

# Introduction to the Ati Yoga Retreat Teaching

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Welcome everybody to this retreat. This retreat is not very useful for old practitioners, because old practitioners more or less know many things, so it would be more beneficial if they did practice. You cannot have realization only by listening to the teaching. First you should learn the meaning of the sense of the teaching, then you apply and integrate what you have learned. This is the reason I repeat the same retreats many times. I do this because there are new people who have no transmission and do not know what to do. For that reason, I have explained what I am doing in this program for these few days. It is very important that you try to understand what we are going to do. So, if you listened well, you can understand. Ok, thank you very much, and welcome everybody.

Good day for everybody and everywhere. We are in Dzamling Gar beginning our retreat. The title of this retreat is 'Ati Yoga Teaching'. This is something important that you should understand. People are always concentrated on the titles of books or teachings, but it is more important to understand the sense of the teaching, otherwise it doesn't work. In general I am teaching Ati Yoga. First of all, try to understand what Ati means. Ati is in the language of Oddiyana. In Sanskrit we say "Adi". Ati means the primordial state. Everybody has that state; so this is what we should discover and then we try to be in that state. When we say 'yoga', yoga you know very well, yoga is very diffused everywhere today. The origin of the word 'yoga' is Sanskrit. In the Oddiyana language it is used in the same way, but the meaning of the word yoga depends on what you are explaining. What you consider as yoga is different; we cannot say yoga is only one thing. For example, in Tibetan yoga has been translated from Sanskrit and Oddiyana in ancient times by very good translators, translators who are not going after a kind of book. These translators know what the real meaning, the real sense, is.

The translators are translating the real sense of the meaning, not only language. For example, when we say 'yoga', the translation into Tibetan is *naljor*. If you are learning the word *naljor*, then you can understand much more the real sense of the word *yoga*. In Tibetan when we say *naljor*, we must understand what it means. You cannot use it according to how you feel or how you want to use it. You see there are two words: *nal* and *jor*. *Nal* means *nalma* and *nalma* means the real condition. Maybe some of you learned what you sing when you dance the Dzamling Gar Song, the song that I composed. *Nalma*, *nal*, is repeated many times. *Nalma* means our real condition without changing or modifying. *Jor* means possessing that knowledge, not only in an intellectual way, but how it is related to our real condition. So you see when we say *naljor*, it means possessing the real knowledge of our primordial state. To learn the Dzogchen teaching means we are learning that. To apply the Dzogchen teaching means that we try to be in that state. So, if you are not doing that,

you are not following in that way, the teaching is not working. These are very important points that we should remember.

## **Guru Yoga**

In this retreat I am giving an introduction to this teaching called Ati Yoga. You can try to understand our real condition in a concrete way. I am explaining this for hours and hours and we are also doing practices addressing this. Then to apply, all people, new and old, can apply these methods. We should understand a little how we get into our real nature. Our real nature is not what happens when we are judging and thinking. In general when we speak our ordinary language, we say mind and nature of mind. What is mind? We can understand mind very well because we are judging and thinking continuously – that is mind. So even if we cannot touch, we cannot see something outside, when we observe a little how we are thinking continuously, one thought after another and then another thought arises, continuously, this is mind. But we don't have the knowledge of the *nature* of mind. This is the essence of the teaching. So there are two ways we will learn and apply that. That aspect I am not explaining today, I will explain that tomorrow.

In this case it is indispensable that the method, which the new people or the old people who are here must learn, is Guruyoga and what it means. Guru means teacher in Sanskrit. So, when we are learning and following a teacher, the teacher tries to help us understand the real sense is. We listen to the explanation and how to apply what we have learned from the teacher. We need to go with this experience even if we really cannot discover our nature of mind. We cannot discover our nature of mind because our capacity is related with our mind. We can judge, we can think, etc., that is no problem, but those activities are related to time and space. When we say nature of mind, we cannot get in that state only by going after mind.

When we follow a teaching and go a little deeper, then there are many topics like "*madhyamika*", "the state of the *madhyamika*" or "absolute truth", etc., there are so many different names. That means we are discovering and learning with our mind and we have at least a little idea of what it means. When we follow a teaching we receive many things called instructions. Instructions are not only visualizing a deity or chanting a mantra; these are very relative. The real sense is when we say: "How is the nature of mind?" Even if we are not following a very high level teaching or the essence of the teaching, when we receive an example of Ati Guruyoga we can have a little experience.

