

PROLOGUE

Intended only for dedicated disciples of outstanding integrity, the purpose of a tantric empowerment, initially bestowed by the sprinkling of water, is to wash away defilements and purify the disciple's body, speech and mind in order to prepare him or her for the profound practices of speedy maturation and liberation on the stages of development and perfection. Being led into the very heart of the teachings, symbolised by a throne at the centre of a spacious maṇḍala, the worthy disciple is introduced to his own buddha nature in the form of a wisdom deity and is taught to meditate upon the special qualities and activities of that deity in order to awaken and strengthen these potentialities within himself. Receiving the seed of the mind of enlightenment (*bodhicittabindu*), in both relative and absolute forms, directly from his guru, the disciple is subsequently taught how to arouse and maintain this precious essence within himself.

Of crucial importance in the life of anyone who wishes to follow the path of secret mantra, the occasion of a tantric empowerment is a pivotal moment of guidance in which the stages and direction of the path to be followed are made clear, and the sacred bond that is forged between the guru and disciple at this time constitutes a *samaya* vow of amazing power and depth. Having washed away the impure habit patterns of worldly entanglement, the guru gradually introduces the disciple to increasingly subtle states of consciousness, and thus the disciple awakens to an open and fresh paradigm of being, in which the material world is transformed into a pure land and all living beings are viewed as deities. The ultimate state of a buddha, however, being radiantly clear and utterly free of grasping conceptions, the disciple must eventually discard even this purified restructuring of his outlook in order to reach the final stage of complete liberation. This path is not for the faint hearted, and only those who are able to take upon themselves the vows of heroic conduct will ultimately be prepared to face the dynamic energy of blissful wisdom as they open to the non-dual unity of all things within vast, all-pervading emptiness.

ITI SAMAYA

With regard to the way in which the disciple should prepare himself for a vajrayāna empowerment, see *The Path of Secret Mantra: Teachings of the Northern Treasures Five Nails*, and with regard to the characteristics of the *ācārya* who is to bestow the empowerment, the nature of the disciple who is to receive it, the benefits to be derived from empowerment and the disadvantages of not being initiated, see *Gathering the Elements*, Ch.VI.