

What is Wong Kur?

Explanations by
Ven. Namgyal Rinpoche & H.H. Sakya Trizin

May this work aid those who are newly come to the Teachings of Dharma,
and others also, for the benefit of all sentient beings!

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An Introduction To Wong Kur

by

The Venerable Namgyal Rinpoche

The Tibetan Teaching

The Tibetan Vajrayana, Wong Kur is the spring from which all blessings flow. Therefore, for the student of the Diamond Vehicle, a correct understanding of the theory of the Wong Kur and right attitude in its practice are important. The uniqueness of the Tibetan system lies in two factors:

- a) The conscious understanding based on experience of the structure and content of the human psyche, and
- b) The systematic way in which it teaches its unfoldment.

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

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

In the depth of the psyche lie all possibilities in a state of unrealized potential. In every being there exists the possibility of experiencing transcendental consciousness, which, when the student is ready, the Teacher can make accessible to him in the Tibetan system by the practice of Wong Kur.

Wong Kur in Theory

You should regard Wong Kur as an event in which the Lama sows the seed of transcendental consciousness in the depth of the student. The seed will lie in the unconscious until the student brings it to realization in the practice of meditation. To receive the seed or vibration only the physical presence of the student at Wong Kur is necessary. He may experience the vibration as a strength or healing, (in this respect Wong Kur is a blessing) or he may not be aware of its effect at

the time. But, the seed as an aspect of transcendental consciousness has been sown and remains in the depth for its eventual unfoldment.

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

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

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

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

The Structure of Wong Kur

There are three main parts to Wong Kur. The first is the preparation by the Lama which takes about the same length of time as the empowerment itself. The Lama in meditation performs the entire text of the Wong Kur with complete realization and all visualizations, and consecrates the temple (or place of bestowal) for the ceremony. The students enter and perform certain preparations for cleansing, purification and preparation of mind.

The second part consists of the Lung (a brief history of the wong, with authorization to read/recite the text), the sacred books where the text may be found are referred to, and the benefits and accomplishments that can be obtained by its practice are enumerated.

Then the Lama leads the students in certain preparations and bestows the vibration on each on in turn. This bestowal by the Lama is the heart of Wong Kur. By this he imparts the vibration (or

vibrations, if the empowerment contains more than one Initiation) by touch; reciting the mantram of the deity; giving the visualization by description and by pictures; and showing all the forms by which the principle is symbolized. At the end the students make an offering to the Lama and leave.

The Practice of Wong Kur

Although to be initiated one need only be touched by the Lama when he is in meditation and has the intent to bestow the initiation, by the correct practice of Wong Kur the student greatly assists the Lama and augments his own realizations.

It is important to be tranquil and in as clear a state as possible. The mind should be calm, alert and free of discursive thought. You should bathe before a Wong Kur, dress simply in clean clothes, avoid ornaments (and glasses when receiving). The neck should be exposed and the top of the chest below the throat should be capable of being exposed.

Observe a fast if so required, in any case eat lightly beforehand. Enter a meditative state of mind. Perform at least one rosary of the long Vajrasattva mantra. Before entering take the consecrated water in the right hand and rinse the mouth, remove shoes outside the temple and take off all unnecessary clothing. Take some grains of rice at the door and sit down quietly in rows leaving an aisle for the Lama to enter. Do not sit between the throne and the Torma. As soon as the Lama enters, you should stand and as he takes his place, perform three prostrations and sit down.

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

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

Notwithstanding its complexity, Wong Kur is a joyful, spontaneous event and Tibetans are surprised by the apparent seriousness of Western students at Wong Kur. There is no need for an outward show of piety or reserve. In all things be natural, be in the flow of giving, sharing and

receiving. However, it must be remembered that the Lama has spent hours in preparation for the Wong Kur, that he has become the deity and is giving of himself in meditation. Realization by the student depends upon no less than being in complete union with the Lama. For his sake, for the sake of all others in the place and for your own sake, avoid any form of behaviour which obstructs the flow, hinders concentrated awareness or attracts attention.

Do not come unprepared – (remember the offering.)

Do not come in an agitated state of mind.

Do not rush in to grab the best seat.

Do not obstruct the movement of others.

Do not talk unless it is right to do so.

Do not draw attention to yourself.

Do not distract the Lama's meditation.

