

LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE

TEACHINGS FROM THE 3RD & 4TH
KOPAN MEDITATION COURSES

Lamrim Teachings from Kopan 1972 & 1973

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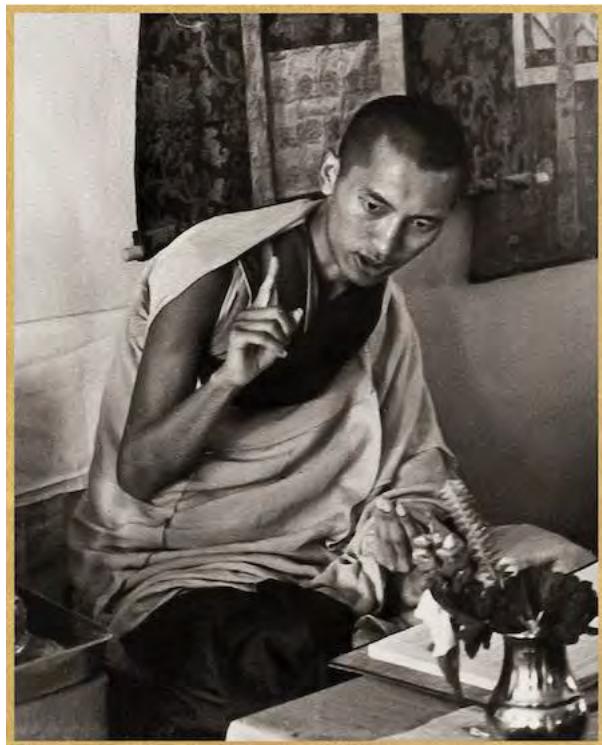
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**Teachings from the 3rd and 4th Kopan Meditation Courses:
Lamrim Teachings from Kopan 1972 and 1973**

Lama Zopa Rinpoche



Kopan Courses
Series editor Gordon McDougall

May whoever sees, touches, reads, listens, remembers, talks or thinks about this book never be reborn in unfortunate circumstances, receive only rebirths in situations conducive to the perfect practice of Dharma, meet only perfectly qualified spiritual guides, quickly develop bodhicitta and immediately attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.

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Cover image of Lama Zopa Rinpoche teaching during the Fourth Kopan Course, 1973. Photo by Brian Beresford. Cover design by Gopa & Ted2, Inc.

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ISBN 978-1891868870

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What to do with Dharma teachings
 Dedication

Introduction



Kopan Monastery, 1972. LYWA collection.

About the 3rd and 4th Kopan Meditation Courses (1972–73)

In October–November 1972 and March–April 1973 Lama Zopa Rinpoche led the third and fourth meditation courses at Kopan Monastery in Nepal. The third course was attended by about fifty people and the fourth course had around 120 participants. These historic courses from Kopan Monastery’s formative years were life-changing for many students and helped lay the foundation for the worldwide FPMT community. Author Adele Hulse describes these courses and the development of Kopan in general in *Big Love: The Life and Teachings of Lama Yeshe*.

LYWA director Nick Ribush writes:

I stumbled into the third course not knowing anything about Tibetan Buddhism and came out of it wanting to know more, so I finished up staying at Kopan for the next five years. I also wanted to help Lama Yeshe and Rinpoche as best I could, so I got involved in organizing the fourth course and working with Rinpoche on the course text, *The Wish-fulfilling Golden Sun*.

The first edition of this book had been compiled by students from the second course (March 1972) and the way Rinpoche taught was to read from the text and comment on what he’d just read. Students at the fourth course were taught from the first edited edition in the same way. I had taken skimpy notes at the third course and slightly better ones at the fourth, but Brian Beresford, a student from Dharamsala, took quite detailed ones. I edited all these notes into what has become this ebook. I have described how that came about here.

The transcript was first published by students of the [International Mahayana Institute](#), an organization of Western monks and nuns dedicated to learning and teaching the Dharma for the benefit of all beings, and came with this disclaimer:

Unfortunately, it is certain that what has been presented in this book and what was originally meant by Rinpoche resemble each other as closely as earth does sky. This is the result of the infantile clumsiness of those who attempted to interpret his holy speech while taking and rewriting these notes. For this the compilers sincerely apologize and humbly request that the holy guru will overlook these inadequacies and bless this work that it may somehow benefit each and every mother sentient being, bringing immediate release from suffering to all.

This ebook presents a lightly edited compilation of Rinpoche's teachings from these two courses, primarily drawn from the fourth. The transcript has been lightly edited by Gordon McDougall for clarity, while preserving the flavor of these two historic courses. Page references to *The Wish-fulfilling Golden Sun* follow the 2016 edition, available online at [LamaYeshe.com](#). Discourses given by Lama Yeshe at the end of both the third and fourth courses are not included here.

The archive number for these teachings is 022. To read the transcript online go to [LamaYeshe.com](#) and search by teaching title or by entering the archive number using the [Search the Archive Database](#) link on the home page. A comprehensive [glossary](#) of the Buddhist terms in this book is also available on the Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive website.

About the LYWA Kopan eBook Project

In 2024, LYWA launched a new project which involves publication of a series of ebooks of Lama Zopa Rinpoche's teachings from the Kopan meditation courses held annually at Kopan Monastery in Nepal since the early 1970s. All of Rinpoche's teachings from the annual Kopan courses will be converted into ebooks, including those already [published on our website](#) and those not yet published.

The Kopan courses began in April 1971 with a ten-day program attended by about a dozen people. From these early beginnings, the Kopan courses evolved to become an annual event with over two hundred attendees from all over the world. [Read more here about how the Kopan courses began.](#)

Kopan Monastery is the heart of the FPMT, the international organization founded by Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche to preserve and spread Mahayana Buddhism worldwide. The Kopan meditation courses were life-changing for countless students, and this is where many students met the Lamas, received teachings and became Buddhist. For more information about attending the yearly lamrim courses at Kopan Monastery visit [KopanMonastery.com](#).

Visit our website at [LamaYeshe.com](#) to find more Kopan course transcripts and many other teachings, and to read about how to support our work. LYWA's Kopan ebook project is possible due to the generous support of donors like you. Your contribution plays a vital role in ensuring that these timeless teachings continue to inspire and transform lives for generations to come. Thank you!

The Third Meditation Course: October–November 1972



Third Kopan Meditation Course, December, 1972. LYWA collection.

Introduction: We Must Remove the Veil of Ignorance

The mind—why does it exist? Parents do not produce the mind. The previous [moment of mind] produces the present [one], which produces the future mind. The mind is impermanent, created by impulses.

Enlightenment clarifies the above statement.

Those who believe there is only one life are like we ignorant ones who even forget yesterday and tomorrow. We must recall past lives and prepare for the future—those who don't will certainly have present and future problems. We should eliminate the obscuration of the mind by a proven method, thus becoming a buddha.

We need a perfect understanding for this meditation course. Since suffering and its cause are mental, the method to cure them is also mental. This can't be done with materials or chemicals. Smoking hash slows the brain. The pure mind helps other beings.

Meditation should be done through the process of checking and thinking. This comes from listening. Positive meditation and positive Dharma practice are inseparable. Meditation is positive if it is done for one or all of the following three reasons:

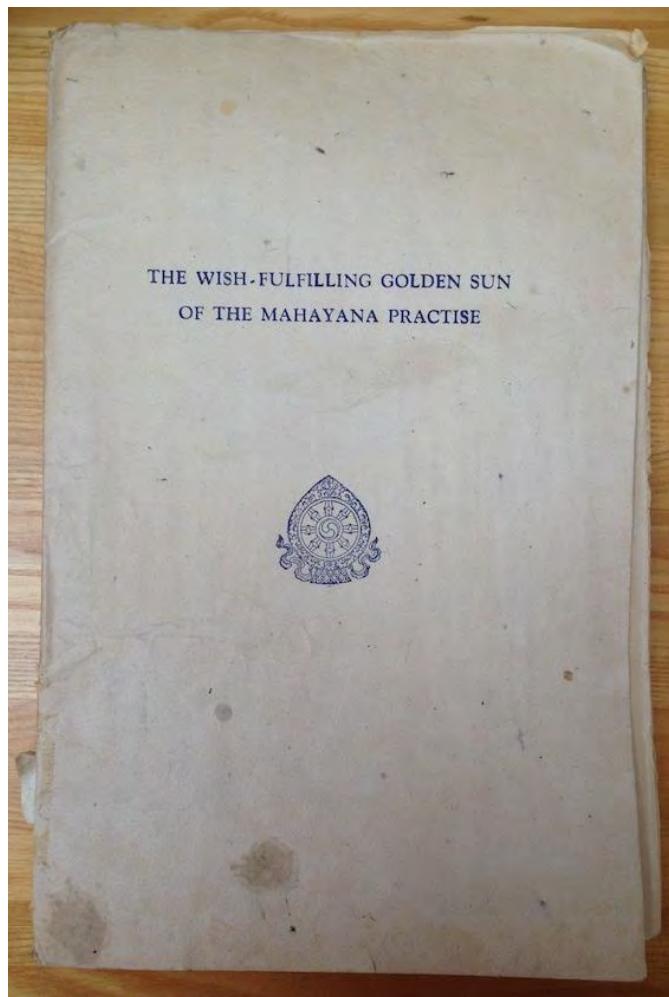
1. For better future lives
2. To destroy suffering and delusions, bringing complete understanding and release from ignorance
3. To achieve the highest, perfect peace

Positive meditation is perfect the Dharma practice.

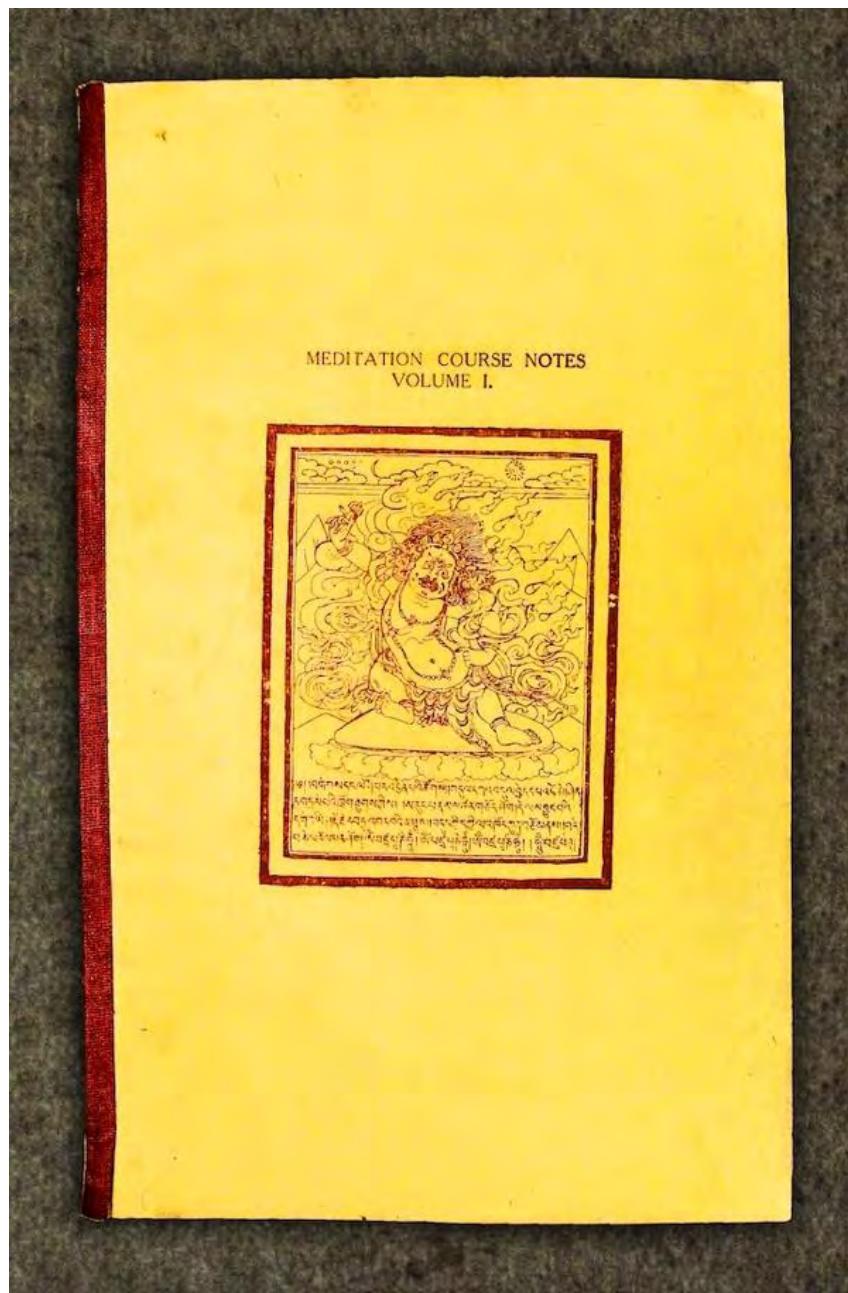
Training the mind brings compassion. We should train ourselves so that the mind is one with the path. There are many levels on the path before enlightenment. Understanding overcomes suffering. The most important rule for meditation, and the reason for doing this course, is to make meditation a positive thing through understanding the reasons. Nothing arises in the mind intuitively, without reasons. We must hear the right subjects, and this will bring right understanding, which will then lead to right action and to purity.

Dharma can be created in the mind by anyone.

To understand any subject, instead of trying to increase the amount of material we take in, we must remove the veil of ignorance.



The text book for the third course

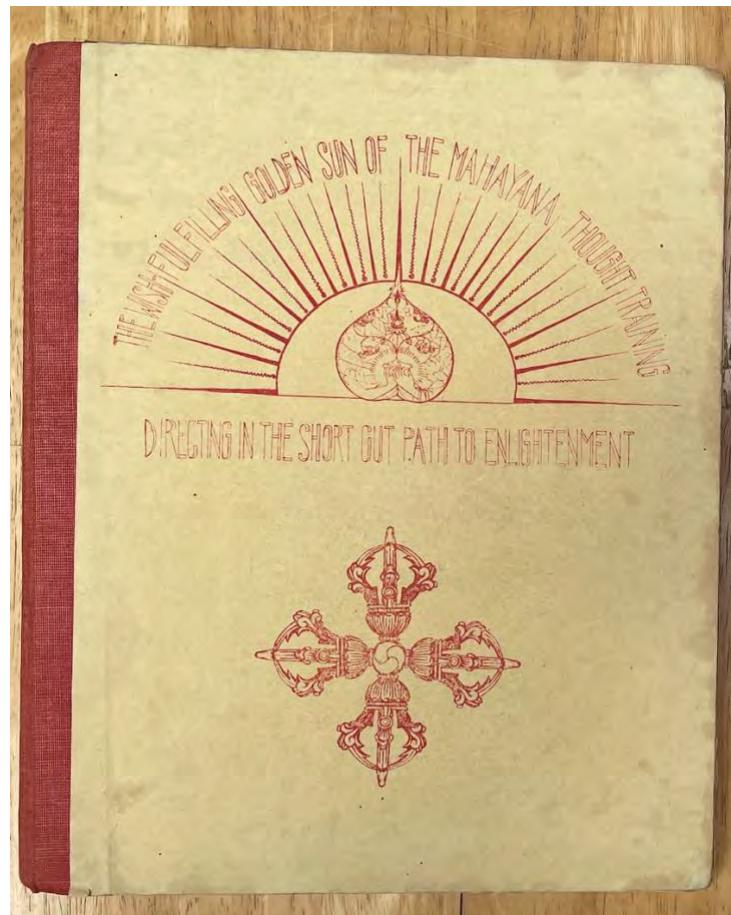


The cover of the text book for the third course

The Fourth Meditation Course: March–April 1973



Group photo from the Fourth Meditation Course, Kopan Monastery, 1973. Brian Beresford (photographer)



The text book for the fourth course

Chapter 1. Introduction: Only the Dharma Can Bring Perfect Peace



Lama Zopa Rinpoche teaching during the Fourth Meditation Course, 1973. Photo by Lynda Millspaugh.

With Buddhists, it isn't so much a matter of how we began on this planet as much as it's a matter of how the mind began. Since the answer to such a question is incomprehensible to our ignorant minds, we say that mind is beginningless.

If we ask why the mind exists, or even existence for that matter, we could answer that the mind exists to perceive its own nature, which ultimately is the absolute true nature of reality or existence—that is, the truth that is devoid, or empty of, any intrinsic self or “I.” In tantric visualizations, we make the body one with Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's holy body and the mind one with space, like his fully enlightened mind.

Guru Shakyamuni Buddha gave three levels of teachings to those with three different levels of intelligence. At Sarnath, he gave teachings to beings of lower capability. Near Bodhgaya, he gave teachings to those of higher capability—the teachings on emptiness or absolute truth. At a third place, he gave tantric teachings. At the same time Guru Shakyamuni Buddha appeared in different forms to different people—as a bhikshu, as a king and so forth, as was fitting to their minds.

Before meditation we must understand the Dharma to understand that we are suffering. Our minds have been asleep, sleeping comfortably within the truth of suffering, although perhaps not as comfortably as in American hotels. From the tiniest insects, seen only through the microscope, to the most famous person, who owns the whole earth, all living beings are conditioned by suffering, or *dukkha*. There is no choice to not experience suffering—even a king who has great power and is supposed to be perfect has no choice but to suffer through samsara.

Because our minds are not aware, not open, we do not see the Dharma, and we're unable to avoid the various kinds of suffering. Has there ever been anyone since the beginning of time who has avoided death? All those past kings and presidents are now dead, only their names remain—their minds are somewhere else. Also, there is no choice not to become older—aging begins in the

mother's womb. This is the nature of impermanence—as something comes into existence it changes; it's all suffering. Taking rebirth without choice is also suffering. Exactly the same thing is true for animals and insects—they have no choice but to experience suffering. Some sicknesses can be temporarily cured by medicine, but this is never certain, and some can't be cured. This is the logical experience of reality.

The sufferings of living beings are incredible—there are so many kinds. Dissatisfaction is suffering. No matter how many material possessions people have, they are never satisfied. In fact, one of the eight types of sufferings is that of not getting what we want; whatever we have, it's never enough. This fundamental suffering is extremely difficult to overcome, and it's one of the main sufferings of human beings. Longing for ever more material possessions keeps us busy; we are never finished collecting things for ourselves. And we can see the things we have are no longer new and attractive; they are only getting older and older. That is the nature of impermanent things.

Every problem arises from the inability to recognize that our mind is in the nature of suffering, causing us to have attraction and aversion for others without control, just as we lack control of rebirth, old age, sickness and death. Not recognizing the true nature of our mind, we keep ourselves busy day and night, supporting the body, which is also in the nature of suffering. That arises from the suffering mind.

All the material development there has been over the many centuries has not helped to stop uncontrolled death or old age or rebirth. What can cease this suffering? We have to find a way.

The real peace that we seek is control of and freedom from rebirth, old age, sickness and death as well as all of our other problems. Peace from the Dharma point of view means the cessation of karma and delusions but achieving this is not easy. It depends on recognizing the cause of these problems. All of them are causative—everything has a reason for happening and for its existence.

The principal causes of our problems are the three negative minds: greed, hatred and ignorance. These are not external, physical things, but internal states of mind. Real, perfect peace depends on recognizing these three minds and the sufferings that arise from them and overcoming them.

We must have a method to achieve this perfect peace, and the only method to bring this peace is the Dharma. Only the Dharma can free us from the three negative minds. No external, material method or development would ever be able to cut the suffering result and its cause forever. It has not done this so far, nor will it in the future.

For example, when animals or humans feel hungry, they think that the principal cause is lack of food in the stomach. Then they eat food, but in a few hours the hunger recurs. From the time of our birth until our death, the cycle of eating, making *kaka*, getting hungry and eating has continued and it will do so even if we live for a thousand years. This means that the solution of eating is not a permanent one for hunger, therefore it's not the best solution. There must be a reason for it.

Since food doesn't solve the problem forever, the lack of food is not the principal cause [of the suffering of hunger]. There must be some other cause that is independent of external things. The principal cause is greed, hatred and ignorance. If we apply this example to any other problem, we

will see that as long as the external solution does not cut off these three negative minds, there can be no cessation of the suffering result. Because external conditions can't cut off the principal cause, they can't stop suffering. Even being on the moon or on Venus is only a change of place, an external thing. However we try to change things externally, it can't help to cut off the problem. We have to check up inside. By understanding the cause of our problems, we can open the door to the solutions.

This doesn't mean that we must reject external material development. It can be important, and every country should be developed both internally and externally. It can bring peace if the people of a country can develop both materially and internally. With that, that can bring peace to their country and to other countries, peace for all beings. If politics could be inseparable from inner development, then real peace would definitely be possible. The problem is the lack of spiritual development. Having material development alone can only cause problems for our own and other countries. Perfect development is, therefore, internal development together with external development.

Dharma, which in Sanskrit means "that which holds (us from suffering)" is the method by which we can cease the cause of all suffering on every different level. Within the Dharma itself as shown by the Enlightened One, the Buddha, there are many different methods to bring this about. Why did he show us how to practice in this way? Because there is ignorance. As long as ignorance exists in the form of even the slightest unknowing mind, there's definitely a need for Dharma practice. If such an ignorant mind didn't exist, there would be no reason to practice Dharma at all because we would be permanently free from problems.

Dharma practice is the cultivation of a positive, pure mind and of the actions produced by a positive, pure motivation, the motivation for truth and peace. Simply put, any action that helps us to cut off suffering results and their causes is a Dharma action, inseparable from our spiritual development. Material development alone cannot bring peace. It can only bring peace if it, too, is inseparable from spiritual development. We don't have to wear robes to engage in such actions.

We can think of certain medicines that can be poisonous and dangerous or medicinal and restorative depending on how they are used. In the same way, actions can be Dharma or non-Dharma. Just as we need understanding and skill to use a substance as medicine so that it can bring benefit, we need understanding and skill, or wisdom, in order for our actions to bring about positive results. If we lack this understanding and skill, even what appears to be a Dharma action can bring about a suffering result.

Therefore, to practice the Dharma we must first of all understand the mind. Unless we do, we will be unable to meditate, and the door to enlightenment will remain closed. Understanding the mind is the door to all past, present and future happiness, to every realization, the door to every perfection.

The Correct Way to Listen to the Dharma

Learning the Dharma isn't the same as studying in schools and universities, which are done with worldly thoughts, expecting worldly comforts. The objectives of studying the Dharma are not the same. The objectives of our Dharma study should be higher; unless they are, we're simply wasting

our time. Our knowledge will only work in a positive way depending on our motivation. If we try to gain knowledge in a positive way, the effect will be positive. If not, the result will only be suffering. The serious Dharma practitioner appreciates the great importance of generating a positive motivation.

The subjects that we study during our Dharma education are hard to understand, taking years, so we must not become discouraged and give everything up if the results don't come immediately. As we continue our meditation, practice and study, understanding will slowly come.

It's also important to remember that any difficulty we have is caused by our ignorance, not by the subject matter. If we abandon the subject, we waste our human life with its potential for great realizations. Were we to spend our whole life in ignorance of the vital Dharma subjects, we would die with a mental state no better than that of an animal. The very lowest state of mind that we should die with is happiness—the lowest purpose of human life is not to suffer after death.

To reach enlightenment, the way to study the Dharma is like this:

1. Listen carefully to the subject matter.
2. Check up to eliminate doubts; contemplate, ask and discuss.
3. Meditate, making the mind one with either the object or the subject of meditation and becoming habituated to it.

[Meditating on patience, for example, is to eliminate anger, so that is making the mind one with the object.] Meditating on bodhicitta is done for the purpose of making the mind one with it, as is meditating on the different manifestations of enlightened beings, which is making the mind one with the subject.

Meditations vary. If we doubt a particular meditation will be successful, by checking and observing in the right way, we will be able to understand its benefits. If we still have doubt about this after checking, we should ask someone who knows the subject well.

Single-pointed meditation involves single-pointedly concentrating on one object of meditation, which may be any internal or external object, and habituating the mind to it by controlling the distractions. The more the mind gets accustomed to this, the fewer disturbances will arise.

Because we have created them from beginningless time, it's very easy to engage in negative actions—the impulse to do so arises in our minds effortlessly because we are so used to them, so familiar with them. Images of the objects of the negative emotions arise so easily and our negative mind wants to dwell on its objects. Holding a positive mind is so much more difficult to do.

As the teacher or guru gives the teachings, we should take those words as a mirror in which to check the reflection of our own minds. Just as we would check in a mirror to see if our face is clean or dirty, we look at our mind in the reflection of the lama's teachings to measure our personalities, behavior and so forth. And just as we don't use the mirror to check another person's face while leaving our own black and dirty, we shouldn't use the teachings to check the faults of others. The teachings are meant to be used to clean our own mind and enlighten ourselves for the sake of sentient beings. They aren't meant to be used to help us to see others in a negative way.

As we listen to teachings, we should check our own mind, asking ourselves whether we are doing what the teachings advise or not. We should compare our own states of mind to the realizations described in the teachings. We should always try to do this. Even if we have no experience of what the teaching talks about, it's still important to try.

We should not become bored with listening, bored with hearing the same words repeated. Just to hear the words of a teaching is not the Dharma. The actual study of the Dharma is not studying the words but rather making the mind one with the object and trying to realize the subject through practice, for we must achieve the many levels of realizations that lead to enlightenment. It's possible to study the Dharma for samsaric reasons, with pride and an egotistic mind, only knowing the words and then telling them to other people.

We should check up. No matter how many times we have heard the subject matter in the past, if we have not gained any realization of the topic we should continue to practice it. Until we experience that realization, we can't hear it enough. And even if we *have* gained a realization of a particular subject, that realization still has to be developed until we attain enlightenment. Even though advanced practitioners might have realized a particular subject and are living in the practice—even though they have heard it a hundred times before—they still keep listening in order to develop their realizations. We shouldn't be satisfied with words alone; even a parrot can be taught mantras.

So, we should take up the mirror of the teachings and check our mind to see if we find any defects. The teachings are the mirror of the mind and the subject matter they address is primarily negativity and suffering. If we find that our mind has such defects and problems, we should try to avert and overcome them. Our job is to clean away any negativities in our mind.

This is the way that serious practitioners listen to the teachings. This is how our gurus instruct us to practice. We shouldn't have pride, thinking, "I know this subject, why does he repeat it again and again?"

Meditation

[WFGS, pp. 75–82] [\[1\]](#)

There are two types of meditation, and the attainment of enlightenment is totally dependent on both, therefore each is important.

- analytical or checking meditation, in which we analyze the subject to come to an understanding
- single-pointed or fixed meditation, where the mind stays single-pointedly in its object

Analytical meditation is most helpful at the beginning of our practice. This kind of meditation expands the knowledge of the mind, clarifies the nature of the object and enables us to gain correct understanding and realization. Without this kind of analysis, the possibility of wrong understanding is great.

In single-pointed meditation, the mind is unified with the subject of meditation and thus becomes familiar with it. The goal is to maintain this concentration for an increasing amount of time, which reduces any distraction or dullness we might otherwise experience.

Physical discipline can aid the development of this kind of meditation. When sitting, we should take the position of Vairochana, one of the Dhyani Buddhas. This position both prepares us for meditation and also inspires others. Our legs should be crossed as comfortably as possible, with a straight back and level shoulders. Our mouth should be closed, our teeth as usual, and we should place the tip of our tongue against the back of our top teeth. We should place our hands in our lap with the two thumbs touching, which is symbolic of preparation for future tantric realizations. Our eyes should gaze down the line of our nose, and our arms should be held in a round shape. Then we should concentrate on breathing through the nose as follows.

Visualize that the suffering of all sentient beings is inhaled through the left nostril in the form of dark smoke and fog. When the smoke and fog reach the heart, they become like the sun burning all negative minds and actions.

Visualize that our entire body becomes clean, like transparent white light that passes out through the right nostril to all sentient beings.

Then visualize that the breath leaves the right nostril in the form of light, reaching every sentient being and transforming into all of the things that they need. Visualize that through their enjoyment of those things, all sentient beings receive perfect peace.

Repeat these steps making three times in total and repeat three more times, beginning with inhaling all the negativities of sentient beings through the left nostril, and then visualizing light passing through the right nostril.

This breathing meditation can be very powerful—like an atom bomb that destroys the delusions of our own negative minds, such as the belief in the ego. If we practice this way with strong bodhicitta, this practice becomes like a shortcut to enlightenment. However, this is very difficult to do in the beginning since we are so lacking in our understanding of bodhicitta, which must be pure and sincere in order to give this method of practice its greatest meaning.

This practice can bring about the purification of our own delusions and negativities. As well as not wasting our body, we don't even waste our breath because we use this meditation and our breath for other sentient beings to develop bodhicitta. As purification is necessary for the success of our other meditations, this practice can become a support for those as well. The degree of purification that we experience as a result of this practice depends, of course, on the depth of purpose that we apply to it, which in turn depends on our own will.

Up until this point, our mind has been mostly distracted, wandering around unsubdued and driven by superstition, as uncontrolled as dust blown through the air by the wind. In order to meditate properly, however, on any subject, our mind must be prepared—it must be clear and peaceful. The breathing meditation gives us this basis.

The meditations of the course [as shown in *Wish-fulfilling Golden Sun*] are in opposition to worldly superstition. To bring our mind to a positive place, to make our thoughts positive is very difficult.

As long as our mind is in a negative place, it cannot be in a positive place simultaneously. We need a skillful method to bring us there—a tricky method to play with the negative mind.

Why do we have negative thoughts and distractions? They have so much control over us, and we find it so difficult to control them. Even to concentrate single-pointedly for five minutes is difficult—so many other thoughts arise. All this is because the mind is so accustomed to being distracted, so habituated to existing and functioning in that way. Our mind is greatly obscured by superstition and has been throughout beginningless lifetimes.

Actually, in breathing meditation, the breath itself is not so important. What we are really trying to work with is the mind.

Keeping our breath natural—slow and gentle—we breathe in and think, “All sentient beings are extremely precious, they are most kind, they are the source of all my past, present and future happiness, including the perfect happiness of the realizations that lead to enlightenment. They have cared for me up until now and will continue to do so in the future, and they are more important than my own life. Therefore, I take all of their suffering and negative minds into myself in the form of smoke through my left nostril. As it enters it becomes light, like the sun, so that all wrong self-cherishing and all other negativities are burned and disintegrated, and my whole body is cleansed, becoming transparent and full of light. My entire body and mind are one with great, infinite, immeasurable happiness.”

Then, breathing out, we visualize countless rays of white light, and think that this light is sent out to each sentient being, fulfilling the needs of every single one. As a result, every suffering and cause of suffering that they might experience is completely purified, and they attain the state of enlightenment.

Meditation is not dependent on words. We can't transplant realizations and they aren't already in the mind. In order to have realizations, we must make meditation a practice, not just close our eyes. Practice is the best meditation. In order to practice, we must receive an explanation of the subject we will practice. Once we have listened, we should check their meaning and try to understand them, using the methods that we have been taught to gain greater understanding. Through constant repetition, we try to see the subject of our meditation increasingly clearly. Then, our practice will deepen. Feel ... experience ... realize. This is the practice of meditation.

Therefore, the practice of meditation does in fact depend on words at the beginning, but the realizations will not arise immediately. The length of time it takes to develop realizations is dependent on our karma and our level of intelligence.

As we practice, it's important to remember not to rush. We are trying to gain realizations through practice, not trying to finish something. We are trying to explore the subject in a deeper way. We should do so slowly, trying to control the distractions within our mind. This depends on our skill. We first remember the outlines of the subject we have been taught, and then we amplify them. This is the best way to develop the wisdom of any subject.

Before we can get out of samsara, we must develop a realization of emptiness. The development of emptiness must be supported by the merit of many positive actions, the practice of discipline and the purification of the negative mind.

Following the practices of the three vehicles [the Hinayana, the Mahayana Sutrayana and the Mahayana Vajrayana] leads to better rebirths and freedom from the three lower realms. The practice of each brings increasing realizations. We must especially develop the realization of the absolute truth. If we follow the disciplines carefully each time, we may be able to complete this process within sixteen perfect human rebirths.

How Enlightenment Is Possible

[WFGS pp. 25–28]

Mind is beginningless. Negative minds arise from previous negative minds—the negative mind of this present life arises from the negative mind of the former life. There is no first life. If we hadn't existed before the creation of this earth, it never would have been created, as the earth is a creation of our own minds and karma.

Mind is defined as that which is clear and has the ability to perceive objects.

Delusions are that which disturbs the mind, keeping the door closed to perfect happiness, the complete cessation of suffering. Delusions are temporary negative minds and can be ceased. They see the object in the wrong way, in a way that is in direct opposition to the reality of the object.

The mind has continuity, in the same way as a seed has the ability to produce a plant and another seed, and so on. As it's not possible to have a seed in one place and a plant in another, it's only through the development of our own mind that we can achieve enlightenment or perfect peace. The relationship between the development of the mind and enlightenment is the same as the relationship between the seed and the plant. The seed develops in association with the necessary elements and this produces the plant. The development of the mind is our own creation, depending on our decisions. Perfect peace cannot be given by a buddha or a lama, nor can it arise from the use of drugs and so forth.

How does Guru Shakyamuni guide his followers? As is said in a teaching,

The Great Ones do not wash away sin with water;
they do not rid beings of suffering with their hands;
they do not transfer realizations of suchness onto others.
They liberate by teaching the truth of suchness. [\[2\]](#)

The Buddha guides and releases sentient beings from suffering, from the cycle of death and rebirth only through showing the absolute truth. In order that we might realize this, Guru Shakyamuni Buddha also presents many other teachings such as those on the suffering nature of existence, impermanence, great love, great compassion and bodhicitta. All of these teachings lead to the realization of emptiness, the absolute truth.

However, a direct realization of emptiness doesn't come solely by being shown these teachings by a teacher. To do that, we need to study, practice, and transform our mind into these teachings,

into the essence of the Dharma. Only through the continual practice of right understanding can we become free from samsara and attain enlightenment.

The pure, clear light nature of mind is not one with ignorance. If that were the case, it couldn't be purified. The ignorant mind couldn't be transformed into an enlightened one. Ignorance refers to the obscurations that prevent enlightenment. Because ignorance (*marigpa* in Tibetan) means unknowing, how could it become the fully knowing mind (*rigpa* in Tibetan)? Just as a dirty cloth can't be dirty and clean at the same time, but it can be cleaned, our mind, which is currently dirty with delusions, can be cleaned of its impurities. If the mind were one with ignorance, there would be no way to achieve understanding. Our delusions are always obscurations to the realization of enlightenment. We are not trying to make ignorance enlightened. The intrinsic nature of the mind is not one with ignorance, rather it is obscured by ignorance, which degenerates the positive qualities of the mind and makes us forget.

Our present obscured mind has a relationship to our future omniscient mind because this obscured mind will become the completely purified, omniscient mind in the same way that a seed has a relationship to the future flower that will grow.

Although we have been alive for so long, we still don't know what life is. The mind is a great luggage of impressions, packed up from previous lives. The way that we perceive the external world depends on the karmic seeds that ripen at any moment. An enlightened mind contains only enlightened knowledge, the complete collection of merit—good karma—and the complete purification of negativity. Therefore, the enlightened mind arises from karma although its actions are not karma dependent. The negative mind, on the other hand, has never been enlightened.

Chapter 2. A Meditation Practice



Lama Zopa Rinpoche teaching during the Fourth Meditation Course, 1973. Photo by Brian Beresford.

The Lineage of the Teachings

[WFGS pp. 29–36]

Atisha's teachings show three things: fully realizing all pure views of enlightened beings, listening to subjects and meditating stops delusions and purifies negativity and knowing different practices and the levels of teaching—Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana—increases the power of practice.

All methods lead to buddhahood; all depend on the practitioner's understanding. We can't say that any method is independent of the teachings—we need both wisdom and method to reach buddhahood. We can practice the different teachings at different times as our level of understanding progresses.

'There is great benefit that arises from listening to teachings; they can impart understanding by explaining everything. There is no way to perfect peace without the teachings. The full explanation of the subject brings full recognition, and then we must fully integrate them into our practice, avoiding meaningless actions.

In order to act positively we should recognize positive actions. Then, as our wisdom increases, our ignorance and negative minds decrease, allowing the three great purposes to arise: the attainment of the happiness of future lives, the perfect peace of nirvana and the peerless happiness of enlightenment. Unless we can control the disturbed mind, however, we will be unable to reach the higher meditations. This is the import of Atisha's teachings.

Tsongkhapa, who is the founder of the Gelug school, was a highly realized being, a manifestation of the buddha of wisdom, Manjushri. He gave extensive commentaries on Atisha's teachings and explained the graded path to enlightenment.

Morning Prayers

[WFGS pp. 37–74]

This meditation course can be the key to make your life meaningful; this includes so much research.

The prayers are arranged to allow us to perform them by ourselves, alone. They are to be used to purify negativity and to facilitate successful meditation. No other books on Dharma have this arrangement, nor do they show how to meditate on subjects. The prayers are very deep since they contain the essence of all the teachings that follow.

For those who wish to do a retreat, if the prayers are done as shown, the practice improves and becomes more beneficial. Each prayer is of great importance to purify negative minds and to create merit. All of these prayers are powerful, containing so much Dharma, and are correlated with all the meditations that follow. As so much of the vast teachings of the pandits is related here, to go into great detail would take time.

The whole purpose of these activities of prayers, prostrations, making offerings and so forth is to prepare for meditation. They are to be done each morning after waking, before meditation. They are something that has to be done as part of daily life. The better the preparation we have, the quicker and better the experience of the meditation will be, and the deeper the understanding. Then, our meditation will help us to understand the meaning of the prayers as well.

Offerings

There are physical offerings and visualized or mental offerings; both create positive karma. The purpose of making offerings is to purify miserliness and attachment to objects that our mind can't renounce. Without purifying miserliness there is no way to achieve enlightenment. We have to eliminate miserliness and attachment to even get out of samsara. Making mental offerings helps us to become unattached to making actual offerings, and making actual offerings helps to destroy attachment and miserliness toward any object.

When we make visualized offerings to enlightened beings, although there is no such thing as that offering, giving up those mental objects is training and creates positive karma as it makes our miserliness decrease. It's extremely good because we are making the offerings to enlightened beings. We shouldn't be mentally attached. We shouldn't be like we are in church—giving offerings but still thinking "I like that flower." Then, there is the danger that we make offerings to ourselves, so we must check up. Because our mind enjoys samsara, we can easily find fault with any positive action we do, such as making offerings.

The best offering is the mind that is not attached to external things. That is the essential offering and making offerings of material things on the basis of this creates doubly positive karma—mental and material.

It's negative karma to have the motivation of making the offerings in order for others to think we are such a good practitioner or that we will receive many things as a result and our life will be

happy. It's negative karma because it's done with greed and attachment to the comfort of this life. If there is attachment to the offering it becomes a black offering. If it's a Dharma motivation, it's a pure action. Therefore, when we do actions, as we visualize, we should check up on our motivation. Then, we will be able to overcome any strong attachment.

If our mind is well trained in this practice of offering, we will remain at peace, away from the negative mind of attachment to this object or that person. During our meditation we can work with any object of attachment that arises, mentally overcoming the attachment. Visualizing offerings without attachment always creates positive karma and counters the negative, attached mind that we usually hold in a worldly life.

Overcoming miserliness is a positive action, stopping jealousy and generating generosity. If we become rich in the future, we will naturally be able to use those riches in a Dharma way because we will not be attached to them.

The only reason we make offerings, do prostrations and so forth is to overcome our mental problems; this is also the reason for reciting mantras, doing meditation and so on. Even if our work were to be finished for ourselves, it's still not the end—there are so many other solar systems where there are so many other beings who have problems. The real purpose of all this work is only to achieve enlightenment, to cut off all the problems, all the suffering. It's easy to visualize ourselves as capable of doing this if we have the understanding. We can even make a really big offering like prostrations to Chenrezig. This all depends on our level of realization.

Confession

The more we repent a negative action, the greater the positive effect we create and the less the suffering result will be. Then, we make the decision that we won't repeat the negative action. If we can't honestly promise never to repeat it, we can decide we won't do it for at least a month, a year or until death. The strength of our resolve affects the strength of the confession. The stronger the resolve not to repeat the negative action, the greater the possibility of not doing it. In order to make a worthwhile confession, we need strong resolve; we need the strong will not to engage in that action again. If we were to kill an insect and then immediately apply the four opponent powers, [3] it becomes that much easier to purify negativity. If we don't confess today, then the negative karma that we created increases and is that much harder to purify.

It's difficult to fully understand these prayers because they are very powerful and contain so much meaning. While some people may find them difficult, whoever understands the Dharma can talk about these prayers for years because when we talk about the Dharma, we are talking about everything that exists.

As our meditation deepens, we become more and more able to understand the necessities and meanings of the prayers. The prayers are very profound. Like the rainwater that originates from the ocean, all water finally returns to the ocean. In the same way, the whole of the Dharma that Guru Shakyamuni Buddha gave—the eighty-four thousand teachings to dispel the eighty-four thousand negativities—are subsumed in these Dharma prayers. If we are concerned about how we create karma in our life—when we travel, when we do a retreat or whenever—these prayers help in our meditation and are so beneficial in bringing realizations.

Although the monks in the Tibetan monasteries have to study many texts, studying alone is not the way to develop wisdom. Study can create many inner and outer disturbances. Of course, the monks study, but they also have to make prayers and do pujas. The whole purpose of a puja is to purify and create merit. Doing a lot of pujas helps them study, stops the disturbances to their meditation and brings realizations sooner. Realizations will only come with this combination of study, purification and the creation of merits. Therefore, I'm giving this introduction to these prayers for those people who wish to use them.

Refuge in the Holy Guru

[WFGS pp. 37–40]

The disciple who takes teachings from the guru does so by viewing the guru as the Buddha, who is the founder of the teachings. Learning from the guru is not the same as simply listening to lectures. The guru will show the disciple how to act depending on their own mind, which means that the discipline the disciple is asked to follow is a very individual thing.

As the guru's disciple, we shouldn't have a negative mind toward the guru, especially not creating negative actions with our teacher or giving up on them. We shouldn't judge the teacher's physical body or think badly of them because they don't say sweet things to us.

When listening to the guru, we should avoid the three defects of a pot. Our mind should not be like an upside-down pot that can't be filled, nor should it be like a dirty pot, which can be filled but which pollutes the food within. A dirty pot is like the mind that holds wrong meanings. Nor should our minds be like a pot with holes, easily forgetting everything we are taught.

We must integrate the teachings with our mind. We should consider ourselves, the disciple, as the patient, the teachings as the medicine and the guru as the doctor. Our suffering will be cured more quickly if we follow the guru's instructions correctly. In the same way that it's of no use to collect many medicines without taking them, not practicing the teachings we are given renders them useless. Just reading something in a book doesn't alter the mind on its own. Guru Shakyamuni Buddha said that if we don't practice correctly and fully after listening to the teachings, he will not be able to cure our suffering. We can't cure the sickness by reading the prescription; we must take the medicine.

Every atom of the Buddha's holy body has the same infinite wisdom that his holy speech and mind have. To fully understand this is to be enlightened; it can't be explained. A painting cannot replicate his holy body.

The guru has to have higher knowledge even to give basic teachings. The unity of the guru and the Buddha can't be seen until we have purified our mind. Until we reach a certain level of understanding, we can follow a guru who is less than perfect, but then we need to move on to a higher guru who, according to Dharma, is leading a better life.

The first benefit of following the guru correctly is that doing so brings us closer to the enlightened state. One of the Tibetan words for a spiritual teacher is *ge wai she nyen*. In this sense

the guru is like a brother or a friend who shows the disciple the correct way of thinking, thereby correcting their actions. The guru instills the virtuous Dharma and moral discipline into the mind of the disciple.

The second benefit of following the guru correctly is that if we do so, it pleases all the buddhas.

Third, if we follow the guru correctly, we will not be disturbed, influenced or controlled by evil friends or spirits, both in the external world and in our own mind. It's the guru's responsibility to show the disciple how to remain in control and not be influenced by such things as greed, hatred or ignorance.

The fourth benefit is that we will not be reborn in the three lower realms.

The fifth benefit is we will experience the success that we wish for in both temporal actions and purposes and in terms of our Dharma practice. For example, our meditations will lead to quick realizations.

The sixth benefit is that we will receive enlightenment more quickly.

The seventh is that we will eliminate all our delusions.

The eighth is that our realizations and understanding of the Dharma will increase without us being distracted.

The shortcomings of not following the guru's instructions correctly are almost infinite and include plagues and so forth, as well as the experience of results opposite to the above.

The Prayer of Taking Refuge in the Gurus

*La ma sang gyä la ma chhö
De zhin la ma gen dün te
Kün gyi je po la ma yin
La ma nam la kyab su chhi (3x)*

The Guru is Buddha. The Guru is Dharma.

The Guru is also Sangha.

The Guru is the creator of all [happiness].

In all the gurus, I take refuge.

Each time we recite this very powerful and blessed prayer we benefit because it leaves an imprint in our mind. This prayer can be said for refuge, but it can also be recited before eating in order to offer the meal and purify the action of eating, to purify greed (which creates negative karma and results in suffering) and to create positive karma.

This prayer contains the meanings of all the paths and realizations from guru devotion up until enlightenment, which can take a very long time to explain. Guru devotion is one of the most

profound subjects and is most difficult to realize. It's much more difficult than realizing emptiness, which can be attained through logic. While realizing the guru yoga practice brings very quick enlightenment, we need to do so much purification for that to happen. It doesn't depend on logic alone.

In addition to what is given here, there is a separate meditation on the subject that can be practiced continuously in daily life. What I'm giving here is just a tiny seed to give you some idea. With skill and wisdom, the whole essence of the subject can be understood from just this prayer. It contains everything. If you wish to have this meditation, to make vows to continuously practice this, a further explanation can be made.

Just the introduction to this prayer alone has such vast meaning. The guru is the one from whom we take teachings for enlightenment. In Tibet, the ancient yogis checked their gurus thoroughly and the gurus checked their disciples thoroughly. If we were to do the same, checking our whole life, it would be over before we got any teachings. At the very least, the guru should have greater knowledge than us. This can be difficult to recognize because of our limited and obscured mind. In order to actually see an enlightened being, with light rays all around, having all the realizations, we need a fully purified mind.

Generally speaking, it's also good to have a guru who is living in the practice, in discipline. In this way, their example can help our practice a great deal and can be a great inspiration. For example, if the guru meditates a lot, so will the disciple. Usually, since we have so much negativity in our minds, we see the guru as a mirror of ourselves. All that reflects back at us are what we see as their faults, which in reality are only our own. When our minds are purified, we will be able to see every manifestation of the buddhas with all qualities and perfections. So, in the very beginning it is very helpful for our own practice to have a guru who is living in the discipline. In this situation the disciple takes their example, which is good for purifying our minds. Of course, this mainly depends on our faith and living in our Dharma practice.

The highly realized Tibetan yogi Padampa Sangye says,

When will the demon of Death appear? There is no easy way to tell;
People of Tingri, right now be always on your guard. [4]

Before he passed away, this was the advice that he gave his followers, [the villagers of Tingri, where he stayed]. While we spend our lives trying always to work for the enjoyment of samsaric happiness, deceiving ourselves, our lives are in danger of being taken by the demon of death. At the moment, death has not occurred, so we have a chance. It's therefore necessary to practice Dharma purely all the time.

Also, when we listen to the Dharma for a few hours, we should make it as pure an action as possible. A pure action depends on a pure motivation, which depends on having refuge in our heart, which comes from a profound fear of suffering and full confidence and belief in the wisdom of the Three Rare Sublime Ones. Furthermore, we should make it a Mahayana action, which depends on having the Mahayana thought, "I must attain enlightenment to be able to enlighten every sentient being, to release them from all their sufferings, to repay them for all their kindness in providing all my past, present and future happiness. I must purify my mind in order to attain enlightenment, therefore I'm going to listen to teachings on the graduated path."

Chandrakirti, who wrote much on emptiness, said that the Three Rare Sublime Ones, the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, are the objects of refuge for those beings who wish to attain liberation. It's impossible to follow the path without refuge. We can't become an arhat without refuge. There's so much to learn on this subject that to understand refuge more fully we must learn Tibetan and study the original texts. To translate the whole of this subject would be so difficult and it would take so much time.

No non-enlightened being can guide us out of samsara. If any living being doesn't have the realization of the absolute truth and of the true cessation of suffering, even if they were surrounded by light, they would not be free from samsara. We can't take refuge in such beings, and we can't completely rely on them, no matter how they look. Many spirits who look sublime are no better than beings in the animal realm. For instance, in Tibet a shepherd once saw a being with light rays emanating from it and thought, "This must be the Buddha." But it was a spirit, and it suddenly disappeared because it didn't have the full power to be the recipient of this shepherd's prostrations. It wasn't the perfect guide. The perfect guide must be free from samsara.

Also, in Tibet there are piles of stones along the mountain trails that are actually places where mundane spirits abide. Spirits usually have a leader who sends servants to look for flesh. Once, a man who had a large goiter had to sleep near one of these places and the servant spirits took the goiter for their leader's food. Because the man was very pleased to have lost it, he trusted the evil spirits and told others about this. Then, another person with a goiter slept at that place hoping to have his goiter removed as well, but the spirits not only didn't like his goiter, they added another one as well. So, he was betrayed.

There are different ways a guru can manifest; they don't only have to give teachings. A guru can also be a mandala or a deity. Learning the hand mudras for enlightenment can also be a guru. The practice of relying on a guru is one of the most important things there is, more important than anything else. However, it's a little difficult for us to understand the actual meaning and purpose of this.

Without the guru there would be no existence of the Buddha. A great yogi, Khedrup Sangye Yeshe, mentions in the teachings,

Before the guru exists, there is not even the name of what is called "Buddha."

In order to understand this quote, we need to understand the relative and absolute guru and to realize the actual guru.

The line of the prayer that says, "The Guru is the creator," means that just as all the water on earth comes from many different places—lakes, streams, wells—it's always water and it all comes from one main place, the ocean. Without the ocean, the lakes, rivers and wells couldn't exist. Like that, without the existence of the guru, the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha and the path leading to enlightenment couldn't exist.

The entire graduated path, from where we are now until we reach enlightenment, has to begin with the practice of guru devotion. This practice is like the gate at the border of the country—the correct approach to the gate allows easy entry into the country and to the country's enjoyments.

The guru devotion practice is the entrance to the path to enlightenment. All realizations depend on how pure we make this practice, how perfect; that's why it's so important. It's the essential practice of ancient yogis and the essential practice of present practitioners. How quickly we attain the different levels of the path and all the different realizations depends on the guru. How strongly we depend on the guru makes the rest of the process much quicker and more successful; it takes less effort and is easier.

Incorrect practice, however, causes our problems to increase. It's very important not to break the guru's instructions and orders. This can cause a great obstacle to progress and may prevent enlightenment in a lifetime when otherwise it would have been attained. For example, there is the story of Milarepa's disciple, Rechung, who was told by Milarepa not to go to his home near Lhasa. Not listening, Rechung went and gave a turquoise to a beggar when he reached home. He was then beaten by his wife with a soup spoon. After much trouble, he returned to Milarepa, who showed him the turquoise. As it turned out, the beggar had been a manifestation of Milarepa. All the trouble he had was due to breaking Milarepa's instructions. From then on, he experienced much more trouble and failed to attain enlightenment.

The absolute guru comes close to being the absolute nature of mind, the essence of lack of self-existence. Without the absolute guru there can be no Buddha, Dharma or Sangha. Without the absolute guru there is no way for an enlightened being to exist; there is no way for all past, present and future happiness and suffering to exist. There is too much to talk about in relation to this topic; this is only a seed.

If our guru is a monk or Sangha member it's a good example for our negative mind to follow. If our guru is a layperson with a spouse and family, the reason for following their precepts isn't so obvious. We might wonder why we are asked to do this and that, and these kinds of questions create negative karma. The superstitious mind always looks for faults in the guru, which is a great hindrance.

When we see faults in the guru, our negative mind increases. Because we see the guru as ordinary, we never seek knowledge from them and thus there is no way for us to attain enlightenment. Like a reflection of our own face, greed sees the guru as greedy, anger sees the guru as angry, and ignorance sees the guru as ignorant. It's possible for the guru to appear in the form of our negative minds, which should prove to us that we, the disciple, possess this negative mind that must be purified.

The first time Milarepa saw his guru Marpa, Marpa appeared as a very ordinary man, dirty and digging in the fields, and drinking *chang*, beer made from barley. Later in their relationship, Marpa made Milarepa do great physical work—but actually all these things were teachings, purifying negativity.

For many years the great guru Tilopa didn't give Naropa teachings, no matter how much Naropa followed him and asked for them. Naropa had to follow strange instructions constantly, taking things from others and getting beaten as a result. Once there was a wedding going on in the street and Tilopa sent him to go there and take the wife, which resulted in Naropa getting beaten. Also, Tilopa appeared as a poor fisherman, wearing few clothes and eating the wrong parts of the fish.

One day, after all these years, Tilopa asked Naropa to make a mandala offering, although there were no materials to use. But Naropa needed to offer this mandala, the universe, to purify his negative karma—as had all the previous sufferings he had experienced over the years also been to purify. Tilopa told Naropa to make *pipi* into the sand as there was no water, and Naropa made the offering from that. Then Tilopa threw the wet sand into Naropa’s face saying, “Here’s your mandala!” and told Naropa to look into space. At that point Tilopa transformed the space in front of him into the full mandala of the deity Heruka and Naropa received full purification.

Therefore, we should remember that there is nothing to trust in outer appearances. It’s the inner mind that is important.

Generating Bodhicitta

[WFGS p. 40]

If we make charity of many universes full of the seven types of jewels to each living being without bodhicitta or of a small bowl of rice to an animal with bodhicitta, the benefits of the latter are much greater. They are much greater than we are capable of realizing, beyond the concept of the ordinary mind. The action of giving, making charity, depends on the mind, not on the action or the materials.

Even the action of giving when we have realized emptiness but without bodhicitta is nothing in comparison to giving without emptiness while having the realization of bodhicitta. Such action always brings enlightenment more quickly for ourselves and others. Therefore, it’s so important to practice bodhicitta as much as possible. Even if we don’t have the full realization yet, this keeps the mind living in the practice and keeps ourselves and others in peace, never causing confusion to arise between ourselves and others.

Unless we train in this practice, we will continue to have a negative mind and cause confusion to others. Therefore, besides our own enlightenment and perfect peace, this practice is important for others. Because we make this kind of effort, others become less confused and there are fewer problems. If we even have a bodhicitta motivation for what we do, wherever we go it makes other people happy just seeing us. There is always peace; everybody likes us and wants to help us. Such is the power of bodhicitta.

Seeing a person with a bodhicitta motivation has a strong effect even on the mind of somebody without any Dharma knowledge. That person will have a good feeling, even though they might not recognize a holy person. Any doubt they might have had is overcome by the power of the holy being’s bodhicitta. Even a very evil person’s negative mind is subdued by the power of this mind. And so, the holy mind of bodhicitta, besides being helpful in terms of our own realization of enlightenment, is also extremely helpful for other people.

Our physical body comes from our father and mother, from the combination of sperm and egg, and is composed of bone, flesh, blood, and so forth, and is of limited size. Due to the power of bodhicitta, it becomes possible for us to discard this body and take on the holy body of the king, the holy body of a buddha, which has such infinite wisdom and knowledge not even realized by the highest bodhisattvas. It has no suffering of rebirth, old age, sickness and death; it’s completely

free. A buddha's holy body can appear in many trillions of manifestations according to different beings' level of mind, and it also possesses the function of the buddha's holy speech and holy mind. By discarding this body, which is always living in suffering, we can attain the precious holy body of a buddha due to the power of bodhicitta. The value of this present body is insignificant by comparison. Because it always gives us great trouble and gets us to work so much for it, we should be pleased to discard it in order to replace it with the holy body. However, although it is relatively valueless, we shouldn't waste this body. Unless we practice bodhicitta, that is exactly what we are doing, wasting this body and our precious human life.

Everything Comes from the Mind

[WFGS pp. 55–59]

It's important to constantly investigate what makes different people have different feelings: about food, likes and dislikes and so forth. If it were only caused by particular external conditions, there would be no reason for hundreds of people to have different feelings about the same thing. For example, if we try to build something somewhere, some people will like it while others will see it as ugly and dislike it. We shouldn't examine the external conditions, because since the beginning of the earth, if we were to try to find the external cause of peace, there would be no solution. What we should examine instead is the mind that makes a person enjoy things through the senses. Without knowing the nature of the mind, the door to finding the solution is closed. There must be a reason why a hundred people each have a different attitude to food in one pot and food in another pot. There must be a reason why some people like Tibetan tea and others don't. These problems are not created by the physical body and do not depend on our genes.

The different feelings that we experience are not brought forth by the cooperative condition, the object itself, rather, they arise from a principal cause, that which is in the mind. This cause was created by the habitual mental patterning we have built up over lifetimes, not in the physical body. If the principal cause were in the elements—the stones, the water or in non-living things—it follows that there must be a creator. If this different principal cause originally arose from these non-living things, then suffering and happiness should arise from these as well. If we agree that happiness is an internal state of mind, then the elements like the earth that have caused this happiness must have mind. Further, there could be no existence of these non-living things.

This is a big wrong conception. Nobody thinks like this. If the original living beings came into existence without reason, without another creator, intuitively, there would be no reason for all people on this earth to work for peace. It would be better that all people just die as that would end all the troubles. If everybody were to die, there would be peace; while everybody lives, there is suffering. Talking frankly, it comes down to this.

If the original beings on this earth had no reason to exist, if there were no creator, when the mind ceased, there would be no reason for continuity. The great conflicts that we see in the world today should be the fault of these people's existence. Therefore, everything else would become unnecessary; it would be better for life not to exist and all problems to be completely stopped.

We should explore this thesis. Why is there existence? What made the original elements of this earth exist? As we understand the subject of this evolution more deeply, our understanding of the

mind will also deepen. If there were no creator, there would be no reason for us to exist. Each thing we see here has a reason for its existence, even that colored flower in a pot. Being in that pot over there, sitting on that table, being seen by us, that means there is a relation to us.

Sometimes, when we go to a new country and see new people, we may feel that we have lived with them for a long time, that they are familiar; we may feel a close feeling. With other people we may feel alienated and become frightened. There are reasons for these experiences; they have something to do with the mind.

When we see a new person for the first time in this life and feel afraid, we should check our mind. We have been a human being numberless times, as well as animals, spirits and so forth. To be afraid of this person we have just met means at some time, before this life, before taking this body, we were probably in the form of another human being and perhaps this person killed us, so now, due to the imprint carried on the mind, in this life we are intuitively frightened by this person. If someone was a friend in a past life, that is carried on in this life. Some people may especially like different animals for the same reason. We should study these things, research them—finding reasons helps us develop wisdom and find solutions. It means that there was a relationship in a previous life, which led to the creation of positive or negative karma. In that way, everything comes from the mind.

By subduing the mind, every external suffering that arises from outer cooperative conditions can be stopped and transformed into the nature of happiness.

Bodhicitta

Lama Tsongkhapa says,

The person whose mind has less anger and is humble is well liked by everybody, attracts helpers and has few enemies.

Generally, all actions become less troublesome as we follow the path due to the power of the noble mind. It's noble—or *arya*—because it's the opposite of cruel. For this mind, even external things become helpers. In contrast, the negative power of the cruel mind makes external objects—living and non-living—into enemies. The noble mind has patience and is humble.

Wherever the bodhisattva goes there is less disturbance—even in a wild, dangerous forest the bodhisattva's great love, compassion and power protect them from tigers, snakes and other animals that might kill others. These wild animals become respectful instead of harmful. This is not due to the animals' understanding but to the bodhisattva's powerful presence. This has been the experience of numberless beings who developed bodhicitta.

The opposite example is a person who is very cruel and angry. Their body shakes, their nose turns red, and, creating many negative actions, they are disrespected and disliked by everybody. Because they are recognized as a bad person, they suffer because nobody helps them. This is the result of negative mind.

To have a pure, positive mind and to imitate the bodhisattvas is very important when we are trying to cultivate bodhicitta. Because there's not one tiny happiness that doesn't arise from bodhicitta, because we want happiness and want to avoid suffering, even if we don't meditate or believe in karma, we still have to develop bodhicitta.

Each of us has a life to live. The duration varies but it will not be more than one hundred years. Among this group here, someone will die first—maybe me (because I'm smaller), maybe you—someone will die first. After fifty or sixty years none of us will exist; we will have become only names in books or on tombstones.

If we search for “life,” we find that the mind isn’t life and the body isn’t life. Life is the association of mind with body, the combination. Nothing is permanent. We might think, “Perhaps I shall live for forty years.” But “forty years” is just a title for the time, the name of a number, a collection of that many years. If one year is missing, then it’s not forty. A year is the collection of twelve months, and if one month is missing, then it’s not a year. A month is the collection of weeks, or the collection of thirty days—if a day is missing, it’s not a month. A day is the collection of twenty-four hours, an hour is the collection of minutes, minutes the collection of seconds, seconds the collection of split seconds and so on. If we check up, we can’t find anything permanent. There is no concrete entity we can call “time.” Everything is in a state of flux. As each split second passes, the second, minute, hour, day, month, year finishes—that “forty years” is finishing in dependence upon the split second, and in this way our life is finishing continuously, not stopping for even the smallest amount of time.

Now, that is clear. Or it’s supposed to be clear, anyway! That’s how time goes so quickly. It doesn’t exist as we believe it to, as concrete, permanent and self-existent. By a split second finishing, the “forty years” is on the way to finishing, like a river passing, like everything becoming decayed. Thus, it’s important to constantly think that each moment our human life is finishing, getting shorter, and that we have less and less time to live. Far from this understanding of truth causing suffering and the development of ignorance, it only causes the *release* from suffering and ignorance.

The worry that arises when we consider the shortness and impermanence of the human life, of how we are wasting time and missing Dharma practice, is very worthwhile because it makes us focus on positive action in preparation for the next life. Always thinking of the way life changes only keeps us more and more mindful of seeking the inner method to escape from ignorance and suffering and to purify the causes already created. This kind of thinking is always helpful.