With this experience you can understand; even if we have not discovered the nature of mind completely, we may discover in which direction to go. Direction is not only believing in something; it is not only learning how to do a visualization of a deity or how to chant mantras. I am not saying that these activities do not have benefit; there could be relative benefit because we live in the relative condition. These methods that we have learned and we know, should be applied related with our mind. Mind is totally in time and space and therefore limited. Mind has no capacity or knowledge going beyond that kind of limitation. This is the reason that when we say "nature of

mind” – this is only a concept in our mind. We do not know what the nature of the mind is. To learn that, we should at least learn Ati Guruyoga. You remember that when we do a retreat I repeat a hundred times: “You try to concentrate on Ati Guruyoga.” Even if you are here on retreat and you have learned many things, the most important thing is related with Ati Guruyoga. The essence of the teaching given by the teacher is related with Ati Guruyoga. Now I am going to explain Ati Guruyoga and how we should do practice. People are not satisfied when I explain a very simple way to do practice.

Some people they say, “Oh, I learned Ati Guruyoga for many years, so there is no need to explain it again”. I know you can understand mentally what Ati Guruyoga is, but if you are not integrated with Ati Guruyoga, what is its’ function? This is the problem I always see so therefore I repeat it a hundred times. So when we do Ati Guruyoga, how do we start, for example? We can understand mentally by saying, “Oh, Ati Guruyoga is something to understand related to the nature of mind. Then I want to learn, I want to know that”. So, what is this? This is your mind. Your mind is thinking and judging that way. This is not Ati Guruyoga. Now you are thinking, “Now I want to do Ati Guruyoga”. Sometimes when you are thinking, “I want to do a practice”, then you are thinking, “Oh, I want to stay comfortably”. Particularly when people are starting, new people, when they start to learn the teaching and dharma, etc., they are very much interested to listen while sitting on the earth with crossed legs. These same people, after some months or years have passed, are going to find a chair when we practice. You observe how we are developing. This is not development; we are always creating with our mind that way. I am not saying you should stay on the earth with crossed legs. If you feel better and it is easier and more comfortable, it is ok. You remember that Buddha Shakyamuni sat under a tree with crossed legs and remained for six years.

In this case, crossed legs are considered important because when you are sitting with crossed legs and sitting on the earth, etc., there is a bone in the right and left ankle that is always touching the earth and you have pain. When you have learned the Vairocana position, etc., crossing the legs by putting one leg above, then you can remain for hours and hours and there is no pain. You are also more able to keep the physical body straight. In all practices, in Sutra, Tantra, in any kind of practice, we always need to keep our backs straight. That is for balancing our energy. So, if someone has learned a little Yantra Yoga, you can observe that person always tries to keep a straight back. In this case, sometimes it is necessary, but we do not always need to do this way. In the Dzogchen teaching instructions, sometimes it says you should remain sitting comfortably. Maybe you are sitting on the earth with crossed legs and you are not comfortable. In this case, maybe you are more comfortable sitting on a chair. Sometimes Japanese practitioners sit on their knees – also that is comfortable. But it is important that we keep our energy balanced and that means we are going more into the essence. Then we think, “Oh, now I need to do Ati Guruyoga”. So, now you work with your mind. You have learned this from the teacher and the teacher explained how we should do Ati Guruyoga. This is called a transmission.

Maybe new people don’t know how to do Ati Guruyoga. When you listen to the teacher and the teacher explains and you learn and apply – this is called transmission. The teacher explains and

the students understand. We should do a kind of visualization when we do Ati Guruyoga. We need to do a visualization because we are living in time and space; we have that attitude and that experience. So when we are doing visualizations, it becomes easier. In Ati Guruyoga you should visualize white A and a *thigle* of five colors. You should imagine something just like this in the center of your body. So this is visualization. Also when you do this visualization, you sound “A” because in the center of this *thigle* there is a Tibetan character called letter A. A is considered something like all different kinds of sounds the origin of which is A. For example, in the Sanskrit alphabet first we have the vowels, which start with the A. There is also this influence in Western language. When you are doing also your alphabet you say “A, B, C, D”. A is the origin of all sounds. Then A becomes other sounds: I, U, E, O etc. And there are sixteen different vowels in Sanskrit: A ?, longer and shorter. Then I ? U ? Ri R? Li L? E ? O ? Am Ah – all these are considered vowels.

