of the deities of the whole maṇḍala, most of whom hold phurbas in their hands. Otherwise, you can make a maṇḍala of colored sand, and then using a

“phurba box”⁵⁹ as a support, for example a three-legged metal stand, arrange phurbas in the corresponding locations, as symbols of the deities of the maṇḍala. These concrete supports for visualization are the main significance of the term “substantial Phurba”, but it also extends to include the visualized deity and the deity evoked in reality through such visualizations, since both occur in dependence upon the actual phurbas used as a meditative support.

In the generation stage practice of *kyérim*, first we generate a visual image of the deity by means of “the three *samādhis*”⁶⁰ which is termed the *samayasattva*, or “commitment being”⁶¹. By then inviting the natural maṇḍala⁶² of the deity Vajrakīlaya and his retinue from the Akaniṣṭha pure realm where they dwell in sambhogakāya form, these actual deities, known as the *jñānasattva* or “wisdom beings”⁶³, dissolve into the visualized forms, and become inseparable from them. So, both *samayasattva* and *jñānasattva* are called “substantial Phurba”, and the term is extended to cover them both.

In addition to the “wisdom being,” the sambhogakāya manifestation of the deity is also called the “natural Phurba”⁶⁴, since it is the natural reality of the deity which the practitioner must evoke. The *samayasattva*, or initial, visualized form of the deity and the maṇḍala can also be called the “samādhi Phurba”⁶⁵ or the “generation stage deity Phurba”⁶⁶, as we meditate upon our very own nature as Vajrakīlaya in the practice. This three-fold “substantial Phurba” must penetrate grasping at ordinary perception, a penetration which eradicates all impure, discursive thoughts or negative conceptualization. So, we actualize the manifestation of phenomenal existence as the pure expression of Vajrakīlaya and his maṇḍala of deities. This fourth

aspect of the phurba will be the main topic of discussion here, since it includes the deity of the generation stage practice, which is at the heart of the meditative process.

(iii) The fruition Vajrakilaya is the primordial wisdom awareness of the mind of all the buddhas.

The reason I have made a point of discussing these different aspects of Vajrakilaya is because we tend to think of Vajrakilaya as simply the deity with three faces and six arms that we meditate on in practice. However, as you can see, in fact it is far more than that, and includes the wisdom awareness, the enlightened-mind developed in the practices of the completion stage, the immeasurable compassion developed through contemplative practice, as well as the visualization supports and deities present within the practice of the generation stage.

3.2 The Generation of Vajrakilaya

I shall now explain in detail the generation stage of deity practice. To begin with, in order to generate our own nature as the deity, we must actualize the three samādhis. These three samādhis are not exclusive to Vajrakilaya by any means, but are fundamental to all generation stage practices. The words used to lead the mind into these three samādhis are the same as those found in the sādhana treasure revelations of Ratna Lingpa, which themselves derive from the root phurba tantras. In fact, these stanzas, which belong to the beginning of the deity generation stage, are shared by all phurba treasures as the means for generating the three meditative absorptions or samādhis:

DORJE TROWÖ SHYÉ DANG CHÖ
TSON CHEN NGÖNPO CHER BAR WA

NAMKHÉ KYIL DU TIKLÉ SHAR
SOK GI GO RU SHARWA DANG
NYING GI KYIL DU GOMPAR JA⁶⁷

Literally:

The wrathful vajra cuts through anger.
The blue [HŪṂ] blazes ever higher as the great
indication,
Arising as a bindu in the center of the sky.
Dawning in the gateway of its life-force:
I must meditate on it at the center of my heart.

If we separate out these lines to show how they correspond to the three samādhis and the generation of the palace as the support, they are as follows:

1. The samādhi of suchness⁶⁸

DORJE TROWÖ
The wrathful vajra..

2. The samādhi of total manifestation⁶⁹

SHYÉ DANG CHÖ
...cuts through anger.

3. The causal samādhi⁷⁰

TSÖN CHEN NGÖNPO CHER BAR WA
NAMKHÉ KYIL DU TIKLÉ SHAR
The blue [HŪṂ] blazes ever higher as the great
indication,
Arising as a bindu in the center of the sky.

4. The Generation of the Palace as the Support⁷¹

SOK GI GO RU SHARWA DANG
NYING GI KYIL DU GOMPAR JA
Dawning in the gateway of its life-force:
I must meditate on it at the center of my heart.

1. "Wrathful vajra" refers to the first samādhi, the samādhi of suchness, meaning the meditation on the

nature of emptiness. In general, *vajra* has three meanings: (i) unborn emptiness⁷²; (ii) diamonds⁷³, which are known as “substantial vajras”⁷⁴; and (iii) the vajras or “sceptres” used along with bells in tantric rituals, which are known as “symbolic substantial vajras”⁷⁵. However in this context, the primary meaning of “vajra” is unborn emptiness.

The term *wrathful* usually means springing from anger. Here, the one who is angry is the “vajra” itself, the unborn emptiness. At whom is the vajra angry? The object of anger here is our inveterate grasping at concrete identities in conceptually apprehended dualistic experience. How does the vajra express its anger? Darkness is completely absent within the fiery nature of the sun. In fact it is its antithesis; darkness can never resist the rising of the sun, and can only fade away. In the same way, when the unborn nature of emptiness is realized, then its antithesis, dualistic conceptuality, cannot resist its anger, and dissolves.

To sum up, the main point of the first samādhi is that when we meditate on our own nature as the wisdom deity, first of all we must enter into an awareness of the nature of reality, which is the unborn nature of emptiness, and remain in that state. Subsequently we will also come to understand that the deity’s own nature is nothing other than emptiness.

2. The second samādhi, the samādhi of total manifestation, refers to the experience of appearances rising out of the state of *emptiness*, which happens in two distinct contexts:

(i) First: during the formal contemplative state of meditative equipoise⁷⁶, when we are focused principally on one-pointed immersion in *emptiness*, so that any visions of radiant light are withdrawn within its

expanse, this is “the samādhi of suchness”. However, when the appearance of luminously radiant light⁷⁷ as empty forms⁷⁸, which derives from completion stage practice, is emphasized, our consciousness is then integrated with them, and these visionary forms intensify and spread in extent. When *radiant light*, or luminosity, is emphasized in meditative equipoise instead of emptiness, it is termed “the samādhi of total manifestation”.

