

## **A Practice Manual of Profound Object-Severance: Essence of the Vital Meaning**

By Tāranātha

Translated by Sarah Harding

*{186} Namō Guru*

Source of spiritual powers, Precious Guru,  
Union of all places of refuge, Precious Lord of Beings,  
Teacher of the abiding nature's meaning, Precious Dharma Lord,  
Hero who conquers the four devils, grant your blessings.

A person who practices the profound Devil Severance  
mentally gives up this life by recollecting inconstant death,  
has great fortitude and conviction devoid of nondharmic thoughts,  
accomplishes the guru's advice entering haunted mountain retreats,  
and blends bad circumstances in an expanse of equal value in whatever occurs.

As stated, this is certainly what is needed. The required dharma practices are to cultivate devotion for the lineage and to have received the empowerment conferral that transfers the blessing. Then, the essence of the guiding instructions is [divided into] three: preliminaries, main part, and conclusion.

### **I. Preliminaries**

This has four parts: refuge, arousing the aspiration, mandala, and guru yoga.

#### **A. Refuge**

Imagine your root guru in the center of a lotus-and-sun seat on a lion throne in the sky in front of you. In front of the guru are the yidams and buddhas, to the right the volumes that are the essence of dharma, {187} to the left the sangha of the greater and lesser vehicles, and in back are the ḍākinīs and dharma protectors. Thinking, "You know all the joy and sorrow, good and evil, of myself and all beings equal to the sky," say:

All sentient beings equal to space, migrators such as myself,  
take refuge in Lord Buddha,  
take refuge in the holy dharma,  
take refuge in the sangha,  
take refuge in the guru, union of all.

And:

I go for threefold refuge in the buddha, dharma, and sangha.  
I go for threefold refuge in the guru, yidam, and ḍākinī.  
I go for threefold refuge in my own mind, emptiness, and dharmakāya.

Take refuge as much as you can. In the end, the objects of refuge dissolve into you.

### **B. Arousing the Aspiration**

In a state aggrieved by love, compassion, and enlightening aspiration for all sentient beings that equal the reaches of space, reflect on this as you say it out loud:

I will make all these mother sentient beings have happiness and all causes of happiness. {188}

I will separate them from suffering and all causes of suffering.

I will make them quickly attain unsurpassable enlightenment.

### **C. Mandala**

Imagine in front of you the guru inseparable from Machik Lapdrön, with the yidams in front of her and so forth, as in the refuge visualization. Offering substances, desirables, and luxuries of all world realms are piled high. Imagine offering that plus your own body, speech, and mind, along with your collection of virtue throughout the three times, to the guru and Jewels while offering however many seven-heap mandalas. At the beginning and the end of each session offer the extended mandala. At the end of each mandala say:

My body and possessions and  
all virtue gathered in the three times,  
I offer to you, my guru and Jewels.  
Please accept it with compassionate intent.

### **D. Guru Yoga**

Meditating on the guru and Machik inseparable above your head, arouse intense devotion from the bottom of your heart. If you want, do the lineage supplication of this practice. In particular, imagining that you and all sentient beings supplicate the guru with intense devotion, pray with single focus:

Genuine Precious Guru, please bless me. You are my only hope; please bless me now. Bless me to relinquish ego-fixation. Bless me to decisively realize the unborn. Bless me to use obstacles as spiritual powers. Bless me that the devil hosts will be severed in their own ground. Bless me to achieve buddhahood in a single lifetime.

At the end of the session, the guru dissolves into light and absorbs into you. Recite prayers to be looked after by the guru, and then rest for a bit. {190}

Sometimes visualize each of those [separately] and meditate by training in each. Then [you could] meditate intensely on refuge in the morning, arousing the aspiration at midday, mandala in the evening, and guru yoga at night. Maintain that for a week or two or more. Whatever experiences are appropriate for those practices will come and even a

bit of experience<sup>1</sup> and realization related to the main practice might arise. In any case, those who have practiced them as individual meditations before should do each practice for seven days. Combining them all, it is important that the minimum time for the preliminaries is two and a half months.