We have to study any existent object in order to know its true nature. Study is something we usually do at school in order to become knowledgeable about the subjects taught there. Therefore, why don’t we study this fact of impermanence? Studying this is much more worthwhile. Even though people don’t want to know about death and cover the truth with ignorance, it makes no difference to the facts. The truth cannot be covered; no change can make ignorance into truth. The study of external things can never destroy our own ignorance; it can never release us from suffering. When we don’t want to hear the truth explained, when we are afraid to listen because of shock, it’s crazy—it’s like finding black marks on our face when we look in a mirror and smashing the mirror in order to not have to see them. You might laugh at this, but this is what we are doing when we deny the truth of impermanence; we are trying to

close off wisdom as much as possible in order to not see the truth. Then, after some time, we miss the mirror, and we realize “Oh! I’ve broken it.”

Purifying the Place and Invocation

[WFGS pp. 40–41]

Everywhere may the ground be pure,
Free of pebbles and so forth,
As level as the palm of the hand,
In the nature of *vaidurya*, and soft. [5]

The purpose of purifying the place before invoking the buddhas, arhats and holy ones is to create good merit. This action becomes an offering to the holy beings and creates good karma. The better we can visualize purifying a place, the more it will purify our negativity. The action of purifying the place before invoking the holy beings brings a result such as rebirth in a pure land, the realm of the enlightened beings. Pure lands are much higher than the lands we live in—there are no ugly objects, and the ground we walk on is as soft as a rubber bed and it reflects like a mirror. In a pure land, none of the cooperative conditions to generate a negative mind arise, only those that will decrease it. To visualize in this way is very good. We should do so in order to create good karma for the purpose of attaining enlightenment.

Although the enlightened beings definitely know this, we might be skeptical, doubting they even exist. An action done with skepticism won’t be very powerful. The more faith we have, the more power our actions have to purify negativities. The enlightened beings are always with us. Not seeing God is not his problem; it’s ours for not seeing. If we don’t understand the nature of our own mind, how can we understand the enlightened mind?

The “place” can be seen as Guru Shakyamuni Buddha himself, just as all beings and ourselves can be visualized as Guru Shakyamuni Buddha through continual practice. Purifying the place creates positive karma, especially if it’s done before the invocation of the buddhas, making it beautiful for them.

Creating the best smell that we can through the offering of incense is creating positive karma. This offering represents the reduction of miserliness and purifies our attachment to things we designate as “best.” In reality, of course, all things smell good to an enlightened being. But at the same time, passing wind in a place where there are enlightened beings, such as in a gompa or a place where people are meditating, is considered a negative action.

Then, we invoke the buddhas and bodhisattvas to attend.

Savior of all sentient beings without exception,
Divine destroyer of the unbearable hordes of maras and their forces,
Perfect knower of all things without exception,
Bhagavan, together with your retinue, please come here.

Invoking the holy beings creates great positive karma and purifies so much negativity. We should do an invocation when we first move into a new house and so forth. In these situations, we should first organize the house and fix it up and then make the invocation. The same can be done when we set up an altar.

Prostrations to the Thousand-arm Chenrezig

[WFGS pp. 42–45]

Prostrating and saying the mantra of Chenrezig (Avalokiteshvara) creates great merit for listening to, contemplating and meditating on the three divisions of the teachings, the Three Baskets or *Tripitaka*, that contain all the teachings on the three higher trainings: the higher training of ethics, of concentration and of wisdom.

The *Tripitaka* are the *Vinaya Pitaka*, the *Sutra Pitaka* and the *Abhidharma Pitaka*.

The *Vinaya Pitaka* sets forth rules of moral conduct that counteract certain kinds of extreme conduct, such as attachment to wealth and expensive possessions—clothes, cars, houses, and so forth, and attachment to individual possessions, even just to a set of old clothes or a suitcase.

The *Sutra Pitaka* sets forth the general rules of conduct that counteract certain kinds of extreme thought, such as independent existence. It includes the general religious discourses such as concentration on the twelve links of dependent origination, the four noble truths and so forth.

The *Abhidharma Pitaka* contains the metaphysical instructions, teaching on the wisdom that is the remedy for the wrong conception of a self-existent I and phenomena.

When you make prostrations, if you are an inner being practicing the Buddha's teachings, you should hold your hands together with the thumbs inside enclosed by the hands. This symbolizes holding a jewel. (There are two other ways to hold the hands.) Then, touch the top of the head, the mouth or throat and the heart to symbolize body, speech and mind, respectively. The prostration of the body creates the karma to receive the double crown protrusion of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha when you attain enlightenment.

Because Chenrezig's one thousand eyes represent one thousand buddhas and their great compassion, when you prostrate to Chenrezig, your merit is greatly multiplied. One prostration to Chenrezig equals one thousand prostrations, and the resulting merits are that much more. If you pray to this aspect of the enlightened form, which appeared especially to grant bodhicitta, you will find it very easy to establish a link with him, like a kind father meeting his child.

Making offerings and prostrations is not only a practice intended for worldly beings. Even noble beings transform their bodies into many manifestations, each having many hands, heads and eyes, and into the different realms where there are enlightened beings and then make offerings and prostrations with each of these bodies, chanting prayers admiring the wisdom of the enlightened beings.

Although you don't yet have the power to make such transformations, you should think that if noble beings who have so many realizations do so, why shouldn't you? Those who can see their past and future lives and have attained psychic powers make such offerings to enlightened beings, creating merits through body, speech and mind, and seeing this you should realize that it's very necessary that you should do likewise. Actually, you should engage in these actions even more than they do. You are supposed to be able to transform into different manifestations like these beings, yet you have delusions. You need very good fortune to have the ability to create good karma through making offerings and purifying; this ability is very precious and those who are able to do it are rare.

Prepare for the visualization of Chenrezig by first thinking that there is no self-existent I, that your I is completely empty of the self-entity. This I doesn't depend on the relationship of the body and mind; from the head down to the feet it exists nowhere, in no atom of the body. This concept is completely empty.

Then, visualize countless buddhas of the past, present and future in front of you. All become one with Chenrezig. Imagine that there are that many Chenrezigs on each atom of the universe, as already visualized. Imagine that the number of your bodies is equal to the number of atoms in the universe and each makes prostrations to each of these Chenrezigs—each one on each atom of the universe, all the countless past, present and future buddhas in the manifestation of Chenrezig.

Why such a visualization? This is a method to create incredible merit and to purify as quickly as possible. Higher beings actually have the power to transform into many thousands of manifestations, but as you do not have this power yet, you try to visualize like this. The more bodies you visualize making prostrations, the more positive karma you create.

People can do samsaric prostrations, merely imitating someone. Making prostrations to trees or dogs doesn't create positive karma. You create positive karma and increase your faith in dependence upon the object you prostrate to—in dependence upon the infinite power and great wisdom of the enlightened beings. The nature of the power of the object is to create positive karma. Therefore, instead of samsaric prostrations, you should visualize like this, thinking of the past, present and future buddhas in the manifestation of Chenrezig on all the atoms of the universe and prostrating to them.

Then, you visualize yourself in the aspect of Chenrezig, visualizing the letter HRIH. This is a seed syllable of the buddhas, representing the mind. Visualize this syllable letter at your heart. If you can't visualize yourself as the manifestation of Chenrezig, then just think of yourself as making many offerings to many Chenrezigs. Imagine yourself carrying many offerings for Chenrezig's infinite happiness and enjoyment to each of the limitless Chenrezigs in front of you.

Then make prostrations with the mantra OM MANI PADME HUM. While doing this, you should visualize light entering your body from his holy body, purifying every one of your obstacles to attaining enlightenment. This is all visualized without the emptiness meditation.

After the prostrations, make the following prayer:

Please purify my body, speech and mind of all negativities
So that I may fully receive all knowledge

Of your holy body, speech and mind.

Then, the Chenrezig in front of you enters your body through the head and comes to be seated at the heart. This visualization can be difficult at first but it becomes easier as the mind is trained.

Then, from the Chenrezig at your heart, visualize sending light out to all sentient beings, purifying all negativities and transforming their realms into pure lands. Pure realms are defined as such by the purified mind. A place that common people see as filthy can be seen as a completely purified place that brings only transcendental happiness by the purified mind. This level of view is only created by the mind in accordance with its stage of development.

Again, visualize yourself as numberless, as having bodies as many as atoms in the universe. Think, “The number of Chenrezigs is equal to the atoms there are in the universe. With my body in front of each of them, I make prostrations.” This is simple.

This visualization is a bodhisattva practice. Maybe we’ll talk more about this later when we do the mind meditation. You should visualize the central channel from your crown chakra down. After all sentient beings become Chenrezig within their pure land they are absorbed into the Chenrezig in your heart.

How Chenrezig Attained Great Compassion

Chenrezig is an aspect of the Buddha and there are many aspects of Chenrezig. If fortunate, great devotion may arise in relation to this deity.

Chenrezig received his great compassion in the presence of his guru Buddha Rinchen Nyingpo. In earlier times, Guru Shakyamuni Buddha prophesized that a being called Holder of the Great Eon would manifest after the number of eons equal to the number of grains of sand in the River Ganges passed, and in that place there would be a Buddha called Rinchen Nyingpo. He would liberate many millions of sentient beings, including insects, by showing the Dharma.

At another time, Guru Shakyamuni Buddha was surrounded by trillions of arhats in the cities near a king’s palace. The king went with many thousands of people to see this buddha, Rinchen Nyingpo, to make prostrations and receive teachings. For three months he made offerings to this buddha. The king had thousands of sons, the eldest of whom was called Not Closing the Eyes, and this son also made offerings to this buddha exactly as his father did. In addition, a man of brahmin caste made offerings to this buddha for seven years, and he asked the king to generate bodhicitta. The king did so, and Buddha Rinchen Nyingpo prophesized that this king would later become the Buddha of Limitless Life in the realm called the Western Paradise. The son Not Closing the Eyes developed such great compassion for sentient beings, wishing to release them completely from suffering and from their negative mental delusions, and because of this Buddha Rinchen Nyingpo prophesied that he would become a buddha called Chenrezig, and that as a result of his compassion he would release hundreds of thousands of billions of sentient beings from suffering. Buddha Rinchen Nyingpo also prophesized that when that son became a bodhisattva he would work just like a buddha, and when fully enlightened he would become Pagpa Gyalzig Kelpo, that his realm would become a pure land paradise, and that he would give many teachings to numberless sentient beings.

Countless eons before Chenrezig received enlightenment, he was called Chokyi Ngawang. Due to his previous prayers and great compassion, he took the aspect of a bodhisattva many times in order to benefit sentient beings. This aspect of the Buddha is the bodhisattva Chenrezig. There are so many other worlds where he gives Dharma as a bodhisattva or as an arhat. Also, he takes many different forms as it suits beings, to show them the Dharma and give teachings. For example, he may appear in the form of a desire realm god, a spirit, a leader of the army, and so forth.

Tibet is usually admired as Chenrezig's realm on earth, but the story behind this is too long to tell. All the Dharma kings who established the Dharma in Tibet had the development of the Dharma as their main responsibility and are recognized as living bodhisattvas. Those of the lineage of His Holiness the Dalai Lama are recognized as incarnations of Chenrezig, including the present one.

The original Tibetan people are recognized as completely separate, of a different spirit, as unique in quality because of the Buddhadharma coming to Tibet from Guru Shakyamuni Buddha and also because of the generations before. Long before the Dharma came, Tibet was a very cold country with many jungles, inhabited by very wild people who ate human flesh. It was a very mischievous place of evil spirits, and people couldn't travel there safely. Then, Chenrezig took the form of a bodhisattva monkey in order to bring Dharma to Tibet, and the female aspect of Buddha, Tara, took the form of a female cannibal. They lived near each other in the rocky mountains and had eight children of different shapes in the form of human beings. Although the blood of these humans came from these two deities, their minds came from the realms of samsara, under the control of karma and delusions. So, the blood generation of Tibetan people is unique, and they are recognized as a totally different race.

Guru Shakyamuni Buddha prophesied that Chenrezig would enlighten so many people in the northern land.

The benefits of making paintings and statues of Chenrezig are much greater than those of making ordinary paintings or statues, including images of any other buddhas, and equal to those of making thousands of other buddhas. Similar benefits arise from meditating on Chenrezig. Also, Guru Shakyamuni Buddha said that so many other enlightened beings and realms of enlightened beings are contained in each atom of Chenrezig's holy body.

The benefits of prostrating to Chenrezig and reciting his name and mantra are equal to the benefits of doing so in relation to all the other buddhas. Chenrezig's mantra OM MANI PADME HUM is very beneficial and has to be given at an initiation. It's the same with the visualization.

When you prostrate and recite Chenrezig's name and mantra, it's important to remember their meaning and to visualize the aspect of Chenrezig. Doing so creates so much positive karma. If you have no idea who you are prostrating to, just moving your physical body up and own, then it's only exhausting.

The Visualization of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha and Other Deities

There are all kinds of different deities' bodies that can help you in attaining a pure land, which is a creation of our own minds.

[WFGS pp. 47–51]

The purpose of doing this practice is to receive blessings and attain realizations. Visualizing Guru Shakyamuni Buddha and visualizing a rock or tree are two quite different things. If you can visualize correctly, the effect on your mind will be quite different. Because of the realizations he has attained, just seeing a statue of Shakyamuni that symbolizes his infinite wisdom and knowledge is quite different from seeing the picture of a beautiful man or woman. Merely seeing the statue makes the mind peaceful, calm, relaxed, well-controlled and subdued. Even a picture gives a very different effect. Actually, there is no more beautiful form than Guru Shakyamuni Buddha; there is no more inexpressible knowledge of beauty that we can see. The great effect that we receive from seeing his picture, or a statue of his form, is the decrease of greed.

It's not that Guru Shakyamuni Buddha existed in previous days but doesn't exist now anywhere. He sees us and we can see him. It's definitely possible that we can communicate and receive teachings from him, but this depends on the level of our obscurations, and how strongly we do the purification practice. Even though we can't see our own mind, that doesn't mean that it's not there. This is something within us but we don't realize it because that mind is obscured by ignorance. Of course, it's extremely difficult to see enlightened beings and communicate with them. Doing so is dependent on the blessings we receive and our foundation of faith.

There are many instances of beings that received teachings from various deities. Lama Tsongkhapa received the teaching on the absolute truth from the aspect of enlightened wisdom, Manjushri, who granted this realization for the purpose of benefiting all sentient beings. In fact, Tsongkhapa received many teachings from Manjushri and is himself thought to be the manifestation of the buddha of wisdom. His teachings on the absolute truth are incredibly clear and incredibly profound. He had so many followers, like stars in the sky. Many of them received realizations.

On the altar here are statues of Lama Tsongkhapa and two of his closest disciples, Khedrub-je and Gyaltsab-je, who helped him a great deal. Both of his followers achieved all of the different levels of realization and completed the Dharma practice. Khedrub-je, because of his deep devotion, saw Lama Tsongkhapa in five different manifestations. Gyaltsab-je was the substitute for the Dharma king; he cleared up misunderstandings in the teachings of Lama Tsongkhapa through logic, in debates. Before he met Lama Tsongkhapa, he lived in the lower part of Tibet and was already highly learned. When Tsongkhapa visited that place and gave teachings, Gyaltsab-je, thinking he might be more highly realized than Tsongkhapa, sat down on the same bed. Tsongkhapa took no notice and continued teachings. Then, when Gyaltsab-je realized the purity of Tsongkhapa's teachings, he moved to a lower level. He later took teachings from Lama Tsongkhapa himself, and after Tsongkhapa passed away, Gyaltsab-je helped clear up any misunderstandings that remained.

Asanga, the highly realized pandit, tried to achieve a direct vision of Maitreya, who is the buddha to come after Guru Shakyamuni Buddha and who will descend from the pure realm of Tushita. Asanga spent twelve years trying to attain the vision of this future Buddha. After the first three years he came down from his retreat, discouraged. Then, he saw water dripping onto a rock into which it had worn a deep hole, and thought that if even water, which is not solid, can make a hole in a rock, how could it be possible not to achieve the realization of Maitreya, so he went back. Three years later he came down again, discouraged, saw a man cutting a rock with a thread, and went back again. Three years later he came down again, saw a bird flying into a small cave, and saw that its wings had eroded the rock. He went back again. Three years later he came down again, totally discouraged, and saw a dog whose entire backside was an open wound, full of maggots. He felt compassion and wanted to remove the worms to help the dog but realized that doing so could cause the maggots to suffer. Due to his great bodhicitta he made a strong decision, cut his own flesh and placed it on the side for the maggots, and, so as not to injure them, bent down to remove them with his tongue. As he did so, the dog transformed into Maitreya. Asanga clung to Maitreya and asked why he took so long to appear. Maitreya showed Asanga his robe and said, “I’ve always been in your cave; look where you spat on my body.”

We see from this story that Asanga’s obscurations were finally purified through the practice of bodhicitta, through caring for other beings more than ourselves and thus purifying much negativity. As a result of his fundamental devotion and the deep purification he engaged in with such great bodhicitta, Maitreya asked Asanga what he wanted. Asanga asked for teachings, and, telling Asanga to hold on to his robes, Maitreya took him to Tushita pure land and gave him five divisions of teachings in one morning there, which is fifty years of our lifetime. Tibetans still study these teachings—they are concerned with logic and practice, and also explain the absolute true nature of reality, the development of bodhicitta, and faith.

Once a mother sent her son to find relics of the buddha, but after looking everywhere he found nothing. Instead, on his way home he picked up a dog’s bone and brought it to his mother. With much faith and devotion, she believed in that bone and put it on the altar, making prayers and offerings to it and so forth. After some time, real relics began to come from that bone. That was a creation of her mind.

It’s definitely possible to perceive the Buddha. It’s our own mental creation, a creation from within that arises from our own knowledge. Even ordinary knowledge doesn’t come spontaneously from outside; it comes from our studying at a school or university.

Prayers are very powerful and make sense. In order to understand and develop realizations, prayers are set up in each meditation. Before the prayer, begin by visualizing Guru Shakyamuni Buddha.

Visualizing Guru Shakyamuni Buddha

Guru Shakyamuni Buddha is seated on a throne, on which is a lotus, sun and moon. The space between the throne and you, the meditator, is equal to the length of the prostrated body, and it should be visualized at the height of your forehead. The bigger it appears, the better, but the size that stays best in the mind depends on your level of mind. Shakyamuni is smiling and his lips are cherry red. His very fine eyes are thin, narrow and long. He is crowned by the double knot. The

image should not be visualized as a drawing but as a person, with the body made entirely of light. All of the hairs on his head curl to the right and are dark blue in color; they are short but nicely curled. Each of these features is a sign of his holy body. Also, he has chakras or wheels on his feet, and when he walks on the earth, he doesn't touch the ground but remains four inches above it. His robes, too, don't touch his body. Guru Shakyamuni Buddha has such a peaceful aspect that it dispels all negative minds straight away.

When Guru Shakyamuni Buddha was in the form of a bhikshu showing the Dharma to a great number of people, even those who didn't receive teachings but merely saw him were helped a great deal, and their minds were purified of negativity due to the power of his realizations. When Shakyamuni looks at one person, even those who are standing behind him see him in the same way, and he sees everything that is happening all around. When Guru Shakyamuni Buddha was born as a prince, one of his relatives was sort of evil and wanted to kill him because he had so much power. Although the Buddha walked so slowly, this person with the wrong realization, carrying weapons and running after him, was unable to catch him no matter how fast he ran. Guru Shakyamuni Buddha said, "You are running but not coming to me." This was his great control over ignorance.

Visualize Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's body absorbing into your body, and visualize your mind as one with his, as emptiness like space, without the self-existent I. Concentrate on this for as long as possible.

Begin with the breathing meditation, then purify with the light coming from the Buddha. Then concentrate your mind as above, without letting your mind and your superstitions disrupt your meditation. Those who are new to the meditation course can meditate on the other higher meditations, following the outlines and amplifying the meaning through your own wisdom. The form is the internal examination of your own mind. Realization can only be attained by checking.

As you go to sleep, do this sleeping meditation. Go to bed and lie down. Visualize Guru Shakyamuni Buddha in front of you sending light rays from his body. Think, "As I don't desire suffering, I should make my sleep virtuous for the sake of all sentient beings." Light comes from Guru Shakyamuni Buddha and enters your body, which then becomes the nature of light itself, and all impurities are expelled. Then Guru Shakyamuni Buddha absorbs into you, and you become one with his holy body and mind, as space, with no self-existent I anywhere in this absolute true nature. Hold this visualization for as long as possible. This is very good practice for many things. During sleep you may dream—it's very good if you meditate in your dreams, with the gross mind not arising much and the sincere mind arising.

Then, when you wake up, as soon as possible try to be in that state visualizing space—then Guru Shakyamuni Buddha appears, and you yourself are him. You should try to remember the last part of the sleep meditation.

During the day, visualize yourself as Guru Shakyamuni Buddha and also visualize others around you in this way. This helps to destroy partiality, criticism and judgment, which are all only functions of the negative mind.

Offerings to Lord Buddha

Offering Beauty

Whenever we hear a beautiful sound or see a beautiful sight, offering it to Lord Buddha will greatly purify the negative mind.

Sleeping

When in bed, we should visualize Guru Shakyamuni Buddha and pray from the heart to receive enlightenment by purifying negativity.

Before the visualization is made, we should think, “I am going to dedicate to attain enlightenment in order to help all sentient beings.” This makes our sleep different from that of animals and insects; it gives meaning to our human life so that it makes sense. Then we visualize that light enters our body and that our mind becomes one in the nature of infinite space. Then, we try to sleep.

Offering Food

When we see food, we should examine how we feel about it, trying to discern if there is any greed, if the mind is unpeaceful. When we want to enjoy the delicious taste of the food, unless we are careful, we can become very attached to the taste, exaggerating its qualities and wanting to experience the worldly pleasure of eating it. This is very difficult to differentiate from just eating to sustain the body. Attachment is a main cause of rebirth in the three lower realms and a major cause of our present suffering.

We should also check and see if we want to use this food with the self-cherishing mind, thinking more of ourselves than other beings—human, animal or buddha—and taking care only of ourselves, eating with that thought. This is the most subtle, ignorant negative mind, the most powerful obstruction to attaining enlightenment.

Attachment and ignorance are the two main disturbances in our life, and since we don’t want to experience suffering, we must destroy them. We should think, “Eating with greed and ignorance only makes me more greedy and ignorant; it is eating just like an animal. Since I am human, my actions should be higher, and not like those of a dog eating *kaka*. Animals don’t check up since they have no wisdom; they just eat as quickly as possible before the food gets taken away by someone else, and it doesn’t matter to them if the other is hungrier or not. Therefore, I am going to make an offering of this food to Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, the essence of all buddhas, who is at my heart, that I may receive enlightenment by purifying all negativity.”

Then, we visualize the sun, moon, lotus, throne and Guru Shakyamuni Buddha at the heart, as beautiful as possible. The more beautiful, the better the karma. Then, we think. “This food doesn’t belong to me; it’s Guru Shakyamuni Buddha’s holy mind and belongs only to him.” This is the most important thing—to make a strong and clear decision that will have a great effect on the mind. Great Tibetan meditators recognize this sort of thing as the best puja, done with our own mind and body. As we do this meditation, we shouldn’t think of other things but think that Lord Buddha has received infinite happiness from our offering, and when he is finished, he sends the light of realization, power and happiness to fill our body.

When taking food, we should meditate to cleanse and purify the negative mind of rubbish with the broom and water of dedication, without being involved in samsaric practices. But it's not so good to purify sometimes and then afterwards to create more negative karma. In this way, we never finish. Therefore, we must keep our mind as clean as possible once it has been cleansed. Because the purpose of meditation is only to cleanse the mind, there is no point in continuing to create negative karma once we have purified it. Instead, we should try to create as much positive karma as possible. We should meditate to purify all the time. The less negative karma we create, the less purification we will need.

We must have discipline when eating and drinking. In retreat, every action—getting up, washing and so forth—is done in conjunction with a meditation. The effects of this depend on our level of realization.

We either visualize ourselves as one with Guru Shakyamuni Buddha or visualize him at our heart, then offer the food to him without attachment. When eating, we think, “I must become free from all suffering; I must not be attached to these objects, which are not mine. I am offering it to him, it completely belongs to him.” Just as we don’t have much feeling for someone else’s ordinary possessions, we should try to feel the same way about the food. Strongly feel, “I am Guru Shakyamuni Buddha,” and give it to the Buddha, thinking, “I am offering it to him, who is the infinite buddhas.” Don’t talk while eating; concentrate fully on Guru Shakyamuni Buddha and on offering the food. This lessens attachment, purifies negativity and creates much good karma, which stops suffering and brings us closer to the Buddha. We then visualize that the Buddha has received infinite happiness from the food and sends light to us so that our entire body is filled with it, from our head down to our feet, purifying it completely. His infinite knowledge dispels every single one of our negativities so that they no longer exist anywhere, neither inside nor outside the body—like a light switched on in a dark room. This will help us to soon attain all his wisdom.

Before eating say the offering prayer.

OM AH HUM

The supreme teacher, the precious Buddha;
The supreme refuge, the precious Dharma;
The supreme guides, the precious Sangha:
To the Three Rare Sublime Ones, the objects of refuge, I make this offering.

May we and those around us, in all our lives,
Never be separated from the Three Rare Sublime Ones,
Continuously make offerings to the Three Rare Sublime Ones,
And receive the blessings of the Three Rare Sublime Ones. [6]

When I'm in retreat on a mountain such as at Lawudo, it's customary for people to bring food, so it's very useful to visualize it as kaka. This way the mind is so free, unattached, relaxed. Sometimes the mind becomes one with the object, stuck to it, but visualizing the food as kaka is the most helpful way to overcome our attachment to it.

Interferences

When doing puja, inner, outer or secret interferences can happen. Outer interferers appear in fearful forms, like the images we see on some thangkas, but as light. These interferers appear as beings with wrathful aspects, outside and around each of us. They can also invite other interferers, spirits who disturb the teaching by making us unhappy and causing different kinds of sickness. Inner interferences are the delusions: greed, hatred and ignorance. The secret interference that destroys the Dharma is the impure view.

The outer interferences appear in the form of very wrathful beings surrounding us and also around the edge of the country. An offering of nectar from the skullcup is given to them as a gift to fulfill all their wishes. Because of this, they vow to never harm the practice, to leave this place, crossing the great ocean and leaving this earth. Their forms are like that of Yama and are just to exemplify the different spirits that are karmically created by mind. “Yama” means those who disturb our success in Dharma practice. If we do this visualization with confidence, it can be very useful, because then we can think that there are no inner and secret interferences left to disturb our practice.

Ignorance, suffering and so forth depend on one thing—our concept. If somebody recognized a doctor as a person who could completely cure them, they would have full confidence in them and the doctor could help them, whereas if they were doubtful and skeptical, it might be difficult to be cured. For this reason, having full confidence can be helpful.

In tantric practice, holding a wrong view such as of inherent existence is considered the secret interference. Stopping the secret interference depends on eliminating the inner interference and that depends on our study and listening to these teachings.

Since so much good karma from previous lives has brought this precious human rebirth, it's our responsibility not to waste even one hour of it. Since we are doing this practice with a bodhicitta motivation, it can also help many mother sentient beings as well as the world. Whatever mundane activity we do—even working for the government—becomes a Dharma activity with this motivation and is greatly beneficial.

Vajrasattva and Green Tara Meditations

One very powerful method of purification is to recite the Vajrasattva mantra while visualizing Vajrasattva above our head, in union with the consort, upon a moon and a sun disc and a lotus. Facing the same direction as us, his body is made of white light. It emits rays of light and nectar that drip down onto us like rain, purifying our negativities, eliminating our greed, ignorance and doubt, and turning our body into a body of light.

Tara, the female aspect of Buddha, has green and white forms. Green Tara encompasses all the power and great compassion of all buddhas. Remembering and praying to her constantly can help overcome dangers and catastrophes. Tara is especially effective in helping practitioners gain realizations, especially the teachings of bodhicitta through the method of exchanging oneself with others.

The green color of Tara's holy form symbolizes the granting of wishes and the symbolic purification of the defilements of envy and jealousy, as well as the purification of the ordinary impure aggregate of form. The fifth of the five transcendental wisdoms is the completely purified transcendental wisdom of the fulfillment of wishes. Her green color also symbolizes success in action.

Reciting her mantra and remembering her can bring success and realizations. Countless people who have faith in Tara have received the benefit of her blessings, including travelers of old that were pure practitioners. Within the Tibetan community, so many Tibetans have received great benefit from making prayers and pujas to Tara. Even family problems such as infertility and so forth can be overcome with Tara's assistance. One of her great qualities is that she quickly grants the wishes of those who petition her.

There is no way to attain enlightenment without attaining the realizations of the meaning of Tara's mantra.

OM refers to the Buddha's holy body, speech and mind and the three kayas or bodies of a buddha. It also symbolizes release from the sufferings of the three lower realms, from samsaric attachment and cyclic existence in general and from the great release of the subtle obscurations, from the attachment to liberation and the thought of perfect happiness for ourselves alone.

TARE symbolizes the release from temporal attachment and the sufferings of the three lower realms.

TUTTARE symbolizes release from samsaric attachment and from samsara itself.

TURE symbolizes great release from the subtle obscurations, attachment to liberation and the thought of perfect happiness for ourselves.

SOHA is said at the end of the mantra and enables the blessings of these syllables to take root in the heart, and to absorb and remain in the mind.

The Seven-Limb Prayer

[WFGS pp. 52–54]

Usually, people in retreat say the seven-limb prayer every day. This is the essential puja. The purpose of saying this prayer and meditating on its meaning is to purify the negativities, to lengthen the lifespan by stopping dangers and to create infinite good karma without physical activity. This prayer contains such great meaning. Meditating on what this prayer means creates such positive karma that it can never be destroyed by anger or heresy. Such is its power. It also purifies negative karma created from beginningless lifetimes until now. Even high bodhisattvas engage in this practice. The effect of this prayer depends on our motivation and understanding.

I prostrate reverently with my body, speech and mind.

I present clouds of every type of offering, both actually arranged and mentally emanated.

I confess all my negative actions and downfalls collected from beginningless time.

I rejoice in the virtues of ordinary beings and aryas.
Please remain until the end of cyclic existence
And turn the wheel of Dharma for transmigratory beings.
I dedicate my own and others' virtues to great enlightenment. [2]

The first of the seven limbs is *prostration*, the antidote to pride. Respect for a person is the remedy for pride. Pride is one of the worst negative minds. For instance, if we have pride in our own knowledge of some subject, and we think, “I know that,” pride causes us to feel that we have no need to listen to the knowledge of others, that we don’t want to be told about anything. A person with pride never develops their wisdom.

Sometimes this kind of mental state can arise when listening to the Dharma. We may think, “Why is the teacher repeating this?” Pride sometimes involves a negative form of shyness, the mind that is attached to the comfort of this life. Pride also means being attached to reputation, wanting others to understand our great level of knowledge and exclaim how clever we are.

A common Tibetan proverb says that the nature of pride is like a glass turned upside down. A person with strong pride is like this; nothing goes inside, and they will never become the receptacle of Dharma understanding.

The second of the seven limbs is the limb of *offering* that we have already talked about.

The third is the limb of *confession*.

The fourth limb of the seven limbs is the limb of *rejoicing*. Rejoicing is the best remedy for jealousy and envy. Rejoicing doesn’t depend on material or physical actions; it can be done while we are working, eating or sleeping. It can be done at any time and it is such a simple way to create good karma. When we see a person with many friends, we should naturally feel joyous, thinking how lucky that person is. This result is due to the good karma they created in past lives. It’s the same with somebody who has many possessions or children. Seeing this, we should feel joyous. Rather than feeling jealous of some couples who have harmonious and loving relationships, we should think that this is due to having created the cause for such experiences in past lives. So, why shouldn’t they experience the joyful result now?

Avoiding jealousy and envy and trying to feel joyful for others’ happiness creates so much positive karma. Feeling joy also keeps the mind at peace. If we are jealous and envious, we will feel very uncomfortable—like we have a big stone in our mind. But feeling joyful keeps the mind peaceful, without problems. When we are joyful, we don’t create a bad atmosphere or show a bad aspect to others.

We should also try not to feel jealous or envious of anyone who meditates and studies the Dharma a great deal. Instead, we should try to feel joyful. When bodhisattvas see another being attaining bodhicitta, their holy minds are extremely pleased, as if they have found a jewel. They feel very joyful that the other being understands the Dharma and is working for sentient beings due to karma. This kind of thinking keeps the mind relaxed, not bubbling like boiling water, and keeps peace between us and the other person.

When we judge other people, we exaggerate their negative qualities so much. Putting people down creates so much bad karma. Whenever we see other people creating positive karma, we can always create good karma ourselves by simply rejoicing. This not only keeps the mind happy, because there are infinite numbers of sentient beings, this creates infinite good karma.

This is a very simple way to purify and create good karma. The mind that rejoices in others' merits is always pure. There is no danger of having too many expectations from thinking like this, such as hoping that others will like us or having other desires for temporal rewards for the comfort of this life. The mind that is pleased that others create merit is always happy.

The fifth of the seven limbs is *requesting the buddhas to remain* in existence until samsara ends. The purpose of doing this is to request our own purification, that we may receive the path. It doesn't imply that the buddhas will become nonexistent. There are many different nirmanakaya or emanation bodies of the holy form of the buddhas—giving teachings, showing the path in many different worlds, and showing people the nature of suffering. When we request the buddhas to remain in existence, we are requesting that these emanations will remain longer in that form, so that many other beings can take teachings. For example, if His Holiness the Dalai Lama didn't exist, then all the hundreds of realized beings in this world would be without guidance, especially in these times. Asking them to remain until samsara ends is a cause for our own purification, as well as a cause for us to continually receive teachings.

When we are doing retreat, at this point in the practice we should offer from our heart a throne with a double vajra on the front, for longer life, and adorned with jewels, offering it to the nirmanakayas in order to make the conditions for us and other sentient beings to continuously receive teachings from them. This also becomes a cause for us to live longer.

The sixth of the seven limbs is *requesting the buddhas to reveal the teachings*. Here we should meditate that we are offering a golden Dharma wheel from our heart to the visualization of the Buddha. This is also purification. Stepping over Dharma books or pictures of the Buddha arises from great ignorance of the Dharma and is one of the worst things we can do, creating much negative karma.

The seventh limb is *dedicating the merits*. As grain burned by the fire no longer has the power to produce a plant, merits when dedicated become like the burned grain; they can no longer be destroyed by anger and heresy, minds that would otherwise cause the greatest destruction, destroying any undedicated merits and even delaying the results of merits that have been dedicated. For instance, even though somebody might have created incredible positive karma in this lifetime but then gets angry just before they die, unless that is purified, it will delay the result of that positive karma from arising. Say, they were about to realize bodhicitta, anger and heresy would block that realization and prevent enlightenment. This is why it's so vital to not let anger arise.

The perfect prayer must include motivation, action and dedication.

The Mandala Offering

This is only a rough presentation of the mandala offering. The practice is an incredibly profound one, but this explanation is enough for now.

In the mandala, there is the universe: the sun, the moon, the planets and the different worlds. Generally, there are many different ways to look at the universe. It can't always be the same shape. According to different people's karma, there are different ways of seeing it, and according to the time it appears in different shapes. The universe is also not something that permanently exists; it's possible for it to become empty. This earth, too, is just one of the worlds.

There are four levels up [above sea level] and four levels below, with the gods living above and the demigods living below. The demigods sometimes come up to fight. The principal cause of a human rebirth on this earth is karma and delusions. It's possible to be able to see these other karmically created realms when we have developed high psychic powers. They were described by Guru Shakyamuni Buddha and the ancient highly realized pandits to help us when we meditate to understand other beings' karma and how they live their lives.

Besides visualizing this mandala, we should meditate by offering this universe to the guru, to the enlightened ones, in order to complete our realizations and purification. This is one of the wisest ways to gain higher realizations. Even those with highly developed powers make mandala offerings. It's one of the most vast and important ways to create positive karma, especially if we understand every aspect of the evolution of karma and how different beings live.

We should practice like Naropa, whose main offering was in his mind—the symbol of the universe. Just after Tilopa threw the mandala in his face, Naropa saw the deity transformed by his guru in the sky. If he had not made that offering, his ignorance would never have allowed him to see the deity, his guru. This is such a great Mahayana tantric practice.

Yesterday, we talked about a mentally transformed offering, visualizing a universe full of jewels, and making the offering to the Guru Buddha we receive enlightenment and perfect peace from. As much as we can visualize, we create that much good karma. This is why the mandala offering is especially recognized as the best practice to do. Yogis consider it better to offer the mandala as many times a day as we can. Offering the mandala is the most beneficial practice to purify the mind.

After we visualize the mandala as it is explained here [WFGS pp. 55–65], we think that the outer mandala is the universe, and all our possessions are as explained. The inner mandala is the transformation of our body. All of our past, present and future virtuous actions are offerings around Mount Meru. There are also the inner, secret and suchness ways to offer the mandala.

Offering a mandala is a very powerful purification. Having visualized and offered the body, speech and mind and transformed them into the inner mandala and all existence in the universe into the outer mandala, we offer it to Guru Shakyamuni Buddha and think that it belongs completely to him—everything in our world, including friend, enemy and stranger. This will bring peace to our environment, for us and others. It will subdue the mind of partiality that creates

friend, enemy and stranger. World peace will never come about until the partial mind is eliminated.

We should think that all sentient beings have been friend, enemy and stranger in countless former lives, are so at present and will continue to be in future lives as long as we have a mind of partiality and discrimination and are not free from samsara.

Besides offering all the possessions of the universe, we also offer every enemy, stranger and friend, and all beings, and our body, speech and mind to Guru Shakyamuni Buddha. We completely give whatever is ours to him, dedicating it. Because it all belongs to him, there is no reason for attachment. The success of this practice depends on the mental decision.

As Guru Shakyamuni Buddha used his holy body, speech and mind to fulfill his wishes, now our body, speech and mind should only be used for the same purpose. Also, as we have completely dedicated enemy, friend and stranger to Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, we can't make other sentient beings our enemy or get angry with any of them. How can we get angry? Just as killing a Nepalese person would hurt the King of Nepal because they are his population, harming any sentient being, any enemy, is completely against the wishes of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha. It's like telling a lie. The Buddha's work is to free all sentient beings from suffering and bring them to enlightenment, and his wish is for us to do the same, to enlighten all beings from suffering. How can we lead them from suffering with a partial mind? In the same way, how can we be attached to any sentient being—to the friends we presently have in this southern continent or to any beings in other realms we may encounter in the future. This is a very shameful habit, to offer them in the mandala and yet still be attached to them. We can't be attached to them because we are responsible for fulfilling the Buddha's wishes to release sentient beings from suffering.

It's very effective for the mind to think like this. If we are attached to them, they also become attached to us, and this, too, is against his wishes. To release all sentient beings from suffering and to enlighten them, we must first attain enlightenment and release ourselves from negative minds. To achieve this, we must not be attached.

Then, as we offer the mandala, we visualize Guru Shakyamuni Buddha accepting our offering. The entire offering absorbs into his heart, as if it had been given into his hand. Then, we visualize light shining from him and absorbing into our body, causing all the interferences that block the realizations from guru devotion up until enlightenment to be purified. We receive every realization.

We should not offer the Sangha money that has been obtained by wrong means, such as from the sale of holy books, statues and so forth. This creates bad karma, degenerates wisdom and builds ignorance.

The Outer Mandala

[WFGS pp. 66–70]

The practice of offering the outer mandala is the practice of offering the universe without transforming ourselves, without the details of the inner mandala practice. In this practice, we offer the mandala as it is.

Mount Meru is not the kind of mountain that we can see, such as the Himalayas. It's in a different category, on a different level. The gods of the senses live here in the god realm. We can't see these levels with our human perception and without a great deal of control, but we have been born in all of these levels in the past. If we could develop the appropriate degree of clairvoyance through meditation in this lifetime, we could travel to these places. Mount Meru is karmically created, as is the world of form.

The Inner Mandala

[WFGS pp. 71–72]

The objects of my attachment, anger and ignorance—
Friends, enemies, strangers, body and enjoyments—
Without any sense of loss I offer them.
Please kindly accept them,
And bless me to pacify the three poisons in dependence on their own objects. [8]

Although we say the prayer at certain times, we shouldn't regard this as a job lasting only a few hours. Our mind should live in the meaning of the prayer all the time. It should be said from the heart, in such a way that we feel a weight lifted from our mind. It's best if done each day.

We make the strong decision to give up attachment to the negative minds of greed, hatred and ignorance. Offering those objects of our three poisonous minds—our friends, enemies, strangers and enjoyments—to Guru Shakyamuni Buddha and to the other enlightened beings, we should think that they now belong to them and are no longer ours. Therefore, we can't feel attached or averse to them. All our possessions should be visualized in the form of the mandala. A strong decision makes the best mandala.

To “give up” doesn't mean actual separation from body and mind, for then we would cease to exist; it means giving up the attachment from the heart. This is the most important thing. These things are no longer ours; they are offered to the enlightened beings in the same way that we would sincerely give something to a friend. Then, because the enemies, strangers and so forth now belong to Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, we must take good care of them.

If the mandala offering is made in the morning, it can be remembered if problems arise during the day. With a strong and conscious mind, we can't get angry at anybody. Nor can we become attached to gifts or anything else. If we were to become attached, we should feel positive shame.

The Importance of the Right Motivation

The nature of the motivation is what determines the nature of our meditation; for perfect meditation the motivation must also be perfect. If dirty water is used to make tea or prepare food, the result is not good. Even if the water were to be chemically purified, its taste is spoiled, so again the tea isn't perfect. Just as the quality of the water is important here, so is the quality of the motivation important for our Dharma practice in determining whether our actions will be virtuous or not. If the motivation is impure, our meditation can become the cause of suffering

and confusion. Therefore, to avoid wasting time—and wasting our life—we should take care to prepare our motivation well.

Preparation and motivation are more important in Dharma work than in our mundane life. We might get fired from our job because we were late, but this may or may not make any difference finding another job. However, meditating with a nonvirtuous mind will certainly cause problems, even in this lifetime, so our motivation must be as pure as possible.

Why should we care if it's virtuous or nonvirtuous? Because everything we do, including this meditation course, is in order to find some deeper happiness. This means that our actions are done with the expectation of happiness. Besides a bodhisattva who experiences suffering for the benefit of all sentient beings, no sentient being, including us, desires suffering. Most of us don't wish to experience suffering for ourselves, let alone for all sentient beings.

Therefore, the solution is to seek the cause of happiness. In order to do this, it's vital to recognize the cause of suffering. Wanting happiness yet still creating the cause of suffering is like a blind man walking toward a precipice. Numberless beings even now are in great suffering, just as that blind man is.

Most people think in a materialistic way, seeing the cause of suffering as a lack of material possessions. They fail to realize that seeking happiness from external conditions is never able to eliminate suffering and bring happiness; the relentless search for more material possessions is itself a cause of suffering.

Food, for example, is neither the principal cause of happiness nor suffering. It can fill the stomach yet it can also cause diarrhea. If it were the principal cause of happiness, it should always bring happiness and never change to suffering, and yet this never happens. If we were to eat nothing but cake, believing it was the principal cause of happiness, we would get bored after only three or four days. This is the nature of the mind that finds the pleasure it experiences at first turns into suffering afterwards. These feelings are merely a creation of the mind. Thus, such external methods are not the principal causes of happiness.

The real principal cause of happiness can only be something that can never change into suffering; once we have attained it, we will always have it. It is that which is in the mind; it is a mental state. Similarly, the principal cause of suffering is also a mental state. The cause of happiness is virtuous action, and the cause of suffering is nonvirtuous action. The creator of the actions of our body, speech and mind is our motivation.

At the moment, we can see only two different forms of sentient beings, humans and animals, but there are many other kinds of beings that we are unaware of in different realms that we can't see. Some of these living beings can see us. Each being sees different people and places in different ways, with different feelings arising for each. If we were to check up to see what causes the difference, perhaps we would understand how these differences occur.

In Tibet, there was a very famous holy statue created by a miraculous bodhisattva. Every day, the area around it was very crowded with many people coming to make offerings and receive blessings. Yet one person saw a dog instead of the statue. If the mind is that which is clear and knowing, when we misperceive something, that shows there is some delusion clouding our

consciousness. This person who saw only the dog instead of the statue that the others saw was deluded by lack of positive karma. His negative karma had built up in his mind so that he was habituated to seeing negative things and, because of that, he was unable to see the holy statue.

Another example of mental obscurations created by nonvirtuous actions is the mind of the person who, attending teachings given by a lama who had a large pile of texts in front of him, only saw the lama eating from a large pile of meat.

There are many other types of beings in the world, and we should not limit our understanding of them. There are essentially six different types in the uncontrolled cycle of death and rebirth, the cycle of samsara. Samsara is created by ignorance and ignorant actions. We are included amongst the samsaric beings. The six different realms are divided into three upper realms (the realms of god, demigod and human) and three lower realms (the realms of animal, hungry ghost and hell being). All beings in this cyclic existence called samsara are living in ignorance.

We should think, “I must receive enlightenment only to help release other suffering beings, besides myself, from samsara. In this way. I will meditate.”

Checking Internally Before Checking the External World

[WFGS p. 75]

“Checking internally” is the inner method to discover the negative mind, which we must fully recognize as the creator of suffering by understanding its wrong views. “Checking the external world” is done after we have checked internally, when the outer objects and wrong views are more easily recognizable. Then, we can see our misunderstanding, our mis-knowing of subject and object and how that creates conflicts. Then, we can understand how to overcome them

Making the mind positive and holy depends on our recognition of the deluded minds that make us create nonvirtue and of the false object that our negative mind believes in. Without recognizing the creator of the negative mind and its object, there is no way to make the mind positive and holy. Without recognizing and avoiding the false object created by the negative relative mind, there is no way to see the true positive object and its absolute nature.

Because each person’s mind is a mixture of positive and negative, each sees the same object differently. When viewed with a negative mind, we see the object falsely. To be holy depends on the creation of the positive mind, the mind that sees an object in its true nature, as it actually exists. To see it like this depends on recognizing its opposite, how the negative mind creates the object in relation to its mode of perception. Because that mode is false, the object it perceives is false. Through this process, we can destroy the negative mind and cultivate the positive one. This is the way to become virtuous and to eliminate problems.

The solution to problems doesn’t depend on destroying the object, making it nonexistent. For example, if we are suffering because of a thorn in our flesh, although we might hate the thorn for causing the suffering, completely destroying it—burning it and so forth—will not solve the problem completely and forever, because we can easily get another thorn in our flesh at some other time and place. The external solution is flawed because it doesn’t even help externally.

Before this earth even existed, we experienced great suffering from thorns. Even in the future we will continue to have problems with external objects. To destroy a thorn in one place and time doesn't make all thorns nonexistent.

More importantly, trying to find an external solution doesn't destroy the relationship between our suffering now and that of the future. For example, we have an enemy we hate and we want to be rid of them. This negative mind of anger is created by ignorance. We might kill the enemy with the mistaken belief that they will never be our enemy again. But they will be reborn, possibly as an animal that attacks and kills us. Killing the enemy in this lifetime is nonsensical because that enemy will continue to be our enemy again in many lifetimes. All this one negative action gives us is great suffering, keeping us in ignorance longer, holding us in the cycle of death and rebirth for so many eons. As long as we keep ourselves in the suffering realms, further ignorance is always produced. It's entirely our fault that they became our enemy, not theirs, and because of that, we keep ourselves in the prison of ignorance, samsara.

Greed, hatred and ignorance create problems. Ignorance is the fundamental cause of all suffering, producing greed and anger. No problem can ever be completely ceased until we are released from ignorance, so the whole problem is only our own fault. Even killing all enemies or totally destroying a particular place will never bring a final solution. Ignorance only causes more problems; it never cuts off the problem.

The mind checking internal causes and relating them to the external world can never create actions done with ignorance. On the other hand, miss-seeing the world through ignorance only creates greater problems that become more long-lasting and habituated, causing us to remain trapped in the eternal cycle of suffering that is samsara without even bringing any solution.

A solution is the complete cutting off of the problem between the object and the subject, the cessation of the negative mind that is the creator of suffering. To bring about such a perfect solution we should check the internal causes—greed, hatred and ignorance—and the way they distort our thinking. In this way, we can realize which object is true and which is not. With correct understanding, we can develop the positive mind, and through this all problems can be ceased.

Much of what is taught in Buddhism is about understanding and eliminating the negative mind. Without checking the internal causes of suffering, we will always make mistakes. There will be no solutions, only problems. Understanding the external world requires understanding the internal world, our mind.

Chapter 3. The Perfect Human Rebirth



Lama Yeshe, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, Lama Lhundrup, Anila Ann and other monks in a group photo from the Fourth Meditation Course, 1973. Photo by Brian Beresford.

The Negative Mind

The essential guru yoga practice brings about realizations that lead to enlightenment. This is like fuel for a rocket. Discipline is the main thing: when we eat food, when we go to bed before sleep, we should have the discipline of meditation, a discipline for the mind. Because the main purpose of meditation is to clear the mind of negativity and impurity, we should meditate many times during the day. In this way, the sick mind can be cured. If it didn't depend on our own efforts, it would be impossible, but it's very possible. Therefore, we must each meditate in order to subdue our mind.

Realizations cannot be transplanted, and the only way they can be attained is through following a method based on discipline, based on our own efforts. This is just what Guru Shakyamuni Buddha did, following the methods of the previous buddhas. After him countless beings practiced correctly and attained enlightenment. Therefore, it's also possible for us. All buddhas were sentient beings, suffering and so forth at one time. The difference between them and us is that they practiced the teachings correctly and so became enlightened more quickly.

The mind that craves eating food, drinking tea, putting on beautiful clothes and so forth is an attached, negative mind, wanting to enjoy comfort and worldly happiness, seeing the objects of its attachment as beautiful. For example, think about the peanut butter we offer here at Kopan. Delicious! The untethered mind sees it and rushes to it. We don't check, we don't recognize the character of our own mind; we just let the mind act as it wants. We must check and bring the mind back. Besides being an attached mind, the mind that sees the object as beautiful and wants

to possess it for reasons of comfort is a selfish mind, taking more care of itself than of other beings.

Attachment is the creator of all suffering, causing even greater ignorance to develop. The attached mind leads to nonvirtuous actions that make us even more ignorant. Attachment is the servant of ignorance. If we help our attachment grow, we help our ignorance grow. Attachment comes from ignorance, from the unknowing mind. Fundamentally it arises from the mistaken mind. Hatred also arises from this mistaken mind. They are like a sick person's possessions. Nobody wants to touch the body or belongings of someone who is sick with an infectious disease like T.B. And yet the sickness is in the mind; it's not related to the physical body or the possessions. The suffering result comes back to our sense of self; we are suffering physically because of our mental suffering. When we practice the Dharma, we are disciplining ourselves to subdue the various negative minds in order to overcome our suffering.

The whole reason everybody—all people and animals—try to avoid problems is because nobody wants to suffer. Unless we can overcome the cause of suffering, that fear of suffering will continue. We can't overcome the cause with good food or beautiful apartments. Even the richest family in the world has no solution to suffering. They are all still ignorant of what suffering truly is and of its cause.

Practicing the Dharma and meditating correctly will ensure that we stop our suffering now and that we will no longer have to experience it in the future. Some people think that Dharma practice is only for the poor—for beggars and so forth, or that Dharma and meditation are only for the “crazy.” Such people do not know the meaning and purpose of the Dharma and meditation. They think that it is merely a fad or something. Even if they're in a place where Dharma exists, they don't attend a meditation center due to ignorance. They think that because they have wealth, a house, a spouse, friends and so forth, they don't suffer. They see suffering as disease, injury or starvation, not recognizing the nature of suffering. Their concept of suffering is, “One day things are OK, and another day there are problems.” But this is not the definition of suffering, and they continue to mentally suffer.

Suffering is not knowing the underlying cause of what we do, of cause and effect; it's not knowing the difference between negative and positive actions. Not recognizing these or not knowing our own ignorance is suffering; and so too is not recognizing the nature of our own mind. From the Dharma point of view, freedom from ignorance is freedom from suffering.

The basis of world politics is greed, hatred, jealousy, pride and so forth. The basis of the Buddha's politics is to prevent the branches of the negative mind from arising.

When we eat, we should visualize the Buddha abiding in our heart, thinking, “I shall make this food offering to the Buddha abiding at my heart, so that I can attain enlightenment by completing all the virtues that lead to enlightenment and by purifying all negative minds with the total aim of guiding all sentient beings to enlightenment. Furthermore, if I eat this with greed and selfishness, it only strengthens this greedy, selfish mind, which disturbs my happiness and the path to enlightenment. The nature of all this food is the Buddha's sacred mind; it does not belong to me but to him.” The object is to overcome our attachment, so, remembering its shortcomings, we eat with an unattached mind.

When there is trouble with the body, there is trouble with the mind. A clean body doesn't result in a clean mind, but a clean mind does result in a clean body.

How can we sentient beings purify the negative mind? We can be released from suffering by seeing absolute truth, how things really exist. All the meditations and disciplines we practice are for the purpose of fully realizing the absolute truth. Of this, in *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* Shantideva says,

[9:1] All of these practices were taught
By the Mighty One for the sake of wisdom,
Therefore, those who wish to pacify suffering
Should generate this wisdom. [9]

To do so, we need a lot of help. We have to do so much purification, so much cleaning. All meditations and practices are for the purpose of purifying the obscurations of the mind in order to see the absolute truth, which is the method to cut off ignorance. Then, through our own mental practice, perfect happiness will arise.

We should not talk too much because this distracts the mind. For example, if we talk while trying to listen to a lecture, we miss the point, or while we are eating, we forget to notice the taste of the food. Attention to what we are doing strengthens the concentration and brings us closer to enlightenment. It stops selfishness and attachment from entering the mind. Such discipline must continue until the mind is purified, not just for the duration of this course.

The negative mind has been obscured by many delusions for numberless previous lives; it cannot be purified by practicing for only a month or a year. We need to persevere over a very long time, because the negative mind has no beginning and is very powerful. It's an incredible undertaking, but the most profitable job there is. A crippled beggar who practices Dharma is actually doing the best work. He is the truly rich man.

We must not cling to our delusions. We need a guru to attain enlightenment. When listening to our guru, we can question what they say, but if we were to listen while waiting for mistakes, that is listening with a negative mind.

The Wrong View: Samsara

The reason we are still in samsara is that from beginningless time we have had the wrong concept that sees the suffering realms as realms of pleasure and happiness. This view has betrayed us, showing samsara as opposite to its true nature. We must avoid seeing greed as good.

Medicine, food and clothing should be used without attachment, to keep the body healthy and allow us a long life for the purpose of the pure practice of the Dharma. While we should look after our body, we should also regard it without attachment, as a temporary dwelling place of the mind. If we can develop a deep understanding of the suffering realms and a strong fear of ending up there, we will stop using these things as mundane comforts. Just as we feed an animal to make it healthy and strong for work, we should feed our body and use it for Dharma practice.

Usually as we are feeding, clothing or pampering our body, we feel, “This is me; this is my body,” as if it’s a permanent possession to be had forever. This view is not only the greatest hindrance to the realization of impermanence, it also leads to greater attachment to the body. The feeling of permanence deep in our heart blocks the ability to see objects and ourselves in their true nature. If we were to realize impermanence, we would see how all objects are changing every second. This would transform the mind from negative to positive, stopping us from wasting time and giving us more time to practice the Dharma.

For example, a Tibetan meditator was meditating on impermanence so intensely that when he left his cave for a pipi, he had no time to cut the thorns that had grown up around the entrance and often tore his robes. Thinking he might not live to return, he didn’t waste time cutting the thorns that caught him. For years, he didn’t cut those thorns and spent more time meditating.

Working and living for our own mundane comforts and enjoyments alone is leading a life like an animal.

The concept of “world peace” depends on an absence of war, which is enforced by the use of force, control of other countries, destruction of property and so on—the complete opposite of Dharma peace. The former is endless, but the latter has an end. Trouble and happiness do not exist by themselves; they are concepts of the mind.

Delusions can be gross or subtle. The objects of the deluded mind are nonexistent; the objects it sees are illusions, hallucinations. The creator of that mistaken view sees the false, nonexistent object as existent. After delusions and the gross negative minds cease, there are still the subtle obscurations, which are subtle imprints of the delusions that remain on the mindstream. After these cease, the mind is completely pure, enlightened. It’s easier to cease the gross delusions. An arhat has done this but is not yet fully enlightened due to the subtle obscurations that remain.

The mind purified of delusion is free from ignorance and the twelve links. But we still have subtle obscurations and go to a pure land where there is no death and rebirth. Here, we attain enlightenment by following the higher path. Some beings attain a pure land with ignorance, not following the bodhisattva’s path, and without bodhicitta, but having other realizations. They then have to destroy their delusions by following the bodhisattva’s path. Even though they are out of samsara, without bodhicitta they can’t become enlightened.

The Eight Freedoms And Ten Richnesses

[WFGS pp. 83–85]

The *eight freedoms* are also sometimes termed the eight “rests”—the human is “resting” from these restless states. The eight freedoms are being free from being born as (1) a hell being, (2) a hungry ghost, (3) an animal, (4) a long-life god, (5) a barbarian, or (6) in a dark age when no buddha has descended, (7) holding wrong views, and (8) with mental or physical problems that preclude us from understanding the Dharma.

The *ten richnesses* or endowments refer to the ten things that give us the opportunity to practice the Dharma perfectly.

The first of the ten richnesses is *birth as a human being*. But this is not enough. Think about how many humans lack the other richnesses.

The second of the ten is *being born in a religious country*, which means a country in which Buddhism is present. If we are born in a place where there is no Buddhism, it means that there are no fully ordained monks, and therefore we cannot become ordained. Ordination is a discipline that protects the mind from negative actions, freeing the mind, keeping it away from delusions. This is a quick and profitable way to practice the Dharma and to reach enlightenment. As the number of monks increase, so the teachings of the Dharma increase.

In a religious country, there are people—monks and nuns—keeping the different levels of ordinations and precepts. This enables us to practice morality, as these are the people who grant the ordinations. We are extremely lucky to be born in a country where there are such people. Some may think that this has nothing to do with them, that it's only a tradition or custom, but the person who becomes ordained is very fortunate, because keeping the different precepts is a quick way to be led to enlightenment and freed from suffering. People who observe such precepts are in the safest place; it protects them against the outside enemies and their harmful actions, like a protective fence surrounding them. If an ordained member of the Sangha were to go outside that fence, to break the ordination, there would be so many problems. Without the fence of the vows, there is no protection from danger, making it easy to be disturbed by living beings, elements and so forth. Ordination protects us from ignorance and creates positive action.

The third richness is *being born with perfect organs*.

The fourth richness is *avoiding the five immediate negativities*, also called the five uninterrupted negative karmas. They are killing your father or mother, killing an arhat, maliciously drawing blood from a buddha and creating a schism in the Sangha. Avoidance of these five immediate negativities is necessary for ordination. These extreme negativities are very difficult to purify. An arhat is beyond the suffering of samsara, so they don't suffer when they are killed, but it creates very bad karma for the killer.

The fifth richness is *having a belief in all three divisions of the Dharma*: the Vinaya, the Sutra and the Abhidharma. Unless we are born with a belief in these three divisions of the teachings, we can't develop our wisdom. Realizations depend on the complete understanding and practice of these teachings. Within the three divisions, the Abhidharma contains the explanations on the evolution of the universe, both about the mind and the outer universe. The Sutra explains much about the path and the absolute true nature of reality. The Vinaya gives the details of the precepts and ordinations, the necessity of taking them and many other things.

The sixth is *being born during a non-dark period*, a period when a buddha has descended and there are teachings. This is a non-dark period because there are still highly realized beings in the world who have the continued lineage of the teachings from the Buddha.

The seventh is *being shown the teachings of Buddha or his followers*.

The eighth richness is the *existence of the complete teachings* in the world. Our present gurus have received the teachings from other gurus back to Guru Shakyamuni Buddha continuously, without

a break in the lineage. The Tibetan Dharma practitioners look upon the present teachers as representatives of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha. If there were no existence of the experience of the teachings in the minds of beings, then something would be missing. It's not enough for the teachings alone to exist; there must be realized beings.

The ninth richness is that *there are still followers of the path* of Buddha's teachings. We must follow the path of Buddha's teachings as our future enlightenment is only a creation of our own mind, and so is our suffering. There would be no suffering for all sentient beings if there were no reason for it, but all suffering is a creation of the mind. It's vital to know this at the beginning.

Without looking for ourselves, we will be unable to find the solution to our problems for hundreds of eons. Yet, just as we can be our own worst enemy, we can also become our own best friend and helper. Through the purification of the mind, each human being can achieve enlightenment; the time it takes depends entirely on the person. If suffering were not our own creation, there would be no need to create our own enlightenment—but there is no suffering that is not a creation of mind, and if we don't try from our side, we won't find the solution to our problems.

However, when we try to perform positive actions there is often much interference from the negative mind. That is why there are fewer holy beings than non-holy beings. It's difficult to be a holy person with a well-subdued mind because there are so many disturbances to our positive actions. Our negative minds interfere with the development of our Dharma practice. Even outside evil spirits and non-living disturbances such as elements afflict us. But when there is pure positive mind, there is no way that the interferences can disturb us, because these things arise from the negative mind. So today, to prevent those interferences as much as possible, the quickest method is to practice the Dharma.

Consider two countries, India and China for example, who wanted to create a war. India had some kind of negative aim toward China—they wanted to get some goods—so they put a bridge across the border. Then, they had a disagreement and because of the bridge the Chinese were able to cross easily and cause many problems. So, the bridge that was built by the Indians for that negative reason now causes the great problem of war. If those negative aims hadn't been there, there wouldn't have been the bridge, and there wouldn't have been the problem. This is an example of how the negative mind creates problems. None of the interferences are the fault of the interference itself, but are only a creation of the negative mind, which creates the cause for the interference to happen. It's just the condition.

Each topic in the Dharma practice is correlated. That's why it is such a vast, profound and deep subject. There are two perfect guides. One is internal—the inner being we become—and one is external—the one who gives us the teachings. The outer guide is the causal guide and the inner guide is the resultant guide. When we talk about an enlightened one, we shouldn't think that we are talking about something separate from ourselves. It's within.

