



DHARMA OCEAN FOUNDATION PATH STRUCTURE & REQUIREMENTS

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PREFACE

I began studying with Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche in 1970. Since then, through my experience with him during his life and after he died in 1987, to the best of my ability I have been trying to gradually absorb and transmit the lineage that he taught. Lineage is defined in many ways in Tibetan Buddhism, but in Rinpoche's ultimate presentation, its definition is actually quite simple and straightforward. Once we remove the politics and cultural trappings from it, a lineage is simply a way, based on tradition, of understanding and practicing the spiritual life. In my experience, the lineage that Trungpa Rinpoche taught and embodied was amazingly profound, insightful, and transformative, and it is my hope and my mission that, through Dharma Ocean, it will be passed on to others.

The spiritual journey outlined by Trungpa Rinpoche included five stages of development. The first stage in fact precedes the official entry onto the Buddhist path; in Rinpoche's presentation, it involved discovering and connecting with our basic human situation and becoming healthy, grounded, and decent people. He called this stage *introducing the world to the basic Shambhala principles*, and he believed that it can be presented to anyone, regardless of whether or not they ever become a Buddhist. The next three stages are traditionally called the three *yanas*: the Hinayana, focusing on the development of discipline and a sustained meditation practice; the Mahayana, focusing on awakening the compassion of the heart and the realization of the interconnection of all beings; and the Vajrayana, through uniquely powerful practices and methods, focusing on fully transforming the two veils of emotional upheavals and deeper unconscious obscurations that get between us and our true self. The fifth stage taught by Rinpoche (roughly corresponding to the fruition stage of Dzogchen) revisited the Shambhala teachings, but at a deep post-Vajrayana and post-Buddhist level. In this stage, the basic Shambhala principles—the fundamental openness of reality, the perfection of the unfolding of the universe, and the utter sacredness of our incarnation—become matters of direct and personal

experience and an actual way of being in the world, rather than being mainly an intellectual understanding.

In Dharma Ocean, we study and practice these same five stages. Each involves a way of looking at things, a meditation practice, and a specific outcome. We call them the Five Yanas in order to emphasize the fact that each one of these yanas is a unique, important, and necessary stage in our spiritual development, and to clarify and highlight the particular contribution that each one makes to our own unfolding. We designate the first yana *The Ground Yana*; the next three stages, *Hinayana*, *Mahayana*, and *Vajrayana*, as did Trungpa Rinpoche; and the fifth yana, *The Yana of Life Itself*.

Although the Five Yanas correspond to Rinpoche's five stages, the way we practice them in Dharma Ocean represents a further evolution of his teaching in one important respect. We understand and practice them in a less theoretical and hence much more grounded and embodied way than was often the case in Rinpoche's day. Hence, there is much more emphasis on the actual direct, non-conceptual experience of each yana.

It might be helpful to think of the five yanas as falling into three major phases: first, the preparation for the journey (the Ground Yana); second, the heart of the training (Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana); and third, the fruition of the journey (the Yana of Life Itself).

In this document, each yana is described in terms of view, practice, study, and community. It is not intended to be a complete guide, but to provide a concise overview of the Dharma Ocean path. Fully engaging with this path necessitates engagement with the Dharma Ocean community, but much of it, such as working with a meditation instructor, can be done from anywhere in the world. There are many ways to become involved with this lineage, and following the path as it is laid out here will not be right for everyone, all the time; this document is not a description of boxes to be checked off, but a guidebook to the territories we might explore together in this training.

THE GROUND YANA

VIEW

The spiritual journey involves fully exploring who we are and what the experience of our own life is. It involves awakening to what is real in our situation and our world: what is actually the case beyond what we may think or assume. The life that we actually have, what is given to us as our incarnation, is the ground of the journey. It is what the practice works on, and it is ultimately where the gate to true reality lies.

But what if we have little or no direct connection with our actual experience? What if our life consists entirely of what we know through the mediation of the conceptual frameworks of our left brain? In the globalized, commodified modern culture that we live in today, many of us spend nearly all of our waking hours preoccupied with the purely conceptual, virtual reality of our electronic world. While we may have lots of ideas and preconceptions about who we are and what is real, we often have little if any direct, non-conceptual contact with ourselves or with life. More and more, one meets people who unquestioningly believe that what they *think* about themselves and reality is what is real. No wonder, then, that so many of us are lost in fantasy and wishful thinking and do not know very much at all about who we or others actually are. This disconnection is, of course, pernicious, and it lies behind much of the personal, interpersonal, and societal dysfunction and illness that plagues our world.

When we try to practice meditation in such a state, it generally ends up being further reinforcement of our disconnection, and this was the problem with many of us in Trungpa Rinpoche's day. Without the ground of reality under our feet—the foundation of direct experience—meditation is limited to recycling what we already think and assume. There can be no true path without that experiential ground. If we enter the spiritual path and are not deeply connected with what it means to be human in healthy, wholesome, and complete ways, then the spiritual journey becomes a means of escape, utterly lacking the genuine exploration and discovery that is at the heart of real spirituality. Trungpa Rinpoche calls this disembodied approach *spiritual materialism*, a facsimile spirituality that serves only to reinforce our purely conceptual, abstract, disembodied ego. John Welwood refers to this as *spiritual bypassing*: using the concepts of spirituality as a hiding place where we can avoid the often painful, anxiety-producing developmental tasks of actually growing up.