## **II. The Main Practice**

Introducing the meaning of the Mother and severing the four devils in basic space.

### **A. Introducing the Meaning of the Mother**

Instructions to apprehend the mind and the introduction.

#### **1. Instructions to Apprehend Mind**

Place the body in the seven-point posture of Vairocana. Rest the speech in its natural condition. And for the mind, having cut off conceptual elaborations of the three times, rest in the immediacy of this instant of present consciousness when the previous thought has stopped and the next one has not arisen. If thoughts keep erupting, abruptly interrupt their trajectory and return to the previous way of maintaining. Since the biggest problem is the [unchecked] proliferation of an undercurrent [of subtle thoughts], make a powerful resolution that from now on this kind of thing won't occur and remember it again and again. Meditating as before, that [problem] will diminish.

For a while don't do any other method than just that. Meditating for a long time, however, if only agitated thoughts arise, visualize a golden vajra the size of a barley grain in front of you, and concentrate by intensely focusing the awareness for the time it takes to eat three mouthfuls of food. Then right away return to maintaining a fresh state without contrivance. Again, mentally focus on the vajra, and again maintain the state of freshness. [Again mentally focus on the vajra].<sup>2</sup> Alternating in this manner, meditate twenty-one times. By doing this every day, the force of the thoughts is broken and they are completely clarified.<sup>3</sup>

In case that doesn't help, then in place of the vajra meditate on the form of the Bhagavan Buddha, Lord of Sages, about an inch high. Proceed as before with the other method. If even that doesn't work, then focus intently on the guru and Machik inseparable. A resounding *phaṭ* projects distinctly from her mouth, and from her body inch-high [miniatures] like blazing meteorites shoot out everywhere without obstruction, coming from everywhere and landing helter-skelter. They perforate your body, passing straight through from the top and bottom, and hither and thither. Then immediately meditate, maintaining a state of nonthought and so forth as before. This is the definite way to clear up all meandering thoughts and other obstacles to the arising of absorption.

With those kinds of techniques, when you rest in evenness as before, mind will abide however you want in clarity and vividness. You will be able to recall whatever you want, such as the needed frame of mind. Since this is not the unwanted mix of discursive thought, it approaches calm abiding.

At these times, if consciousness is not clear and there is a darkening gloom and in the breaks there is dullness with unclear recollection, it is the power of a gathering sinking. So go to a housetop or mountaintop or some other place that is cool and

spacious. Gaze upward and intensify the awareness. If you meditate with concentration, it will certainly clear it up.

## **2. The Introduction**

Within that previous state, with the consciousness turned inwards, look directly at the essence of that mind. External appearances with their variety will be vanquished just by being unwavering. Since there is nothing at all, there is nothing to recognize—meditate again and again on just that. The guru needs to do the introduction in accordance with the way that one’s own experiences arise. Nonetheless, this is the way to put into practice the meaning that has been introduced:

When this mind itself is still, without any identification at all, self-appearance is lucid and clear, {191} but still arising and arising.<sup>4</sup> When it is moving, the essence of movement itself is empty of an objective object. Even though the appearance of movement is unhindered, there is not a single thing to identify. Even though various objective appearances arise, there is no identification from the first flashing forth of the unimpeded appearing aspect arising and arising. Thus the essence of these three—objective appearance, conceptual thought, and the abiding mind—cannot be established as different. It is indivisible, yet it is not established as single: everything is empty of objective reality. This is precisely the meaning of the Great Mother Perfection of Wisdom. And one can certainly add any number of other designations: the intention of the buddhas of the three times, emptiness, free of elaboration, ineffability, the absolute, and so forth. Since the meaning is in the single moment of one’s own mind, one rests in evenness without any fabrication through just recognizing that itself, whether there is abiding or movement or whatever.

