Purpose of Teaching the Guru Puja:

Arjia Rinpoche mentioned that the purpose of introducing the Guru Puja was twofold. First, once a month on special days the ordained Sangha of KCL holds a tsok puja. The Guru Puja of Je Tsongkhapa is part of this ceremony. Although initiation and permission into a practice of Highest-Yoga Tantra is required to extensively study the tsok ritual, all are welcome to attend as a blessing to create beneficial imprints for future practice.

Rinpoche mentioned that sometimes in the past, people have sat during the tsok ritual simply meditating, without necessarily understanding any part of the ritual or knowing any of the visualizations or meditations at all. Therefore, by presenting an overview and general framework of the Guru Puja, it is hoped that attendees of monthly tsok offering will be better able to actively follow and engage those parts of the practice which can be discussed openly. Rinpoche also mentioned that even in the monasteries there is some confusion as to the treatment of the Guru Puja with regards to Tantric Samaya. Guru Puja is among a class of texts and practices which border between Tantra and open-level Sutra and has sometimes been ambiguous in this regard.

Second, the purpose of presenting an outline of the Guru Puja is not simply to provide a framework for the monthly practice cycle of KCL, but also to provide a preliminary framework and imprints for the possibility of a formal initiation and permission at a later time.

Commonalities & Distinctions between Sutra & Tantra:

Mahayana Sutra tradition will still produce a bodhisattva result, the same as the Mahayana Tantra tradition.

There are forms of Hindu Tantra which are not Buddhist. There are conditions that distinguish Buddhist & non-Buddhist doctrine, such as lineage, teacher, teaching and view. Regarding content and view, Both Mahayana Sutra and Mahayana Tantra MUST have primarily two conditions in order to be considered as a Mahayana Buddhist teaching or practice:
1. Must have compassion and bodhicitta
2. Must have wisdom that accords with Madhyamaka two-truths doctrine.

**Compassion:** Here compassion does not equal love, what is thought of in western culture as romantic love. The compassion is based upon the equanimity that sees all beings **EQUALY.** A friend can become an enemy, an enemy can become a friend, a stranger can become an enemy or a friend, all these beings all desire the same happiness, and all wish to not suffer.

**Wisdom:** Recall His Holiness’ teachings from the Heart Sutra last month. What we think of as “I” is not really here. In the Sutra tradition, we are in samsara trying to reach nirvana. They are mentally different. While circling through samsara, we have been considering the self as very important. For instance, we may have the thought “I think I’m this nationality” strongly thinking that I exist here. Part of understanding emptiness is understanding the ways which we think the “I” is here.

For instance, if I have the thought “today I am a monk” – that is only true conventionally and is not ultimately true. When you try to find it, ask “where”? “Where is the “I” that I think is myself”?

The bodhisattva path of sutra tradition uses a union of wisdom and compassion. In sutra practice, we practice with the thought that “the Pure Lands are out there, in the future. The Pure Lands described in the sutras are what I will obtain after nirvana through enlightenment. This samsaric would is not pure and is decaying, but the Pure Lands will be the future result of my practice.”

In the Tantra tradition the **Pure Lands are HERE RIGHT NOW.** We take up Tantric practice with the thought “this land right here is a Pure Land”. This is a controversial view. This seems to contradict our everyday experience of aging and suffering and negative emotions.

**The natural question is HOW? How do we arrive at such a view?**

There are conditions for Sutra practice:

1. Renunciation – The primary thought is love for one’s self. Because I love myself, I want to be free of suffering, so I will take refuge and practice the 10 virtues and work towards my nirvana.
2. Bodhicitta is the compassionate wish to attain full enlightenment in order to benefit all other beings, seeing that other beings also do not wish to suffer.
3. Wisdom – Middle Way two-truths view.

To progress to Tantra, we develop these three paths in our mind streams: renunciation, compassion, wisdom. Then we move to Tantra. We receive an initiation and permission to practice. Then we practice.

**Entering the three doors to Tantra:** Take refuge & practice the 10 Virtues -> Bodhisattva Vows -> Initiation from a Vajra Master

**The Guru Puja is a combination of Sutra and Tantra Practice.** Tantra is like playing the part in a movie: We are the actors. The Yidam is the character we play.

In a movie, the actor plays a character. Consider Richard Gere who is a person. However, when he is on film, he is not Richard Gere but rather character he plays.