The tenth of the ten richnesses is *having the necessary conditions to practice the Dharma*, such as receiving the kindness and compassion of others. We must have a compassionate guru and somebody to help with food, clothes and so forth. In Tibet, a practitioner's life was easy as far as begging went, because all the people greatly respected anybody who observed the precepts. Some

benefactors gave food with faith and others with compassion, so there were no distracting problems of temporal needs. In most parts of the world, this is more difficult.

So, there are the chances to practice the Dharma.

The purpose of meditating on these eight freedoms and ten richnesses is to understand what it would be like to be stuck in the opposite states that we are now currently free from. For instance, if we imagine being born as a heretic, somebody with wrong views, we would see how ignorant we are, and what bad karma we can create. With such a mind, we would surely be reborn in the hell realm, where the suffering is unendurable. In the hot hell, it's as if the earth itself were made of red-hot burning iron with no escape and no control or, in the cold hell, where it's as if the body is one with the ice of the realm.

We need to discover how precious and vital having this perfect human rebirth really is, to help us understand and develop the mind, and to escape from suffering. The human birth has great freedom compared to the other states. When we are honest and see how lazy we are, following ignorance, how even if we receive the teachings we don't follow them, we can use this meditation to destroy our laziness. We then do everything we can to not be born in these non-free states. It gives us an answer to the question of the purpose of the human life—its great freedom to practice Dharma and to escape from suffering.

It's important to see the benefits of the perfect human rebirth so that when we come into contact with the teachings, we use them and aren't lazy. Therefore, this meditation comes first within the lamrim. If we don't understand the sufferings of other rebirths, laziness will stop us from using this method. The Buddha's method is like this. Understanding the importance of treasuring this perfect human rebirth stops so many dangers, therefore this meditation is extremely precious. With it, we can escape ignorance and attain enlightenment. This is the technique of such highly realized pandits as Nagarjuna and Lama Tsongkhapa.

Meditating on the eight freedoms and ten endowments is not just counting numbers; it has great purpose. By deeply understanding the examples, we come to realize the value of the human rebirth. Unless we know about these lower realms, we won't see the importance of this human realm. This is due to not realizing the deep ignorance of the beings in other realms.

We should feel so happy when we examine this. If we can sacrifice our lives for our possessions, why can't we work for all sentient beings who have served and helped us since beginningless time? Not just feeling joyful about having as much as we have, we should prepare to receive whatever is missing in the future. We should create good karma so as to be reborn with perfect organs in the perfect situation to further develop our Dharma practice. During our meditation time, we should remember it all.

In this meditation, we should feel joyful for our perfect human rebirth. Then in the true Dharma way, we should take care of it and not waste it. On this basis we can develop our Dharma practice. Without it, there's no possibility of following the true path. It was from this basis of the perfect human rebirth that the great yogis such as Milarepa gained enlightenment.

The Reasons the Perfect Human Rebirth Is Highly Useful

[WFGS pp. 85–87]

When we really check up to see how useful the perfect human rebirth can be, we see that it stops the ignorance of using our lives as if we were animals. We should also compare our precious human rebirth to the lives of those humans who can't practice the Dharma. It's a sad thing to consider an animal born as a human.

The selfish mind suffers from the concept of self-cherishing based on the delusion of the truly existing self. This ignorant, impure mind prevents everlasting happiness. Because samsaric happiness cannot be everlasting, these mental hindrances must be destroyed. The wise person doesn't care for their present, small suffering because they know that, unless they purify their mind, their future suffering will be great. Greed, hatred and ignorance are not useful, even for a moment. This is the most important thing to realize. Kaka is better than chocolate since it doesn't create a positive or negative mind and so is less of a hindrance to existence.

The great yogi Milarepa, Lama Tsongkhapa and other ascetic lamas lived in the essential practice of the Dharma by begging, under great temporal difficulties, before their powers were well developed. But they developed great energy from understanding the nature of ignorance, how it causes suffering. Also, by using themselves as examples, they understood the suffering of the great numbers of other beings. They renounced their own greed, hatred and ignorance and had the great determination to defeat their own negativities. In this way, their compassion became energizing—using the knowledge of their own suffering to understand that of others—and they could help other beings more quickly.

For the great yogis, each mental or physical problem that arose helped their realizations and practice, since they deeply understood the cause as rooted in ignorance, which they further tried to control. Instead of feeling angry with other people, they would feel it for their own ignorance, the only real enemy.

The perfect human rebirth is highly useful for many reasons:

1. We can be free from samsara.
2. We can become a bodhisattva.
3. We can become an arhat.
4. We can attain bodhicitta.
5. We can attain other realizations
6. We can also attain the rank of a wish-granting king.
7. We can experience worldly benefits.

It is highly useful because *we can be free from samsara*. This is our one chance to end the round of samsara and end all the mental sufferings and worries that we don't desire. Yet we still keep on suffering as we have been from beginningless time. We often think that this suffering is new, but this is only due to our lack of understanding—each experience of suffering has no beginning, yet still we haven't stopped it completely. We have always had imperfect births, births in irreligious countries where there is no Buddhadharma, thus creating more bad karma. So, this time, having

attained the opportunities of the eight freedoms and ten richnesses, we have the possibility to extinguish suffering because we have so much freedom to practice the Dharma. This is the chance we have never had before. With this life, we have the freedom to break the continuity of suffering.

If there was no suffering mind, there would be no suffering body. Through Dharma practice, we work to stop suffering by realizing the absolute nature of existence. The reason we are born as a human with the freedom to practice the Dharma is the meaning of life. This is why you have come here from the West to do this meditation course. An airplane is used for flying in the air, not in the jungle or in the bushes. The perfect human rebirth has been created by our past lives for this vital purpose. It's now in our hands to do it; it's up to us, the pilots of our perfect human rebirth.

We are trying to figure out how to best use our lives. How quickly we travel to America depends on the cost. Similarly, the time it takes to reach enlightenment depends on our determination and the strength of our practice. The fewer mistakes in the practice, the shorter the time—but the practice must be pure, for purity is its foundation.

Just as different degrees of merit are created depending on our understanding, different degrees of merit are created by practices such as circumambulating. Going around a blessed holy object such as a stupa creates merit even for somebody of limited understanding, because the object itself is associated with the holy minds of so many buddhas, to guide sentient beings and to allow them to create positive karma. This is especially true for the famous stupas such as that in Bodhgaya. Because so many highly realized beings are associated with it, these objects remain holy until the earth is destroyed. Having been blessed by the holy beings, due to the power from the object's side, even being near such holy objects purifies negativity and creates positive karma, even though we may not have a pure motivation as we are circumambulating them.

There are so many ways to create good karma, but without understanding the Dharma, they can't bring quick enlightenment. Any action done with the expectation of comfort for this life is negative. Destroying the attachment to the happiness of this life alone is the purpose of the meditations of the practitioner of lower capability.

The student of one guru, with strong will and faith, cleaned the guru's house for many years. Due to this good karma, he achieved enlightenment, despite difficulties in receiving teachings.

Also, in this lifetime, even if we don't attain enlightenment, *we can become bodhisattvas* and attain clairvoyance to see the many past and future lives of countless beings. According to the level of realization, we can travel to the many other realms and help the beings there. As our realizations become higher, we will see more and more buddhas and hear their teachings. This is also possible in this lifetime.

With this perfect human rebirth, *we can become a bodhisattva.*

It's also possible *we can become an arhat*, released from rebirth in samsara and having achieved everlasting happiness without going through the bodhisattva's path.

With this perfect human rebirth, *we can attain bodhicitta*, the mind that seeks enlightenment in order to benefit all other sentient beings.

We can also *attain other realizations*, such as a direct realization of emptiness and the true nature of mind. Our Dharma understanding arises from our practice.

With the perfect human rebirth, *we can also attain the rank of a wish-granting king* and have possession of many universes.

We can experience worldly benefits that naturally arise from the creation of positive karma.

We don't usually pay attention to the usefulness of our human life, due to a lack of understanding of the Dharma. But now we are checking it to see.

If we look at the sufferings of lower beings, such as animals, we will see just how precious our human rebirth really is. This is important to know because clearly understanding these differences causes us to not use our human life as if we were animals. In this way, we destroy our ignorance and use our human rebirth for a higher purpose. The more we realize this, the more determination we will have to do this.

Animals do things such as sleeping, eating, desiring happiness for themselves, killing other beings and having sexual intercourse. If we do the same things as an animal, it makes no sense; it gives no purpose to our birth and life as a human being. There are far more suffering animals than there are human beings. Overwhelmed by suffering, how can any animal do anything positive?

The mind is beginningless. From beginningless time, we have taken rebirth in each of the six samsaric realms, forever circling in the cycle of death and rebirth created by ignorance. After one life has finished, the mind takes another body, either in the same realm or a different one. This is determined by what karmic seeds ripen at our death, seeds created by the positive or negative actions of our body, speech and mind. From beginningless time, we have been experiencing taking the bodies of human beings, animals, hungry ghosts and hell beings, all depending on the karma that ripens at the time of our death.

For instance, in one day, one month, or one year, we create all kinds of different karmas for future rebirths in all six samsaric realms—positive and negative ones. The experience of creating karma is beginningless. We are even creating karma at the time of our death. At the time of death, of all the countless karmic imprints we have on our mindstream, whichever is the closer, heavier or more habitual brings the result for the next life. If it's the karma for rebirth as a pig, the craving and grasping for a pig's body arise and push us into the link of becoming, where we will be reborn as a pig. At the death of the pig, if the karma to be reborn as a human being is the closest, heaviest and most habitual, we will take a human rebirth. The positive karmas for a human rebirth are almost invariably created in the human realm; in the lower realms it's nearly impossible to create such karma. Because we can break the continuous, beginningless chain of negative karma in this human realm alone, this rebirth is extremely useful and precious for our escape from samsara.

Meditating without overcoming our attachment to our sense of self, our possessions or our reputation can never purify us or bring enlightenment. We are fortunate in that we have a method

of making even our breath beneficial to each sentient being. Because this exchange of selfish concern for the concern for others is formless, we can't see it, but each time as we exhale, we give all our happiness and merit to all other sentient beings and create the perfect peace of enlightenment. We should therefore feel most fortunate. In the past, we were born as a human being many times, but we have wasted those lives, using them only for our own self-interest. So, now we shall use this human life for other sentient beings as well as offering service to the infinite enlightened beings. We become the Buddha's best servant by working for sentient beings, because enlightened beings exist only for the benefit of sentient beings, to lead them from suffering to enlightenment. When we help sentient beings, it's the best offering to the enlightened beings, like the soldier who fights to protect the country and serves the king.

Because the vast majority of people on this planet have no freedom to practice the Dharma, their lives are not so useful. There are so many human beings on earth, but the perfect human rebirth is very rare. And compared to nonhuman beings, there are so few humans; they are rarer than jewels. The more we can understand how little freedom others have, the more we can appreciate how precious our human life is. Then, it's easy to renounce worldly concern and use our rebirth for sentient beings, in contrast to ordinary people who dedicate their lives to obtaining material possessions and reputation, unable to find happiness in their worldly concerns and unable to discover Dharma happiness.

Of the two types of happiness, worldly happiness and Dharma happiness, beings of the lower realms are unable to experience either. While beings of the upper realms might be able to obtain some worldly happiness, very few are able to experience Dharma happiness. Not having met the Dharma, they are forever chasing worldly happiness alone. We have the most fortunate opportunity in that we have a human rebirth and, more than that, a perfect human rebirth where we have met the Dharma and the perfect virtuous friend and we have all the conditions to make the utmost use of this life. If we can't see that, we can easily waste this life, not using it wisely.

Why is there so little peace on this earth? Why are we not released from ignorance? Why are there so few beings with pure, well-subdued minds and so many with suffering minds? The reason is that the vast majority of beings have no understanding of the Dharma's perfect methods or of the usefulness of the perfect human rebirth in allowing them to practice the Dharma. As a result, they spend their lives pursuing happiness in unskillful ways, according to their worldly understanding. This limited view holds that life, which is meaningless, is only to be used in a worldly way: This short-sighted, sad view brings loneliness and boredom, unhappiness and dissatisfaction. We are so lucky that we can recognize the wise and beneficial alternative way of using this life.

If material possessions were the cause of perfect peace and happiness, we would already have perfect happiness, because in past lives we have had great wealth and numberless possessions. But even with that wealth the mind is still ignorant. To transform the mind's inclination from negative to positive is the way to perfect peace. No jewel in existence can destroy even one of the thousands of negative minds we have; it can't cut off even one of the negative mind's tendencies. But the perfect human rebirth can be used to completely cease the billions of problems and their foundation: ignorance. Nothing can compare to one lifetime of a perfect human rebirth, even wish-granting jewels filling infinite space, because these jewels are unable to stop the continuity of even one single type of suffering. Stopping some degree of material suffering for a brief period through material means is not the end of suffering; it's not the cessation of all suffering. True cessation from the Dharma point of view is ending the continuity of suffering.

Unless we can recognize the nature of suffering, we can't recognize its cause. Nor can we recognize perfect happiness and the way to attain it. Trying to use worldly methods to obtain a temporary pause in our suffering only creates the cause for more suffering. Beings who do so are preparing for future suffering while thinking that they are stopping it. Because of attachment to temporal pleasures, they work to fulfill the desire for momentary freedom from unpleasant things. We have been working for attachment; we are slaves to it. If we were to truthfully check all of our actions, we would see that it's our habit to always follow our attachment to pleasure. As the three negative minds always see the object in the wrong way, not in the ultimate way, they always cause problems.

Wasting the Perfect Human Rebirth

In *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* Shantideva says,

[4:17] With behavior such as this,
I shall not win a human body again,
And if this human form is not attained,
There will be solely wrongdoing and no virtue.

Having no chance to know the Dharma, animals have almost no opportunity to create positive karma; they are forced to create negative karma instead. Many humans, such as barbarians and heretics, are in the same situation. Therefore, those who have the perfect human rebirth, with its eight freedoms and ten richnesses, who fail to train the mind in Dharma practice are much more foolish and ignorant. Wasting this chance is the worst thing. To use it for the pursuit of samsaric happiness or for our own peace is selfish. We must use this time for the purpose of enlightenment. We must not be like the man with great wealth who dies of starvation because he doesn't want to spend any of it.

Shantideva says,

[4:18] If when I have the chance to live a wholesome life
My actions are not wholesome,
Then what shall I be able to do
When confused by the misery of the lower realms?

The meaning of this verse is much the same as the previous one. If we were born as an animal, we would be unable even to enjoy samsaric pleasures, let alone practice the Dharma. The animal rebirth awaits us, depending on the ripening of the particular karma.

If we see an object and the buddha doesn't, the object doesn't exist. If a buddha sees an object it exists, even if we don't see it. For instance, we can't see nagas, but they exist. Nagas are sentient beings living in ignorance who can make or stop rain. Related to the karma of the beings living in a particular place, special pujas can be done to influence these beings.

The Eight Worldly Dharmas

[WFGS pp. 87–88]

The Buddha says,

From the time of conception in the mother's womb,
Life continues until death,
Following worldly ways
Without following a new path.

The sufferings of death and after death are the fault of not following the new untried path as shown by the enlightened being. Any kind of worldly life, whether we pursue it in the East or the West, is the old life, the life experienced countless times in previous lives; there is nothing new.

Milarepa said many important things in his teachings, including exhorting us not to be attached to our own body. He also warned that food was like Mara's spy, in that the more we enjoy it, the more attached we become to it. He gave this advice to his disciple Rechungpa, [\[10\]](#)

Son, if you want to practice the holy Dharma and have devotion arise from the depth of your heart, do not look back toward this life. Follow my truth. The relatives are Mara who delay you, who prevent you from practicing the holy Dharma. Don't believe what they say. Cut off attachment to them. And food and possessions are the spies of Mara. The objects of desire are like Mara's noose, tying you to itself, therefore definitely cut off attachment. [\[11\]](#)

Attachment to food and other enjoyments is what ties us to samsara, like "Mara's noose." This is what we need to free ourselves from. In other words, we must give up the eight worldly dharmas.

The main problem is not the object but the mind, the creator of negativities. If we can learn to control the mind, the objects will cease to be a problem. The pure mind, free of delusions, can change poison to medicine or kaka to nectar, bringing infinite happiness.

The senses of seeing, hearing and so forth are limited because they are caused by the mistaken mind controlled by karma and delusions. As a result, we invariably enjoy sense objects in the wrong way. By changing the creator, our mind, we can definitely change our sullied, deluded relationship with the sense objects, transforming them from objects of attachment into clean objects, from ugly into beautiful. Overcoming our attachment to the objects of our senses and learning to see them in the correct way, as they actually exist, is a long process and will only slowly happen as we develop our wisdom. It can't be done straight away.

Consider a friend who always speaks beautifully. One day, instead, they speak angry and ugly words to us. Suddenly, we no longer see them as beautiful but as ugly. Their appearance hasn't really changed, yet the sight of that same face induces anger. Then later, we make up—with words, gifts and so forth—and that ugly appearance changes again. Attachment sees beauty; anger sees ugliness. Only purification of the negative mind brings perfect peace.

Milarepa also said that our relatives are Mara in that when we want to practice the Dharma, they find ways of delaying us, leading us back to worldly ways. Because they can betray us in that way, we need to be cautious. He warned us of our home, saying it's Mara's prison, so difficult to escape from. Because we will have to leave all these objects of our attachment at the time of our death, it's much better to do that now. He then concluded by saying,

If you can do all this,
You have the fortune of practicing the Dharma.

The door to the understanding of our own nature, the door to a positive mind, is the recognition of problems created by the negative mind, such as not wanting to meditate. Ignorance always likes things that are wrong and false, so of course it dislikes any new subject or practice. Because the Dharma asks us to meditate on ignorance, suffering, death and so forth, to our ignorance it's not "pleasant."

Since beginningless time, we have taken great care of our greed, hatred and ignorance. While we continue to work for those three poisonous minds, serving ignorance faithfully and working for our attachment and against our enemies, we will never be free from suffering. The Buddha's way of helping us is to make us understand and allow us to make a free choice about which method to follow.

Unless we can renounce the worldly life through the practice of the meditation on impermanence, the Dharma actions we perform only become a service to the eight worldly dharmas. The eight worldly dharmas are four sets of cravings: craving for material possessions and craving to be free from lack of material possessions, craving for happiness and comfort and craving to be free from unhappiness and discomfort, craving for a good reputation and craving to be free from a bad reputation, and craving for praise and craving to be free from criticism.

Any action done free from the influence of the eight worldly dharmas should be done with a mind living in the practice of the meditation on impermanence. When our mind renounces the worldly life, any action becomes positive, a Dharma action. "Dharma" is not just a name. It has great meaning. It doesn't only belong to Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and so on. The pure practice of Dharma is created by our mind. It's the method shown by the enlightened being that he followed, practiced, and experienced completely. In the same way, the true nature of things and their impermanence don't belong to a sect.

Literally "Dharma" means "holding" or "guiding," holding us back from, firstly, the suffering of the three lower realms; secondly, the suffering of the whole of samsara, ruled by greed, hatred and ignorance; and thirdly, the subtle obscurations that block us from enlightenment.

Dharma leads us from these three levels of suffering to enlightenment. Each of us has to create our own essential practice of the Dharma and become a positive guide to ourselves instead of our own enemy. For example, when we crave an object due to ignorance, we easily follow the negative mind and create negative actions to obtain that object, such as stealing.

If we live in the pure practice of the Dharma, we will get what we need naturally—food, clothing, accommodation and so forth, and in our next life we will still be able to work toward enlightenment. Obtaining the happiness of this life is not the goal of our Dharma practice, but it

will happen by the way, just as when we travel to another country, we see many things on the way, even though that is not our main purpose.

Since we don't know the time of our death, it is most worthwhile to seek enlightenment soon. If we are living in the essential practice of the Dharma, there are fewer problems. Through understanding comes a great mental change, with less need for physical activity and, as a result, less physical worries. This happens when we renounce the eight worldly dharmas.

Problems don't exist by themselves but arise from our attitude to situations we encounter. The same person is sometimes a friend, sometimes an enemy, depending on how they treat us. When we avoid the eight worldly dharmas, as our concept changes, we cut off so many problems, and understanding and peace happen naturally. By realizing their shortcomings, we must be as afraid of the eight worldly dharmas as we would be were we to even smell a poisonous plant.

Just as attachment to the eight worldly dharmas causes suffering when they can't be fulfilled, with renunciation we are naturally free from that suffering. The peace of renunciation is inexpensive and doesn't depend on rockets, factories, weapons, armies or presidents. Such peace continues until we reach enlightenment, growing stronger and stronger. It starts with renunciation of the eight worldly dharmas, which is like opening a door. It's a simple step requiring an understanding mind that avoids ignorant, negative actions. We must know what negative actions are and what their results are in order to fully renounce them.

We are usually ignorant of the result of any negative action we do, such as taking drugs, which instead of the happiness it promises only makes us crazier and crazier. On the other hand, renouncing negative actions only makes us saner. It's like a saw that cuts away the problems and confusion. It's the opposite to the worldly desire that actually stops all happiness, including samsaric happiness.

Many people who don't understand the Dharma and who have no experience of it are shocked by those who follow a spiritual path and give up worldly things. This is especially true in the case of parents of Western students. Many of them get angry, thinking their child is being forced to suffer deprivations and being taught not to think. At best, they think their child is foolish and leading a nonsensical life that will only bring more problems and rob the child of being self-sufficient.

However, all this is judged with ignorance, without understanding the benefits of following the path of the Dharma. Since they haven't been through the experience, they can't know. Besides not seeing the future benefits of such actions, they think it causes us problems in the present, which is totally opposite to reality. Renunciation of the eight desires releases us from the mental troubles of confusion and samsaric worries, bringing peace not only in the future but immediately.

It's very dangerous to think of our meditation practice, "I was happier before doing this." Such thoughts disturb our practice and destroy the merits of any virtuous actions we do. They are poisonous and block our chance at happiness. If we seem to have a problem with our practice, that means there is something wrong with the way we are practicing, not the practice itself. We should check what is wrong and identify its cause, which is some confused mental state. Until we sort this out, continuing our practice will be difficult.

With renunciation, the power of practice grows stronger, our future improves and we get things without trying. By not focusing on our worldly needs, we find we naturally have whatever we need. It is said that no great meditator has ever died of starvation or with the cold through ignoring their material needs. This refers to the sincere meditator and applies to both the present and the future.

There was a Tibetan called Geshe Ben Gungyal who had trouble satisfying worldly needs until he practiced the Dharma purely, after which it was easy. Before, when he had everything, it was never enough, but when he lived in the hermitage, renouncing the eight worldly dharmas, he received plenty of food and never wanted for things because of all the offerings people made. He said, “Before I practiced Dharma my mouth had trouble finding food but now food has trouble finding my mouth.”

This helps us to understand how things are created by the mind. The unenlightened mind is a friend to ignorance. Whereas when worldly people experience problems, their ignorance and anger increase, the wise ones use worldly problems for enlightenment and peace.

When we can renounce the eight worldly dharmas, the freedom we gain creates real peace. Renunciation is a mental attitude arising from a positive determination. This is difficult because it's hard to change our mental attitude. The problems we face don't come from the objects or situations but from our desire for them. Suffering is created by the mind. We must understand how this works beyond intellectual knowledge.

Attachment Causes Us to Circle in Samsara

The negative, attached mind has caused us to continue circling in the samsaric realms forever. From the smallest animal to the biggest, from the beggar to the king, those whose lives are not focused on the practice of the Dharma are concerned only with present problems, not with future suffering. Their greatest mistake is to always create the cause for greater suffering while trying to stop the temporary problems happening now. This is because they lack the understanding of the nature of both suffering itself and the cause of suffering. Therefore, they are unable to understand true happiness.

We won't be able to overcome our problems until we can recognize our mistakes and accept these fundamental Dharma points: that worldly methods can never help and that, rather than alleviating the problem, they will only ever create the cause of future problems.

And the reason for this is that such methods are mostly done to obtain one of the eight worldly dharmas, craving to have the four desirable things or craving to be free from the four undesirable things. Most of us spend our life working for these eight worldly dharmas, like the slave working for the master. We should check up on our own actions even now, asking ourselves honestly why we are doing this current action. We can discover how to stop worldly problems by asking, “Is this what my attachment wants?” In this way, we can uncover the underlying cause of so many of our actions. But we must know that the result of actions done with greed, hatred or ignorance is always suffering and problems.

Attachment is the creator of samsara. Love mixed with attachment is love created by ignorance; with it, we still remain in samsara. This love is not the same as real love, and because of it, we have to experience its results in the three lower and three upper realms. Why doesn't it bring peace? Because the principal cause is the unsubdued, untamed mind; the root mind is a confused, mistaken mind, because the three negative minds always see the object in a faulty way. They see the object in a way that is not true to an enlightened mind. Just as if we have a black mark on our face, we can't expect to see a clean face in the mirror, it's impossible for peace to arise from those three negative minds. Therefore, the whole problem is their fault.

All actions done with attachment to worldly desires are negative actions. When we attempt to cut off a problem using a mind of the eight worldly dharmas, this can only bring similar problems in the future because the methods are negative, arising from a mind that is not well-subdued. To stop that which was created by previous negative karma, we use a method similar to that used before, and so it continues. It's just a cycle of suffering.

Besides the actions that are caused by attachment, we can also harm others to get our way. For example, a butcher's livelihood is killing animals, which causes so much suffering for other beings. The butcher doesn't think they are a negative person. They do that job in order to have a comfortable life; it's their way of taking care of the worldly problems that arise. Their life as a butcher is due to previous negative karmic imprints ripening that bring about that life. The imprints have ripened and they must experience the result. As long as they don't try to understand the Dharma, they will definitely have to experience the suffering result of the actions they are doing now as a butcher, if not in this lifetime, then in some other lifetime.

The method the butcher uses to obtain happiness—slaughtering animals—not only doesn't stop them suffering in this life, it also creates great negative karma. Focusing solely on the concerns of this life, they are creating the cause of future suffering. Creating negative karma to stop negative karma is an impossible thing. This is nobody's fault, but they will have to suffer in a future life and create more negative karma, and so it always circles around.

Stealing and telling lies are also actions created by our own attachment, creating suffering for us in the future and suffering for others. Any action—even reciting mantras or making music—done with attachment or anger only brings the result of being trapped in the cycle of samsara for a longer time and experiencing more suffering results.

Every action—eating, writing, playing, dancing and so forth—can be either a Dharma action or a non-Dharma action. No matter how it might look, if any action is done free from involvement in the eight worldly dharmas and with a bodhicitta motivation, it is a Mahayana action, and if it's done with attachment and greed for the sake of the eight worldly dharmas, it's a non-Dharma action.

How can we define a Dharma action? It's any positive action that avoids and opposes the eight worldly dharmas; it's any action motivated by non-attachment. Such an action creates positive karma and brings happiness in this and future lives. It's the cause of a future human rebirth with better conditions and a religious life, bodhicitta, perfect peace and enlightenment.

When we come to really understand the Dharma, it can come as a kind of shock. Many people think it's easy, just imitating another person—"If they close their eyes, I'll close mine." But the

real Dharma is the person's actions that are free from any stain of the eight worldly dharmas, free from attachment, free of hatred, free from ignorance. It doesn't matter what the person is called because the action doesn't depend on the title "Buddhist," "Hindu," "Zen," "Christian" or "Muslim." Others may even call them "evil," but if their actions are pure and positive, they have the power to destroy the negative mind and to create good karma. Such actions arising from pure motivation are called the Dharma because they can lead to an escape from ignorance and bring enlightenment. This must be created by the mind, not by external actions alone.

Because the form of Dharma actions is not definite, the Buddhadharma is something that everybody can do. If we are unable to do it, it's our own delusions that are blocking us, nothing else. It has nothing to do with class, caste, occupation, title or color of our skin. We are unable to practice only because we haven't created enough merit due to our ignorance. The difficulties we face when we try to study the Buddhadharma's deep and profound subjects only come from the delusions that obscure our mind; they haven't been created by the enlightened beings trying to make the subject complicated.

Why aren't more people practicing Buddhism? Because their ignorance doesn't give them a chance. Renunciation and avoidance of the eight worldly dharmas is more powerful than the atomic bomb. The atomic bomb destroys a whole city and all the people, which would end anyway, but it can't destroy the mind, which is continual. Even if the atomic bomb were to destroy all other beings and we were left alone on earth, other enemies would still arise to make us unhappy. Even if this realm ended, the mind would transfer to another realm because it has not been released from ignorance, the delusions are not cut off, and the continuity of previous negative karmas are still there on our mindstream. In other realms we meet other enemies, and we will always do so until the problem is resolved.

The cause of the external enemy is the mind. The real enemy is the inner enemy, ignorance. As long as we travel in the six realms befriending this inner enemy instead of destroying it, there will be no end to the problems with the external enemy. Rather than helping, actions such as destroying our external enemies with atomic bombs only create great negative karma.

The action of avoiding the eight worldly dharmas, however, is a purely mental one, creating the positive energy to bring all the realizations and finally enlightenment. It's like fuel for a rocket. The rocket is just a useless machine until it has been refueled, and then it can go anywhere. The renounced mind brings us a quick escape from ignorance and the delusions.

Guru Shakyamuni Buddha became enlightened by completely purifying his mind of all negativity, and he became the object of respect and refuge for all sentient beings. All this was the result of his practice of avoiding the eight worldly dharmas, allowing him to work for the happiness of all sentient beings.

Due to the power of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's realizations, we are able to create incredible positive karma by keeping statues of him with the understanding of what this represents. Now, many Western people are starting to realize what the mind is, how what we have makes life meaningful, and so on. This too is the power of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's wisdom.

The power of the atomic bomb is nothing; it's lost. It only has negative effects. This is unlike the power of renunciation, the benefits of which can affect numberless sentient beings, including

those we have never heard of. We need to practice with our mind, as Guru Shakyamuni Buddha did.

Even this meditation course results from the existence of his teachings, the power of his enlightenment, and his practice of avoiding the eight worldly dharmas. The mind that has this practice is shapeless and cannot be seen, yet this mind is so incredibly powerful that numberless sentient beings can achieve enlightenment because of it.

If we want to be exactly like Milarepa, we have to practice the avoidance of the eight worldly dharmas. This is the fundamental practice of the Mahayana teachings and meditation. Many people, not understanding the importance of these subjects, study other practices such as kundalini yoga. While becoming very skilled in such techniques, they waste their perfect human rebirth, ignorant of the highest purpose of the human life. So many humans have achieved clairvoyance from such methods only to die and be reborn in the lower realms.

Practicing Dharma is the wisest way to use the human life and make it meaningful. Using our life in the most beneficial way is to be free from suffering, not to destroy our comfort or to miss the happiness of this life. By subduing the mind, our Dharma practice has the power to bring peace in this life. Whereas it brings the happiness of freedom, any pleasures that are received from actions arising from greed are the pleasures of bondage. The happiness from the practice of avoiding the eight worldly dharmas is the peace of renunciation.

Renunciation of the eight worldly dharmas doesn't mean physical separation. That is not the definition of renunciation. A king who has everything can live in renunciation; the beggar without any belongings can still have attachment. We have to check up how we generate renunciation. What is the definition? Renouncing desire for the eight worldly dharmas is a mental attitude; it comes from the mind. Pure renunciation can never cause problems. Just as the cause is pure, the result will always be pure; it will be happiness. But if we see renunciation as rejecting objects without giving up our attachment to them, we cause problems for ourselves and others. Correct renunciation brings release. "Release" has a very tasty meaning.

The main problem is not merely the attachment to the things of the worldly life but also the greed and ignorance that are deep rooted in our mind. We have to both avoid the negative mind and at the same time avoid the actions of the negative mind, because when we create nonvirtuous actions, we perpetuate the negative states of mind and create this continual circling called samsara.

The Power of Renunciation

Not understanding is ignorance; if somebody were to abuse or slander us, due to our attachment to the eight worldly dharmas, we would really dislike and probably get angry with them, maybe even suddenly seeing them as ugly. All this creates negative karma and could well lead to creating bad verbal and physical actions.

Why do we have so many problems? Anger arises from our attachment being frustrated, from not getting what we want. Desire sees the object of its attachment as beautiful, but it's a poisonous mind, one of the worst ones. Desire is a very tricky mind that always causes suffering, which

arises from attachment. Because it's a negative mind, the result can only be suffering, which generates more negative minds, thus creating the cyclic existence we are currently trapped in.

This all arises from attachment, such as craving praise and never wanting blame. For a person in the essential practice of the Dharma—avoiding the eight worldly dharmas, not following attachment—there is no anger, because without attachment to the pleasant there can be no anger at the unpleasant, so whether somebody abuses us or not is irrelevant. Their abusive words are like the sound of the wind; seeing no essential difference, we are utterly unaffected by them. Without anger or attachment, we no longer create negative karma and we experience complete, perfect happiness. Our mind is very strong. It's very free, loose and released, whereas the attached mind is very tight.

You have all come to this meditation course seeking happiness, not suffering. Because we are all equal in desiring happiness, we must all make our motivation positive in whatever we do in order to create positive karma, which is the cause of happiness. We must make our motivation positive, even when listening to Dharma. Just taking the teachings isn't enough to avoid rebirth in the three lower realms. Even taking the teachings with the sole thought that it will release us from suffering is a form of selfishness, a kind of self-cherishing, despite the fact that it will bring perfect peace.

Being unaware of the suffering of others can't help anyone. We are exactly the same as all other beings in not desiring suffering and in only desiring happiness, so there is no reason to care more for ourselves than others. But the others are unlike us in that they haven't met the teachings and don't have the wisdom to follow positive actions and avoid negative ones. Because of that, they are always suffering and creating its cause.

From those suffering sentient beings come all our happiness, realizations and ultimately enlightenment. Because they have always been kind and they always will be, they are more precious than any possession. We must repay their kindness; we must take care of them, dedicating ourselves to them. There is no other way to enlightenment.

The best way to take care of them is to lead them to enlightenment but at present we don't have the power to do so, therefore this is something we must strive to acquire. It means we must destroy all our negativities and develop fully all our positive qualities. This is the motivation we should have when we are listening to the teachings on the graduated path, when we are studying, meditating and doing purification practices. In cultivating such a pure motivation, the action of listening to the teachings becomes that much more powerful, benefiting both ourselves and all sentient beings.

The benefits of avoiding the eight worldly dharmas are infinite. The power of this practice of renunciation is such that we can never finish explaining its value. The more we understand the Dharma, the more we appreciate the infinite, transcendental wisdom of the buddhas. At the same time, we discover for ourselves how powerful and precious this practice is. It's more precious than any jewels. Unlike a treasure of jewels, there's no danger of it ever being lost or stolen. The more wealth we have, the greater the worry, the more preoccupied we are with that wealth, how to use it, how to protect it and so forth. But the more purely we practice the avoidance of the eight worldly dharmas, the more quickly our ignorance decreases and our wisdom arises, and the sooner the problems associated with material possessions disappear.

If we can live in renunciation of these worldly needs at the time of death, we will definitely avoid rebirth in the three lower realms. But anyone who has not renounced greed, even though they might have somehow developed some form of clairvoyance, will certainly be reborn there. In ancient times, there was a Tibetan who practiced tantra without practicing renunciation. With merely a look he could kill a hundred people. But when he died, he was reborn in the hell realm. Anything that fails to cut off greed and attachment can only keep us suffering; it can't guide us to freedom.

The power of renunciation can allow us to transform a stone into a flower. There are said to be three powers that allow us to do miraculous things: the powers of medicine, mantra and the elements. But the power of this practice is the safest, strongest power to protect our mind.

So many meditators in past times have protected themselves with renunciation. For example, before the meditator Kharag Gomchung achieved his Dharma practice, he was in a very miserable condition, suffering so much from leprosy. Because others avoided him in his state, he was always alone, which made him very upset. Deciding to make this situation worthwhile, he went to stay in a little cave by a road to beg and recite mantras. There was no other practice. One night he dreamed he was in water and a man in white appeared and took him out of it. Much water came out of his body and, when he awoke, he found he was cured. This was due to the strength of his mind. He had trained his mind to renounce attachment to the eight worldly dharmas by going to the cave and practicing. Even temporary, mundane suffering can be cured by this practice, and the happiness arising through this practice can be developed until enlightenment. Kharag Gomchung didn't aim to be cured of his leprosy, but this came about as a result of his pure practice.

Many people think that the renunciation that the Buddhadharma advocates is all about denying the things that bring a happy life and embracing things that cause suffering. Many think that if they had to renounce worldly pleasures, they would be miserable. Such a notion is completely wrong; it's completely opposed to the logic we gain when we experience renunciation. The more attachment there is—the less renunciation—the more confusion and suffering will result.

This can be proven clearly by personal practice. If we train ourselves to overcome our attachment to worldly comforts, we will observe the effect on our mental state, how we become increasingly peaceful and happy. The notion that renunciation doesn't bring happiness is wrong.

In *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* Shantideva says,

[8:80–82] In the same way as animals drawing carriages
Are only able to eat a few mouthfuls of grass,
Likewise, desirous people
Have many disadvantages such as these, and little (profit).

And since even animals can obtain this (little profit)
Those who are pained by their (previous) actions
Waste these leisures and endowments [freedoms and richnesses], so difficult to find,
For the sake of something trivial that is not so scarce.

The objects of desire will certainly perish,
And then I shall fall into the hellish states.
However, buddhahood itself is attained
With just one millionth of the difficulty.

When we engage in any action caused by the eight worldly dharmas, it's like we are purposely keeping ourselves in ignorance, trapping ourselves in the cycle of death and rebirth. It's very foolish. In fact, it's crazy, but it's not recognized as such by a worldly person because the ignorant don't see ignorance as an affliction. To a worldly person, their actions that come from attachment are positive and good. This kind of disturbed mind is worse than that of a person [with psychosis], whose condition is temporary, because this ignorant belief in chasing attachment without a thought of purifying the inner afflictions can never cease suffering.

Many Dharma practitioners face difficulties in their practice, which they overcome by the practice of thought transformation, using problems in the path to develop the realizations. By utilizing current problems, they are effectively cutting the continuation of suffering that arises from the ripening of negative karmic seeds from previous lives. This is a wise action. They are also trying to not create any negative karma for future lives. For this reason, they practice Dharma, unheedful of worldly problems, thinking that by cutting off the cause of all suffering, they will cut off all worldly difficulties.

If we too can practice like that, with such great determination, we will overcome any worldly problems we have. When our disturbed states of mind are overcome, our worldly problems will be overcome. The ignorant mind is a very limited mind, always finding ways to continue the cause of suffering. The Dharma mind is the complete opposite to that.

Because the negative mind is that which is attached to the pleasure of samsara, using this human rebirth for that always creates suffering. There is not the tiniest bit of help or happiness that can come from the negative mind, from desire. How can it be useful? It's important to know that its effect is always harmful.

Many people think, "Without desire, how can we enjoy food and so forth?" They feel that life is not worth living without desire. If we don't check up, we can also make this mistake. This represents a lack of understanding of where desire comes from. Happiness doesn't arise from attachment, anger and ignorance but from the opposite, from the minds of non-attachment, non-anger and non-ignorance, from wisdom. It comes from positive actions and positive minds. Perfect peace can only be achieved by destroying the negative mind of desire.

Samsaric happiness that is recognized by the limited mind is of a binding nature, like being imprisoned by thick chains. The happiness that arises from Dharma practice is free and loose; its nature is freedom. The principal cause of samsaric happiness is ignorance—not having the realization of the absolute truth and any action done without this realization. When we intuitively hold the concept of a truly existing self, we create actions that perpetuate samsara and the pursuit of worldly happiness. The samsaric happiness that comes from this type of ignorance is suffering from the Dharma point of view. True happiness can't arise from the negative mind.

Even if we can attain all eight worldly dharmas, such pleasures can't last; in time they must become suffering. As such they are not real happiness. When we are attached to the eight worldly dharmas, we follow desire as a servant follows their master.

It's stressed in the teachings of the Buddha that we should not trust desire and that we should not be attached to samsaric happiness, which is created by the deluded mind, is suffering in nature and is not true happiness. As long as we trust such pleasures, we will remain in samsara. True Dharma happiness is that which arises from the practice of renunciation of the eight worldly dharmas. This kind of happiness can never end, its enjoyments can never finish. However, the work to achieve this state can be finished. In the case of samsaric happiness, on the other hand, whereas the pleasure we might get always ends, working for mundane enjoyments never ends. When we eat, we make kaka, and then we are hungry again and must eat again (and make kaka again). This is what samsaric pleasures are like. Until we cut off the karma created by ignorance, we have to go round and round like this. As long as we still have the cause to take rebirth, we die again and take rebirth again, always cycling around. While we haven't overcome the cause, it can have no end.

The work of developing renunciation will end in time, but samsaric actions never can. The wise ones know the meaning of life, comprehending its best use. By understanding karma, they tirelessly work toward that which can be finished. Whereas samsaric happiness can't be developed, the peace that arises from renunciation can be developed at higher and higher levels; the experience of that peace can never end.

We get pleasure from swimming, but if we stay in the water too long it becomes cold and we crave warmth. We are happy eating food, but if we eat more and more, we lose the taste, our stomach becomes bloated and we vomit. All this proves that the nature of such "happiness" is suffering; it cannot be developed, it always turns to suffering and it's not permanent. Sherpas who enjoy drinking wine will drink one cup and then another because they liked the first, and so on until they become totally uncontrolled, without discipline, often fighting and shouting nonsense and breaking things that were obtained with great difficulty. Their minds aren't happy, and this is caused by the wrong belief that fails to see the true nature of suffering. The same things can be said about people who use drugs.

Is the Perfect Human Rebirth Easy to Attain?

[WFGS pp. 88–90]

In *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* Shantideva says,

[4:16–17] Although today I am healthy,
Well-nourished and unafflicted,
Life is momentary and deceptive;
The body is like an object on loan for but a minute.

With behavior such as this,
I shall not win a human body again,
And if this human form is not attained,
There will be solely wrongdoing and no virtue.

This perfect human rebirth we now enjoy arises from the positive karma we have created through beneficial actions and through having developed our wisdom. Unless we cultivate our positive qualities—if we persist in “behavior such as this”—we won’t attain another human rebirth. Our future life depends on our present life’s actions. That’s why this present life is so important and precious. It’s more precious than the whole world filled with wish-granting jewels.

There are so many good things that we can do, especially in this lifetime. We can cease the cycle of death and rebirth. We have attained this perfect human rebirth depending on the causes created in previous lifetimes. It was the result of the virtuous mental, verbal and physical actions and the understanding that any actions based on ignorance and done with greed or hatred cause rebirth in the three lower realms. Based on that firm understanding, we led a moral life and practiced the Dharma, resulting in this life we now have.

There are many levels of positive motivation, but the ultimate motivation is the wish to attain enlightenment so that we can best help others. Other motivations can also be positive but have less power, such as the motivation to attain our own perfect peace. If we help others because we expect a reward in this life, we don’t create good karma.

Shantideva says,

[1:12] All other virtues are like plantain trees;
For after bearing fruit, they simply perish.
But the perennial tree of the awakening mind
Unceasingly bears fruit and thereby flourishes without end.

Samsaric pleasures are enjoyed once and then are finished. Dharma happiness continues to grow. (Here, Shantideva is referring to the “awakening mind,” bodhicitta.) Just as we plant the seeds from the fruit we have eaten so we can enjoy more at a later time, we must plant the seeds of positive karma so that we can experience happiness in the future.

Karma is the law of cause and effect in relation to the mind. If we fully understand how the mind evolves—the inner evolution—we can understand the outer evolution on a deeper level. Everything we experience in this world is an experience of the mind. Therefore, everything comes from the mind; everything is created by the mind. The earth that we see is created by our mind, although that doesn’t necessarily mean it’s a mental fabrication. Whereas the mind has the power to perceive objects, anything that is not mind does not. Samsara is a creation of the mind, but buildings, mountains and so forth, which are also created by mind, are not in samsara.

Our current perfect human rebirth depends on the karma created by the previous lives’ minds. This means that the present is created by mind. If there were no mind, there would be no creation. There are so many ways to understand the Dharma—just a few words can mean many things to those who know.

In *The Foundation of All Good Qualities*, Lama Tsongkhapa says,

When I have discovered that the precious freedom of this rebirth is found only once,
Is extremely difficult to find again, and is greatly meaningful,

Please bless me to unceasingly generate the mind
Taking its essence, day and night. [\[12\]](#)

The cause for this perfect human rebirth can't be created by the negative minds of attachment, anger or ignorance. Negative karma is a creation of mind, generally expressed through actions of body and speech. But greatly negative actions can be created in the mind without the involvement of body or speech. This is one of the most dangerous things. Even if we stay in silence in one place for our entire lives, we can still create negative karma and suffer for countless eons. The mind can be very dangerous, especially as it is responsible for the actions of body and speech. And yet every good thing is also created by mind. The whole focus of our Dharma practice is to overcome the negativities of the mind and to increase its positive qualities so there will be no room for the negative. This is the whole point of taking ordination and following precepts.

The mind is the creator of all suffering and all happiness. Attaining enlightenment is a matter of time. Wisdom requires energy and energy comes from the mind, through meditation.

Morality and Charity

The two principal causes of a perfect human rebirth are morality and charity, with the intense wish to have such a rebirth. With an ignorant mind, it's difficult to appreciate the need for morality and charity, and so we become increasingly habituated to ignorance and negativity. We think that being moral means going against our own self-interest and is a form of suffering. Such a mind is itself extremely lazy. We should understand the benefits of morality and charity and also understand the disadvantages of not practicing them.

It's extremely rare to find anyone practicing pure morality and charity. We could easily count the number. With such an explosion of the negative mind, this practice is very difficult in both the West and in the East, but especially in the West. This is nobody's fault; it's something that has been created by the negative mind.

We must practice while we are still human if we want a perfect human rebirth in the future. In *The Three Principal Aspects of the Path*, Lama Tsongkhapa says,

Freedoms and endowments are difficult to find
And life has no time to spare.
By gaining familiarity with this,
Attraction to the appearances of this life is reversed. [\[13\]](#)

Circling in any of the six samsaric realms, it's difficult to create the cause for a perfect human rebirth. In the three lower realms it's impossible due to the great ignorance and suffering of these realms. In the upper three, especially the god and demigod realms, it's difficult due to distractions. At the present time in the human realm it's also very difficult and getting increasingly so. Yet, the cause for this present human rebirth was created in many previous human lives, not just one, so wasting it wastes so much previous time and effort.

In Dharma practice, the level of realizations depends on how much we have purified our obscurations. It takes time, and the continual energy and determination we need comes from our basic understanding of the importance of developing our mind and is the result of continual practice. It's not easy, habituated as we are to laziness. But our laziness came through habituation, so just as we created it, we can destroy it. Just as the holy beings did, we must give up samsaric comforts and our pursuit of the happiness of this life.

From the Dharma point of view, morality is abstaining from the negative mind and negative actions, those actions that harm others. While we harbor such harmful minds, enlightenment is impossible. Abstaining from harming others is essential for morality. At this stage of our development, it requires a strong determination. We must want to take care of ourselves and our mind. Charity also requires the motivation to dedicate ourselves to other beings.

The practice of charity without morality brings rebirth as a rich animal, like a naga, for example. In the Buddha's time there were many nagas living in the ocean. There was a great increase in their number at that time, and when a king who was surprised by that increase asked about it, the Buddha explained that this was due to the fact that these beings did not correctly follow the moral precepts they had taken in previous lives and failed to purify themselves after breaking the vows.

Not observing morality while practicing charity brings an animal rebirth with wealth in that rebirth. If we become a wealthy animal like a naga, in that lifetime we are too ignorant to create more charity, so that karmic result ends and only future suffering will ensue. As Chandrakirti says,

One who breaks the leg of the precepts
And is reborn as an animal
Never receives enjoyments
Once the result of charity has finished.

According to the Mahayana view, charity doesn't depend on materials. It is our responsibility to help others have happiness, not to increase their attachment to samsaric pleasures. If we were to put drugs in the food we offer to a person living in ordination, thinking they might like it, it would disturb their practice and create negative karma. We must be careful what we give; we must be skillful in helping others. If we ourselves can purely keep vows we have taken, it helps cleanse the mind of obscurations and helps us not create more negativities.

The texts further explain the difficulties in creating the cause for the perfect human rebirth as follows. In the hell realm there are so many beings. This is a terrible place, a karmic creation without escape. Hell beings don't die as we do, and the environment of the hot hells is extremely hot and totally dark. Their lives last a long time, varying in accordance with the karma they have created. It doesn't matter how much they desire to escape, there is no freedom to do so. With all this suffering, ignorance, and the desperate desire to escape, there is no opportunity to create positive karma, especially through the practices of morality and charity. In these realms, the beings can't create the cause for a human rebirth. The hungry ghost and animal realms are similar.

The beings in the god realms are too preoccupied with enjoyments. They have bodies of light, drink transcendental nectars and enjoy long life. They neither see nor recognize suffering and can't practice renunciation.

Even in the human realm, it's difficult to practice morality and charity. Just thoughtless abstinence is not enough. There must be motivation, determination and understanding of the suffering result of not practicing this way. Somebody alone in a cave, never coming out, isn't necessarily practicing morality. We must make the choice.

People following morality are much rarer than wish-granting jewels and they are decreasing in number each year. It's difficult to practice this way because the minds of us sentient beings are more and more obscured by ignorance. The mind of morality directly counters the negative minds of ignorance and greed, which find it difficult to practice for even a day.

Even when trying to observe morality, if we think that keeping moral conduct is like being in prison, our practice of morality will fall apart, and it will be very difficult to achieve the perfect human rebirth in a future life.

Therefore, because we can now see how difficult it is to create the cause for a perfect human rebirth, we must take the utmost care of this life since it's so difficult to receive another one again. We can only create the causes for this to happen if we know what they are.

The cycle of suffering is such that as long as we don't seek the truth through continuous Dharma practice, our problems will continue. If we don't do this when we have attained a perfect human rebirth, then when? How long will we have to wait for another opportunity?

The Secret of the Mind

[WFGS pp. 90–91]

As we have seen, the highly realized Tibetan yogi Lama Tsongkhapa says that when we understand how meaningful the perfect human rebirth is and how rare, we will definitely avoid any actions that make life meaningless. He urges us to take its essence day and night.

To make the life meaningful, meaningful actions are required. To create such actions, we need to recognize the perfect human rebirth, therefore we start our meditation with this. This is the principal cause to build up the determination to persevere over a great length of time in order to attain all the realizations that lead to enlightenment. This takes a long time, depending on how quickly we purify our obscurations and many other things. Just as a long trip requires many porters, we need many supports.

We must have the sincere wish to create the determination. Why does it depend on determination? Because the trip from where we are now to enlightenment is the hardest trip; it's something we have never attempted before, from beginningless lifetimes until now. And it's so hard because it's purely a mental trip. Because there are many obscurations and interferences blocking the way, we have to overcome all those hindrances. Destroying the self-created mental hindrances is harder than destroying the earth.

In our previous lives, we have killed every sentient being without exception countless times. Such actions are old habits; there is nothing new in that. Furthermore, each of us has been killed by

every other sentient being countless times. There's no reason to go on like this. It hasn't helped. When we can deeply understand the causal creation of samsara, it can be very shocking to know the depth of the ignorance that underpins it. But with that understanding comes wisdom and with wisdom comes the method to overcome samsara, which leads to perfect peace.

The greatest solution to the negative mind is the meditation on impermanence and death. We might wonder if it matters whether we or anybody else dies today or tomorrow. This meditation supplies the answer.

Shantideva says,

[7:14] Relying upon the boat of a human (body),
Free yourself from the great river of pain!
As it is hard to find this boat again,
This is no time for sleep, you fool.

Being ignorant is like being asleep. When asleep we are unconscious of even large and heavy objects. If we don't make the effort to wake the mind from ignorance, to gain enlightenment, and instead use our efforts for the comfort of this worldly life, all of our actions only create ignorance. As long as we work for attachment, hatred, pride, jealousy and the many other negative minds, we are working for ignorance. On the other hand, if we help sentient beings, if we have the ability to do this, we are working to help the buddhas, the enlightened beings. Following our delusions is acting as if we are asleep, unable to see the objects around us with any clarity. It's as if we are constantly in the dark.

Although the mind is beginningless, until now the mind has been unable to recognize its own true nature. Recognizing the nature of the mind is what Shantideva calls the "secret of the mind." It's secret because this is the point so few people can understand and it's the point that is vital if we are to transform the mind into an enlightened one. He says,

[5:17] Even those who wish to find happiness and overcome misery
Will wander with no aim nor meaning
If they do not comprehend the secret of the mind—
The paramount significance of Dharma.

Until we fully understand this subject, we shall make many more mistakes in our actions. Due to not recognizing the true nature of the mind, our actions always create the very opposite results from what we expect. We ignorantly create nonvirtue and expect happiness, not understanding we must create virtue to obtain it. As long as there are mistakes in our mental actions, there will be mistakes in our verbal and physical actions. Until we recognize the "secret of the mind," no matter how long and how strongly we desire to be free from suffering and attain happiness, our methods will fail, no matter how hard we try.

As long as we don't discover this inner secret, we are also generally ignorant of the way the external world functions. We have been using the mind from beginningless time until now, yet we still don't know what it is. If we don't recognize it when we are human, how can we do so when we take rebirth as an animal or a hungry ghost? It will be impossible.

Discovery of the secret of the mind is the key to opening the door to understanding every other existence. Like a medicine, this discovery provides the solution and cures all problems.

Therefore, we should use this perfect human rebirth like a boat to cross the ocean of suffering and reach enlightenment. This is the purpose of having such a rebirth.

There are three levels of a Dharma practitioner: the graduated path of the lower capable being, the graduated path of the middle capable being and the graduated path of the higher capable being. The goal of the graduated path of the higher capable being is full enlightenment and of the middle capable being is liberation from the whole of samsara. The goal of the lower capable being is to receive another rebirth in the upper realms. Although this mind is certainly not the optimum motivation to have, if we can't attain enlightenment in this lifetime, it's best to be reborn in the upper realms, so that we can create the karma to receive another perfect human rebirth. Then, using that life as a bridge, if even then it's not possible to receive all realizations, we should create the causes for another perfect human rebirth. In this way, gradually, we will reach enlightenment.

There are two types of fear: useful, positive fear that causes us to prepare for our future life and useless, negative fear that arises from ignorance and doesn't do that.

In *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* Shantideva says,

[4:23] So if, when having found leisure such as this,
I do not attune myself to what is wholesome,
There could be no greater deception,
And there could be no greater folly.

“Attuning ourselves to what is wholesome” doesn't mean that we should not eat or wear clothes and so forth. If there's no understanding of the Dharma, no matter what the action, even virtuous behavior is not Dharma practice. We who have received the perfect human rebirth have many freedoms, and if we don't use this life to attain higher realizations, we are more ignorant than any animal. There is no greater folly.

Therefore, it's important that even our practice of listening to the Dharma is done in the best way, making the most of the perfect human rebirth. Bodhicitta, the highest motivation, should be especially strong so that the listening becomes the most fruitful. If we don't have this, then at least we should be determined to be free from the eight worldly dharmas and from having any samsaric motivation, such as wanting to learn the Dharma to teach others for the sake of our reputation.

In ancient India and in Tibet, the highly realized pandits had the full experience of the practice and fully saw their own nature and that of other beings. Yet they never showed pride. They looked humble, as if they knew nothing, like beggars, as if all they did was sleep and eat. But this was just their external appearance; the quality of their minds couldn't be seen. People might ask them for teachings, but realized teachers don't teach those who are not ready, for it might disturb them.

Even though such pandits had lifetimes of knowledge, they had not an atom of pride. Their minds were at rest and peaceful. They would never say, “I know the Dharma; I have these

achievements.” They never boasted about their realizations as if they were in a marketplace. Instead, they were always very humble, accepting defeat so that others could have the victory. This is bodhicitta. Their only reason to strive for enlightenment was to benefit other sentient beings. We too should try to cultivate this motivation. We should think, “I am going to listen to this teaching in order to achieve enlightenment only to benefit other sentient beings.”

This is the motivation that makes an action most beneficial. How should we make the perfect human rebirth meaningful? The best, highest way is to work for the achievement of enlightenment in this lifetime. If not that, then we should work for the state of a bodhisattva, or the destruction of ignorance as an arhat, or the realization of bodhicitta, the fully renounced mind, and the understanding of the absolute truth to equip the mind before death. At least we should be sure to avoid a lower rebirth.

If we can attain bodhicitta, we definitely won’t be reborn in any lower realm. This mind has the power to protect us from negative karma. It has more power than all the material possessions on this earth, because those things can’t protect us from the cycle of suffering, from birth, old age and death. But bodhicitta can stop all these problems. It has incredible power and can be developed through meditation without having to fight, steal, kill or destroy.

However, if we know the method but don’t use it, then no matter where we go—even to the moon—we will never attain bodhicitta. And life will end before our travels are over, before we have seen everything. Without opening the door of wisdom with the Buddhadharma, we can never fully understand anything. We could continue to travel and study, yet there is too much to learn, even about our own body, let alone understanding the reality of other beings.

We should study the Buddhadharma and in particular the absolute nature of reality and then put it into practice by meditating and purifying. With the support of purifying our negative karma and not creating any more, our practice will bring realizations, which would be impossible to achieve without doing this.

Even now we don’t know such basic notions as what “I” and “mind” are. Becoming aware of our own nature makes it simple to realize the nature of the minds of other beings. To obtain full knowledge of the external environment, we have to make a full study of the knowledge of the internal environment, and this can only be done by making ourselves the object of study.

This is the key to the secret of the mind. Receiving all the levels of realization depends on purifying and overcoming the many different types of unsubdued mind. This isn’t as easy as sweeping rubbish from a room. It depends on the continual practice of the Dharma, on not being lazy and on surmounting many hardships. But any hardship is very worthwhile for the practice of the Dharma, because with the Dharma we can finish completely all the innumerable sufferings and their causes forever. By one action—the completion of our Dharma practice—all those sufferings and their causes can be completely ended. This could never be accomplished by any samsaric action, by any action of the negative mind. This is one of the reasons for the existence of Buddhadharma, why the Buddha showed the teachings.

Denying Future Lives

It is incredibly worthwhile to experience any hardship for the practice of the Dharma. So many people undergo unbelievable difficulties just for this worldly life—a life that may go on for only five, ten, fifty or seventy years—so why not experience hardships for the practice of the Dharma, for the greater cause that will have untold advantages for so many future lives? It's so much wiser to take care of all future lives and cease the cycle of suffering. From the Dharma point of view, this is the wise action. The other action is ignorant.

Furthermore, those who work for this worldly life only experience its result, which is a suffering rebirth in the three lower realms. Worldly comfort doesn't last. In this life, we have to work until death, and even then, our work doesn't end; in the next life we have to do the same thing again. Working hard for the sake of temporal comfort doesn't end until we are free from ignorance, therefore there is no reason to experience these hardships taking care of this life. Although this kind of activity is meaningless, due to the ripening of our past lives' karma we don't get bored with it. This stems from our ignorance.

Because the lowest purpose of a human life is to avoid a lower rebirth, we have to make definite preparations before the time of death. Consideration of the next life is more important than thinking about how to live tomorrow or next year. Of course, we all have a general awareness in our mind that we will die at some time, but most of us have no idea when. How many days? How many years? Without wisdom, this is an area of complete darkness, despite the fact that everybody must die. Death is definite; the next life is definite. What is very indefinite, if we check, is that we will live into the future. So, why should we work for the future of this life, the existence of which is indefinite? We work to attain material things in the future, but we have no idea whether there will be a future. But we will have a future *life* with future suffering; that is definite, and because we currently create more negative karma than positive karma, there will be great suffering in the future. Therefore, it's important that before this life ends, we make a definite preparation to never experience the sufferings of the lower realms.

We may think that in fact there is no existence of a future life, that this is a Tibetan idea. "We Westerners don't have a future life." But this fact doesn't depend on belief. Not believing in future lives doesn't mean they don't exist. We think that there is no future life; yet we prepare for projects coming up next year and so forth. But can we really see that we will exist next year? We can't tell if we will still be alive in three or four years. This is the nature of ignorance. But without knowing clearly, we still make arrangements.

You might ask me why I'm talking like this. You don't want to know about death. The answer is that even though we don't want to experience suffering, we can't experience happiness without depending on the cause. To deny death is to want happiness without creating its cause.

We try to make arrangements to make our life permanent but it's not. Without knowing clearly whether we will exist next month, we still make arrangements to buy these things then, to go here or there, to do this or that. Say, we plan to go on holidays to Greece in a couple of months. We're happy; it should be a great trip. We aren't thinking of today but of the future. But we have no idea if we will still be alive in a couple of months. It's foolish to be happy about this very indefinite

future holiday but be skeptical about death and our next life, which is very definite. Just denying future lives doesn't stop them existing.

I think it's really foolish to ignorantly deny that future lives exist, reasoning that they don't exist because we can't see them. This wasn't taught in school; we didn't read it in science books. And, based on that assumption, we don't make any preparations. By this same reasoning, we shouldn't make any preparations for our Greek holiday either. Being unconcerned about our future life is the greatest mistake.

We can't clearly see the future of this life, yet we still plan and prepare for it in order to avoid suffering during those years ahead, so it's illogical not to plan for future lives, which are also unseen. Because death is definite, it's much more worthwhile to prepare for it than to work for the time before death, making plans about how to enjoy it. With human wisdom, this is easy to understand.

We think we are wise. We think that we know this and this, that we want to do these things, that we're always correct. And yet we always make such mistakes, like not preparing for our certain death, not being aware of it and so on. And unless we prepare for the life after death, we will go through the suffering again, generally more than that of this life because it's far more likely that we shall be reborn in the lower realms than the upper ones. This isn't difficult to understand if we check up on our daily lives.

People who deny future lives and refuse to make preparations for it have the same level of ignorance as an animal; there's little difference. Animals are only worried about the present life and everything they do is to take care of it for this short time. They never prepare for the coming life. The human who acts in the same way has exactly the same level of mind; they are equal. There is little difference between a hunter preying on deer and a spider preying on flies. Both are clever, taking care of this life. In fact, there are quite a few things that we humans can't do as well as animals. The spider can make beautiful webs that we can't, and there are so many other animals that can do things that we can't do. Even a bedbug is so clever—it waits until the light is out and then it emerges to eat people, taking care of its worldly life. It's very upsetting to see humans leading such a life.

