I am going to explain one of the practices of the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara (Chenrezig). Avalokiteshvara is a bodhisattva because he said so. He took a vow not to attain enlightenment until the last sentient being attained enlightenment; that is, to remain as a bodhisattva forever. This action was also symbolic as it represented compassion. Compassion is only relevant until the last sentient being attains Buddhahood. We do not need compassion for Buddhas – we need devotion to them. If I were to write a letter to Buddha I would not sign off, “Yours sincerely, with compassion, Tai Situ.” I would write “Yours sincerely, with devotion, Tai Situ.” Compassion becomes irrelevant only when the last sentient being reaches Buddhahood. This means Avalokiteshvara, as a representation of compassion, is relevant until the last sentient being reaches Buddhahood.

These are the two aspects of Avalokiteshvara. He is not just one person called Avalokiteshvara who decided not to become a Buddha until all sentient beings have reached Buddhahood. He is also the symbolic representation of compassion. We describe Avalokiteshvara as the father of all the Buddhas because compassion is the father of all the Buddhas.
There are many Avalokiteshvara practices: two-armed Avalokiteshvara, four-armed Avalokiteshvara, thousand-armed Avalokiteshvara, red Avalokiteshvara, white Avalokiteshvara, and many more. The great goddesses White and Green Tara, along with the twenty-one Taras, are manifestations of Avalokiteshvara and Wangchuk Chenpo (Mahashevara, Shiva), the great god of Hinduism, is also described as a manifestation of Avalokiteshvara. In our prayer we say “Chenrezig tu wang chug lha chenpo,” “The manifestation of Avalokiteshvara, the great god Shivaji.”

The thousand-armed Avalokiteshvara came about because many eons after taking his vow, through his wisdom, Avalokiteshvara assessed how many beings had already attained Buddhahood and how many were still suffering in samsara. The sentient beings suffering in samsara were countless and the beings who had attained Buddhahood were also countless. The sentient beings suffering in samsara were hopeless though, and seeing this Avalokiteshvara became discouraged and almost broke his vow. Now originally, when he had taken his vow, he had promised that if he broke his vow his body would fall into a thousand pieces so when he became discouraged this is exactly what happened, his body broke into a thousand pieces.

Through the blessings of all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, however, he was transformed into his thousand-eyed, thousand-armed form. The thousand eyes represent a thousand Buddhas, and the thousand arms represent a thousand Chakravartins, universal monarchs who are the patrons of the Buddhas. This is the way the thousand-armed Avalokiteshvara manifested.

Another time, when Avalokiteshvara again gazed on all sentient beings and saw how many countless sentient beings were suffering in samsara, he shed two tears. These two tears transformed into Green and White Tara, two manifestations of Avalokiteshvara. They vowed to play the role of enlightened mother to all sentient beings, helping them to attain Buddhahood and fulfill Avalokiteshvara's original aspiration. Green Tara and the twenty-one Taras manifest to help sentient beings, in particular to liberate them from types of fear or aspects of
suffering. This is the Anuttarayoga aspect of Avalokiteshvara.

I believe that many people in East Asia consider Avalokiteshvara to have a female form and be white in color. I can’t be a hundred percent sure but I presume this is White Tara, a manifestation of Avalokiteshvara. To be sure you would have to go to a lineage master of that particular practice, scholars and many other people. I am drawing conclusions here, because I have no authority and don’t know for sure, but for me this is what Kuan-Yin is, White Tara, Avalokiteshvara in female form.

Avalokiteshvara’s practices, as with all dharma practices, have three parts. The first of these is refuge and bodhichitta. We have to focus on refuge and bodhichitta every time we practice, otherwise we may forget the purpose of our practice. To make sure we know clearly why we are doing a practice we start by saying the refuge and bodhisattva prayers. These two prayers together make up four simple sentences. These two sentences are the refuge prayer:

*Until I reach enlightenment,*
*I take refuge in all the Buddhas,*
*And in the dharma and all the noble sangha.*

The next two sentences are the bodhichitta prayer:

*By the merit of accomplishing the six perfections,*
*May I achieve Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings.*

