



# **Playing an Enlightened Symphony**

**The Extraordinary Characteristics of the Vajrayana Path of Liberation**

**Lama Chokyi Gyaltzen**

Writing based on a transcription of the beginning of the instruction class, which followed the Reading  
Transmission of the Chos Yangzab Preliminary Liberating Instructions  
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*The ability to dwell in the midst of appearances without having to push them away because they hurt or are wrong is a great gift to self and others, knowing with certainty that all appearances of mind are already liberated.*

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## The Extraordinary Characteristics of the Vajrayana Path of Liberation

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Most of you are very familiar with these traditions, so I am speaking mostly to one person here, who has requested the transmission and instructions of the Drikung Yangzab Preliminary Liberating Instructions<sup>1</sup>.

There are many, many traditions of Preliminary Liberating Instructions or ‘Extraordinary Foundation Practices’. Similar in essence, they all came from India in seed form from the Buddha’s time and developed through the Indian lineages of Vajrayana practices. There are many different ways of expressing the teaching for the liberation of sentient beings. It is important to know why and how they are applied.

One way of approach that many of us go through in trying to be free, happy, and unencumbered is to try to get rid of everything. We want to get rid of the feeling that the phenomena, the experiences of life—certain people, places and things—are in the way, that our concepts are in the way, and our life is in the way, somehow stopping us and making the path of liberation difficult. So, you push things away, you get rid of things. You wear white clothes; you have white cushions, etc., to feel pure.

This manner of removing that which is sticky and apparently harmful serves a great purpose only if it is conjoined with discernment. Then, it is a type of wisdom awareness. It’s like eliminating the foods that don’t work well with you. It’s akin to finding out that wearing nylon pants is uncomfortable for meditation. Do you know what I mean? You start to eliminate things that get in the way and to discern that which makes sense to adopt and what needs to be abandoned. So, that particular path is really for ‘you.’ It is for certain beings at certain times. Not bad, an effective path. We all need purification by discernment of that which needs elimination and that which is excellent to adopt—at least for some time. It is a path by which one has to learn what works for you to have a more alert, awake, lucid, compassionate, love-filled mind and body for beings. And to be at ease and less clinging.

So, that is a valid path of unfolding for many beings. However, it doesn’t include the interconnectivity of life. It does not incorporate the busyness, shall we say, the messiness of phenomenal

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<sup>1</sup> In this tradition, the practitioner receives a transmission of practice texts and the authorization to practice it upon a request to the teacher and in their presence. For this reason, Lama Gyaltzen does not generally publicly make available any recordings of transmissions. This principle has everything to do with helping practitioners gain merit and understand interdependence.

experience, of a natural existence. Being able to live in that activity and serve beings, help beings and interact, and most importantly, help all types of beings recognize the awake mind, means you actually have to go quite a bit deeper into what is happening. It's not just about meditation. It's your interaction, your interpenetration and your interdependence with all sentient forms. And really, as it turns out, it has everything to do with one's recognition of the nature of appearance-emptiness in unity with compassion. It doesn't matter, beings or no beings. The key point is to know the essence of all appearances or the quintessence-experience of the mind. Only from this recognition is great compassion born and utilized.

**This is really an indestructible teaching. It is your mind's nature.**

So, to unfold the realization of the non-clinging free and unobstructed nature of all experience as a gift to all sentient beings, as a way of bringing all types of sentient beings, all six classes of beings—hell beings, hungry ghost-like beings, animals, humans and multitudinous god-like beings, all kinds of beings—forward to awakeness, of bringing them out of the confusion, the hallucination about what their mind is really like, this is the purpose, the intent and the practice of these profound teachings of the Vajrayana, the 'adamantine' vehicle. I think 'diamond' (Skt. *vajra*, Tib. *dorje*) vehicle is probably not the right translation. Just because diamond is the hardest natural mineral, the symbol used is diamond. Good. However, in the ancient language, in its deepest sense, the word means adamantine, indestructible and lustrous. The realization of Dharma, the pristine nature, is indestructible and extraordinarily luminous.

This is really an indestructible teaching. It is your mind's nature. Not actually 'your' mind, but the pervasive nature of the mind. It is about the abiding nature and how to find that nature. A key point of the Preliminary Liberating Instructions is to continually point out that this nature is revealed. But it can only be revealed as steady experience with the accumulation of great merit and wisdom. It is similar to having a flawless diamond, all dirty and greasy, and mistaking the slight luster and occasional scintillation for a magnificent, revealed diamond.

But if you don't teach it properly—the liturgy, the words, the teachings—they can come off as if an experience of this lustrous adamantine nature is an endpoint. That freedom will lack a richness of myriad liberating appearances and great love. It would be like a diamond that is so clear and flawless yet does not give off brilliant rays of light. So too, the ability to dwell in the midst of appearances and not have to push them away because it hurts or is wrong, has sticky feelings or is something tainted, and to let experience liberate—because one knows with certainty that all appearances of mind are already liberated—is a great gift to self and others.

Having the capacity to realize what your mind is really doing, what it's actually on about, this intent and ability to bring vivid awakeness to all sentient beings, to cut the very roots of confusion and suffering; this is the Vajrayana path.