Tantric Practices or sadhanas are like the movie scripts. The end of every movie is enlightenment. These practices cannot be altered or substituted or switched around.
Yidam: To adopt the role of a specific yidam, you must consider which Buddha you have a better connection with. People can take different initiations, but for lifetime daily practice and intensive retreat, you stick with ONE. Rinpoches, high lamas and Lineage Holders have to take many initiations, to be like a storehouse in case a student comes along who has a connection with a certain Yidam or practice. Ordinary people stick with one and ultimately everybody in their own practice also will stick with one.

Guru Puja is limited to Lama Tsongkhapa. This practice cannot be switched around or substituted with Yidams from other practices.

6 Preparatory practices:

1. Clean the room and set up the altar. Ideally you should have a separate room for practice, but if it doesn’t disturb your family, you can just have an altar set up in part of a room that is not separate.

2. Arranging symbolic offerings and objects of refuge
   Image of the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha
   Offerings – pure offerings
   5 senses have different objects. Ex: fruit is for smelling and eating, but not for hearing

   Pure motivation has two types here:
   A. Doing good for all sentient beings
   B. Purifying to eliminate suffering for all sentient beings

3. Sitting on a comfortable cushion, maintain the Seven-fold posture, take refuge, and generate the mind of enlightenment.

   Seven-fold posture:
   - Crossed legs
   - Straight back
   - Neck slightly forward
   - Hands in mudra position
   - Shoulders up and then relaxed – not tight
   - Eyes are closed or looking at tip of nose
   - Mouth closed

   Visualize while breathing in through the right nostril and out through the left nostril three times, then switch to breathing in through the left nostril and out through the right nostril three times and finally breathe in and out through both nostrils three times. Just aspire to breathing this way, you don’t have to actually physically check. This is one round of nine. Complete as many rounds as it takes to get the mind settled.

Using the analogy of Tantric practice being like a movie, within the sadhana there is the prologue, the real practice, and the epilogue.

Prologue: Verses 1-6

Instantaneous Arising = This is after having meditated on the union of emptiness and compassion. A warm heart does not equal compassion. We can be warm when we want something. Compassion requires equanimity, seeing friends and enemies as being one and the same.

Regarding emptiness or wisdom: ignorance needs to be cast aside, the illusion that everything exists solidly out there. An analogy would be the leader of the Sangha or the leader of a country, like President Barack Obama or
Hillary Clinton. If one in a position of power is thinking “I am the leader”, one must investigate and ask “Can you find the leader in your body?” What happens when the leader gets fired or if the leader resigned? They didn’t lose anything from their body. So this feeling of being a leader is of an empty quality, it cannot be found when looked for.

Similarly, consider counterfeit money. You can print up a piece of paper to look like real money but then when you try to take it to the supermarket or the grocery store, and the clerk looks at it and finds it’s counterfeit then they won’t accept it. But whether it’s money or artificial money doesn’t matter, because these are both artificial. They are designated by the mind. Paper and money are still labels.

This should not be thought of as being mere nihilism. When we speak of emptiness we are speaking in terms of “being empty OF” a quality, being empty of solidity, empty of permanence, empty of existence apart from labels. What needs to be addressed is this type of everyday thinking that’s feels “I’m important, I’m better than these people” or “I’m worse than these people” which is a reverse form of pride. Emptiness helps to address and dispel the thought that there is something here that is a solid “I”. Emptiness should be seen as being united with cause and effect. Emptiness is the proof of cause and effect.

Everything is there or is not there BECAUSE of cause and effect.

When we visualize the guru or the Merit Field or the Buddha in front of us, it is emptiness united with cause and effect that allows them to appear there. With Instantaneous arising, we visualize the Guru Tsongkhapa arising spontaneously because of the energy of our prayers and their clairvoyance and ability to send forms.

We visualize the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and then take refuge.

When you enter Buddhism it is a celebratory occasion, because you are treating yourself well by vowing to take up practices that turn one away from further suffering in samsara and will eventually lead to nirvana. Part of the conditions for refuge is a subtle, that one wants to avoid further suffering. Principally, there are two parts:

1. Inside, there is a fear of suffering, fear of the obvious suffering, and the subtle suffering
2. There is faith and belief in the Three Jewels, and belief that following them has the power to lead in the right direction.

Refuge also has homework- to avoid the 10 Non-virtues and uphold the 10 Virtues. The Refuge vows and commitments act as antidotes to the 10 Non-Virtues.

There are 3 virtues related to Body, 4 related to Speech, and 3 related to Mind.