(ii) Second: when we rise out of formal meditation and enter the post-meditation state of awareness⁷⁹, the dimension of emptiness recedes into the background, relatively speaking, and appearances are highlighted once more. So we become focused again on all the illusory⁸⁰ beings who have as yet failed to realize emptiness, and an intense compassion wells up towards them and their plight. Compassion flows naturally from the realization of emptiness. This also is termed “the samādhi of total manifestation”. In the first case, the manifestation is of empty forms of radiant light, while in the second, the manifestation is both of the sentient beings and of our own compassion towards them.

Compassion, the thought of bringing benefit to others, will eliminate any kind of anger or aggression just as naturally as the sensation of heat eliminates the sensation of cold. So compassion has the effect of naturally calming anger, which is what the first line is referring to when it says that the wrathful vajra...*cuts through anger*.

3. The third samādhi, the causal samādhi, refers to the blue syllable HŪṂ, which transforms into the maṇḍala of the supporting palace that is the residence, and the supported deities that inhabit it. So the letter HŪṂ is the “seed”⁸¹, or foundation⁸², which generates the maṇḍala.

*The blue [HŪṂ] blazes ever higher as the great
indication,
Arising as a bindu in the center of the sky.*

“Blue” refers to this syllable HŪṂ, which “blazes” as it emits countless rays of light in the process of transformation. “Great” indicates that its essence is the five primordial wisdoms, and “indication” points to it generating the maṇḍala itself. Since it is a seed, it is referred to as a “bindu” (a term whose meanings include “seed” and “sexual fluid”), and it arises within the center of reality itself (dharmatā), like the sky, beyond any sense of periphery or center. In brief, the indivisible, non-dual integration of the emptiness of the first samādhi and the compassion of the second samādhi becomes the letter HŪṂ. It should also be considered as the essence of the enlightened mind of all the buddhas.

In terms of the actual visualization, we begin by contemplating a blue HŪṂ in the middle of empty space (we no longer have any perception of our own body). The HŪṂ then alternates between radiating and absorbing rays of light. When the rays of light stream out, they make offerings to all the Buddhas of the Ten Directions and dispel all the obscurations of living beings. When they are re-absorbed, all the attainments are achieved, both ordinary and supreme. Then the HŪṂ itself transforms into the residence and deities of the maṇḍala.

The three samādhis are also expressed as “bringing the three kāyas onto the path”⁸³. Two points in the practice at the beginning of the evocation of the deity, when we actualize the first samādhi on the nature of emptiness, and then also in the conclusion, when we dissolve the deity into the nature of emptiness—are termed “making the fruitional dharmakāya of the buddha into

the path"⁸⁴. The second samādhi on compassion and illusion-like manifestations is termed "making the fruitional sambhogakāya of the buddha into the path". The third samādhi on the cause, as well as the meditation upon the details of the deity and the complete arrangement of the maṇḍala, are termed "making the fruitional nirmāṇakāya of the buddha into the path". In this way, the resultant buddhahood of the three kāyas is brought directly right into the path.

4. The final two lines then refer to the actual generation of the palace and deities of the maṇḍala, while the preceding lines focused on the HŪṂ itself.

*Dawning in the gateway of its life-force:
I must meditate on it at the center of my heart.*

"Life-force" refers to the vitality of the letter HŪṂ, which brings forth the vital palace and resident deities out of its energy or "gateway". The "center of the heart" has three connotations: (i) The initial visualization of the HŪṂ at the beginning of the transformative process must be a vivid visualization⁸⁵ with the full commitment of our *heart and mind*, in order to achieve perfect clarity. (ii) Furthermore, the HŪṂ, as the non-dual integration of emptiness and compassion, pervades all the phenomena of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa as their heart-core, and they are never anything other than it. We need to contemplate with the firm belief that this is the inner reality of the HŪṂ. (iii) Finally, when the deities have actually taken form, the central deity, which is ourself, has a wisdom deity within its own *heart*, in the heart of which stands the syllable HŪṂ, known as the samādhisattva or "samādhi being"⁸⁶. The samādhisattva forms a triad along with the samayasattva and jñānasattva.

3.3 The Visualization of the Palace

Before actually generating the deities in the process of contemplation, first we must generate their residence in the form of a celestial palace. We begin with the base that supports it, and which is constituted of the five elements, arranged one by one on top of each other. Initially, out of the letter HŪṂ emanates a syllable É, the seed syllable of the energy of space, from which manifests the dark blue, star-shaped maṇḍala of space, consisting of two interlocking triangles known as *dharmadayo*⁸⁷—“the source of all phenomena”. This syllable, as well as all the syllables described below, emanate in sequence out of the syllable HŪṂ itself. Now, we visualize the blue syllable YAṂ, the seed syllable of wind, from which emerges the bow-shaped blue maṇḍala of wind. Upon that appears a red syllable RAṂ, the seed syllable of fire, which transforms into the triangular red maṇḍala of fire. Upon that we visualize a white syllable BAṂ, the seed syllable of water, which transforms into the spherical white maṇḍala of water. Upon that, we visualize the seed syllable SUṂ, the seed syllable of earth, which transforms into the square-shaped golden maṇḍala of earth. Then we visualize the seed syllable KEṂ, the seed syllable of the central cosmic Mount Meru, out of which, as this is a wrathful maṇḍala, Mount Meru manifests as a heap of skeletons. Upon that, we visualize a seed syllable BHRŪṂ, the seed syllable for the celestial palace⁸⁸, which emanates a palace of stacked white skulls. And so we visualize the palace with its proportions and characteristics exactly as they are described in our own specific practice text. The essence of the palace is wisdom, and its appearance should be visualized as the self-manifestation of wisdom.

3.4 The Visualization of the Deities

The visualization of the deities residing within the palace, and the details of their exact number, appearance and so on, will vary from one sādhana to another. For example, in the case of the principal deity Vajrakilaya, many different manifestations are described with regard to his faces, arms and hand implements. It is stated in *The Secret Phurba Tantra*⁸⁹ that Vajrakilaya is to be meditated on as having 1000 heads, 1000 arms and 10 million eyes, which is how Vajrakilaya manifested at the time of slaying and liberating Rudra. However, in the *Nirvāṇa Tantra of Vajrakilaya*⁹⁰, Vajrakilaya is visualized as having nine heads and eighteen arms, another form in which Vajrakilaya manifested at the time of slaying and liberating Rudra. Then in the root tantra of Vajrakilaya, entitled *The Root Tantra: Wrathful Vajra*⁹¹, he is described as having three faces and six arms. So when, as in many sādhana rituals, we meditate on our own nature in the form of Vajrakilaya with three faces and six arms, it is based upon this text. In *The Twelve Kilaya Tantra*⁹², a form of Vajrakilaya is described with one face and two arms. This is the form in which Vajrakilaya appears in the *Gur Khukma Vajrakilaya* treasure of Khenpo Jigmey Phuntsok, and so we can say that this tantra is the source of his revelation. Given this variable, indeterminate nature of the manifestations of the deities, I shall not go into detailed descriptions, which can be found in your own particular sādhana manual. For the time being, I will just briefly sketch out the essentials as found in the phurba tradition of Ratna Lingpa.