Within the tantric perspective of Dharma Ocean, there's a very good reason why building a relationship with the concrete experience of ourselves and our world is the foundation of the whole journey: it's because, ultimately, the raw and rugged reality of a fully present and embodied life is where the universe delivers its highest teachings. When we separate from life, we separate from ultimate reality and the opportunities for transformation and meeting sacred reality that our lives offer. This is why, before taking refuge and entering into the Buddhist journey in a full and

committed way, we need to connect with our body, our current situation, and our direct experience of being human. The purpose of the Ground Yana is to connect us in this way and establish this direct, experiential ground under our feet.

In the Ground Yana, we address our disembodiment directly through the somatic meditative protocols that are the foundation of the Dharma Ocean practice journey. These consist of roughly twenty-five distinct practices that are explored in a progressive manner. The practices begin by enabling us to contact our body or soma in a new way, beyond and outside of the conceptualized body or body image that we all habitually interpose between our conscious, ego selves and the direct, unmediated, non-conceptual experience of our body. We gradually discover how our uncontrolled anxiety, ego reactivity, and endless discursive proliferation obscure the natural health and wisdom of our soma and end up creating physical and psychological distress and illness. The practices lead from this point through a process of deepening somatic awareness wherein we gradually discover the virtually unlimited internal vistas and expanses that wait for us within this incarnation of ours. The journey within the body goes on forever and, in the Ground Yana, we begin to get a sense of the inner geography.

When we experience something from within our body or soma, without jumping immediately to conclusions, to categorizing, evaluating, and judging, we begin to discover the realm of pure experience: an approaching storm is portentous, filled with its own impending power that we can feel in our body, that saturates our senses with its own being, its own meaning, its Isness. And we are brought into a state of utter stillness and awe before it. We smell it, we taste it, and we receive it into our being. Nothing need, should, or can be done in addition, so overwhelming and so tactile is its stark reality. And so it can be with everything we encounter in our life. We realize that there's a certain fundamental rugged reality to things that we have never experienced in quite this way, that we never even realized was there. We gradually discover in ourselves a larger and freer range of emotional and perceptual experience than we have previously known. We begin to sense the limitless terrain of our physical being—the endless, open spaces we can enter through the body and the seemingly infinite scope of experience that arises therein. Now we have a context within which we can actually experience the energy of our body, and the tremendous inspiration that arises for life, without the mediation of our ego.

One could practice the somatic disciplines of the Ground Yana for one's whole life without proceeding to the further yantras and experience much health, well being, and happiness, within the inherent limitations of our human existence. If we take this route, the Ground Yana will continue to bring us back to ourselves, help us heal, open us to our life, and reveal to us the wonders and endless possibilities of this incarnation of ours. That is why the Ground Yana is appropriate for anyone and everyone, regardless of situation or circumstance.

PRACTICE REQUIREMENTS

The first step of the Dharma Ocean five yana path is to fulfill the practice portion of the Ground Yana. The main practice of the Ground Yana is the bodywork taught in the Meditating with the Body® (MWTB) curriculum and in the *Your Breathing Body* (YBB) audio program. Each of these offers training in roughly the same set of somatic protocols, but they are delivered in two different ways. If possible, you would attend the MWTB retreat program, and we offer generous discounts and scholarships to enable community members to do so. The MWTB program is ideal because it provides the most support for your practice, including two five-day in-person retreats in Crestone, Colorado, five months apart, with an at-home weekly study curriculum between the retreats. A strong sense of community is cultivated through the retreats and in regular calls with a mentor and conference calls with a small discussion group in the intervening months.

If the MWTB program is not feasible, you can pursue the training in the Ground Yana by following a home-study course using the YBB audio set. If you follow this approach, spend two to three weeks on each of the twenty CDs, listening to the talk at least once and doing the meditation every day for that period. Start by listening to the guided meditation; when you have developed enough familiarity, simply do the practice each day on your own. Periodically, you might listen to the guided meditation again, for you will notice more than before. Dharma Ocean members following this second option will be asked to work closely with a meditation instructor as they pursue the curriculum.

During the time that one is training in the Ground Yana, it is also important to be spending at least some time in sitting meditation. In the MWTB curriculum and in the YBB CD's, simple meditation instruction is given, addressing the basic posture and working with the breath. This is the practice one should be following when doing sitting meditation. An exception would be if one has already received instruction in shikantaza (the Hinayana discipline), in which case one could be doing that as one's sitting practice.

STUDY REQUIREMENTS

Reading helps us deepen our understanding of each yana. In the MWTB program, there are regular assigned readings. For those following the YBB curriculum, the following readings are recommended: *Touching Enlightenment* (Ray), *The Posture of Meditation* (Will Johnson), *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism* (Trungpa), and the articles on the *Articles & Interviews* page on the Dharma Ocean website (dharmaocean.org/articles-interviews).

