

Vajrasattva's Hundred Syllable Mantra

a summation of the path

by Tarchin Hearn

Portrayed as a radiant buddha figure, Vajrasattva represents the primordial natural state of pure and total presence – the essence of body, speech and mind activity of all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. As a meditation, the primary purpose of Vajrasattva practice is to remove the obstacles obscuring one's perception of the true nature of mind, and hence to cleanse unwholesomeness from all levels of being.



The Vajrasattva purification and healing meditation is widely practiced in all Tibetan Buddhist traditions. In general it's practice involves visualisation and mantra, coupled with clear intent and care filled inquiry. Vajrasattva is usually depicted as a white Buddha figure, seated in meditation, holding a bell and dorje. The bell symbolises wisdom. The dorje symbolises skilful means or compassion.

A distinctive aspect of this meditation is the hundred syllable mantra which can be understood in a variety of ways depending on the maturity of the practitioner. In this short essay I'd like to share with you an approach, or perhaps we should call it an explanation/understanding, that arose in the course of my own contemplations. It is not a fresh a translation but is more a modified rendition with poetic license. I am offering it for the benefit of those people already involved with Vajrasattva practice who may appreciate having their understanding of the meditation stretched a bit.

One of the many meanings of the word *mantra* is 'teaching', which can be understood, both in in terms of direct instruction and also, as a form of inspirational intimation. The '100 syllable mantra of Vajrasattva' could be regarded as 'the 100 syllable teaching' or, since 100 syllables

indicates something quite long, it could indicate 'the extensive or complete teachings of Vajrasattva'.

In general, *vajra* means unshakable, firm, indestructible or adamant and *sattva* means living being, or becoming. In a literal sense, the word *vajrasattva* means unshakable being, unshakable becoming, or unshakable suchness. In essence, Vajrasattva is the immeasurable expanse of inter-being. A central aspect of the classical form of this meditation involves visualising a flow of crystal clear nectar washing through one's body, speech and mind, loosening, dissolving and clearing away defilements. Biologically speaking, the body/brain/mind/community that we are is like a multi-dimensional braided river, a living tapestry of flowing transformation. We are composed of an inconceivable number of flows of different 'nectars': water, earth, gasses, energies, foods (*rupa*), thought and memory (*these are cognitive flowings*), talents and understandings, that are pouring through, revealing and demonstrating our utterly inter-dependent wholeness, this present 'body of experience' which involves everything. The experience of multi-levelled fluidity, rather than a frozen or static state, shows the activity of purifying. All these flowings are modes of connecting; the languaging, the coupling of all phenomena, things and processes, (*dharmas*). This body/mind is truly community in action. Gradually the practitioner experiences his or her body, speech and mind and all being's body, speech and mind, and the subsequent timeless inter-being of body, speech and mind, to be the display of Vajrasattva – this *dharmadhatu* – this total expanse of all events and meanings.

From a deep ecology/buddhadharma perspective, the ideas of unsustainability and impermanence are inseparably linked. *Sabbe sankhara annicca'ti*. All compounded things are impermanent. Thoughts are impermanent. Feelings are impermanent. Creatures are impermanent. Species are impermanent. Geological features are impermanent. Planets are impermanent. Galaxies are impermanent. All compounded things are impermanent. When we look around us, everything is fleeting and ephemeral and yet we find ourselves constantly grasping for duration and stability. The only dharma to have demonstrated any kind of meaningful sustainability is 'Life' which, on earth, has been continuing in an unbroken or unshakable continuum for more than 3.5 billion years. In this sense the Hundred Syllable Mantra of Vajrasattva could be described as the Extensive Teaching on Sustainable Living–Being–Becoming.

For beings experiencing a fairly continuous sense of separation between subject and object, the traditional translation will have most meaning. One is petitioning a higher being or power, outside oneself, for help. Here Vajrasattva represents the unshakably clear state, the embodiment of Buddha Wisdom. The hundred syllables become a prayerful request for

Vajrasattva's blessing which comes in the form of nectar flowing through your being. A traditional rendition of this prayer, along with a partial translation can be found at the end of this article.