Inside the celestial palace, we meditate on the seat of the principal deity, and the other deities. Generally, at the base of the maṇḍala, we visualize an iron wheel⁹³

with ten spokes. Unlike the typical wheel in the maṇḍalas of peaceful deities, shaped like a bicycle wheel with spokes as in the classical depictions of the Wheel of Dharma, the wheel in the wrathful maṇḍalas is a circle with the "spokes" being triangles that protrude from its outer perimeter, so that it resembles a cog more than a bicycle wheel. In general, the triangular shape is associated with wrathful deities, and spherical shapes with peaceful ones.

At the hub of the wheel is a lotus and a solar disc, on which the principal rudra pair, male and female, lie in union as mentioned above, forming a seat; on top of this stand the three-faced and six-armed Vajrakilaya and his consort. They represent the non-dual expression of the expanse of emptiness and primordial wisdom awareness.

Outside the hub, in the four directions are the Supreme Sons of the four types⁹⁴. At the perimeter of the wheel, on top of each of the ten spokes, lie the individual Protectors of the Directions, male and female, also forming seats, on top of which appear the ten corresponding male and female Wrathful Ones⁹⁵, emanated from the principal deity in order to subdue the Protectors of the Directions. These are herukas of wisdom. Also, on top of the seats formed by the bodies of the Protectors of the Directions, to the right and left of each of the Wrathful Ones and their consorts are one male and one female *tramen*⁹⁶. Tramen are beings with the bodies of gods, and the heads of either birds or carnivorous animals. All the females are bird-headed and termed "executioners"⁹⁷ or "winged ones"⁹⁸, while all the males are carnivore-headed and termed "devourers"⁹⁹ or "fanged ones"¹⁰⁰. The males can also be referred to as "attendants"¹⁰¹, in which case the females by themselves are referred to as "tramen".

The manner in which these deities first emerge is that ten orbs of light are emitted from the secret places, the

genitals, of Vajrakilaya and his consort, themselves the union of emptiness and awareness. These orbs of light shine above, below, and in the four principal and four intermediate directions, the light then transforming into the Ten Wrathful Ones, male and female. The male Wrathful Ones then emanate the ten male devourers, while the female Wrathful Ones emanate the ten female executioners.

Outside the perimeter of the wheel are the sixteen phurba protectors¹⁰², and beyond this are the four gateways in the cardinal directions, which are the entrances to the maṇḍala. These are guarded by the four female gate-keepers, whose seats are the male and female Gandharvas¹⁰³ and so on. Their functions are to summon, bind, subdue, and drive crazy¹⁰⁴.

The root deities¹⁰⁵ are Vajrakilaya and his consort, the Supreme Sons, the male and female Wrathful Ones, and the four female gate guardians. The branch deities¹⁰⁶ or "further emanations"¹⁰⁷ are the twenty tramen and the sixteen phurba protectors.

This visualization of the maṇḍala and the seats within the maṇḍala, is called the "supporting"¹⁰⁸ aspect of the maṇḍala, since it supports the deities who take their places upon it; the deities in turn are referred to as the "supported"¹⁰⁹.

While this has been a brief outline of the presentation given in the terma revelation of Ratna Lingpa, you should meditate on the different facets of the maṇḍala given in the sādhana manual of your own particular tradition.

3.5 The Supreme Sons of the Four Types

Out of all the sons emanated from the enlightened heart of Vajrakilaya, the supreme ones are those of the four types. In other traditions, these are presented as five,

in which case they correspond to the enlightened body, speech, mind, qualities and activity. In fact their number is not definite or determined: in some maṇḍalas there are as many as one hundred and eight, in others as few as one. In some Vajrakilaya rituals, they are termed “phurba of approach”¹¹⁰, which refers to the first of the four stages of visualization practice¹¹¹. Initially, by accumulating many recitations of the mantra, you gradually gain the potency of the mantra, and so you are able to activate these deities. Once their potency has reached its threshold, then you can move on to engaging in enlightened activities, such as liberating and so on, based upon these deities. Since the mantra accumulation “approaches” these deities as their potency is gradually activated, they are called the “phurba of approach”.

Alternatively they can be referred to as the “substantial phurba maṇḍalas”¹¹². This is a name which expresses how the Supreme Sons embody all of the maṇḍala’s deities and blessings, which are compared to “substances” in the general sense of the word, referring to a collection of things.

The upper parts of the bodies of the Supreme Sons are sometimes described as having one head and four arms, and sometimes as having three heads and six arms; however, the bottom parts of their bodies are always the three-edged blade of a phurba. Each of the other deities of the maṇḍala, including Vajrakilaya, holds a single phurba, but not the Supreme Sons, since they themselves are phurbas. These phurbas symbolize the achievement of enlightened activities. The term “sons” indicates that they were emanated from the heart of the deity and his consort. Actually, all the deities of the maṇḍala are contained completely within the body of each of these four Supreme Sons, who are also the principal performers of the four enlightened

activities: pacifying, expanding, controlling and fierce¹¹³. So they are truly supreme among all the sons of Vajrakilaya, as they both embody the entire maṇḍala and execute enlightened activity to perfection. Vajrakilaya and his consort themselves are also “supreme”, but they are not “sons”, since they have not been born from anyone. The ten male and female Wrathful Ones are “sons”, since they derive from the secret places of Vajrakilaya and his consort, but they are not “supreme” sons. The tramen are emanations, but neither “sons” nor “supreme”.

3.6 The Three Elements of Deity Generation Practice

When we visualize ourselves as the deity in the form of Vajrakilaya, we must apply the three essential points of any deity generation practice:

- (i) Clarity¹¹⁴
- (ii) Pure Recollection¹¹⁵
- (iii) Divine (or Firm¹¹⁶) Pride

These three are essential elements of the practice, without which it will be incomplete.