These practices are to develop the skills, the abilities—the notes, the score, the scales, the muscles, all the instruments, the breath—to expand your talents into what it's like to play a symphony for beings, an enlightened symphony.

So, when we practice *sadhana*, such as the Three Roots or Chenrezig, Amitabha, all these overflowing practices, they're like playing symphonies of interdependence to awaken all sentient

beings. And they build muscles! If we only play the music of penetrative insight meditation, one-pointedness, or sadhana for ourselves, to feel better, to end our suffering, then we have strayed, missed the point and the essence of the Vajrayana path.

Though ultimately the diamond and the grease are of the exact same nature—the one taste of appearance-emptiness, the non-dual— by doing the ‘cleaning job’ we are also flexing the muscles and refining the music that expresses the awake mind. Thus, we are cleaning off that which obscures the full properties of the diamond. We are learning its qualities to gain such a vast deep surety of how all experience is—luminous freedom—to shine this adamantine light, without pretense or fabrication or any self-interest, for the great love of sentient beings so they can be free of confusion or suffering. This ‘sole intent’ (Tib. *yangzab*) of this practice you are receiving today is called bodhicitta.

Therefore, you must develop Dharma muscles. Some people aren't interested in that. “Just leave me alone.” “Let me free myself so I can be happier.” But Vajrayana is like playing music in a forest, then playing it in the world with all kinds of sentient beings to call them to come out of confusion and wandering in samsara. And so, by being available in appearances, we have opportunities, spontaneously, naturally, without any weird productions. It is not necessary to show a bell and dorje, and it is not necessary to wear a robe; but they may be necessary, out of a great compassion and understanding of interdependence. The essence is to meet beings and help them find a way to discover their mind’s nature—in Tibetan *ösäl dorje nyingpo*<sup>2</sup>—based on their talents, capacities and interests.

### **What’s your mind?**

This is really something extraordinary! People will not look at their mind's nature! That includes many Dharma practitioners. We like to be entertained and bewildered by the phenomena that appear in our minds, but we don’t want to look at our minds. We need to place our trust, have confidence—real faith—to listen and be directed to peering deeply and skillfully at our awareness in order to reveal the adamantine nature within. It is a huge jump, conceptually and emotionally. Philosophically, it is a huge leap. It is an enormous, breathtaking change in what is most vital to study and know.

It's the last thing you want to do: to look at your mind (*Lama laughs*). But you will look at things—internal things, stories and fantasies, things outward—if they are entertaining and fascinating. It's fantastic how the conditioned mind works, day in, day out. But, what's your mind? WHAT’S YOUR MIND? What potential is lurking in there? Can you imagine that one peers into mind’s nature and discovers symphonies, with or without sound, naturally playing the music of liberation? That’s indeed what we discover. Not a blank mind. Not just an empty space. But an adamantine space full of liberation qualities.

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<sup>2</sup> Found in the Namgyal Yangzab Contemplations and Prayers booklet, p. 4, last line of Generating Bodhicitta

## How about turning your mind to a refuge that supports liberation and being awake for all kinds of sentient beings?

Another way of saying this about Vajrayana: It is all about refuge. Everything is refuge. Outer, inner, secret, and suchness or totality refuge. It's not just totality refuge which is *dharmakaya*. Not just the thought-free awake nature of mind and discovering the way everything naturally abides. But it's outer, inner, and secret refuge. That's us! Stuff that is hidden to be revealed!

We are constantly taking refuge, that is, blind hope that people, places, concepts and things as illusory appearances will bring us profound lasting happiness, safety or even freedom. Yet, when we grow up, mature into clarity and compassion, we know that is not true. How about turning the mind to a refuge that supports liberation and being awake for all kinds of sentient beings? That kind of refuge is so hard to find because you must trust the view presented—pervasive primordial awakeness—and purify right down deep to find the pocket of gem treasure that has always been in your heart-mind.

An ancient way of saying this is to imagine visiting someone's house. You get invited to someone's house—maybe a yurt or a cabin—and they keep complaining how poverty-stricken they are, how depressed or unhappy they are. Or they don't have enough tequila... you know (*the Lama is joking*). Whatever it is, things are difficult for them. But what they don't know is that underneath the house, just underneath the floorboards, down there is the most gem-encrusted, gold-like world that they're sitting on. But the floorboards look ordinary, apparently preventing them from seeing how extraordinary, unobstructed and enriching all this experience is. Not to know this is sad.

So, that's really what this is about, such pure intent of Dharma, the Preliminary Liberation Practices. To bring out the radiance, the freedom and the ability-riches that truly are in every single sentient being. But alas, they do not know it. It is so hidden. Most of us look elsewhere. But it is right here. Closer than one's nose tip. That's why it is a hidden quality, precious and gem-like.

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### Endnote

The editors recommend listening to the audio recordings of the Lama's words, which convey more flavours, riches and deeper meanings than printed words can.

Find the audio recordings on [nybcc.org](http://nybcc.org) > Teaching Treasures > Lama Chokyi Gyaltsen > Audios

*Edited March 2025 by Lama Gyaltsen. Transcript and layout by the NYBCC Editing Team.  
May any errors and omissions not obscure the essence, and may they be forgiven. May these teachings, so  
generously offered, help lead to the cessation of suffering and the full awakening of all beings!*



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