THE ROLE OF THERAPEUTIC AND HEALING MODALITIES ON THE JOURNEY

The Ground Yana calls us into a state of physical and psychological health, well-being, and functionality as the foundation of our spiritual journey. Throughout the five yana journey, our ongoing attention to this foundation can be greatly enhanced and facilitated by the wide array of healing, therapeutic, and well-being modalities

now available. Most practitioners engaged in the five yana journey typically avail themselves, from time to time, of holistic, somatic, energetic, and psychological modalities of healing and supporting disciplines, such as yoga, T'ai Chi, and Qi Gung. Somatically-based psychological therapies, such as Integrative Manual Therapy, Jungian, Hakomi, Feldenkreis, Eutonie, and Coherence Therapy modalities, to mention just a few, become very helpful, particularly at the Vajrayana level, where we are seeking to dismantle deep, unconscious emotional biases and distortions laid down perhaps before we learned to speak.

THE HINAYANA

VIEW

One of the outcomes of the Ground Yana is the realization of how quickly and often we exit from direct, non-conceptual experience into our thinking mind. While the Ground Yana opens the experience of our true body or soma, helps us see the exiting process, and shows us how to come back when we depart, it also makes us aware of just how disembodied and “in our head” we are most of the time. Even as practitioners of the Ground Yana, while we are more or less in our bodies—or at least trying to be there—during our actual practice, the impulsive reactivity of our ego mind still holds sway in daily life, and can seem quite intractable. The yana that addresses this impulsivity, the next task in our journey, is the Hinayana.

For this reason, the keynote of the Hinayana is *discipline*. It works on the blind impulsiveness and emotional reactivity that for most of us governs our moment-to-moment, day-to-day life. It is this impulsiveness that creates whirlwinds of distress, dissatisfaction, and confusion all around us, and makes us feel constantly vulnerable, off balance, and dissatisfied. Of course, we may think these whirlwinds are coming from the outside and just happen to us; we may think there is this or that big problem out there, and if we could only resolve or manage it, we’d feel better. What we don’t see, however, is that the whirlwinds, and the anxious and distressed states of mind they tend to lead to, are entirely of our own making. The Hinayana brings us to the point where we can begin to see this.

Thus, the second yana *directly* addresses our largely unconscious, habitual and reactive exiting—from the world of direct, non-conceptual experience, into the disembodied ego realm of left brain abstraction. While the fundamental issue addressed in the Ground Yana is our *disembodiment*, in the Hinayana, the fundamental dynamic to be addressed is *impulse*. If the Ground Yana addresses the givenness or ground of our situation, and our direct experience and disconnection from it, the second yana addresses the dynamic mechanism of our dissociation—exactly how and why it occurs.

This is accomplished through the core Hinayana discipline, the practice of *shikantaza*, or “just sitting.” We are adopting shikantaza, a Zen approach to sitting meditation, because among the various Buddhist mindfulness-awareness instructions, the Zen approach is the simplest, most accessible, and most profound. The shikantaza practice we learn here, with some refinements later on, will be the meditative technique used throughout the rest of our five yana journey. Shikantaza practice instructions are available on the Dharma Ocean website on the *Sangha Home* page in the *Community* section (dharmaocean.org/connect/sangha-home).

The main aspects of shikantaza involve the physical posture and the breath, and how we work with them in the practice. The practice of shikantaza is, eventually, to identify fully and completely with the posture, so that there is no separation between awareness and posture—so they are not two. Shikantaza at this beginning level is essentially a mindfulness or shamatha technique to gather and stabilize our

mind, used as the first stage of meditation in virtually all schools of Buddhist meditation. However, instead of the common Buddhist shamatha practice of paying attention to the breath at the tip of the nostrils and coming back to that when our mind wanders, here we are paying attention to the points of posture and the feeling of the breath, perhaps in the lower belly, and bringing ourselves back to that.

Strictly speaking, this shamatha or mindfulness practice is not the pure awareness practice of full shikantaza, but more the preparation and pathway of entry into it. At the same time, as our practice matures, the basic instruction to identify with the posture and the feeling of the breath does not change; we never back away from that and, in fact, enter into it more deeply as we go. What does change, however, is our experience of the posture and breath and what we find in it.

COMMITMENT—THE REFUGE VOW

Take refuge at or near the beginning of the Hinayana phase to signify your entry into the Hinayana training, your acceptance of your life as the ground of the path, and your commitment to the spiritual journey.

PRACTICE REQUIREMENTS

1. Establish a daily meditation practice of forty-five minutes of shikantaza, followed by fifteen minutes of movement practice of your choice—walking meditation, T'ai Chi, Qi Gung, yoga, etc. The initial meditation instruction I received in 1970 and the one I pass on to you is this: "If you can practice at least an hour a day, your meditation will evolve beautifully." Each practitioner needs to see what their life will permit, but from this point onward the commitment to daily meditation practice is the foundation of the entire journey, and should be a life-long intention and discipline. If you are following this path, the expectation is that you will figure out a way to make this happen, at least most of the time.