(i) Clarity

“Clarity” signifies a clear visualization, without any fogginess or roughness. However, a visualization that merely lacks non-clarity is not sufficient, as it must also be so precise that we have a vivid awareness of details as minute as the white and black elements of the deity’s eyes. This is because we are performing generation stage practice in order to purify our impure perception. The degree to which our direct perception of the deity in all its many details is clear and vivid will indicate the extent of our ability to transform ordinary perception so that it no longer appears.

(ii) Pure Recollection

This signifies the necessity for understanding the various visible appearances of the deities—their color, hand implements, and so on—as symbolic elements¹¹⁷, which point to the pure factors of reality¹¹⁸ and transcendent wisdom¹¹⁹. In fact, it is actually reality and transcendent wisdom which take on this vivid form of the deity. We must meditate with this perspective firmly in our mind. Otherwise, if we meditate thinking the bodies of the deities are similar to the appearances of ordinary living beings, our meditation will become a means of creating a rudra, rather than a deity. Below I shall give a detailed explanation of pure recollection as it applies to the appearance of the principal deity Vajrakīlaya and the main members of his retinue, such as the ten Herukas and their consorts.

(iii) Divine Pride

The third element is the divine pride¹²⁰, of being convinced that you are in reality the wisdom deity¹²¹. There are two reasons behind the need for such firm pride. The first is that in the context of the view of the secret mantrayāna, we must realize that all the phenomena of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are primordially pure. The second is that after we have visualized our own samayasattva form of the deity, the actual wisdom deity from the Akaniṣṭha pure land must approach and dissolve into that contrived image, and we must therefore have a resolute belief in it. If we lack this resolute pride, then we won't be able to divest ourselves of impure clinging and attachment. If instead, we think that we are *not* in fact the deity, but it is all only imagination, then this will neither be authentic generation phase practice, nor will it be able to act as an antidote to ordinary impure perceptions.

3.7 Deity Visualization and Emptiness

In generating the deity, initially we meditate in the first two samādhis, on emptiness and compassion. So the visualization of the deities and maṇḍalas all takes place in dependence upon reality, *dharmatā*, which is the union of emptiness and compassion. No matter which practice we are doing, the principal deity, the retinue, the celestial palace, the seats, and the sequentially arranged elements at the base of the maṇḍala all originate from emptiness and continue to be, in their true nature, nothing other than emptiness. So there are both the appearance of the manifest maṇḍala in all its vivid details, including ourselves as the principal deity, and its empty nature, which signifies that it has arisen from the expanse of reality beyond all discursive elaboration¹²². Integrating the appearances and their essential nature into an indivisible union, free from any mental fixations, is the completion stage of the practice. Thus the practice becomes what is known as “the non-dual practice of generation and completion”.

Without this awareness of emptiness, our perception of the deity will become an object of grasping, and in our belief in its concrete reality we will lapse into the extreme of *eternalism*. This explains why it is imperative that all these appearances be subsequently dissolved, in the dissolution phase, back into their own luminous emptiness. However, if you have genuinely divested yourself of all grasping, then there is no longer any need for an explicit dissolution, which is why Khenpo Jigphun’s phurba treasure does not say that the dissolution of the deity is imperative. It says, “The appearance of the deity, without dissolving, free from grasping, relaxes within the sameness of *dharmatā*”¹²³. In fact, we need to maintain a sense of the vivid vision¹²⁴ of the deity constantly, including during the post-meditative

state and throughout all our usual activities after the formal meditative session. However, as a general rule, first we need to dissolve the contemplative presence of the deity into non-referential emptiness¹²⁵ at the end of the session, and then re-generate the appearance once again before we conclude. With this re-emergent sense of the deity, we also ensure that we avoid the danger of lapsing into the extreme of nihilism through immersion into emptiness. This is not something that pertains only to Vajrakilaya practice, but applies in general to all deity generation techniques.

3.8 Pure Recollection

Now I will explain pure recollection in more detail as it relates specifically to the chief deity, Vajrakilaya, and the principal members of his retinue.

Vajrakilaya's appearance in union with a consort, which in Tibetan is referred to as *yab-yum*, literally "father-mother", symbolizes the non-duality of the expanse of emptiness and the expression of primordial wisdom. We could also say that ultimately the non-duality of emptiness and primordial wisdom appears as the *yab-yum* deities. The deity's blue color symbolizes unchanging reality, while his three faces symbolize the three bodies of a buddha and the three states of thorough liberation¹²⁶. Vajrakilaya's six arms symbolize the six transcendent perfections, while his legs represent the four legs of miraculous transformation¹²⁷.

In terms of hand implements, he holds a nine-pronged vajra symbolizing all the nine vehicles on the path to liberation, as well as a five-pronged vajra symbolizing the five primordial wisdoms. The blazing fire-ball of wisdom¹²⁸ symbolizes his total incineration of emotional distortion¹²⁹, while his three-pointed *khatvāṅga* trident symbolizes the annihilation of the

three poisons from their roots. Finally, with his two lower hands Vajrakilaya rolls a phurba called “the Mount Meru phurba” on account of its massive size, which symbolizes his subjugation of all malevolent forces¹³⁰.

There are three clumps of ashes on his forehead, from a corpse burned in the charnel ground, three drops of blood on his two cheek bones and the bridge of his nose, and three streaks of human fat on his throat. These three substances¹³¹ are applied like make-up to the bodies of all wrathful deities, not just Vajrakilaya. The same is true of the three types of garments and ornaments detailed below, which, together with the three substances, jointly symbolize all the enlightened qualities of the ground, path and fruition.

The three types of garments of a wrathful deity are a wet elephant skin draped over the upper part of the body, a flayed human skin draped over the shoulders, and a tiger-skin skirt wrapped around the lower part of the body. The ornaments are made of skulls and serpents. Vajrakilaya wears a crown of dry skulls, as well as a very long necklace hanging down below the waist that is made of dry skulls, moist skulls, and freshly severed heads. These two skull ornaments, along with all the serpent ornaments (considered as a single set) constitute the three types of ornaments. The serpent ornaments are as follows: Vajrakilaya’s hair is tied up with white serpents, he has yellow serpents as earrings, a red serpent as a necklace, green serpents as bracelets and anklets, and a black serpent necklace as long as the human head necklace, which hangs down below the waist.

All of the wrathful deities wear these ornaments, which are called “the eight charnel ground ornaments”: the three substances, the three types of garments and two types of ornaments—skulls and serpents.