Bodhichitta is peace. Sometimes I feel people misunderstand, or do not understand clearly, the difference between basic compassion and bodhichitta. If you are able to spend a few hours doing something for somebody you don’t even know people might call you a bodhisattva. They may say, “Oh, he or she is so kind, they are a bodhisattva.” This is not necessarily so. A kind person is not necessarily a bodhisattva. Being kind is very good, being a compassionate person is very good, but it does not necessarily make us a bodhisattva. A bodhisattva has to be kind and compassionate for a reason. A bodhisattva is kind and compassionate in that they are working to establish all beings as Buddhas. In this way bodhichitta is very specific.

As a Vajrayana Buddhist whose ultimate aim is to reach Buddhahood, not just nirvana but Buddhahood, we must have bodhichitta. We cannot attain Buddhahood unless we wish to attain Buddhahood. We cannot attain it by mistake or accident. It has to happen intentionally. The intention must be to become a Buddha for the benefit of all sentient beings. If I were to wish to become a Buddha just for my own reasons, it would never happen. This intention would make my Buddhahood limited, private, but Buddhahood cannot be limited. By definition Buddha is limitless. This means that Buddhahood has to be attained by a limitless purpose – the limitless freedom and liberation of limitless sentient beings. Bodhichitta, therefore, must be focused on enlightenment in this way.

The next section of the practice is the visualization of the four-armed Avalokiteshvara.

*On the crown of my head and that of all sentient beings pervading space,*
*On a moon, on a lotus, is a HRI.*
*From the HRI on the lotus appears the Noble one, Chenrezig.*
*He radiates clear white light.*
*He gazes with compassionate eyes and a loving smile.*
*He has four hands. The first two are joined in prayer.*
*The lower two hold a crystal rosary and white lotus.*
*He is arrayed with silk and jewels.*
*He wears an upper robe of doeskin.*
*His head ornament is Amitabha, Buddha of Boundless Light.*
*His legs are in the vajra posture.*
*A stainless moon is his backrest.*
*He is the essence of all those in whom we take refuge.*

Following the refuge and bodhichitta prayer we visualize Avalokiteshvara. On the crown of our head, and the heads of all sentient beings pervading space, there rests a white lotus and moon disc. Standing on the moon disc is a HRI, a syllable letter: from this HRI comes the noble supreme Avalokiteshvara. He is luminous white, radiating five-colored light and grace. He is smiling charmingly, with compassion, and gazing at sentient beings with compassionate eyes. He has four arms; the upper two are joined together and the lower two hold a white lotus and crystal mala. He is beautifully adorned by precious jewels and silks. A deerskin that symbolizes compassion covers his upper body, worn over his left shoulder.

Some people have a hard time understanding why a
deer skin should represent compassion, but the particular deer whose skin Avalokiteshvara wears was a bodhisattva manifesting as a deer who sacrificed his life for the benefit of all sentient beings. Hence this deerskin represents compassion. It is not as if the deer was killed and Avalokiteshvara is now wearing its skin.

Avalokiteshvara’s crown jewel is the Buddha Amitabha. He actually has five crowns representing all five Buddha families, but on top of these is the Buddha Amitabha. Avalokiteshvara sits in the vajra asana and a stainless moon supports his back. This means there are two crystal moon discs in this visualization: one is used as the seat underneath him and the other behind him as a backrest. Avalokiteshvara, in this basic visualization, is the essence of all sources of refuge.

This is this practice’s main visualization. Following this visualization, we praise the Lord Avalokiteshvara:

Oh Lord of whitest form, not clothed by any fault, Whose head a perfect Buddha crowns in light, Gazing compassionately on all beings, To you, Chenrezig (Avalokiteshvara), I prostrate.

