

Overview of the Vajrayana Track with Natural Dharma Fellowship

(updated February 2025)

Prerequisites

New entrants to Vajrayana at Natural Dharma Fellowship (NDF) must have completed NDF's two-year Margha program (both the Bodhicitta year and the Natural Awareness year).

<https://naturaldharma.org/practice/margha-program/>

To learn more about whether the Vajrayana track with NDF is right for you, please contact vajrayana@naturaldharma.org to discuss the program with our Vajrayana Coordination Team. Please note that entry to our Path starts with annual cohorts for *the Common Preliminaries* which will begin every year **in July**.

Level I: Ngöndro

The Vajrayana path begins with *Ngöndro*, the “Preliminary Practices” which provide a solid foundation for deepening your practice. NDF offers the *Ngöndro* from the long Vajrayogini Sadhana. Within *Ngöndro* practice, there are two steps or levels.

Level I: STEP ONE: The Common Preliminaries (One Year)

Practitioners contemplate the *Four Thoughts that Turn the Mind* for one year. You spend three months with each one of *the Four Thoughts*, in the following order, reflecting on their meaning and relevance to your own life:

1. Precious Life (Three months)
2. Death and Impermanence (Three months)
3. Karma: Cause and Effect (Three months)
4. Sufferings of Samsara (Three months)

A mentor and group practice leader will guide you and answer questions, supplemented by recorded teachings, recommended reading, and a Vajrayana retreat.

When nearing the completion of this year of contemplating *the Four Thoughts*, you will meet with your mentor as a moment of pause to discuss if you are in a place in your life and practice to take on the samaya of *the Uncommon Preliminaries* and embark on the full Vajrayana journey. To begin *The Uncommon Preliminaries*, you will need the initial transmission (*lung*)

and explanation (*tri*) from Lama Liz Monson. Transmissions to move forward to *the Uncommon Preliminaries* take place during the summer retreat every year.

Level I: STEP TWO: The Uncommon Preliminaries

The Uncommon Preliminaries include four separate practices and repetition requirements that you will do in the following order:

1. **Refuge and Bodhicitta:** (10,000 Prostrations)
2. **Vajrasattva Mantra:** (10,000 mantra recitations)
3. **Mandala Offering:** (10,000 mandala offerings and 20 half-hours of Lama John Makransky's Offering Practice)
4. **Guru Yoga** (10,000 prayer recitations)

Transmission instructions, retreats, recordings of teachings, recommended reading and regularly scheduled Practice Groups with experienced teachers will guide you through these practices.

You must complete the requisite repetitions for each practice before moving on to the next practice. Your mentor and practice leader will answer questions along the way and confirm your completion. Progress to each new practice requires transmission (*lung*) and explanation (*tri*) from Lama Liz Monson. Transmissions for all practices typically take place at the summer retreat every year.

When you have finished all four of *the Uncommon Preliminary Practices*, you are eligible to begin *Yidam* (Sadhana) Practice – the main practice of the Vajrayana – after receiving the transmission and explanation from Lama Liz Monson or Lama Willa Blythe Baker.

Level II: Yidam (Sadhana) Practice

NDF offers the Long Vajrayogini Sadhana *Yidam* Practice:

This practice includes five separate parts or “recitations” called “Depas.” You must receive a reading transmission and explanation from Lama Liz or Lama Willa for the full Sadhana and for each of the five Depas.

Depa 1: 100,000 mantra recitations

Depa 2: 100,000 mantra recitations

Depa 3: 100,000 mantra recitations

Depa 4: 100 thirty-minute sessions

Depa 5: 100 thirty-minute sessions

Yidam (Sadhana) is a lifelong practice that will continue as your fundamental Vajrayana

practice. The Vajrayogini sadhana is considered by many masters as a perfect and complete practice for our modern world.

Ongoing Vajrayana Program Resources

KULA GROUPS:

To support your practice, you will be invited to join a “kula” group. “Kula” is a Sanskrit word meaning “family.” These Kulas are peer-led and include three to five fellow practitioners who are at the same level of practice. Kulas enable amazing opportunities to deepen connection within the Vajra Sangha and are encouraged to meet regularly (usually once a month) to practice and share experiences.

MONTHLY GROUP PRACTICE:

You are invited to join a practice group that meets monthly, bringing together everyone who is at the same level of practice. Each Practice Group is guided by an experienced teacher.

VAJRAYANA MENTOR:

You will be connected with a mentor, an experienced Vajrayana practitioner, with whom you can meet regularly to discuss your ongoing practice throughout the program.

ANNUAL VAJRAYANA RETREAT:

Every year, NDF offers a retreat restricted to Vajrayana practitioners, usually in the summer months. While not required, joining in this retreat is highly recommended to deepen your practice and continue to forge bonds with your fellow yogis and yoginis. This retreat includes the option for online attendance. Details about the annual retreat will be posted on the NDF website and Vajrayana participants will receive a registration link prior to the retreat.

SOLO RETREAT:

Traditionally, Vajrayana practices are done in solo retreat. NDF offers practitioners opportunities to engage in solo retreat at Wonderwell Mountain Refuge. Doing at least one, and ideally more, solo retreats is very highly recommended to deepen one's practice and to generate momentum for continuing on the Path. <https://naturaldharma.org/practice/solo-retreat/>

WEBSITE DASHBOARD RESOURCES:

After you join the Vajrayana track, you will create a personalized “Dashboard” on the NDF website for access to the Vajrayana Track Level 1 Resources where you will find recorded teachings and guidance, retreat audio recordings, along with supporting materials. <https://naturaldharma.org/create-an-account/>

READING AND STUDY GROUP:

Courses are offered for a deeper dive into Vajrayana texts with interactive discussion.

Further information about the Vajrayana program can be found on the NDF

website: <https://naturaldharma.org/practice/vajrayana-program/>

If you are interested in joining our program or have questions about the program, please reach out to: Cindy Caros, Vajrayana Program Coordinator vajrayana@naturaldharma.org