Vajrakilaya and the ten male Wrathful Ones also appear in "the eight-fold attire of the glorious ones"¹³², which symbolizes their eradication of the eight classes of gods, cannibals and spirits: (i) their hair is a tangled mess; (ii) it has a half vajra as its top-knot; (iii) each one of the Wrathful Herukas wears a silken diadem¹³³ with blue and red strips hanging down on either side; (iv) they have vajra wings¹³⁴ that are indestructible, but can destroy everything; (v) they wear rhino-hide armour¹³⁵; (vi) they are in intimate sexual union¹³⁶ with their consort, who becomes as an ornament; (vii) they are also like steel in the brilliance of their appearance¹³⁷; while (viii) they are surrounded by an aura of the fire of primordial wisdom.

The wrathful deities have nine styles or demeanors¹³⁸ characteristic of their manifestation, consisting of three sets of three, corresponding to the body, speech and mind respectively. Every wrathful deity has all nine styles, though they do not necessarily display all simultaneously. The three corresponding to the body are: seductive, heroic, and repulsive¹³⁹, which correspond to the three poisons of desire, hatred and ignorance respectively. The three corresponding to speech are¹⁴⁰: their laughter which sounds like *ha ha ha* and *hi hi hi*, malicious threats like "Kill!" and "Strike!", and terrifying roars like one thousand dragons roaring simultaneously. The three corresponding to mind are¹⁴¹: compassion that nurtures ignorant beings, craving to tame wrathfully all incorrigible beings, and the serenity of never wavering from the expanse of reality.

To sum up, while we visualize the wrathful deity Vajrakilaya appearing as the supreme wrathful deity, the universal king controlling the three states of existence and suppressing the three realms with his splendour, we should simultaneously keep in mind all

the symbolic meanings that have been explained above as “pure recollection”.

Now I shall explain pure recollection as it applies to the ten male and female Wrathful Ones, the ten executioners, the ten devourers, the gate-keepers, and the other members of the retinue. The male and female Wrathful Ones, the ten executioners, and the ten devourers all symbolize the purification of the ten non-virtues, the antidotes to the ten Protectors of the Directions in Rudra’s retinue that need to be tamed, and the essence of the ten perfections¹⁴². The term “tramen”, applied to the executioners and devourers, means something fastened together, like fastening ornaments or studding small gems onto a golden cup. Just so, the heads of various animals and birds are “studded” onto the bodies of gods, symbolizing the inseparable union of the expanse of reality and wisdom. All these deities hold vajras and skullcups filled with blood, which symbolize emptiness and wisdom. The deities also hold the hand implements of the ten Protectors of the Directions, which symbolizes their victory over the unruly samaya-breakers. Finally, each one of the wrathful deities rolls a phurba between their hands, which symbolizes their ability to engage in unobstructed accomplishment of enlightened activities.

This completes the explanation of the way in which we visualize and meditate on the deities.

3.9 The Five Empowerments of the Five Buddha Families¹⁴³

After visualizing the deities, the samayasattvas, we generally invite¹⁴⁴ the wisdom deities from the pure land, and they come into the space in front of us. We then “request them to take their places”¹⁴⁵ in and as us, so

that the wisdom deities, the *jñānasattvas*, become inseparable from the *samayasattvas*. Then we make offerings and praises to them¹⁴⁶ as specified in our own *sādhana* manual, and finally we recite the mantra of the deity¹⁴⁷, which will be discussed below.

In some systems, just before the mantra recitation, we project the *jñānasattva* back out into the space in front of us, so separating the wisdom being from the commitment being, who then look back and forth at one another. In this case, we imagine that the mantra is projected continuously out of our own mouth (ourselves as the *samayasattva*) and into the mouth of the deity, and then circulates by descending through their body out of their genitals into our own, and then out of our mouth again. We keep up this circulation throughout the ritual, and then when the mantra recitation is completed, the wisdom being is re-absorbed back into us.

In general, however, the wisdom being simply dissolves into us and stays there throughout the practice. You need to follow your own particular *sādhana* manual.

An additional phase prior to the invitation of the deities is specified in many of the continuously transmitted traditions of *kama*, namely the performance of the five-fold empowerment, though this is often not included in the *terma* treasure traditions. So I shall describe how we perform the empowerment, should it be required. We begin by inviting all the Buddhas of the Ten Directions as embodied by the Victors of the Five Buddha Families, who then appear in yab-yum form in the sky above our head. From there, the Five Buddhas, as the "empowerment deities"¹⁴⁸, transmit the four-fold empowerment to us.

The first empowerment is the five-fold vase empowerment¹⁴⁹: from the east Akṣobhya transmits the water empowerment, from the south Ratnasambhava

transmits the crown ornament empowerment, from the west Amitābha transmits the vajra empowerment, from the north Amoghasiddhi transmits the bell empowerment, and from the center Vairocana transmits the name empowerment. In terms of our visual experience of this, each buddha touches our head with the respective empowerment substance¹⁵⁰ to confer the empowerment. For the “name” empowerment, the substance is the vajra and bell together, while “name” refers to our obtaining a special name in this context.

The second empowerment is “the secret empowerment”¹⁵¹, which is obtained by visualizing the red and white bodhicitta nectar¹⁵² flowing from the union of the five male and female buddhas into the crown of our head and so pervading our body.

The third empowerment is “the insight empowerment”¹⁵³ in which all of the empowering deities melt into light and dissolve into us through the crown of our head.

As the bodhicitta and light of the deities dissolve into us, we experience the coming to the fore of the wisdom of bliss and emptiness¹⁵⁴, which is the transmission of the fourth empowerment, “the verbal” or “word empowerment”¹⁵⁵.

Then, the Five Buddhas re-emerge in distinct form and ascend up our body to our head, where they take up position as a crown on our head, which we then consider we are wearing throughout the mantra recitation.

In order to seal our ordinary body, speech and mind with their enlightened counterparts¹⁵⁶, we visualize a white OM̐ at the crown of all the deities, a red AH̐ at their throat, and a blue HŪM̐ at their heart. From these three syllables, light of the same color emanates outwards to the ten directions, and then the essence of the body of all the buddhas, in the form of Vairocana, takes up residence on the crown of our head, the essence of

their speech, in the form of Amitābha, takes up residence in our throat, and the essence of their mind, in the form of Akṣobhya, takes up residence in our heart. We need to visualize all three of these throughout the practice.

At this point then, we invite all the deities of the maṇḍala from the Akaniṣṭha pure realm; we request them to take up residence; we visualize ourselves prostrating to them; we make offerings and praises; “and then finally we are ready to begin the recitation of the mantra.