There is no specific visualization that accompanies this praise; we should maintain the visualization we already have and mean what we say when we say it. In this prayer we supplicate the Lord Avalokiteshvara, whose white body is not clothed by fault and whose head is adorned by the perfect Buddha Amitabha. Avalokiteshvara looks upon all beings with compassionate eyes. In Tibetan this second-to-last sentence actually contains the Tibetan name of Avalokiteshvara, Chen-re-zig. Chen is the honorific word for eye. Ordinarily we say mik. The two syllables Chen-re together mean the entire face, or the eye itself. Zig is the verb “to look.” To understand Tibetan syllables and words you have to look at their spelling, not only their sound. The zig here has four letters in Tibetan that make one syllable and means “to look.” If this syllable were only to contain the first three of these letters, and not the final letter “sa,” it would still be pronounced the same but it would mean tiger or leopard. So here where it says, Tuk jay chen gyi dro la zig, “Your compassionate eyes look on all beings,” the chen, “eyes,” and the zig, “look,” are the same syllables that are in the name Chen-re-zig.

Following this there is a longer prayer to Avalokiteshvara:

I pray to you, Lama Chenrezig. I pray to you, Yidam Chenrezig. I pray to you, Perfect Noble One Chenrezig. I pray to you, Lord Protector Chenrezig. I pray to you, Lord of Love, Chenrezig.

By the power of accumulating negative karma from beginningless time, Sentient beings, through the force of anger, are born as hell-beings. And experience the suffering of heat and cold. May they all be born in your presence, Perfect Deity. OM MANI PEMA HUNG.

This first prayer is for the sentient beings in the hells. We pray to Avalokiteshvara to help them become free from this suffering. This prayer accords with the last syllable of Avalokiteshvara’s mantra OM MANI PEMA HUNG. HUNG represents the compassion of Avalokiteshvara that purifies the karma of sentient beings committed through anger, and this leads to the liberation of hell-beings from the suffering of hell. In this prayer we start at the lowest realm, the hell realm represented by HUNG, and work our way through the realms represented by ME, PE, NI, MA before reaching the highest realm, the god realms represented by OM.

In this first prayer that relates to HUNG and the hell realms we reflect that because sentient beings have accumulated negative karma since beginningless time, they are born in hell through the force of anger and experience the extreme suffering of heat and cold. We then pray that they may be liberated from this suffering by being born in the presence of the perfect deity, Avalokiteshvara. OM MANI PEMA HUNG.
May they all be born in your perfect realm, the Potala.
OM MANI PEME HUNG

This prayer is about those in the preta or hungry ghost realms. We are not praying to them though, we are praying for them – there is a big difference. We do not pray to the hungry ghosts, we pray to Avalokiteshvara for the hungry ghosts. These beings, having accumulated negative karma since beginningless time, are born in this realm through the force of greed and experience the suffering of hunger and thirst. We pray that they may be liberated from this suffering and all be born in Chenrezig’s perfect realm, the Potala. This means we are requesting Chenrezig to liberate all sentient beings from the suffering of the preta realms.

OM MANI PEME HUNG.

These verses don’t translate very smoothly because Tibetan and English do not match exactly. In Tibetan, for example, instead of asking someone, “How are you?” we will say, “Cherang kusu de6 po yin b6.” Cherang means “your,” kusu is the honorific way to say “body,” de6 means comfortable, yin means are, and b6 is a question particle. A direct translation would be, “Your body comfortable, yes?” This shows the difference between the languages and how when prayers are translated almost word for word that they do not sound very smooth.

By the power of accumulating negative karma from beginningless time,
Sentient beings, through the force of stupidity, are born as animals
And experience the suffering of dullness and stupidity
May they all be born in your presence, Protector.
OM MANI PEME HUNG

This is a prayer for those in the animal realm. It describes how sentient beings have accumulated negative karma through ignorance and because of this are reborn in the animal realm: remembering this we pray to Avalokiteshvara to free them from their suffering. This is the verse of the prayer that relates to the syllable PE.

Animals really are ignorant. I like them but they are very ignorant. People raise them so they can slaughter them by the thousands for food and they just sit there waiting to be slaughtered. If they were intelligent they would know they were going to be slaughtered and would use their superior physical strength to fight back. Animals are many times more physically strong than human beings. Without protective clothing or tools, we cannot even fight with small animals like cats if they really want to challenge us. As animals suffer from ignorance, however, humans can raise them and use them as slaves, while hardly giving them anything, and they will still sit there passively. This is the definition of ignorance.