The conclusion is this. Instead of always spending time making arrangements for the indefinite, we should prepare for the definite. If we know there is suffering to come, we should prepare for it. Once it arrives there will be no way to avoid what has happened; having fallen over a precipice and broken a leg we can no longer avoid the suffering result. Dharma is like a dam built before the flood; it helps the present as well as the future. Even the skeptic should prepare for future lives just as they prepare for the future of this one. They can't afford not to.

The essence of this meditation course is to understand that unless it helps us prepare for our future life, doing anything makes no sense. Consider somebody working in a life-threatening job for money in order to buy things for the temporary comfort of this life that is also of short duration. For example, think about Sherpas on an expedition; they have to keep on doing dangerous things, expending all their energy. Soldiers also have many difficulties, in training, in combat, trying to get a higher rank for more money. The objective of any army job is completely self-destructive with respect to karma. Everything is for worldly comforts that last an even shorter duration than this life. For their entire life, a soldier works tirelessly for worldly comfort

and money, causing their own destruction and the destruction of other beings, which is the complete opposite of bodhicitta.

In *Precious Garland* Nagarjuna says,

From nonvirtue all suffering arises,
As well as the unfortunate realms of the evil transmigratory beings.
From virtue all happiness arises,
As well as the happy transmigratory beings. [14]

It is very worthwhile to give up the worldly comforts of this life for Dharma practice, and we are very capable of bearing the difficulties we may experience in doing so.

It's common for Westerners taught in a scientific education system to question the continuity of the mind after death. People think that when the body disappears, the mind also disappears. How can it be possible for the mind to exist without the body? Without the body, there is no brain, so how can there be a mind? It seems impossible. Such things as continuity of mind are not described in any English science books and are not the experience of most Westerners. If we believe that body and mind both cease to exist after death, like a candle flame being extinguished, then of course there couldn't be future lives.

If we think like this, it's the same as thinking we won't exist tomorrow. If we are skeptical about future lives, we should also be skeptical about scientific explanations of the evolution of life on earth, but we totally believe this because we were taught it in school or have seen it written in books. The mind is not skeptical because it believes in what science says, even though we haven't seen it with our own eyes. It's not empirical knowledge; the source of our information is just another person's thesis. In the same way, the evolution of past and future lives has been the experience of numberless beings; it's the experience of the enlightened beings. They became enlightened only to work for numberless beings through the completion of the practices of bodhicitta and great compassion, with all kinds of different methods as fit beings' minds. Through practice and realizations, they fully saw numberless past and future lives even before enlightenment. After the holy beings achieved enlightenment, they clearly explained to their followers what they experienced, and their followers wrote it down for us, the ignorant beings.

Then, others practiced the teachings and also received the same realizations and enlightenment, passing on their wisdom and experience to their followers. Such a teaching has no beginning; it's a continual lineage. It's not just one person's experience. The pandits proved it through practice, and they wrote many commentaries on that experience, as did Tibetan yogis and lamas. In the same way, we don't fully see the scientists' experience, and yet we don't contradict it. So how can we contradict the experience of those who experienced mental development? If we don't believe the latter, we can't believe the former.

Just as rebirth is an object of knowledge of the great pandits, so too is the existence of different realms, such as those of the hungry ghosts, gods and so forth. Even though we can't see them, they exist. To negate any other person's experience because we don't see it ourselves is very foolish, keeping us a prisoner of ignorance and never opening the door of wisdom. Not believing, not trying to alter our thinking, we remain in a state of ignorance, always suffering and creating the cause of suffering and not understanding the cause of happiness. We run here and there,

traveling to the East, returning to the West, but nothing has changed. To progress spiritually, we must practice with understanding. Without belief, we have no practice, and unless we practice, there will be no realizations.

With his omniscient mind, Guru Shakyamuni Buddha once prophesized that a man would be reborn in the god realm but the man said there was no such thing. To make him understand, the Buddha asked if there was a certain type of tree in existence and the man replied that there was. The Buddha denied it and they argued. The man's conclusion was that it existed because it was in his experience. The Buddha then countered that it was the same with future lives and the other realms such as the god realm—they existed because he had seen them; it was in the Buddha's experience.

Wasting this perfect human rebirth, the result of positive karma created in previous lives, makes both this life and our previous lives meaningless. We have the freedom to make every action meaningful and beneficial for ourselves and all other living beings, making it one with the Dharma. Any action we do, big or small, can become the most profound method of purification. We can even own material possessions in a Dharma way. Having this freedom, as we listen to Dharma, we should listen wisely, with a bodhicitta motivation, so that the action is of the greatest benefit to sentient beings.

Chapter 4. Impermanence and Death



Lama Zopa Rinpoche teaching during the Fourth Meditation Course, 1973. Photo by Lynda Millsbaugh.

[WFGS pp. 92–93]

This perfect human rebirth is extremely difficult to acquire and is extremely fragile. It's selfish to be careless of aging; it shows a lack of care for the suffering of others, such as that of animals that are killed. Some people say animals are a gift from God to be eaten but they are unable to explain just what God is, saying such a thing is inexpressible in words. They also are indifferent to the suffering of animals because they think it natural for animals to kill each other. Such minds are like stone, seeing nothing.

Sickness can be the best medicine. We can use any of life's illnesses or other problems as medicine to attain enlightenment. Using the mind is better than just relying on medicine. That doesn't mean we should suffer, but while we are taking medicine, we can meditate on how our illness is the result of negative karma ripening. Then, having ascertained the fundamental cause of the sickness, we can cure it by not creating the negative action that was its cause. This is true Dharma practice. Through this method we better understand how to stop creating any more causes of suffering.

There's nothing new in the treatment of sickness, in doctors, hospitals, drugs and so forth. We have all experienced these things countless times before. But renouncing worldly comforts and attaining high levels of realizations by purifying the obscurations—that is new. This is a whole new way of thinking and it's difficult to generate a mind that accepts this because our ignorance is strong. But it's very worthwhile to bear the difficulties experienced; such difficulties are temporary.

We should understand how death will definitely happen and how it could happen at any time. Having a useful fear of death should make us practice Dharma day and night, giving up the eight worldly dharmas.

Life is impermanent and transitory. From the very first moment of conception, we are constantly getting older. From one split second to the next, as the time has passed, we've missed the chance to attain higher realizations. From then until now our lives have been meaningless, wasted; we have been playing like children. Life decays as a flower, and we are never aware of it changing. Like a river, it changes every moment but looks the same. Because of continuity, rather than seeing its changes, we see it as permanent. Without pausing for a moment, life runs toward death; all the time death is getting closer and closer.

The nature of life is like this. From the moment it begins in our mother's womb, our life begins running toward death, without pausing for even a split second. From the moment of conception to the time of death is like the snap of the fingers; it seems very quick. But we can only see this at the time of death, when we start to realize we are dying.

Then, there is so much suffering, so much worry. We realize we will never see our parents or our spouse and children again. We suffer as our experience of death continues. It becomes increasingly difficult to see and hear. The closer to death we get, the more we experience suffering visions. At that time, we think our life has finished in such a short time! We realize how brief this life was. No matter how we realize the brevity of our life, we still suffer and die with worry, overwhelmed with sadness.

We always believe that we'll wake up tomorrow. Based on that, we make plans for breakfast. There is always that permanent feeling that we won't die today. This is due to not realizing the nature of suffering. But one day, due to some karmic condition, death comes and the door to the suffering realms opens. Then, we have the thought that life has gone by like the snap of our fingers.

Why is there so much trouble at the time of death, why so much suffering? This suffering is a sure sign that we will take rebirth in one of the three lower realms. Before death, because the mind is unaware, we are lazy and don't care. At death, the people around us weep, and this creates more suffering. Especially if we have created a lot of negative karma, the death time is horrible; we can experience great distress, like blood coming from our ears, our eyes and our nose. No matter how much we hold our parents or spouse, they are still powerless to help us. There might have been a chance before, but at the time of death there is none. No matter who we remember, nobody has any power to help us.

Impermanence

In *The Foundation of All Good Qualities*, Lama Tsongkhapa says,

This body and life are changing, like a water bubble;
Remember how quickly they perish and death comes.
After death, just like a shadow follows the body,
The results of black and white karma follow.

When I have found definite conviction in this,
Please bless me always to be conscientious
In abandoning even the slightest collection of shortcomings
And in accomplishing all virtuous deeds. [15]

By realizing that life is as brief and perishable as a water bubble, we gain the determination to turn our back on worldly concerns and work for enlightenment, making it possible to attain the higher realizations. In this way, Lama Tsongkhapa became enlightened. Therefore, we should also have a mind that renounces the eight worldly dharmas. Just like a bubble, life bursts as easily and disappears. It is perishable and impermanent, momentary and trivial.

Our great guide, Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, the one guide of all sentient beings, whose omniscient mind is free from all delusions, says this in the *Great Play Sutra*,

The three worlds are impermanent like an autumn cloud.
The birth and death of beings is like watching a dance.
The passage of life is like lightning in the sky.
It moves quickly, like a waterfall. [16]

Autumn is the most changeable season of the year. Changing every second and disappearing within a minute, we can't locate a cloud in any definite place. This also applies to the three worlds, meaning the desire, form and formless realms, how sentient beings change so quickly, how quickly they die and how quickly they are reborn. In that, our life is exactly the same as an autumn cloud.

Such are the changes of our internal world and of the external world. The impermanence we see if we closely observe can also appear as the instructions of the guru, allowing us to make progress in our spiritual journey.

Since we woke in the morning, while everything has been constantly changing every second, due to our limited understanding, it feels as if nothing has changed. This is because we haven't realized impermanence; we are unable to comprehend the momentary changing of all phenomena, how things grow older, decaying with each second, while becoming new at the same time. Distracted by other delusions, we are ignorant of this subtle impermanence and so we see things as unchanging, as permanent.

All the holy beings, the great meditators of old, regarded the meditation on impermanence as essential. Just as ordinary people regard money as important and always try to get more and more, the holy beings kept meditating on impermanence for their whole lives because they regarded it as vital. They saw that this was a practice greatly beneficial in gaining every level of realization and releasing them and all other beings from suffering and ignorance. Having achieved the realization of impermanence, the rest of their lives became meaningful and pure because their minds were protected from distraction. This allowed them to focus the mind completely. For us, even if we want to meditate for only five minutes, so many other thoughts arise in the mind. The mind takes us all around the world and we remember all kinds of objects we feel desire or anger for.

The realization that sees this life, this body and mind as impermanent, is vital to enable us to have even an hour's undistracted meditation. And the realization of impermanence is the best offering to enlightened beings and to the Dharma. In *The Great Nirvana Sutra*, the Buddha says,

Among all the reappings, the autumn harvest is supreme.
Among all the tracks, the track of the elephant is supreme.
Among all the ideas, the idea of impermanence and death is supreme because with it you eliminate all the attachment, ignorance, and pride of the three realms. [\[17\]](#)

While it's good to make many offerings to hundreds of holy objects, there are immense benefits from meditating on impermanence in order to gain a realization of it. At the beginning, remembering impermanence obliges us to follow the Dharma, the only true method that clearly explains karma and gives every method to release us from suffering. The thought of impermanence also obliges us to create nothing but positive karma. This helps us greatly in seeing the absolute truth, the emptiness of ourselves and of every other being, of every existence and of the Buddha's holy mind. In other words, it helps us attain enlightenment.

To fully realize the power of our own mind, we must realize impermanence. Without having the effortless thought that realizes the impermanent nature of things, no matter how much of our life we spend learning psychology, we can't attain the realizations we need. This is why from beginningless time until now, we still have no idea what the mind is and, because of that, problems persist and will continue until the mind realizes its own true nature.

Without realizing the nature of our own mind, how can we understand the minds of others? Therefore, the best study is to try to make the mind recognize its own nature. Through this, we can easily understand the minds of others. First, we should become our own psychologist so that we can become a true psychologist to guide the minds of others. Unless we do this, it's like trying to clean other people while having our hands covered in kaka.

All this depends on the realization of impermanence, so it's very important to check the nature of our own impermanence. This is everybody's responsibility, not just that of lamas and meditators living in the Himalayas. Why? Because all of us are suffering and wish to be free from suffering and the only way to do that is to realize impermanence, which must come before the realization of the causes of suffering. However, realizing impermanence is not simple.

Many think that the practice of Dharma is not their responsibility. They think that it's for beggars, cripples and other "unfortunates." Such people are ignorant of the nature of their life as well as of impermanence and suffering.

This practice is one of the things that makes the holy beings happy, without depending on friends, material comforts and other external needs. For instance, despite Milarepa living on nothing but nettles for years, he had no suffering and was happy, enjoying the importance of his practice. It's the realization of impermanence that generated all the energy that he required to live for that time without depending on external things. Such a happy life, living in a cave on nettles without depending on other things, was not intuitive. He gradually attained realizations, and these made for a happy and uncomplicated life. Ordinary people lead a complicated, unhappy life that depends on external things, a life contrary to the yogis. These two are opposites: the yogis who

developed practices bringing mental discipline and the ignorant beings whose “happiness” doesn’t arise from mental practices but from the acquisition of material possessions.

In the *Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva*, the bodhisattva Thogme Zangpo says,

Loved ones who have long kept company will part.
Wealth created with difficulty will be left behind.
Consciousness, the guest, will leave the guesthouse of the body.
Let go of this life—
This is the practice of bodhisattvas. [18]

There is much to be considered in this quotation, especially the analogy of the mind and body as guest and guesthouse. It shows how foolish it is to spend so much effort looking after the physical body, which is neither a permanent place nor belongs to “me.” Yet people spend their whole life working for money to support their physical body, which they only have to leave with great sorrow.

Ordinary people living within the eight worldly dharmas take so much care of this impermanent, trivial body by harming many other beings, both human and animal. Yet this body has to be left at death, causing suffering and giving no help at this inevitable time. Even if we are reborn human, we will have the same problems of having to take care of the body, experiencing harm and death. As long as ignorance is not cut off, we must take care of the physical body again and again and we must experience the same problems again and again.

The conclusion is this: if we don’t wish to have such a physical body that suffers, takes so much energy, and so forth, we must try to live in the essential practice of the Dharma so that we can reach enlightenment and be released from all suffering—including that of having a physical body—as quickly as possible.

Overcoming Laziness

Milarepa says,

Remembering death conquers laziness.
Any action done remembering impermanence
Becomes a Dharma action.

Laziness is the worst habit we can have, interfering with enlightenment and therefore with future happiness. It’s a greatest obstacle to happiness. One of the main antidotes to laziness is remembering death. While we are trapped in the eight worldly dharmas, our ignorance blocks us from creating actions that will bring about fortunate future lives or from escaping from samsara and attaining enlightenment. Remembering death stops actions that seek the comfort of this worldly life.

There are three types of laziness:

1. the laziness of discouragement
2. the laziness of being attached to worldly affairs
3. the laziness of procrastination

The first is the *laziness of discouragement* that causes us to object to doing things with the excuse that we are unable to do them. This is the mind that thinks, “It’s beyond my capabilities.” The second is the worst form of laziness, the *laziness of being attached to worldly affairs* that is drawn to engage in negative actions of greed, hatred and ignorance, actions that distract the mind from Dharma practice. The third is the *laziness of procrastination*, the type of laziness that interferes with our wish to practice Dharma and causes us to waste time with distractions. This kind of laziness comes about as a result of lacking the understanding of the nature of samsara, the cause of suffering and the evolution of karma.

The less laziness we have, the fewer hindrances to meditation we will experience. Spending all day and night working for samsaric comforts is considered laziness from the Dharma point of view. Because we don’t remember our past sufferings or know those that lie ahead, we are lazy, and we work for ignorance and greed. Examples of this were clearly shown by the Buddha.

When we fully understand the suffering of others, we must help them as much as possible. We can’t become enlightened without seeing how others are suffering. Paradoxically, seeing others’ suffering also opens our eyes to beauty. Although there is suffering all around, as we purify our minds, we see more and more beauty, even in things we would have considered ugly before. In contrast, the “beauty” the ignorant mind sees only creates more ignorance. Everything depends on seeing the true nature of suffering. We don’t lose our appreciation of beauty by meditating on suffering; we only lose it through the increase of our ignorance.

The death meditation is a very useful practice to deal with the problem of attachment to a friend. Doing this doesn’t mean that friends can’t stay together. This meditation has nothing to do with the physical body; it’s purely to transform the mental attitude. To do it, we don’t even have to sit down and meditate. We can do this meditation in conjunction with whatever else we are doing, including talking to that friend. Asking, “Is the time of death definite?” is especially useful in this situation. It’s especially useful if we are physically attached to the friend. We can remember that their body is constantly changing and that every second they are closer to death. This is something that the attached mind never does; it believes in permanence. We can also imagine the same body turned inside out. Beauty doesn’t depend on the object.

Death Is Definite

[WFGS pp. 94–96]

Shantideva says,

[4:16] Although today I am healthy,
Well-nourished and unafflicted,
Life is momentary and deceptive:
The body is like an object on loan for but a minute.

[4:24] And if, having understood this,
I still foolishly continue to be slothful,
When the hour of death arrives
Tremendous grief will rear its head.

Among the methods to extend life, we can do pujas, make statues of certain aspects of the Buddha, do purification practices and so forth. Tibetan people consult astrologers or lamas to see how much longer they will live, especially if somebody is sick. If there is some danger of an untimely death, there are methods to stop it and extend the human life. Often the person would take ordination and become celibate.

Sometimes, families have bad luck. Their children die young, and they ask the lama to stop what is happening. They would give their existing child a new name and try to get them to lead the life of monk or a nun when they are old enough to take ordination. My family is like this. Many children died and it was observed that the last child, my sister, would also die, but she was able to overcome her life hindrances through particular practices.

But to really escape from suffering, rebirth and death, we must attain the fully renounced mind and realize emptiness. This depends on the realization of the perfect human rebirth and on belief in reincarnation. That is why we are working on these here.

We must understand the absolute truth of emptiness. It's said,

All compounded things are impermanent.
Let all be well-equipped with heedfulness.

The highly realized pandit, Nagarjuna, says in *Friendly Letter*,

With all its many risks, this life endures
No more than windblown bubbles in a stream.
How marvelous to breathe in and out again,
To fall asleep and then awake refreshed. [\[19\]](#)

As the water bubble is certain to burst, our lives are certain to end in death. No sentient being has ever escaped death. Nothing can stop death. No material possessions, wealth, servants, fame or any other thing can prevent us dying. No samsaric enjoyment can ever stop death. Even if we are treated like a god, we still must die.

Death is definite. We must remember that, as we must know that there can be great suffering at the time of death, something that nobody wants. Without consciously working on our mind, making it more positive, we can just naturally slip into increasingly negative ways, making our death a terrible time. We can have a peaceful death, but only with a peaceful, positive mind.

The Time of Death Is Indefinite

We all have a particular lifespan when we are born, determined by our karma. When our karmic lifespan runs out, that lifetime ends.

We can also meet an untimely death at any time, even before our karmically determined lifespan has finished. We can die from so many causes, such as an accident or poisonous food, or even overeating.

Many of the great meditators through signs and omens knew that their death was coming days before they actually died. They could try to overcome life hindrances by checking the outer, inner and secret signs. There are long signs, which appear years and months ahead of time, and those that appear close to death. But even if they could delay their death, they still had to die later on.

In *Precious Garland*, Nagarjuna says,

Hence while in good health create foundations of doctrine
Immediately with all your wealth,
For you are living amidst the causes of death
Like a lamp standing in a breeze. [20]

Just as a lamp's flame can be easily blown out by a breeze, our human life is full of problems that threaten our life. Just as the flame is unstable, so too is our life.

Death is definite. Throughout the evolution of earth, not one samsaric being has existed forever. All beings have to die. There are more conditions harmful to life than support it. There are many living beings and non-living things that can harm us. Even the conditions we create to look after life may bring danger and death. This is easily seen. A son kills his father, a husband kills his wife, vehicles cause injury and death, food causes sickness and death. Because the body is so fragile, its elements become imbalanced and it's easy to encounter suffering. Some beings even die in the mother's womb.

We should think, "One day death will happen to me. If it happens to me now, do I know what will happen?" We should meditate on somebody else's death if we can remember it, but the most important thing to do is to try and feel that that death is happening to us now. Do we know what to do when we die? Do we know where our karma will take us? After death, there are only two ways the mind can go—to the upper fortunate realms or the lower suffering realms. Which realm we are reborn in is decided by our karma, the result of our actions. We have no control as we die.

When we examine the state of our mind, it's quite frightening. Even today, let alone throughout our life, have we created more positive karma or more negative karma? In all our previous lives have we created more positive or negative karma? If we are honest, I think the answer will certainly be that were we to die today, because we have created far less positive karma than negative karma, we would definitely go to the lower realms, where there is so much suffering.

No matter how much we might be suffering now, it is absolutely nothing compared to the suffering we will have to experience in the lower realms without any freedom at all. Now we

suffer when we are given food we don't like, but how will we stand it as a hungry ghost when we are unable to find even a scrap of food for hundreds of years? If we don't desire suffering here, how will we feel when we experience suffering that is infinitely greater?

To avoid rebirth in these realms, we must die with a mind that has renounced negativity. This is work we must do now. We must prepare now for a higher rebirth and work toward the end of suffering. Even if we died in terrible conditions in our last life, when we meditate on death in this way, we can certainly purify our mind.

The reasons we practice the Dharma and meditate are the same reasons that we do things for this life—for happiness, not suffering. To cease the principal cause of suffering we need a method, and the Dharma gives it to us. We need the Dharma more than we need hospitals and doctors, because without ceasing the principal cause of suffering, no problem can be solved. We may think that when we have an illness, a hospital will cure it, and that will be the end, but that's not true. Take T.B. for example. If T.B. is contracted when we are young, we may be cured, but it can still recur.

We may think that external factors are the principal cause of illness, like food, the environment and the elements, but no matter how we improve the environment or change the external conditions, the illness recurs or others come on. This proves that the external conditions are not the principal cause of suffering, that there must be something else that causes an illness to arise, some internal factor. In fact, the cause is in the mind, the delusions that obscure our mind, and those delusions are what we must destroy. We can't do this with any external condition or material thing. Our negative mind states can only be ceased by other mental methods—by developing positive mental states that are antidotes to our delusions.

The fundamental cure for all negative mental states is the mind that wishes to attain enlightenment in order to free all beings from suffering, the mind called bodhicitta. This mind can root out the principal cause of suffering. Developing this positive mind is not intuitive; it must be explained by the right person and then practiced. If we do this correctly, we can definitely develop the most positive of all minds and then definitely cease suffering. It all depends on receiving the Dharma and then practicing it in order to experience the positive results. That is why we need the Dharma more than anything in this life.

Preparing for Death

There are many different signs that can show that death is approaching: outer, inner and secret signs, and the longer and shorter signs. This is something known to the great yogis. The outer signs are changes in the body, urination, and the breath. The inner signs are seeing different signs of catastrophe, especially in dreams. The secret signs are changes in sperm and menstruation.

One method to check up on the time of death is to check up on how the shadow of our clothes appears on a full moon day. This should be done on the first day of the month when the sky is very clear.

We begin by reciting a mantra one hundred and eight times, stand up, and then on the heart of the shadow write the letter OM. As we stand, we stretch out our arms and legs and stare without

blinking until our eyes feel uncomfortable. Then, we suddenly look up into space. We will see the shape of our body, and that will show the different kinds of catastrophe with spirits, nagas and so forth, as well as the time of death, in dependence upon the shape of the body—if it is square and so on. If the body has no legs or hands missing, it means that no catastrophe will happen.

This can be done in the daytime or nighttime. The mantra is: OM AH U KO PARA HAKA RESHETE HUNG PE. After finishing, we should make seven prostrations in each direction to the holy beings and then recite the mantra. This kind of checking is for the long-term sign—a year or five years.

There is also a way to check up on the dangers of this life by means of the breath. Usually the breath works like this: on the first day of the Tibetan month, at dawn, the stronger breath comes from the left side for three days. After that, at the time of dawn the stronger breath comes from the right side for three days. Then it changes back. As it varies from this, we can observe it. When practitioners recognize the signs of death, they usually do pujas, although there are all kinds of different methods. Then they check up to see if the signs have stopped or not. If not, they do more pujas. These methods are used to check up on untimely death that is not dependent on karma.

The outer signs are easy to check up on. The most difficult is the secret closer sign. Slightly less difficult is the inner sign, which is a little more difficult than the outer sign. The death shown by the secret sign is extremely difficult to stop, that shown by the inner a little less difficult, and that shown by the outer is the least difficult to stop.

At the time of death, it is most useful if we have completely abandoned our attachment to our own body, friends, relatives, pleasures and possessions. Attachment to those things only causes great suffering at the time of death and starts us spiraling into the three lower realms. That is why it's so important to overcome our attachments.

Tibetan Dharma practitioners have many ways to transfer the consciousness at the time of death. If we have no attachment to any of those things, we will be OK.

It's very good to have the wish to be born in a pure land because from there we can receive oral teachings. All enjoyment in a pure land is completely pure, not a creation of the deluded mind. In a pure land, we take spontaneous rebirth in a lotus, so this kind of rebirth doesn't depend on birth from parents. All the enjoyments in a pure land not only bring pure happiness, they also cause the understanding of Dharma to develop. Nothing that exists on this earth can compare in quality, even living things. In a pure land all things are spiritual, giving much pure pleasure and supporting development of realizations. The mind always receives teachings from the enlightened beings, who pray that many other sentient beings may be born in a pure land to receive teachings. In a pure land it is very easy to get out of samsara.

It's important to try even now, before death, to understand how to die and what to do when death comes. Because we never wish to experience a suffering death, it's important to not be lazy and to make arrangements before death comes.

The fuel that will take us to the pure land is the desire to be born there, similar to the craving at the time of death that takes us to the other realms. Rebirth as a human depends upon the desire to be reborn as a human at the time of death.

To renounce attachment, it's important to start with meditation one [of *Wish-fulfilling Golden Sun*, the perfect human rebirth and impermanence and death] and continue through to meditation eight [the meditation on concentration]. The death meditation is especially useful. It's very simple, easy to understand and very beneficial if we wish to quickly eliminate attachment.

The second part of the first meditation is on the impermanent nature of life and on death. When we realize this meditation, we can be born in a pure land or receive enlightenment. Otherwise, it's impossible to escape from the suffering of the three lower realms. If we are not conscious of death coming, we have to suffer when it comes. This meditation is mainly to train the mind. We should use this method to overcome problems and prevent them from arising. Unless we do that, at the time of death the negative mind will be so large that we will suffer. This occurs due to lack of practice.

It's most important to make what we have understood through our practice beneficial for ourselves and for others. Unless we use what we have understood, when we meet a problem it makes no sense. Our meditation would lack the insight to become meaningful and would be unable to reflect our mind back to us like a mirror. The benefits of meditation depend on how we use what we have meditated on, how it works within the mind, not on things written on paper. The purpose of meditation is to train our mind to become more aware.

As we realize the practice on the impermanence of life and death more deeply and profoundly, it's definite we will be able to overcome momentary problems and remove negative minds such as attachment. Who creates the karma that keeps us in suffering? We do, so we are responsible.

Although we alone can overcome our ignorance, we have the help of the enlightened beings, through their teachings. If we had fallen into a hole and somebody above had let down a rope to help us out, unless we recognize it and hold onto the rope, we will continue suffering. The enlightened beings have shown us the path, so it is a matter of us holding to the method—like holding the rope—and lifting ourselves out of suffering. The more we practice purifying our negativities, which are the cause of our suffering, the stronger our essential practice of Dharma will be. That in itself is a great purification. Whatever we do for a living—a farm worker, an office worker, a businessperson or whatever—if our practice really purifies the mind, it's the essential practice of Dharma.

Purifying our negative states of mind is the essential practice, no matter what religion we follow—Hinduism, Islam, Christianity or any other. As long as the actions of the religion can purify the mind, that is the essential practice of the Dharma. This is an internal transformation; it doesn't come about by simply turning a prayer wheel or playing a *damaru*. [21] Even killing another being in order to cut off the cause of suffering may be a true Dharma action but would only be so if we had incredible bodhicitta, where every action is solely for the benefit of others. While there is even one single self-cherishing thought, without wisdom, an action we might think of as a Dharma action is really only developing the negative mind.

Since we don't want to suffer at the time of death or in our next life, it's important to start training the mind well now with these practices. The mind has to be well fertilized through the practice of the basic meditations before we practice the different tantric deity meditations or the transference of consciousness at death. Just as wheels are essential features of a car, enabling it to take us to various places, the basic practices are the same; without them, we can't progress along on the path.

Running Toward Death

It's insufficient just to recognize the fact that one day, in time, we will die. Everyone has this idea, not just those who practice Dharma, but this idea is not enough. It's more important to understand that the time of our death is indefinite and that we could die at any moment, which will give us the determination to immediately fulfill the meaning of our perfect human rebirth.

The practitioners who sincerely live in the practice of the meditation on impermanence and death have a mind that is greatly concerned with the purification of negativity and the creation of positive karma, either for the purpose of achieving another perfect human rebirth or of attaining enlightenment. When we have the realization of both impermanence and death, we are much less concerned with this life and are working hard for the next life. Just as we would be rushing to the cinema if we were late for the film, heedless of any discomfort, in preparing for our death and our next life, we don't care about worldly discomforts, such as not getting the best food or falling and being injured and so on. We are not so concerned with little problems such as itches, pains, lice and so forth, and we can spend more time concentrating on meditation, paying more attention to avoiding distraction and disturbances. What we are concerned about is not wasting this life, not missing this real opportunity to prepare for our future life and attain the goals of the cessation of samsara and enlightenment. This brings the result of less distraction and disturbance to our Dharma practice, making it more successful.

When we have a lot of concern for our physical comfort, we waste our time and have less time for meditation. This is because while we should be meditating, we are concerned with what is going on around us. Wrapped up in the external world, we have no sense of the impermanence of things and no thought of death.

If we were to see the importance of being aware of impermanence and death, we would realize that only the Dharma can help at the time of death, then, as a result, we see that our Dharma practice must be developed quickly. We are more concerned about our future lives than our current one, with the negative karma we have collected that will ensure future suffering. This gives us great impetus to not create any more negative karma and purify the negative karma on our mindstream. Our present situation becomes less important and our pleasures and momentary enjoyments become insignificant. The more we can see the importance of understanding impermanence, the fewer distractions there are to our Dharma practice.

It's logical that we will have fewer problems than somebody who doesn't live in this practice. They probably know that at some stage in the future they will die but subconsciously think that they will not die tomorrow. With no sense of impermanence, they have more concern for this worldly life than any possible suffering in some future life. While they continue to make preparations for this life alone, with the mind that they will continue to exist, their plans are very

short-term, planning how they can be happy tomorrow or next month or next year and engaging in negative actions produced by greed and ignorance to fulfill their plans. Going around and around like this, their lives are extremely busy.

We shouldn't be caught in the same spiral, chasing worldly happiness. We shouldn't merely seek to make our temporal life comfortable, which is said to create negative karma because worldly concerns block any thought of future lives. Rather than helping us out of the cycle of suffering, chasing worldly goals inevitably creates attachment and anger and causes us to spiral further and further into the cycle of suffering called samsara and further and further from the ultimate goal.

It's wrong to think that we shouldn't make plans. Plans can be positive, like having Dharma practice as the goal, but we should be careful because they can also be negative, like having temporal comforts as the goal. Our Dharma plans should start from now, because the actual time of our death is indefinite. At least we should work more for the positive plan than the negative. The more we practice this meditation, the more effort we will make to stop future suffering. Just as a person who knows that their building is about to be demolished won't spend much time redecorating it but instead make preparations to leave, in this way, we hurry to save our next life from suffering, unconcerned with this life's temporal comforts.

There is a quote from one of the great masters:

Running toward death without the freedom of not running for even a second is the nature of samsaric life.

This is the nature of our samsaric lives. Unless we clearly see that the time of our death is indefinite, we will never pay any attention to this fact and never prepare for our death or create the positive karma that will ensure a good future life. Concerned only with our own worldly happiness now, we naturally create more negative karma than positive. This is due to the wrong concept of not checking up on the suffering of death or future lives.

Then, when death comes, all our freedom ends and our life is wasted. Here at Kopan, you are probably missing your life in the West at present, but the way you miss the West is nothing compared to how you will miss it at the time of your death. If we were to suddenly think at the time of our death that we now need to devote our life to meditation, it's too late; there's no longer any choice. Numberless beings have died in terrible suffering because they have not bothered to purify their minds before they died. Regret at the time of death is too late. This hasn't been our experience—yet—but we're well on the way. Death is getting closer with each second. At the time of death, without choice we will remember much of the negative karma we have created, causing us so much worry.

Attachment to Our Body and Possessions

At death, as we think, "I am really dying now," we understand that we are leaving our relatives and friends, our possessions and our body. As we feel this, great attachment arises for the body and possessions, and we feel a terrible loss at the separation. We experience incredible fear and suffering. With the mind overwhelmed by this attachment, we take a lower rebirth, especially in the hell realm, having to experience utterly unbearable suffering for an unimaginable length of

time. This attachment to our body and possessions keeps us continuously cycling from death to rebirth to death, on and on. Because of that, at the time of death our body and our possessions become our enemy.

This body that we feed and take so much care of is supposed to be a constant source of pleasure, never causing suffering. But in addition to bringing so much trouble during our life, at death it also causes great fear and suffering. At death, even the body becomes our enemy. It's important to continue thinking like this—that the body will appear as our enemy at the time of death. Concentrating on this more and more, we can loosen the attachment to the body and possessions. As these attachments decrease, the suffering due to the body and possessions decreases proportionally.

The attachment we feel toward our body and possessions is like a sweet-talking person who acts as a friend but really aims to kill us. Until we realize their intention, they seem like our friend and we are attached to them. When we discover their plan, however, our attachment vanishes immediately. Knowing them and what they are going to do to us, we have no wish to indulge them anymore. We become wary of them, skeptical of everything they do. Knowing that the end of this relationship will only be our death, motivated by that fear, we do everything we can to avoid that suffering. Our body and possessions are the same as that sweet-talking friend. Therefore, we should meditate on the great disadvantages of our attachment to them and meditate on our death in order to cut the attachment that will cause us great suffering at that time.

The only education that schools and universities offer is how to take care of this short-lived body. No matter how much biology we study, we will never learn the true evolution of the mind. All that study can actually be a cause of great suffering, working so hard for that degree that will give us the money to pamper our body. The study of Dharma is the best thing we can do.

We have to go to so much trouble because we have this body. We get married for the desires of the body, not for the mind. Although marriage is supposed to be for life, we can be besieged with problems. Convincing ourselves after some time that we have the wrong partner, our marriage becomes like a prison. If we didn't have this body, there would be no need for marriage. There would be no need to exhaust ourselves working to feed this body.

We would have much less trouble with other beings. Because of this body, we need a house for it to live in. The first houses were built because the ancient ones started having sex; they became embarrassed at their behavior and made houses to hide in. Without the body there wouldn't be all the sicknesses related to it. We would never get tired, buy food and prepare it; we wouldn't make kaka and pipi.

Why do we continually take a body, life after life? Our present attachment to having a physical body creates the craving as we are dying that ensures we take another physical form, one caused by karma and delusions. This attachment is not to the particular future body we will take but to having a physical body; if we didn't have such an attachment, we wouldn't take this form. However, because the attachment is there, it plants the seed for rebirth in a human body at some future time. In this way, we can see that the body is the principal cause of our suffering. Meditating on this is a good way to eliminate attachment to the body.

A bodhisattva who has attained a direct realization of emptiness and who has achieved perfect peace is totally free from the negative mind and free to leave the form that they take at any time. Their form is not an uncontrolled one like ours; they can manifest in whatever way is most beneficial for all sentient beings. They don't have the sorts of problems we do because their body is not the result of karma and delusions. Being free from greed, hatred and ignorance, they are free from karma and delusions. With such a holy body, there is no suffering, only infinite bliss.

On the other hand, there is no end to the harmful actions we do in order to take care of this body. We have been doing all our samsaric actions of eating, drinking, marrying, being reborn and so forth since beginningless rebirths. We think that everything is new, that each action to take care of the body is a novelty, but in fact none of these experiences are new; we have done them all countless times in the past. The only reason they seem new is that we have forgotten them. We think the people we meet are new, taking drugs is new, but none of these experiences are new; they are terribly old, they are beginningless.

Padmasambhava says,

The appearances of this life are like last night's dream.
The meaningless works of this life are like ripples on water. [\[22\]](#)

All that we have done, from the time of birth until now, has passed like a dream, as quickly as last night's dream. The experience of this life and the experience of that dream both exist only in the mind, and both have ended. This shows the impermanence of life, how quickly it goes. Therefore, we should practice the Dharma because all actions done to take care of this body are like ripples on a lake; they are meaningless, coming and going one after the other, giving no comfort. Everything we have enjoyed is like this.

It's certainly OK to take care of our body if it is purely for the purpose of attaining enlightenment in order to help other sentient beings. In this case, it can't be mixed up with the eight worldly dharmas. In order for this to be so, each action must be completely selfless, expecting nothing in return and having nothing to do with seeking happiness for self. Such an action would greatly delight all bodhisattvas, who would recognize a new friend in the world. Bodhisattvas are those whose only concern is the welfare of all sentient beings.

Meditating on Death

If the mind is occupied with external distractions and not with the inner practice of the Dharma, we will experience great suffering at the time of death. The mind can't take even a tiny hair from the body into the future life; it certainly can't take numberless jewels. The more attached we are to our body and our possessions, the less we are conscious of how ignorant our mind is. And since it's uncertain whether tomorrow or the next life will come first, yet it's certain that the body and possessions will become enemies at the time of death if we are attached to them, from now on we must be skillful in not being attached to these things. We should train our life like that, instead of spending our life in the service of our enemies—the body, relatives and material possessions we are attached to, which only give trouble at the time of death.

In the next minute our future life could be here. When we meditate on death, we can visualize our own death, how the mind separates from the body like a hair pulled from the head. The purpose of this is to cut off the cause of suffering, the negative mind, and to protect us from suffering and especially from creating the negative karma that arises from attachment to the body, possessions and relatives.

We must remain aware and meditate at the time of death but if at that time our attachment arises and gets stronger, it obscures our view. In order to be able to continue meditating, we need a strong practice. There can be many fearful visions and so forth as we die, so we should practice during our life. To do so, we must understand what death is. It's not like a butter lamp coming to an end.

This meditation is more useful than the most expensive medicine, containing so much understanding. It has the power to eliminate the negative karma we have created with our body, speech and mind by cutting attachment to the body, possessions and relatives, and through realizing the evolution of death, rebirth and suffering.

Generally, even to finish this first meditation takes a lot of time because there is so much that can be said. But it can also be finished in an hour, depending on the mind. Just as it takes a long time to flatten a rocky mountain, we have to work with the mind throughout many lives. This is not working with words alone but with the mind. The explanations can never be finished because they are related to many other subjects. Generally speaking, the explanation and understanding of the first part of the meditation couldn't be completed in a year.

For the great ancient pandits and the present great yogis, the purpose of meditation is only to control and purify the negative mind, and not for physical comfort and worldly happiness.

In *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* Shantideva says,

[2:36–38] Just like a dream experience,
Whatever things I enjoy
Will become a memory.
Whatever has passed will not be seen again.

Even within this brief life
Many friends and foes have passed,
But whatever unbearable wrongdoing I committed for them
Remains ahead of me.

Thereby, through not having realized
That I shall suddenly vanish,
I committed so much wrong
Out of ignorance, lust and hate.

Life is so fleeting, lasting only a few months or a few years. When we think about the friends, relatives and possessions we have fought to obtain due to our partial mind, harming other beings in the process, we can ask, "Will they last; will they stay with me? Isn't it definite that I shall have to leave them in time, maybe tomorrow? Isn't it meaningless to relentlessly get angry with and

fight the person who wants to take my possessions, harm my relatives, insult my friends, hurt my body?" Every action that we do to protect these objects of our attachment creates negative karma. We should think that we might well die tonight, we just can't know, so it's meaningless to get angry and create negative karma to care for something that will last only a few hours. Some people even die while doing this. In order to take care of these very transient things, by creating the causes of so much suffering, such actions are very foolish.

Unless we meditate on the impermanence of life and on death, we won't discover the suffering nature of these negative minds. Meditation doesn't mean sitting in a particular posture and keeping very still; it's to do with transforming the mind from negative to positive.

When we meditate on death, we should ask ourselves what we would do if we were to die at this moment. We have to be honest and assess the state of our mind. If at present our mind is more negative than positive, what would we experience as we are dying?

There are many methods to protect ourselves from suffering at the time of death, but they have to be practiced while we are alive. A mind of desire is a very disturbed one, extremely difficult to control. Because it will take a lot of training to overcome our attachment, we must practice diligently in this life. Unless we see death as suffering, we won't be able to effectively practice and won't be able to overcome suffering when we die. We have a choice now. At death, we can become our own enemy and cause great future suffering, or we can become our own perfect guide.

Without control at death, we will continue to be reborn in the six samsaric realms. When an insect lands on a spider's web, who causes the problem? The web has not been created just for that particular fly—but the fly has the karma to fly into the web and become trapped. We also place ourselves in the web of samsara, creating negative karma and forever circling in cyclic existence. Countless trillions of problems arise from that. This has been explained by the Buddha. It was something he clearly saw with his omniscience and something that has been the experience of his followers.

These numberless problems all arise from lack of awareness of death. Being bored or lazy, feeling sleepy—all arise from not realizing that the actual time of death is indefinite, not having full belief in the next life, and not understanding the evolution of karma. The whole problem starts from this. Not knowing there is a method, we don't try. Even if we remember to do something and practice the Dharma, we will be unable to effectively meditate.

We might put some effort into meditation but because we are lazy and only do it sometimes, we have little success. When we are careless in our Dharma practice, we can create a lot of negative karma. Then, at the time of death we will experience great fear. Therefore, thinking about death makes our human life very meaningful, allowing us to achieve realizations more quickly by not being obscured by worldly thoughts and negative minds.

The power of bodhicitta and of living in avoidance of the eight worldly dharmas comes from remembering death, how death is definite but the time of death is indefinite. All the great powers that are achieved by higher practices are founded in the death meditation. Even enlightenment is due to thinking about death.

Even at the beginning of the path, we should strive for the fully renounced mind. This is the first step. To attain renunciation, we must practice the avoidance of the eight worldly dharmas, which depends on understanding suffering. We need to see death and rebirth as suffering, which comes from having a fear of death. Without a great deal of contemplation on how its time is indefinite, the door will remain closed.

What creates the two different views that two people have toward one object? It depends on the different past karma each has created. It's impossible for two people to have exactly the same view of one object. Is it possible to fully experience past and future lives, as past holy beings have experienced it? We won't fully understand these subjects until we have fully purified our mind. The purpose of meditating on death is to build the practice and only create positive karma.

Unless we employ the methods shown by the Buddha, there is no possibility that the body can stop the sufferings of death or the problems that come after death.

Because We Can't Remember Past Lives Does Not Disprove Them

Reasoning that there is no continuity of mind before or after this body because we have no personal experience of it or because it hasn't been explained by scientists is illogical. If we reason in this way, then on the same grounds we should say that, because none of us fully sees how the mind came into the mother's womb or how it suffered there, the mind can't exist in her womb. It's a completely dark subject. We don't even remember our present life after our birth.

What caused us to enter the mother's womb? Scientists explain the physical level, but there is no scientific explanation of the mental experience, the feelings in the womb, the feelings at birth or at death. Using only empirical knowledge, scientists don't fully see the mental experiences of evolution in the womb or at death. Even their understanding of the growth of the fetus doesn't come from their personal experience, just through instruments. They don't see the mental continuity of life.

Unless we can fully explain the evolution of the mind in this life, how can we explain past and future lives? Based on this reasoning of not remembering, we should say that there was no mind in the womb and there is none at death, because there's no experience of it. We should also say that the I doesn't exist because we don't see the I. Denying the true nature of ourselves because it wasn't taught in school, we would become nonexistent. To be skeptical of past and future lives, we have to be skeptical about the mind too, because we don't recognize what the mind is. And if we are skeptical about the mind in this way, we must be skeptical of everything we don't see.

We must be skeptical of tomorrow's existence, but this is where our skepticism falls. If we investigate, our definite assumption is that there will be a tomorrow and we will still exist tomorrow, and for many years to come. But if we are skeptical of these other subjects, we should be skeptical of that as well. We should be skeptical about not dying tomorrow. We are skeptical where we shouldn't be and not skeptical where we should.

Although there is no logical reason for thinking tomorrow will happen using this kind of reasoning, our mind doesn't have the power to fully see it. Here is something for our mind to be skeptical of, and yet we *believe* in our tomorrow. Why aren't we skeptical of this belief? Whereas

being skeptical of continuing to exist in this life definitely helps us escape from ignorance, the fear of death and all those sufferings, being skeptical of the past and future lives can only lead to ignorance and more suffering.

Without fully seeing mental evolution it's extremely difficult to understand physical evolution. They are not one, but they are related to each other. That's why the explanation in science books is incomplete. I'm talking about my own experience. Science doesn't seem to have an explanation for the evolution of the original consciousness. It talks of life beginning in the ocean but if we explore what science says, much is speculation and theory and not only is the explanation of physical evolution limited, there is no explanation of the evolution of the mind. Without recognition of the mind, the explanation of evolution is incomplete.

Because scientists are limited to what they can measure with their instruments, they ignore the existence of other realms that are not easily seen, such as the hungry ghost and hell realms, realms that have been clearly explained by the enlightened beings. Because the buddhas have described them with their perfect knowledge, we can believe fully what they say. How can we verify that they are perfect beings who can fully see these natures and realms? Their realizations are perfect and what they see is correct because the methods to cease the beginningless sufferings that they have shown have been proved successful by the many other beings who have followed them. As these beings practiced the methods all the way up to enlightenment, they also saw and proved these things through their experiences. The numberless buddhas have explained and achieved the different level of realizations and numberless followers have proved this through experience.

Stories of Good Deaths

Many Indian pandits could see more and more clearly as they achieved different levels of clairvoyance. This had nothing to do with machines but with the mind. This was also clearly proven by a great number of Tibetan yogis, who received the methods from the Indian pandits and experienced the same thing. So many beings were enlightened in India as well as in Tibet, such as Milarepa, whose story is of achieving realizations through his Dharma practice, being able to take many forms and so forth. Also, Lama Tsongkhapa and Lama Atisha, who had fantastic human lives, also proved the suffering of the different realms that we can't see.

There were also many yogis who attained a vajra body through sutra and tantra practice. These methods prove that the enlightened beings' experience was perfect. The purpose of Dharma practice is to transform the mind from negativity and cause us to experience realizations so that we can attain perfect peace. The Tibetan yogis gave the same explanations that Guru Shakyamuni Buddha had given. They greatly emphasized that we must take care of our karma. There have been so many highly realized incarnate lamas and yogis who have control of death and rebirth and who have bodhicitta. Wherever they can help sentient beings, they take birth in that place by choice. Unlike theirs, our births have been uncontrolled because we have been unconscious. We had feelings at birth but now we don't remember them; nor do we remember the realms we were in before. This is because we are in the uncontrolled cycle of death and rebirth, under the power of karma and delusions.

I have no realizations. I don't remember being in my mother's womb, but many lamas living now have such remembrance. His Holiness the Dalai Lama could recognize his past servants and his past religious items.

People who carefully look after karma and practice tantra can die and be reborn freely since they have control of their delusions. In India, before they passed away many lamas meditated for twenty days or so, and when they died they remained in the lotus position, their bodies not decaying for some time while they remained in meditation. People wanted to be in the room where the body was because of the wonderful, blissful energy and the good smell.

There was also an aristocratic lady in Tibet who was always meditating and practicing the teachings of her guru. At the time of death, she had no fear; she made the correct prayers and sent her servant out, then after some time she passed away in a happy state of mind. Most of us spend our lives in distraction, being thoughtless of death, but then, at the time of death, we are terrified. From the Dharma point of view, being self-supporting only in this lifetime is not a wise way to be. If we are free at the time of death, we are really self-supporting. This lady took care of her karma. She meditated on suffering and had control over her death.

Just recently, a year or two ago, there was an ascetic meditator living down from our place. He was a very austere lama who had no attachment to samsaric existence. He had realized impermanence and the renounced mind, and his Dharma practice was pure. For a year before his death, he took the aspect of being sick many times, but if he heard that others were doing good things for the Dharma, he recovered. At the time of death, he was perfectly OK. One night he told the monk who was his servant not to worry, and at dawn he sent his servants out and poured out some tea, and then he died. After staying in meditation for a week, his mind left his body. He reincarnated in that area and was identified by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and many other lamas.

Before death, many lamas prophesize where they will take rebirth. Having control after death is not definite and doesn't only depend on being ordained. At the time of death, we can become enlightened. Many lay people practiced like this, taking a fearless death on the instructions of their guru.

There was an Indian lady, a benefactor, who observed her karma and had deep devotion to her deity. She was taken care of by her son. They kept donkeys. She often went to the monastery and one day, when she returned from the monastery, after she thanked her son for taking care of her, she passed away without fear.

Those who closely observe their karma and meditate on impermanence are much happier at death time than during their lives because they have the confidence of the path. Most people, however, suffer at the time of death. Even the person who has killed many people will be OK if they can practice strong purification. Milarepa is an example of this.

There are many instances of reincarnation in the West, such as the soldier who was reborn as the son of the man who killed him. The best way to remember our past lives is through the clairvoyance obtained through the practice of meditation.

There are two kinds of incarnation, controlled and uncontrolled. As the above examples show, when the method practiced in this lifetime becomes effective at the time of death, we go through death fearlessly, with recognition and understanding. This shows that the method given by the Buddha is true. The way to check the enlightened beings is to check their method, to see whether or not it helps as explained.

When we understand the great realizations that the meditators have attained, we should be inspired to follow their methods because we also want to achieve realizations ourselves. The understanding of karma and of the other realms depends on our level of wisdom. Those with great intelligence and much positive karma can clearly see it after a brief explanation; for others it takes time and even a hundred pages of a text can't explain it all. Ten people reading the same book will have ten different understandings of it. To understand these subjects and go on to attain realizations requires the support of not just an intelligent mind but having created sufficient merit and purified enough negativity. Without such help it's very difficult.

The Evolution of the Original Human Beings

[WFGS p. 97]

The evolution of human beings depends on karma.

Although external existing phenomena such as mountains and trees come into existence through causes and conditions, they are not part of karma because they have no continuity of mind. The karma that is fundamental in everything we experience is a mental factor, something that only occurs in sentient beings. Whether we experience happiness or suffering is dependent on which karmic imprint ripens due to the various conditions we meet. This is something that nonliving things don't experience.

All phenomena, living and nonliving, are empty of inherent existence and so depend on absolute truth. Something that is independent of absolute truth doesn't exist. An independent phenomenon is a hallucination.

If we plant the seed of a lotus in dirty mud, it grows to bring forth a beautiful, perfectly clean flower. Before the flower blooms, its potential exists in the seed, although the flower doesn't yet exist. Only the potential exists, and that produces the flower. The seed in the mud is not the flower but it has the power to bring it forth.

The nature of the mind is clear light and exists in every sentient being, making enlightenment possible. It's called "clear light" because it's not mixed with the obscurations of the negative mind. When the obscurations are purified, the nature of the mind becomes clear. At present, although our mind is not clear but obscured, the nature is the same. If I had been a tiger before, the nature of that mind and that of my present mind would be the same, although at the moment it's not the same mind. This mind is a continuity of that one.

A human is a being not born in a nonhuman realm from the intermediate stage. Humans are those beings who can communicate and understand meaning and who live in one of the four continents that surround Mount Meru. We live in the southern continent.

The original humans came from the form and formless god realms. Beings in formless realms live only on consciousness, without form, feeling or cognition. Rebirth in this realm arises from meditating based on a dissatisfaction with the desire realm and with the material pleasures and suffering of the realm. These beings pass a long, unconscious life, like deep sleep.

The Evolution of Death

[WFGS pp. 98–102]

In India, at the time of death the custom is for the body to be moved quickly, but this can be dangerous because the person may not be dead. If the heart area is touched, it may still be warm, even though the heat has left the other parts of the body. This indicates that the consciousness is still in the body.

This body is like the earth, composed of the four elements: fire, water, air and earth. During the death process, when the form aggregate decays, different visions occur. The chakras open at this time, but this usually occurs in an uncontrolled way. In meditation, the chakras can be opened using advanced meditative techniques, which can help us at the time of death.

Of the five wisdoms, the mirror-like wisdom is the power of the mind to perceive and remember objects, the ability to learn things and to understand meaning. With the first dissolution as we die, this wisdom dissolves.

We have five aggregates: form, feeling, discrimination, compositional factors and consciousness. Any mental experience that doesn't exist within the aggregates of form, feeling, discrimination and consciousness is considered the aggregate of compositional factors. There are fifty-one mental factors, both positive and negative, and these include shyness, caution, ignorance, jealousy, pride and wisdom. Intention, one of the mental factors, is another way of describing karma.

The four mental aggregates are the link between the mind and the physical body. The experience of these five aggregates operating gives us the sense of self or the I. Without them, we would have no concept of a physical existence. The mental aggregates are not physical themselves but rather a form of knowing. While we, as humans, have five aggregates, the gods in the formless realms have only four.

As we progress toward enlightenment, our aggregates are gradually purified. At present, our aggregates are very impure, being caused by karma and delusions, but they can certainly become completely pure, which is the state of omniscience.

Nam shä means consciousness or mind in Tibetan. The first syllable, *nam*, literally means aspect, which refers to the appearances that are recognized—such as positing, “This is a flower,” and “This is space.” *Shä* means knowing, which refers to discrimination of sensation or perception. The Sanskrit translation of consciousness is *vijnana*. *Sem* means heart or mind, which is *citta* in Sanskrit. *Yi* also means sentience in Tibetan; the Sanskrit is *manas*.

Consciousness is the mind that recognizes the object. It continues after the death of the body, bearing all the karmic imprints from the limitless karmas we have created over beginningless lives. Our human consciousness is a property of the human rebirth. As the rebirth changes, so does the type of consciousness. At present, we aren't aware of our entire consciousness. This will only happen when we attain enlightenment.

The visions that are experienced as we go through the various dissolutions as we die are also experienced by animals. What we are discussing here is the process of a "natural" death, which means a death not brought about by sudden, instantaneous conditions—such as a trauma, in which case there is no time for the process of the various visions, and the mind goes straight to the intermediate state or bardo.

As the death advances, we pass through various visions, with the appearance of mirages first, then smoke, sparks, and finally something like a spluttering candle, before we have the three visions that occur after the breath has stopped but before the consciousness leaves the body. They are the white vision, followed by the red vision and then the black vision. After the black vision, the clear light mind arises, which is the moment the consciousness leaves the dead body. That is our moment of death.

The Intermediate State

From the clear light, the black vision arises again, followed by the red and the white. From this point the gross superstitions as well as the aggregates arise in dependence upon the realm we are to be reborn into. The visions, fears and suffering that we experience at the time of death are dependent on the rebirth we will take in our next life.

At death, the gross mind absorbs and the subtle mind and then the very subtle mind become manifest. The very subtle mind is always there, but we are not conscious of it because the gross mind overwhelms it. The very subtle mind that resides at the heart chakra is the seat of our buddha nature. In order to attain enlightenment, we have to eliminate both our gross minds with their gross obscurations and our subtle obscurations.

This very subtle mind doesn't perceive gross objects such as flowers and so forth. These things are perceived by the gross mind. We experience the subtle mind at certain moments, such as when we sneeze or have an orgasm, but it's so subtle that we almost never perceive it.

When the very subtle mind arises at the time of death, there is a vision of clear light. But unless we can recognize the other visions that appear before that, this vision is almost impossible to perceive.

The intermediate state body [23] is not the subtle mind. Such a body is caused by the vehicle of the mind, the subtle wind. That is the principal cause of the intermediate body. Just as when we make a chair out of wood, we call it a chair, not wood, this is a subtle body, although caused by the subtle mind.

Due to karma, the intermediate state being doesn't recognize their own dead body. They perceive it with great fear and have no desire to reenter it. The intermediate state being has a subtle karmic body that can travel anywhere it wishes simply by thinking about it.

It's possible to attain enlightenment at the stage of vision of clear light, but this depends on being able to control our winds and bring them into the central channel. To achieve enlightenment in the intermediate state, we need to have completely purified ourselves, seeing ourselves in the completely purified form of the deity.

The yogi Ngagpo Chöpa had very high tantric attainments and could fly through the air surrounded by dakinis. However, as a result breaking samaya with guru, Naropa, he was unable to attain enlightenment in that lifetime, although he did after death. Having many psychic powers does not mean that we are free from delusions and released from the chain of karma and ignorance. Even some birds have psychic powers, such as vultures who can see a corpse behind a mountain, but this doesn't mean that they are free from the cycle of samsara.

The nature of the subtle mind is impermanent. The subtle mind depends on causes, which means it changes. Although plants don't have karma because they don't have mind, the cause of change in a flower is the previous moment of the flower. The subtle mind possesses a vehicle, the subtle wind. In normal life, although we possess this subtle mind, we don't perceive it. The very subtle body is the vehicle of the very subtle mind. We attain enlightenment through the perception of this very subtle mind.

Gross and subtle minds generally work like this. When the gross mind dissolves, the subtle mind becomes manifest. At that point, we can't perceive gross objects because there are no gross superstitious minds to perceive them. At death, although the gross mind becomes unmanifest, it doesn't disappear for good—only for as long as the subtle mind is manifest. It will only completely cease with the purification of the negative mind.

Each type of mind has its own vehicle: the gross mind has the gross winds and the subtle has the subtle winds. The gross winds abide in the two outer channels or *nadis* (right and left) that run either side of the central channel, a psychic energy channel that runs parallel to and just in front of the spinal cord. At present, our mind is uncontrolled, full of gross superstitions, because of the gross winds and gross superstitions that run through these channels. Thoughts travel through the right and left channels only, but don't flow through the central channel because it's blocked. Although the very subtle wind and mind abide at the center of the central channel, it's inaccessible because of the blocks that stop our normal minds from flowing into it. This is the main problem we must purify.

All this explanation is just to give you an idea, to help you to recognize the visions when you meditate on them, and to make the visions beneficial as a method of purification. The white, red and black visions occur when the white and red drops that normally abide at the crown and the navel descend and rise to meet at the indestructible drop, which is like a sesame seed at the heart chakra. As they meet, the vision of sudden darkness, like a dark room, is experienced, and then when the seed opens, there is the vision of clear light as it splits. The vision of clear light is none of the other three visions. The white vision is like snow on the mountains and clear light is like the vision of early autumn dawn—complete emptiness and very clear, like the sky.

At this time during our meditation, we should take a little time to concentrate on this. This vision is the basic thing, so we have to make it beneficial, purifying ourselves by recognizing it through practice. Merely concentrating on that complete emptiness, however, doesn't help a great deal. We need many other things as well, just as food can't be cooked by merely boiling the water. This vision can be used to achieve higher realizations and to attain enlightenment. When our mind reaches the point of the vision of clear light, we should concentrate on it as being one with our own mind and think that this is the complete emptiness of the self-existent I that mistakenly appears independent. Concentrating on our selflessness without any other thought arising causes the clear light vision to become transcendental.

Now we are only training, but at the time of death the mind that does this is the subtle mind. If we haven't trained our mind during our lifetime, we won't recognize this. As we get more control with habituation, it becomes more likely that we will be able to control the mind at the time of death. We have a similar experience when we fall asleep, but due to our lack of control we don't recognize it because of its brevity and subtlety. If we could control and recognize it and concentrate on it, it would be so much easier to control the mind as we die.

From this life, passing to the intermediate state is like passing from sleep into a dream state. We have to sleep because we are ignorant. While we are doing this practice, we shouldn't allow other thoughts to arise, otherwise at death we won't be able to recognize the visions.

The subtle mind can be pure or impure. It's not the same as the absolute nature of the mind. The nature of the mind is not the mind; it's interdependent with the mind but it's not the mind itself. Like a mirror covered in kaka, the absolute nature of the mind is the mirror, not the kaka. A mirror that is clear and one that is covered with a little kaka both possess the absolute nature of mind, the absolute truth. The mirror is not inseparable from the kaka; the absolute nature of the mirror depends on the mirror itself. The absolute nature of the mind and the mirror are inseparable, but the kaka of the negative mind can be cleaned from the mirror. Just as the absolute nature of the mirror is inseparable from the mirror, the mind and its absolute nature are inseparable. As it says in the *Heart Sutra*, form is emptiness, emptiness is form.

The subtle mind doesn't perceive gross objects as being different from the subject. The gross mind, however, differentiates between subject and object, and therefore has likes and dislikes. The gross mind has to be purified, after which the subtle mind, which sees no difference between subject and object, arises. Then, the subtle mind, which still has subtle obscurations, also has to be purified. Only then does it become omniscient.

The principal cause that traps us in suffering is the concept of the self-existent, independent I. When we attain buddhahood, we have no thought, "I am going to do this and that." The action is instinctively done.

When we meditate on the clear light, we think of the complete emptiness of a self-existent, independent I. Then we think that this vision of emptiness is one with our mind. The vision is dependent on these two things. We should concentrate on these without letting other thoughts arise. Doing this can help a great deal in many ways, especially in tantric practice. If we train our mind in this practice, we will be able to use it at the time of death, to protect ourselves from suffering.

The concept of the self-existent I is a delusion; such an I exists nowhere. We need to explore this. Because such an I would be independent of the body and mind to exist, how could it possibly exist? There is no such I that doesn't depend on the body and mind. An independent I would be one that exists without depending on the creator, on the name—and there is no such I.

It is the complete emptiness of the self-existent I that makes the clear light vision usable in death. As long as there is mind, there is the subtle mind.

This is just a simple meditation to practice at the time of death. This practice is just a seed and according to our development, we can decorate this clear light vision with more and more things; we can make it rich. After we have purified the mind, we will be able to perceive the pure intrinsic nature of mind.

The consciousness leaves the body when the indestructible drop opens. At that time, it goes to its karmically determined realm. At present, we don't have the control necessary to send the winds through the central channel. The purpose of deity yoga is to open the chakras and let the winds flow. The wind travels up the right and left channels and down the central channel. Until the visions at the time of death begin, the channels are blocked, tied at the chakras in knots. Some meditators can open the central channel before this, but it's very difficult, requiring great mental focus derived from meditation. As the winds enter the central channel, the mind follows; the mind rides the wind like a person rides a horse.