In a broader, more embracing sense, Vajrasattva represents the complete realisation of emptiness (*śūnyatā*). In this profound non-dual state, Vajrasattva is understood as the essence, nature and expression of your own mind. Or, put in other words, Vajrasattva is the essence, nature and expression of the immeasurable expanse of knowing that you are. Here contemplating the mantra is not a petition for help, rather it becomes a self empowerment into Mahamudra or the Great Perfection. As an extensive teaching, the mantra serves as a reminder of the entire path from beginning to end. It becomes a song of awakening, a skilful path of wholeness unfolding, resonating with deep understanding and loving presence.

The following explanation/understanding is not a translation. You could think of it as a rendition done with poetic license. By combining this radically inclusive approach with the more traditional translations also outlined at the end of this article, you may glimpse fresh intuitions of how you might engage with this profound practice.

OM

Vajrasattva source of vows

Vajrasattva ever present

Steadying, Gladdening, Enriching, Loving

Treasury of all perfections

Empowering this heart/mind

HUM

HA HA HA HA

HOH

Blessedness,

Unshakable abiding suchness

Beyond all separation

Oh Diamond Jewel of Love

Oh Being of the Great Vow

AH

OM

Vajrasattva source of vows

(Om Vajrasattva guard my vows) *The bracketed italics are the more traditional translation.*

Unshakable suchness, the state of vajrasattva, is the ground of everything and the source of our determination, commitment, and confidence in the process of awakening.

Vajra => usually translated as diamond or unshakable – the most durable or unshakable thing we know of is life. This is the most real demonstration of sustainability that humans know of. According to our present understandings it has been in process of billions of years.

In Dzogchen usage vajra can represent ever-fresh or timeless awareness or timeless presence and hence is synonymous with *yeshés*, a Tibetan word meaning wisdom.

Vajra (p 913 Monier Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary) => 'the hard or mighty one', a thunderbolt, adamantine, hard, impenetrable, indestructible, invincible, firm. The ultimate vajra is *śūnyatā* emptiness; the spacious openness or ungraspableness or un-pin-downableness of interbeing.

vaj from the root, *vraj* => to go, walk, proceed, travel, wander, move

vaj => from the root, *vajati*; to go, to prepare the way, to trim or feather an arrow

ra => acquiring, possessing; giving, effecting; fire, heat; love, desire; speed; amorous play; giving; gold; going, motion; brightness, splendour

va => air, wind; the arm; name of Varuna; the ocean, water; addressing; reverence; conciliation; auspiciousness; a dwelling; a tiger; going; an arrow; weaving; strong, powerful

jra => from the root, *jri* => to go, to overpower

How Marvellous!

The Vajra of self-knowing awareness is timeless awareness blazing everywhere.

The naturally manifest Vajra without characteristics blazes in all directions.

The radiantly fearless Vajra is supreme emptiness.

The immaculate Vajra of what is subtle and coarse blazes intensely.

The great Vajra crown is all-pervasive emptiness.

The limitless Vajra is not conferred, but naturally perfect.

The limitless Vajra is samaya that is beyond being upheld.

(from Longchenpa's "The Precious Treasury of The Way of Abiding" Padma Pub.)

Sattva (p 1135 MWSD) => being, existence, entity, reality, true essence, nature, disposition of mind; spiritual essence, spirit, mind; vital breath, life consciousness, strength of character, strength, firmness, energy, resolution, courage, self command, good sense, wisdom, magnanimity; it renders something pure and clean, hence purity and goodness, renders a person true, honest and wise.

- material or elementary substance, entity matter, a thing
- a living or sentient being, creature, animal

Sat => being, existing, occurring, happening, being present

- that which really is, entity or existence, essence, the true being
- beautiful, wise, venerable, honest

tva => 2nd personal pronoun, your, you, thy

Samaya (Skt) or *damsig* (Tib) means vow, discipline or commitment. Depending on a person's level of maturity and life experience, samaya can be understood at many levels, Reflect on whatever levels are pertinent to you at the time.