By the power of accumulating negative karma from beginningless time,
Sentient beings, through the force of desire, are born in the human realm
And experience the suffering of excessive activity and constant frustration.
May they all be born in the Pure Land of Dewachen.
OM MANI PEME HUNG

The next verse describes how accumulating negative karma since beginningless time has caused sentient beings, through the force of desire, to be born in the human realm. In the human realm we experience the suffering of excessive activities and constant frustration. Sentient beings in the human realm are said to suffer from drelwa and polba. Drelwa refers to a state of busyness, and polba to the non-fulfillment of greed. In order to alleviate this suffering we pray that all humans may be born in Amitabha’s pure land of Dewachen, Sukhavati in Sanskrit.

By the power of accumulating negative karma from beginningless time,
Beings, through the force of envy, are born in the realm of jealous gods
And experience the suffering of constant fighting and quarrelling.
May they all be born in your realm, the Potala.
OM MANI PEME HUNG

This prayer is for those beings in the asura or demigod realm. I think it can also be called the realm of the titans in English. It describes how sentient beings, through the force of jealousy, are born in this realm. Here they experience the suffering of jealously fighting and quarrelling. To ease this suffering we pray that they may be born in the Potala.

By accumulating negative karma from beginningless time,
Sentient beings, through the force of pride, are born in the realm of gods
And experience the suffering of change and falling.
May they all be born in your realm, the Potala.
OM MANI PEME HUNG

This last verse is a prayer for the gods. It describes how, by the power of negative karma accumulated since beginningless time, sentient beings through pride are born in the realm of the gods and experience the sufferings of change and falling. The highest of realms, and births, is the god realm.¹ Gods suffer because they know the future and the past, and when their karma to be a god is coming to an end they can see where they will be born next, which is a lower realm due to the exhaustion of their virtuous karma in being a god. This causes them to suffer immensely. This prayer, then, is for the liberation of all the gods from the suffering of samsara. To alleviate this suffering we pray that they may all be born in Avalokiteshvara’s realm, the Potala. OM MANI PEME HUNG.

As you can see, these six verses show us the meaning of the mantra OM MANI PEME HUNG, which is how it relates to the six realms.

Following this, the prayer becomes much more personal.

May I myself, through all my existences,
Act in the same manner as Chenrezig.
By this means may all beings be liberated from the impure realms.
And may the perfect sound of your six-syllable mantra pervade all directions.
By the power of this prayer to you, Most Noble and Perfect One,
May all beings to be trained by me take karma and its effects into account and practice skillful acts diligently.
May they take up the dharma for the good of all.

We pray that wherever we are born our deeds will equal Avalokiteshvara’s, liberating beings from impure realms and spreading the perfect sound of the six syllables in the ten directions. We pray that in this, and all future lives, our activities will be like Avalokiteshvara’s activities – liberating sentient beings from the lower realms and helping them to become free and happy. We pray that the sound of OM MANI PEME HUNG, the sacred syllables, will pervade all directions. Sometimes we say “ten directions,” which is another way of saying everywhere. The ten directions are the north, south, east, west, north-east,

1. Birth in samsara is described in terms of three realms, the desire realm (this includes the six realms of hells, craving spirits, animals, humans, demigods and gods), the form realm (gods of subtle form), and the formless realm (beings in high meditative states of absorption).
The prayer continues, "By the power of this prayer to you, most Noble and Perfect one, may all beings who are trained by me take karma and its effects into account and practice skillful acts diligently. May they take up the dharma for the good of all." Here we ask that by the force of praying to Avalokiteshvara all sentient beings who become subject to our influence will respect and sincerely follow the teachings on cause and result. We pray that they will live moral, ethical lives and that by diligently practicing these virtues everything they do will benefit sentient beings, according to the dharma. We pray that all sentient beings live according to the dharma and that we live according to the dharma for the benefit of all sentient beings. We pray that all of our followers, anybody who encounters us in the future, will live according to the dharma for the benefit of all sentient beings.