3.10 The Mantra Recitation

There are four facets of the “presence” of mantras¹⁵⁷, which are common to all Buddhist mantras:

—the presence of mantras as being reality, dharmatā, in essence¹⁵⁸,

—the presence of mantras as the nature of phenomenal appearances¹⁵⁹,

—the presence of mantras as being blessings¹⁶⁰, and

—the presence of mantras as intrinsically having a potent force¹⁶¹.

The first refers to the essence of mantras being primordially empty. The second refers to how the various syllables of the mantra appear, even while it remains empty. The third refers to the buddhas and bodhisattvas blessing the mantras as the essence of the deities. The fourth refers to each mantra having its own specific potencies, which are the power to accomplish whatever attainments or *siddhis* we desire, ordinary or supreme. If we recite the mantra with the realization that the wisdom deity¹⁶² and the syllables of the mantra are primordially indivisible, then with that blessing our recitation of the mantra will result in the ability to accomplish unobstructedly both supreme and ordinary attainments. So the mantra has this power

to produce results, just like a potent medicine can cure an illness.

While the first two facets apply to all syllables and all mantras, the latter two are attributes unique to the mantras deriving from buddhas and bodhisattvas. When a form body, a rūpakāya with faces and hands, manifests from the dharmakāya of the buddhas, we think of it as a deity. In just the same way, the mantra takes form out of the essence of the dharmakāya, and we should think of it also as a deity. So the sound of the mantra is the deity, and the deity is the mantra. Recitation of mantras is especially powerful when we realize the triple indivisibility of the wisdom body¹⁶³, the mantra, and reality or dharmatā.

The mantra of the deity Vajrakīlaya is as follows: OM VAJRA KĪLI KĪLAYA SARVA BIGHNĀNA BAṂ HŪM PHAṬ. Its recitation has three divisions: the extensive, intermediate and concise. The concise is the nine syllable mantra: OM VAJRA KĪLI KĪLAYA HŪM PHAṬ, where it seems that the OM is not counted as part of the nine syllables. The intermediate is the thirteen syllable mantra: OM VAJRA KĪLI KĪLAYA DZA HŪM BAṂ HO HŪM PHAṬ. The extensive is the following: OM VAJRA KĪLI KĪLAYA SARVA BIGHNĀNA BAṂ HŪM PHAṬ. The different Vajrakīlaya traditions vary in terms of which of these they include.

3.11 Explanation of the Mantra

I will now explain each of the syllables of the mantra, one by one.

OM	signifies the five kāyas and the five primordial wisdoms ¹⁶⁴
VAJRA	signifies the uncompounded nature of the three times: past, present and future ¹⁶⁵

KĪLI	signifies the energization of the deity and the phurba ¹⁶⁶
KĪLAYA	signifies piercing with the phurba ¹⁶⁷
SARVA	signifies "all" the enemies and hindering demons ¹⁶⁸
BIGHNĀNA	signifies "suppressing" ¹⁶⁹ the negative forces
BAM	and HŪM these two syllables together mean to over-power or bring under our control ¹⁷⁰
PHATṬ	signifies liberating ¹⁷¹ the negative forces

It is also taught that all of the deities in the Vajrakilaya maṇḍala are contained within the syllables of this mantra.

OM	the principal male deity, Vajrakilaya himself
VAJRA	the principal female deity
KĪ	the ten male Wrathful Ones of wisdom ¹⁷²
LI	the ten female Wrathful Ones of space ¹⁷³
KĪ	the fanged ones of skillful means ¹⁷⁴
LA	the winged ones of insight ¹⁷⁵
YA	the Supreme Phurba Sons
HŪM	the four attendant gate-keepers ¹⁷⁶
SARVA	the gathering of all the deities of the maṇḍala
BIGH	the enemies and hindering demons ¹⁷⁷
NĀNA	the suppressing of the enemies and hindering demons
BAM	overpowering or bringing under control

HŪṂ destroying
PHATḤ the completion of the enlightened
 activity of liberating¹⁷⁸

So this single mantra embodies the secret mantras of all the deities. With the recitation of this mantra, all four enlightened activities—pacifying, and so on—are accomplished. This is why we should enunciate the mantra carefully and accurately. When we come to the end of our mantra recitation in a given session, we should recite three times the garland of vowels and consonants, the one hundred syllable mantra of Vajrasattva, and the mantra of interdependent origination. The point of this is to increase the potency of the mantra, as well as to erase the negative consequences of any mistakes we may have made in the recitation.

3.12 Concluding Phase

When we conclude a meditation session, so as to counteract our tendency to fall into the extreme of eternalism, we should dissolve the deity in the completion stage. This is done by: first performing a final set of offerings and praises to the deities, then requesting them to depart¹⁷⁹, and finally dissolving our own visualization of the samayasattva. Then, to avoid the extreme of nihilism, we re-emerge as the deity and clarify our visualization. Finally, we seal the entire practice with a dedication¹⁸⁰, aspirational prayers, and a prayer for auspiciousness.

Afterword

These days Vajrakilaya has become, to some extent, well-known in the West. Although you may find the details presented here somewhat overwhelming, if you are a practitioner of Vajrakilaya, it is crucial that you be familiar with these teachings. The reason I have given this teaching is to plant a seed within you, in the hope that in the future it will bring benefit to practitioners of Vajrakilaya in the West. In fact, Vajrakilaya can be explained in an even more extensive fashion, and perhaps in the future you could invite a Tibetan teacher able to do so. For the time being, I have taught you what I can, to the best of my ability.

About this Book

In June 1995 at Kunzang Palyul Chöling in Poolesville, Maryland, USA, Khenpo Namdrol gave a three-day series of teachings on Vajrakilaya, which were orally translated by Sangye Khandro. The transcript of these teachings was then systematically revised, supplemented and edited by Khenpo Namdrol in August 1996 at the Ngagyur Nyingma Institute in South India with the assistance of Dorji Wangchuk and David Germano.

Our deepest thanks and appreciation go to Khenpo Namdrol, and also to Dorji Wangchuk and David Germano for all their priceless assistance.

Vajrakilaya is dedicated especially towards removing obstacles to the long life and work of Kyabjé Penor Rinpoche, Kyabjé Khenpo Jigmey Phuntsok and Sogyal Rinpoche. It is also dedicated towards removing obstacles from the life and work of Patrick Gaffney.