- 1 - traditional precepts (*found in Daily Pūja*)
- 2 - positive precepts (*found in Daily Pūja*)
- 3 - Bodhisattva Vow (*found in Daily Pūja*)
- 4 - *Vajrasamaya* - to live in harmony with the intent of one's teacher's teaching and one's vajra sangha
- 5 - the Four Samayas (*outlined by Longchenpa in "The Precious Way of Abiding"*)
 - ineffableness
 - openness
 - oneness
 - spontaneous presence
- 6 - *Bodhicitta*; relative and absolute in perfect union; pure and total presence; a mind of openness and compassion; this is referring to the open dimension of the total field of all events and meanings.
- 7 - Unshakable compassion and radical inclusivity.

Vajrasattva – this self-sustaining interbeingness of life unfolding, this unshakable inter-knowing of everything and everyone, this wide open expanse of being and becoming, this Mystery, this Suchness, is the source of all *samaya*. The level of vow / discipline / commitment that feels most relevant to us will reflect of how we are seeing / experiencing the universe at that time. Each level, as it unfolds, will eventually morph into the next.

Vajrasattva ever present

(Vajrasattva stay nearby)

Stay nearby => ever present => Vajrasattva, the diamond state of being (spontaneously present, ever-fresh awareness) is omnipresent in time and space throughout body, speech and mind. It is this spontaneously present ever-fresh awareness that 'guards' one's vows.

From a classical Buddhist perspective, these first two lines of the hundred syllable mantra address the area of **Sila**, the path of ethics and moral conduct.

The next sections down to the end of 'Ha Ha Ha Ha Hoh' deal with **Samadhi**, the hineyana, mahayana and tantrayana paths of cultivating attentiveness (meditation).

Hineyana - self-focussed vehicle

Steadying => Samādhi (1st and 2nd tetrads of ānāpānasati)

Gladdening => enlivening the samadhi, waking it up => joy, bliss-void; (3rd tetrad)

Enriching => Insight => vast array of understandings and abilities

Loving => Fruition => boundless love, both in time and space

All four together => indicate the four foundation practices. Steadying = refuge;
Gladdening = Vajrasattva; Enriching = Mandala offering; Loving = Guru Yoga.

Mahayana => great, all-inclusive vehicle

Treasury of all perfections => Six Paramita (the Mahayana Path of the Bodhisattva)

(Bestow on me every perfection)

Empowering this heart/mind => This 'treasury of all perfections': generosity, wholesome relating, patience, skilled use of energy, a continuity of caring and enquiring, and profound understanding, is infusing every karma of body, speech and mind (every action of this body/brain/mind/community) with the qualities of liberation, thus moving towards Tantra, the study and practice of a total inter-weaving dynamic wholeness – what could be called 'the fundamental continuity'.

(In all my actions make my mind noble)

Hum => all the above are one in me

Tantrayana => vehicle of the fundamental continuity of everything

Ha => vase empowerment, experiencing everyone and everything as radiant

Ha => Secret empowerment, experiencing the bliss clarity of the functioning nadis, pranas and bindus (the subtle communicatings of what are mostly unconscious functions of the body; neural, hormonal, visceral etc. which together contribute to the arising of a sense of self.)

Ha => Wisdom empowerment, experiencing the non-dual realm, the mutual interdependence and hence non-separation of subject and object.

Ha => Word empowerment, realisation of Mahamudra. Experiencing the above three in functional union (*see the note below on the four empowerments*)

Ho => awake, realisation of all the above.

The remainder of the teaching deals with **Prajna**, the Vajrayana and Ekayana paths of wisdom. Now the experience is in the realm of Mahamudra/Dzogchen. The rest of the mantra is describing the awakened state.

Vajrayana -> unshakable vehicle

Blessedness

(*Bhagavan*) => blessed state, blessedness, blessed One(-ness)

Unshakable abiding suchness, or unshakable living suchness => unshakable abiding natural state (the open, cognizant, unimpeded, nature of mind (suchness); Dharmakaya or dharmadhatu; the abiding state of all Tathagatas (spacious, clear and unimpeded; wisdom, compassion and non-clinging awareness.)