When we translate this verse it becomes a little unclear. Its meaning is quite simple but if we cannot see this meaning the verse's wording may make things complicated for us. This happens with many translations, I will give you an example. One of our most precious texts is Gampopa's Tharpa Rinpoche Jen. It has been translated many times and the translations are very good. Sometimes, however, the translation of its title does not give us exactly the same meaning as the Tibetan original. Often it is translated as the Jewel Ornament of Liberation, which is okay, but that does not have exactly the same meaning as Tharpa Rinpoche Jen. Literally translated Tharpa Rinpoche Jen would be the Ornament of Precious Liberation, or the Beautifier of Precious Liberation. There is not much difference between the titles Jewel Ornament of Liberation and the Ornament of Precious Liberation: it is just that the latter is more precise. In Tibetan, the Jewel Ornament of Liberation would be written Tharpe Rinchhen Jen. But it is not Tharpe Rinchhen Chin, it is Tharpa Rinpoche Jen, in which Tharpa Rinpoche means precious liberation and Jen means ornament. An ornament makes something more beautiful and in this text “precious liberation” is made more beautiful, more understandable, more approachable, more easily appreciated, clearer. In a similar way to the slight change in this title, through translation, this Chenrezig prayer has become a little less clear. However, I hope now through my explanation it has become clearer for you.

After this personal prayer, the visualization continues:

Having prayed like this one-pointedly,
Light shining from the sacred form
Removes all impure karma and ignorance.
The outer realm becomes the realm of bliss
(Dewachen).
The body, speech, and mind of all beings

Become the perfect form, sublime speech, and
pure mind of Chenrezig.
All knowledge, sound, and appearances become
inseparable from emptiness.

Until this point we have been using the same visualization, but now it changes. When it says, “Having prayed like this one-pointedly,” it refers to the prayers we have already made. Through the power of these prayers, light radiates from the body of the sublime Avalokiteshvara, purifying impure karma, appearances and deluded minds. That is, Avalokiteshvara blesses and purifies the impure karma of the body, speech and mind of all sentient beings. The outer realm transforms into the pure land of Dewachen, Sukhavati, including its inhabitants whose body, speech and mind are transformed into the perfect form, sublime speech and pure mind of the mighty Avalokiteshvara. As light radiates out from Avalokiteshvara, whatever it touches in the whole universe is transformed.

The last sentence of this visualization is quite important. It says Nang drak rik tong yer may gyur. That is, “All knowledge, sound and appearances become inseparable from emptiness.” Appearance, sound and awareness are indivisible from emptiness. Whatever you hear, see and are aware of becomes non-dualistically Avalokiteshvara. Your mind and Avalokiteshvara’s mind, your body and Avalokiteshvara’s body, your speech and Avalokiteshvara’s speech all become non-dual. In the beginning of this visualization there is a lot happening; light is radiating, and everything is transformed. Once it has been transformed, however, it is one in absolute harmony and union – non-dual. Trying to remain in this state we recite the mantra OM MANI PEME HUNG.

OM MANI PEME HUNG is the mantra of all Avalokiteshvara’s forms, including the thousand-armed, six-armed, four-armed and two-armed forms. Some forms’ mantras add other syllables to these six, but the four-armed Avalokiteshvara’s mantra is simply OM MANI PEME HUNG. In groups, after saying OM MANI PEME HUNG for a little while, we usually sing it for a little while, because it may inspire us. If you are practicing this at home though, you don’t have to sing. When we sing the mantra we cannot repeat it as many times as when we say it, so if we are practicing at home we should say the mantra and repeat it more times than when we are in a group.

The mantra of the thousand-armed Avalokiteshvara is not the same as that of the four-armed mantra, but in essence they are the same. If you recite the mantra of the thousand-armed Avalokiteshvara this will enable you to connect with this form of Avalokiteshvara also. His mantra is:
NAMO RATNA TRAYAYA NAMO ARYA JNANA SAGARA BEROTSAANA BAYUHA RADZAYA TAT’HAGATAYA ARHATEH SAMYAK SAMBUDDHAYA NAMA SARWA TAT’HAGATEBEH ARHATBEH SAMYAK SAMBUDDHEBEH NAMA ARYA AWALOKITESHRAYA BODHISATOYA MAHASATOYA MAHAKARUNIKAYA TAYATA OM DHARA DHARA DHIRI DHIRI DHURU DHURU EETAH WEETAH TSALEH TSALEH TRATSALEH TRATSALEH KUSUMEE KUSUMA WAREY EEELEH MEELEH TSEETEHDZOLA MAPANAYA SOHA.

