



NGONDRO PRACTICE TO BE OFFERED BY GESHE TENZIN ZOPA FPMTA National Office

WHAT IS NGONDRO?

The purpose of doing preliminary practices is for you to purify obstacles to achieving realizations of the path to enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings—defilements, negative karmas and downfalls—and collect extensive merit. They are also done in preparation for longer tantric retreats.
– Lama Zopa Rinpoche

The Ngöndro is a practice common to all schools of Tibetan Buddhism, as a preparation for sadhana (deity yoga) practice. The practice entails outer preliminaries and inner preliminaries, culminating in the Guru Yoga meditation.

Ngöndro practice enables us to accumulate the merit needed for our spiritual practice to be successful. The aim is to clear and enrich our minds, allowing our practice to progress smoothly.

ABOUT NGONDRO

In the Gelugpa tradition, Ngöndro practices are done along the way, not as a start for our Buddhist practice, and are done to enhance both sutra and tantra practice. The emphasis is on first learning about and developing to some extent the states of mind that will accompany the physical and verbal repetitions, and also on developing a sincere motivation for doing the practices.

On a psychological level, the preliminary practices alleviate much of the guilt and uncomfortable feelings we have been carrying around for years. Such feelings may be due to previous negative actions that we have done which we have never looked at honestly and resolved. Other feelings may be due to harmful situations we have experienced which have generated unrecognized emotions or otherwise adversely affected our psychological well-being.

The preliminary practices give us the opportunity to look at our past honestly, from the perspective of the Dharma, under the kind gaze of the Buddha.

Alexander Berzin gives the example of Lama Tsongkhapa who wasn't satisfied with his understanding of voidness even though he had done many tantric retreats and retreats on emptiness. It was Manjushri, the embodiment of wisdom and intelligence, who told him that to break through to a correct non-conceptual understanding, he needed to do intensive Ngöndro practices to build up more positive force and rid himself of more negative potential.

5 YEAR PROGRAM WITH GESHE TENZIN ZOPA

We are so fortunate that our precious teacher, Geshe Tenzin Zopa has committed to teaching students who are interested and ready for a 5-year period whilst they complete their Ngöndro practices under his guidance and instruction.

The program encompasses:

Year 1: Taking Refuge

Using the *Taking Refuge* Visualisation and Meditation practice, students undertake this practice daily until they reach 111,111 (this is because we add 10% more to cover any errors).

Year 2: Vajrasattva Practice

Students undertake the daily *Vajrasattva* purification practice, according to Geshe Zopa's instructions, until they accumulate 111,111. This reinforces the purification of our negative karmas required for us to progress on the path.

Year 3: Mandala Offerings

Students undertake the *Offering of 100,000 Mandalas*. How beautiful. This helps us to create the merit necessary to progress on the path.

Year 4: Lama Tsong Khapa Guru Yoga

Students undertake over 100,000 *Guru Yoga* practices, strengthening our connection and devotion to our gurus, without whom nothing would be possible. Wow.

Year 5: Preparation for Tantric Initiation

Our four years of intense preparation we have cultivated deep understandings and the potential for realisations. Geshela will provide instruction and guidance to those who are freshly entering into Highest Yoga Tantric (HYT) practice and for those already practicing. He will show us how to engage with and progress extensively into HYT.

Please note that Geshela's approach will be to ensure the maximum benefit to students in an atmosphere of flexibility and mutual support rather than rigidity.

BEFORE TAKING NGONDRO

Before undertaking Ngondro it is advised that students have established some general Buddhist foundation through study and practice, like being familiar with the foundational teachings of the Buddha, such as the Four Noble Truths, the law of karma, causes and conditions etc.

REFUGE

Refuge or protection is something we look for very often in our daily life, like looking for shade against the heat of the sun, a house to protect us from the bad weather, all kinds of temporary refuge. However, there is only one definitive refuge: Buddhahood — the ultimate refuge from suffering.

To obtain it, we seek refuge in the three jewels. It is a supreme refuge for any kind of sentient being, for all of us, as the Buddhas are unbiased in their determination to help all beings without exception.

You can consider yourself a Buddhist if you feel that Buddhas are really present and if you are confident in their power to free you definitively from suffering; and not only you but all other beings. If you feel this intensely, strongly, this is the real, actual taking refuge.

‘In this Ngöndro, we should think of our guru as a Buddha and feel that all the Buddhas are present with (him/her/them) in front of us. The cause for us to receive their blessings is our aspiration. Even if a buddha will manifest in front of us, if we don't 'open up' we won't receive their blessings! And even if the object of our faith is not a real Buddha, if we consider it as a Buddha we will definitively receive his blessing! Taking refuge has so many benefits that we cannot enumerate all of them now but you can study them in the Pramanavartika (Compendium on valid cognition, by Dharmalacirti)’

(Dagri Rinpoche)

References:

[A Preliminary Practice of Refuge’](#) by Lama Zopa Rinpoche contains detailed practices
[Preliminary Practice Advice](#) by Lama Zopa Rinpoche (2006) is a detailed commentary
[Brief Instructions for the Preliminary Practices](#) by Lama Zopa Rinpoche – short commentary
[Preliminary Practice of Water Bowl Offerings](#) FPMT Shop
[Preliminary Practice of Prostrations](#) FPMT Shop
[Preliminary Practice of Vajrasattva](#) FPMT Shop
[Preliminary Practice Overview \(Ngöndro\)](#) article by Venerable Thubten Chödrön
[Advice Concerning Ngondro Preliminary Practices](#) article by Dr Alexander Berzin
[Misunderstandings about Ngondro](#) article by Dr Alexander Berzin
[What Is Needed before Ngondro or Preparatory Practices?](#) Article by Dr Alexander Berzin
[The preliminary practice of Taking Refuge](#) article by Ven. Thubten Chodron