### **B. Severing the Four Devils in Basic Space**

#### **1. Severing the Tangible Devil in Basic Space**

The so-called tangible devil refers to the extent of the arising of fixating concepts in dependence on the objects of passion and aggression—enemies, friends, etc.—that are [perceived as] form, sound, smell, taste, or texture. The significance of “tangible” is that it is based on an external thing, such as form, and so on. For instance, when you recall something like your supposed enemy and get worked up as aggressive thoughts gradually arise. To sever that, shout *phaṭ* that very instant without falling under its influence. Sever the concept abruptly as it emerges without considering whether it has faults or qualities. [Then] rest freely there, as before, in the basic space of the meaning of the Mother. It is the same for mental attachment to friends, wealth, and other things, or attraction to pleasing forms and so forth, or disgust with what is unpleasant. You are afraid of some, upset at some, {192} and feel attachment or anger at anything in between, without discretion. Train as before with all emergence of intense conceptuality that fixates on those things. You are carried off by the devil if you give in to the power of the sudden eruption of conceptual thought. Uttering *phaṭ* instantly and severing the flow of thought is Severance. Afterwards, as the former meditation [on the meaning of the Mother] has been enhanced, there is the evidence of success and the evidence of severance. This applies in the same way to the following.

## 2. Severing the Intangible Devil

The significance of the intangible devil is that it refers not to [events] based on external circumstances, but to all conceptual thoughts such as joy or sorrow or excitement or regret or fear that arise even without [external] conditions. When those suddenly arise, sever their flow and rest in basic space.

## 3. Severing the Devil of Exaltation

When [feelings of] exaltation and exhilaration arise based on pride and fixating on the greatness of having a good guru and dharma lineage, or on increasing spiritual practice, or conducive circumstances accruing to you, and so forth, it is the devil of exaltation. As above, sever it in basic space.

## 4. Severing the Devil of Inflation

Whatever concepts and fixations occur is all the devil of inflation. As before, *phaṭ* carries all that arises over to basic space to be cut off. This one includes the other three. Up to this point, it is worthless to wander in haunted retreats without experience with a well-established independent practice of one's own. Foundational meditation must be established from this point on. Since doing it in haunted retreat is the enhancement and reason for going, you need to understand it in this way.

## III. Conclusion: Maintaining Experience

This has three parts: peaceful severance, wrathful severance, and half-peaceful, half-wrathful severance.

### A. Peaceful Severance

In your own house, meditate intently for four sessions on love and compassion for all sentient beings. {193} At the end [of the fourth session]<sup>5</sup> it is important to do the white distribution (*dkar 'byed*) once. For that, imagine that three hearth skulls appear in front of you, and your own mind exits from between the eyebrows in the form of Vajravarāhī. The top of the skull is sliced off and placed upon the hearth-skulls. The rest of the body is chopped up into pieces and poured into that. It becomes as vast as the reaches of the sky. Uttering *om āḥ hūm* turns it into an ocean of elixir. Root and lineage gurus, yidams, buddhas, bodhisattvas, heroes, *ḍākinīs*, and dharma protector guards are all invoked. Offering it to all of them, they are satiated and pleased. By donating it to all sentient beings of the six realms, they are temporarily satiated and ultimately all of their sins and obscurations will be purified. Throwing out the leftover elixir, immeasurable offering goddesses arrive and offer it as unimaginable offerings. Understand that all of that is your own mind. Looking nakedly at its essence, utter *phaṭ* and blend space and awareness. Again all of that manifests vividly and while recollecting it, say *phaṭ* again and blend space and awareness. Go through that process many times.

Once your visualization is somewhat trained by this meditation, you can go in person to a haunted place and there set your intention. Meditate with intense love and compassion for all sentient beings in general, and in particular for the local spirits, elementals, demons, malicious spirits, and such that live in that place. Then do the visualization of the white distribution as before, doing it again and again for two or three days. When that is successful, again meditate in turns on love and compassion and blending space and awareness.