**Body:**
1. Not Killing
2. Not stealing
3. No sexual misconduct

**Speech:**
1. Lying (white lies are neutral in cases where the direct truth would cause more harm)
2. Harsh speech (gossip and slander)
3. Idle gossip (nonsense, jokes can be OK depending on the context. If a respected professor is always talking nonsense it may lead to a decline in reputation, but in a situation where people are overly tense or serious or worried about a trivial matters a joke may alleviate tension)
4. Divisive speech -- intentionally trying to split
Mind:
1. Covetousness — I want that person’s possessions, I want that person or what they have, I will do harm to get it, relates to non virtues of body
2. Malice, ill intent
3. Ignorance (not thinking about 2 truths/ karma)

The 10 Non-Virtues prevent and obstruct the accumulation and experience of good merits. OUR HOMEWORK as Buddhists is to STOP THEM by applying antidotes

To summarize: in the Guru Puja, if we have had an initiation

- We visualize ourselves as Lama Tsongkhapa. In the center of Lama Tsongkhapa’s heart is Buddha Shakyamuni. In the center of Shakyamuni’s heart is Buddha Vajradhara. Vajradhara is the same being as Buddha, he is the enjoyment-body form of Buddha when Buddha taught Tantra to celestial bodhisattvas and beings with pure vision. Shakyamuni is the emanation body when Buddha taught Sutra to ordinary beings in samsara.

We take refuge and generate the Mind of Enlightenment and the Four Immeasurables. Why do we take refuge?
Two reasons:

a. Fear inside of us all of suffering. (Even the pillbugs in Rinpoche’s shower have this same fear)
b. Faith/trust in Buddha

Namo means respect or homage.

NAMO GURUBAY
NAMO BUDDHAYA
NAMO DHARMAYA
NAMO SANGHAYA

- Refrain from committing the ten non-virtuous actions and practice the ten virtues
- generate the seed of compassion (bodhicitta)
- Then we bless our offerings. Offerings can be both real and imagined. We get the same result. OM! AH! HUM! Is Enlightened Body, Enlightened Speech, and Enlightened Mind respectively. OM doubles and increase offerings and purifies the impure body. AH offerings become great nectar which can be enjoyed by wisdom beings. Also, regardless of culture, studies have shown that “Ah” or “Ma” are usually the first sounds made when a baby is learning to talk. Hum purifies blessings.

Real Practice: Verses 7 -49

Visualize the Buddha field

We should visualize these three cushions upon which the Buddha is sitting:

1. Lotus flower (= renunciation)
2. Moon disc (= compassion)
3. Sun disc (= wisdom)

The lotus grows in dirty water – polluted like Samsara while the lotus flower is pure like the mind.
The moon represents compassion because when it shines at night, we are cooled off from the heat of the day. The
sun represents wisdom because it is the light that dispels the darkness of ignorance.

The Yidam is the chosen Buddha. We are like an actor who is portraying a character. The character that we are
portraying is the chosen Buddha or Yidam. We should be like an actor portraying Lama Tsongkhapa. Once we can
do this, we picture Lama Tsongkhapa as an actor portraying the character Buddha. Ultimately we then see
Buddha portraying Vajradhara – but this is too much for us right now. It’s enough to stop with Lama Tsongkhapa
portraying Buddha right now.

We generate the Supreme Field in front of ourselves. We imagine that we are no longer in our ordinary
surroundings, such as our room or the temple. First we visualize ourselves as the actor, our ordinary selves. We
have generated Buddha Vajradhara dwelling at the heart of Buddha Shakyamuni, who is dwelling at the heart of
Lama Tsongkhapa. Within Vajradhara’s heart is the syllable HUM, representing enlightened mind. In the Tantric
tradition, the mind is considered to be at the center of the heart chakra. The mind is not the physical brain. We
have many stories of high lamas who passed away in meditation posture, whose heart and chest areas stayed
warm days and even weeks after they were physically dead. The subtle most mind is said to settle here during the
dying process.

So from Vajradhara’s mind emanates the Supreme Field. This is what we call the refuge tree. There are many
rows below Vajradhara. In the first row immediately below are the Buddhas from the Highest Tantra Systems:
Yamantaka, Guhyasamaja, Kalachakra, Heruka-Chakrasamvara, and Hevajra. Then we have individual bodhisattvas
in the row below that, then the arhats. Then, branching off on two sides are the Buddhas Maitreya and Manjushri,
and individual teachers of the Lineage. Maitreya is the Lineage of Great Deeds and Great Compassion, his
principle disciple is Asanga, Manjushri is the Lineage of Great Wisdom, his principle disciple is Nagarjuna.