(*Diamond of all the Tathagatas*)

Ekayana => vehicle of Oneness

Beyond all separation, beyond practice and non-practice, beyond ordinary and extraordinary => One Taste. The actual experience of Vajrasattva is the true nature of being from which you could not be abandoned even if you wished => hence 'beyond all separation'.

(*Do not abandon me*) => May this realisation be stable within me in all situations and all circumstances.

O Diamond Jewel of Love => unshakable confidence, this jewel, this invaluable treasure, is the end, the highest, the Great Completion, a vast ocean of lovingkindness arising as this very moment . . . just as it is.

(*Make me Adamantine*)

Oh Being of the Great Vow => the Great Vow is Compassion

samaya => damtsig => commitment, pledge, vow, spiritual obligation, tantric vow, tantric promise, sacred commitment

(Oh Being of the Great Vow) = Oh Samayasattva

AH => realisation: effortless, compassionate, presence.

If you feel inspired with this approach to the hundred syllable mantra, then you might explore working with it without any particular visualisation. To practice this way, each line becomes a reminder of qualities or modes of experience. Allow yourself to merge with the experience so that your entire arising field of knowing expresses that quality. Breathe with it. Walk with it. Live with it. And after a while, move to the next line and do the same with that one. Eventually the possibility of integrating the entire teaching into a seamless flow will become very real and you may glimpse a profound mystery – a truly Extensive Teaching on Sustainable Living–Being–Becoming.

A Note on the Four empowerments.

"The purpose of the first empowerment is to transform your body into the body of an enlightened being. With this vase empowerment, there is a maturation such that your ordinary body is purified and can arise as the deity's body. The second empowerment, the secret empowerment, enables you to transform your channels and vital energies through practices that purify the speech and ripen your experience such that you hear all sounds as mantras. The purpose of the third empowerment is to yield the experience of connate bliss and emptiness. This wisdom/gnosis empowerment purifies all latent and residual impurities of the basic elements of the body. It also purifies the essential fluids of the body, and you are matured so that you experience great bliss and connate primordial wisdom. The fourth empowerment is the attainment of the union that transcends the intellect, and you are matured so that you can experience the expansive purity of the dharmakaya."

(Gyatrul Rinpoché "Naked Awareness" p 245, SnowLion, 2000)

A More Traditional Explanation and Partial Translation of the Hundred Syllable Mantra

The following translations have been taken from the Monier-Williams Sanskrit Dictionary. The page references are from that text. These translations are offered as a stimulus for deepening contemplation. They are not an attempt to convey a definitive meaning. The diacritical marks have been left out for greater ease of transferring from one word processing program to another.

OM VAJRA SATTVA SAMAYA MANUPALAYA VAJRA SATTVA TVENOPATISTHA DRIDHO ME BHAVA SUTOSYO ME BHAVA SUPOSYO ME BHAVA ANURAKTO ME BHAVA SARVA SIDDHIM ME PRAYACCHA SARVA KARMASU CA ME CITTAM SRIYAM KURU HUM HA HA HA HA HOH BHAGAVAN, SARVA TATHAGATA VAJRA MA ME MUNCA VAJRI BHAVA MAHA SAMAYA SATTVA AH	OM Vajrasattva pray guard my vows. Vajrasattva pray thou stay nearby. Steady me. Gladden me. Enrich me. Be loving towards me. Bestow on me every perfection. In all my actions make my mind pure. HUM HA HA HA HA HOH Blessed One, Diamond of all the Tathagatas. Do not abandon me. Make me Adamantine. O Being of the Great Vow AH
---	---

Om => untranslatable seed syllable associated with a sense of totality

Vajra p 913 => 'the hard or mighty one', a thunderbolt, adamant, hard, impenetrable, indestructible, invincible, firm. The ultimate vajra is emptiness. In Dzogchen terminology vajra sometimes represents 'ever-fresh or timeless awareness'
vaj from the root, *vraj* => to go, walk, proceed, travel, wander, move
vaj => from the root, *vajati* to go, to prepare the way, to trim or feather an arrow
ra => acquiring, possessing; giving, effecting; fire, heat; love, desire; speed; amorous play; giving; gold; going, motion; brightness, splendour
va => air, wind; the arm; name of Varuna; the ocean, water; addressing; reverence; conciliation; auspiciousness; a dwelling; a tiger; going; an arrow; weaving; strong, powerful
jra => from the root, *jri* => to go, to overpower