A Word About Deities

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

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

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

On Receiving Initiation Into the Vajrayana Path

by

H.H. Sakya Trizin

(These notes were been written on the occasion of the visit of His Holiness Sakya Trizin, head of the Sakyapa Order of Tibetan Buddhism, to New York at the invitation of the Jetsun Sakya Centre for Buddhist Studies and Meditation. During His visit to North America His Holiness gave many Vajrayana empowerments, or 'Wongs', to people who wished to enter the path of Vajrayana Buddhism and to practise meditation according to Tibetan methods.

In recent years a number of Tibetan Lamas have visited America and have given numerous wongs here; but many people who are interested in Vajrayana are still unsure of what a wong is, and of what they are receiving in a wong. Also there is widespread ignorance of the proper things to be done at wongs and when meeting Lamas. Thus these notes of advice have been written in order to disseminate understanding of what a wong is, what happens during a wong, and what should be done when attending a wong. Ngawang Thubten Nyima, a disciple of His Holiness Sakya Trizin, wrote these notes in December of 1977. They express his understanding of answers to questions which he put to His Holiness on this subject.)

Explanation of Terms

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

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

The Tibetan term 'Lama' refers to any person who, after many years of study and practice of the Tibetan Buddhist teachings, has acquired philosophical understanding and spiritual realization, and

who is respected as a teacher by one or more disciples. Thus a Tibetan monk who does not have any special attainments is not a Lama. A Lama needs not be a monk. The Vajrayana Path is open to all, and married persons are not barred from receiving any of the tantric teachings. Among the head Lamas of the Sakyapa Order, some (such as the founder, Sachen Kung Nyingpo) have been married and some (such as the illustrious Sakya Pandita) have lived celibate lives as monks. (*H.H. Sakya Trizin is married and is helping to raise a family – Editor's Note.)

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

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

The Tibetan term 'wong' is literally 'empowerment'; it may also be translated as 'initiation' or 'consecration' (Sanskrit: 'abhisekka'). It refers to a ceremony in which a Lama, on the basis of his own spiritual attainments and his understanding of the proper rituals, places a disciple in touch with a particular tantric deity (or deities) and empowers that disciple to visualize the deity, recite the mantra, and seek to realize the non-duality between his own mind and the mind of the deity. Much happens during a wong, and everything that happens has its special meaning, and is not just for ceremonial decoration.

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

There are also protecting deities such as Mahakala, dakinis such as Vajrayogini, and wealth deities such as Zambala and Vaishravana. The higher yidams (Deities representative of one's own personal insights and connections with the Teaching) such as Hevajra and Kalachakra are completely Enlightened or, in other words, are Enlightenment in deity-form. The ignorant regard the deities as beings who are external to their own minds; those of greater understanding regard

the deities as within their minds; those of highest understanding realize the true nature of their own minds and the true nature of the deities to be non-dual.

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

The Four Classes of Tantra

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

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

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

At the level of Yoga Tantra you yourself become the deity, but only during actual meditation on the deity. In meditation at this level you first create yourself in the form of the deity, and then you invoke the Transcendental Wisdom Aspect (the real nature) of the deity; this is then absorbed into yourself, so that you become not different from the deity. But at the end of the meditation, the Transcendental Wisdom Aspect leaves you, and you make offerings to the deity as if it were a separate being, after which the deity leaves. So even at the level of Yoga Tantra you still think of yourself and the deity as separate for most of the time.

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

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

be able to begin at the level of Anuttarayoga Tantra. But for most people it is best to begin with Kriya, Caryā or Yoga Tantra practices.

Classifications of Wongs

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

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

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

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

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

About the Wong Itself

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

A minor wong generally has three consecrations, one each for Body, Speech and Mind. These are the 'three doors' through which we act (and thus create karma). To purify our actions we must purify each of these three doors. Actually they are already pure, though we may not realize this. The goal of Tantra is to purify all our actions of Body, Speech and Mind by removing our moral and mental defilements, so that our actions become not different from those of a Buddha. Receiving a wong is like the planting of a seed; later, with the right conditions, this seed will sprout and grow into Buddhahood. During the wong each of the three doors is blessed individually, and thus there is a Body Consecration, a Speech Consecration and a Mind Consecration.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Just as there are teaching lineages, in which a particular teaching is handed on from master to disciple, so also there are 'initiation lineages', in which a particular empowerment is handed on. Among the different sects there are different views concerning the qualifications which a Lama must have in order to give a particular wong. The Sakyapa view is that a Lama is qualified to give a particular wong if (a) he has himself received that wong and (b) he has successfully performed a major meditation retreat belonging to the same class of tantra as the wong (so that, for example, a Lama who has successfully completed a long retreat on any Anuttarayoga Tantra deity is then able to give any Anuttarayoga Tantra wong which he himself has received). (In consequence, it may happen that a Lama who has performed many Anuttarayoga Tantra meditation retreats is yet not qualified to give a Kriya Tantra wong because he has not performed a Kriya Tantra retreat).