At the end of Verse 14, we have dissolved this Supreme Field into ourselves. Just like when the camera start
rolling, we dissolve the Supreme Field into ourselves, like a duplicate copy. DZA! HUM! BAM! HO! This is the cue
for when we generate ourselves as the wisdom beings, or when the wisdom beings enter us. Using the movie
analogy, this is comparable to when the movie director shouts “ACTION!” and we become the character.

Taking this analogy further, sutra practice is undirected practice, whereas Tantra is a directed practice that is very
precise and specific. Sutra will still get a practitioner to enlightenment, but it proceeds at a slower pace. Both use
great compassion and happiness.

Verses 15-19 are the 7-Limbed Practice and the prostrations from body speech and mind.

7 Limbs of Practice

After the mantra DZA-HUM-BAM-HO at the end of verse 14 is when we would dissolve the wisdom beings into
ourselves, for people who had the initiation and permission. So here I would like to review one of the differences
with Sutra and Tantra.

In Sutra we practice as a human being, with the mentality that Buddha is distant and the Pure Lands are distant,
one day we will reach it, but there’s a distance, and we’re going to somewhere else.

In Tantra, we bring all of those Enlightened Beings to your mind HERE AND NOW. So here’s this contradiction—
we’re still human. This is still a Temple in the woods, we are not enlightened yet—BUT we PRACTICE NOW as
though we are and invite them in.
A good analogy is the character and the actor in a movie. The Tantric practice is the movie, the sadhana or the practice instructions are the movie script. You’re the actor, not the character, but when they start shooting the movie you become the character. So when the practice starts you dissolve the wisdom beings and practice as though you were already the Yidam.

WHY ARE THERE 7 LIMBS OF PRACTICE?

7 Limbs are an antidote to not being able to concentrate. Why can't we concentrate?

Meditative Concentration has two conditions
1. Supporting conditions – WE have to build up merits in order to sustain concentration and create the merit to be able to practice, both in future practice sessions in this life and future practice in all future lives.
2. Obstacles- Part of the 7 Limbs overcomes and subdues obstacles to concentration and obstacles to practice. In particular the confession limb and promising to stop non-virtues in the future.

The 7 Limbs are Prostrations, Offerings, Confession/ Purification, Rejoicing, Requesting, Supplication, and Dedication of Merits.

1. **Prostrations**, Verses 15-19
   We have 3 entrances or 3 gates. When humans want to express something we have to go through one of these 3 gates, showing respect to someone higher than you, expressing that you think someone is lower than you, expressing a main idea, these use one of the three gates of body speech or mind. So with prostration we are expressing that the Buddhas are higher than us. The main idea is to get rid of pride, not being arrogant.
   With our body we perform physical prostration, we speech we perform praise or gentle speech, and with our mind we perform meditation or thinking about the Buddhas or the Dharma or a meditation topic.

2. **Offerings**, Verses 20 -31. There are outer, inner, and secret offerings
   Incense, water to drink, water to bathe and wash the feet, perfumes, flowers, lamps, jewelry, beds, food, instruments, clothes. We have 5 senses with five different uses, eye ear nose, tongue, body, so all of these offerings relate to 5 sense pleasures. Then we can also offer up the qualities of our mind, negative, positive, and a mandala with the entire universe or all of the pleasures in the universe. Offering up negative qualities falls under confession.

3. **Confession and Purification**: Verse 32
4. **Rejoicing** - Verse 33
5. **Requesting**: Verses 34
   requesting Buddhas not to enter final nirvana,
6. **Supplication**: Verse 35 – requesting to teach and give blessings
7. **Dedication**: verse 36
   dedicating merits of practice

So we perform the 7 limbs, then generate Lama Tsongkhapa, Shakyamuni and Vajradhara as mentioned before and then there are 4 initiations and 3 Entrances. The 3 Entrances are Taking Refuge, Developing Compassion/ Taking the bodhisattva vows, and then Permission and Initiation into Tantra.
Verses 37-49 are the Praises and the 4 Initiations. These purify 404 delusions.

Verse 48: Why 4 Initiations?

There are 4 Obstacles to Enlightenment. Taking the 4 Initiations from a qualified Vajra Master plants the karma to overcome the 4 obstacles

1. Karmic Obscuration – karma caused something, immediate suffering
2. Delusive Obscuration (nyomo) – inclined to do bad things instead of doing practice
3. Obscurations to Omniscience (shije?) – difficult to learn things, difficult to retain Dharma information
4. Obscurations to Meditative Absorption – obstacles to meditating and developing shamata-vipassana

3 Entrances: Refuge, Bodhisattva Vow/ Mahayana, Permission into Tantra
The 3 Entrances are Taking Refuge, developing compassion and taking the bodhisattva vows, and then permission and initiation into Tantra. Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, and Yidams are ALL ONE, this covers everything up to the Tsok Puja.