After arriving in that place, search for a power place to sit down. There, first send off a fragment torma (*sil gtor*) to the local spirit hosts, a general torma to the *ḍākinīs*, a local spirit host torma, {194} an obstructor torma, and whatever others that you know about. It's very important to meditate intensely on love and compassion for them as well. Then for the preliminaries and so forth, dedicate yourself to the four parts of the preliminary practices for quite a long time. Afterwards, meditate many times on the visualization of the white distribution as described above. Then again visualize sentient beings of the six realms and primarily the particular demons and malicious spirits of that haunted place and meditate with intense love and compassion. That area and the demons and spirits and so forth will appear vividly/flashy forth (*snang ba lam lam pa*) as sentient beings. Focus your consciousness intently directly upon them, blend awareness and space saying *phaṭ*, and rest without fixation. Again meditate on compassion. Again blend space and awareness and so forth—meditating on that alone. No matter what sights and apparitions occur, wrap yourself in these two methods] of blending space and awareness and meditating on compassion. It is appropriate whether fierce apparitions occur or do not occur. Ultimately, when the place feels quite pleasant and the spiritual practice is greatly enhanced, you are ready for evidence of success and evidence of severance. To give thanks for the enhancement of spiritual practice by means of visualization, do the white distribution many times and dedicate it to the *yidams* and *ḍākinīs*, and donate vast tormas to all the local spirit hosts. Recite whatever aspiration prayers you know. On the road, meditate as before, and when you arrive back home offer as gratitude whatever offering tormas you know to the Three Jewels.

## **B. Wrathful Severance**

At first in your own home do the practice in sessions as with the peaceful severance, but at the final session do the visualization of the red distribution (*dmār 'gyes*) one time. For the red distribution, your mind goes out as before. Your body becomes an oily, greasy, juicy human corpse filling the billion-fold universe. Calling out the summons to the eight kinds of gods and spirits in the world realm, they all gather immediately. Imagine them pervading the earth and the sky. Then chop up the parts of your body into pieces, and say, “You all eat whatever you like, enjoy whatever you desire.” {195} They eat, drink, and carry away the parts of flesh, blood, bones, innards, and limbs that they each prefer. Imagine that they are satisfied for the time being and that ultimately their afflictive emotions are pacified. Then meditate that they have all returned to their own places again. Then, while understanding that it is all your own mind, say *phaṭ* to blend space and awareness and rest. Meditate in that way over and over again. When that becomes somewhat familiar, meditate for two or three days while visualizing a haunted place. The way to meditate on the road is the same as for the peaceful severance. When you arrive

there, find a power spot to sit, and do the four preliminary practices and generally practice as before. Meditate on the guru and Machik inseparable and the five kinds of *ḍākinīs* with their entourages. During the guru yoga, guru-Machik inseparable dissolves into you and you imagine that yourself become the *ḍākinī* of primordial awareness, blazing with the ferocious fire of primordial awareness, dancing with various wrathful stances, and resounding like thunder with various wrathful mantras. At this point you need to have the pride of actually being Machik and, without ever harboring ill will toward the demons and spirits, understand that they are all an illusory dream, blending more and more your own mind with the essence of whatever arises. [Say *phaṭ* and only do the blending of space and awareness. If turmoil and apparitions rise up,]<sup>6</sup> run and jump with *phaṭ* and utter all the wrathful mantras you know.

Then, back in the place that you left, rest in the evenness of emptiness alone. Whatever lofty and lowly mind states or perceptual concepts occur, just say *phaṭ* and blend space and awareness. No matter what turmoil and apparitions rise up externally as visual appearances, internally as sickness, or secretly as afflictive emotions, wrong views, and so forth, know that they are delusional and just blend space and awareness. Don't do anything else. Just rest in the evenness of the meaning of the Mother. {196} Take up the practice with a promise and sincere oath never to say anything with the speech or move around with the body. At all times be without even an atom of cherishing body and mind. If it turns out that you have actually been transported by fierce gods and demons, imagine that you are still sitting in the previous vacated place [but stay where you are].

The actual practice is that in your current circumstances it is important that you do not succumb to requesting refuge of another, or succumb to a protection circle, or succumb to subduing demons, or succumb to hopes and fears. This is crucial no matter what occurs: cultivate an attitude of indifference and remain always in nonconceptuality by blending space and awareness.

As explained before, if the evidence of success and uprising are in order, do a few of the red distribution visualizations and then do the concluding practices as in the peaceful severance. Offer however many tormas, such as water torma and *nāga* torma and so forth, and do many aspirations prayers. It is important to exert yourself at activities such as explaining the dharma and reciting sutras. By doing so, the impairment of desired places, physical well-being, and wealth will be restored, previous karma will be exceedingly purified, and your thoughts will be endowed with dharma. Think of that again and again, and do the concluding practices as before.