Khenpo Namdrol

Khenpo Namdrol was born in 1953 in a small village, three days ride from Palyul monastery in Kham, East Tibet, to a family that can trace its history back through the royal house of Derge to the famous 7th century minister of King Songtsen Gampo, Gar Dampa.

Having left Tibet in 1959 for exile in India, Khenpo Namdrol joined HH Penor Rinpoche's monastery, Namdroling, in Bylakuppe, Mysore, just a few years after it had been founded; he was 13 years old. There he served for some time as attendant to Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche, who was the first master to encourage him to pursue the path of study.

Since then he has received teachings from a number of renowned masters and khenpos. In Sikkim he studied with Kyabjé Dodrupchen Rinpoche and then for five years he studied with Dzogchen Khenpo Tsöndru. Later, he continued his studies with Khenpo Rinchen and Khenpo Dazer. When he returned to Mysore in 1978, he and Khenpo Tsöndru started the Ngagyur Nyingma Institute, the Higher Buddhist Studies and Research Centre at Namdroling Monastery.

Khenpo Namdrol has received many teachings from Penor Rinpoche, and has served him tirelessly for many years. He also received a number of transmissions from Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, who visited Namdroling monastery on three occasions. It was during his first visit that Khenpo Namdrol was enthroned as khenpo.

In his quest to receive deeper teachings on the Guhyagarbha Tantra, which has always been of particular interest to him, Khenpo Namdrol journeyed to Tibet. During this time, he met and discovered a very close connection with Khenpo Jigmey Phuntsok, from whom he received many teachings, and whose students he was invited to teach. In 1990 Khenpo Namdrol played a leading role in arranging the meeting between HH the Dalai Lama and Khenpo Jigmey Phuntsok, and in 1993 he accompanied Khenpo Jigphun on his tour of the West. He has now become a lineage holder of Khenpo Jigphun's terma teachings.

Khenpo Namdrol is a senior khenpo at the Ngagyur Nyingma Institute, which has become the largest Nyingma study college outside of Tibet, with over 300 monks enrolled on courses and a reputation for outstanding scholarship. By 1995 at least 30 students there had qualified to teach the sūtras and tantras, which stands as a tribute to the 18 years Khenpo Namdrol spent establishing and teaching at the Institute. He now looks forward to being able to offer teachings in other Nyingma monasteries in the East, as well as in the West.

Notes

1. *spyi'i rgyud*
2. *'phrin las thugs kyi rgyud*
3. *spyi'i thugs rgyud*
4. *lha grags ldan mchog skyong*
5. *klu rgyal mgrin pa nag po*
6. *gnod sbyin kun tu bzang po*
7. *gnod sbyin skar mda' mdong*
8. *srin po blo gros thabs ldan*
9. *li tsa bi dri med grags pa*
10. *dgongs pa'i rtsal bdun*
11. *rdor sems zhal mthong gyi le'u*
12. or *Indrabhūti*
13. *dbyings; yeshes*
14. *slob dpon lang lab*
15. *bka' babs*
16. *rgyud lung man ngag*
17. *mgur khug ma*, literally: 'The Small Pouch Worn at the Neck'
18. *sgrub pa bka' brgyad gi chos*. The term 'Kagyé' is translated as 'Eight Proclamations', which refers both to these teachings, and the deities on which each one centres. 'Drubpa' refers to the *sādhana*s for each deity.
19. *dgongs pa*

20. *mchod rten bde byed brtsegs pa*: in Sanskrit, *Śaṅkarakūṭa caitya*
21. *mkha' 'gro ma las kyi dbang mo che*: in Sanskrit, *Mahākarmendrāṇi*
22. *bsil ba tshal*: in Sanskrit, *Śitavana*
23. *dam tshig gi mdzas*
24. 'Nāgārjuna garbha'
25. *thar pa nag po*
26. *phur pa myang 'das kyi rgyud*
27. *rdo rje khros pa'i rtsa ba'i rgyud*
28. *ru dra bsgral ba*
29. *sgrub chen*
30. *bskal pa bzang po*
31. *kun bkod*
32. *mngon par dga' ba*
33. *thub dka' gzhon nu*
34. *ke'u ka ya*
35. *srin po*
36. *dam sri*
37. 'phrin las kyi he ru ka
38. *dpal rta mgrin*
39. *gzugs sku*
40. *kha 'bar ma*
41. *thags bzang ris*
42. *gnam chos*
43. *phyogs skyongs*
44. *khro bo bcu*
45. *bla*
46. *srin po'i ngur dbyangs*
47. *dpa' bkong*
48. *Rudra smre bshags*
49. *shes rab*
50. *rig pa ye shes kyi phur pa*
51. *byang chub sems kyi phur pa*
52. *tshad med snying rje'i phur pa*
53. 'dus byas rdzas kyi phur pa or *mtshan ma rdzas kyi phur pa*
54. *rang byung ye shes*
55. *shes rab lam*

56. *thabs lam*
57. *bde ba chen po lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes*
58. *dmigs pa'i rten*
59. *phur pa'i sgrom*
60. *ting nge 'dzin rnam gsum*
61. *dam tshig sems dpa'*
62. *rang bzhin dkyil 'khor*
63. *ye shes sems dpa'*
64. *rang bzhin gyi phur pa*
65. *ting nge 'dzin phur pa*
66. *bskyed rim lha yi phur pa*
67. *rdo rje khro bos zhe sdang gcod / mtshon chen sngon po cher 'bar ba /
nam mkha'i dkyil du thig le shar / srog gi sgo ru shar ba dang / snying
gi dkyil du bsgom par bya*
68. *de bzhin nyid kyi ting nge 'dzin*
69. *kun tu snang ba'i ting nge 'dzin*
70. *rgyu'i ting nge 'dzin*
71. *rten gzhal yas khang bskyed pa*
72. *skye med stong pa nyid kyi rdo rje or skye med don gyi rdo rje*
73. *rdo rje pha lam*
74. *rdzas kyi rdo rje*
75. *mtshan ma rdzas kyi rdo rje*
76. *mnyam bzhag*
77. *'od gsal*
78. *stong gzugs*
79. *rjes thob*
80. *sgyu ma lta bu*
81. *sa bon*
82. *gzhi*
83. *sku gsum lam khyer*
84. *'bras bu sangs rgyas chos kyi sku lam du byed pa*
85. *gsal snang*
86. *ting nge 'dzin sems dpa'*
87. *chos 'byung*
88. *gzhal yas khang*
89. *phur pa gsang rgyud*