With shikantaza practice, we are taking the next step in terms of the body. It incorporates and integrates the essential bodywork practices from the Ground Yana, and gives us a new container for staying with whatever arises in our practice. To use the analogy of learning to play the piano, in the Ground Yana, we were learning the different scales, so to speak, the different elements of being in our soma. With shikantaza, we are putting all these different aspects together into a single piece of music, a single posture—a *super* meditating with the body technique—and we are learning to stay with this somatic embodiment, without departing. These are new elements that allow our experience of the body to continue to develop, becoming more complete and less affected by impulse and thus more continuous.

Dharma Ocean practitioners would normally spend a minimum of a year exclusively practicing shikantaza from the time they complete the Ground Yana requirements, before taking up the Mahayana practice.

2. Complete a total of four weeks of intensive group meditation retreat at the Blazing Mountain Retreat Center, in programs such as Winter Dathün, the Summer Meditation Intensive, or the fall Shikantaza program. If you can do a dathün, ideally you would complete four consecutive weeks, but you can also complete this requirement in segments of one to three weeks at a time. If you do spread this requirement over more than one dathün, you might want to experience different weeks, as they each offer something different (e.g., not coming only to week one each year).
3. Complete a solitary retreat of at least one week. Please connect with your Meditation Instructor before and after solitary retreat. It is best if you are able to do your retreat in a cabin or other dedicated retreat space, but it can also be an “at home” retreat if need be.

STUDY REQUIREMENTS

1. Complete the Sutrayana Hinayana course.
2. Complete the online Hinayana Training program (4 courses of 5 classes each) that Dharma Ocean will begin to offer in 2015.
3. Listen to the recordings from at least one dathün retreat (not necessarily one that you attended) in order to more deeply absorb the dathün teachings. You should listen to these recordings *after* you have completed at least one week of the four-week intensive meditation requirement.
4. Complete the Hinayana Reading List: *Indestructible Truth* by Reginald A. Ray; *The Path is the Goal* and *The Myth of Freedom* by Chögyam Trungpa.

MENTORING AND COMMUNITY

1. Take advantage of interviews with senior Dharma Ocean teachers, at programs or when they are offered to the sangha.
2. Establish and maintain a relationship with a Dharma Ocean Meditation Instructor. Information on how to do this can be found in the *Community* section of the Dharma Ocean website (dharmaocean.org/connect/meditation-instructors).
3. Become a supporting member of the Dharma Ocean sangha if you haven't already, which will give you access to teachings and documents on our website—including talks and messages from Reggie—that are not otherwise available.

THE MAHAYANA

VIEW

The third yana is called the Mahayana. As we practice and continue to open up, slow down, and become more grounded, we begin to realize that we are deeply, deeply connected with everything. We are already in relationship with other people, animals, nature, and the whole world, and the rest of the journey will be discovering and deepening that sense of connection. You and a quasar billions of light years away—you're on the same journey. We're all in it together. You and a black hole, you and an exploding star, not to mention you and everything in this world or you and an atom or a subatomic particle—we're all in it together and we're making the same journey.

The Mahayana begins to open up this vast sense of how connected we are with others; it opens up the tenderness of the heart, and the sense of sympathy for everyone and everything that suffers, which is everything that is. It's very beautiful, and we have a whole set of practices around this process, called the Seven-Limbed Bodhicitta practices.

When we enter the Mahayana, we are committing ourselves to see, experience, and feel things from the viewpoint of an open heart. This is what the Bodhisattva vow means. It sounds very simple, but it requires a lot of work. It's not some kind of romantic idea of compassion or loving people. When you do the difficult and often painful work of truly opening your heart, then you see others as they are, and seeing them, you cannot help but *love*. You feel a sense of warmth, kindness, understanding, and empathy toward them—and in fact, as the Mahayana path unfolds, you might almost feel a sense of identity, in the sense that you know exactly what's going on with them, because you sense and feel it quite directly.

Over time, we develop our capacity not simply to feel with our heart but to come into proximity with what we call *the knowledge of the heart*, which is completely embodied. It's physical, it's emotional, and in a very deep way, it's cognitive. The heart knows what the thinking mind can't know. This is a capacity that has largely atrophied in most modern people. We need to learn how to see and sense and feel and know through the heart, and this begins in earnest with the bodhicitta practices. It's a gradual waking-up of the capacities of the heart.

We need to overcome the ideas of sentimentality and romanticism that people in Western culture often associate with the heart, as if the heart is a sort of feeling organ. In fact, that's not accurate. The heart *is* the knowledge. The heart knows in a way that's entirely objective and operates independent of the ego. The heart is the Buddha nature. When we talk about experiencing the world within the big space, we're talking about the heart. It's the heart that is the organ of knowledge—of seeing and comprehending—of the big space.