### **C. Half-Peaceful, Half-Wrathful Severance**

Do the preliminaries as before and then meditate on both white and red distributions. As soon as you arrive at a haunted retreat place, offer copious tormas as in the peaceful severance practice. For the four preliminary practices, do the first two sessions as in the peaceful severance and the last two sessions as in the wrathful severance. In the practice of the main part, for each session first do the peaceful severance visualization many times and then, as in the wrathful severance, meditate only on emptiness. If uprisings do not occur for a long period of time, do the elaborate way of conduct for provoking uprisings described in the wrathful severance. Uprisings will certainly come. For a while, until they settle down, {197} meditate only on emptiness as in the wrathful severance. If it happens

that gods and demons actually attack, tear out your whole living heart and give it to them or resolutely cut off your head, arms, and legs and give them away. Without even separating body and mind, without an atom of cherishing your body, this casting out the body as food is crucial. When the [evidence of] success [and] uprising (?tshar lhongs) are set, do the concluding activities as above.

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A word about the required occasions for those [practices]: At first, go to practice peaceful severance in a retreat place with good, auspicious characteristics, where there are gentle local spirits sympathetic to dharma. It's very difficult to apply the practice in action if right from the start you do wrathful severance and stay in rough places and go to the abodes of malicious demons and spirits. Even if you can make your way there, it sets up bad interdependent connections with your dharma lineage, spiritual companions, and so forth. Therefore, for the first two or three times, do practice based upon peaceful severance in auspicious haunted places, and then after that meditate on peaceful severance in a few middling haunted retreats. Then meditate on peaceful severance in a few rough haunted places. In that way, when you have refined meditation in many haunted places, you can do the appropriate half-peaceful half-wrathful severance in a few rough haunted places. In places of really malicious demons and spirits, the wrathful severance alone is only done on occasion. Generally, the ongoing practice is the combined peaceful-wrathful severance. Where the gods and demons are gentle and sympathetic to dharma, do mainly the actual peaceful severance, though it is appropriate to do the half-peaceful half-wrathful as the occasion demands. It is no good to do wrathful severance alone.

Here the combined peaceful-wrathful as it was presented above is called "elaborate." The final practices of alternating meditation on love and compassion and blending space and awareness, as in the peaceful severance, is called "unelaborate." Afterwards, entering into evenness on the meaning of the Mother alone is called "exceedingly unelaborate severance." {198} Therefore, you should meditate with that relationship to them.

When setting out to do severance, if intense aggressive or passionate afflictive emotions arise, or devotion to the guru strays into fickleness, or your sacred oaths lapse due to arguing with spiritual companions and so forth, or seminal fluid is diminished, then the interdependent connections have deviated and wandering in haunted places will not be effective. In those cases it is important to fix the particular interdependent connections through supplications, compassion, confession, aspiration prayers, feast offerings, tormas, channels and winds/energy/prana meditation, and so forth before going.

Of three [kinds of] uprisings, outer uprisings are earthquakes, avalanches, and frightening visual and auditory perceptions that are certain to occur. Inner uprisings are sudden intense sickness such as depression ("heart-wind"), brain pain, intestinal pain, and so forth. Secret uprisings occur in the mind. They are like the arising of unalterable feelings of happiness and sadness, fear, revulsion, thoughts of desirables, various impressions of the eight concerns, the increase of thoughts influenced by the three poisons, and so forth. When they occur then wrong views of the dharma and the guru



come up. All of these sorts of things should be understood as being uprisings. Do not move physically. Except for your daily recitation routine and *phaṭ*, maintain the discipline of not uttering ordinary speech. Do not come under the influence of whatever perceptions occur in the mind. Blending space and awareness is important.

Also, when you need to stay in a place where many people gather or when you need to travel, persisting in spiritual practice in front of people is generally proscribed and in particular to shout wrathful mantras [such as] *phaṭ* is inelegant. So it is important to keep “*phaṭ*” to a whisper and never deviate from your mode of practice.