What to Do in the Wong

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

Before entering the area where the wong is to be given you should remove your shoes and wash your mouth with water. Then upon entering the presence of the Lama you should make three

prostrations toward him, and then take your seat on the floor. It is best to make three full prostrations; before each one place the palms of your hands together at the forehead, throat, and heart (these three places represent the three doors of Body, Speech and Mind). If for physical or mental reasons you cannot make full prostrations, then it is sufficient to bow three times in the direction of the Lama (as an expression of homage).

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

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

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

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

This empowerment is worth more than anything material which you could offer, so even if you gave the whole universe (as you are doing symbolically) this would still not be enough in return for what the Lama is giving you. When the person assisting the Lama concludes the chanting of the

mandala offering verses, they will throw some rice in the air. At this point you should also throw some rice into the air (forward) with a movement of the hand beginning at the heart, (these offerings are from your heart).

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

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

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

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

The main part of a lower wong consists of the Body, Speech and Mind Consecrations as described earlier. Usually at the beginning of each of these you visualize light issuing from the Lama's heart and shining upon yourself and all other sentient beings, purifying them of all defilements. During the Body consecration you visualize yourself in the form of the deity, according to the instruction of the Lama. This Body Consecration is made firm in you when incense is wafted about by the monk assisting the Lama. During the Speech Consecration, you usually have to visualize the mantra of the deity (in Tibetan letters) emerging from the heart of the Lama and entering your

own heart. The Lama then recites the mantra, which you repeat after him a certain number of times (usually 3, 7, 21 or 108 times).

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

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

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

Offerings

When the earliest Tibetans went to India to seek tantric teachings they took with them large quantities of gold to offer to their Gurus. In those days both masters and disciples knew the value of the teachings. In North America at present some people seem to come along to a wong to be entertained, and in return offer even less than the price of a movie ticket.

Traditionally, in Tibet, a Lama would give a wong only when requested to; the person requesting the wong would certainly offer a substantial gift (gold, horses, new copies of the Tibetan canon, etc.), and everyone attending the wong would also make offerings to the Lama. In North America, since disciples tend to offer very little, some Lamas charge a fixed amount for a wong. Since this comes close to the commercialization of something which should not be commercialized, (the transmission of spiritual empowerment), His Holiness Sakya Trizin prefers that it not be done. His Holiness prefers the traditional custom of giving the wong without charge, and allowing the disciples to offer whatever they wish at the end. i

If you understand what you have received during the wong then you will feel a natural inclination to make vast offerings to the Lama out of a recognition, of his great kindness. The value of a wong cannot be measured in dollars, but that does not mean that money is unsuitable as an

offering. Lamas do not need money for their own comfort, but they do need it for their work of teaching and fostering the growth of the Dharma and (especially for building monasteries and schools). Flowers and fruit are also appreciated, but they are of little help with the practical problems of ensuring that the Tibetan Vajrayana teachings continue to be handed on from generation to generation in an authentic and effective form. Each person should offer what they can and what they feel is appropriate. For a rich being, several gold bars would not be too much, for a poor person it is sufficient to make an offering of time and energy in the service of the Lama. You should also remember that the Lamas themselves have already offered much to their own Gurus, and in some cases they have on several occasions offered all they possessed to their Gurus in gratitude for teachings handed on to them.

After the wong you should retire from the area to allow the Lama to perform the concluding rituals without distraction. Check that you have the mantra properly, and (if you wish to meditate upon the deity) enquire whether the instructions concerning the meditation practice are available. If you perform the meditation, it should be done regularly, (preferably every day) in a quiet place before an altar or an image of the Buddha. In your daily life cultivate an awareness of the sufferings of others, search out your own delusions and place your trust in the Buddhas.