Along these lines, the Mahayana takes the somatic work to a new level of subtlety. Whereas the Ground Yana and Hinayana work primarily with the Nirmanakaya aspects of our incarnation, the Mahayana and the Seven Limbed Bodhicitta practices uncover new levels of subtlety of our body; they open up the level of the Samboghakaya, or the energetic and feeling level, that is centered in our heart and extends out through the whole body.

In the Mahayana, even though there is a whole body of compassion practices that we do, it's really about developing the shikantaza further, in terms of increasing the sensitivity of our feeling, sensing, and intuiting capacities—our hearts—to the entire universe. We are deepening what our body knows, and we need to remove the veils from that sensitivity to open it up. When we do that, we start to see people *completely* as individuals, and we begin to see that we have a natural love for them. We don't have to force it or manufacture it—we have a self-existing, relentless love for other people, and a desire to connect with them.

It's *within* the shikantaza posture that we can do this. If we lose our posture and become discursive, we can't do the bodhicitta practice. The only place from which you can do the kind of bodhicitta practice we're talking about is within the shikantaza posture. So, you take the posture, see where you're at, what's happening, and then you begin to do your bodhicitta practice.

Instead of breathing into the lower belly, when you're doing bodhicitta, you're breathing into the heart. That's the *only difference* from the shikantaza practice of the previous yana. Everything else in the shikantaza is exactly the same: remaining within the posture, feeling the breath, not moving, and working with impulse so that it arises, does not capture us, and can then fall away.

The experience of practice in the Mahayana typically unfolds in several stages. First, we might feel quite numb. *I can't feel anything. I can't feel my heart.* At a certain point, through breathing into the heart, you might begin to feel something. You may feel like your heart is in a vice, it's constricted, it's dead. That's fine. You keep breathing. You want to run, you want to scream, you want to tear your skin off. You want to do something to open up your shutdown, armored heart. Although it is very painful, there is so much good inspiration in that; it is your heart beginning to wake up, to know what it is feeling.

The next step is that you may begin to feel actual physical pain in your heart—it's sore, aching. You might practice with this discomfort for quite some time. But then, eventually, emotional pain will likely begin to come up. This first level of emotional pain is related to our habitual neurotic upheavals, our basic emotional freak-outs that get between us and relating openly to others and the world around us. We call that level of pain "the first veil."

As we work with the material of the first veil, we learn a deeper level of heart awareness. Through the practices, we begin to sense the open, empty space that lies right at the center of the heart. At this stage, we will spend some time exploring this unconditioned space of the heart and opening it further. In the bodhicitta training,

we now see that this space, which we discovered as the underlying reality of our body in our shikantaza practice, is also the underlying reality of our heart.

By developing the feeling of the unconditioned openness of our heart, we are providing psychological room for ourselves to experience our pain and the pain of others in an unconditioned way, without feeling that we are polluting ourselves or taking any of it into ourselves in a solid way. The heart can never be tainted, injured, or compromised; because it is grounded in the unfathomable expanse of our basic nature, there is never any place for anything to land or stick. We learn here not only that we can afford to love in a completely open way, but that that is the only way to truly love.

After a certain amount of time and practice, a much deeper level of emotional pain may start to surface. Uncomfortable as this may be, it is an extraordinarily important step in opening the heart. We begin to run into the deep unconscious predispositions, blockages, and emotional distortions that make up “the second veil.” In our culture, we call them deep traumas. They’re not conscious, and therefore you can’t get at them directly; but through breathing into and opening the heart, they come to the surface, and you begin to see that you have these fundamental—but quite twisted and distorted—attitudes and beliefs about life. The more you see, the more you begin to wonder about them and distrust the stamp of reality they seem to have. For instance, you may always feel that you’re a victim, that that’s your role in life, and it runs through everything that you do. You find that you are attracting people who want to victimize others. You think the world is simply like that—a place that victimizes—and you are just one of the victims. But it is not how things actually are; it is the appearance of your second veil.

When second veil issues start coming up, they’re amazingly painful and very disturbing, because they’ve been so deeply buried in our unconscious. This is where the shikantaza is absolutely essential. Now, when you begin to run into very difficult experiences, you know what to do: you come back to the shikantaza posture, and you try to be here, try to be here, try to be here. The shikantaza enables us to work with every triggered and spun-out state of mind that we could ever come up with, because it brings us back into the openness and infinite peace of our body, our soma, our basic being, our heart—and we disentangle from the traumatized state.

But there is more. By breathing into the heart when we are triggered and our second-veil-based, compromised person comes up, we keep breathing. Eventually, we arrive at a place where we simultaneously see on the other side of the second veil. In other words, we see that this tormented version of the world is not the real world; we are simultaneously in touch with the second veil and seeing the real world—beautiful, pure, and beyond distortion—on the other side. This experience of feeling our distorted, tormented self and, at exactly the same time, seeing what actually is on the other side of our twisted, traumatized version, dissolves the trauma over time. The second veil, the trauma, can only survive in ignorance and unconsciousness of what is real and true. In this way, we can resolve core traumas at their very root. (For some recent fascinating experimental verification of this

approach, look into Coherence Therapy and its research arm, Memory Reconsolidation).