The thousand-armed Avalokiteshvara is the main bodhisattva deity of the fasting practice, the Nyungne. Hopefully, in the future you will be able to do lots of Avalokiteshvara practices including the Nyungne fasting practice. This is a very, very sacred, precious practice that I hope you will do from time to time. Many of you may already be doing the Nyungne practice from time to time, but those of you who are not should, it is a wonderful practice. You can really feel inspiration and blessing by doing the Nyungne practice. Physically you feel cleansed and mentally you feel blessed. It is not that easy though.

The concluding visualization is:

_Everyone appears in the form of Chenrezig; All sound is the sound of his mantra; All that arises in the mind is the great expanse of wisdom._

After reciting this mantra, as we conclude the practice, we dissolve the visualization. This is translated here as, “Everyone appears in the form of Chenrezig; all sound is the sound of his mantra; all that arises in the mind is the great expanse of wisdom [the great jnana].” The “great jnana” is primordial wisdom. Here we visualize that Avalokiteshvara dissolves into ourselves and all sentient beings with everything becoming inseparable from Avalokiteshvara.

After this dissolution, we should sit for a little bit, maybe a few seconds, maybe a minute or so. When we manifest again, we should do so as Avalokiteshvara, with the outer universe as the mandala of Dewachen, all thoughts as the compassionate wisdom of Avalokiteshvara and all sounds as OM MANI PEMA HUNG. This does not mean brainwashing ourselves, it means maintaining pure perception for as long as we can and trying to say OM MANI PEMA HUNG whenever we have a free moment during the day. At other times we should do what we have to
naturally, comfortably and simply try to feel the presence of Avalokiteshvara at all times.

When we are new to the dharma there is a tendency to take things extremely seriously and literally and this is not very healthy. We have to sit back a little bit and take it easy. Everything is okay, everybody is Buddha, everything in its essence is a pure land, but being practical, a little bit of pragmatism is necessary. We can’t all of a sudden become totally different – it doesn’t work. Even if we pretend everything is different, it is not. We still need our common sense. We just have this other outlook at the same time as a bonus. When we see somebody who is not very nice to us, we can still do everything we can to avoid harm, trouble or bad feelings from them. At the same time though, deep inside we know that in essence he or she is no different from Avalokiteshvara, and this is our bonus.

Also, when we are walking, if we see a really dirty place it is not as if we should purposefully walk straight into it saying it is a pure land. We should avoid it, but deep inside we should know that in essence it is a pure land. We should know that in essence there is no difference between this dirty place and the very clean apartment or house in which we live. Relatively, however, there is a very big difference. If you go somewhere dirty, your clean home will become dirty, and more importantly, because of attachment to your clean home you will stay in samsara.

We may be like the yogi in the story about the two great Vajravarahi practitioners. One of them had a very beautiful mala, and the other didn’t. Both of them practiced so well that Vajravarahi sent them stairs of red light to lead them up to the pure land of Akanishtha. The one who did not have a nice mala went straight up to Akanishta, but the one who had the nice mala got half way up and realizing he had forgotten his mala came down to get it. By the time he had collected it the stairs had gone. Our very nice homes may be our beautiful malas, but knowing deep inside that the essence of everything is the same, we should try to maintain the presence of Avalokiteshvara in all aspects of our life.

Through virtue of this practice may I now quickly Achieve the All-seeing One’s great state. And to this same state may I come to lead Every being, not one left behind.

After arising from our state of oneness we move on to the next stage of the practice, the dedication. The dedication at the end of this practice is very short. It says, “Through virtue of this practice may I now quickly achieve the all-seeing one’s great state. And to this same state may I come to lead every being, not one left behind.”