In sexual intercourse, we feel ordinary happiness because the sperm touches the outside of the central channel, although it doesn't enter. Were the sperm to enter the central channel, there would be great merit.

The wisest way to practice deity yoga is on the basis of bodhicitta, a fully renounced mind and with the realization of emptiness. We must have this foundation, otherwise the practice doesn't fit our mind and it becomes poisonous. This is not the fault of the method but of lack of ability. Even though we might practice diligently, it takes a very long time to achieve results. Without having fully developed bodhicitta, practicing kundalini yoga where we play with the subtle winds, for example, doesn't bring about the cessation of suffering or break the cycle of birth, death and rebirth.

Even though we have not accomplished the practice of entering the subtle winds into the channels and so forth, if we live in the practice of these three realizations of bodhicitta, renunciation and emptiness, it helps a great deal to cease the cycle of suffering and it's certain that we will never be reborn in the three lower realms. Without bodhicitta, death will be much more difficult, and it is extremely difficult to avoid an unfavorable rebirth.

If we have the basis of bodhicitta, renunciation and emptiness, we won't have much difficulty with the higher tantric practices. They will help us to quickly purify and attain enlightenment. Tibetan yogis are not surprised to find people who can do kundalini yoga and open their chakras, but they are greatly surprised and pleased to find those who have attained the three realizations.

Meditation On Impermanence: A Summary

It's important to note the titles of the outline when meditating. If you do this, the meditation becomes much shorter. The more often you meditate on a subject, the more powerful will be the mind that holds that subject. It's the nature of the mind that it can be developed like this. It's good to remember the quotations by using the titles. Then, you can expand the subject outside the meditation by reflecting on it and making observations. This is very effective for your mind.

First, meditate that the time of death is indefinite. Second, meditate on the different cooperative causes of death, such as starvation and so forth, and untimely death that arises due to external factors such as accidents, carelessness, and ignorance. Also meditate on natural death that occurs as the result of the end of your karmic lifespan. The most important thing to remember at this time is to check whether you have a deep sense of when you will die. And conclude that realistically it could be tonight or it could be tomorrow.

You should also meditate that at the time of death your possessions become the enemy. You have been constantly working to attain these things during your life, but why should you do this since none of them can help you at the time of death?

Then, if you can remember the quotation that states that the future life is more definite than tomorrow or the next hour, that quotation has great power. Just as you can't take one single hair from this life into the next one, your possessions can't help your mind in the future life.

Thinking in this way is for the sole purpose of training the mind, and especially for eliminating attachment. If you get angry because someone did something, as the anger suddenly arises like a geyser, check up like this, "I'm getting angry because I'm attached to temporal comforts. This life is impermanent, and the Buddha said that it is uncertain which will come first, tomorrow or the future life. Therefore, it is very silly to get angry with this person for such a short time, only creating the cause of suffering that only I will experience in the future life. Why should I be attached to possessions since they only cause me trouble at the time of death? Also, as my time of death is indefinite, why should I be attached to possessions even at this very moment?"

You should try to imagine how the mind will feel at the time of death—all alone, leaving your possessions and so forth to other people.

When a problem like anger, jealousy or pride arises you should think as outlined above. You should also consider the possibility of accidental death, such as a car accident and so forth.

The meditation on death has to be experienced through practice, not through books. If you experience this meditation through practice, you protect yourself. Then, if you are calm in a situation, the other person will become calm, whereas if you retaliate, they too will retaliate and then it only goes on and on. This is medicine created by your mind; you become your own psychiatrist or psychologist. It's the same thing if you are attached to something—to food or another person, for example—you will never have peace in your mind. Being peaceful means being free, relaxed. The happiness that this meditation gives is very calm, loose and relaxed, like a very controlled person who is gentle. Otherwise, you will be uptight and unrelaxed, which is another form of pain.

If you continuously practice this basic meditation, as you check up and expand on it yourself, you will see the subject more and more clearly, and with that you will have more and more faith in it. Also, if you do the whole practice continuously, as the mind becomes well trained, the practice itself becomes shorter and shorter, taking an hour, then half an hour to complete.

To complete the death meditation, after the clear light vision, meditate on taking your place in the mother's womb if you want to consider rebirth in the human realm, or meditate that you are taking rebirth in some other realm that you have visualized. The cycle of birth and rebirth goes around and around like that. Alternatively, you can stop at the point of meditating on the clear light vision.

Chapter 5. The Suffering of the Lower Realms



Lama Zopa Rinpoche teaching during the Third Kopan Course, 1972. LYWA collection.

Introduction to the Suffering of the Lower Realms:

[WFGS pp. 110–18]

The fully renounced mind is essential to the practice of the path, but there are many other realizations that we must gain before our mind is free from attachment, hatred and ignorance and all the other delusions. Compassion is the desire to release other beings from suffering. The ordinary compassion we normally experience is partial, usually directed at friends and those who are close to us. It usually only arises in relation to some overt suffering that somebody is experiencing, some lack of a samsaric pleasure or need. This compassion is limited and is not compassion in the Dharma sense. When somebody is free from this kind of suffering, they only experience more suffering. As opposed to this, the goal of great compassion is to release every sentient being right now from the suffering that they experience due to greed, hatred and ignorance. Great compassion is a pure positive motivation. Milarepa and other great yogis themselves looked poor, ugly and so forth, and people felt compassion for them, but the yogis themselves felt much greater compassion for those ignorant beings.

The buddhas return as ordinary beings and show the suffering of old age and death in order to show us the path, and also to show us the meaninglessness of this worldly life. By emulating having a worldly life and then renouncing it, these great beings show us the purpose of giving up temporal comforts in order to attain enlightenment; they are an example to all sentient beings of how to practice the Dharma and experience its results.

It is very important to follow the laws of karma, to create positive karma and avoid negative karma. If we have no greed, hatred or ignorance, we'll have no fear. In other words, we'll have no fear if we have realized the workings of karma to their fullest extent.

Samsara doesn't refer to a place or an action, like cutting off your hair and taking the robes of a monk. The mind that is under the control of karma and delusions is in samsara. That ignorant mind is also the creator of samsara. This suffering body we have is in samsara. We practice the Dharma with the aim of no longer being under the control of karma and delusions, with the goal of avoiding samsaric actions and ceasing samsara.

Guru Shakyamuni Buddha took a human form and led the life of a prince. He then married and renounced worldly life and practiced strict ascetism for six years. After his enlightenment, he gave teachings on the path to beings on various levels of existence. When he manifested passing away, it was in order to teach impermanence to sentient beings. This is the only reason. The actual time of death is indefinite. Even though Guru Shakyamuni Buddha was born as prince in the highest caste of Indian society, it didn't matter; his life was still lived in the shadow of impermanence. His entire life was only an example for us and for all sentient beings, and his death was also an example meant to demonstrate impermanence to us. Actually, for the Buddha there was no reason to take birth as a prince, lead that life, get married, and then give it all up to seek the truth, make a life of retreat and pass away. Because he was already enlightened, the twelve deeds of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha were only an example for us, as was his attainment of enlightenment.

As a prince, Shakyamuni ventured outside the palace and saw an aged man, a sick person, a dead person, and an ascetic. As a result of these cooperative conditions coming together, he realized what suffering is. He also realized that suffering is continual but that there is a method to eliminate it, and that this method is to control the negative mind through the attainment of the realization of the truth and of the different levels of the path, of which the highest goal is enlightenment. The prince then left home to do retreat. The purpose of all of this was to demonstrate the path to other beings.

When Guru Shakyamuni Buddha spent six years doing the practices of an ascetic, his body became very thin and stiff, like a tree. He passed through many difficulties—including the difficulty of ants making a nest in his ear—all to show us how and why we should practice Dharma, why suffering exists and what causes it.

Before attaining enlightenment, Guru Shakyamuni Buddha took the form of the maras, or evil beings, and manifested a violent fight between himself and them. A million maras fought him with various weapons huge as mountains, and all around them there was a thick fog and lightning. Because the Buddha's attainment of enlightenment would lead to his complete control over these forces, they didn't want this to occur, so the great force of maras attempted to destroy him. They came in the form of beautiful, naked women, tempting him with their physical forms but they were unable to break his concentration. They tried many different methods to distract him, but they were unsuccessful. The arrows and weapons they shot at him were transformed into flowers by the power of his concentrated mind and his infinite love and compassion. Later, these same beings received teachings from Guru Shakyamuni Buddha and deeply regretted their previous actions.

By this example, we see that all suffering is only a creation of the mind. Just as it is created by the mind, it can be controlled by the mind. The maras, which are really the delusions, tempted Guru Shakyamuni Buddha in order to demonstrate this to sentient beings. All suffering can be controlled by the mind without the need for a single movement. All the power of the universe is unequal to the power of the Buddha's great love and the realizations he achieved as a result of

controlling his own negative mind. It's not necessary to control the maras by external means, for they can't disturb us unless our mind lets them.

It's insufficient to think that the Mahayana refers just to the teachings of the Buddha. The Mahayana is actually the practice of those teachings done in the mind of the person who has heard them. The mind must be positive. We should think that we have received this perfect human rebirth, which is highly meaningful, especially right at this minute, as we have the chance to listen to the teachings on the nature of suffering, the nature of happiness and the cause of both.

Because we desire happiness, we should desire to use this highly meaningful perfect human rebirth to attain higher realizations. We must work diligently *now*, because this perfect human rebirth is very difficult to find and it is also extremely fragile, like a water bubble in the wind.

If our life ended at this moment, it's much more likely that we would be reborn in the three lower suffering realms. But even rebirth in the three upper realms is still rebirth in samsara. We should think that although we must release ourselves from this, that alone is not enough. Because we are exactly equal to all living beings, we must work for their sakes and help them to be free from their suffering. And while we have a guide to show us the teachings, we have the chance to help other sentient beings. But now we have no power, so we must achieve enlightenment in order to be able to do this. We receive anything that we desire from other sentient beings. They are the source. Therefore, to bring this about, we must complete the realizations by listening to the teachings and practicing on the graduated path.

In order to realize the truth of the suffering of the three lower realms, we must fully see the sufferings that exist there. However, at the moment we have no power to perceive these things directly, and therefore we should try to experience those realms through our practice, using the examples shown in the teachings. In this way we can gain the power to see this suffering clearly in our minds.

Even at this moment, most beings are suffering in the three lower realms, especially in the hell realm. Their suffering has not been created by God or fixed by some other being. It's only a creation of those suffering beings' minds, just as in a dream we may sometimes suffer in a fire, or from all kinds of fearful persons or demons fighting and terrifying us. In the same way that these fearful dreams and visions are the creation of our deluded mind, the suffering and the realms of the hell beings and so forth are the creation of those beings' ignorant minds.

However, the hell realm is not the same as a dream, but the karmic creation of the ignorant mind. This is similar to the way that one place can be seen differently by two different people, one seeing a clean place while the other person sees a dirty place. Or how with one container of liquid, a human may see a cup of water while a god sees nectar and a hungry ghost sees pus. Although the object is the same, the view varies according to the level of mind and the karma the being has created. As the mind reaches higher levels, the enjoyments and the visions change, and the awareness and happiness that we experience increases more and more.

Each living beings' samsara is a creation of that mind; each living being's enlightenment is also a mental creation. In a dim room lit by a small candle with a flickering flame, a person may see what they think is a fearful moving animal or demon and become afraid, perhaps throwing

something at it. This problem is only the creation of that person's mind. The person with a calm, relaxed mind, on the other hand, will see what is actually there clearly. All experiences are created by the mind, and similarly the suffering of the hell being is merely the creation of the suffering being's mind. Therefore, whether we experience suffering in a suffering realm or the perfect peace of enlightenment depends upon how we develop our mind.

Shantideva says,

[5:7] Who intentionally created
All the weapons for those in hell?
Who created the burning iron ground?
From where did all the women (in hell) ensue?

The Buddha says,

No one has arranged the thousands of ways of suffering but one's own evil mind.

If we are even afraid of paintings of the three lower realms that depict the subjects suffering in different ways, why shouldn't we fear the actual suffering? If we are afraid of even the trivial physical sufferings that we sometimes experience, why shouldn't we fear the greater sufferings that exist in the lower realms? The only reason we aren't terrified is because we can't remember the beginningless times we suffered in those realms before, due to the intervention of death and rebirth, and to ignorance. We've even forgotten the sufferings from the earlier parts of our life, so of course we don't remember the suffering of those countless past lives when we were born as these sentient beings. That means we haven't yet achieved the complete cessation of suffering. We need the practice of the Dharma to stop the cause of suffering.

The main purpose of meditation on the hell realm or the hungry ghost realm is to give us a clearer idea. In the case of the animal realm, the realm we can see, we should put ourselves in the place of the animals and look at their sufferings. Think about the pigs killed in India, for example. They are put in a sack and stuck in the heart with sharpened bamboo poles, and they scream horribly. Fish are sliced up while they are still alive, maggots are fried alive to be used like popped rice as a Chinese delicacy at big parties. These beings are also sentient beings with mind. Animals have much less freedom than we do. We treat them like they are vegetables, but whoever has a mind has suffering.

We have to renounce all attachment by seeing its faults rather than running to it, which is what brings samsaric suffering. We have to realize that samsaric happiness is in the nature of suffering. Until we do this, it will be absolutely impossible to escape from samsara.

Guru Shakyamuni Buddha always tried to show the nature of suffering. He used the example of flowers to show the nature of impermanence, that samsaric happiness is in the nature of suffering, to encourage us to not deceive ourselves by being attached to things. It's very important to have a deep understanding of suffering. In order to succeed in our Mahayana practice quickly, it's vital that we develop bodhicitta supported by great compassion and great loving kindness. Without the understanding of the true nature of the suffering that other beings experience, there's no way to generate great compassion or great loving kindness, and therefore there's no way to generate bodhicitta and become a bodhisattva.

First, we should gain a deep understanding of our own experience of samsaric suffering and feel that this suffering is unbearable. Then, as we feel this, we should also consider the suffering of others and think that their suffering is equally unbearable. As a result of this, feeling terrified of our own future suffering, we can then develop great compassion for other beings.

When we realize our own suffering is unbearable, we naturally develop aversion for creating the causes of suffering, such as attachment, hatred and ignorance. Even a king can be a suffering person. People had compassion for Milarepa based purely on seeing his external form—his poor clothes and so forth—without understanding the level of realizations he had in his mind. Many people practice austerities in order to further develop their Dharma practice and purify their delusions. The partial compassion we feel for those in pain that excludes those in seemingly good situations is incorrect compassion.

We shouldn't feel that somebody is suffering only because they are lazy, that they aren't working hard enough. Not only should we feel that the pain of sentient beings is unbearable, but we should also feel that the fact that they possess the negative minds of greed, hatred and ignorance is unbearable as well. The best result we can have from this practice is to feel that it's unbearable that sentient beings possess negative minds.

To develop bodhicitta, we must first understand that our own negative mind is suffering, feeling this to be unbearable. Once we feel this, it will be that much easier to feel the same in relation to the suffering of other sentient beings. Without it, it's impossible to feel compassion for others. The clearer we are able to ascertain our own suffering, the clearer in turn we will be able to ascertain the suffering of others. For example, if we were to eat some food that made us sick, we would naturally try to stop the next person from experiencing the same trouble. Because we have experienced it already, we recognize it, and if we see another person doing the same thing, as a result of our own experience, we will understand how much the other person could suffer.

Seeing other beings' suffering doesn't mean seeing only the gross results. Since we don't remember our own experiences of the lower realms, when we meditate like this, we can see more clearly how other beings are suffering. The more we see their suffering, the stronger will be the great compassion, great loving kindness and bodhicitta that we develop.

The main purpose of meditating on suffering is to create energy. When we meditate on suffering, we feel fear, although the purpose of the meditation is to actually stop the fear of the three lower realms and the fear of death. If we are afraid at the time of death, of death and of the three lower realms, that will only cause more suffering and will not help our situation at all. However, experiencing fear now by trying to see the subject more and more clearly, we will certainly develop the determination to control our mind in order to stop future samsaric suffering and to attain enlightenment.

In order to surmount the mental difficulties of greed, hatred and ignorance, we need the energy-fuel that will help us to overcome all these disturbances and strongly develop our practice. Usually, we are afraid because we might lose some worldly possession, something we are attached to. This is negative fear and does us no good. Positive fear is less common. Positive fear is the kind of fear that will lead us out of our ignorance and out of future suffering.

Continuing to create negative karma has no end. Problems in samsara have no end. But this meditation gives us the understanding of karma and stops the negative mind from arising, which in turn stops the creation of negative actions and suffering results. The purification of past negative karmas and prevention of future ones will end the continuity of ignorance and suffering and end our cycling through the six realms of death and rebirth. Therefore, we should keep meditating on this until we have overcome our problems and ceased our suffering, in fact until we have reached enlightenment. Then, there is no longer any need.

It has been proven that this meditation helps a great deal; it's like the best medicine. We should always keep in mind that we could easily be reborn into one of these lower realms.

In *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* Shantideva says,

[4:23–24] So if, when having found leisure such as this,
I do not attune myself to what is wholesome,
There could be no greater deception,
And there could be no greater folly.

And if, having understood this,
I still foolishly continue to be slothful,
When the hour of death arrives,
Tremendous grief will rear its head.

Shantideva means that even though we have the ability as a human being to see the difference between positive and negative karma and to understand the terrible suffering of the three lower realms, our lazy mind can still lead us back to the hell realm as if on purpose. We should investigate to see why we can still even contemplate creating negative karma when such fearful suffering awaits. Nothing can cause more harm than the negative mind; it's far more dangerous than the most fearsome external objects, such as snakes, scorpions and so forth. Although formless, it has the power to inflict the most awful pain. This internal danger is far greater than any external danger, alive or not. And conversely, without this internal thorn, we can't be harmed by external thorns.

Generally speaking, we want to develop full confidence before our death that we won't be reborn in the three lower realms of suffering. However, if we don't understand how terrible those sufferings are, we will never develop fear of them and we won't be strongly inspired to only create positive karma. Meditation on these topics shows us how great the suffering of these realms is. By giving us confidence in our understanding of karma, it protects us from creating negative karma and therefore from rebirth in the suffering realms. And, as we have neither the power to remember our past sufferings nor the power to see those of the future, we must depend on the teachings of the Buddha to show us.

The Hell Realm

[WFGS pp 110–114]

Hell is created only by our own negative mind, not by God, our parents, or anyone else. Everything that we perceive is actually a creation of our own mind. This is true for humans, animals, insects and so forth. For instance, different people may perceive the same painting as good or bad, as beautiful or ugly, and yet the object is the same. This is because different karma is ripening for each of us, so we all see things differently. As our negative mind arises, our view changes. A friend who is loved may begin to annoy us, we get angry, and then we no longer see that friend as beautiful or desirable.

The bodhisattva has a well-trained, positive mind. With their great love, they even see the beings who harm them physically or verbally as beautiful. They see these beings as kind, as beneficial, as precious jewels. They see the harmful being with equanimity. To the bodhisattva, they are equally as precious as the one who helps them by giving them food and offerings. This view is not self-existent or intuitive, it's only a creation of the bodhisattva's holy mind, and has been brought about as a result of the thought transformation practice. Before such training, the bodhisattva, too, had an ordinary view. But as the mind develops, the view changes and the problems between the subject and object diminish.

In contrast, with our present negative mind, we not only hate the enemy that harms us but also their friends, relatives, possessions and so forth, even though these things have nothing to do with the enemy's body or mind. We see their things as ugly, although they are not necessarily so in and of themselves. However, if we can do as the bodhisattva does, through mental development we can bring perfect peace to our own mind.

In the hell realm the mind creates its own form, similar to the way it does in the intermediate state. The hell being has a huge body covered with skin the texture of balloon rubber that is incredibly sensitive and feels the greatest suffering at any touch. This is a karmic result, just as what we experience in our life is a karmic result, such as living in uncomfortable, dangerous places.

The Hungry Ghost Realm

[WFGS pp. 114–15]

Beings of the hungry ghost realm experience three types of obscurations. The first is the inner obscuration, which means that their karma is such that it takes them hundreds of years to find water, although they are very thirsty, and when they do find it, they have to sip it through mouths that are as tiny as the eye of a needle. In their mouths, the water usually dries to poison before it reaches the stomach. If it does reach the stomach it burns, like drops of petrol on red-hot ground. The inner obscuration is such that whenever hungry ghosts find something that would ordinarily relieve their suffering, it only brings greater misery.

The second obscuration is the obscuration of food and drink. This means that when a hungry ghost sees food and runs toward it, it changes, bringing them great disappointment.

The outer obscuration is such that they are chased away from food and drink by protectors.

When we think about these realms, we should visualize beyond the words. This has a positive effect on the mind. Understanding the suffering of these realms inspires great energy to avoid negative karma and will cause our negative mind to arise less easily.

Some places where hungry ghosts reside can be seen but not others. Some Tibetan lamas of the past could see these beings on the roads or in the monasteries, and when they did so they made offerings of food and prayers. In some places in India hungry ghosts can be seen in the form of a moving light at night, but nobody can ever get close to them. Hungry ghosts can see us but most of us can't see them. To the hungry ghosts, we look very strong and powerful.

Some hungry ghosts have a human shape but suffer a great deal because they have tiny legs and skinny necks. They are so miserly that they fight over a piece of spit like dogs over a scrap of food, and when they get it, they hold onto it for eons.

The Animal Realm

[WFGS pp. 115–18]

Now consider the feelings of a being suffering in the animal realm. An animal's place is not definite; they live all over, in the ocean, on the earth, in the air.

Animals are dumb and ignorant. Although these are the general sufferings of the beings in the animal realms, for each animal there are also specific sufferings. For example, in winter when it is very cold, we keep warm with as many clothes as we like. We have comfortable beds, warm bodies, a room inside a warm house, doors that close, a fireplace and hot food and tea. There is so much we can do to try to keep warm. Most animals, however, have no house; instead they are exposed to the wind without choice, and to rain, hail and snow. In addition, they live with incredible fear. A strong wind can destroy a bird's nest and kill her babies, for example, and for most animals there is a big danger of being killed by others. They are forced to hunt and search for their own food. They can't speak of their suffering and they have no money to pay to stop it.

We should investigate the details of the specific sufferings that each animal experiences.

In addition to these, animals experience the suffering of having no choice or freedom. Think of a cow with a rope tied around its neck being led to the slaughter and killed for money. For us, a small amount of skin loss or a slight headache can be a problem. But compare these to the things that happen to an animal. Animals can't express their problems, have no medicine and generally experience great suffering.

There are all sorts of ways that animals are slaughtered. Some are cooked alive in oil; others are pulled from the sea with a hook in their mouths. Others are suffocated or sliced like vegetables while still alive. Maggots are fried alive. In some places, people cut off a piece of a turtle to eat, wait until it grows back and then cut it off again. A human being going off to fight in a war can be compared to an animal.

Chapter 6. Refuge



Lama Zopa Rinpoche teaching during the Third Kopan Course, 1972. LYWA collection.

Going for Refuge

[WFGS pp. 199–27]

The topic of refuge is a most profound subject since it includes all the knowledge of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. This topic requires deep understanding obtained through practice, which, when attained, can purify all obscurations.

When we recognize a problem incorrectly, it leads to the wrong solution. Thinking that any problem is the result of external circumstances is a wrong assumption, and trying to solve it by material means ultimately fails. Problems must be seen as arising from within and must be solved by inner means. For example, a person dying of starvation thinks that lack of food is the main problem. But from the Dharma point of view, this is not the case. Even if the starving person were to receive food, their problems would continue; the negative actions that caused their suffering have not ceased and there is still ignorance in their mind. Food is only a temporary relief.

In order to eliminate suffering in future lives, we need to stop creating negative karma. Even though we have been eating food since beginningless time, we still feel hungry. We've eaten a greater amount than we could ever imagine—the earth is the size of an atom by comparison—and it isn't helping now. Eating food is not the principal cause of freedom from hunger.

Why are the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha called the Three Rare Sublime Ones? [24] Because each of these three has the power and wisdom to release us from suffering and lead us to enlightenment. These three refuges have the greatest knowledge, greater than that of any worldly existence or of any samsaric being. Therefore, they are the Three Rare Sublime Ones—precious,

rare and the best. They lead us to enlightenment, in conjunction with the practice of observing our karma.

As Milarepa says,

Be afraid of samsara, remember impermanence and death, rely completely on the perfect guides, the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and be careful in the creation of karma.

If we are afraid of being born into one of the realms where there is no freedom, if we are afraid of samsaric suffering and the suffering of the three lower realms, if we are frightened of all of these things and don't want to experience them, we must rely on the Three Rare Sublime Ones and be careful in our creation of karma.

Our principal aim should not be the experience of worldly pleasures but liberation from samsara and the attainment of enlightenment. In order to achieve these aims we should rely on the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, with full confidence in their knowledge. For example, in order for Tibetans to regain independence and return to their country, their beloved motherland, they need to depend on the help of another free country, just as a blind person needs the help of a sighted person or a person with limited mobility needs the help of someone who can walk. In the same way, we are blind without wisdom; we do not see the evolution of karma, nor the difference between cause and effect. Neither do we understand the Dharma, the graduated path that leads from the beginning until enlightenment. In that way, we are also limited and can't tread the path alone. We must rely completely on the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha with full confidence, being guided by their wisdom.

However, having faith alone is not enough to lead us to escape from suffering; we must also place our actions of body, speech and mind in the Dharma. We must continuously place our mind in our Dharma practice. And then, we will be able to reach the beautiful land of enlightenment.

We are like a person trapped down a deep well. Merely having faith that the person above us with a rope can pull us out is not enough. We must also grasp tightly to the rope in order to escape from the well. If we have no faith in the rope or we fail to hold it tightly, we will never escape the well. The rope is like the path that we must take. The essential Dharma practice that leads to enlightenment is the practice of observing our karma with full confidence in the Buddha's explanations.

An enlightened being is defined as one whose realizations of mind are fully developed. The Buddha can take many forms. Guru Shakyamuni Buddha wasn't necessarily born only in India; sometimes his name was "Christ."

Shakyamuni Buddha is a perfect guide. He has eliminated both of the two types of obscurations. *Nyōn* *drib* means affliction obscurations, what are called disturbing-thought obscurations. These are the obscuration that prevent the lower realization of nirvana. *She* *drib* means obscurations to knowledge, which are the obscurations to full enlightenment. These are profound subjects requiring a great deal of study in order to be understood.

Shakyamuni Buddha also possesses extensive skill. He has completed his own work and also the work of others. If a being is enlightened, there is never any question about whether they will

guide somebody without belief. Their lack of belief only affects them. Enlightened beings are utterly impartial; they help all beings regardless of whether or not those beings have faith in them or not, or like or dislike them. Any being with a partial mind is not enlightened. Even a very new bodhisattva who has just attained bodhicitta, because they are free from the partial mind, they have great compassion for all beings equally. The partial mind and bodhicitta are dichotomies. These two minds can't exist together.

Many people think that if you don't have faith, you can't be helped; you won't receive the blessings of the holy mind or help from God. This is not the case. Even the noble bodhisattvas who have attained the full realization of emptiness perceive the person who cuts them with knives and the person who lovingly caresses them with equal loving kindness and compassion.

There are five bodhisattva paths: the paths of merit, preparation, right-seeing, meditation and no more learning. To attain enlightenment, it's necessary to complete all five. Bodhisattvas are on their way to attaining enlightenment; they are on these paths.

The sole wish of the buddhas is that we are released from the cause of suffering, the negative mind. Therefore, eliminating negative minds and attaining realizations is the best offering we can make to the enlightened beings. Guru Shakyamuni Buddha released himself from every single defect of the negative mind. This is the meaning of "enlightened being;" the perfect guide who can lead other beings out of suffering. The Buddha attained enlightenment for each of us—only to help sentient beings. Therefore, it's impossible that he has a partial mind.

In *The Foundation of All Good Qualities*, Lama Tsongkhapa says,

When I have discovered that the precious freedom of this rebirth is found only once,
Is extremely difficult to find again, and is greatly meaningful,
Please bless me to unceasingly generate the mind
Taking its essence, day and night. [25]

As the teachings instruct us, the essential method to take the essence of Dharma practice is to turn every action from negative to positive.

When we take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, we think of the Buddha as the doctor who discovers the medicine, the Dharma as the medicine itself and the Sangha as the nurse who helps us—the patients—on the path. The Dharma causes mental suffering to cease, but in order for this to occur it must be explained by the enlightened being, the Buddha.

Taking refuge in the Buddha means correctly following the founder of the Dharma and the guide, who is the guru who imparts the teachings, with understanding and devotion. Taking refuge in the Dharma means correctly following the teachings as they are explained, trying to avoid creating negative karma as much as possible and making effort to create positive karma and merit as much as possible with understanding, faith and respect for karma.

Accepting the good influence of the objects of refuge will help us to be released from suffering, to become free from samsara and to achieve enlightenment. We rely on the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha to show us how to bring this about.

According to the instructions of the enlightened being, in order for refuge to be present in our mind, there must be two causes. The two causes are likened to the presence of a bridge over a river—one side, ours, is not fixed, while the other side, the Buddha's, is always there. It's first necessary to fix our side, and then it's possible to get to the other side. Enlightenment is attained on the basis of refuge, but first we must have the fundamental connection with the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, and ourselves, as well as the two causes.

The two causes are *fear*—of samsara and suffering—and *faith*, or full confidence in the wisdom of the enlightened beings, in their fully realized omniscient mind, their great compassion, and their great power to guide all sentient beings from suffering by whichever method is most appropriate for them. This confidence or faith arises from the fear of the suffering of samsara. Without that fear, there is no reason to seek out the enlightened beings or to take refuge, no reason to try to understand their wisdom, no reason to develop devotion for them and no reason to develop confidence in their abilities. Without fear, we cannot escape from samsara.

The topic of refuge is very powerful. If we talk too much about refuge when the mind is not ready or receptive, it can cause difficulties. To completely understand refuge, we need the basis of the understanding of the complete path to enlightenment. To completely understand the Dharma, we need the realization of karma—the realization of each and every single, subtle karma, each cause and each result, and each result of each cause. Only fully enlightened beings see karma at this level of subtlety. Therefore, refuge is not an easy subject. It takes a lifetime to fully understand it, for doing so depends on attaining the entire path of the Dharma up to enlightenment. It also depends upon attaining the knowledge of the Sangha, which depends on the realization of karma and the recognition of the three lower realms of samsara, which in turn depends on the understanding that mind is beginningless. Without this understanding, our mind will remain closed.

Refuge is a topic that we can discuss for our entire lifetime and study without stopping until we reach enlightenment, because it contains so many things. The teachings of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha and the commentaries by the highly realized Indian pandits are all related to one another and are rooted in the topic of refuge. Even though it is presented here as a simple subject, actually it is neither simple nor easy. In the monasteries there are so many texts. If we talk about the root, refuge, all those other subjects will be included.

This is just the seed of knowledge, on the basis of which we can grow wisdom through our study of the bigger subjects with details, because they are related to one another. If we study for so many years without living in the practice of the meditations, our actions will not become Dharma and will not become positive or virtuous. Perfect peace does not depend on a large collection of Dharma words in the head; it's not enough to acquire a huge intellectual understanding without any feeling; we must practice.

The Qualities of the Buddha

There are three or four bodies of the Buddha depending on how they are counted. The three are: the dharmakaya or the truth body (*chö kū*), the mind of the Buddha which can emanate as the nirmanakaya or enjoyment body (*long kū*) or the sambhogakaya or emanation body (*tul kū*). The fourth body is the nature body or svabhavakakaya (*ngo wo nyi kū*), which is the essential purity of

the holy mind that is the dharmakaya. It is completely purified of obscurations and delusions, and of the imprints of delusions that make up the subtle obscurations. The nature body is the clear light nature that exists in our mind even at present. The truth body, the dharmakaya, however, is not present in our mind at the moment. The truth body will be attained after the purification of the mind is complete. The function of the mind at enlightenment is the truth body, while its nature is the nature body.

The mind we have now has the potential to become the omniscient mind of the Buddha through our Dharma practice. Purifying the mind doesn't mean we eliminate the mind. A fully purified mind doesn't mean that there is no mind left. If that were the case, when we reach enlightenment, we would cease to exist and there would be no truth body or enjoyment or emanation body.

When we become enlightened, this becomes our own enlightened truth body. Every living being who possesses mind also possesses the continuity of mind. If there were no continuity of mind, there would be no chance to work toward future enlightenment. When the mind is completely purified, enlightened, there is no cause to be a sentient being again, to experience suffering again, because the creator of suffering, the ignorant, deluded mind, has ceased. Without a cause, the result can't happen. If the negative mind were to continue even after enlightenment, there would be no end to Dharma practice and purification and no reason to put effort into practicing the Dharma. But since it will end, we should make an effort.

When we try for samsaric happiness, the work we must do to acquire it never ends. When the action ends, the samsaric happiness ends as well, and more effort is always required. But when Dharma work ends, its happiness is endless; it brings greater and greater happiness until we reach the state of perfection. Therefore, it's much more meaningful to do Dharma work than samsaric work. Dharma work and samsaric work are in complete opposition—like earth and space. Any happiness that samsaric work brings will end. It can't last and it keeps us forever busy. We have been working like this for all our lives so far, and what has the result been?

The mind has the power to end ignorance; that is its nature. Many people think that when we cut off the negative minds of greed, hatred and ignorance, the mind ceases completely, but this is wrong. The state of full enlightenment is not the cessation of the mind. When a dirty bowl is completely cleaned, if it were then to become nonexistent, how could there ever be a "clean bowl?" It's the same when we clean our mind of negativity; it's the nature of the mind to become omniscient. When we achieve this state, we can help other sentient beings and lead them from suffering. This is the purpose of completely purifying the mind. If there were no omniscient mind, there would be no reason to practice Dharma.

Just as we clean the bowl so the food won't be tainted and dirty—something we don't want—we clean our mind to eliminate suffering, which means we must overcome the causes of suffering that exist within our mindstream. The way we clean the mind is not with water or by hand, not by external means, but mainly by mental effort. Both the gross and subtle obscurations need to be cleaned. Just like the dirty bowl, we begin by removing all the rotten food. Once this is gone, still a subtle smell remains, so we use other methods to clean it even more. In the end, the completely clean bowl is left—or the pure mind, which is endless. If the bowl or the mind ceased to exist after it was cleaned, the action of cleaning would be pointless.

We clean the mind by using the mind itself, by understanding and developing our wisdom, by seeing the evolution of the mind and karma, and by achieving the different realizations, the realizations of the graduated path and of bodhicitta and wisdom.

The wisdom that realizes emptiness is vital. If we were to see a coiled rope on a dark road at night, we would be very afraid, thinking it was a snake. This fear arises as a result of the time, the conditions, and our lack of understanding. When we recognize that the rope is a rope after all, and not a snake, there is no longer any fear or suffering. This kind of mistaken recognition between subject and object arises due to the circumstances but also due to the mind that is obscured from seeing the truth. When we fully understand the wisdom of emptiness—how things actually exist—suffering and the causes of suffering are naturally eliminated. To attain this wisdom, we must purify our mind through practice.

The emptiness of the mind is its absolute nature; the mind itself is its relative nature. Everything that exists is included in these two truths: absolute and relative truth. The object perceived by the mind engaged in the meditation on emptiness is an absolute truth, and the object that is true to the ordinary relative mind is a relative truth. Absolute nature and true nature are the same. The absolute mind is so designated because it sees the absolute true nature of existence.

This is a very deep and profound subject, and it takes a long time to understand. In Tibet, the monks in the colleges spend forty years studying this subject and still they may not have completed their examination of the two truths, which subsume all existence. To gain a deeper understanding of this subject matter they spend many years studying the commentaries written by highly realized Tibetan yogis and Indian pandits.

Every existent thing exists because of its absolute nature. Without absolute nature, things can't exist, in the same way that you can't have the existence of the second and third floors of a building without the existence of the first. The absolute nature of the mind is the opposite of what our ordinary wrong concept sees with our limited mind. According to our ordinary limited view, the absolute mind doesn't exist, whereas we think what doesn't exist—*inherent existence*—does exist. This belief in truly existing objects, especially in the truly existing I, is the reason we cycle in samsara. It's where all suffering arises from.

The great yogi Padmasambhava was invited by the Dharma kings to Tibet to tame the negative forces and evil spirits and to establish the Buddhadharma there. He said,

The meditator who does not realize that his mind is a liar takes the wrong path at the time of death. [26]

The principal cause of the negative mind is not recognizing the absolute truth, which means not realizing emptiness. Unless we recognize how nothing has self-existence, we believe the opposite, that things have self-existence. Without this recognition, there is no way to escape from ignorance and no other way to stop fear. Any actions that are created as a result of following the deluded mind that sees self-existence—the opposite of how things exist—only create more problems.

The subtle mind is the consciousness that carries all the positive and negative imprints of the actions we have created. No matter what form of rebirth we take, the subtle mind exists. The aggregates also have continuity; if they did not there would be no continuity of a person. The

subtle mind can be categorized into two: the pure and impure subtle mind. The impure subtle mind is that which is unable to use the state of the clear light on the path to enlightenment. The gross mind is the deluded mind, and at the time of death, when it's absorbed, the gross superstitions also dissolve.

The ordinary mind is accompanied by an impure subtle mind at the time of death and is usually completely out of control. In order to gain control at death, we need to purify our gross mind through practice in this lifetime.

The Sambhogakaya

The present mind has a relationship with the future sambhogakaya, just as a seed has a relationship with the future flower it produces.

The Buddha's emanation body or sambhogakaya is the body seen by highly realized beings. It's ornamented by thirty-two perfect qualities. His feet and hands are like those of a young person, without wrinkles, as result of his practice of charity of food and so forth while he was following the path. The length of his body is seven times the length of his forearm and his body is straight, not curved, due to the karma of avoiding killing other beings. His hairs stand up straight due to the karma of avoiding killing other beings, and also due to creating many merits and helping many people create good karma. His hands reach down to his knees when he stands; they are long and beautiful as a result of giving to other beings when asked. His skin is clear and very pure and golden as a result of the karma from serving other beings well, such as bringing them cushions, arranging their beds and so forth. Each hair on his head is curled and untangled as a result of his avoidance of mental distraction and samsaric enjoyment. Between his eyes is a curl which, if rolled out, would be three times the length of his forearm. This curl is the karmic result of respecting the holy beings and gurus. His double crown protrusion and right-turning blue hairs are the karmic result of the offerings he made at temples, palaces and to other beings.

The eighty minor marks of the Buddha are an indication to other holy beings of his holy body and serve as an example. His nails are the color of copper as a result of his complete avoidance of greed. His holy body is free from surface veins due to his avoidance of the ten nonvirtues. He has no channel knots because he is completely released from all the delusions. He has a perfectly proportioned body as a karmic result of having given teachings that perfectly suited every different living being's mind. As he walks, each step is equal, meaning that he has equal compassion for each and every sentient being. His lips are cherry red in color, like a piece of shiny fruit, meaning that he fully realizes living and nonliving existence as a reflection.

The Nirmanakaya

Since the different levels of the sambhogakaya do not appear to ordinary beings, the Buddha manifests to them in the nirmanakaya or emanation body form. Many beings, however, do not even have the karma to see the Buddha as a human being. As he says, "In such degenerate times I shall appear only in the form of letters."

The function of the nirmanakaya is to guide sentient beings from suffering, but the form the many millions of different emanation bodies take is indefinite. He won't always appear as a monk in robes. The different forms he takes suits the minds of those he benefits, fitting in with the country and customs of those beings.

Lama Tsongkhapa made prostrations while visualizing the thirty-five aspects of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, and as a result he saw the Buddha on the walls of his cave. This occurred in the same cave in which Khedrub-je saw the manifestation of Tsongkhapa. In that cave, which still exists in Tibet, there are also letters such as the seed syllable of Manjushri that appeared spontaneously due to the power of the purification of Lama Tsongkhapa. If our minds are purified and we have devotion, it's certain that we will be able to see the different aspects of the Buddha. We can also see them in dreams and in meditation.

The way that the Buddha shows himself depends on the karma of the observer and it varies accordingly. When we have never even heard of the Buddha, we might see a statue and become interested because of the positive feeling it gives us. Many families are helped through the income received from making statues.

The Qualities of the Buddha's Holy Body, Speech and Mind

[WFGS p. 122]

At present our own body, speech and mind are not oneness, they are three separate aspects of what we are, but the Buddha's holy body, speech and mind can work together. His holy mind can appear as many trillions of different aspects. The holy mind is not even an object of the mind of the highest bodhisattva who has attained the ten grounds; it's only an object of the mind of a fully enlightened one. It's something incomprehensible to us. In Tibet, there are many people who are incarnations of the holy body, speech and mind, who take different forms and take birth in different places.

It is said in a sutra teaching that the appearance of the Buddha doesn't depend on our recognition. Each form has as its purpose the benefit of sentient beings. The enlightened beings see the way to bring this about; it's very difficult to be the object of our attention. For example, Maitreya appeared before Asanga as a dog with wounds in order to purify Asanga's obscurations and allow Asanga to develop bodhicitta. As Asanga realized bodhicitta, his obscurations were purified. The form of the Buddha is extremely difficult for us to recognize and doesn't depend on a name. It's stressed in the teachings that we must be careful how we create karma with other people. Our limited mind can't tell who a holy being is or what level of realization they have. Getting angry with a holy being for even a second creates the cause to suffer in the lowest hell for an eon. Depending on how realized the other being is, the number of seconds we have that anger determines the length of time we have to experience the suffering result in the lower realms.

Therefore, because we never know who a holy being is, we have to be very cautious in how we treat other sentient beings; we should never mistreat or criticize anybody. When we learn to avoid anger, the result is to develop patience. In order to not create negative karma, we should think, "Perhaps this person is an enlightened being and I'm too ignorant to see it. It could be Guru Shakyamuni Buddha manifesting as an angry person so I can develop bodhicitta." Thinking like

this is incredibly useful because it stops the negative mind from arising and stops us creating negative actions of body and speech.

For example, when Atisha was in Tibet, he usually kept a servant who was very bad-tempered and always caused other people to get angry. Asked why he kept him, Atisha explained that he did so in order to practice patience, for without patience it's impossible to be a yogi. It's very useful to think like this. Because we can never be sure that this being in front of us isn't Guru Shakyamuni Buddha manifesting to guide us, we should always be careful and always avoid creating negative karma.

If other people cause trouble, instead of reacting we should think, "This is extremely helpful. Even those highly realized yogis do it like this; so why not me?" Remembering that Guru Shakyamuni Buddha can manifest in any form always helps us avoid the negative mind. We stop it from arising by recalling the incredibly heavy negative karma we would create if it really were the Buddha. It also helps us keep the Buddha in mind, making us more and more aware and protecting us from creating the cause of suffering.

It's also especially helpful during the critical time of death to remember Guru Shakyamuni Buddha. The more familiar we become with him, the easier that recognition will come at the time of death and the less suffering we will experience. This is the power of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's realizations.

In Tibet, when a person dies, if they are lucky, a monk does a puja and says the name of that person's guru or of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha as the breath stops. The monk probably has to shout it loudly, and if the person is fortunate enough to hear it, they will remember to pray as the gross mind absorbs. It's usually very difficult to remember because we go into a kind of blank state, as we do in life when we get a sudden shock. At death, it's far more difficult; there is much less control. Therefore, we have to be very fortunate for all this to happen correctly. But such is the power of the Buddha's name.

In life, it's also good to frequently remember Guru Shakyamuni Buddha. If we are about to create negative karma, it can help protect us because it stops the negative mind from arising. This is also due to the power of his holy mind and his realizations.

Reciting a mantra is also extremely powerful because a mantra contains an enlightened being's holy name. Just reciting it helps to purify all past negative karmas that we have created up until now. Mantras are like the flame that can destroy the negative karmas that have been created. By reciting mantras, we can be reborn in a pure land and released from samsara. Mantras can cease different sicknesses, including those that can't be cured by medicine. All that is the power of the Buddha's enlightened mind; just his name protects us that much from suffering.

Reciting mantras also helps a great deal to protect us from outside interference and to extend our life. Cataracts can be cleared through mantra recitation. In Tibet, a person with cataracts would recite a mantra early in the morning before speaking at all and then wipe their eyes with a soft cloth. Little by little the cataracts would clear. Mantra can also control epidemics, and boils and sores can sometimes be cured. Mantras can also protect us from fearful dreams. This is all through the power of the great compassion of the enlightened beings.

The benefits of reciting mantras are vast. Mantra recitation causes stronger and stronger devotion to arise through the frequent recollection of the Buddha's name, and devotion is the real protection from our suffering. We can change how others think through meditation on a mantra, helping them change their wrong ideas and making them joyful and happy.

There was a meditator in a cave with few possessions, but one day a thief put his arms through a crack in the wall, trying to steal his coat. So, the meditator grabbed the thief and tied him to a post and then went outside and beat him. With each stroke, he made the thief repeat the refuge prayer. When the thief was released, because it was late and he couldn't make it back to the village before nightfall, he had to sleep under a bridge where spirits held meetings. By reciting the refuge prayer, he was protected. There are a lot of lay people in Tibet who can cure illness by using mantras; this doesn't necessarily have to be done by a monk. The stronger the devotion, the quicker the purification.

Shantideva says,

[1:9] The moment an awakening mind arises
In those fettered and weak in the jail of cyclic existence,
They will be named a "child of the sugatas,"
And will be revered by both humans and gods of the world.

Even if we are still trapped in the prison of samsara, when we develop bodhicitta we become an object of offering and prostration for humans and gods. We receive the title *child of the sugatas*. Sugata means enlightened being. This is because of the holy mind of bodhicitta. Why "child?" Because we developed bodhicitta in dependence upon the enlightened beings, just as a child receives their body in dependence upon their parents.

The attainment of bodhicitta is not caused by any external thing, but only through developing its causes. As we have received a perfect human rebirth, we too have the opportunity to develop bodhicitta and become the child of the enlightened beings, attaining enlightenment and being able to lead others to bodhicitta. In this way, we become the object of universal beings' offerings and prostrations. Becoming a holy being doesn't happen instantly; it depends on the accumulation of merit and training the mind in bodhicitta. Each time we think about bodhicitta, our mind becomes more and more trained.

Therefore, if we can listen to the Dharma with this kind of beneficial, positive mind, it will bring countless benefits. We should think, "I am responsible for releasing all sentient beings from suffering, for enlightening every sentient being. They are the source of all my past, present and future happiness, and of all my needs up to enlightenment. In order to repay them for their kindness, I must first attain enlightenment in order to be able to understand and guide them properly. Unless I do, I can't help them. Therefore, I will listen to the explanation of the graduated path."

The Qualities of the Dharma

If merely saying the Buddha's name or reciting his mantra has so much power, how much more has practicing his teachings. The practice has great power to release us from problems, so much

power that it's not the object of our limited mind. It's impossible to conceive of the infinite power and wisdom of his holy body, speech and mind. Even the benefits of saying his mantra are endless. The incredible knowledge-wisdom is not something that is causeless, that exists by itself. It is attained by following the path laid out in his teachings, the teachings that he himself practiced in gradual stages. Therefore, we must all create the cause ourselves, also following the graduated path as shown by our gurus and other holy beings. In the same way that he examined and transformed his mind without relying on another person's mind, we must do the same. If we do so, it's certain that we will attain the same level.

Attaining realizations is impossible unless we practice his teachings and follow the path. It's much more powerful than just reciting his mantra, which alone can never bring this about. But the mantra does help due to the power of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's teachings.

Guru Shakyamuni Buddha depended on the Dharma to attain enlightenment by receiving teachings from other enlightened beings. That is why we take refuge in the Dharma. Without refuge it's impossible to have higher realizations, and impossible to become enlightened. As we discover the knowledge of the Dharma, our devotion deepens, and our sense of refuge in the Buddha and Dharma strengthens. The enlightened beings see the mind and actions of every sentient being at every moment. This is the power of the Dharma, for without the Dharma there would be no enlightened beings, bodhisattvas or arhats.

All past, present and future happiness is due to the Dharma. Although the Dharma is the original refuge, it must be shown to us by holy beings. We experience so much benefit from practicing the Dharma; we will quickly escape from suffering and attain infinite powers. Actually, the Dharma is our best possession; it's something we should care for more than anything else. However, due to ignorance we take more care of the material possessions we take pleasure in rather than the Dharma, the good karma, that makes these things possible. All the benefits and power of mantras come from the power of the Dharma. If we renounce the Dharma in order to take care of our body and possessions, we do so due to ignorance, not understanding that the Dharma is the source of all happiness.

The essence of the Dharma that leads to all the realizations is watching our karma, being careful to only create positive karma and always avoid negative karma. This is the principal Dharma practice. Therefore, the actual Dharma is the practice of virtuous actions. If we fail to pay attention to this, no matter how long we struggle with difficulties—even if we spend our whole lives meditating and fasting in a cave—we will not succeed in our practice; we will never gain mental peace or control over our negativities.

If we want to attain the realizations and powers of the enlightened beings, the most important thing of all is to take care of our karma. When this is done properly, it becomes a powerful cause to quickly purify obscurations and quickly gain realizations. How quickly this happens depends on how strongly we purify by creating positive karma. We can make great progress in this way, even if we don't practice tantra.

How does the Dharma cause the past, present and future happiness of each and every sentient being? The answer is very logical. The principal cause of all of the suffering we experience, big or small, in this lifetime is internal; it is mental. It was created in this life and in previous lives. This is also true of every happiness we have ever experienced. Each experience of happiness or suffering

arises from a principal cause and cooperative conditions created previously and stored in our mindstream as karmic imprints.

What is the principal cause of happiness? Positive actions, done without attachment, the concern for the comfort of this life, without ignorance and without anger. With our ordinary limited mind, however, we usually confuse the cooperative condition that causes the karma to ripen with the actual principal cause. That is not so. Because the principal cause of happiness is creating positive karma, creating positive karma is the essential Dharma, the heart of the Dharma. This is how each person's happiness arises from the Dharma.

For instance, in hot weather some people are happy and others are unhappy. In this situation the heat is the cooperative condition and the mind of the person is the principal cause. If the external circumstance were the main cause, everyone in a hot place would feel the same. This shows that there's some other reason for likes and dislikes, a reason we can come to fully understand by studying the Dharma and getting to know about karma. There are countless examples of this. One type of food, such as a curry, is enjoyed by some people whereas others find it disgusting, and the same with types of clothing and certain people. Some tourists like one country and others dislike it. There is some reason other than the external situation that causes the difference in feeling. Although this is difficult to understand because it relates to a mental state, it can be understood through knowing the evolution of karma which always comes back to the beginningless mind. Without understanding this, there is no way to discover the fundamental reasons why we suffer or are happy. We should research these important points.

Some people may ascribe the differences between people just to having different personalities, caused by physical conditions created by the parents and the grandparents and so on. We can take our ancestry back and back and end up with no clear idea of why we are like we are. We fail to understand that our mind is beginningless and that each time we experience something another layer of habituation is added to our mindstream.

Each part of the Buddha's holy body is the result of his karma, as is ours. There is not one tiny shape of our body that does not depend on karma. Each shade of color of the peacock's feathers is also the result of karma.

The Qualities of the Buddha's Holy Speech

When beings hear the Buddha's holy speech, they feel great peace with every word. Their negative minds, however strong, become automatically subdued. When he teaches a great number of followers, each word is understood by the beings according to their level of mind. If he mentions impermanence, some hear it as a profound teaching on emptiness and others as one of suffering and so forth. Each word of the Buddha's holy speech perfectly suits the intelligence of the listener; it is perfectly fitted to the level that their mind is ready for. Each word also prepares them for the more profound subjects. This is the power of the Buddha's holy speech.

If all sentient beings asked questions simultaneously, one word of his would give the answer that each one needed. This also is the quality of the Buddha's holy speech. For instance, those whose minds are ready to understand that the mind is beginningless will hear him say that, whereas those who think that the mind has its beginning with this body will only hear that answer. Judging the

level of mind of the listeners, the Buddha can see whether or not they are ready to receive higher teachings.

Besides having the power to really guide others, he has such incredible compassion and uses his understanding to help all sentient beings with methods suitable for their mind. With his great compassion, because his only wish is that all sentient beings attain enlightenment, he teaches according to their level of mind. Nothing he says is superfluous. Each word is only to lead all beings gradually to enlightenment by following the Dharma.

There are texts in Tibetan that explain the creation of machines and things like ships and so forth, but these were not acted upon because they were not seen as beneficial for enlightenment. There are many other things not even made in the West explained in these texts. Actually, there is not one single kind of existence that isn't talked about in the Dharma.

Taking Refuge

Giving up the Dharma in order to take care of our worldly life means creating negative karma. It's the practice of samsara, the opposite of creating positive karma. When we have little understanding of the Dharma or the nature of suffering, we value worldly pleasures over the Dharma. On the other hand, as we come to understand samsaric life more deeply, as we come to understand the nature of suffering and the result of nonvirtuous actions, we come to realize the nature of the Dharma more and more. We see that the Dharma is the source of all our past, present and future happiness and for every sentient being, and it is the source of enlightenment. As we realize the value of the Dharma more deeply, we can see that the Dharma is more important and more beneficial than anything else. Therefore, we will be able to give up worldly life for the practice of Dharma, to practice the teachings of the Buddha and strive for enlightenment by creating positive karma, accumulating merit and purifying our negativities.

There are countless beings following the worldly life, living in ignorance, working for samsaric happiness and possessions, while those who renounce the worldly life to take care of the development of their Dharma practice are so few.

The benefits of the Dharma are inexpressible; we can never finish explaining them. There are infinite enlightened beings who all attained great realizations and then enlightenment through their Dharma practice. Every living being, from the tiniest insect visible only through a microscope up to an enlightened being, receives all their happiness from the Dharma. This is too much to explain fully, but generally we can say that the source of all happiness arises from creating positive karma.

The actual way to take refuge is mental. It's a frame of mind that comes from understanding what refuge means. Taking refuge in the Buddha doesn't just mean saying the prayer. It depends on understanding and fearing samsaric suffering—the cycle of death and rebirth, the three lower realms of suffering, ignorance and the negative mind. From this recognition of suffering and understanding of samsara, having full confidence in the noble beings arises. The noble beings are those who have achieved the true cessation of suffering and the true path, power, compassion and the omniscient mind, and who put it all into practice. We must trust the omniscient mind of the Buddha.

With the foundation of these two causes, fear and faith, we should rely completely on Buddha, just as children depend completely on their parents and follow their orders with full confidence. This is the true way to take refuge. When we come to fully rely on the Buddha, we have taken refuge even without saying a mantra or a prayer.

This is the foundation of our refuge: fear of the suffering of samsara and faith in the ability of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha to lead us out of suffering. This is likened to the confidence a patient has in their doctor, fearing sickness and death but confident of the doctor's help, willing to follow their instructions, taking the medicine and changing their diet. As their health improves, their confidence grows. The actual cure depends on following the instructions given by the doctor. This is the main thing. A doctor needs to know the methods to cure the patient, and then it is up to the patient to follow the instructions.

Relying on a doctor is not enough to cure us, we must follow the instructions we were given. When we take refuge in the Buddha, we shouldn't follow prohibited practices or practices that present wrong views, such as those which say there is no absolute truth, no karma or no existence. If we do, our realizations of the Dharma will collapse. Following practices that encourage wrong views pushes us further and further into samsara, as does believing wrong concepts, such as believing that samsara is not suffering (which is like sitting in the middle of a fire and denying we are burning) or that greed is good and necessary.

In the Dharma there are many types of discipline. Taking refuge is something to be done with feeling and not with words alone; it must come from the heart. No matter how much we might repeat Jesus' name, if we live our life creating negative karma but then pray to God for forgiveness, we can never escape suffering. This is like continuously taking poison and asking for help to get better all the time. We must help ourselves. Taking refuge depends on us, and the best and most correct way to take refuge is in accordance with karma. We must create refuge ourselves, in our own mind. The method was shown by the Buddha. This practice will guide us; it will take us away from suffering. Because we fail to understand the correct method, most of us create the cause of suffering instead of the cause of perfect peace and happiness. So, it's important to follow the correct path.

When we have taken refuge, we should not harm other beings with a negative mind. This should really be avoided as much as possible, because the Dharma is the method to bring happiness to each and every sentient being and harming others is its complete opposite. The Buddha showed us the Dharma to stop sentient beings' suffering and to stop the creation of negative karma.

Because Dharma methods help to free us from greed, hatred and ignorance, our motivation is so important. If we are aware of the evolution of karma, we are careful to only do actions with a pure motivation and ensure all our actions bring happiness to other beings.

To fully know Dharma, we must see each and every subtle karma. Once an old man nobody liked or wanted, Jinpa Pelgye, tried to become a monk. Shariputra, the Buddha's attendant checked up using his clairvoyance and could find no evidence of even the tiniest previous merit. But Guru Shakyamuni Buddha checked up and found a very subtle merit in the old man's mind that was hidden from the arhat. In a previous life, countless lifetimes before, he had been a fly who alighted on a pile of kaka that was taken around a stupa on a stream of pipi. That alone was the

tiny merit that he had accumulated that allowed him to become a monk. Every color on a butterfly or on a peacock's feather is the result of subtle karma, beyond the view of the arhat. Fully knowing karma does not happen until we attain enlightenment.

The Dharma object of refuge includes every realization of the enlightened and noble beings, as well as the belief that the Dharma is the true cessation of suffering and the true path. True path means the wisdom that sees the absolute truth. True cessation of suffering and its cause, ignorance, comes about when we have achieved the true path, the realization of the absolute truth. Following the Dharma stops us from following the negative mind. We cannot follow both things at the same time. Doing so would be like wanting the milk and the meat from the same cow.

The noble bodhisattvas who have attained the pure realization of the absolute truth are the Sangha. The more we realize the qualities of the Sangha, the more our devotion will arise.

Instructions in the Practice of Refuge

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Instructions relating to refuge in the Buddha say that *we should respect all holy objects*. All statues, no matter the quality—even if they are made of kaka—should always be respectfully kept in a clean, high place since they are the essence of Buddha. We should remember the wisdom-knowledge that the Buddha attained and treat these things as if they were Guru Shakyamuni Buddha himself. We should not think of them merely as statues.

Each statue or thangka symbolizes so much wisdom. Each tiny hair of the holy body of Buddha contains incredible knowledge, infinitely greater than all samsaric knowledge put together. Even a single hair of Buddha is the result of many eons of purification and so many merits. Even the lowest realization of the bodhisattva path, the realization of bodhicitta, would be incredibly difficult for us to realize and maintain, even for an hour. All the knowledge in the world cannot compare to even a single atom of Buddha's body. Therefore, because a statue or a thangka represents this great wisdom, we must respect it, although our respect will vary according to our level of understanding.

We can also visualize a statue as a real, living person. Practitioners in India and Tibet make offerings to the statues or to the holy texts. Depending on the level of practice and the level of realization of the practitioner, the value of the offering is determined. The serious offering to the statue is the offering that is made by the mind without depending on the material substance that is offered. The best offering is one that is made with the mind free of the eight worldly dharmas, or at least with the mind free of gross attachment to worldly life. Unless we have this latter motivation at the very least, the offering doesn't make sense.

Even if we don't have material substances to offer, we can still make offerings. The size of the offering depends on the motivation behind making the offering. We must make offerings with as pure a mind as possible. The more certain that we are making the offering free from negativity, the more powerful the offering will be. If we have yet to completely renounce attachment, our

offering is that much smaller. Clean offering, dirty offering—these things are determined by the mind.

Once there was a Tibetan meditator, an ascetic geshe called Ben Gungyal, who lived in a hermit's cave. One day, when he heard his benefactor was coming with food, he jumped up to offer clean water in the offering bowls on his altar. As he did this, he realized that he was doing it with a negative mind that wished for a good reputation, wanting the benefactor to respect and think highly of him. He recognized his enemy, the negative mind of the eight worldly dharmas.

Offering clean water was negative karma because his mind was so attached to reputation. So, he scattered ash from the fire over everything and, whereas the offerings were now dirtied, they were clean in that they represented the renunciation of the comfort of this life, the mind opposed to attachment, the real Dharma. When other yogis heard about this, they admired and respected him very much, because of his success in recognizing the actual Dharma and opposing the negative mind.

The purpose of making offerings to the enlightened beings is to purify our negativity. Prostrations to the enlightened beings also help with this. How do these actions have this power? The power is not only dependent on the action performed, but also on the qualities of the objects we are offering. These qualities include pure, limitless compassion. When we remember this holy quality as we make offerings, it increases our faith. Every tiny Buddha figure symbolizes this quality.

Offerings and prostrations are not done merely as customs, but in order to purify negativity. If they are done with full understanding, we can quickly purify our negativities.

Another action that can bring this result is cleaning holy places. We can also purify by meditating on the figure of the Buddha and on his infinite qualities. It's helpful to do this at the time of death.

The holy statue and the holy text do not depend on the quality of the material. We should not place gold statues up high and clay statues down low. It creates great negative karma to pay more respect to an expensive statue than to a cheap one. This applies in the same way to thangkas.

It is definitely possible to contact the enlightened beings through the form of statues. They do exist; this is not just some theory. Many statues in India, Nepal and Tibet have given teachings in the past to realized beings. If we have great devotion and our minds are purified, no matter what the quality of the statue, it's possible to receive teachings, prophecies and so forth. I have no idea if this is still the case in Tibet or not.

Instructions relating to refuge in the Dharma say that *we should respect all holy texts*. Dharma books can contain many pictures and words of enlightened beings. Sometimes we use these holy texts as cushions, sitting on them to keep our clothes clean, and sometimes we put them on the floor. Such actions show an extreme ignorance of karma. If we disrespect the texts, it becomes very difficult to meditate or to even comprehend the subject. Even simple Dharma explanations become hard to understand. In meditation the mind will be distracted and difficult to control; it will be hard to visualize the object of meditation and difficult to achieve realizations no matter how much we meditate. Nor respecting the holy texts, statues and figures can bring these results.

Why are these things holy? Because of the realizations of the enlightened beings, which are an example for us to follow. These texts represent the Buddha's holy mind and so they themselves are holy; it has nothing to do with the quality of the material. Each statue or Dharma book makes it possible for us to attain the holy mind of the Buddha. His mind is holy because it is free from every single defect. He sees each and every sentient being's thoughts every second, simultaneously—all past, present and future existence; he has great compassion for all sentient beings with no discrimination.