THE TSOK PUJA begins at Verse 50 and ends at Verse 65.

The Epilogue: Lam Rim – verses 66 to 97

There are two parts: the Sutra part is the Lam Rim – stages on the path. The Nga (Tantra) Rim- is tantra as a stage

Three Stages:

Lower Stage

1. Relying on the Guru. (verse 66)
   • The guru, or teacher, has to have certain characteristics. These are known as the “ten conditions.” Of these ten, he has to have at least two of them: morality and knowledge.
   • Make offerings to the Guru. Please bless me.
   • We have to have faith, but this faith is based on reason. If you have faith, you can practice. This is why faith in the Guru is first.

2. Precious Life is Hard to Find (verse 67)
   • You need good karma to have the great compassionate mind
   • I have a wonderful life; therefore, I should practice compassion

3. Recall Sufferings (verse 68)
   • There are 3 better realms and 3 worse realms
   • Our realm – we can protect ourselves
   • Today, luckily, I am a person and I can protect myself.
   • What should we do? If you stop bad activities, you will have happiness. If you continue bad activities, you will have suffering

Middle Stage
Begin Renunciation (verse 69)

- Renunciation begins liberation
- Bad karma results in 3 kinds of suffering (3 sea dragons): pain, change, and pervasive
- We are in samsara and attachments tie us up.

Solution (verse 70)

Through the 3 trainings, we will realize emptiness

- Morality
- Contemplation
- Wisdom

Highest Stage

Compassion: verse 71:

- All suffering beings are our mother
- Compassion must be authentic

Take Impartial Person as Model: verses 72-76

- 7 steps to generate compassion
- Exchange self with others: donglen
- If I think about others, it will create more merit and I will eventually have more happiness

Very Powerful Prayer – verse 77

If you have a bad day (headache, etc., then you can practice verses 77 Instead of saying “Lama,” you can say “Three Jewels” if you wish.

Generating Compassion: verses 78-82

- Take miserable conditions as a path
- Two types of Bodhimind: Conventional (not stable) and Ultimate (true)
- 5 forces:
  Hearing- study & learn
  Thinking – analyze
  Meditation – get used to it so compassion is automatic
  Mindfulness – be aware of obstacles
  Alertness – think of this all of the time
- 3 moral disciples: body, speech, and mind.
- We have a precious human life and can have great thoughts (a dog doesn’t care about the environment, but we can have this concern.
- We can create compassion by practicing the percepts and training the mind (lojong)
- We can generate compassion by practicing don-lon: giving and taking
- When we practice compassion, we must include all sentient beings. Our biggest enemy is loving ourself—self cherishing. When we practice don-long we think “may all negativities come to me and thereby destroy self cherishing and give compassion to all sentient beings
Bring love  
Bring compassion  
Have a special mind: resolute intention and loyalty to all sentient beings—no matter what.

- Practice 3 moral virtues  
  Morality of abstention from wrongdoing  
  Morality of integrating virtues  
  Morality for the welfare of other sentient beings

The Paramitas: verses 83-90

- Generosity:  
  a. body – do something for someone; speech – give a talk; mind – thin of how to do good things  
  b. Wealth  
  c. Good deeds – dedicate merit

- Morality  
  a. Follow self liberation vows  
  b. Follow bodhisattva vows  
  c. Follow vajrayana vows

- Patience – forgiveness and forebearance

- Effort  
  Joyous effort requires good motivation – e.g. be willing to clean up a friend’s dirty house

- Contemplation  
  Your mind stays in same place  
  Your mind listens to you (not vice versa)  
  Mind in tune – neither dull nor agitated; cf. strings of a musical instrument – not too loose and not too taut

- Wisdom  
  Analyze: “where is the self located? We can’t find it. If we look for a disease in our body, we can find it; if we look for a virus in our computer, we can find it. We can’t find the “self.” When we die, all goes away. The self does not remain.

  Our mind takes the position that our self exists, but is an illusion. There is only cause and effect. The concept of “friend” and “enemy” comes only from our mind.

  When you meditate, you sit on a cushion, but you visualize the whole universe; after meditation, you see everything is a dream. The experience of emptiness is like an illusion at the post-meditation stage. After arising from meditative equipoise on emptiness at an actual session, the experience of all that is seen, heard about, or recollected is like that of an illusory feat

Vajrayana (practice of Tantra) – verses 91-96

- Yidam is the chosen Buddha  
- “Glorious Proctector” is your guru  
- “heart’s eight petals” is a lotus flower