This is the realized state of Avalokiteshvara. We ask that we ourselves become like Avalokiteshvara and all sentient beings also become like Avalokiteshvara. This is our prayer and also our visualization. There are many other dedication prayers that we can add to this, for example the Mahamudra and Amitabha dedication prayers.

So this is a nice, short, near Avalokiteshvara practice. As you know there are many other practices in our lineage also. It is a rich lineage, with abundant practices: so many Tantras, so many deities, so many bodhisattvas, so many mantras, so many sadhanas. The purpose of all of these practices, however, is to realize Buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings. This is the only purpose of any practice. On the way we may also have to clear physical, mental or environmental obstacles from our path, but our ultimate goal is to reach enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings.

There may be those of you who have decided to follow the tradition of practicing exactly step by step through the preliminaries and deity practices. This is wonderful, this path is very clear, in this lineage everything is laid down for us. Still, if you only did one practice wholeheartedly, like OM MANI PEMA HUNG, I can guarantee you that you could still reach Buddhahood. OM MANI PEMA HUNG represents the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara and it purifies all the karma we have accumulated through countless lifetimes. The bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara’s compassion manifests as OM MANI PEMA HUNG to purify all the karma we have accumulated through pride, jealousy, attachment, ignorance, stinginess and anger over countless lifetimes. It purifies all of the causes and conditions for the suffering of samsara and if all our karma and defilements are purified then we are left with pureness itself, our ultimate essence, the tathagatagarbha – the Buddha-nature.

This means that OM MANI PEMA HUNG is the simplest, easiest, most complete and convenient practice for everybody. I sometimes get the feeling that when I tell some of my disciples that they should only practice OM MANI PEMA HUNG, this does not make them very happy. Then I realize that they think it is too simple, it is a practice for peasants who do not know how to read or write. This is absolutely wrong. OM MANI PEMA HUNG is for everybody. It is also a practice for intellectual, learned people who know how to read and write.

Nobody can attain Buddhahood without overcoming the five – or as outlined in this practice, the six defilements; nobody can attain Buddhahood without purifying all their karma, it is impossible. Therefore I would say that on top of the practices you have from your guru, in any extra time you get – on the bus, the airplane, the couch or in the restaurant waiting for your food to be served – you quietly say OM MANI PEMA HUNG. You have plenty of time.
in these situations. Don’t come and tell me that you don’t have any time. For example, only 150 years ago, to communicate with your relatives on the American or African continent would have taken a very long time, and now you can do it in a moment and correct their spelling. All you need is one little gadget, one laptop, and you can actually see the person you are talking to. You may, of course, hear what they are saying after their lips have already moved, because the technology is not yet that good, but these are small problems.

This is how we live. We had so much time before, why don’t we have more time now? We are saving so much time with all these gadgets that we should have more time, but we feel busier. It must be in our heads. Many people even work harder on their holidays than they do at work! They plan their holiday, they make schedules and they have so much luggage. They pack, unpack, pack, unpack, pack and unpack. They check out of one hotel and into another, get out of one taxi and into another. They spend time waiting in lines in airports and their plane or train is late so they have more problems. They then come back home relaxed and say they had a wonderful two-week holiday! They say they feel good, rejuvenated when there is actually less stress going to work.

When you are working you just drive from your nice home, only half awake with a nice, flat bottomed cup of coffee in front of you that won’t spill but still you drive slowly. Then you park in your own parking spot, go into your office and sit in the comfortable chair that you carefully chose after visiting many different furniture shops. You may have secretaries and all kinds of people working for you. You may sit there, look at what people write, change it a little, sign a few things, and still you say, “It is so tiring. I need a holiday.”

Other people may not be the boss, their situation is even better. As an employee you only have to think from eight o’clock to five o’clock. You show up at eight o’clock, do whatever you are supposed to do and at five o’clock you are finished, you can go home or do whatever you like. Being an employee is actually less stressful than being an employer, but people don’t like being an employee; they want to be the employer, they are really looking for trouble. It is all in our head. That is why I am saying all of this, because it is just all in our head.

The mantra OM MANI PEME HUNG in Sanskrit.

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