



## Prerequisites for Vajrayana

Depending on the tradition and the teacher, Vajrayana requires variations on previous experience, understanding, and motivation, including:

- ❖ Having taken refuge in the Three Jewels.
- ❖ Understanding and some realization of the Sravaka vehicle of the four noble truths, eightfold path, dependent arising, and some degree of insight into emptiness.
- ❖ Understanding and some realization of the Mahayana, especially the form bodhicitta aspiration and motivation to fully awaken for the sake of all beings.
- ❖ Having the fruits of the ordinary foundations: Contemplation of precious life, impermanence, karma, and samsara.
- ❖ Accomplishing the extraordinary foundations: Refuge in the Three Roots, Vajrasattva purification, mandala offerings, and guru union.
- ❖ Empowerment to practice, being introduced to the yidam by a vajra master carrying the blessings of the lineage, and instructions in the sadhana.
- ❖ Maintaining samaya vows, commitments, and relationship to the guru and the practice.

## Aspects of Vajrayana

- ❖ Vajrayana is the *secret vehicle* because its methods and perceptions are hidden from ordinary view. Whereas the Sravaka and Mahayana are *causal vehicles* because we cultivate the causes of awakening, Vajrayana is the *result vehicle* because we directly manifest buddhanature and its qualities. Vajrayana is also the *method vehicle* because it includes many skillful means including devotion, visualization, ritual practices, harnessing of subtle psychophysical energies, and transforming the basic energies of the kleshas.
- ❖ Pure perception where beings are awakened beings; the environment is a pure land, and all sights, sounds, and activities are pure expressions of awakening.
- ❖ The Three Jewels manifest as the Three Roots. The Buddha is one's guru; the Dharma is one's yidam; the Sangha is the protectors.
- ❖ Yidam practice changes one's ordinary sense of self into the extraordinary awakened qualities such as compassion, wisdom, and liberating skillful means.
- ❖ Depending on the lineage and tradition, Vajrayana practice is classified as: *Kriya tantra* (Action): external rituals for protection and purification. *Charya tantra* (Performance or Conduct): balancing external activities and internal meditation. *Yoga tantra* (Union): more meditation than external activities; one's body, speech and mind as inseparable from the yidam's. *Anuttarayoga tantra* (Unsurpassable union): no reliance on externals; full creation and completion stages, and cultivation of subtle body yogas.

## Resources for further study and reflection

Dharma cannot entirely be grasped by conceptual understanding, and Vajrayana is especially so. Conceptual knowledge can even become an *obstacle* to practice and realization. With that caveat, it's also true that understanding has to begin somewhere. These are some of the better books on Vajrayana, each with its own strengths and limitations.

Geshe Tashi Tsering. *Tantra: The Foundation of Buddhist Thought, Volume 6*. Wisdom Publications, 2012.

Lama Yeshe. *Introduction to Tantra: A Vision of Totality*. Wisdom Publications, 1987.

Ringu Tulku. *Daring Steps to Fearlessness: The Three Vehicles of Buddhism*. Snow Lion Publications, 2005.

Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche. *The Wish-Fulfilling Jewel: The Practice of White Tara*. Rinchen Publications, 2009.

Ken McLeod. *The Magic of Vajrayana*. Unfettered Mind Media, 2023.

Jamgon Kongtrul. *Creation and Completion: Essential Points of Tantric Meditation*. Translated and introduced by Sara Harding with commentary by Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche.

Jamgon Kongtrul. *Systems of Buddhist Tantra*. Snow Lion Publications, 2005.