Sattva p 1135 => being, existence, entity, reality, true essence, nature, disposition of mind; spiritual essence, spirit, mind; vital breath, life consciousness, strength of character, strength, firmness, energy, resolution, courage, self command, good sense, wisdom, magnanimity; "it" renders something pure and clean, hence purity and goodness, renders a person true, honest and wise.

– material or elementary substance, entity matter, a thing

– a living or sentient being, creature, animal

Sat => being, existing, occurring, happening, being present

– that which really is, entity or existence, essence, the true being

– beautiful, wise, venerable, honest

tva => 2nd personal pronoun, your, you, thy

sa = *saha* and *sam* => expressing junction, conjunction, similarity, equality, with, together, along with, accompanied by

va => spirit

vayo => air, wind, vibration

vam => water, cohesion

sa (with) *va* => weaving

sattva => the existence 'being' of moving (vibration) cohesion weaving

Samaya p 1160

1 - to level, regulate

2 - to go or come together, meeting, intercourse; compassion, coming to a mutual understanding, agreement, compact, covenant, treaty, contract, arrangement

3 - convention, established custom, law, rule, practice, observance, discipline

4 - order, direction, precept, doctrine

5 - appointed or proper time, occasion, time, season, right moment

6 - solemn address, declaration

sam => to go, to come together, meet at or with, encounter (as friends or enemies), to come together in sexual union; to come to, arrive at, approach, visit, seek, enter upon, begin

sa- a- yuj (yoga) => conjunction, union brought together, brought in contact

ya => going, mover, wind

yam => vibration

ma => time, poison, a magic formula, the moon, a mother, measure, authority, light, knowledge, binding, fettering, death

sa => with, good

samaya => *damtshig* (Tib.) = commitment, pledge, vow, spiritual obligation, tantric vow, tantric promise, sacred commitment

Samaya = outer => a harmonious relationship with the Vajra master and Dharma friends; inner => not straying from the continuity of the practice.

Manupalaya

manu p 784

man => to think, believe, imagine, suppose, conjecture

manu => thinking, wise, 'the thinking creature', man, mankind, "the sons of Man", the code of Manu => sacrificial and domestic rites

pal => to watch, guard, protect, defend, rule, govern; to keep, maintain, observe a promise or vow

pala => a guard, protector, keeper; herdsman; protector of the Earth, King, Prince, Guardian

ya => possessive case; belonging to, of

Tvenopatistha

tvat => thou

pati => against

stha => standing

pati from the root, *patin* => way, path, road, course

patistha => sitting in the way

vena p 1018 => *ven*, *venati* => to care for, long for, be anxious, yearn for, worship; ` yearning, longing, eager, anxious, loving

Dridho

from the root, *drih*, *drinh* => to make firm, fix, establish, strengthen

dridha => fixed, firm, hard, strong, solid, massive,

- firmly fastened

- steady, resolute, persevering

- confirmed, established, certain, sure

- intense, violent, mighty

- reduced to the lowest common denominator

- anything fixed or firm or solid

- stronghold, fortress

dri => to respect, honor

dho, *dha* => fix, make firm

Me Bhava

=> coming into existence, birth, production, origin, state of being

sutosyo or sutokhyo gladden me

khyo => to make known, announce

sut => extracting juice, making libations

sute => preparation of soma

suti => to bring forth a child, offspring

sutosha => easy to be satisfied

suposyo (khyo) enrich me

suposha => prosperous, easy to be maintained, not requiring much support

anurakto

anu - rakta => fond of, attached, pleased

anurakti => affection, love, devotion

anu => again, after, along, alongside, near to, under, with

rakta => colored, dyed, painted; red, crimson; excited, affected with passion or love, impassioned, enamoured, attached, devoted to; beloved, dear, lovely, pleasant, sweet