Unless we pay respect to the statues and teachings of the holy beings, we will never be able to attain realizations. We should pay much more attention to holy objects than we do to money, which we recognize as important. Disrespect creates so much negative karma. Using books as a pillow or a cushion is disrespectful. Books are holy because they explain the Dharma, and by meditating on this we can attain realizations that make us holy. Just as the Buddha is holy, having become enlightened through the practice of the Dharma, the Dharma texts are holy and have the power to help us to escape from suffering and make us holy, perfect.

Since many enlightened beings have attained their realizations from the holy texts, the texts are absolutely invaluable. All the realizations from the beginning of the path—the basic knowledge of karma and the continuity of mind—up until enlightenment come from the holy texts. The basic meditations such as bodhicitta and the other steps on the path depend upon receiving the explanations that are taught in the holy texts. We should think that each text is the transformation of the speech of the holy beings.

Disrespecting such texts causes us to lose wisdom and become forgetful. Holy books should be kept clean, and we should make offerings to them—not because the book wants respect, or claims it, but for ourselves, to create positive karma and purify our negativities. We shouldn't step over books. In monasteries, Dharma books are kept in a high, clean place, and in lay people's homes in Tibet they are as well.

Dharma books should never be placed on the floor or in dirty places. They are very precious, and in the same way that we respect the enlightened beings, we should also respect these books. They are holy and can bring wisdom to ignorant beings. Because we have been born as a human being, we have the responsibility to recognize the holiness of the teachings. We should not treat the texts in a way that will create any negativity, such as using them as cushions or as newspaper. When problems arise in the future due to the actions we do now, we won't recognize the cause of suffering. In this way, the suffering situation becomes cyclic.

We make prostrations and offerings to figures of enlightened beings not merely as a custom, but also out of respect and with understanding of the great purpose.

The Benefits of Taking Refuge

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The benefits of refuge practice can never be counted. They are innumerable, beyond what our limited mind can perceive.

The first benefit of taking refuge is that *we become a Buddhist*. In Tibetan we say *ngagpa*, which means *inner being*—a person who completely relies on the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha with the support of the two causes of refuge in their mind. The two causes, again, are fear of the samsaric suffering realms and full confidence that we can be guided from this state of suffering by the Buddha.

Relating to the first cause, even if we don't fear all of cyclic existence, at the very least we should fear the three lower realms. Relating to the second cause, in order for us to have full confidence in the Buddha, we should understand the qualities of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha fully, completely comprehending and fearing samsaric suffering. This also depends on understanding and believing in karma, which in turn depends on understanding and believing in past and future lives. This doesn't depend on robes, beads or prayer wheels, nor on saying prayers or playing cymbals. It doesn't depend on our clothes or the way we act, only on what is in the mind. Refuge is in the mind. To become an inner being is not easy; it's a question of great understanding and it takes time.

If we wonder what's so special about becoming an inner being, we should know that without depending on refuge we can't attain realizations or enlightenment. Achieving the higher Mahayana path depends on the achievement of the lower path, which depends on the fully renounced mind, which in turn depends on fully understanding the nature of samsaric suffering and so forth. The preparation for refuge comes at the very beginning, before we even attain the path. It's the very beginning of the development of the positive mind, the foundation. There is no way to follow the Mahayana path without refuge, and the stronger the two causes for refuge, the quicker the realizations will come. With refuge, every action we do becomes an inner action, higher, more powerful, more beneficial, more positive, and purer than those of the person who doesn't have refuge.

A Meditation on Refuge

To begin your meditation on refuge, you should try to remember what refuge means, and what the purpose of taking refuge is.

Next, you should check up—who is the perfect refuge? The Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

Then, you should think about the qualities of the Buddha's body, speech and mind. Where does all that knowledge come from? It comes from the Dharma; it is the power of the Dharma knowledge.

Then, you should meditate that not only is this the case, it is also the power of the Dharma and Sangha.

Next, thinking that although the objects of refuge have so much power, ask yourself whether that is enough for you. What is missing? You also need the two causes from your own side. Check up to see whether you have the two causes in your mind or not. If you don't, then think, "In order to have refuge, I must have fear and devotion. I must create these two causes in my mind."

Think that fear should arise because you understand that mind is beginningless and that it has experienced past lives and will experience future lives, and that based on your understanding of the evolution of negative and positive karma, you have definitely created more negative karma in the past. Therefore, you will definitely suffer in the three lower realms if you don't begin to overcome your ignorance. At the moment you have an upper rebirth but you are still suffering and still under the control of karma and delusions. Think, "Why am I still not released from all these problems?" It's the fault of your own ignorance—you believe that samsaric pleasure is happiness, but it doesn't continue; it's trivial and is no different from any other suffering. The most important thing to realize is that all samsaric pleasure changes to suffering. Knowing this brings a useful fear that causes you to find a path.

Now, you should think that on this path it is necessary to rely on someone. Who you need to rely on are the objects of refuge: the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

Taking Refuge

[This talk was given to students taking refuge, November 1972]

Taking refuge is passing through the gate of the path leading to enlightenment. When we take refuge, we take a vow, we make a promise. This is not the same as attaining the realization of refuge. The vow is made with the understanding of the purpose of taking refuge. The essential meaning is twofold; one is the complete reliance on the Guru Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha with full confidence, knowing that they have the supreme power to guide us from the suffering of the three lower realms, samsaric suffering, and from every delusion in our mind. The other is the fear of suffering in the three lower realms and of all samsaric suffering.

The motivation for taking refuge should be at least to release ourselves from being reborn in the three lower realms. A higher motivation would be to release ourselves from the three sufferings of cyclic existence—the suffering of pain, the suffering of change and pervasive compounding suffering. The third motivation is the highest motivation, the motivation of a Mahayana practitioner of refuge. With this motivation, we think that in the same way that we are suffering, so too are all other sentient beings suffering in samsara, therefore we take refuge in order to attain enlightenment to rescue other sentient beings from the cause of suffering.

Before taking refuge, we should have pure motivation, especially, if possible, the great Mahayana motivation. It's not enough to have the motivation to be free from the three suffering realms, nor is it enough to wish to be reborn in the upper realms. We have been born in both places countless times, and we are still trapped in samsara. Even now, born in the human realm, we have many problems, with confusion, suffering and dissatisfaction. We don't recognize the causes of suffering and happiness or the results of these causes. We constantly make mistakes in our actions. No matter how much we try to be happy, we create the causes for suffering, bringing about the opposite result from what we expected. Most of our actions are done with a disturbed motivation, destroying the happiness we desire. We fail to understand the difference between positive and negative karma.

In the six samsaric realms, even in the three upper realms, wherever we are born is like escaping from one red-hot burning iron house to another, from one blaze to another, always bringing

suffering. It is like jumping from one pit of thorns into another. Wherever we are born, everything is meaningless and is in the nature of suffering; nothing lasts forever. From beginningless samsaric lifetimes until the present, there is not one tiny suffering that we have not experienced, nor one tiny samsaric happiness. In the same way that we have experienced every great samsaric happiness, we have experienced every great suffering—and ordinary happiness and suffering, too. There is no single place in which we haven't been born, no being that we haven't become, no food that we haven't eaten before.

No experience is new, our comfortable samsaric life and the enjoyment of material things we now have is old. Even though we believe it's new, all this is beginningless.

If we think deeply about any samsaric happiness or pleasure and understand that it has no beginning, our mind will become tired and bored, understanding that we have done these things for such a long time. We will have no interest in samsara, as many of us in the West have lost interest.

Just as having old possessions is boring, we can feel tired of samsara very strongly, due to deeply understanding its suffering nature. No experience of happiness or suffering is new. Our spouse, our parents, materials, places—nothing is new. New fashions, new colors, new countries, when we think it's all new, we become attached and must have all this. We mistakenly think that we've never enjoyed it before, not understanding that we have experienced these things countless times before in numberless lives. No samsaric experience is new. Nothing at all is new. All actions that seek samsaric experiences are beginningless.

By understanding the suffering nature of samsara deeply, we will lose any interest in samsaric experiences or activities, becoming increasingly cynical of what samsara offers. This view develops clearly through meditation; we see it through logic. We find no interest in the nonexistent “new” samsaric experiences of pleasure or suffering. We are tired of living in these realms, tired of being reborn in them, tired of chasing their enjoyments. We can attain the state of nirvana more quickly with this more realistic view of the suffering nature of samsara and samsaric existence.

There is nothing to trust, even samsaric existence itself. For example, we see beautiful clothes in a shop and buy them, or we see a motor car and buy it. As these things get older, we lose interest in them. Day by day, they lose their beauty like a dying flower. After a short time, our interest ceases completely. Then, attracted to a newer model, we buy this better, newer thing. And then the same thing happens again and again. We repeat this without end until death. At death the same thing occurs with the body. The samsaric actions that we have created with this body end, just as the actions we do with our belongings end. This is why existence is meaningless.

Usually, however, we don't see our existence in the same way that we see our material belongings. But just as we see an attractive, beautiful object decaying and breaking each day, the body we have also decays and breaks. Then, the object appears completely opposite to the way we first perceived it. We feel the object has cheated and betrayed us and our trust. If we check up, we will find that when we first see a beautiful object, we believe in our heart that it will remain attractive forever. But this belief is betrayed. It's the same thing with trust in the permanent deliciousness of a certain food. If we were to eat nothing but that one type of food all the time, sooner or later it would bore us. Therefore, all the great Indian pandits and the enlightened beings emphasize that

we should never trust material possessions because we will always be betrayed. One of the purposes of taking refuge is to destroy this ignorance, the source of attachment, the wrong beliefs in permanence and samsaric existence.

That is the nature of samsaric existence. Things change from the way we think they are. Because we blindly believe that changeable objects will never change, we are constantly disappointed. It's the same thing with friends. We fail to realize the relationship between our mind and external objects.

Therefore, another purpose of taking refuge is to cut off problems by helping us to recognize the negative mind and the nature of objects and people and so forth. Refuge helps us to understand how we take the object as a fact, as true, and see it with the wrong conception of the self-existent I. Attachment to these non-existent permanent, inherent things causes greed, anger and so forth. We think that because we see this object as beautiful and this enemy as ugly, it must be true. We take the view of material existence that is created by our own negative minds as true, and believe in our own ignorance, and in greed and hatred.

Another main problem is that ignorance doesn't see past or future lives or the many other profound objects of inner knowledge. Believing our ignorance, which is unable to see these things, we conclude that they don't exist. The Buddha explains everything logically, with his experiences, with his holy mind that sees and understands everything. We see things with ignorance, with the limited mind, insisting that there are no past or future lives, no karma and so forth, believing this to be true. Holding on to this ignorance creates negative karma and leads us to have no belief in the realizations that meditation can bring.

All samsaric experiences are in the nature of suffering; they are old, beginningless. When we take refuge, they no longer interest us. This includes the experience of making our worldly life comfortable by acquiring possessions at the cost of harming others and so forth. Once we are enlightened, we will stay enlightened. We won't need to make any actions for happiness; there will be no further work to do to create perfect peace. Our only work will be to free all sentient beings from suffering.

There's no reason for us to selfishly think of ourselves as more important than any other sentient being. All of our desires are exactly equal. We should think as follows. "Since every sentient being has been my friend, enemy and stranger, we are all related. All have been my mother. I must help them all, as they have all helped me countless times and will continue to do so until I reach enlightenment. However, the wisdom of most sentient beings is blind; through ignorance they usually make mistakes and their actions create an unhappy, suffering result. They have done this from beginningless lifetimes until now, and so have I."

"Therefore, I am responsible for leading them to enlightenment by leading them to attain the cause of enlightenment. Many of their sufferings are caused by me. I take rebirth from their bodies in the form that was created by my negative karma and ignorance. As my mother, they have created so much negative karma in order to look after me. These negative actions have left strong negative imprints on their minds which are causing them to suffer terribly now and will continue to cause them to suffer. I see my present sufferings as unbearable, but their sufferings are so much greater, which they also must experience without choice."

“Therefore, in order to lead sentient beings to enlightenment right away, by creating positive karmas and cutting the cause of suffering, I am going to take refuge in the presence of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha and countless other buddhas.”

Chapter 7. Karma



Lama Zopa Rinpoche teaching during the Fourth Kopan Course, 1973. LYWA collection.

[WFGS pp. 128–35]

Karma is a mental action; it can be positive, negative or changeable.

There is also neutral karma which is, for example, a movement without any reason, such as a movement we make in our sleep. A neutral action has no specific motivation.

To create Dharma actions doesn't mean that the mind has to be free from the Dharma point of view, which means free from greed, hatred and ignorance, where it would be impossible for these things to ever arise again. But what we mean by "free" in terms of the ordinary mind is that we practice the Dharma, we practice virtuous actions despite the fact that our mind is still not free of greed, hatred and ignorance.

Karma and Emptiness

Positive or virtuous karma is any action that cuts samsara. It is any action that will leave a positive imprint on the mindstream that will ripen as a positive, happy result. Negative or nonvirtuous karma is the opposite: the action that leaves a negative imprint and results in suffering.

Creating positive actions within our meditation on emptiness is the most powerful way to create virtuous, positive karma. It's a very powerful method to cut off samsara and always causes rebirth in the upper realms. This kind of karma is recognized as the perfect positive action. Other kinds of positive karma, such as making charity, that are created without meditative concentration on emptiness are seen as more indirect methods but they can still help free us from samsara. These are still good karmas but not so strong.

The most powerful antidote to samsara is the realization of emptiness, particularly seeing that the sense of I that we hold is not self-existent as we see it but is the complete opposite. It's empty of inherent existence, empty of self-existence. We should be aware of this all the time. For instance, even when we offer a stick of incense to the Buddha, we should think we are doing it in order to be free from samsara and to release all beings from samsara. We should also add that the I that is making the offering has no self-existence, the action of offering has no self-existence and the Buddha we are offering it to has no self-existence. This is the most powerful way to make an offering, the most perfect way to cut off samsara. Any positive karma done with awareness of emptiness becomes a direct method to achieve this.

Without emptiness, an action can still be positive and cause us to take rebirth in the upper realms, but it's not nearly as direct as the positive karma created with emptiness.

“Self-existent” is the opposite of “non-self-existent.” We are completely empty of a self-existent I. When we normally think of our sense of self, we feel that we are our body and mind, that the I is a kind of self-existing entity within the aggregates. That is completely the opposite of how the I exists. The I exists as merely imputed on these aggregates; it is a mere name, empty of any more existence than that. There is no I that exists by itself, without depending on the aggregates and also without even depending on the name “I.” That self-existent I doesn't exist anywhere.

In the same way, the action of offering and the object, the Buddha, are empty of self-existence. Similarly, when we are prostrating, meditating or creating any other positive karma, we should think, “I, my mind and form, are empty of self-existence and the Buddha himself is also empty of self-existence.” Always think like this.

The same thing is true in terms of our self, body and action. We act through our speech and body. These aggregates are completely empty of self-existence, of any action that exists by itself without depending on the function of body, speech or mind. It's the same thing with the name and the same thing with the Buddha. This is how to create positive karma that is direct action with awareness of emptiness.

The karma created with the realization of emptiness is the principal force that destroys all negativity. Meditating on this emptiness of subject, object and action is the opposite of creating karma with ignorance.

Virtuous karma that is created without an understanding of emptiness, without meditating on the absolute truth in this way, is still positive karma, but because these actions are done with the mistaken concept of a truly existent I and object, there is a degree of ignorance to it. This kind of wrong concept is the principal ignorance, like parents who give birth to many children. This wrong concept that thinks that the I is self-existent and the object is self-existent is the main ignorance that we are talking about.

Positive karma created without emptiness can help us attain enlightenment, but it's not a powerful method to fight ignorance. Therefore, although the motivation is positive, it's an indirect method to liberation. Just as a tree can be cut down easily and quickly with a very sharp axe but can also be felled by hitting it with an iron bar, although it takes a very long time, this is the same with positive karma created with an understanding of emptiness and without it. Emptiness is the direct method, like the axe. The other method is like the iron bar—it will break the tree but it will take a long time.

Understanding emptiness doesn't happen instantly; it takes time. Creating positive karma with the practice of emptiness is utterly unlike creating positive karma without it. With that, because the mind is ignorant, the object is viewed with that ignorant mind. Although ignorant, it can be valid, such as one person mistakenly seeing a person as a tiger and another correctly seeing them as a person. Both fail to see the emptiness of the object, so both are still ignorant, but one is valid and one is not.

The greatest ignorance is seeing ourselves as truly existent. That truly existent I doesn't exist at all, not even an atom, and believing in that hallucination is the cause of self-cherishing and the cause of samsara. The I held by this ignorance doesn't exist, whereas the I that appears to the understanding of emptiness, the merely labeled I, does.

The ignorant mind and the mind understanding emptiness view the object completely differently. The ignorant mind is incapable of seeing the object correctly, in its absolute nature; the mind with awareness of emptiness does. Understanding emptiness is like the axe cutting a tree.

Understanding Karma Leads to Understanding Everything

In one way, karma is not definite. The more we research the subject of karma, the more our wisdom grows, and the more we become aware of the evolution of ourselves and others. The best medicine for the suffering mind is the understanding of karma. Karma is not definite—all beings are different, no face is the same—some are large, some small, some have big heads, big hands, short legs and so forth. Animal bodies are also all different.

In Tibet, when there is no water, the monks in the monasteries make prayers and recite mantras as shown by Guru Shakyamuni Buddha. They offer a puja for the nagas in a special place, and after one or two days the water comes. It's not always monks who perform in the ceremony; sometimes lay people can do it as well. This is very common in Tibet; the person doing it is not considered to possess some high power. Still today, in Darjeeling, India, they do pujas to protect the crops. There are beings in this world that we don't see. Due to the power of the method shown by the Buddha, these prayers can have a positive effect. The prayers are connected to the

karma of the people of that area. If the nagas are not happy with the people, if they are distracted by the people, they keep the place dry and don't allow rain. This is rooted in karma.

Collective karma can be seen when, for example, a hundred people die in a bomb explosion or during a meditation course. The Chinese have the collective karma to control Tibet; the Tibetans have the collective karma to be under their control. A heavy storm is not only the elements at work, it's also related to spirits. Basically, it is rooted in people's karma; the storm is the cooperative condition. In the same way, when a person beats us with a stick, they and the stick are the cooperative conditions. The principal cause of suffering is our own mind.

Meditating on karma is one of the most important meditations we can do. Just consider what we don't understand about "life." Disregarding all those complicated matters of rebirth, absolute truth, clairvoyance and so on that we find so confusing, at a basic level, what is the meaning of life? What is the creator of suffering, the creator of happiness? We are completely blind in our understanding of these things. We have created so much confusion, not finding a solution to our worldly problems. This all comes about due to a lack of understanding of karma.

Also, all the negativities of body, speech and mind that we have created until now have been caused by not understanding and not believing in karma, which in turn is caused by the ignorance of the mind. As a result of this, we have all of these problems on earth now: fighting, disease, famine and so forth. They are all caused by not having a full understanding of karma. Rich people and poor people are all suffering due to not understanding karma.

This meditation is a checking meditation involving research with understanding, not ignorance. The kind of research it involves is the kind in which the understanding of one thing, karma, leads to the understanding of the whole thing. It's very useful to study karma and to meditate on this subject. It is like a mirror where we can see all objects reflected without physically being there ourselves, without having to change position. By understanding karma, we can understand the evolution of every single existence, we can realize every single nature, we can fully see each and every existence with the achievement of omniscient mind. Every subject in this world is included within this subject.

Finally, understanding karma, we can fully achieve all the wisdom of the enlightened beings. As well, it brings the realization of every meditation much more quickly, including the realizations of higher tantric practices and the yogic development of clairvoyance. To achieve full understanding, we should do this checking meditation on the evolution of karma. It won't make us ignorant. Rather, it will lead us to control our negative mind and allow us to observe our karma, which is essential for the attainment of perfect peace. This is the nature of the Buddha's teaching.

Karma Is Definite

[WFGS p.135]

Even though the whole universe can one day become completely empty, karma is still definite. As long as the karma has been created, the result must happen, unless we destroy the negative karmic seeds through purification or destroy the positive karmic seeds through a negative mind like anger or heresy.

Karma that was created hundreds of eons ago will still ripen into a result one day. This is more definite than the existence of this whole planet or solar system. For instance, if we plant a seed in a field, it's definite that it will bring a stem and a plant unless we stop the conditions for it to grow with different methods. Karma is like the seed and its result is also definite. The method to purify negativity must be done before the result arises, while there is a chance; if we are already experiencing the result, it's extremely difficult to stop it.

Karma is definite because it definitely brings its own result in time. All the results that we have not yet experienced created by previous karma will definitely be experienced unless we can prevent them by following the different methods that stop the results from arising.

Also, karma is expandable. We should always think about the fact that there are so many other karmas that we created many eons ago that still haven't brought their result, and yet we think only about karmas of this lifetime, or maybe the lifetime before. There are so many terrible negative actions that we have done that we have yet to experience the result of—such as the five immediate negativities of killing our parents, killing an arhat, drawing blood from a buddha or creating a schism in the Sangha. We shouldn't think that because we haven't created any really gross negativities in this lifetime that we've never done them. There is not even one negative action that we have not created in samsara; there is no new negative karma left to create. We should not be complacent due to our poor memory.

Why are we so ignorant, not understanding the Dharma, finding meditation difficult, unable to visualize holy beings and so on? Because the mind finds it far easier to create negative karma. Creating positive karma is difficult, like crossing over a mountain. Usually, we create good karma for a few minutes, and then for the rest of the day we create negative karma. Such is the propensity of our mind. The negative karma that we have created in all our past previous lives is the cause of all the present problems that we are experiencing: the problem of ignorance, of not having realizations, of finding it difficult to develop wisdom, of not clearly remembering the past and not seeing the future, and even not understanding what will be going on tomorrow. All this is due to negative karma.

Therefore, the development of wisdom and understanding the Dharma is most difficult because it works in exact opposition to the negative mind that is the cause of suffering. It's obvious that if we follow the negative mind that leads to suffering, it's harder to see the Dharma, which brings happiness.

We should think that all this confusion that we now have—difficulty in meditation, not even understanding what the mind is or knowing where it exists—all this is due to the negative karma that we created in past lifetimes, and other than this there is no cause for ignorance to exist. It can't be eliminated by any being other than ourselves—not by God, not by our parents, and not by anyone else. Only our previous deluded mind, our ignorance, has caused this suffering.

Parents aren't the principal cause of our suffering; in fact they are the cause of all of our past, present and future happiness. If they were the cause of our ignorance, we would be right to blame them. But it's never like this. Parents can be ignorant and their children not ignorant; parents can be free from ignorance—enlightened or bodhisattvas—yet their children may be ignorant. It's said that Tibetans come from Chenrezig and Drolma and yet Tibetans are suffering. Most

children are born without control over their rebirth, so their ignorance has nothing to do with their parents.

Ignorance is not created by God. If it were created by God, then God would be the creator and cause of suffering and all of the world's problems are his fault and he becomes the enemy. This is impossible; it's opposite to the notion of what God is. An enlightened being acts only to enlighten all sentient beings, to release all sentient beings from suffering. The enlightened being can never be the creator of suffering; that would make no sense.

We should never just consider this life and think that we've created very few negative karmas. Since beginningless lives we have created far more negative karmas than positive. Even since we got up this morning, if we check up on the actions of our body, speech and mind we can see this. Creating negative karma doesn't mean being outside doing things with other people.

It can happen when we are meditating, sitting cross-legged in a lotus position, looking beautiful as if we are receiving realizations. We should check up on the state of our mind. Negative karma can be our mental attitude as well as verbal and physical actions. As we start to meditate, our mind is out of control, wandering all over the place, spending more time on distractions than on concentration. Past memories come into the mind, leading us to think about things we've done before, and we also think a great deal about what we are going to do in the future. All these things come into the mind during meditation. In this situation, it's definitely possible to create much negative karma.

When we think back on experiences we've had in our own country, we feel great attraction for our life there and attachment arises very easily. We can then so easily become attached to the plans we've made for when we finish this course. Anger can also arise in meditation when we think of the enemies who disturbed us in the past and who are still disturbing us. We see them as completely negative, with evil personalities. These are just a few examples of how we can create negative karma even when meditating. Creating positive karma is so difficult.

Why do we find it so difficult to create positive karma, to have a mind of non-attachment and non-anger? Why is it so easy to be negative? It's because we are habituated to negative actions. If there had been no ignorance in the previous lifetimes, no past karma, we wouldn't find it difficult at all to renounce attachment. Following the negative mind is easy and intuitive. Creating positive karma, however, is very difficult, requiring great effort.

We've lived so many years until now and yet we still don't know what the mind is. Ignorance is beginningless; it's hard to give up. If ignorance had a beginning, why had our mind originally become attached or angry? We should try to discover why we become frightened at the idea of giving up attachment, how we naturally move toward attachment to something even though it might require overcoming many difficulties.

We work so hard to get what we want—what our attachment wants. We can even give up our life to follow attachment. The world is full of examples. We can see it in the movies or in stories of people who risk everything to gain a good reputation or a valuable prize. Even those who commit suicide when things don't work out are pushed by attachment.

Take a couple, for instance. The wife is miserable, always worrying about her husband going after someone else. If he is indeed with someone else, her problem is huge and she cries so much, even though she leads a very comfortable life without lack of food or possessions. Because of her husband's infidelity, she may even commit suicide. This is all done for attachment. She is so afraid of giving up attachment. She might be very rich, with expensive clothes and a beautiful house, but still be consumed by jealousy. She plots to harm the other woman, directly or indirectly, wishing some danger would befall her rival, even wishing for her death. Men also experience these things. Men fight with others over their wives, disregarding their own life. They are very brave! All of this, again, is only for the sake of attachment. It's no surprise that the mind follows attachment so easily.

Karma Is Expandable

[WFGS pp. 135–36]

Negative and positive karma are both expandable. In the same way that one rice seed can bring so many results, so many more seeds, so can the results of positive and negative karma expand. Positive karmic results can be experienced in many other future lives as can negative karmic suffering results. This is why it's vital to understand karma. We must understand how one action created in a short time can bring results over such a long time.

The evolution of one universe, from beginning to end, from empty space to empty space, takes one great eon. One great eon has four parts. The first part is the *eon of evolution*, when the universe and the beings come into existence. The universe includes this southern world we live in, the other worlds and Mt. Meru. The second part is the *eon of existence*. The third part is the *eon of degeneration* or decay. And the fourth part is the *eon of emptiness*.

Each of these eons consists of twenty eons that are not short, but very long, and eighty of these make one great eon.

The human life starts off with an incredibly long lifespan, getting longer and longer until it reaches eighty thousand years. Then humans stop evolving. After that, their lifespan gets shorter and shorter, down to ten years, and then it gets longer again, to eighty thousand years, and then down to ten once more. One small eon is the time it takes to degenerate from eighty thousand years to ten years. In one of the eighty eons, there are twenty such ups and downs. At the present time our lifespan is less than one hundred years and we are degenerating toward ten. This is all based on karmic evolution. Thinking about this will lead to greater understanding of positive and negative karma.

One created karma can bring either one result or many. And many karmas can bring one result or many. One karma can bring its result in one life or in many. Many karmas collected in many lives can bring one result. For example, when we feel hot and crave being cool, if we become habituated to craving cold, this becomes our normal mindset and can result in a rebirth in the cold hells.

Examples of Karma Expanding

How does one tiny karma bring many results? Once, somebody made an offering to the Buddha with devotion and from this small karma they received many future lives rich in enjoyments and possessions, as well as attaining realizations and nirvana. To somebody who was cynical that this could happen from such a small cause, the Buddha asked what the cause of a huge banyan tree was. When the man replied that it was a small seed, the Buddha countered that using his logic this was impossible. The man then said that it was possible because it was his experience that this was so, and the Buddha then said that the vast result of the karma of that small offering was also the Buddha's experience.

Guru Shakyamuni Buddha explained something similar to a brahmin—that if with devotional mind a person offers food for just one day to the Buddha, that karma can cause them to be wealthy for many future lives and to be reborn in the upper realms, even though the cause only happened for one day. When the brahmin doubted this, the Buddha asked if he had seen a big result in nature coming from a small cause. The brahmin gave the example of a crop of wheat that can grow from one seed, and the Buddha showed that, with karma, one cause brings many results in the same way.

The result of negative karma also expands. In the time of one buddha, a king built a monastery that had all the necessities inside and offered it to the Sangha. His son, through true renunciation, became celibate and lived there; but despite the monastery being full of things, this king had such great envy that he couldn't give any of these possessions to any other living beings. His karma caused him to suffer in the hell realm for thirty-one eons. After that, he was born as a naga called Temetong. Whatever touched this naga's body burned it, and the flames that came from it caused it so much suffering.

Guru Shakyamuni Buddha told these stories about karma to instruct living beings, to make them careful in creating karma.

In another buddha's time, a girl once slept with some bhikshus on the steps of a monastery. The karma created by this caused her to be reborn in the lower realms for many eons. She suffered in the hell realm for all of the eons, but her karmic debt was not completed by the end of that universe and this caused her to be reborn in the hell realm of another universe. After that she was reborn as a blind naga with a rotten body oozing with pus and insects eating it. This also lasted for a long time.

As the universe is destroyed, our sun increases into seven suns, getting hotter and hotter until everything burns up. The golden hills melt, the oceans dry up, iron mountains burn, the earth disintegrates and eventually the sun itself disappears. When this time comes, the minds of beings who are suffering in the hell realm and who still have karma left to experience are reborn in the hell realm of another universe, where they continue to suffer until their time is up. Other beings who have expanded their karmic result can be reborn as humans, gods and so forth. The place of the hell realm is not definite but in many places; it can be on this earth.

There are even occasional hells where beings can be human in the daytime and suffer greatly at night. Once, a person was asked by a noble being to keep precepts. He agreed to do so only in

the daytime but not at night. The result of this was that he took a rebirth in which in the daytime he lived in a very attractive place, with five women, enjoying himself very much, but at night they became dogs that devoured all parts of his body without control, barking and eating his heart. At sunrise he would become the human enjoying himself again; at dusk, he was eaten with much suffering. This kind of rebirth is a type of hell rebirth but not quite so bad and it occurred because the person didn't follow the precepts at night, only during the day.

We have a perfect human rebirth now, but it's extremely difficult to attain again. After this universe ends, the minds of the beings who inhabit it take form in another universe. Universes can't be exactly the same but there are many of them.

Once the Sangha of a particular place deposited a jewel with the manager of that place. When they asked for it back, the manager refused, claiming it was his and asked them if they would like to eat kaka. Due to this, he was reborn in the worst suffering for ninety-one eons. Each time during those eons that there was a different founder of the teachings on earth, he was born as a snake in a place near a very dirty lake where people threw their kaka and rubbish. He experienced much suffering. Six of those buddhas used this snake as an example of karma for their followers. After the snake rebirth, he returned to the hell realm until the next buddha came into the world. Altogether, there will be one thousand buddhas; Guru Shakyamuni Buddha is the fourth, and all of them have prophesied about the karma of this being who was once the manager.

There are many other stories that are told about karma expanding, especially about bad rebirths due to verbal or physical negative actions toward holy objects, such as monks and temples. The rebirth often suits the action. For example, if you call someone a dog you yourself may be born as a dog. Positive actions, such as offering to holy beings, may even be rewarded the same way, especially if the offerings are from a beggar or a poor person who has little.

In a previous time, in Benares, [27] one person tried to stop his mother from giving charity. He locked her up in a house and at mealtimes made her eat dirt for six days, after which she died. He wasn't the least upset. Sometime later, an arhat came to beg from this man, and the man took the food from inside the arhat's bowl and trampled on it. Due to these karmas, he was reborn in the lowest hell realm. After many eons he was reborn as a very ugly son to an Indian family. At birth, his mother's milk dried up and whenever they found a wet nurse, her milk dried up too. When he grew up, he always had trouble finding food. After some time, he became a monk, begging food. He asked a particular Sangha member if he could sweep their monastery and they fed him. The first day they were all invited to a benefactor's house but there was a quarrel there and he missed out. The next day they were again invited, but his food was forgotten and so again he missed out. The next day Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's disciple, Ananda, forgot food for him. The next day he tried very hard to get some food, but it was taken by a dog. The next day Maudgalyayana brought him food, but it was taken by a Garuda and dropped in the ocean. The next day an arhat brought him food and left the bowl at the door, but it was absorbed into the earth. So the arhat, who had great psychic powers and could see the past, present and future, went under the earth with his power and tried to get the bowl that had been absorbed. But when he returned, the man's mouth was closed by karma. That made up the six days without food. Then, he ate dirt mixed with water and died. In this process, all those three karmic actions were repaid. We must remember to never stop someone from giving charity or creating other good karma. This creates very bad karma for us.

In a previous time, a member of the Sangha called another monk jumping into a stream a monkey because he was so quick, and because of that, the name caller was reborn as a monkey. Another monk criticized someone else's voice, saying their chanting sounded like a dog barking. Because of that, he was reborn as a dog. Just calling people names or telling them they are blind and so forth, can bring a similar result.

You don't even need anger to create great negative karma that will result in experiencing a suffering result. In a previous time, a king made an offering of five hundred dancing ladies who played music to bodhisattvas. A girl criticized this to others who were talking about Dharma. The result was that for ninety thousand rebirths she was reborn in the hell realm and for five hundred lifetimes she was reborn as a barbarian and heretic, because of her judgment of the action of offering. For six lives, she was born blind and without a tongue. In the hell realm, some beings are born as walls or pillars—the hell being is not of definite form, it can be any shape according to the living being's karma. Such a rebirth can arise as a result of actions such as spitting in a holy place or dirtying it.

In the hell realm, we can also be born as a tree, a leaf, a road or a broom. This kind of karma can be created by using the possessions of the Sangha, such as trees and so forth, for our own use, without permission or without a Dharma reason. Any negative karma created with the possessions of the Sangha is extremely difficult to purify.

In the time of a previous buddha, a lower caste child who was devoted to the buddha threw a handful of beans to him. Only four of them dropped into his bowl, and one dropped on his head. The result of this was that the child became a universal king, extremely rich, with full control of the four great worlds and the realms of the desire realm gods. All this arose from the bean that dropped on the enlightened being's head. A member of the Sangha offered a coin to another buddha and vowed never to kill—as a result, in many future lives he lived a long time, feeling no danger, with few distractions.

Rejoicing can also create negative karma, such as rejoicing over someone's death. Some Tibetans, for example, rejoiced over the death of Chinese soldiers. Thirty-two people once stole and killed an ox and an old woman rejoiced. After a long time, in the time of a buddha, that ox became a king, and the mother was reborn as a woman with thirty-two sons. The king killed all thirty-two sons.

Rejoicing can also create great positive karma, if we rejoice over positive deeds.

The only war is against ignorance. With the Dharma, we can't harm any other sentient being. Rather, the Dharma is a method to bring perfect peace to ourselves and to others. The Buddha's sole wish is for all sentient beings to overcome all ignorance right now. If we hurt even the tiniest insect, it hurts all enlightened beings, just as harming the child hurts the parents. The best offering to the enlightened beings is to help sentient beings, for their holy minds are strongly bound by limitless compassion.

When Guru Shakyamuni Buddha was crossing the Ganges at Varanasi, five hundred hungry ghosts nearby asked him for water, which he satisfied them with. They developed such strong faith that they were reborn in the god realm, where they saw him again and received teachings and attained enlightenment. When someone asked Guru Shakyamuni Buddha about this story, he

explained that in a previous buddha's time, they had been ordained with the five precepts, and once some fully ordained monks had taken some of their food. They had remarked that those monks begged like hungry ghosts, and the result was rebirth as hungry ghosts for five lifetimes, until they met Guru Shakyamuni Buddha.

There was a very poor place in India which the Buddha once passed through, being seen by five hundred dirty, ragged farmers who were plowing wheat with a thousand cows. The farmers and cows felt strong devotion for the power of his holy body and received teachings. As a result, they were reborn in the god realm where they met him again and fully realized emptiness. (It's possible to see a buddha and receive teachings in the god realm but extremely difficult—just as seeing the stars in the daytime is difficult due to brightness of the sun.) The explanation of this story is that the five hundred farmers had been monks in the time of a past buddha but had been so lazy that they were reborn as poor, suffering farmers. The thousand cows had once been monks too but had no respect for the secondary precepts and so were reborn as cows.

Ignorance creates the wrong view that leads to the eight worldly dharmas and to hatred and anger. Many negative minds arise from greed for possessions and comfort, which leads to anger, destroying ourselves and others. The negative karma thus created causes rebirth in the suffering realms by way of the four results: the ripening or maturation result, the possessed or environmental result, experiencing the result similar to the cause, and creating the result similar to the cause. This only makes ignorance stronger, which causes anger to return in future lives and so on. A moment's anger brings eons of suffering. The growth of ignorance takes us further from the cause of perfect peace and from the realization of emptiness. Until we stop to purify our ignorance, we go in the opposite direction.

Examples are good, since we can remember them when we are about to create negative karma. They will make us afraid of doing so and thus give us protection from creating suffering by following the negative mind.

We Cannot Meet the Result Unless We Have Created the Cause

[WFGS p. 136]

We can't experience any pleasure unless we have created some previous good karma. Without planting the seed, we can't grow grain, no matter how strongly we wish to enjoy it, no matter how much we expect it, and it's the same with karma. This applies to both positive and negative karma and their results, happiness and suffering.

But neither can we expect a potato seed to bring corn or an orange tree to grow bananas. The result has to arise from a similar cause. Karma that is created with ignorance can't be expected to bring the result of happiness. For example, if we commit one of the ten nonvirtues, such as sacrificing a cow in order to bring about a good result, a happy result is impossible because the original action creates suffering. If we understand this basic fact about karma, we won't make a mistake. Sacrificing animals to a god is an ignorant action, the action of somebody who is ignorant of karma and believes that the god will be pleased by the sacrifice, which is the complete opposite to what happens. If sacrificing living beings pleased the gods, we would have to

conclude that the gods were selfish, without compassion and without any care for the happiness of living beings. That is a very ignorant mind.

Most people have no idea of the Christian God. Some might even think he will be pleased by sacrifice. Some people think that worldly evil spirits are gods and do things to placate them. These misconceptions of what a god or God is leads to great suffering. Such a being could never be pleased by this action. The nature of God, or the holy mind, is something that is complete loving kindness and compassion, wishing happiness for all sentient beings and wishing them to be free from suffering.

Ignorant of karma, foolish people expect rebirth in heaven and a long, happy and successful life in return for their sacrifice. They think that if they don't make a sacrifice, their god will punish them. Some only sacrifice because other families do it or because it's a family custom. If the family doesn't do it, they will get a bad reputation. This only causes their ignorance of karma to increase, even though they might believe that their motivation is a good one.

The Result of the Karma Created Is Never Lost

[WFGS p. 136]

The result of the karma created is never lost. Because we don't know which past karmic results we have already experienced, knowing we must experience the results of karmic imprints still on our mindstream, we need to do a lot of purification as well as not creating any new negative karma. An eon is a very long time and karma is beginningless.

We are so fortunate to be able to practice the Dharma at this time. During the eons of emptiness, evolution and degeneration as well as most of the eon of existence, there are no teachings.

In the eon of existence, the teachings only begin when the lifespan has decreased from eighty thousand years to one thousand, and as life gets shorter there are fewer teachings. At Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's time, the human lifespan was about one hundred, which is when the founder of the Dharma manifests on this earth. The great yogis and lamas recognize the present people who practice the Dharma as very fortunate to be alive and receiving the teachings at this point in time because their mind is now ready. When humans live for eighty thousand years, their minds are not ready for teachings due to the fact that they have no experience of suffering. As the lifespan gets shorter, their minds become ready. Therefore, because the teachings are so rare, only existing in this brief period, we must cherish them.

Incorrectly believing that the negative karmas we create can bring happiness is our worst enemy. Such ignorant belief is worse than any possible external enemy. We are now human due to past karmas created over billions of eons. Because the suffering result that happens when negative karmic imprints ripen doesn't occur straight away, we tend to think it doesn't matter. Such a view is very limited, deeply ignorant of how karma works and of the teachings of enlightened beings. We think, "The result comes in a future life which maybe exists, but maybe it doesn't, so it doesn't matter." This is very ignorant.

In China, the astrological method of determining the past and future developed from Manjushri, the buddha of wisdom. But proper karmic teaching tells us that we have experienced all lives and actions, all samsaric experiences, that they are beginningless. Because the astrological teachings only refer to this rebirth and to immediate past and future lives, they are very limited. It's better to have confidence in teachings on karma because they show us how to stop the cycle of rebirth, which is the best practice.

The main thing that we should remember is to stop creating negative actions. To do that, we must recognize what the negative mind is. Then, we can recognize its very opposite: the positive mind and positive actions. From beginningless lives until now, the whole problem has been our failure to recognize the negative mind. Recognizing this, we can put an end to our suffering. When we recognize the ignorance in our minds, we can more easily recognize the ignorant view, and, transforming our mind into a virtuous one, it becomes much easier to overcome external problems. Perfect peace depends on internal change. Trying to only change exterior problems only creates more problems and the need to work to overcome them will never end. When we are ignorant, the teachings themselves, created to dispel ignorance, become an enemy. Such an ignorant mind is taking the best care of ignorance.

The Four Opponent Powers

[WFGS pp. 137–38]

The four opponent powers are the four factors needed to make our purification perfect. The first of the four opponent powers is the *power of the object*, taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. The second is the *power of regret*, feeling strong regret for having done a negative action. The third is the *power of resolve*, determining not to do that negative action again in this lifetime. (We can't make promises for future lifetimes.) And the fourth is the *power of the remedy*, which is any virtuous action that counters the negative mind that created that negative action. That includes doing retreats, prostrations, building stupas and statues, reciting mantras, especially the Vajrasattva mantra, reciting purification prayers, reading books, doing pujas and making offerings to the Sangha.

Regret is the most important of the four. The stronger the regret, the greater the purification. Because the other powers depend on how strongly we regret the action, it makes the power of the remedy and the power of the resolve stronger.

We do purification practices to avoid the suffering result, to eliminate it before it ripens. During meditation, we should remember all the negativities we have committed and confess them. Then we should build up positive karma through pure Dharma practice, which is the other means of building merit. When our purification is strong, by experiencing some small suffering or illness in this lifetime, we can avoid many lifetimes of terrible suffering in the lower realms.

We have created so many negative karmas in beginningless past lives, and yet we now enjoy the result of the one that brought this life. We could have been born anywhere, as anything. How does this work? The heavier a karma or the more frequently it's committed, the more likely it is to ripen, so the karma that brought this rebirth must have been heavier than the others. Or, if it was the same weight, it must have been closer to ripening. Or, if that was the same, it must have been

more habitual. Or, even if all these different factors were equal, this karma must have been committed first.

As long as we are ignorant of karma, we are ignorant of the suffering of samsara. To stop suffering, we must know its cause. The understanding of karma is a most profound subject, and gaining this understanding depends on meditation. We must discover its evolution within our own experience. But we must be fully confident about what karma is before we can live in the practice of creating positive karma and avoiding negative karma. We create our own suffering—negative karma—and will keep doing so until we develop full confidence coming from a deep understanding. Before we can transform our mind, we need explanations, which come from the teachings of the enlightened one. We should check up on the explanations, understanding them, believing them and living with them. Failure to recognize karma doesn't mean that it doesn't exist.

Karmic Result

The results of karma differ for various reasons. A thought, such as greed, for example, arises and we may suppress it as a result of our conscience or fear of reprisal, or we may act it out. This can occur with or without the knowledge of karma. In all cases, the karmic result will vary. There are also different results that arise from small actions done with different motivations. For instance, if we tell a lie with a pure motivation, such as to really help someone, and without expecting something in return, it's a positive action. It's not positive if we do it to help ourselves, for example, if we expect a reward.

We can create great negative karma in our life, but if we then learn about the Dharma and practice it very purely, we will be able to purify that karma. In *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* Shantideva says,

[7:14] Relying upon the boat of a human (body),
Free yourself from the great river of pain!
As it is hard to find this boat again,
This is no time for sleep, you fool.

We are in a very deep, wide ocean of suffering and the boat that we depend on to cross over is our present human rebirth. In the same way that a boat is needed to cross a vast ocean, by depending on the boat of the human rebirth, we can escape from suffering. But just having this human rebirth alone is not enough to cross over the suffering because most human beings die without having created the causes of happiness and then are reborn in the three lower realms as a result of the negative karma they have created.

Therefore, we not only need this boat of a human rebirth, we also need to correctly observe our karma, creating only positive karma and never creating negative karma. What causes the suffering in the three lower realms is only the inability to correctly follow karma. We have also created far more negative karma than positive over our countless lifetimes, so after death we are much more likely to take a lower rebirth, unless we create much more good karma and purify our past bad karma before its result is experienced. Because this perfect human rebirth is just found this once, we must act now to transform ourselves. This is why Shantideva says it is no time to sleep.

The only way to cross over the vast ocean of suffering is to observe our karma as best we can. We need faith in and a deep understanding of karma. In order to develop this, we need fear. When I say fear, I don't mean the ignorant fear that even insects and animals have, the fear of death, that causes them to take great care of their lives, to always work to avoid being killed. That fear is insufficient to practice the Dharma. Most of us are afraid anyway; that's why we work to support ourselves and plan for the future and so forth.

The fear that we need in order to practice the Dharma correctly is the useful fear that we will die without having created any positive karma, and because of that we will be reborn in the lower realms. Unless we have created the merits to be reborn in the upper realms, there will be no chance to practice Dharma in the next life. This useful fear of dying is the fear that we won't be able to make any preparation for enlightenment before we have purified our negativities.

Such fear is very useful because it keeps us away from the negative minds of greed, hatred and ignorance. The more we genuinely fear an unfortunate rebirth, the easier it is to overcome our attachment. This fear makes our Dharma practice pure and sincere. With such strong fear, we have the determination to use anything for the Dharma, including what we would normally consider worldly enjoyments such as food, clothing or sleep.

Just as in the example of the two nephews of Ananda, with such strong fear, we can't become lazy or sleepy. We have so much energy for meditation or any positive action, wanting to continue despite any difficulty. We have no problems keeping our vows purely until death. We see worldly problems such as hunger and so forth as unimportant, as trivial matters. Unless we have this useful fear, we will have great difficulty even keeping our vows. We see the prohibitions that come with the vows as suffering.

People who take vows often feel deprived of what they think are the good things in life. They miss smoking, they feel hungry, they feel tired. This is because they are still influenced by the eight worldly dharmas. Even if they try to practice the Dharma, they can't continue. They feel the vows are torture; they lose interest in studying. In short, they get bored with the Dharma.

This is like the Tibetans under the Chinese who complained that they couldn't even get butter tea and there was sand in the *tsampa*. Some Sherpa monks from Tashi Lhunpo Monastery said that they had to work incredibly hard as laborers and only got dirty *tsampa*, so there was very little food to fill their stomachs. They had so much suffering.

On the other hand, when we have a good understanding of karma and a fear of death, we will have no problems observing our karma, keeping our vows purely and doing whatever we can to create merit. Unheedful of the comforts of the worldly life, we work to attain realizations.

There is a big difference between somebody who understands karma and somebody who doesn't. It can make a big change in a person. Even if somebody was very cruel and negative earlier in life, if they then gained some understanding of karma and death, they could completely transform from the way they were before, becoming holy, a bodhisattva. The person they were before and the one they are now have completely different personalities, actions and lives. Therefore, the main purpose of this human life is to be careful in the creation of karma and to have faith and understanding in it.

The tantric path is the short path to enlightenment. It's very powerful. The person who correctly follows the practices of the Hinayana and the Mahayana can definitely attain enlightenment after sixteen lifetimes without tantric meditation. The short path of tantra, however, makes enlightenment possible within one lifetime.

There are many mental disciplines practiced by bodhisattvas to control the delusions in order to attain enlightenment. Ordination, for example, is an act of discipline. Just shaving the hair and wearing robes doesn't mean the mind is subdued. There are many holy beings who have subdued their minds without robes or shaved heads. Not involved in creating negative karma, they keep their minds pure.

The bodhisattva's attitude is to always be unattached to the actions of body, speech and mind, to worldly possessions, and to always work for the happiness of sentient beings. This never depends on external changes, painting the body or wearing rosaries and so forth, but on subduing the mind. Unless the mind is subdued, no matter how they appear, it's difficult for a person to really be a bodhisattva.

Which is more important, the comfort of this life or the future life? Is trying to receive peace in this lifetime through meditation positive or negative? It's not negative because although the desire is to receive peace in this lifetime, it's attained through meditation, by following the path, and the purpose of the path is not for this life. We have to be very clear about this. Are we aspiring to the happiness of this life or of future lives? If we study Buddhism but underlying everything we do is the wish for worldly happiness, that is not Dharma. We simply can't attain the path to enlightenment without renouncing the eight worldly dharmas. If we run after that kind of happiness, we will never get it.

If, however, we desire peace in this lifetime and try to attain it by following the path, because that involves renouncing the eight worldly dharmas, that is not negative because it will lead to higher realizations. This peace can be developed into perfect everlasting peace. This desire to experience peace in this lifetime is always very useful. The other desire, which does not renounce the attachment and the comfort of this life, is negative; it's not attained through the path but through samsaric actions, through temporal methods, and its motivation is attachment to worldly comforts. Because of that, it's tainted, it has no beginning and no end and it can't last. The result is trivial, with nothing to do with bringing peace in future lives. Because of that, it only brings suffering. Therefore, there is no reason to do it again.

The action of trying to attain peace through meditating on samsara and suffering is meaningful because the purpose of this action is to fight the negative mind. Because of that, it has the power to bring everlasting happiness. This meditation causes us to renounce attachment and actions that arise from the negative mind of ignorance. The method is perfect because it has an end. The more we practice in this way, the purer our actions become and the closer we get to enlightenment. Enlightenment is the most perfect everlasting happiness. Whereas desire is generally seen as a negative mind, the desire to destroy ignorance is positive.

The desire for the worldly comfort of this life is negative, mostly causing us to be reborn in the three lower realms. When we desire another samsaric rebirth with samsaric enjoyments or another human rebirth for its enjoyments, although it's considered Dharma because it's beyond

this life, it's still negative because it causes us to be reborn in samsara and keeps us there. Positive desire is the desire for freedom from samsara, the wish to be free from greed, hatred and ignorance. But because the desire to be free from samsara still has some taint of self-cherishing, it can still be seen as negative when we compare it to the selfless desire to attain enlightenment for the sake of sentient beings.

All of this has to do with the amount of positive karma we create. Any action that is done for our future life that is not ignorant of karma is a Dharma action. If an action is done for the worldly comfort of the future life, it's the lowest kind of Dharma action. Any action done for the worldly comfort of this life is *not* the Dharma.

When we die with full confidence and faith in karma, we will have a very different rebirth from somebody who doesn't have this confidence and faith. For them, the next rebirth will probably be in the lower realms, especially if they have broken any vows they have taken.

Because we ourselves don't have the ability to see how karma works, the examples shown by the Buddha are extremely useful to help us understand. It's vital to follow the laws of karma, particularly at times like these when there are so many international, social, political and racial conflicts, and problems also between teachers, all spurred by animosity and greed. Following karma is the only way for everybody to have peace, to keep from creating negativities. Peace is impossible without this. Why is there so much trouble on earth? Countries keep changing political parties, but no matter what they try it never suits everyone. The changes are to prevent suffering but never succeed because the method is not perfect. Therefore, problems arise and get bigger. Again, the situation changes, and again it fails. So many leaders come and go, groups form and dissolve and so on.

At the beginning humans didn't need a king, leader or guru because the negative mind was very subdued, not violent as it is now. The present problems were not there: crops grew easily, bodies produced their own light, there was no need for work, and enjoyments and happiness were much greater. People didn't collect things or make arrangements for the future. Miserliness was unknown, although the seeds were there.

Slowly, however, the negative mind became stronger, growing more and more violent, and so the behavior deteriorated—jealousy, stronger desire and miserliness arose. As it degenerated, more and more problems came, so a king was needed to look after the people. Having social structure doesn't mean things are better; it means they're getting worse.

The fundamental method to have peace is to follow karma; no other method can possibly work. For everybody on earth to have peace depends on every person on earth following karma, not just some people practicing Dharma and giving peace and enlightenment to others through their mental control. This would be like expecting a few people to work hard and fill their stomachs in order to become the cause for millions of others to be free from hunger without having to get food. It's the same thing if a few people only practiced the Dharma; they can't give their peace to those who don't practice the method. Perfect peace is mental control. Their minds are completely separate from the other millions of minds and have different karmic propensities. This doesn't mean that we can't influence others, but we must all work to subdue our minds; such control can't be divided and shared like a loaf of bread. That's impossible.

If two people had the same mind, it should be exactly the same. If one was hungry, the other would be hungry; if one was happy, the other would be happy. Their physical appearance should also be completely the same, because to have the same mind means having exactly the same karmic imprints. To think mental experiences can be shared like bread is a big mistake. The mind can't be shared. If that were possible, we would all have attained enlightenment by now. Since there are infinite numbers of enlightened beings with unbearable compassion for us, they wouldn't leave even one sentient being suffering for even a split second.

If there were no karma, there would be no such thing as different lives, or things like uncontrolled rebirth and death, or sickness and old age. It wouldn't be possible for all these things to exist, for beings to have to lead such lives without choice.

Also, without karma, coming here from the West and taking a meditation course like this one wouldn't be possible. Everything would be self-existent. There would only be two possibilities if there was no karma. Either everything is self-existent or everything is nonexistent. Actually, if this line of reasoning is followed everything becomes nonexistent—no enlightened beings and no sentient beings, no enlightened mind and no ignorant mind—because the enlightened mind comes from purifying the ignorant mind. The enlightened mind is not eternal, it didn't always exist, but it's permanent once achieved. If the enlightened mind was eternal there would be no such person as Gautama Buddha, beginningless suffering could not be ended, and omniscience would be impossible. There wouldn't be any mind or any existence, because every existence is a result, depending on the cause, which means there is karma and there is dependent arising. The mental effort of following karma is necessary. Without it, no other method works.

Talk is old; realizations are new.

Chapter 8. The General Sufferings of Samsara



Lama Zopa Rinpoche during the Fourth Kopan Course, 1973. Photo by Brian Beresford.

The Ten Nonvirtues

[WFGS pp. 131–35]

The result of negative action is rebirth in the suffering realms. This is the principal result, the result of a complete nonvirtue. An action has four factors: object, motivation, action and completion of action. If the action is not complete with all these four factors, it's not a complete nonvirtuous action and the result may not be fully experienced; it may not mean a lower rebirth. Although we may not experience the full result, we will experience various suffering results when we take another human rebirth, such as experiencing the result that is similar to the cause. After a lower realm rebirth has been exhausted, there may still be some effect of the result of the principal karma to be experienced. Experiencing the result similar to the cause means we will have to experience the same suffering as the negative action we did. Creating the result similar to the cause means we will do the same action again and have to experience the same results. The possessed result is living in a horrible or suffering place as a result of that negative action.

The General Sufferings of Samsara

[WFGS pp. 141–43]

In *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* Shantideva's says,

[4:16–17] Although today I am healthy,
Well-nourished and unafflicted,
Life is momentary and deceptive:
The body is like an object on loan for but a minute.

With behavior such as this
I shall not win a human body again,
And if this human form is not attained
There will be solely wrongdoing and no virtue.

The great pandit Chandragomin tells of a cow seeing grass at the edge of a cliff, running to it and, before it can take a bite, tumbling over the cliff. Samsaric pleasures betray us, just as grass betrays the cow. We shouldn't trust these things, but this experience doesn't come intuitively, it only arises through understanding.

The best way to destroy our trust in samsaric things is realizing the shortcomings of attachment and coming to see attachment as the real enemy. Unless we can overcome our wrong view that creates our attachment to samsaric pleasure, we won't be able to do this.

The best way is to check up using examples from our own life. From the Dharma point of view, we do many childish and pointless things that we think are important. Sometimes we are so blind that we need to be shown examples. In *Precious Garland*, Nagarjuna says,

There is pleasure when a sore is scratched,
But to be without sores is more pleasurable still.
Just so, there are pleasures in worldly desires,
But to be without desires is more pleasurable still. [\[28\]](#)

When we have a sore, it feels good to scratch it a bit, but if we keep scratching it, there will be even more pain. Not scratching it is pain; scratching it is pain. The best solution is not to have the itch at all. As long as we have samsaric desires, we will have dissatisfaction, so it's better to be free from desire.

Food is another example. When we are hungry, we suffer, but when we eat too much, we also suffer. Or when we are without possessions, we are miserable, but when we are wealthy and have countless possessions, we have many enemies and great fear that our things will be stolen.

Despite the fact that we are full of such living examples, our wisdom is so small, our minds are so limited, that we have to depend on somebody to show them to us. But it's not enough to listen to examples, we must understand their meaning and find a solution to the whole situation. The Dharma method provides this solution through recognizing the negative mind and changing it. This recognition must be profound, not just by reading the book.

Just as the lack of desire to attain enlightenment is the greatest obstacle to attaining our goal, when we desire enlightenment, we have the energy to live in the essential practice of the Dharma. If the body didn't exist, there would be no samsaric problems such as discomfort, hunger, thirst or problems with possessions. Depending on this body, the three poisonous minds of greed, hatred and ignorance arise naturally. We have been drugged by these three poisons since beginningless time. If we can eliminate these three negative minds, we will no longer be a slave to our body; the suffering body will no longer exist. Changing the negative mind depends on practicing the teachings.

The meditation on the general sufferings of samsara [WFGS pp. 141–142] shows the suffering nature of all the realms of samsara. Without realizing this meditation, there is no way to fully and clearly understand suffering. As long as we don't recognize samsaric happiness to be suffering, we will always be deluded, thinking that it is true happiness. This wrong concept will keep us suffering. It's extremely important to understand these things beyond the level of mere words. What we must do is to actually experience this knowledge, realizing the clear and deep feeling that samsara is a blazing fire. Without this, there is no way to attain the fully renounced mind, however much we may talk about it. If the mind has not fully realized this point, we cannot renounce samsara. It is blocked, making our Dharma practice difficult, our meditation difficult, and we are hindered from attaining enlightenment. By discovering the suffering nature of samsara, this meditation is so useful; it protects us from suffering.

Renunciation

If we can experience samsaric pleasures with renunciation and without attachment, we won't experience the suffering result. Our attachment betrays us, just as the cow is betrayed by attachment to the pleasures of eating the grass at the edge of the precipice. When we follow attachment, we don't think that we'll be cheated. We presume there will be a pleasant result; but in fact, we are making arrangements for a suffering result to arise. In this way, we are cheated by attachment. If we understand karma and what brings suffering results, however, no matter many friends and relatives we have, no matter how comfortable our lifestyle, we have no interest in following attachment because we can see it as our enemy. Thinking of all the past suffering that attachment has caused and of all the future suffering it will bring, we have no wish to engage in actions that lead to attachment. We can enjoy things while our mind remains free from attachment to them; we are capable of changing samsaric enjoyments into Dharma actions, using our possessions in a positive way. Then our daily life becomes pure and controlled. We can always experience the happiness of our positive actions and will never be cheated by attachment.

When we are attached to an object, we are being cheated by our greedy mind, because we trust that our samsaric happiness is real happiness, which is a wrong concept. The classic Tibetan example is of cannibal, who uses sweet words to befriend somebody, enticing them with gifts and money, only to lead them to their death. Only when the victim arrives at the place of slaughter do they realize that their trust has been betrayed due to their greed.

The person whose mind is well trained in the nature of samsara and has achieved effortless renunciation sees the whole of samsara as a blazing fire. They don't experience even a split second of desire for samsara, wanting only to escape from it.

Although we might be interested in attaining nirvana, the wish alone is not enough. Nor is it enough to think that samsara is a suffering place. We must develop strong aversion to it in order to bring about effortless renunciation. The person with this kind of mind sees all samsaric enjoyments as a blazing fire.

In northern Tibet where it is very cold, a hungry boy from a nomadic family wanted tsampa very much. Because there was no tsampa, his mother gave him cooked radish instead, and he cried because he didn't like it. She gave him raw radish, partly cooked radish, sliced radish—she prepared it many different ways, but whatever the form the boy always thought, "This is radish" and saw it as ugly. This is the feeling the fully renounced mind has for samsaric enjoyments—no

interest, no matter how high the enjoyment, how expensive the possessions, how nice and numerous the relatives and friends. They see all this as suffering by nature and are cynical about its empty promises.

Just because a person is poor and without possessions doesn't mean they are renounced. Neither is a wealthy person who is living poorly in the jungle and trying to look like a yogi. The realization of renunciation can't be judged by external appearances. It depends on our mental attitude; it's not something that comes merely by getting rid of possessions. A king can have fully renounced samsara, and a beggar can be extremely greedy. Without trying to destroy the negative mind through living in mental discipline, we can't be renounced no matter how much we separate ourselves from possessions. That only causes conflict. We must renounce the negative mind and live in the practice. We must know what true renunciation really is. If we have destroyed the negative mind, no possession can cause suffering. We can use any enjoyment, including our body, to help attain enlightenment. The principal cause of suffering is the negative mind; possessions are only the cooperative conditions. Therefore, we must destroy the negative mind.

Understanding suffering is fundamental to the knowledge of the evolution of samsara. Once we have it, we won't get attached to these realms. We'll develop stronger renunciation and get out of samsara more quickly. If we don't have the desire to get out, we become lazy. The mind not recognizing the suffering of samsaric life is an ignorant mind. By recognizing suffering, we eliminate ignorance. Without this recognition, we can't renounce samsara to reach enlightenment. It's the same as if we have been poisoned; we must recognize the poison as the cause of our pain before we can alleviate the suffering.

The Four Noble Truths

[WFGS pp. 145–47]

The four noble truths give an overview of the Dharma and show what we can experience through practice. To completely purify every single defect of negative mind, we should fully realize every single absolute and relative truth, which includes all existence, which means attaining the omniscient mind. We then attain the two results of the two holy bodies. We can only do this through Dharma practice, following the Dharma path of wisdom and method.