In the case of local humans, demons, and spirits of a certain area {199} suddenly arising as visible objects or mental appearances, meditate with yearning compassion for all human and nonhuman beings, and set the intention of thinking that all of them are brought under your control. Then by uttering *phaṭ* all of them are carried over to basic space. You can do this visualization at dawn or whenever, repeating it however many times and then meditating. Finally do extensive aspiration prayers. When you meditate without any attachment to anything as if it is illusion, all the human and nonhuman beings in those areas will certainly come under your control. As this illustrates, this vital point of visualization should be applied in a similar fashion to whichever of the four actions you wish to accomplish.

Furthermore, by carrying devoted supplication over to basic space, the guru accepts you with compassion and blessings enter. By carrying compassion over to basic space, the welfare of migrants happens and sentient beings are brought under control. By carrying revulsion and renunciation over to basic space, your own individual spiritual practice gets to the point and the mindstreams of others are greatly inspired in the dharma. By carrying creation phase over to basic space, abilities grow and mundane and super mundane dharmas are brought under control. By carrying the yogas of channels, *prāna*, and drops/*bindu* over to basic space, realization grows greater and greater while the gathering/attracting of outer and inner *ḍākinīs* is continuous. If wandering in haunted retreats gets to the vital point, the fierce eight classes [of spirits] can all be compelled to serve. Furthermore, if desire is carried over to basic space, you can subdue desirous beings, gathering them as entourage. However, if you do not keep them with compassion, obstacles will arise to you and your close circle and based on that. Therefore in carrying desire over to basic space, it is important to carry that emptiness over to compassion. As that illustrates, the other thoughts of afflictive emotion can be applied similarly.

At the root of all of them is the importance of having no hopes and fears. So although severance in general is a practice that clears away all obstacles and attains spiritual powers, {200} you must have absolutely no desires and hopes to gain such spiritual powers and benefits. You must have absolutely no fear about obstacles and troubles occurring and no hope of alleviating them. If the innermost flaws in your mind are not exposed, spiritual practice will not get to the point. For those with the wrong attitude about the guru, who judge the dharma, and desire their own excellence while desiring misfortune, who grasp wealth and possessions with the clutch of death, and are so carried away by hopes and fears that they can't make up their minds--how could they possibly give rise to meditation by taking up the path of haunted retreats? Talk of pacifying the uprisings of malicious gods and demons, and talk of achieving a bit of wealth and notoriety cause much confusion. So until there is great development of the mind of spiritual practice, do not trust in pseudo evidence of success. If spiritual practice

is actually enhanced, it doesn't matter if the others things happen or not. That is the final point of good advice.

The essential meaning of all severance object

is summarized here in its intention.

Fortunate child, do the practice!

Don't be scatter-brained!

This “Practice Manual of Profound Object-Severance: Essence of the Vital Meaning” was taught by Tāranātha at the request of Jadral Rinchen Tashi and compiled at the dharma school of Taklung Tang. Auspicious!

## Reference

*Gcod yul zab mo'i khrid yig gnad don snying po*. DNZ vol. 14, pp. 185-200. Kundeling Printing: vol. 9, 630-645. Tāranātha Collected Works (TSB), Dzamthang printing, vol. 20, pp. 661-679.

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<sup>1</sup> DNZ has *sems rtogs* (“mental experience”), but the edition in Tāranātha's *Collected Works* has *nyams rtogs*, which I have preferred.

<sup>2</sup> This additional line from TSB.

<sup>3</sup> *sal ding gi 'gro* from Tāranātha's *Collected Works* is correct, rather than DNZ *dal deng gi 'gro*, according to Ringu Tulku, 4/23/13.

<sup>4</sup> Following TSB, *ces kyang 'char 'char du btub pa* rather than DNZ *ci yang 'chag tu btub pa btub*.

<sup>5</sup> *thun bzhi khar* inserted from the edition in Tāranātha *gsung 'bum*, vol. 20, p. 670.

<sup>6</sup> Added lines from TSB, vol. 20, p. 673, l. 3.

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