Through the bodhicitta work, then, we begin to find that we are able to work with ourselves, and with others, in a very direct and precise way and, through that, transform our deepest obstacles. We are able to genuinely open, handle the inevitable triggering that happens when we do, and come through it to a place where we have the capacity to care about others in a more and more true and authentic way.

COMMITMENT—THE BODHISATTVA VOW

Take the bodhisattva vow at or near the beginning of your Mahayana practice. You must maintain a consistent daily practice for at least a year from the time of taking of the Refuge Vow, and then you can take the Bodhisattva vow.

PRACTICE REQUIREMENTS

The Mahayana requirements may be started as soon as you complete the Hinayana phase. The Seven-Limbed Bodhicitta Training should be undertaken as a course of sequential practice—i.e., you should do them in order. This also applies to the slogan practices (limb number seven), as each slogan sets up the next.

1. The Seven-Limbed Bodhicitta Training: The bodhicitta practices outline a 300-hour course of Mahayana training, and should be completed by everyone in Dharma Ocean. Sangha members who are not yet tantrikas, but want to enter the Vajrayana, will need to complete the 300 hours before attending Vajra Assembly. As it has only been recently introduced, there will be tantrikas and sadhakas who have not yet completed it. Everyone in this situation needs to make the bodhicitta requirement a top priority in their practice; they should complete the 300 hours as soon as they can, ideally within a year. For all who have taken the Bodhisattva Vow, both pre-tantrika and tantrika, even if you have completed the basic 300-hour requirement, you are asked to make bodhicitta practice an essential part of your daily practice commitment going forward. You will need to figure out when, how often, and how much time you are able to devote to the bodhicitta practices.

A detailed outline of the Mahayana bodhicitta practices, requirements, and supporting audio—both talks and guided meditations—are available online in the *Teaching and Practice Library* (dharmaocean.org/meditation/teaching-library).

2. Please complete at least one ten-day solitary retreat. This should be a bodhicitta retreat.

STUDY REQUIREMENTS

Complete the Sutrayana Mahayana Course.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Continue your relationship with your Meditation Instructor and find ways to offer your gifts, experience, and inspiration to your sangha sisters and brothers, in the context of either local or remote sangha events, programs, or other areas of sangha life. This is a very good time to coordinate a Dharma Ocean program or serve within the program mandala in other ways. I would like everyone engaged in the bodhicitta training to offer themselves to Dharma Ocean in some way or other. Also, begin to find ways to offer what you are learning and experiencing in the context of your daily life in work situations, family life, and other social contexts.

COMPLETION

Once you have completed the above, contact your Meditation Instructor for an assessment interview before moving on to the Vajrayana practices.

THE VAJRAYANA

VIEW

As we continue to practice, we begin to feel a kind of hunger to let go more, to receive the universe further into our state of being; a hunger to extend ourselves to the ends of space and time; a hunger to embrace the totality of what is, and to feel and know it. And not just from our own personal standpoint—we begin to realize, as a result of the Bodhicitta practice, that it is possible for us to know, inhabit, and experience life from standpoints that are far beyond the normal, centralized human conception and experience of things. We long for that kind of knowledge. We also begin to realize that the universe itself is on some kind of journey, and we want to know more about that. When this begins to stir in us, that is the point at which we might consider entering the Vajrayana.

In our lineage, what we are working toward is the complete openness of being, where we see, experience, engage, appreciate, and love life as it is. At the Vajrayana level—in Tibetan Buddhism, in Chögyam Trungpa’s teaching, and in Dharma Ocean—there are two basic ways of practice to approach this. Everyone in Dharma Ocean, regardless of which approach they follow, will enter the Vajrayana by attending Vajra Assembly, receiving pointing-out instructions, and attending the Vajrayana Training Intensive (VTI) the next year. Following that, the expectation is that they will attend at least two weeks of VTI each year, as the one time each year when the Vajrasangha gathers for a feast of teachings, practice, and community in the Vajrayana mandala.

In terms of the two practice approaches, first is the form path of Vajrayana; this includes completing the classical ngöndro or preliminary practices, including 100,000 each of prostrations, Vajrasattva mantra, mandala offering, and guru yoga. Following this, one would typically receive the empowerment or abhisheka into Vajrayogini’s mandala. This confers permission to practice the Vajrayogini sadhana and provides extensive oral instructions. After completing one million mantras, one is then able to attend the Vajrayogini Fire Offering, one of the most impactful and transformative of all the Vajrayana form practices. Subsequently, one can receive instruction in the Six Yogas of Naropa.

The other primary Vajrayana path is the formless path of Shikantaza/Mahamudra. “Formless” means that rather than working primarily with liturgies, visualizations, mantras, and mudras, as in the form path, here your practice is relating directly with the empty, open awareness of your basic mind. Though this path is “formless,” like the form path, there is a progressive journey. Here, one begins with practices designed to help us explore what is called the “unmoving mind,” the emptiness of the Dharmakaya mind of the awakened state. Next, one focuses on the “moving mind,” “the expression of awareness,” the mind of thoughts, memories, images, moods, feelings, emotions—all of the mental phenomena that arise out of the emptiness of our fundamental awareness. Then,

one takes up the sense perceptions, “the radiance of awareness,” examining the nature of perceptions when they are taken exactly as they are, without mental overlay. Finally, one concentrates on developing a mind that can be with whatever arises, taking the appearance itself as the guideline, both in formal practice and everyday life.