All vehicles—the Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana—include the paths of wisdom and method. The Vajrayana method is the quickest method, more subtle than the Mahayana, which is more subtle than the Hinayana. The wisdom is the same. Unlike the Hinayana, the Mahayana uses the methods of bodhicitta, great love, great compassion and the six perfections. The tantric path uses other methods such as the visualization of a deity where the result is taken as achieved—we practice as if we have already achieved enlightenment—which is why it's called the resultant vehicle.

The Dharma explains everything that exists through the two truths, which are the base. All three vehicles lead to the two kayas, which are the result, and method and wisdom are the path that leads to that result. Although tantra uses very different methods from the sutra vehicle, the two are not opposed to each other. The tantric methods are compared to medicine that can

sometimes be poisonous and sometimes nonpoisonous substances, the sick person needing one sort at one time and the other sort at another stage of their recovery.

Both the poisonous and the nonpoisonous substances are used as medicine to cure sickness.

The four noble truths counteract the sixteen wrong concepts. It takes a very long time to realize these subjects.

The Truth of Suffering

The first noble truth is the truth of suffering. True suffering was shown first by the Buddha, before the cause of suffering, because the cause of suffering is very hard to recognize. Because we have failed recognized the cause since beginningless time, we continue to suffer. Living beings are too ignorant to recognize the cause easily, and so they would lose interest if it was shown first, thinking that there was no reason to practice. Therefore, true suffering is shown first so that we will recognize it.

Why did you come here from the West? I think if you were really honest with yourselves, you would see that you've come here to find some happiness because you are suffering. No matter what we say our reason is—to learn, to experience and so forth—the real reason is because we don't want suffering. This is the same reason we study the Dharma. Certainly, nobody expected to experience suffering at this meditation course! If we don't recognize suffering, there would be no reason to put effort into finding its cause or into following the method of Dharma. We should also remember that perfect peace is not in the nature of suffering; it never changes.

The whole of samsaric suffering is included in the three sufferings: the suffering of pain, the suffering of change and pervasive compounding suffering. We could never finish explaining the suffering of even one sentient being, which is beginningless, so how could we do so in terms of *all* sentient beings? Yet all suffering is included in these three. We must meditate to realize these before we can gain a true understanding of samsara.

The first type of suffering is the *suffering of pain*, also called the suffering of suffering or of feelings. The three sorts of feeling are happiness, unhappiness and indifference. All our worldly mental and physical problems, such as worry and sickness, are the suffering of pain. These are things we can easily recognize and define as suffering.

Samsaric happiness is the *suffering of change*, the second type. The suffering of change is experienced when we eat delicious food, enjoy the sun and so forth. The enjoyment itself is in the nature of suffering. For example, if we like eating a certain food and we eat a lot of it, we get tired of it. If we get cold and sit in the sun, it feels good at first but then we get burned. If an enjoyment was not in the nature of suffering, it wouldn't decrease by repetition. Enjoyments that are not suffering are things such as meditation, whose pleasure only increases as we develop it, bringing perfect peace until enlightenment. No samsaric pleasure can do this. Based on ignorance and attachment, chasing samsaric pleasure can only lead to continued desire, leading to repeated actions which bring suffering in the end.

The suffering of change is difficult to recognize because we are attached to it, because at present we see samsaric happiness as real happiness. Our whole life is spent working for samsaric

happiness, ignorant that this “happiness” is in fact suffering. If we don’t clearly see this, we can’t understand the nature of suffering or of samsara. Even if we had great clairvoyance and could fly or travel beneath the earth, it wouldn’t help. Unless we recognize all suffering and renounce samsara, we are still suffering.

There’s no way to escape from suffering without renouncing the negative mind and we can only do that when we can see the whole of samsara only as suffering, not as happiness at all. We must see samsaric pleasure as like honey on a razor blade. With the mind living in the avoidance of the eight worldly dharmas, we can enjoy the honey, but with desire, the effect of licking the honey of those desires is far worse than a cut tongue, because unlike the wound it can never be cured. This is because it leads to greater attachment to samsara, which obscures the nature of attachment and of samsaric happiness, and causes the negative mind to increase.

The third kind of suffering is *pervasive compounding suffering*. This means that whatever we do is under the control of karma and delusions, so our suffering is all-pervasive. Ignorant of our true nature, suffering pervades the whole body. Wrong concepts dominate our samsaric existence; we have no control because of karma and delusions.

The Truth of the Cause of Suffering

Ignorance is the true cause of suffering because it’s the fundamental creator of our delusions that cause us to create karma. It’s wrong to think that there is no reason for suffering. Sentient beings are always suffering, meeting new problems. Although ignorance is the fundamental cause, there are many differing secondary causes due to karma and delusions.

Because our mind is pervaded with karma and delusions, we suffer and our suffering is individual to us. Our suffering arises strongly from them and not from someone else’s karma and delusions. Each of us creates our own suffering. If it were created by some other being such as God, then our ignorance should be God, but this doesn’t make sense.

The Truth of the Cessation of Suffering

The true cessation of suffering is the result of completing the true path, which is the fourth noble truth. In the teachings, this noble truth precedes the fourth in order to show the existence of nirvana and give a reason for following the path. Nirvana is perfect peace, the cessation of all suffering. When we see this, we ask how we can attain it. The answer is through the path.

While our mind-and-body composite are bound by karma and delusions, we are not liberated and both body and mind are out of control. But there is such a thing as liberation because it’s possible to free the mind from all delusions.

The deluded mind is the opposite of the peaceful mind. It’s suffering. For instance, although sexual pleasure arises from the delusion of attachment, we see it as peace. Such happiness is not peace and seeing it as peace only increases our delusions. And delusions are in the nature of suffering.

Even when we are free from some suffering, we can't assume we are permanently free from it. It can and will return. Only when we can be free from all suffering and attain nirvana will we be permanently free. When we use worldly methods to stop our sufferings, they might cease for a short while—perhaps—but they will certainly return again and again. Using Dharma methods, we can cease our sufferings permanently. If we couldn't, then our Dharma practice would be meaningless. Unable to attain peace, there would be no reason to practice at all. And that would mean that there are no enlightened beings, those who have totally purified all their delusions and completed all the realizations. That would be impossible. That would also mean that what those enlightened beings show us—the Buddhadharma—is nonsensical.

But we can clear our mind of our delusions. Our mind is something that we can develop. When we started school, we were very ignorant, not knowing how to write or count, not knowing science or geography or anything. But over the years, we were taught and we learned so many things. Our knowledge and understanding increased. Just as we can acquire all this worldly knowledge gradually, studying it at school, we can study the Dharma and come to understand why we are suffering and how we can cease our suffering. We can also come to know that the nature of the mind is pure and if we continue to purify it of delusions, we can certainly become perfect, omniscient. We can certainly achieve the holy mind that sees every part of every sentient being, every tiny karma ever created and clearly remembers every second of every day of every sentient being simultaneously.

At present, our mind is limited. When we hear a pleasant sound and listen, we can't hear a friend who is talking to us. When we read a book, we are so interested that we aren't aware the radio is playing. Conversely, we can be reading the book and thinking of many different things. We have a mind incapable of complete concentration, very limited in its abilities.

The omniscient mind is never like this; it has no such obstacles. Such a mind that sees all past and future lives is unimaginable to us. Consider the number of sentient beings that exist, even on this earth. The number of humans is nothing compared to the number of animals, who are everywhere—in trees, in houses, in oceans, in the stomach, some visible, some invisible. Yet, the omniscient mind is aware of each split second of mind of all these living beings, as well as being aware of every atom of nonliving matter and how it changes constantly.

Just as it's possible for a child to develop their mind through education, we can develop our mind all the way to enlightenment. Just as the ignorant mind isn't permanent and unchanging, neither is the enlightened mind. For example, the person who invented the rocket didn't always have that knowledge. They had to learn how to do it, eliminating their ignorance of the technique. We too can remove all ignorance from the mind, including being ignorant of enlightenment. Through Dharma practice, purification and realizations, this can be our experience, as ordinary education is already our experience.

Once our ignorance has been completely ceased, suffering can't return. There is no longer a cause of suffering, which is ignorance. The cessation of suffering can't give rise to ignorance. Only ignorance can cause ignorance just as the cure for the sickness doesn't cause sickness. Ignorance and the cessation of ignorance are complete opposites. To think that we would still suffer after we had ceased all our ignorance is like the farmer expecting another crop of corn even though he had removed every seed the year before and never replanted. No farmer thinks like this. Rocks can't bring corn; only the seed can do this. So, for the cessation of ignorance to cause ignorance is

impossible. The creator, the negative mind, is impermanent. The cessation of suffering means the cessation of the creator.

The Truth of the Path that Leads to the Cessation of Suffering

Wisdom is the true path. If it doesn't go against the delusions, it isn't the true path, since the liberated mind is the opposite of the deluded mind.

Some beings don't want to renounce the negative mind of attachment because they are afraid of losing samsaric happiness.

The Suffering of Birth

There are eight types of suffering:

1. the suffering of birth
2. the suffering of old age
3. the suffering of illness
4. the suffering of death
5. the suffering of encountering what is unpleasant
6. the suffering of separation from what is pleasant
7. the suffering of not getting what you want
8. the suffering of the five appropriated aggregates.

Even our birth involves great suffering, beginning with the conception in our mother's womb. We don't remember these sufferings, nor have they been scientifically explained. Even though we have feelings at birth and death, they are beyond the object of scientists' minds, otherwise this would be explained in books. Because they have forgotten their own experiences, scientists don't investigate them. The main reason people don't consider that the fetus has a mind is that they don't remember their own experiences. It's extremely difficult for us to see others' sufferings because mental states are so much harder to check up on than physical states.

The meditation on karma [meditation three in *Wish-fulfilling Golden Sun*] is very useful. We usually don't see others' sufferings and, presuming that they are happy, like the gods, we want to be like that. When poor people look at the very wealthy, all they can see is the enjoyment that they seem to have—on the surface, they look very happy—and the craving to also have that kind of life arises. This is the seed of existence in samsara.

But if we meditate on how suffering pervades the whole of samsara, we will see suffering more clearly, and then we can discover that they are all suffering—rich and poor, famous and unknown, even the gods who have bodies of light and many palaces and women, with beautiful parks, enjoying delicious and rich food. The richest man on earth would seem a beggar in comparison. If we could see their lives, it would be very difficult not to crave the same.

Seeing how the lives of every being in samsara, including ourselves, is only suffering, we lose any interest we had in the pleasures of samsara, even the wish to be the richest person of earth or a

desire realm god. We understand that it's not happiness, that it's actually suffering. So, there is no attachment and no craving for samsaric enjoyments, and no evil friend or evil possessions that can cheat us because we know that they are just cooperative conditions and the main problem is within our mind. Unless our mind is free from delusions, the karmic imprints can easily allow these conditions to arise, and then we'll be cheated. Then, we can come under the influence of false friends who lead us into wrong views and so forth. When we know this, others might tempt us to create nonvirtuous actions in order to enjoy samsaric pleasures, but we are stopped by being aware of the suffering results that will mean countless suffering lifetimes.

When we discover that the smiling friend who flatters and gives gifts is false, that they flatter us to betray us, that in time they will cause us trouble, we lose interest. We become skeptical and cautious, no matter what they give us.

If we discover the nature of suffering and understand its causes and results, we will have no interest in remaining in this samsaric state. No matter which realm in samsara we are born in or which state of mind we have there, it's still suffering. When this knowledge becomes a conviction, we have the determination not to be reborn in samsara and therefore stop creating the causes.

We should follow Milarepa, who gave this advice to his disciple Rechungpa:

Son, if you want to practice the holy Dharma and have devotion arise from the depth of your heart, do not look back to this life. Follow my truth. The relatives are Mara who delay you, who prevent you from practicing the holy Dharma. Don't believe what they say. Cut off attachment to them. And food and possessions are the spies of Mara. The objects of desire are like Mara's noose, tying you to itself, therefore definitely cut off attachment.

We always think that beings in the womb are happier than they would be outside. We think it's so happy and pleasant there. This is because we don't understand the experience and have forgotten our own.

Creating positive karma is difficult; creating negative karma is so easy. Without any effort at all we can use our birth to increase our delusions, but this just creates more delusions. Usually, whatever rebirth we have is in the service of ignorance. But if our rebirth doesn't arise out of karma and delusions, delusions won't increase and our rebirth won't be used for the ignorant, negative mind.

Taking care of this body when we are overcome with ignorance means we are slaves to the negative mind. Why is it difficult to use our rebirth for virtuous work? Because we took the wrong kind of rebirth, a suffering rebirth, not a perfect rebirth. That's why this body is always in the nature of suffering. Having sat in meditation for just a few minutes, we already feel exhausted and uncomfortable, itching with insect bites, thirsty, hungry and so forth. This shows how hard it is to concentrate on virtuous work. It's our fault for taking a rebirth created by karma and delusions.

We are always concerned about our troubles and how to stop them. If there are no troubles at present, we're still concerned about possible future troubles. We collect possessions—clothes, money and so forth—and then worry that they will be stolen, broken or lost. All this is also the fault of the suffering rebirth. We worry about having the best situation and because of that, attachment and anger easily arise, and our ignorance increases. No matter how much we want to

practice the Dharma, we find it so difficult when our attachment to possessions is strong. We become too involved in overcoming future troubles or trying to be free of poverty. We work hard to have enough food and be warm or cool enough and it takes up so much of our time that, even though we might want to practice, we have no time. All this is the fault of the suffering rebirth. If the rebirth were not in the nature of suffering, there would be no need to build houses or to work hard for possessions.

Although in the form and formless realms they don't have sickness as we do in the desire realm, they do have death. They also have the suffering of change and pervasive compounding suffering.

The beautiful object is the object of the poisonous mind of attachment, and when we acquire it we can feel a deluded sort of happiness. The ugly object is the object of hatred and when we have to experience it, there is suffering. The neutral object is the object of ignorance and results in indifference. When the person or the object is neither an object of attachment or aversion, we are indifferent to it and fail to see any of its actual traits—its impermanence and lack of true existence and so forth—so even the neutral object is an object of ignorance for us. This probably won't be a conscious thought because it's in the nature of our relationship with a neutral object that we don't especially notice it or check on it.

These three poisonous minds of attachment, aversion and ignorance that bring the three delusions of deluded happiness, anger and indifference, make us see objects in the wrong way, the opposite to the way they really exist. Whenever we interact with objects with our greed, hatred and ignorance, we create negative actions. Until we see objects in their true nature, with a positive mind, this will continue. This is how incredibly easy it is to create negative actions, making ourselves more ignorant. The whole problem is not understanding our relationship with the objects of the six senses, not using them in a positive way.

Even just here in this room, as we look at each other, all this is happening. We look at an object we like, and attachment and greed arise. We look at one we don't like, and aversion and hatred arise. Then we look at a neutral object with ignorance. All of this is also due to having taken a suffering rebirth. It's always like this when we go to town and see many different objects.

Although they are all impermanent, we see them as permanent, so we fail to see how they really exist. In the depths of our heart, we think they are permanent and we're unable to recognize this negative mind; even to understand that it is negative takes a lot of time. To recognize each type of negative mind takes so much meditation, so much study and practice. It's not like differentiating external objects such as knowing wheat from rice by its shape and color and so forth.

We also see people as permanent. A friend comes to see us and we see the same person, unchanged from the last time we saw them. It's always the same person. In the same way, we see inanimate objects such as the earth, the sky and so forth, with indifference. Seeing objects in this way, with the wrong concept of permanence, our ignorance increases.

And the worst wrong concept is seeing the person and the object as independent, self-existent. This definitely causes ignorance to increase. This misconception is the principal ignorance. Due to this, we totally believe that this person or object is self-existent, that it is an entity separate from all other entities. If we do a profound search for the object of this belief, it can never be found; it can't be found anywhere, not on the head, not on the leg, not on the body, not anywhere. Without examining our misconception, we naturally believe in the existence of this

self-existent entity. If we use our wisdom, the opposite of ignorance, we can never find the object of the belief of ignorance on any person or object.

That's why the negative mind is an incorrect mind. It's wrong; it's deluded, because to the correct mind the object of ignorance doesn't exist anywhere. Therefore, the wrong object—the object that doesn't exist—is created by the deluded, ignorant mind. Every other negative mind arises from this wrong view, bringing with them all the different problems of pride, jealousy, greed, anger, envy and so on and so forth. When we completely believe in the ignorant view of the object, seeing it as permanent and independent, as self-existent, our ignorance definitely increases. This is because to our ignorant mind we see this false object—the one that is permanent, independent and truly existing—as true, as actually existing like that. That completely obscures the actual nature of the object.

Living in this ignorance, we have no way to discover the nature of ignorance. We can't see the faults of ignorance, that ignorance is an incorrect mind. Continuing to view the world in this way, seeing everything as permanent and independent, this ignorance causes us to become more deeply mired in ignorance. Like a mother giving birth, this fundamental wrong view gives birth to countless other deluded minds. Habituated to this view, it becomes impossible not to have greed for permanent, independent, attractive things and hatred for permanent, independent, ugly things. This fundamental ignorance pushes us deeper and deeper into samsaric suffering.

Just as the mind gets more and more used to viewing objects as independent and viewing ignorance as correct, not false, in the same way it can be turned around to view objects in the right way. It can be trained to see that the object is not self-existent, independent and permanent; that it is completely empty. Nowhere on any of the atoms of the object is there this characteristic. The mind can be trained to see that ignorance is completely the wrong view; we can learn to see this more and more clearly, more and more deeply as the practice continues, transforming our mind from an ignorant, negative one to its opposite.

Without discovering that ignorance is the negative, false mind, we can never make our views faultless and clean. That's why recognition of the negative mind is vital. It's not an easy subject. Even the explanation, which is very profound, is difficult to understand. We can never change the wrong creation—our deluded beliefs—from untrue without discovering the wrong creator—our ignorance—and without fighting to overcome it. To see the object without mistake in views and actions, to see its nature, we must discover the creator. So, without confronting the wrong creator and destroying it, we cannot correct mistakes in our views and actions.

Because of our unsubdued mind, the actions of our body are also unsubdued, uncontrolled. When we are out of control, even our looks transform from a peaceful, smiling appearance to an angry, ugly one. Fighting and violence arise from the unsubdued mind encountering what it dislikes. Similarly, greed and desire arise from the unsubdued mind encountering a beautiful object.

With each split second, life moves toward death without choice, out of control. As soon as we are born, we face death. This is another suffering of rebirth.

The Suffering of Birth

[WFGS pp. 151–52]

We think that the mother's womb is wide and spacious, and that the baby inside is relaxed and comfortable. But imagine animal meat and intestines, and then imagine living inside of it, like sleeping in a toilet. Although we all experienced this, we don't remember it. As the fetus grows, although the sense of smell is not fully developed, there is so much suffering, even when it's just a shapeless mass of cells.

If the mother is near a fire, she might feel pleasantly warm but the baby in her womb feels unbearably hot, due to the karmic creation of its own mind. This is not in the mother's mind; she doesn't experience it as the baby does. The principal cause of the baby's suffering is created by its own mind. The mother doesn't experience the baby's suffering and the baby doesn't experience the mother's; each mind creates its own. Therefore, the suffering the mother experiences as a result of the baby is created by her own mind, her own karma. And it's the same for the baby. Even though the baby is in her womb, the mother can't feel its mind, its sensations or its feelings. The mother doesn't have the power to prevent the baby's suffering, as the principal cause of the karma of each is different.

For example, some people are terrified when they see a particular animal or insect, such as a spider or a snake, even though the person right next to them isn't afraid. This is a karmic thing. Because the karma of each differs, the cause is different. Thus, one object has many different effects, depending on the karma of the person experiencing it. It's the same thing with the baby inside the womb.

During each month of life in the womb, the baby evolves through different periods. When it is small, even the element of air pushes the body into shapes. It becomes round, then sort of square when the limbs develop, and the baby feels suffering as if it is being pulled and stretched. The principal cause of this experience is the negative mind and the cooperative condition is the air.

Once it is born, the baby's skin is so fragile and thin, making it incredibly sensitive and causing it to suffer with the slightest discomfort. At first the baby cries a lot, but this generally decreases, although occasionally it can increase. Although there is a good reason for the crying, we can't see how the baby can suffer because we keep it in warm clothes, comfortable and so forth. We presume the baby isn't suffering because we are unable to know what the baby's experience is.

Some people have to go through painful and difficult operations that endanger their lives. Even if they live, they aren't as strong as before the operation. Some always feel pain when they walk quickly and so forth.

We should remember all the various sicknesses and imagine ourselves in that situation. For example, we can think about epilepsy, how it's difficult to cure, how it comes on suddenly and can interrupt our daily activities.

Another suffering that comes from having taken rebirth is how we must separate from what we want. Separation of parents from children, of partner from partner, as well as separation from the

objects and experiences we desire; things get broken, and money, clothes and food run out. We miss them and suffer. For example, in Tibet a person who had never eaten fish found it so delicious that, when he tried it for the first time, he gobbled it down in one go and immediately started to vomit it back up. Feeling his great enjoyment was being lost, he suffered terribly and tied a rope tightly around his neck to stop him from losing the fish.

When we examine our own experiences from rebirth until now, we will find that we have always been living in suffering.

As long as attachment is not renounced, there is always this problem. When we hear ugly rumors about a relative, we suffer. When there are dangers and problems, we suffer. When we are in a horrible place with poor conditions, we suffer. When we see ugly, unpleasant objects or have to eat horrible food we suffer. Each of our senses is forced to experience many ugly objects.

Even if we find the things we desire, there is always dissatisfaction and suffering. Our lives are full of examples of these problems.

Just as attachment and anger create karma, so does the third type of feeling, indifference, which leads to ignorance. The problem is not experiencing objects with any of these three feelings. Lack of equanimity keeps us in samsara.

Even in the upper realms, our body has been created by karma and delusions. Being deluded, we are uncontrolled and create so much negative karma, the karma to be reborn in the lower suffering realms for many future lives. If we can cease the continuity of the karma that makes us experience this deluded body, there will no longer be the continuity of the deluded body in future lives. Therefore, we must stop karma and delusions in this lifetime.

Because this deluded body is the result of past karma and delusions, no matter how many karmas have been created in previous lives that would bring future suffering, they can all be stopped. As we cease the cause of suffering, delusions, the results cease. Therefore, we should put all our energy into eradicating the cause, delusions. This is the fundamental means to be free from suffering because this one action, overcoming karma and delusions, can stop all future sufferings already created in past lives that will otherwise have to be experienced. Many negative results can be stopped by this one, very wise work. Cutting the delusions is Dharma work, even though they were caused in previous lives and the results will come in many future lives.

No samsaric action cannot compare to Dharma work. Worldly work is powerless. To overcome worldly problems that even ordinary people can recognize—the gross suffering that can be stopped by samsaric methods—we need many different samsaric methods. But there is no samsaric action that can stop all suffering for all beings. There might be a temporary solution to a particular worldly problem, but it will recur and no matter how long we do it for, it will never end. As we are working to alleviate one problem, another happens. We can never complete it. As long as we depend on worldly methods alone, problems can never end.

For example, we can temporarily overcome the suffering of hunger with food and when we feel cold, we can put on warm clothes, but even with all those things, we will still feel hungry later and still feel cold. When we feel sick, we will always need to buy medicine without end.

Another suffering of taking this deluded body is that it is the cause of suffering in future lives. We take those delusions into our next life because we have never tried to stop the principal cause, the delusions, and the cause that makes us take the body, karma. It's vital that we understand the evolution of karma and not be attached to either our own present body or attached to taking another such samsaric body in future lifetimes.

With this deluded body, we need all the samsaric things that create difficulties in this world. There are so many problems on this earth—between rich and poor, bosses and workers, governments and the people, one country and another—all based on money. If we didn't have this deluded body, there would be no need for money, but this body makes that need. All major conflicts such as killings, protests, wars, are based on the poor wanting money, the weak wanting power. As long as we have craving for this body, we get the problems that it brings. When we look at the causes of protests and so forth, they are not new. They aren't caused by the employer or the government but by each person who followed ignorance, under the control of karma and delusions, having to take this deluded body without choice. Each of these suffering people created the cause of their body that caused those problems and makes them create so much negative karma. Having problems is inevitable because we have ignorance, which is the cause of our suffering. We are the creator, having not tried to cut off ignorance.

Practicing the Dharma to eliminate ignorance is the most profitable work we can do. It can stop every single problem that exists in samsara for everyone. Therefore, not spending our time practicing the Dharma when we have the chance is incredibly foolish—foolish from the Dharma point of view but not from the ignorant point of view. To our ignorance, any actions we do that are opposed to the Dharma are wise. Our ignorance would have us following samsaric methods to get what we want, not trying to cut off ignorance itself. The ordinary being thinks that renouncing samsaric enjoyments is very foolish, that we just exhaust ourselves for nothing. The view of ignorance and the view of the Dharma are completely opposite. The ignorant mind seeing things completely differently from the truly understanding mind. Why does the ignorant mind think that renunciation is foolish? Because it's an ignorant, unknowing mind, one that has no understanding.

Another suffering of taking this deluded body is that all this life's sufferings, those from rebirth to death, are due to the existence of this body. If we become free from karma and delusions, there would be no need to experience any of these sufferings.

Pervasive compounding suffering causes the other two types of suffering. Being in the nature of suffering, the body decays and perishes. The body is always experiencing different problems, one on top of the other. It's very fragile and so easily encounters suffering.

Searching for the I

[WFGS pp. 154–56]

Why should we stop these three negative feelings? Because the whole problem between the subject and the object arises through feelings. But there is a remedy for these feelings, a way to make them nonexistent, and we should use these methods when problems arise.

Palden Chodak says,

Ordinary beings are always attached to the truly existent “I,” saying “I, I, I,” causing them to be attached to desirable objects. That attachment obscures the faults of ignorance.

Our belief in the truly existent I leads to attachment to desirable things, which obscures the faults, meaning the suffering results, of our ignorance and our attachment. We see a beautiful thing and we greedily become attached to it. This attachment clouds our mind, intoxicating it, so we fail to see that attachment itself is a deluded mind. We just naturally think that attachment to a person or an object is good and we don’t bother to check whether there might be any negative consequences. It’s never seen as a wrong mind, as a cause of suffering.

At the time we have a problem, if we were to search for the I rather than the external cause, this would completely counter the negative mind, because the negative mind never tries to discover what this I is. Because it’s opposed to the negative mind of attachment, it takes us from negativity, from attachment, aversion and ignorance. When these minds aren’t manifesting, the problem disappears. Seeking the I when there is a problem is like trying to find the object as it is viewed by the negative mind. Because we can’t find the I when we look for it, the negative mind just naturally vanishes. And the more deeply we probe what this I is, the less the negative minds can manifest. So, as the object of the negative mind goes, the negative mind also goes. It’s like hiding away an embarrassing object from a friend’s gaze for fear of ridicule.

As we proceed along the path, as our realizations increase, the negative minds that currently overwhelm us will diminish and finally be completely eliminated, becoming nonexistent. This is the opposite to how we see things now, where we believe in the truly existing objects we see and then get even more attached and our negativities increase. All other views become unimportant as the view of the self gets stronger. The whole world centers around this sense of I, so much so that we will steal and even kill to maintain it. This is because we see the I and the object of the I as truly existing, which is the view of a negative mind.

So, when there’s a problem, we should immediately investigate its cause, seeing what our belief in the I is and how that brings attachment, anger and ignorance. When we do this, we can cheat the negative mind, which has been cheating us since beginningless times, slowly stopping it from arising. We can keep the mind quiet and cool. The longer we can practice searching for the I, the clearer the effect will become.

So, how do we see the I? Usually, we have no real sense of what the I is; it’s too subtle and the deluded mind is too ignorant, so we can’t explain it. Ignorance can’t be clear about the object of the wrong view. Although our mind is always deluded, many times it doesn’t manifest strongly, so at those times it’s difficult to understand how we view it. As the negative mind gets stronger, the sense of I gets stronger, meaning the object of the wrong view also gets stronger and clearer to see. At that time, we can clearly see the I as self-existent.

The stronger the negative emotion we feel, such as when we are suddenly very afraid or incredibly angry, the stronger the sense of I will appear. At such a time of very strong emotion, this truly existing I is very easy to see.

Identifying the Wrong View

Only by repeated meditations on the emptiness of this self-existent I can we see how the I actually exists. Through meditation, we can come to understand that the I doesn't exist inherently and that all phenomena also lack this inherent existence. If we can start this method as soon as we see a problem arising, the problem is stopped right away because greed, hatred and ignorance can't arise. Samsaric happiness brings confusion and so does suffering. Any samsaric feelings cause us confusion, stopping us from attaining any peace, because when we see objects as permanent and independent, there will always be a degree of attachment, aversion or indifference.

How quickly these methods work depends on how strongly and deeply we understand them. It's possible to immediately overcome a problem. One minute there's a big hassle, the next minute the problem is solved, we have complete peace and can see no reason for the problem having arisen. It's like the peace a very active person feels when they stop to take a rest. This is a method we can use even when there's no apparent problem, because even when we have a degree of samsaric happiness, the mind is still confused and deluded.

We must practice this method of searching for the I before a major problem happens, so that when it does, we will be well trained and be able to deal with it. Usually, when we have a problem, we are overwhelmed by it and don't even think of trying to use this method. We are so confused that we can't think there is a method that can solve it. Even though we might know methods to generate bodhicitta, when we are overwhelmed by a problem, the negative mind is as huge as Mount Meru if it's not well trained in this method.

Sometimes it's difficult to recognize feelings in the depths of our heart. It's so hard to see that the object viewed doesn't exist anywhere. For example, when we look at a person, we instinctively see that person as permanent and independent. We can't see how they are changing every split second, that they have arisen, are abiding and will cease at some stage. In the depth of our heart, we have the wrong concept of this permanent, self-existent person. We need to check up to confirm if we see things like this or not. We see the person as a permanent, independent entity, never changing from year to year. The continuity of the person is the same and because the shape seems the same we believe the person is permanent. Even if we feel indifferent to the person, the ignorant concept arises that they are permanent.

We also see a person as a single entity. For instance, there is somebody called Dorje. For us, his whole body is Dorje, as if his body were the self-entity, the self-existent Dorje. Viewing him as self-existent is the action of ignorance that functions even if we are indifferent to Dorje, neither attracted nor averse to him. The more we allow this ignorance to develop, the stronger it becomes and the more difficult it is for us to understand the absolute nature of things, because this is the complete opposite. Our ignorance develops and becomes more habitual. We are stuck in seeing things as permanent and truly existent.

What does truly existent mean? For example, take the Nepalese king. We think his total body is the king. That person who is now the king hasn't always been the king, physically or mentally, as we believe. Before, when there was no Nepalese population, no His Majesty's government, there was no king. Before he received the title "king," he was the same as any other person. In dependence upon the population, the title "king" was given to the one worthy of the title. In the

same way, somebody becomes a president by being voted in; it all depends on the population. Where is the title? The title was given to him in dependence upon the population and the existence of this person's mind and body. But our wrong concept feels as if the king or the president is a truly existing entity, something that doesn't depend on the population or the title. In the depth of our heart, we think that each person exists by themselves and is permanent.

For example, a porter is somebody who carries luggage, they are dependent on luggage, yet we think that they are a porter as if they exist by themselves. There is the strong wrong concept that see the truly existing "porter" without the understanding that "porter" is just the title given to a specific job. Although the porter exists because they have the job of carrying luggage, we fail to recognize the title is dependent on the job.

It is the same thing with the I. Unexamined, we naturally believe in this truly existing I, one that exists without depending on any of the aggregates, that exists by itself. We can't see how it depends on the aggregates. Because this wrong view of the I that exists independently is in complete opposition to the way the I actually exists, in dependence on the aggregates, the negative minds arise. It's like the door that the negative minds can come through; if it's open they come. Believing in the truly existent I, we think we are so important, and arrogance arises. This truly existent I is the center of our universe; it's much more important than any other being. And then there is attachment to what this I wants and anger when its wants are frustrated.

Anyway, there is no such I, no such king or no such porter that exists independently of the aggregates, the population or the luggage. There is no such self-existent entity. It's the same thing with a house. It cannot exist without depending on the parts. When the cement, the bricks, the wood and so forth are somewhere else, yet to come to the building site, there is no house. Each item is not "house." Nor is one wall "house." Nor is the person building it the "house." Yet our view of the house is of this single entity. To us, this whole thing is a house, something that exists of itself as if it always exists by itself. We think "house" is a single entity without depending on parts or the construction or the label.

Lack of self-entity (*rang gyi thup pe dže yö tong pa*) and emptiness of self-existence (*rang shin kyi tong pa*) are slightly different—the latter is more subtle and harder to realize.

In Buddhism there are four different schools and each presents a different view. Emptiness is the subject matter of the Madhyamaka philosophy and was fully realized by Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, Manjushri, Nagarjuna, and Lama Tsongkhapa. Their realizations of emptiness and lack of self-entity were facts to them, not concepts, as others saw them. To clearly see the positive view, the lack of self-entity, and the emptiness of self-existence, it's so important to recognize the opposites, the wrong concepts of self-entity and self-existence, such as the concept that the I is self-existent.

The more we can identify the wrong view, the more we can clearly prove the right view. Therefore, we should study the wrong concepts and wrong views first. For instance, if we fail to recognize the wrong concept that brings all our problems, the negative karma and the delusions that are the principal cause of all our suffering, it's very difficult to completely overcome all the delusions and stop all the problems. Without recognizing the principal cause and without relying on the right method—clearly seeing the right object—using other methods only makes other negative minds arise, and then overcoming delusions is far more difficult and takes much time.

It's also very dangerous to follow other methods to stop suffering if we have not clearly recognized the principal ignorance that is the cause of suffering—the wrong view of the true nature of objects. It's dangerous because we can cause more problems by using samsaric methods of depending on external things.

For instance, if we knew that somebody was stealing things from this room, it would be a mistake to kill all the people in the room to stop the problem! This is an unwise method that causes more problems. Therefore, before apprehending the thief, it's important to recognize who is the real thief or we may mistake the object and shoot the real friend. If we use the wrong method, besides killing our friend, we could leave the thief in the room. It's the same thing in terms of checking the mind. By correctly checking, we can find the real thief and thereby cause no danger to another person who is not the real thief.

The worst thing is the wrong concept, the principal cause of all our suffering, the mind that grasps at an inherent self, and the self-cherishing thought that arises from that. This really is the thing that steals all our pleasures; this is the most dangerous thief. Why is this so and why should we destroy it? Because this thief steals our enlightenment, our everlasting happiness, and all the other realizations, including our ability to attain clairvoyance allowing us such things as seeing all past, present and future. This wrong concept is the main thief that steals the realization of absolute true nature.

Because of that, this ignorance also steals all our past, present and future happiness. Ignorant of the absolute truth, that all things are empty of inherent existence, we can't understand karma fully. This leads to us mistaking the cause of happiness and suffering and creating nonvirtuous actions in the mistaken belief that they cause happiness. We are ignorant of their results, that they can only bring suffering, and so we run toward the lower realms in this ignorance. Even if we can obtain another upper rebirth, we will be devoid of happiness.

We have been suffering since beginningless times as the result of negative karma produced by ignorance of absolute true nature and the evolution of karma. All the beginningless suffering, all that inability to obtain any happiness, was stolen by this thief, the principal ignorance that is ignorant of the true nature of phenomena.

We are still creating negative karma, bringing a suffering result that we will have to experience with each of the six samsaric realms. Because such suffering arises from the ignorance of the absolute true nature, it steals the happiness of many future lives. This is why we must work hard to destroy it, to make it nonexistent.

If there were no inner, principal thief of ignorance, there would be no exterior thief, and there would be no relationship between them. But there is a relationship—when there is the inner thief, there is the outer thief. We have things stolen from us because of our karma and that is created by our ignorance, an ignorance created by not realizing the absolute true nature. So, this inner thief is the cause of the outer thief. We are the actual thief, all starting from our principal ignorance of not realizing the absolute true nature. When we have something stolen from us, the external thief is a condition, but the actual thief is our ignorance. Because of that, because we have no understanding of karma, we have stolen many things in the past and we will steal in the future. Just as our ignorance steals our happiness, we steal things because of that ignorance.

If our actions happened independent of the mind, that would mean that we, the person, would exist independent of the mind. For example, the action of speech, which arises from a person's mind, is defined as the person speaking. Similarly, the action of thinking is defined in relation to the person who is thinking. There can't be an action of thinking without a mind doing the thinking. It's the same thing with ignorance. When our ignorance, not realizing the absolute true nature, steals our past and future happiness, we ourselves have stolen our past and future happiness.

Why do we say, "This person is negative?" Because their mind is negative (or cruel or miserly or so forth, according to the quality of mind). There is no negative mind separate from the person, just as there is no peaceful and humble mind separate from the person. If there were, they would exist independent of that mind, without having a relationship with that mind. The peaceful, humble, generous attitude would not be the person's mind. But if that person's qualities are not defined by depending on the mind, there's no way to explain how the person is generous, humble, cruel and so forth. There is no way for a person to exist without depending on the mind. The mind wouldn't be the mind of the person and the person wouldn't have any mind. Without a mind, how can we call a person cruel? Cruelty is a function of mind, as are generosity and peacefulness.

So, just as we are defined by the actions of body, speech and mind and because our ignorance of absolute true nature is the principal thief, we are the principal thief ourselves. We destroy ourselves with our ignorance, as we have done in numberless past lives and will do in the future, as long as we follow ignorance. In that case, nobody else outside is the enemy. There is no external being who can be the real thief or the real enemy.

This is why the Buddha says,

You are your own enemy
And you are your own guide.
You are the creator of your own suffering
And you are the creator of your own happiness.

This is not an easy quotation to fully understand because it means many things. We are the principal creator of our own enlightenment—nobody else can give it to us—just as we are the principal creator of our own suffering, which all comes from our fundamental ignorance. Because of that, we are our own enemy and our own guide. The controlled mind gives perfect peace and everlasting happiness. We can create that by ourselves, and so we are our own perfect guide.

Conversely, the uncontrolled mind causes us pain and suffering. Therefore, our ignorance of the absolute true nature of the object makes us the worst thief. Who are we stealing from? Ourselves. For instance, without destroying the inner thief that is in our own mind, it's impossible to get rid of the external conditions that bring about suffering, the external thieves. Even if we can identify an external thief and drive them from the country, they can still return after some time. Even if we kill this external thief, it still doesn't help. Killing that one thief doesn't mean the end to disturbance by thieves. Since we still have the karma of stealing on our mindstream, when the conditions arise, we will certainly have things stolen.

Killing one thief can't eliminate all thieves. All it does is kill the body of the thief, but their mind, with its karma to steal, will continue and in another body will likely steal again, maybe from us. The thief's body may be finished but there is still the continuity of the negative mind of the thief, and as long as we are both in samsara, it's sure that they will at some time steal again from us. Killing doesn't help and only causes us to create negative karma, as long as we are living in ignorance. Just as the thief can return if we kick them out, that is the same with any enemy.

So, we have been stolen from, but we have caused that theft. Who created the cause? We did. Actually, we created everything, from the fundamental ignorance that was the cause through to the theft that was the result. We should think, "The whole thing is my own fault; I started the whole thing by following ignorance. Everything, including the suffering result, is the fault of the ignorance, my mind, and therefore, it's my fault. How can 'my fault' exist? It's all created by my mind."

This evolution is really important. By understanding it we discover ourselves. Every time we suffer, we can discover who we are and become more aware of our evolution, of our karmic propensities. This understanding really brings peace. We no longer get angry at external conditions because we understand things occur as the fault of our own ignorance. Seeing this clearly, we find no reason for anger with others, however much we may be disturbed and experience suffering from others. Unless we can see where this has come from, we will naturally blame the other person and want to harm them in retaliation, which just brings them and us more and more suffering.

There's a big difference between understanding this and not understanding it. With this understanding, we are always relaxed. Discovering the results of our own ignorance more and more, we get that much more energy to destroy it by following the path. If we were happy with ignorance, there would be no energy. If we didn't understand karma, starting from ignorance, instead of decreasing our suffering, we would make it stronger, causing problems and suffering for many others. As a slave to the principal cause, ignorance, we do as it instructs us, which only makes our ignorance stronger. Not recognizing what we do as coming from ignorance, we are happy if we can destroy our enemy. We see happiness as the destruction of our enemy, and we're happy not to follow the Dharma. We have no energy for Dharma practice, to create positive karma, to stop creating negative karma, because the negative mind is attached to the happiness that comes from getting what we want, such as killing our enemies.

Anyway, without destroying the principal, inner thief, no matter how much we destroy the outer thief, we can never bring the action to an end; there will always be outer problems. But not caring about the outer problems, paying more attention to the inner ones, to the only actual thief, and trying to destroy it by following the Buddhist path shown by the holy beings is the wisest way to end outer enemies and inner problems, the thief of ignorance.

Destroying the inner thief is one action. Since by following the path we completely destroy the inner thief, ignorance, there is no reason for the existence of the outer thief and no reason to experience the suffering result. Without creating the cause, we cannot experience the result. The result cannot come without cause; such a thing is impossible.

If we want to cease the temporal outer problems, the complete way, the only way is to destroy ignorance. The only method that will bring this about is subduing our mind through Dharma

practice; no outer method can do so. Subduing the mind requires practice; it doesn't suddenly happen and can't be attained through chemicals, wearing beautiful clothes or eating delicious food. The way to subdue the mind is to practice, and that practice has to be the opposite of the action that is only done for the worldly comforts. It should be the opposite of samsaric actions. Subduing the mind requires learning to control the mind and transform it from a negative one. We ourselves don't have the understanding of the method. We are not born with it. Rather, the method has to be explained, and that depends on the teachings as they were taught by the holy beings who went through it.

Methods to Overcome the Belief in the Truly Existing I

Generally, there are 84,000 teachings that were shown by Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, but these can be summarized into the step-by-step presentation that is the graduated path to enlightenment, the lamrim. Even if we are not concerned about enlightenment, nirvana and so forth, it's still necessary to practice these meditations since we want to avoid worldly suffering such as having our things stolen and so forth. Even people who don't care about past and future lives at the very least don't want to lose their pleasures, so they too must practice these meditations. There is no method other than the Dharma to stop suffering completely. Within the Dharma, there are so many methods depending upon our skill and understanding. If our understanding is limited, however, we find it difficult to control the negative mind when there is a problem and we only create new and bigger problems.

All ignorant sentient beings have the concept of I, always thinking of the self or the I as the most important thing. This is the foundation of all feelings. We have a strong feeling from the heart combined with a view of self-existence, of independence, of not depending on anything. From this concept comes attachment. This I that is separate from all other things sees other objects as desirable or not desirable depending on whether they can bring pleasure or suffering to this truly existing I. Attachment to objects of pleasure causes us to ignore the shortcomings of attachment itself, making the attachment self-perpetuating.

When we meditate on how attachment sees its object in the wrong way and causes us to discriminate, when we see objects as dependent on mind, we come closer to knowing the mind.

If we could overcome attachment, all other negative minds would diminish, but by destroying the negative mind we don't cease all minds, just as the cup still remains after we have cleaned the dirt from it. Attachment causes anger and many other negative minds to arise through discrimination. Because of that, we view the one who disturbs our comfort as an enemy, we get jealous and fight. The I only makes us more ignorant.

One method is to meditate, to observe how the mind and the object of mind exist in dependence of each other. Without the mind, the object of the mind can't exist. Say, we are looking at a flower. Without the mind observing the flower, in our view it can't exist. We can also examine the flower itself. A flower is the seed, the stem, the petals and so forth. Without these elements, the flower can't exist.

What we call a "flower" is just a word. The seed isn't called a flower, nor is the stem, the leaf or the petal. The flower came from the seed. "Flower" is an English word. It's not what we see

before us, an independent entity; it depends on many things. This is just one example. Another is, say, “bread.” Before it’s made into its shape, the bread doesn’t exist. It’s dependent on the flour, water and so forth. We thought of making it, we thought of the word “bread.” It depends on the mind; it’s also dependent.

Another method to overcome our ignorance is to think of the shortcomings of feeling. When we see the negative mind in action, we should react in the same way as we do when we see a fire and know it burns. Doing so depends on the deep understanding of the early meditations, but even if we have this, it’s difficult. However, our practice must be strong. If it’s not, it won’t shake the negative mind, which at present is incredibly strong.

We can also remember the faults of the negative mind in accordance with our understanding of the Dharma. I’m just giving the seed here; it can be greatly amplified. Anytime we have a problem, we should think of it in these terms.

We can also change the aspect of the object of our negative mind. What we should renounce is the mind, not the object, so we should play with the mind in order to not cause ourselves problems. Cheating and playing tricks on the negative mind is a very useful practice so problems don’t arise. For example, greed arises when we see an object as beautiful and want to possess it. If we make the object look ugly in our meditation, we can overcome our greed. For instance, if we are attached to rich food, we can change the aspect and imagine the food as kaka. This is a method to keep the mind in peace, away from being overcome by the senses, and to stop the negative mind.

Another method is to imagine becoming stone or wood. This isn’t nearly such an advanced method and is best to apply to the momentary flare-ups of anger or greed. Stone or wood don’t have such feelings. It’s the lowest method but it can stop problems arising between two people. It’s also a bodhisattva’s practice to cheat the negative mind and give the other person we are in conflict with time to relax. We cheat the negative mind like we cheat a dangerous tiger that will destroy us. And yet, the tiger is not as dangerous as the negative mind, because it can only eat the body, not the mind. The negative mind, however, destroys this life and many future lives. It’s much more dangerous than anything else because all outer dangers arise due to negative mind. Therefore, the best way to protect ourselves is to destroy the negative mind.

Using These Methods

Keeping the medicine in the packet doesn’t cure the sickness; we must take the medicine in order to be cured. In the same way, we must practice these methods to find out how they solve problems, to gain the experience of their help. It’s no good just reading the words. This is like listening to music. We should make our own experiments to see what effect they have on the mind, what they bring into the mind, and how they solve problems without harming a single sentient being. The method of destroying the delusions is a purely mental one; it has nothing to do with physical actions. There are so many other methods to bring external peace, but they harm many insects or people. For perfect peace to arise, however, we need not harm a single being. We have the methods given by the Buddha, all practiced within the mind. If an action harms another being, it’s not the way to enlightenment. In fact, it’s the opposite to the Buddha’s method. He

himself achieved perfect peace and showed the method to bring it about without harming a single sentient being.

These methods are not something that can be learned in just one month. The purpose of the meditations is to progress through the stages we must go through in order to be free from suffering. The methods should be used whenever problems arise, to stop problems and find solutions while keeping our mind and the minds of others peaceful, without creating more negative karma.

Because our problems can't be ceased in a month or a day, to deal with them we have to depend on methods for as long as they continue to arise. These meditations are something we will continue to work on, something to help until we've attained enlightenment, until we are completely out of suffering. These meditations are very effective and beneficial to ourselves and to other beings. They are to be practiced until we cease our problems. To complete the practice of these meditations within a month, we would have to subdue our mind within a month and to have completely overcome our problems. That depends on the experience of these meditations, which in turn depends on our understanding, which in turn depends on practice and training. To train, we must know the subject matter. It's very difficult to know the entire subject in one month. Therefore, there's no way to complete the whole experience in a month.

Chapter 9. The Delusions



Lama Zopa Rinpoche teaching during the Fourth Kopan Course, 1973. Photo by Brian Beresford.

The Six Root Delusions:

[WFGS pp. 158–63]

1. Attachment

Attachment or greed [29] (*do chag*) means being attached to a desirable object. Something is seen as intrinsically beautiful based on the mistaken belief in a truly existent self and a truly existent beautiful object. From that, attachment for the object arises.

The being with a subdued mind also sees beauty as we do but is not attached. We, however, are out of control, possessed by attachment. We see the object as beautiful and problems arise from our attachment. If there were no attachment, there would be no problems. In the same way, if there were no hatred, there would be no problems from ugly objects. Therefore, the renunciation of the negative mind brings perfect peace, not depending on external objects. For the fully renounced mind there are no problems with any object.

Although two people may be in one place, the being with the uncontrolled mind sees it as a hot, burning, suffering place whereas the holy being with the well-controlled mind does not, and has no suffering or problems. For the Buddha, objects that appear to the ordinary being as unpleasant, filthy and ugly become delicious, sweet and beautiful. The experience of objects for the ordinary being triggers different degrees of suffering or pleasure, but for the Buddha there is not one tiny suffering; it's always the same. If we offer him even the most delicious nectar, which gives much pleasure, he experiences its taste and the taste of water as equal. All the experiences of the Buddha are in the nature of transcendental happiness, which are never the experience of our view. For the holy being, any ordinary place is seen as a pure land, a completely purified realm that can also become the mandala without differentiation. The Buddha always experiences the different objects, different foods and different views that we experience in such partial, biased

ways as beauty, with transcendental happiness. This is due to having completely purified the mind and gained all the realizations. He always sees things in beauty and there is no attachment.

2. Anger

[Anger is a very powerful mind that exaggerates the negative qualities of an object, brings dislike and a wish to harm the object. Being an intense mind, anger can very easily lead to negative actions.]

3. Ignorance

[The third of the three poisons is ignorance. When we are ignorant, we walk about with our eyes closed. Ignorance is like a house without windows or doors, somewhere completely dark. Although there are many forms of ignorance, the two main ones are ignorance of the law of cause and effect—karma—and ignorance of the nature of reality—emptiness.]

4. Pride

Pride is the mind that has an inflated image of ourselves. For example, when we are angry, we feel that *I* am more important than anyone. We also feel that the body and the *I* are one, and that the five aggregates are “me.” We have a strong view of the self-existent *I*, that the body and mind are *I*, one entity.

With the sense of pride, we look down on others, as if from a mountain. Filled with pride, we can't take anything in. Even when we listen to the teachings, it's very difficult to benefit the mind. We might understand nothing, but pride stops us asking others to explain.

There is a similar reaction of being separate from others when we feel fear, but it's hard to remember all this since we are unaware of our own experiences.

5. Doubt

Doubt is usually based on being between two points of something existing and not existing, not sure which is correct. For example, we may have doubt whether the *I* exists or not, whether it is permanent or not. Or we may think that maybe the Buddhist path leads to liberation or maybe it doesn't. Our uncertainty causes us to stumble. We become skeptical, which blocks us from practicing and therefore from attaining realizations. This is the greatest disturbance because it doesn't allow us to follow the path to liberation. Doubt about whether something is true, such as positive karma being the cause of happiness, stops us from creating good karma.

6. The Five Wrong Views

[The last of the six root delusions is wrong view, which is often divided into five wrong views: the view of the changeable aggregates, the view of extremes, the view of holding wrong views as supreme, the view of holding moral and religious discipline as supreme and wrong views.]

In meditation, we should always check up on our delusions. For example, we should examine what we believe in and see whether it is an incorrect assumption or not. We should try to understand what this sense of I means and see how a belief in a truly existing I creates a duality between us and other and leads to negative actions that cause suffering. Seeing that the I is just a mere name we place on the ever-changing aggregates and that the inherent I, which doesn't exist at all, is what needs to be eliminated, we can overcome all our obstacles to liberation.

Just as this bell consists of countless atoms and molecules, this life's physical existence depends on the five aggregates.

At death, when the mind involuntarily separates from body, the I doesn't cease. We can define life as the conjoining of mind and body, and death as the separation of mind from body, but at death, whereas the body ceases to function, the mind continues. The mind has existed from beginningless time and will continue to exist, even after we have become enlightened and every single negative mind has been eliminated. Some think that the mind won't continue after death, like a burned-out candle, that the end of the physical body means the end of the mind. This is a wrong concept.

The Twenty Secondary Delusions

[WFGS pp. 160–62]

These arise from the six root delusions. [The twenty secondary delusions are belligerence, resentment, concealment, spite, jealousy, miserliness, deceit, dissimulation, haughtiness, harmfulness, non-shame, non-embarrassment, lethargy, excitement, non-faith, laziness, non-conscientiousness, forgetfulness, non-introspection and distraction.]

Like the root delusions, these secondary delusions are mental factors. They arise from the main minds, rather than being main minds themselves. We need to recognize these minds when they arise and do whatever we can to overcome them.

For example, there are the delusions of non-embarrassment and non-shame. Non-shame is doing whatever we want without considering the harm we do ourselves, and non-embarrassment is the same kind of mind but without considering the harm we do others. The opposite, shame, is an important mental factor to have; it stops us acting rashly and harming ourselves and others. Without it, we may recklessly create nonvirtuous actions when alone and we think nobody will know, or even when we are aware that others, and certainly the enlightened beings, know of our actions. We are not concerned about creating negative actions and have no fear of the suffering consequences.

Positive shame means we don't create negativities because we are afraid of the result. Negative shame increases the negative mind because it causes us only to shamelessly care for the eight worldly dharmas. For example, we dress up in our best outfit for a party so we will be noticed and admired. Such an action is done with the negative shame of wanting reputation, feeling ashamed that unless we do this, people will laugh at us.

We should feel shame in performing actions against the wishes of the enlightened beings and be vigilant so that we don't create any negative karma at all. We must keep the mind conscious all the time because negative actions occur like heavy rainfall unless we are constantly aware of our actions. If we have a negative thought and realize that it's negative and can cause negative karma with a suffering result, this can decrease the power of the karma according to the strength of the thought and the strength of repentance. The more we are repulsed by having done the negative action, the more likely we are to avoid it in the future. But without a deep understanding of the suffering result, we will keep on doing it even though we might feel it's a bad thing.

So, positive shame, which works to destroy greed, is completely opposite to samsaric, negative shame, which works only for greed, and cares only for the worldly comfort. The happiness or unhappiness in any situation is only our mental concept. We often feel happy that we have beaten somebody or stolen something because of non-shame, whereas positive shame makes us afraid to create negative actions.

The Four Changeable Mental Actions

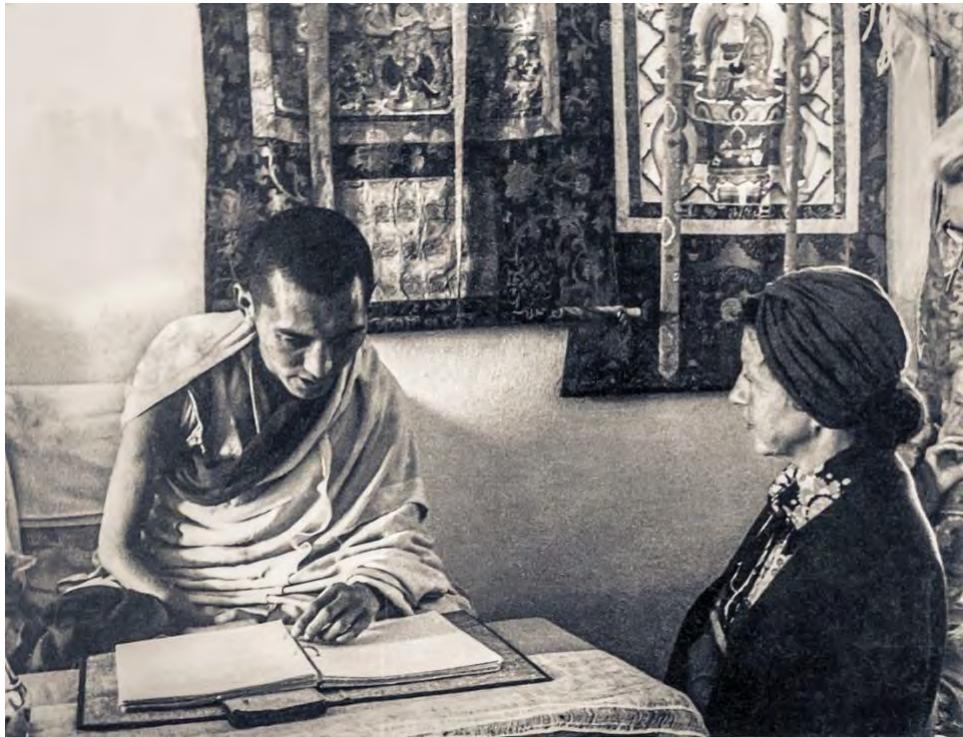
[WFGS pp. 162–63]

The four changeable mental factors are sleep, regret, investigation and analysis. Sleep can be virtuous or nonvirtuous. If we sleep having meditated on Guru Shakyamuni Buddha beforehand, with bodhicitta, the rest of the sleep is virtuous, following this motivation. But if we go to sleep with some kind of greed arising, our sleep becomes nonvirtuous. If we have sexual intercourse before sleep or go to sleep feeling angry with someone, it's nonvirtuous. Such negativities may recur during sleep as dreams and continue upon awakening.

Regret is also changeable. Negative regret is repenting positive actions. For example, after attending the meditation course, we cancel the positive karma of this good act by feeling sorry that we didn't stay in Kathmandu smoking hashish, eating good food and listening to music.

Investigation and analysis are also positive or negative depending on the object we are examining. If we look at an object, attachment or aversion can arise based on what we see as the good or bad qualities of that object. For example, we see a car and admire its whitewall tires or its beautiful color, or, for a person, we will think of their face, hair, skin color and so forth. Positive investigation or analysis means we check the details of an object, such as a flower, with respect to its impermanence and so on.

Chapter 10. The Wheel of Life



Lama Zopa Rinpoche and Bea Ribush during the Fourth Meditation Course, Kopan Monastery, Nepal, 1973. Photo by Brian Beresford.

[WFGS pp.164–72]

THE WHEEL OF LIFE

This is an explanation of what we ourselves are experiencing and not something that is only happening to others. The drawing of the Wheel of Life explains the sufferings of the different realms of samsara. Here we meditate from cause to result. The creator of samsara and suffering is ignorance and each being's suffering is created by their own experience, so we meditate from ignorance to death. Suffering is ignorance and cessation brings peace. Each samsaric rebirth has its twelve links of dependent origination, locking us in samsara; only liberation or enlightenment can sever them.

1. Ignorance

The first of the twelve links of dependent origination is ignorance. To get out of samsara we must destroy both levels of ignorance: ignorance of absolute truth and ignorance of karma. Knowing the evolution of karma stops us from creating negative karma.

When we are ignorant of karma, we naturally create nonvirtuous actions due to our negative motivation, which causes suffering and specifically the suffering of rebirth in the three lower realms. When we are ignorant of the absolute truth, we create the cause of the suffering of the upper realms. Ignorance of karma leads to the creation of negative actions, the ten nonvirtues,

which causes rebirths that lack the chance to practice or understand the Dharma. In these rebirths, we continuously create more negative karma since we are still ignorant of the absolute truth, and, creating even more negative karma, our ignorance increases.

Without fully seeing the faults of ignorance, we only develop more ignorance. Creating negative karma increasingly obscures the mind, making us more and more ignorant of the absolute truth and causing us to create more and more negative karma. That is how ignorance is the principal cause of all suffering. Therefore, the most direct method to quickly get out of samsara is to realize the absolute true nature of reality.

Because understanding emptiness releases us quickly from samsara, it's so important. All suffering is rooted in the ignorance of absolute truth, therefore understanding emptiness, which is the complete opposite of this, directly helps to remove ignorance. When we understand the absolute truth, when we have realized emptiness, we will no longer create negative karma. It's definite that then we will not be reborn in the three lower realms of suffering.

Ignorance of the absolute truth is like the poison that threatens our life and understanding the absolute truth is like an antidote to the poison. Not taking the antidote and just eating food doesn't help to lengthen our life, yet we can't live on the antidote alone without depending on food. So, the effect of poison is like the effect of ignorance of the absolute truth, creating good karma is like eating food, and understanding emptiness is like the antidote. Although creating positive karma helps, it's not a direct method. While taking the antidote, we should also know that food is the most important thing that supports life, so completely forgetting to eat while taking the antidote is a big mistake; our life can be neither long nor happy.

When we realize emptiness, we always see the importance of following karma; that creating positive karma and not creating negative karma is the most important thing. If we were to be careless of our karma, thinking there is no need because we understand emptiness, that just proves we have no understanding of the absolute truth at all. If we did understand the absolute truth of person, mind, existence and karma, we would also have full confidence in dependent origination—how all things arise in dependence on causes and conditions—at the same time and therefore care very much about creating positive karma and avoiding negative karma.

Understanding emptiness at a profound level means understanding the infallibility of emptiness and cause and effect, how they are noncontradictory; it means we will never betray cause and effect.

Thinking that karma doesn't exist is the wrong understanding of emptiness. The right realization of emptiness—the absolute truth—sees that karma definitely exists and that all things depend on causes and conditions to exist. With the absolute truth of emptiness, we clearly see the relative truth of cause and effect. The ultimate truth of emptiness and the relative truth of karma, of cause and effect, are complementary. Unless we see this, our understanding of emptiness is imperfect. When we do see it, however, our understanding and realization of relative truth increases and we have more confidence in the infallibility of karma, understanding that positive karma brings a positive result and negative karma brings a negative one. This helps a great deal to develop the realization of the absolute truth.

Just as a bird needs both wings to fly and can't fly with only one, in the same way both realizations are so important to escape from suffering. We must have full confidence in karma

and the realization of the absolute truth. Without both, we can't escape from samsara. Both are vital: the understanding of the relative truth of dependent origination and the realization of its absolute true nature, the emptiness of the inherent existence of all phenomena including the I. Therefore, the more we can study the subject of karma, the more it will help us to realize the absolute truth.

Why do dependent origination and emptiness help each other? For example, even though the emptiness of a table and the emptiness of a book may be identical, the objects of that emptiness are different. We need to understand that the object lacks intrinsic existence and yet that doesn't mean it's completely nonexistent. If we believe that nothing exists, then we fall into nihilism. That negates karma, dependent origination, meaning there is no reason for creating positive actions or avoiding negative ones.

Believing that everything is nonexistent, that there is no karma, no nirvana and no samsara leads to carelessly creating negative karma and becoming even more ignorant, which in turn leads to creating even more negative karma. Therefore, it's vital to always consider karma. Although the interdependence of emptiness and karma is not an easy subject, it helps in so many ways to purify our obscurations. It's always important to meditate on karma.

At this moment, we are all together here in Kopan, coming from many different places, talking about a subject that is new for most of us, the Dharma. This is something we've never heard about before, either in our earlier life or in our dreams. It's a subject that is opposite to whatever we thought about before. There is something that has caused this coming together here at Kopan—our karma. Why do things happen like this without us having any idea of it beforehand? Why did we happen to come from the West without any notion of what we were doing? The reason is karma.