sarva => whole, entire, all, every

siddhim => accomplishment, performance, fulfilment, complete attainment, success, "the hitting of the mark"; healing see p 1216

siddha => perfected, beautiful, endowed with supernatural faculties

Me Prayaccha

pra - ya - c(ati) to ask for, beg, solicit, request, asking, requesting, imploring

or *pra - yata* => outstretched, far-extended; placed upon, offered, presented, given;

to be active or effective, to strive, endeavour, exert oneself, devote or apply oneself to

or *pra yaksh* => to hasten forward, to press on, to be eager, strive after, pursue, attain

Sarva Karmasu Ca Me Cittam Sriya Kuru Hum

Karma => activity

Ca => p 380 and, both, also, moreover (i.e. emphasis)

Citta 1 - noticed, 'aimed at', longed for

2 - 'appeared', visible

- 3 - attending, observing 'so as to remain unnoticed'
- 4 - thinking, reflecting, imagining, thought
- 5 - intention, aim, wish
- 6 - the heart, mind
- 7 - memory, intelligence, reason

Sriya p 1100

from the root, *sri* => diffusing light (radiance); to burn, flame, diffuse light; to mix, mingle, cook; light, luster, radiance, splendour, glory, beautiful, grace, loveliness
sriya and *sriyai* => 'for splendour or beauty', gloriously
=> prosperity, welfare, good fortune, success, auspiciousness, wealth, treasure, riches; high-rank, power, might, majesty, royal, dignity
Sri => frequently an honorific; sacred, holy, revered

Kuru => a people of India. The Buddha gave the Mahasatipatthana Sutta to the Kurus. Probably a country beyond the most northern range of the Himalaya. Sometimes placed somewhere north of present day Delhi. Often described as a country of everlasting happiness and considered by some to be the ancient home of the Aryan Race.

Hum => untranslatable seed syllable associated with a sense of bringing the realisation home or making it strong and grounded.

Ha Ha Ha Ha Hoh

Ha => water; the arithmetic figure symbolising 0; meditation; auspiciousness; sky, heaven, paradise; blood; dying; fear; knowledge; the moon; Vishnu; war, battle; laughter; a lute; the Supreme Spirit; pleasure, delight; a weapon; a sparkling gem; calling to
from the root, *han* => killing, destroying, removing, abandoning, deserting, avoiding

Hoh => used in calling a person or challenging Ho! Hallo - also expressive of surprise

Bhagavan => possessing fortune, fortunate, prosperous, happy, adorable, venerable, holy
bhaga => happy, dignity, majesty, distinction, excellence, beauty, loveliness
va => air, wind, ocean, water, reverence, conciliation, a dwelling, going, an arrow, weaving, strong, powerful
bhava => being, becoming; literally a weaving of light

bha => light, beam, lustre, splendour; a star, planet, asterism, lunar; a bee
ga => going, moving; going quickly; having sexual intercourse; reaching to, staying, being, abiding in
van => to like, love, wish, desire (English - vanity); to gain, acquire, procure (for self or others); to conquer (vanquish), win, become master of, possess; to serve, honour, worship, help, aid

Sarva => whole, entire, all, every

Tathagata

tatha => in that manner, so, thus, thusness, suchness
Tthagatha (being, coming, going) in such a state or condition, of such a quality or nature
ta => that one (of many); tail, breast, womb, hip; warrior; thief, a wicked man; a Buddha, a jewel, nectar, virtue; a crossing

Ma Me

ma => a particle of prohibition or negation

Munca from the root, *muc* => to loose, free, let go, slacken, release, liberate; to free oneself; to relinquish, abandon, leave, quit, give up, set aside, depose

Vajri Bhava => birth, production, origin, being
(make me vajra-like or adamantine)

Maha => great

Samaya => discipline

Sattva => being

Ah => particle implying affirmation, certainty; to acknowledge, express, signify; to pervade or occupy

=> untranslatable seed syllable associated with love, satisfaction, profound letting go/letting be, and guru essence.