Which path you follow, that of form Vajrayana or formless Vajrayana, will depend largely on your personality type: as you sort this through with your primary Dharma Ocean mentors, one approach or the other will inspire you most, feel right to you, and will bring about the journey and the transformation you seek. But these two are not as separate as it might at first seem. In fact, the form Vajrayana includes a lot of formless practice within it, and by the same token, formless Vajrayana includes quite a bit of form. So whichever approach is yours, you receive a certain amount of training in the other. It is also true that while some of us will stick to the form or the formless path, others of us will end up exploring both, perhaps doing one for quite a few years and then feeling inspired to look into the other. In the end, it is very individual and you and the senior teachers will figure it out as you go.

Whether you’re doing the form tantric path of ngöndro, or the formless path of Shikantaza/Mahamudra, a great deal of our work is to continue to further dismantle the traumatic obstructions between ourselves and our own deepest experience. That’s what the Vajrayana is all about.

It’s a lot of work. We may spend years and years doing it, but if you dismantle the core traumas, then the superficial meltdowns, neurotic upheavals, and emotional acting-out just don’t have any ground anymore. They pop up, but more and more, they will just fizzle out before they get going. Over time, the second veil material becomes more transparent; it becomes very workable for you. You can recognize it, and you know how to come back to your body, to breathe into your heart, and it immediately loses its footing.

At the Vajrayana stage, the discipline has to be doing the practice for its own sake. You can’t get hung up on what the practice produces, because it’s going to produce all kinds of fantastic things and all kinds of horrible things as well, in terms of experience, and if your motivation is based on those, you won’t practice.

The Mahayana view doesn’t really change very much in the Vajrayana, but the practices are much more precise and transformative. We start to approach the realization of ourselves as part of nature’s spontaneous expression. And that’s the goal of the path—we’re getting there.

PRACTICE REQUIREMENTS

There should normally be at least a year period after taking the Bodhisattva Vow before attending Vajra Assembly. Vajra Assembly participants are asked to commit to attending the VTI the following year. After Vajra Assembly, there are certain practices and readings that precede attendance at VTI. Then, as mentioned, if you are following the form practice, you would complete the ngöndro before attending an abhisheka. Other programs, such as the Mahamudra Intensives and MI Trainings,

would also be attended during the Vajrayana phase of the journey. Tantrikas are also encouraged to attend Vajrayana retreats, especially VTI, each year, or as often as life circumstances allow. Practicing together in community and continuing to be in the teaching stream are essential to the Vajrayana path; without that nourishment and support, the Vajrayana journey becomes much more difficult.

POST-BODHISATTVA VOW, PRE-VAJRA ASSEMBLY REQUIREMENTS

Practice:

1. Completion of all Mahayana requirements.
2. Continue a daily meditation practice

Study:

Before attending Vajra Assembly, study chapters 1-13 in *Secret of the Vajra World* (Ray); the *Vajrayana Training Intensive 2005 Volume I* transcript (Ray); and *Journey Without Goal* (Trungpa).

Commitment:

Readiness to make the Vajrayana commitments: The commitments unfold in a gradual manner, with each deeper level of instruction, practice, and experience calling us to a deeper engagement.

ATTENDING VAJRA ASSEMBLY

At this program you will either take up the formless path of Mahamudra, or, if you are following the form path, you begin your ngöndro (the “preliminary practices” that prepare us for entry into sadhana practice). In the latter case, please note that it is best to schedule interviews with your MI whenever you begin a new section of your ngöndro, and when you complete any of the ngöndros.

POST-VAJRA ASSEMBLY, PRE-VTI REQUIREMENTS

1. Regular practice of either ngöndro or Mahamudra. Mahamudra practitioners should do at least one to two sessions per day; ngöndro practitioners should do at least three sessions a week and at least one session of shikantaza on the other days.
2. Solitary retreat of at least ten days.
3. Complete the first half of the *Mahamudra for the Modern World* audio program.
4. Complete your study of the VTI 2005 recordings.
5. Submit a VTI application and a letter from your MI confirming that all requirements have been met.

ATTENDING VAJRAYANA TRAINING INTENSIVE

People can attend VTI no sooner than one year after their attendance at Vajra Assembly. First-time VTI participants are required to attend the entire retreat (three weeks), while returnees may be given the option of attending for a specific shorter period (two weeks). At VTI, participants will continue their practice and study.

THE POST-VTI, FULL VAJRAYANA PATH PRACTICE REQUIREMENTS

For form path practitioners, before attending Vajrayogini Abhisheka:

1. Complete the classical ngöndro.
2. Attend MI training (attendance alone fulfills this requirement; full authorization to act as an MI is not necessary).
3. A solitary retreat of at least one month (this can be broken up if necessary).
4. Complete the second half of the *Mahamudra in the Modern World* audio program.