After the vowels there are consonants; the consonants combined with vowels become infinite words. So the origin is the letter A. They say that the Buddha said, “A is the best letter”, because A is origin of all sound. So we are doing Guruyoga with this visualization. If you are a new practitioner and you don’t know this letter, after one or two times you of doing Guruyoga, you can easily learn. It is not so difficult. In this case you can also do A just like in the Western languages. The symbol of the A is symbol of the sound. In the Dzogchen teaching, sound is particularly explained as the origin of all manifestation. So this is how we learn what the state of Dzogchen is. Dzogchen means our real nature, our primordial state. When we ask how that state is we should receive that information mentally. There is an explanation in the Dzogchen teaching that the state of Dzogchen, which is our condition, is called the non-dual of *kadag* and *lhundrub*. *Kodak* and *lhundrub* are words in the Tibetan language; *kadag* means emptiness. When we say *dharmadhatu*, *dharmadhatu* means all phenomena that has emptiness as its real nature. In the Dzogchen teaching this is called *kadag*.

What is the structure of this word in Tibetan, *ka* is the first letter of the Tibetan alphabet. The Tibetan alphabet is not like Sanskrit; it is different. The Tibetan alphabet starts with Ka, Kha, Ga, Nga, Ca, Cha, Ca, Nya, Ta, Tha, Ta, Nga, etc., at the end there is Ha, A, then there are thirty consonants. Sometimes this seems a little different and strange because at the end of the consonants there is Ha and A, A is final. All languages consider A a vowel. But in the Tibetan language A is a consonant, not a vowel. This is because in the Tibetan language vowels are used for adding something up and down and some signs. This is a vowel. A has its’ body and that is why it is considered a consonant. When we say “I” we are adding something on the top. When we say “U” we are adding something lower. When we say “E” then we add something on the top. Also “O”, there is sign on the top. So they have no body. This is called a vowel in Tibetan. That means that Ka is the first letter. That means also Ka represents “first of all”. *Dag* means pure. Pure means emptiness; emptiness is pure and impure, there is not this dualistic concept. *Kadag* means since the beginning pure. So, emptiness is *dharmadhatu*. *Lhundrub* means that if we understand that our real nature is only emptiness, our understanding is not complete.

If we know only emptiness, emptiness means there is nothing. For example, if you see some objects like a vase, etc., you look inside and there is nothing. Then you say “empty vase”. So, there is nothing. That really means emptiness. But it is not sufficient we understand in that way. Sometimes people think, “I understand everything is emptiness, *shunyata*”. Then you think, “I am realized, I know everything.” In the real sense that does not correspond; even emptiness has infinite potentiality – you should understand that. How does this infinite potentiality manifest and what are its’ qualities? This potentiality manifests through sound. Sound arises from emptiness. Sound slowly develops and then we can understand everything in the relative condition. For that reason we have the letter A in the center of the *thigle*. A represents only that sound. Also when we do practice, sometimes we transform like in the Vajrayana system, and we need to do a visualization like the three vajras: white Om, red A, and blue HUM, something like this. But the essence is not this form. Essence is sound, the sound of OM, A, and HUM. In the same way, when we transform with a seed syllable, sometimes we say HUM, sometimes HRI, etc. In Vajrayana all manifestations belong to the Five Dhyana Buddhas.

So these seed syllable sounds like OM, HUM, TRAM, HRI, A, with these sounds of the seed syllables, we can understand what belongs to which Buddha family. This is more related with sound. But if we are thinking only of sound, then we cannot see, we cannot understand. Sound develops in light. When we say light, light means like light and dark. It doesn’t mean five colors. Five colors are still more developed. So, white A represents the light of the sound A. This is very important to understand. So, slowly when we do visualizations, we should understand the meaning. When we have light, then you can see there is a *thigle* of the five colors. First the five colors develop and then the five wisdoms, etc. When we understand that the characteristic of these manifestations of potentiality is the five elements, then there is possibility. In the Dzogchen teaching we say *lhundrub*, *lhundrub* means the self-perfected qualification, which we all have. We don’t understand this *thigle* and the white A inside as something in our stomach, this is not what is meant. We have this potentiality. When there is this potentiality, in Vajrayana style you receive initiation, instruction, etc., and then you can transform into any kind of form. What we have learned, for example, is how we transform divinities, colors, forms, etc. – these are the instructions.

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