90. *phur pa myang 'das*
91. *rtsa rgyud rdo rje khros pa*
92. *kilaya tantra bcu gnyis*
93. *lcags kyi 'khor lo*
94. *sras mchog rigs bzhi*
95. *khro bo/khro mo*
96. *phra men or phra thabs*
97. *gsod byed*, also translated as 'killers' or 'slaughterers'
98. *gshog pa can*
99. *za byed*, also translated as 'carnivores'
100. *mche ba can*
101. *phyag brnyen*
102. *phur srung*
103. *dri za*
104. also translated as 'entice, capture, bind and paralyze'
105. *rtsa ba'i lha*
106. *yan lag gi lha*
107. *yang sprul pa*
108. *rten*
109. *brten pa*
110. *bsnyen phur*
111. *bsnyen sgrub yan lag bzhi*
112. *phur pa rdzas kyi dkyil 'khor*
113. *zhi rgyas dbang drag*, also translated as 'pacifying, enriching, magnetizing and wrathful'
114. *rnam pa gsal ba*
115. *rnam dag dran pa*
116. *nga rgyal brtan pa*
117. *mtshon byed*
118. *chos nyid*
119. *myang 'das ye shes*
120. *lha'i nga rgyal*
121. *lha ye shes pa*
122. *spros bral chos dbyings*
123. *lha snang mi bsdu zhen pa med/chos nyid mnyam pa'i ngang du klod*

124. *gsal snang*
125. *mi dmigs pa'i stong pa nyid*
126. *rnam thar sgo gsum*, sometimes translated as 'the three gateways to complete liberation' are:
rgyu mtshan ma med pa—causes lacking any characteristics;
'bras bu smon pa med pa—results not involving any aspiration;
ngo bo stong pa med pa—the essence being empty of both cause and fruit.
127. Admiration, investigation, concentration and mindfulness
128. *ye shes me dpung*
129. *nyon mongs*
130. *gdugs pa can*
131. *rtsi*
132. *dpal gyi chas brgyad*
133. *bcod pan*
134. *rdo rje gshogs pa*
135. *bse khrab*
136. *mnyam par sbyor ba*
137. *zi brjid*
138. *nyams*
139. *sgeg pa, chags pa'i nyams/dpa' ba'i ma nyams/mi sdug pa'i nyams*
140. *dgod pa'i nyams/gshe ba'i nyams/drag shul*
141. *snying rje'i nyams/rngams pa'i nyams, ma rung pa'i sems can khro bos 'dul phyir/zhi ba'i nyams*
142. Generosity, discipline, patience, diligence, concentration, wisdom, skilful means, aspiration, power, and primordial wisdom
143. *rigs lnga*, also translated as 'five buddha lineages'
144. *spyän 'dren pa*
145. *bzhugs su gsol*
146. *mchod stod*
147. *snags bzlas*
148. *dbang gi lha*
149. *bum dbang*
150. *dbang rdzas*
151. *gsang dbang*

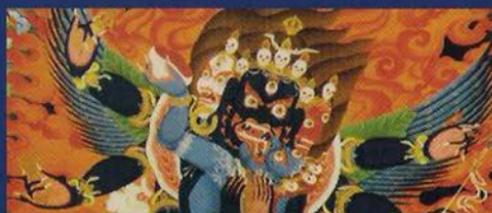
152. *byang sems dkar dmar*
153. *shes rab dbang*
154. *bde stong*
155. *tshig dbang*
156. *sku gsum rgyas 'debs pa*
157. *grub pa bzhi*
158. *chos nyid ngo bo nyid kyi grub pa*
159. *chos can rang bzhin gyi grub pa*
160. *byin gyis rlabs pa'i grub pa*
161. *nus pa'i mthus grub pa*
162. *lha ye shes pa*
163. *ye shes sku*
164. *sku lnga ye shes lnga*
165. *dus gsum 'dus ma byed pa*
166. *lha dang phur pa gso ba*
167. *phur pa 'debs pa*
168. *dgra bgegs thams cad*
169. *mnan pa*
170. *dbang du sdud pa*
171. *sgrol ba*
172. *ye shes khro bo*
173. *dbyings kyi khro mo*
174. *thabs kyi mche ba can*
175. *shes rab gshog pa can*
176. *phyag brnyan sgo ma bzhi*. The syllable HŪṂ at this point in the mantra is included and explained by Jamgön Kongtrul in his *dPal rdo rje phur pa rtsa ba'i rgyud kyi dum bu'i 'grel pa snying po bsdus pa dpal chen dgyes pa'i zhal lung*; in volume 10 of the *bKa' ma rgyas pa*, p. 95. However, when we are actually doing the practice, we should recite the mantra in accordance with whatever text has been taught, and with our teacher's oral instructions.
177. *dgra dang bgegs*
178. *bsgral ba*
179. *gshegs su gsol*
180. *bsngo ba/smon lam/bkra shis*



Nyan Chen Thang Lha

"The practice of Vajrakilaya blazes at the heart of the ancient Vajrayana traditions of Tibet. The wrathful heruka Vajrakilaya is the yidam deity who embodies the enlightened activity of all the buddhas, manifesting in an intensely wrathful yet compassionate form in order to subjugate the delusion and negativity that can arise as obstacles to the practice of Dharma. In fact, the practice of Vajrakilaya is famous in the Tibetan Buddhist world as the most powerful for removing obstacles, destroying the forces hostile to compassion, and purifying the spiritual pollution so prevalent in this age."—Sogyal Rinpoche, from the Foreword

In this series of teachings, originally given over a three-day period in the USA in 1995, Khenpo Namdrol presents a lucid and detailed explanation of the history and practice of Vajrakilaya. Not only are these teachings indispensable for those drawn to the practice of Vajrakilaya, but they will be of tremendous interest and inspiration to Vajrayana practitioners everywhere.



KHENPO NAMDROL RINPOCHE is a senior khenpo (abbot) at the Ngagyur Nyingma Institute, which has become the largest Nyingma study college outside of Tibet, with over 300 monks enrolled in courses and a reputation for outstanding scholarship. Khenpo Namdrol spent 18 years establishing and teaching at the Institute and by 1995 over 30 students had qualified to teach the sutras and tantras. He has received teachings from many of the greatest Tibetan masters, and is considered to be one of the leading khenpos in the Nyingma tradition.

SNOW LION

ISBN 1-55939-103-0

Cover design: Jesse Townsley /

Sidney Piburn

Printed in Canada

\$14.95 in USA

ISBN-13 978-1-55939-103-0

ISBN-10 1-55939-103-0



9 781559 391030