For formless path practitioners:

1. Daily practice including at least two forty-five minute Mahamudra sessions. Include longer practice sessions of three to four sessions at least twice a week.
2. Attend MI training (attendance alone fulfills this requirement; full authorization to act as an MI is not necessary).
3. Solitary retreats are enormously helpful in developing your Mahamudra experience and understanding. Please do these as often as you can. Trying to accomplish the classical thirty-five day retreat one or more times in the first few years after pointing out would be very good.
4. With the counsel of your MI, work your way through the four levels of Mahamudra practice.

For both form and formless path practitioners:

1. All tantrikas and sadhakas should make every effort to attend the Vajrayana Training Intensive each year in order to gather, study, and practice with the Vajrasangha on an annual basis.
2. All tantrikas and sadhakas are encouraged to also incorporate solitary retreats (as feasible), ongoing Mahamudra practice, consort practice, and darkness practice at appropriate points on their unique paths.

THE FIFTH YANA: THE YANA OF LIFE ITSELF

VIEW

At a certain point, through the work of the previous four yanas, we have worn away enough of the second veil that something else is required, and this is fifth yana, the Yana of Life Itself. While in its full practice this is a very advanced stage, still, almost from the beginning, we have glimpses of it. These glimpses are important because they show us where this whole journey is ultimately heading—into a space of complete openness, nakedness, and directness with our human experience. Having this perspective is also important because it undermines any tendency we may have toward spiritual materialism, any tendency to turn our practice at any level into personal territory and ego attainment. For these reasons, it is important that we all have some understanding of this final stage even quite early on.

As a Vajrayana student, you could hang on to your practice, your view, and the spiritual state of being you have created. But you may wonder if there is something beyond that? The Yana of Life Itself is where you begin to let go of your formal practice. You can do it because you have the requisite emptiness, maturity and attainment. You are at that point that you can do it. If you do it too early, it doesn't work, but when the time comes, you let go of your position. In the Vajrayana tradition, they say that you "enter the action." This means that as a teacher, you give up your teaching identity and your position in the world. In traditional Tibet and larger Asia, often people who enter the action disappear into the jungle and are never seen again. In the Chinese tradition, it's called "the return." People just disappear and you can't find them anywhere, because they let go of all that they became in their spiritual journey and become one with life. And that was the teaching for their students: "If you think I was ever anything separate from life itself, you didn't quite get it." (Read Tilopa's final instructions to Naropa, or Marpa's final visit to India, looking for Naropa.)

So, the fifth yana is the process of letting go of everything, including our identity as a spiritual practitioner, and the reason we let go is because there is something to discover, something calling us further. These are called the eight illuminations. Let me give a couple of examples.

In the first illumination, space becomes not only the main thing but the *only* thing. Here, you surrender into the space of your own nature and realize that your fundamental state of being is infinite space. Your being is not separate from the rest of the world, so at this point, you are not a person who is practicing space or looking at space—you see that you *are* space.

Then, in the second illumination, within the space, you begin to experience everything that happens in life as abiding in its own natural perfection. Everything—from the smallest sub-atomic particle up to the galaxies and all the worlds that may exist, including all that we would formerly have called "ourselves"—is part of a vast, glorious, interconnected dance. We marvel at how, in

pleasure and pain, in confusion and enlightenment, in life and in death, the universe is expressing itself in this moment in the most apt and timely way. Here, as throughout the fifth yana, there is no room for any centralizing tendency. Any sense of self-reference is ruled out. There is an opening to the logic, the patterns, the beauty, and the ultimate meaningfulness of the dance of the universe,

In the third illumination, what is called the fourth moment—beyond past, present, and future—arrives at its fruition. Here, we realize that this moment beyond time is the only place that the universe reveals itself, where experience arrives completely, beyond reference points, as absolutely fresh, spontaneous, and unique. Here, we see that this is the true and only reality; that here the universe is in ultimate revelation and that everything outside is just a figment of our imagination. In the third illumination, we do touch eternity. The other five illuminations unfold from here.

As mentioned, we have glimpses of the fifth yana at even the earliest stages of the path—at a dathün, for instance. But what happens in the fifth yana is that this becomes your default experience of reality. You live within the great perfection of the universe, and every emotion you feel, every person you meet, and every situation you see is an expression of the universe’s sacredness itself. So, at that point, there’s no room for an ego at all. There’s no room for a separate position.

They’re called illuminations because you’re not doing anything—in fact, you’re undoing everything that you’ve built up as a spiritual practitioner. The more you undo all those things, the more you come into the illumination of your own state of being, or rather “THE” state of being of which you are an expression and a part. These illuminations were actually there from the beginning, but our whole state of being was so covered over and obscured by our thinking, trauma, and human hopes and fears that we didn’t have access to them. But in the fifth yana, we do. Now, finally, we understand what Life is, completely in and of itself, and, within that context, what our life is: why we were born, what it ultimately means, and how we have never been anything other than a seamless and perfect part of the whole.