Without fully realizing the suffering of samsara, we can't escape it. To do this, we must have a fully renounced mind. To not get hurt by a fire we must recognize its nature—that it's hot and that it burns—and in the same way we must recognize the nature of samsara. As we renounce touching fire, we must renounce samsara. It's very useful to meditate on samsara in both the ways shown, although what I've said is very condensed. Meditation can help stop us thinking that samsaric happiness is true happiness.

2. Karmic Formation

The second of the twelve links is karmic formations. (*Du che* means by gathering delusions; *lä* means karma). *Lä*, or karma, refers to the actions of body, speech and mind. Actually, actions of body and speech come from the mind and also affect the mind, leaving imprints upon it.

Besides positive and negative karma, there is variable and invariable karma. Positive invariable karma brings a rebirth in the upper realms.

With variable karma, say a person has created karma to be both a dog and a pig. By taking a pig rebirth, although the person is reborn in the form of a pig, it is possible to experience the potential of the karma of a dog, because they are of the same "caste," meaning both are in animal form. It is also possible for human beings to complete two results by taking one form—this can

happen when a person has created the karma to take two different human forms, and takes one, completing the ability of both. This is the opposite of invariable karma.

Invariable karma is what we normally think of as karma, how the results of karma are definite. It's possible for human and animals to experience this, but there are some stages where this result can't happen, such as in the form realm. In the form realm, there are four different stages attained originally through craving to experience samadhi. This means that because the meditator attains these different stages through craving the rapturous ecstasy of samadhi, if they create the karma to experience the third stage, for example, that potential can't be finished in the second.

Negative karma brings a lower rebirth, but it can also cause suffering in the upper realms.

Neutral karma doesn't bring results such as suffering and happiness. However, we should check up whether a neutral feeling is the result of a neutral action or not.

3. Consciousness

Karmic formation generates consciousness, the third link. Consciousness and mind are synonyms. Within the twelve links, this is the link created by the second link, karmic formations, where the consciousness joins the next life. Of the five aggregates, one is form and the other four are mental.

The actions of body, speech and mind are created by ignorance. When an action is created, it leaves an impression on the consciousness, like planting a seed in a field. Ignorance causes action, which in turn affects the consciousness and leaves a karmic imprint. If there were no consciousness, none of the rest could happen—the results, for example, or the experience of different things in different lives. Just as the monkey jumps from tree to tree, so consciousness goes from life to life. There is consciousness that is the result and consciousness that is the cause.

4. Name and Form

A house depends on walls and a roof. If one of the walls is missing, it can't be considered a house. In the same way, without the five aggregates, we can't exist. The form aggregate—our body—can't come into being without previous karma. The father and mother produce the form, which is the vehicle for our mind in the womb.

Pung po (*skandha* in Sanskrit) means “group” or “heap,” something that depends on a group. For example, consciousness depends on a continuity, just as it does on time. If it's form, each atom depends on the group or the parts. *Skandha* means group or aggregates.

5. Six Sense Organs

Name and form generate the six sense organs, represented by an empty house with six openings, five windows and a door. The sense organs can't operate without an object, which will happen with the next link, contact. There is an inner sense organ and an outer one. For example, whereas

the ear is the outer sense organ of hearing, there also needs to be a more subtle inner sense organ that connects the object (the sound in the ear) with the mind. It's the same with the tongue, eye, nose and consciousness. The inner eye organ is within the outer physical eyeball, which registers the external stimulus of vision and connects it to the mind.

The sense organs of this life cease at death and don't continue, whereas the consciousness continues. As we die, the various aspects of the consciousness absorb, and so we progressively lose our sight, hearing and so forth.

Why are there no feelings at death? Because the base, the vehicle, of the senses is absorbed, and therefore the senses are also absorbed. Why is it that when something dangerous happens to the physical form, it affects the senses and makes them unusable? Because the sense base is damaged, through disease, for example.

It's also true that when we concentrate on one part of the body, we lose awareness of the other parts. This is due to the fact that the vehicle of the mind, the wind, moves to the part of the body where the mind is concentrating and so it's no longer concentrating on any other part. Usually, when we look at an object, because we are focusing our attention on the sight, we become less aware of the sounds around us. Or if we are listening to something, we are less aware of seeing anything. When we listen, the ear sense organ operates and the wind energy flows to it, taking the focus off the visual sense. Sometimes, we don't know that we feel hungry until somebody talks about food and then our stomach feels hungry. This is true of any of the sense organs. Looking at a flower, the visual sense organ within the eyeball, through the wind energy, makes us aware of the color and shape of that flower. In that way, we can discriminate the flower.

6. Contact

From the six sense organs comes contact. There are six types of contact, one for each sense and for the mental sense power. It is defined as one of the six sense bases meeting and experiencing the object through its own capacity. Contact is the link between having the sense base and developing a feeling about that object, which is the next link.

Contact can be a mental experience, such as the mind thinking of permanent or impermanent things, or of the absolute truth. There are many existent things that are the object of the mind.

7. Feelings

There are three kinds of feeling: pleasurable, painful and neutral. The neutral feeling is the same as the feeling of indifference. With the equilibrium meditation, when there is the feeling of equilibrium for all sentient beings, there is a neutral feeling for all sentient beings. But when we have the concept of friend and enemy, a different feeling arises: pleasure, happiness and attachment for the friend, and suffering, dislike and hatred for the enemy.

From our contact with the object, the feelings that are generated bring all the negative minds. Unless we use the methods to overcome our negative feelings, when we feel pleasurable or painful feelings, happiness and attachment naturally arise on one hand and unhappiness and anger

arise on the other hand. Therefore, we should always examine the feelings we have about an object. We need to understand that there is no self-existent suffering or self-existent happiness due to the object. For instance, when we see a person who has a nice shape, we become attached and we enjoy looking at it, find pleasure in it, and experience temporal samsaric happiness. This feeling arises from the eye sense making contact with the visual sense object. But our eye sense is not one with that person's body and that body is not one or interrelated with our eye sense organ; they are over there and we are here.

Feelings and contact are very closely related because, although contact might seem like some physical action, it's a mental activity. There's no actual physical contact between our eye and the body we are looking at. The contact here means the visual experience we have of encountering the sight of the body.

It's the same thing with food. The contact is not in the food or on the tongue. As the food touches the tongue, the tongue sense organ registers its taste; that is the contact. And immediately, there is the feeling of pleasure (if it's delicious) or displeasure (if it tastes bad). The taste of the food and the pleasure or displeasure it brings doesn't come from the food; it arises in dependence of the food, but it is a mental construct.

Our attachment sees the object as a self-existent beautiful object, seeing it in the nature of beauty, and then the pleasurable feeling arises, something that is only our own conception, our own creation. So, the happiness of a pleasurable feeling is the mere creation of our own mind. The beauty of the person is the creation of our mind. They are neither intrinsically beautiful nor intrinsically ugly. It's our mind that sees them as that. Just as the happy feeling is a mere mental projection, the beauty is also a mental projection.

We can see this when we change our attitude to a friend we thought of as beautiful. If we get really angry with them or tired of them, what seemed to be beautiful before now seems unbeautiful. The pleasure we get by seeing them that seemed to come from their side now no longer happens and we have quite an unpleasant feeling when we see them. Although they haven't changed in appearance, due to our negative minds of pride, anger and jealousy, we see them as an undesirable object. The change that our feelings have undergone doesn't depend on the object changing. Our feelings can change within a minute. Pleasure can become anger; happiness can become suffering. Because the pleasure or misery we feel when we make contact with an object are mere projections of our mind, we can see suffering and happiness are creations of our mind.

We usually believe that the beauty of an object comes from the object's side and is self-existent. There is no such beauty existing from the object's side. If that beauty were truly existing, it would be independent of the viewer. That beauty should be one with the object. For example, if we consider a person's body as beautiful, every atom of that body should be seen in beauty: the nose, the bones, the flesh and every part should be seen in beauty. But they are not. Were we to dissect their body into small pieces, we wouldn't see every part as beautiful. Beauty is not one with the entire body nor with any of the parts of the body. Because the parts themselves are not beautiful, the whole group put together can't be; no such beauty exists only from the object's side. Either the beauty should exist without depending on the group or it should be one with it. But without depending on that body, the beauty can't be found. It never exists only from the object's side.

Therefore, we can't find beauty on the object. The beauty has to depend on the person looking at it.

How does that beauty exist for us? It's only our mental projection. We conceive it as beautiful, based on preconceived notions of beauty or something that triggers a sense of beauty, but it all comes from our own mind. The image we define as beautiful is only our mental creation; somebody else could find it quite the opposite. But we create it and think it is intrinsic and we believe in it.

It's senseless to be attached to the beauty that we create with our own mind, attached to a mental concept. We are attached to our own creation, to our own mental projections and reflections. In fact, one of the main reasons we become attached is that it is our mental projection. But we don't recognize it as such. Therefore, problems always arise between the subject and the object; attachment brings problems. Because of the fundamentally wrong concept that beauty exists only from the other person's side without depending on our mental creation at all, attachment arises. If we can be conscious that it's our own mind's creation alone, attachment won't arise.

If we think, we can see that it's very easy to see somebody with a title as being that title. With a king, we see the king and not the person who is merely titled king. The title seems to have some form of self-existence. King, minister, judge, doctor, lawyer, president and so on—the mind is attached to the title, as if it exists by itself. We become attached to the solidly appearing title. We spend much time trying to become that title, studying hard, incurring many expenses, and maybe in the end we won't even get it. And even though we might receive the degree or the job with the title in the end, where is the title we have received? After all this time and energy spent, this title that we have received is completely the opposite of the title we have been looking for.

The actual title—sweeper, king, president and so on—is merely words, which is only a creation of the mind. That doesn't mean that the mind and body of the person called "president" become one with the president. We see the title as self-existent, not as a creation of mind; it is as a title that exists by itself, independent of the name, independent of the mind creating it; we see it as something solid and concrete. This is the opposite of the real title, which doesn't exist in that way at all.

Just as the title "president" is a mere mental projection, the man receiving the title "president" is also only a mere name, a mental projection. It's the same thing with beauty. If beauty existed only from the object's side without depending on the mind of the person looking, then the object should be seen as beautiful by everyone. But what we see as beautiful is not seen as beautiful by all other beings. It's seen in different ways by different people. Even when a person or object is recognized as a most beautiful thing by one, others see it as ugly and don't like it. Can that object be both ugly and beautiful?

Because all living beings see things differently, this proves that such names are merely mental projections, created by the viewer, and are only their way of viewing it. They are attached to their own mental creation. "Good" or "bad" depends on the person. Because it's only a mental creation, a name, there's no reason to be attached to that beauty.

The reason for explaining this in detail is only to clearly show the wrong conceptions and faults of attachment.

8. Craving

Contact and feeling generate craving. This is shown by a man drinking wine. Just as the man's thirst is never satisfied, so the person deluded by greed is never satisfied and craves more things. A person drinks, becomes drunk and fights for no real reason. We know this happens as it has happened many times before. Even nondrinkers fight, drunk with ignorance. People bring wine to a festival. If there is no wine, there is no festival.

At the end of our life, we crave a human body, leaving this imprint. But we may have to live our next life as an animal, a dog, for example. At the time of this death as a dog, the imprint for the human rebirth causes craving for a human rebirth to arise, and we may be reborn human again.

In the texts, there are three kinds of craving listed: *craving for sense pleasures*, *craving for freedom from fear* and *craving for existence*. Each of the three kinds of craving causes suffering.

9. Grasping

The mind remembers the enjoyment of a past taste and is attached to it, wanting more. This is grasping.

The self-existent I is the misconception that the I is independent, free from the aggregates. This can't be. The I has to depend on the body and mind, or on the mind alone. (We make two divisions, body and mind, without talking about the problem of the five aggregates.) Because of these two, the I exists. But the I can't exist without the mind. This is the I that is beginningless. Until we are enlightened, there will always be a body; at enlightenment we become the pure I.

The self-existent I means an I independent of the aggregates of body and mind. Life is the relationship between body and mind. When these separate, uncontrolled death occurs. The I goes on and experiences death, followed by rebirth, under the control of karma and delusions. As long as mind exists, there is the I. If the mind were to cease, so would the I. This I we know in this life, with this name and this body and all these thoughts, will die with the body, but the consciousness will continue and with it will be this sense of I, arising out of the very subtle mind that takes another life.

There are four kinds of grasping: *grasping at sense pleasures*, *grasping at the wrong view of denying what exists*, *grasping at the wrong view of holding our own beliefs as superior* and *grasping at the wrong view of the sense of a self-existent I*. Each of the four kinds of grasping causes suffering.

10. Becoming

Craving, grasping and becoming arise just before the result. We may have to wait eons before a particular group arises at death, and we may have to work off stronger karmas first. For example, humans crave human rebirth but may have to take rebirth in other realms before this is possible. The dying human creates craving, grasping and becoming karmas for a human rebirth. But if they

have great negative karma, these three imprints are delayed until just before the next human rebirth. In the meantime, they may have to spend eons in the hell, hungry ghost and animal realms before these imprints ripen, to be followed by the next human rebirth. Becoming is said to be in the nature of the ripening aspect, which means that whereas craving and grasping were imprints, becoming is where the link actualizes into an actual birth.

Alternatively, a person may be attached to peacocks, for instance, and wish they were a peacock, thereby planting the seed for rebirth as a peacock in a future lifetime. At the time of death, the imprint left by the ignorance wanting to become a peacock gets stronger due to karma. As it becomes stronger, due to craving and grasping at the time of death, the person is ready to become a peacock.

11. Birth

Past lives leave imprints on the consciousness as a result of the control of karma and delusions, resulting in the aggregates for that physical body. The imprint, which is like a seed, is made stronger by craving and grasping at death, just as elements such as water, heat and so forth make the plant seed stronger and give it greater potential. The seed starting to sprout is equivalent to becoming.

In past times, humans have also been born from eggs and from heat. Many animals are born from heat. Humans can also take spontaneous rebirth, as can hungry ghosts. The rebirths in the god, demigod and hell realms are spontaneous.

12. Aging and Death

[The last link is aging and death. Birth triggers aging but also ensures death. Aging is defined as the aggregates, under the control of karma and delusions, decaying without choice.

We are all in the process of getting old and dying. Within the twelve links of dependent origination, after birth, there is only aging and death. Death is certain; in fact, it is the only certainty in this life. At death, we are separated from our body. That is the simplest definition of death: the separation of mind from body.]

Future Karmic Results

Consider a person who spends their life killing animals, such as a hunter, a butcher or a soldier. Even though they might look rich, like they are not suffering and are enjoying themselves, it's definite that they will experience the result of their negative karma in the future unless they try to stop the result before it arises. Unless they try to purify themselves, even the enlightened beings can't prevent their suffering, even if it has to be experienced for thousands of great eons. This is because the power of the sentient beings' karma and the power of the enlightened beings are equal. Karma is very strong, so each person has to make their own effort—it can never be cut off by an enlightened being or by God. Unless they do so themselves, they will have to experience many horrible results.

It's definite that a being who creates so much negative karma yet seems to be enjoying their work does this for only a few years, and it's definite that in the future their suffering will be greater than their happiness. When we see somebody enjoying wealth and luxury created by nonvirtue, we can't then conclude that there is no karma. This is a wrong concept, a concept that doesn't understand the evolution of karma, that doesn't understand the Dharma. It's a misconception that can cheat us out of creating positive actions and be influenced by a negative person, destroying our chance of happiness, wasting this and many other future lives.

We may create much good karma in our early life, purifying the mind a great deal, but then follow negative influences so that it becomes obscured again. We can't trust such a negative life even though it might be enjoyable. It's so short. We shouldn't think because we have few apparent problems now that there is no karma or that there will be no suffering results despite having done many negative actions. Our present enjoyments are the positive result of past virtuous actions, but they will only last for a few months or years. Even a hundred years is nothing compared to the vast amount of time we will suffer because of our current negativity.

Nagarjuna's quotation from *Heart of Dependent Arising* [WFGS p. 170] gives a complete idea of the evolution of karma and is very useful to know:

The first, eighth, and ninth are delusions,
The second and tenth are karma.
The remaining seven are sufferings. [30]

The first, eighth and ninth links of the twelve links refer to ignorance, craving and grasping. The second and tenth are the karmic actions within the twelve links: karmic formation and becoming. All the others are the suffering results: consciousness, name and form, the six sense bases, contact, feeling, birth and aging and death.

The twelve links are involved in each samsaric rebirth. At the present moment, we are experiencing the result of the twelve links of this human life. What has finished for this life? The three causes—ignorance, craving and grasping—and two actions—karmic formation and becoming. Now we are experiencing the seven results. What still has to happen? Death. We are waiting for that. When this occurs, one set of the twelve links will be complete. But there are countless other sets of links happening at the same time. Every action we do triggers another set.

Each samsaric being is in the circle of these twelve links. This can be finished in two or three consecutive lives, but not in one life, or it can be finished over a longer period of time. For example, there can be eons between the cause and the result. We have yet to experience the results of the countless terrible negative karmas we created many eons ago.

How can the twelve links be completed in two lives? Here is an example. In our earlier life, we created the karma to be reborn as a monkey but for the rest of the lifetime we live purely, keeping our vows, purifying our negativities, decreasing our attachment and creating much good karma. This karma is stronger than the monkey karma at the time of death. We desire to be reborn in the upper realms and we have created the positive conditions for another human rebirth. Each time we desired this, this imprint became stronger and stronger, which manifests at the time of death as craving for a human body and grasping to take a human rebirth again. The grasping makes the

seed of becoming human stronger. Now, both the two actions and three causes have been completed in this life. Ignorance creates karmic formation—this time creating very positive karma—leaving imprints on the consciousness which leads to craving and grasping as we die, which creates becoming, where we take another human rebirth. These five links are finished at the time of death.

Now, there are seven results left, to be experienced in our next life. Because the becoming link for a human rebirth becomes stronger, right after the time in the intermediate state we take birth as a human being rather than in another realm. This is how the twelve links of the future human life are completed.

But in that previous life, we had created the karma to be reborn a monkey, which is still there as an imprint on our mindstream. The ignorance created the karmic formation that left the imprint, which has remained on the mindstream but which hasn't yet ripened. But of the twelve links, one cause, ignorance, and one action, karmic formation, have been completed. The other action, becoming, and the two other causes, craving and grasping, will be completed in a second life unless we either create heavier karma than the monkey karma in this life or we purify that monkey karma and take another upper rebirth. Unless that happens, then in the third life our monkey karma will ripen and we will have to experience a monkey rebirth and complete the seven results then.

Between completing ignorance and karmic formation and craving, grasping and becoming, and the seven results, there may be many eons. In countless previous lives, our ignorance has created many negative karmic formations, but we have still not experienced the craving, grasping and becoming related to them.

Within even one day of this life we are making preparations for another rebirth in the hell realm, in the hungry ghost realm and the animal realm due to the negative actions we habitually do. Our ignorance creates so many karmic formations in this life, with infinitely more nonvirtuous than virtuous. Each one triggers a different twelve links, propelling us toward that kind of rebirth. Hopefully, we are also creating a lot of positive karma propelling us toward another human rebirth.

We might feel pity for the prisoners we read about who are trapped in terrible prisons, but really we are much more imprisoned. There is almost no way to become free from these myriad sets of twelve links that we are constantly creating. Each time we create a set of twelve links, we are further ensnared in the chain. The net we are caught in is our ignorance and the fish that is caught is our future samsaric rebirth. A fish has no choice when it lands in a net; it must end up as somebody's meal. Whenever we start a set of twelve links, we are that fish waiting to be fried; the seven sets of suffering results are inevitable. The prison of the twelve links is far worse than any material prison. That kind of prison is like being in a house, but samsara is a real prison, a karmic prison. Because it has more to do with the mind, it's very difficult. Because the karmic prison is created by the mind, it must be eliminated by the mind.

At least in a material prison we can still practice the Dharma. Jailed for whatever reason, we can still meditate and teach the Dharma to other people. But in the samsaric prison of the lower realms, we can't even have samsaric enjoyments.

We end up in a material prison because we have been caught breaking the law, but this has happened because our mind is habituated to creating nonvirtuous actions. We must endure the material prison because we are trapped in the karmic prison of the twelve links that were started in some previous lifetime. Even in this lifetime, we are creating so many negative karmas that will result in rebirth in the lower realms as well as some positive karmas for an upper rebirth. Constantly starting so many sets of the twelve links, we are really caught in so many other different prisons that we have yet to experience the results for. Unable to escape all these prisons, we have no choice but to spiral through one suffering rebirth after another.

If we were free from the twelve links, we wouldn't have the suffering body that others could imprison and torture, or the suffering mind. Therefore, the work of getting out of the actual prison created by ignorance is more important than the work of getting out of the ordinary material prison.

Chapter 11. The Suffering of the Three Upper Realms



Lama Zopa Rinpoche teaching during the Third Kopan Course, 1972. LYWA collection.

The Suffering of the Human Realm

[WFGS pp. 148–50]

Ignorance itself is the cause of the suffering of all the realms. Any being who has no realization of emptiness can have no clear recognition of their own mind and so will suffer.

Every human being is still in samsara and so will experience the various sufferings of a human. There are eight types of suffering:

- the suffering of birth
- the suffering of sickness
- the suffering of aging
- the suffering of death
- the suffering of encountering what is unpleasant
- the suffering of separation from what is pleasant
- the suffering of not getting what we want
- the suffering of having deluded aggregates

In our samsaric life, from birth to death we experience these eight types of suffering. We are under the control of old age, sickness and death, not knowing how to control our death, unable to take a better way at the time of death. We suffer from not finding beautiful objects and having to experience unpleasant, ugly ones. Everyone's life is involved in suffering.

The beggar and the billionaire—both are in the prison of the twelve links and beset by the eight sufferings. Ordinary people think that suffering only means lacking material things, but for humans the mental suffering is just as terrible. To think that poverty is the only cause of suffering

is to misunderstand what suffering is. It's not that the rich are happy and the poor are miserable. The actual meaning of suffering is having an ignorant mind, a negative mind, one lacking understanding.

Some people think that because they have many possessions and a big family with many relatives, a beautiful house with a garden, because they have all this, they are happy and without suffering, so why should they practice the Dharma? They don't need the Dharma. This is a really deluded way of thinking. They think only poor or crazy people need the Dharma.

If possessions brought us satisfaction without depending on the Dharma, there would be no need to follow the Dharma, no need for it to exist. If having possessions was the sole criterion for being satisfied, all the rich people in the world would be so satisfied and happy. Their wealth seems to keep them trapped in worries and unhappiness; worries they will lose their wealth or jealousy that others are wealthier. They are also trapped in the twelve links, their lives going around and around, out of control. Begun by ignorance, their lives are also under the control of the eight types of suffering. Despite their wealth, they are bound to sickness, old age and death and the other sufferings, with no idea at all what to do at the time of death.

If they deny that their lives are suffering, they are cheating themselves. Already caught in the prison of the twelve links, each second of their human life is on the way to the end of that set of twelve links, to death. Before completing this result, they are already caught in so many other twelve links, already trapped into countless more lives of suffering. Just as the fish in the net waits to be finished by the fisherman, to be cut, cooked and eaten, this person also waits.

To think that we are not suffering, that our life is perfect, is to utterly delude ourselves. We need to see that we are already caught in so many countless sets of the twelve links, ready to experience those many other sufferings in future lifetimes. When we can recognize ourselves more clearly, we can come to understand the different layers of suffering that are our life. Before this, we felt happy and comfortable, but that is a great mistake. It's like seeing a mirage of a river and feeling so happy because we long to jump in and swim, but there is no water there; it's only a mirage. The samsaric happiness we chase after is just such an illusion.

The Suffering of the Demigod Realm

The beings of the demigod realm (asura) are very cruel. Even though they are so much richer than the richest human, it's like they live their life consumed with jealousy for the desire realm gods who have so much more than they do. They feel they have been somehow excluded from the god realm.

Because of coveting the wealth of the gods, they are constantly fighting with them. They are considered higher than us humans, but really they are very ignorant, their minds greatly obscured by jealousy and avarice.

On Mount Meru there are eight levels, four above the water and four below. The demigods live in the levels below the water and go up to the god realms to fight the gods. It's said that when the humans on earth follow the Dharma and lead more virtuous lives than nonvirtuous ones, the gods have the upper hand in the fight between the gods and the demigods, but when the

teachings degenerate on earth and people become more deluded, creating more negative karma, the demigods start winning the fight.

The Suffering of the Desire Realm God Realm

Usually, the bodies of these samsaric gods and goddesses emanate light. Their bodies are beautiful and smell sweetly. The gods are always surrounded by many hundreds of goddesses, always enjoying themselves greatly.

At their time of death, however, this changes completely. Even though they have only ever smelled sweetly for the eons that they have been alive, in the time just before they die, they become aware of their impending death and their body starts to smell very badly. Not even the closest relatives will go near them. All their lives they have worn flower garlands that have never wilted, but now they do. Seeing the flowers wilt and die is very shocking for the gods. Their body gets dirty for the very first time

They experience great worry as karmically they see clearly that they will be reborn in the hell realm. They start to look very ugly; the beautiful light their body has emanated fades. None of the other gods will look after them and their goddess girlfriends desert them. They feel very lonely and suffer so much.

The lesser gods are under the control of other gods who have more possessions. Those with little power and few possessions are thrown out of the god realm.

They are always fighting with the demigods. If any part of their body is cut, it grows again. However, if their neck is cut, they die. This is their karmic creation.

The Gods of the Form and Formless Realms

A being takes rebirth in the world of form as a result of getting bored with the enjoyments of the objects of the five senses, becoming attached to the sublime ecstasy that practicing the samadhi meditation brings.

When the meditator has achieved samadhi through the nine stages of the shamatha (*zhi na*) meditation, they are still not completely satisfied and see that having a corporeal body is holding them back. Through more meditation, they are able to transcend the form realm and take rebirth in the formless realm. Again, the being progresses through the stages of the form realm with meditations of ever-increasing subtlety. Without a form, having just the four mental aggregates, the formless being is completely unconscious from birth until just before death.

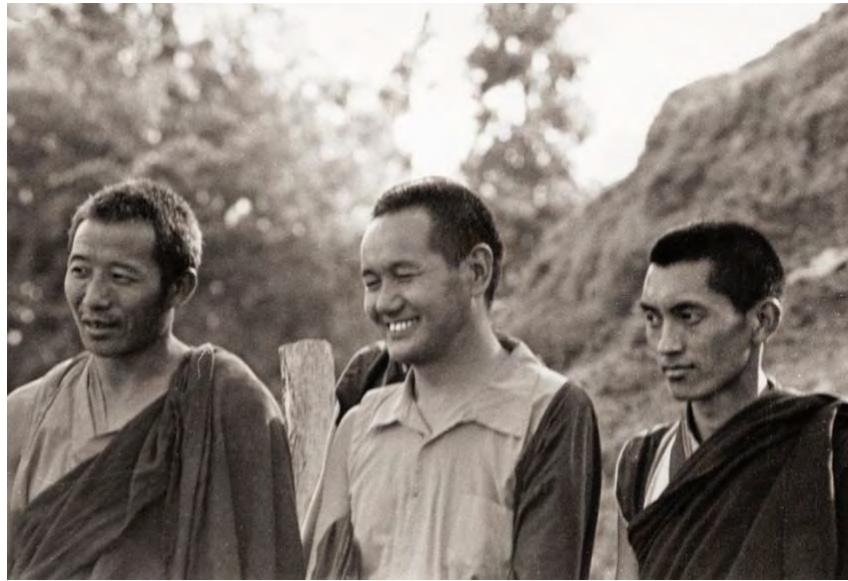
In the form realm there are seventeen categories; in the formless realm there are four categories. The first is *limitless sky*, where the being thinks the whole of existence, whether matter or not, is void, like the sky or empty space. Then there is *limitless consciousness*, where there is just mind appearing to the being. Then, *nothingness*, and finally *neither existence nor nonexistence*, also called the *tip of samsara*.

Whenever a being is born in samsara, it's always in the twelve links, suffering the eight different sufferings and all the sufferings of the different realms. We must not be attached to any samsaric rebirth, even the human rebirth. The principal thing to do is to get out of samsara altogether. But if we can't get out this lifetime, we should strive to take a human life next time, as a bridge to escape. Just as the bridge we used to cross a river is no further use once we are across, once we have escaped samsara, there is no need for another human rebirth.

The purpose of meditating on the sufferings of samsara is to understand how there is no real enjoyment from samsaric pleasures or possessions, that they are in fact a form of suffering. Unless we can see this through meditation, we will be unable to overcome our attachment to taking a samsaric rebirth and so we're tied to suffering. As long as we are in samsara, no matter how much we might crave to be the wealthiest human being, we will be up and down in samsara, sometimes in the upper realms, usually in the lower realms.

As long as we have negative mind, we suffer. Without seeing living in samsara as like living in the middle of a blazing fire, we can't renounce attachment. Then, it's impossible to get out of samsara.

Chapter 12. Bodhicitta



Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche during the Fourth Kopan Course, 1973. Photo by Brian Beresford.

The Mahayana Equilibrium Meditation

[WFGS pp.175–80]

The equilibrium meditation is fundamental to all the Mahayana and tantric meditations. It's used by those who have great psychic powers, such as being able to fly or make footprints on stone, to turn fire to water or make prophesies and so forth. But this meditation is regarded as more useful than these powers of clairvoyance, which can still be acquired even without the realizations of this meditation on the absolute truth of the equality between us and other beings. This meditation brings the realization of the equality of all sentient beings, of us, our friends, our enemies, of strangers, animals, insects and so forth. Anybody who acquires clairvoyance without this realization is not an inner being. Because they have no realizations of the evolution of samsara, karma and so forth, they have no way to overcome suffering, to escape samsara.

The equilibrium meditation is especially useful for stopping attachment and anger. It's a meditation that causes us to have an equal feeling for all sentient beings by cultivating the mind not being attached to some and having aversion for others. When we have realized this meditation, we will naturally have an equal feeling for all sentient beings, something that can't really happen without it.

Stopping the discriminating mind brings peace; it frees us from so many problems with our family and friends as well as with our enemies. Without destroying our partial mind, even clairvoyance can't bring peace, nor can it help us attain freedom from samsara, the realization of emptiness and bodhicitta. This meditation is the best way to bring peace to the world. The discriminating, partial, expectant mind is the exact opposite of the mind we can achieve with this meditation and is the cause of all problems in the world—in families, in societies and in countries.

Each time we do this meditation, the mind gets closer and closer to the subject, becoming more and more familiar with it. Little by little the mind comes into equilibrium from its unsubdued state. As it does so, the actions of greed and anger arise less frequently, since the negative mind responsible for them decreases. And as our discrimination decreases, we create less problems for others. Because discrimination causes us to engage in negative actions to family, friends and all sentient beings, everybody is helped by subduing our mind.

All sentient beings become equal. This doesn't mean equal in their possessions or their political power, but equal in our mind, without dependence on things they do to us, such as helping, harming or ignoring us. The limited mind that judges others only on their immediate actions for or against us fails to understand the infinite previous lives, where beings have been all things to us. With this worldly limited mind, we can never see all sentient beings as equal, whereas a mind of equilibrium can't be betrayed by friend or enemy because all beings appear as equal. This is an unshakeable mind uncomplicated by attachment, anger or ignorance, a mind without confusion. With this mind, we are always happy and we always bring peace to other people. We stop others from creating negative karma. With no animosity to the enemy, they no longer react with anger; with no clinging to the friend, they like us without attachment.

The principal cause of not seeing people in equilibrium is the partial mind.

Guru Shakyamuni Buddha says,

Anything growing on this earth, any flowers, fruit-bearing trees, forests or ayurvedic plants, is due to the lake called Matu, and that lake depends on its possessor, the nagas. Therefore, whatever grows from the earth depends on those nagas. In the same way, every single past and future happiness, samsaric, non-samsaric, and all realizations including enlightenment—from the tiniest samsaric pleasure such as a cooling breeze upwards—arises from bodhicitta. Without it, there can be no happiness. Even the happiness of animals, insects, and so forth cannot exist without bodhicitta.

Every single happiness of all our past lives, every present happiness, even today's, and all future happiness up to enlightenment arises due to the power of bodhicitta. Therefore, bodhicitta is the most important thing, more important than this body or this life. Through bodhicitta we can have the most perfect, most meaningful life.

Why is bodhicitta more important than this life or body? Because it can never cause even a tiny suffering, in contrast to the body, which has been the fundamental basis for suffering. No matter how much we trust bodhicitta, it can never betray us. But the body can cheat us. Every problem arising from this body is due to its very existence, but bodhicitta can never cause suffering.

This body cheats us by making us think as if we will always have it and it will always help us. Yet no matter how much care we take of it, it will leave us in time, even if we try to always keep it happy and free from suffering. It cheats us by giving us expectations of happiness and never achieving them. We work so hard to give it everything it wants but it still lets us down; it still brings us suffering we don't want. We think we are in control but really, we have no control at all.

But no matter how much we work for, trust and take care of bodhicitta it never betrays us, not even for a tiny second. That's not in its nature. Just being alive is not enough to stop suffering

and always enjoy happiness but because bodhicitta can eliminate all suffering, it's more important than life.

People go to war because they worry that their country will become powerless and lose possessions, land and so on. They give up their life or put it in danger to fight other countries for their country's prestige. This is because they see things like reputation and pleasure as more important than life. It's crazy that they are willing to give up their life so they can have a more comfortable life. This works in complete opposition to the intention. They think power and land are the fundamental source of happiness. I'm not complaining, just explaining. It's like explaining that fire is hot and ice is cold; it's just a fact, not a complaint.

Bodhicitta is the fundamental source of our past, present and future happiness and therefore is infinitely more important than power and possessions. Even if we have some degree of samsaric enjoyment, it exists at the most for the rest of our life, usually much less, and is bound to cause problems. But the help of bodhicitta is eternal. It has a beginning and it results in everlasting happiness. Therefore, when we think of the infinite benefits of bodhicitta and compare them to chasing samsaric happiness, the latter looks so silly, like giving up our life for candy. That's why bodhicitta is more important than life.

This well-controlled mind of bodhicitta is achieved on the basis of the fundamental attainment of the equilibrium meditation and attaining this depends on practice.

Visualize a friend, an enemy (animal or human), a stranger, and all sentient beings. Remember that in many previous lives the friend has been the enemy and the stranger for an equal number of times. It's impossible that they were one more than the other. Since friend, enemy and stranger are seen as equal, we should have equal feelings for them.

Then, we should consider what causes us to become angry the most. For example, if we are attached to hearing praise, we should visualize someone criticizing us. If we don't have any enemies, we can do this with anything that bothers us. At the same time, we should check to see if there is a negative mind arising.

Sometimes, if we think how someone is harming us, the more we think about it, the angrier we get. This mind of dislike comes to see that person as ugly, an undesirable object. If we can observe this negative feeling for such a person, we can use that to compare how we feel for a friend and for a stranger and to check the different feelings that arise. By going through the twenty reasons of the equilibrium meditation [WFGS pp. 175–80] we will feel the same about them. Then, think of our parents nearby; they are also equal.

The twenty points covered in the equilibrium meditation in *Wish-fulfilling Golden Sun* are these.

1. If I were to work only to gain my own peace, there would be no reason to have been born human, because, even as an animal, I could strive for this.
2. The main purpose of my being born human is to bring every sentient being into everlasting happiness.
3. Just as I wish to avoid suffering and find happiness, so do all other sentient beings.
4. For countless rebirths I have been discriminating all beings as either friend, enemy or stranger with a belief in the self-existing I.

5. The two negative actions, helping with greed and harming with anger, have thrown me into samsaric suffering for beginningless lives.
6. To continue in this way will cause me the same suffering, attaining neither realizations nor enlightenment, for countless eons.
7. The three objects—friend, enemy and stranger—are not definitely true. The present friend, enemy and stranger have not always been the friend, enemy and stranger in past countless lives.
8. If what my ignorant “I” saw as true, that friend, enemy and stranger are true objects, these three distinctions should have existed from countless previous lives to the present, and even beyond enlightenment.
9. My afflictions are not created by the enemy but by myself.
10. I should not hate the enemy because they are the object of my practice of patience, to control my anger.
11. The enemy is infinitely more precious than any possession. They are the source of my past, present and future lives’ happiness.
12. The enemy is the cause of all beings’ enlightenment, including mine.
13. Because the enemy harming me is under the control of their negative mind, there is no reason to get angry, it’s not their fault.
14. With wisdom I would see that harming others with hate is harming myself.
15. The enemy, as well as every other being, is the object of the Buddha’s compassion. Therefore, even lightly harming any being is like harming the infinite buddhas.
16. The Buddha always considers all sentient beings, even enemies, more important than himself.
17. The enemy and all other beings have been my mother countless times.
18. Not harming the worst enemy, which is my self-cherishing mind, but destroying the outside enemy instead, is like shooting a friend and not shooting the enemy.
19. A bodhisattva sees no sentient being as an enemy even if all should rise against them.
20. If I analyze the attached friend and the hated enemy with the ultimate analysis examining emptiness, I won’t find them anywhere.

Then, think that all sentient beings are also equal, they were our enemy, friend, stranger, parents and so forth in past lives the same number of times. We should think, “There is no being that I cling to more or detest more.” We should feel neutral, the mind not clinging to the notion of friend. Like this, we become more relaxed; the mind is no longer so tight. We should have no anger but feel unattached, equal.

After each of the twenty reasons we should think, “Therefore, there is no reason to be attached to the friend or to hate the enemy.” This is the main resolution that we try to achieve with this meditation.

The first of the twenty reasons is that *there would be no reason to have been born human if we were to work only to gain our own peace*. Animals such as the cat and spider have a discriminating mind. Although the way people fight is different, the fighting is the same—one group against another, each an enemy to the other. Animals also have political minds and cheat one another. Even monkeys know how to throw things on people’s heads. Humans fighting and trying to control each other are no different than animals. However competent a person is in such knowledge, this is not human knowledge.

In Tibet if a rat is left to live in a room, it just runs here and there, eating clothes and other objects people are attached to if it is hungry. If someone harms the rat, it tries to harm the person back as much as they can by destroying their possessions or food.

Behavior such as this, working only for our own good, is not the purpose of the human rebirth. Its purpose is to try to bring every sentient being into everlasting happiness, and we can only do this when we have equal feelings for all sentient beings, seeing all sentient beings equally. Animals, those lower beings, can't do this. Even animals such as dogs or rats have friends, enemies and strangers. If we were to follow this kind of partial behavior, this wouldn't be human behavior but fitting in with that of animals. Animals will help those who help them and try to destroy enemies as much as possible. To do the same is not the action of a human being from the Dharma point of view.

The second of the twenty reasons is that *our aim as a human being is to bring perfect peace to all sentient beings*, not only to other humans. Even if we were able to achieve perfect peace, we wouldn't be able to transplant it to other sentient beings; that state can't be shared. Therefore, there must be some other way to bring them peace. Bringing peace to other sentient beings completely depends on releasing them from the unsubdued mind that disturbs perfect peace. That depends on their having completely attained the method side of the path. Thus, bringing them to peace depends on each of us achieving enlightenment. Without understanding their level of mind, we can't help each sentient being in the wisest way.

Each of us can only attain enlightenment by following the practice of Highest Yoga Tantra and by practicing the six perfections. This depends on having a complete realization of the absolute truth and on bodhicitta. This in turn depends on having the realizations of great compassion and great love. For these, we need to experience the practice and develop a mind that is well trained in the practice of the basic Mahayana meditations through the practice of making ourselves equal with other sentient beings and exchanging ourselves with others.

These basic Mahayana practices depend on knowing that all sentient beings have been our mothers and that they are infinitely kind. We can only do this when we are well trained in the fundamental Mahayana equilibrium meditation. Unless we have attained higher Mahayana meditations, attaining the tantric path is impossible. Therefore, the practice of the Mahayana equilibrium meditation brings peace and release from suffering by achieving enlightenment. It also has the power to lead all sentient beings into perfect happiness. Therefore, this kind of meditation is the principal cause of our enlightenment and the principal cause of enlightenment for all sentient beings.

We always talk about peace: peace in our family, in our society, in our country, in the world, but how can we achieve world peace? When we consider peace we focus on these sorts of groups, but each group wants peace on their terms. Their peace will almost certainly clash with the peace of another group, whether that's within a family, in a society or within two countries. To ensure their kind of peace, in order to stop others destroying their peace, they create weapons of war. And yet none have the power to bring peace, either individually or within the group or the country, or for all sentient beings. Because these things are not done in accord with the Dharma, they never bring peace.

The practice of the Mahayana equilibrium meditation, however, can really bring peace. First, we ourselves gain peace, and then with our own experience of perfect peace, with perfect power and understanding, we can enlighten all parents, relatives, societies, populations, all humans, even all sentient beings, leading them to the highest, perfect peace.

Even if we haven't achieved perfect peace, the mind that is living in the practice of subduing the unsubdued mind, the cause of suffering for ourselves and others, helps other people a great deal. The practice does these things at the same time. It subdues the unsubdued, negative mind; it creates great merit, fertilizing the mind like a precious crop; and it helps others overcome their suffering. Wherever someone living in this practice travels, for all those that they encounter, there are less problems and fewer enemies, there is less suffering.

Our enemy is only created by our unsubdued, negative mind. Because this practice subdues the negative mind, we don't create problems for others—for our parents, our children or any others. Wherever we go, no matter which countries, we are always considerate of people, wisely helping others, never creating problems due to partiality for friend and enemy.

When we live with a feeling of partiality, there will always be problems. We see somebody we don't like and an argument develops. It gets bigger and bigger, more people get involved—different castes, different groups. Because of our prejudice, we confront other elements of our society we don't like and there are huge problems. If it's on the scale of country to country, there will certainly be wars. This is all due to the partial mind.

Even if we were the only human being on this earth, would we be at peace? We might have killed every other person to be rid of our enemies, but there would still be no peace because the principal cause, the unsubdued mind, has not been eliminated.

If just eliminating enemies can bring us peace, then the astronauts who landed on the moon should have achieved perfect peace because they were completely alone in that world. But real peace is the cessation of greed, hatred and ignorance. Peace doesn't depend on the place or on being alone. When we can live in the practice of equanimity, we become a person that everybody likes. With our very positive personality, because we don't foster any thoughts of greed, ignorance or hatred, we don't create problems. If we had attachment to one person, that would mean disliking another, whoever it is who dislikes our friend. Seeing our attachment, they would naturally become jealous and feel hostility, wanting to cause us problems. But because our actions with others are based on equanimity, we don't make others confused. Our mind is always peaceful, always happy, never uptight, like water boiling. With such a relaxed mind, we are a very strong positive influence on others, making them like us. Even though we might still be a long way from attaining the cessation of all suffering, because we are living in the practice, we always have fewer problems.

This practice is purely a mental one; it doesn't depend on bells, dorjes or robes. Such a mind of equanimity has so much power, but if we were to try to find that mind, it's impossible to find.

The third reason is that *just as we wish to avoid suffering and find happiness, so do all other sentient beings*. This is a very logical reason. Because we and all other sentient beings only desire happiness and don't desire suffering, we are all equal. We have life, they have life; there is no difference. Why should we care more for ourselves than for others? There is no logical reason to feel we are more

important. So why should we harm any other being? If they disturb us in some way, such as wearing our clothes or taking our food, because we are equal—both not desiring suffering, both needing happiness—there is no reason to react against them. As we desire happiness, so do they. There is no reason to take less care of them than of ourselves.

The fourth reason says that the *falsely conceived self-existent I is not on any part of the body or the mind*, and not in the continuity of the mind. We live with the assumption that this I we cherish is truly existent, that it is somehow independent of body and mind, that it is more than just a mere label placed on the ever-changing aggregates. This I is totally false; it's a hallucination. Just as for somebody called Max, the name "Max" is not a separate entity, but just a name given to the body-mind constituents that together make up the person called Max.

The wrong concept of the truly existing I is beginningless. As long as this exists, we perpetuate the view, which leads to viewing others as truly existing. The clear light nature of the mind, the natural purity of the mind, which is seen by the enlightened beings, is within us all but at present we are unable to see that. What we see is a false view of an I that appears to exist out there, independently, and because of that, we see others as also existing independently, and this applies to all phenomena, not just sentient beings.

This ignorant view of a separate, truly existing I leads to duality, seeing others as separate, which leads to attachment, which leads to anger. And so, the ignorant mind increases.

To get out of suffering, we must first understand that the truly existing I that we have believed in since beginningless time is false, that it doesn't exist in the slightest. Then we need to examine all other beings and all other phenomena in the same way, seeing how they too lack true nature. This belief in a truly existing I, which is the creator of samsara, can be eliminated by all these basic meditations.

Although the body is not I, were somebody to hit our body we would get angry, as if they were hitting this truly existing I. If we were to check up at that time, we wouldn't be able to find the I that is feeling angry. That anger is nowhere in the body; none of the aggregates is that I. This analysis only really works if our anger isn't too strong and we aren't overwhelmed by it. If we have enough presence of mind, we can see there is no reason to get angry.

The partial mind is a mind of expectations, making a friend of somebody who might help us at some time in the future or who has helped us in the past.

Dharmakirti was a highly realized Indian pandit who wrote the root of the logic, the *Compendium on Valid Cognition*, originally explained by Guru Shakyamuni Buddha. This text not only proved past lives and so forth, it showed how Guru Shakyamuni Buddha was the founder of the presentation of the logical evolution of the mind.

The truly existing I isn't the ignorance that locks us in suffering; it's the belief in this truly existing I. That fundamental ignorance causes attachment to what we think will help this I and anger toward what we think will harm it. But the more we search for this I, the more impossible it is to find. However, our ordinary mind doesn't search for this I; it just assumes it exists. It thinks that we are this I, the body-mind combination that exists as a separate, single entity. Only when we

check using valid reasoning can we see that this truly existing I doesn't exist at all. That's why we say that the I and all phenomena are *empty* of inherent existence.

Just as how, without checking we instinctively feel this real I is there and attachment naturally arises, when we do check and discover there is no such I, we lose our attachment to it. The attachment decreases and loses its strength. The uptight feeling that attachment brings becomes loose, sort of free. Just as objects on a table would fall down if the table were to be suddenly removed because there is no longer a foundation to support them, attachment and the other negative minds would disappear if the belief in a truly existing I were to be overcome. To try to hold on to attachment would be like throwing eggs at a target when there is no longer any target or trying to put things in space and expecting them to stay up. Since it can't find the object of attachment, the attachment itself can't survive.

Just as seeing the truly existing I is the basis for attachment to arise, attachment is the basis of seeing things as good or bad, as beautiful or ugly. Our attachment sees an object of desire and thinks it is beautiful; our aversion sees an object of repulsion and thinks it is ugly. Based on this truly existing I, we chase objects that please our attachment, seeking the pleasure of possessions and so forth. Anything that disturbs our pleasure is recognized as an enemy and anger arises. That negative mind of anger sees the enemy as ugly due to our attachment to pleasure being disturbed. When we are able to enjoy that pleasure, the one who helped us attain it is a friend and beautiful to us. The one who neither disturbs nor helps is discerned as a stranger.

Whether a friend or an enemy, we also see that other person as truly existent, and so our anger toward an enemy is the anger of a truly existent I (which doesn't exist) toward a truly existent enemy (which also doesn't exist). This confusion, this battle of hallucinations, creates many other negative emotions and angry thoughts that lead to negative actions as we are locked into more and more suffering.

Both minds, attachment and hatred, are negative. One makes us blind to the faults of attachment and the future suffering result it will bring, and the other makes us blind to the faults of anger and its future suffering results. We will experience some of those suffering results in this life and others in future lives, depending on the karma.

All these problems originally come from the belief in and attachment to the truly existing I. If we were not attached to the I, there would be no way to be attached to pleasures and possessions. Then, there would be no way to harm the enemy or help the friend. As there is no discrimination, there is no negative mind creating future suffering.

The main thing is this. All the problems, all these discriminations of friend, enemy and stranger that are made by the negative mind, the whole thing comes from attachment to the truly existing I. The whole thing is based on a faulty belief, an ignorant misunderstanding. It's wrong and illogical. Attachment and anger can never have any justification because the creator of the discrimination that causes them is a false mind, and this false mind comes from the incorrect belief in the truly existing I.

Any actions based on this false assumption are incorrect because they assume the hallucination of the real I to be true. For example, if the roots of a tree are poisoned, the whole tree becomes poisoned—the branches, fruit and so forth. Say I were to bark and somebody hears me. Because

they hate dogs, they discriminate against me, thinking I am bad just because I barked once. This is illogical because the situation doesn't exist as they see it; their perception is wrong. They see an object that neither exists for the logical, relative mind nor for the omniscient mind. The object, dog, is a hallucination; it doesn't exist. If it did exist, it should be seen by the omniscient mind, and if it's not seen by the omniscient mind, then it doesn't exist.

Since everything we experience is based on false assumptions, viewing nonexistent objects as existing, how can we trust the negative mind that discriminates the enemy? If we could, we would also have to trust the truly existent I.

This consciousness is like the mother who produces many children. We can't trust these negative minds that hold the I and others as inherently existing because we can't find them (although if we don't seek them, we assume they exist). If we discriminate and trust the wrong view, it only causes us to spiral ever deeper into more suffering and conflict.

The fifth reason is that *the two negative actions have continued to make us experience samsaric suffering for beginningless lives*. These two negative actions, helping with greed and harming with anger, keep us trapped in samsara, continually experiencing all the different sufferings and preventing all the realizations. Our current suffering is the result of following these negative minds in previous times. That is what those negative minds do; we should continually remember this. To understand the Dharma and progress along the path, we have to work hard, but to create any of these negative minds is effortless. But when we have a clear understanding of how destructive they are, we can have the determination to overcome them and eliminate them. Then, we can attain all the realizations. That is the power of the mind, although this might seem impossible to the ordinary mind from the ignorant point of view.

An ordinary example. Say, somebody harmed us or our relatives in the past, maybe even in a previous life. The anger we felt toward them leaves an imprint on our mindstream that is still there today. Although buried, this is an obscuration that clouds the purity of our mind. We retain, even subconsciously, a degree of spite. If we were to meet that person today, now we're in another life and another body, that imprint could ripen and we would immediately and inexplicably dislike them, maybe even hate them. If we continue to associate with them—maybe they are a colleague at work—our prejudice against them grows and we develop real hatred for them, causing a real feud between us. We feel we want to harm them in some way; we might even wish to make them nonexistent! If we could do that, how happy we would be.

All this has come through the negative mind we have, the imprints of anger from harm and being harmed in the past, none of which could have happened if we had overcome our attachment to the self. In this way, we should continually remember the faults of the negative mind, the faults of attachment and anger, seeing them as the worst poison, just as poisonous food causes us great suffering, not knowing when we will die. Just as we would wish to free our body from that poison without delaying even a minute, we should develop a similar feeling for our negative minds. Being afraid of these minds, we should renounce them.

The sixth reason is that if we continue in this way, we will continue to suffer in the same way and be *unable to attain realizations and enlightenment for countless eons*. Negative imprints arise from discriminating with attachment and anger, imprints that will one day ripen as suffering results and that will cause us to do similar actions. Each time we do this, the mind becomes more ignorant.

We do habitual actions without being taught, actions such as those caused by attachment and anger. Things like theft and sexual misconduct are done intuitively; they are habitual actions, coming from habits created in past lives. They don't depend on someone teaching us. The negative imprints ripening now cause us to repeat these actions in this life and will cause us to repeat them again in the future. In this way, the mind is made more ignorant.

The seventh reason is that the three objects—*friend, enemy and stranger*—*don't exist inherently*. We think that hating an enemy is justified because they have harmed us in some way. Perceiving that there is a truly existing enemy there shows that our understanding of reality is flawed. The truly existing enemy is a hallucination. If we get angry at this hallucination, we should also get angry at the illusion created by a magician. Just as the magician's illusion is dependent on some object, a stick or something, this hallucinated enemy is dependent on their body and mind and because of that, they are incapable of any true existence at all. Just as it is silly to become angry at the magician's illusion, it's silly to become angry at this truly existing enemy that doesn't exist at all.

When we can understand the emptiness of the enemy and when we can understand karma, we easily see how anger is meaningless and a waste of energy. Because we see that that person is completely empty of being that self-existent enemy, we don't react with anger.

First, is the anger we feel toward the enemy's body? But their head is not their body, nor are their hands, legs and so forth, and neither is the whole group the body, so how can we find the body in order to harm it?

Second, we can think the same thing about the mind. The mind is also a dependent arising, as is the body. We can decide that the body that harms us is reliant on the intentions of the mind, so it's the mind that is the enemy, but we need to check up on what we consider is our enemy's mind. "Mind" is only a word, merely a name; it's also a dependent arising. To exist, it depends on the continuity of moments, how each moment of mind depends on the previous moment to exist. The mind is not one with the enemy and the enemy is not one with the mind, just as they are not one with the body. If they *were* one with the continuity of mind, they would always be the enemy—our permanent enemy from beginningless lifetimes and for endless lifetimes in the future. If they had been a friend in our earlier life or in previous lives, they would have to be enemy and friend together and continue to be both enemy and friend forever into the future, even when enlightened.

Just as the body isn't one with the parts of the body, the enemy isn't one with the body or its parts, so when we look we can't find the enemy within the body. It's exactly the same thing with the mind.

"Body," "mind," and "enemy" are only words. Just as the magician's illusionary person is a dependent arising, dependent on the observer, the magician, the object transformed and so on, this enemy is also a dependent arising. Because it's a mere name, we can't find it as one with body and mind. We fight the enemy without recognizing what it is. Getting angry at this enemy for many years, fighting with them, arranging for somebody to kill them—all this is done for that word "enemy." Many difficulties only arise because of the name "enemy." Our whole life, all our energy, is spent trying to destroy what is only a name or a word. All the fighting is pointless because it's just a name.

It's impossible to find anything that exists as more than a mere name. Something that is more than a mere name can't exist. When we see that, it makes the anger we have held all our life totally meaningless because there is no such thing. We get spiteful and waste our energy on something that is a mere name. It's just like the child building things in the sand, who cries when somebody kicks them over, crying that their house is destroyed or their car is destroyed. They feel badly hurt because they believe those piles of sand are actual possessions; they seem real to the child. To the adult, the child's action is silly, not worth crying over. This is similar to our own actions, but we don't recognize it.

The designations of friend and enemy change quickly because of our ever-changing negative minds of attachment and anger. Friend becomes enemy; enemy becomes friend; stranger becomes friend or enemy; friend becomes stranger and so on. This has been going on from beginningless lives until now. They change within an hour due to our attachment or ignorance, due to the emotion of that moment. Therefore, the friend is not a true friend, a real friend, and neither is the enemy true or real.

Whenever we are attached to somebody who offers us things or says nice things, we should be conscious that they have been our sworn enemy and killed us in the past and that they will do so again in the future. This will help us break our attachment, because as long as we are in samsara this person will swap from friend to enemy and back countless times, so there is nothing to trust. The trusting mind of attachment arises from the feeling that they will be our permanent friend, so we spend so much time and energy influenced by their decisions while disregarding our own life. Following this "permanent" friend, we fail to create positive karma through our attachment and must remain trapped in samsara. This is very dangerous. For the person who practices meditation, this is one of the greatest disturbances to both the Dharma practice and meditation.

This doesn't mean that we should completely forget that friend and disregard them as an object of true love and true compassion. This is a mistake. If we renounce anybody—human or animal—as an object of true love and true compassion, then we are not practicing correctly. This also breaks any bodhisattva vows we might have taken. To renounce anybody as an object of true love and true compassion is very dangerous.

It's also a mistake to think that we can no longer enjoy samsaric things when we practice the Dharma. If we have achieved a degree of mental control, the actions we do might look like samsaric actions but be the cause of enlightenment. This can apply to having a family, where our married life is focused on protecting and helping our family become better people. Even if we are a leader of a country or a king, we can protect the population in the proper way, through positive karma rather than ruling for our own interests, which only brings confusion. Ordinary actions, even killing people, can become a quick cause of attaining enlightenment if we have bodhicitta and every action is only done for the welfare of others. This applies only if we are a bodhisattva.

Somebody who acts like a bodhisattva but who has a negative mind, working for their own happiness alone, can't benefit others. However beautiful they look or sweetly they speak, no matter what exquisite clothes they wear, even if they seem to have attained Highest Yoga Tantra realizations, their actions can be very negative and they can harm us greatly by deceiving us. The Dharma doesn't depend on how an action looks; it depends on the motivation behind the action. An action that appears to be negative can be done with a negative or positive motivation. An

action that appears to be positive, when it's done with a positive motivation is really positive, and vice versa. It all depends on the motivation behind the action.

Any samsaric enjoyment, such as the enjoyment of sexual intercourse, can become a shortcut to enlightenment. If we do it with the correct motivation it can be more beneficial to other living beings than living in the vows. But for that kind of higher tantric practice, we need the strongest mental control based on bodhicitta. Without the achievement of bodhicitta, we can't transcend our attachment to samsaric enjoyments and therefore can't turn them into a quick route to enlightenment. Until we have totally renounced the self-cherishing mind and do everything purely for others' benefit, until we have bodhicitta, it's much more beneficial for ourselves and others to live in the vows we can take as a Buddhist.

Once we have attained the higher realizations of a bodhisattva, when we have that degree of power, we can see which actions are more beneficial for others, even ones that go directly against any vows we have taken before we had reached that level. What to an untrained mind would be a strong negative action, such as killing or sexual misconduct, can be far more beneficial than practices such as making offerings, doing prostrations and so forth; it might cause us to attain enlightenment far more quickly. When we transcend the dualistic mind, we experience infinite bliss, a happiness far exceeding any samsaric happiness. The happiness of sexual intercourse is nothing compared to the bliss induced by samadhi. Sexual happiness might seem like an unsurpassable happiness but it is just the suffering of change; it's a temporary pleasure that will become the suffering of pain soon enough.

The yogi's enjoyments may outwardly look samsaric but if they are done to only bring enlightenment, they will be greatly beneficial to all sentient beings. Until we attain bodhicitta, there will always be the flavor of self-cherishing in what we do, but when we have transcended that and have a mind that only cherishes others, we can progress quickly to attain enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings.

Our experience of samsaric pleasures is only negative until we have eliminated the self-cherishing thought. Only with bodhicitta, based on this equilibrium meditation, can we achieve this. Even if our goal isn't enlightenment, we still need bodhicitta. We must subdue the mind, otherwise we will forever suffer from an unsubdued mind, without control. We must purify our past negativities and stop creating new ones. For example, the criminal punished for breaking the law has to vow in front of the judge that they will follow the law.

Riding into Kathmandu on the back of a crazy elephant, we probably won't get there on time and we might be killed if the elephant goes amok and runs through the fields and the forests. If we want to make it to Kathmandu, we must ride a subdued elephant. The mind, like an elephant, must be subdued, cured of its craziness. Then, we can follow the path to Kathmandu as we want.

Guru Shakyamuni Buddha says, [WFGS p. 178]

The father becomes the son in another life, the mother becomes wife, the enemy becomes friend; it always changes. Therefore, there is nothing definite in samsara.

One day when Shakyamuni Buddha's disciple, the arhat Shariputra, was going for alms in the town near a family's home, he looked through the door of the house and with his clairvoyance

saw all this. He saw the father was now a fish that had been caught by the son and was being eaten by the family, while the mother, now a dog, was at the son's feet, chewing the bones of her former husband. Meanwhile, the son was cradling his former hated enemy—now their child—in his arms and beating the dog, his mother, with a stick. When Shariputra saw this, he said, "Eating the father's flesh, beating the mother, cuddling the enemy, samsaric existence is laughable."

This sutra quotation is medicine to cure the problem of attachment. There is no point in killing the enemy, or even every sentient being. We've already done this in countless previous lives and it still hasn't prevented enemies from arising. Killing an enemy only results in our own suffering in the lower realms for eons. Creating any negative karma only makes our own enemy. The problem cannot be solved externally. When we cease being an enemy to ourselves, all other enemies disappear.

The tenth reason is that *the enemy is the object of our practice of patience*. Only through having somebody who harms us can we learn to control our anger. Therefore, there is no such thing as an intrinsic enemy. The one we call an enemy can always help us. They help the practices of patience, of great love, and great compassion.

The eleventh reason is that *the enemy is the cause of all beings' enlightenment*. Without having this body, we can't have any physical happiness. The body comes from our mother's body. Because all sentient beings have been our mother countless times, and because there is not one body that the enemy has never taken, the enemy has been our mother countless times. So, we can reason that all our happiness of past times has come from that enemy.

Even when the current enemy wasn't our mother but was the mother of other beings, we still received happiness from them. Take the example of the present life. Happiness depends on many other beings besides our mother. Clothes, food, housing and so forth are produced by many beings who had to bear great difficulties, especially farmers working on the land, having to kill great numbers of other beings such as insects and worms. The food we eat comes from the sacrifice of these beings.

Consider the work in a handful of rice. Even one rice seed is the result of a previous seed and so on. And each is the result of sentient beings' sufferings. If we could really see how many beings have suffered for that grain of wheat or of rice, we wouldn't feel worthy of eating it. And it's the same with clothes and all other comforts. This is one reason why all sentient beings are kind. As this is the case, how can we enjoy all the comforts of our life without repaying the kindness of all sentient beings? It is so selfish to work for our own peace alone. In our countless previous lives, such pleasures have also depended on other sentient beings.

So the enemy, apart from being our mother, has also been working for our happiness from time without beginning. And as long as we are in samsara, our future happiness also will have to depend on them.

Even the pleasure of a cool breeze depends not only on positive karma but also on the enemy who has cut our body to pieces countless times. The positive karmas that we create are impossible without the teachings of the Buddha showing us right from wrong. Therefore, in the texts it's said that all happiness, all positive karma is an action of the Buddha. All enlightened beings attained enlightenment through following the path, starting with lower realizations of the

perfect human rebirth and then the higher realizations of the equilibrium meditation and bodhicitta. Without depending on the enemy, they couldn't have attained realizations, they couldn't have practiced the six perfections and they couldn't have practiced the equilibrium meditation. Without the realization of the equality of all sentient beings, there is no way to attain bodhicitta, so this relies on the enemy. Also, without the enemy we can't develop great compassion. The enemy has to be the object of these meditations, as does every sentient being.

Therefore, this enemy caused Guru Shakyamuni Buddha and all the infinite buddhas to attain enlightenment. Because of that, and because of the Buddha's enlightenment, we have the chance to study the Dharma and attain enlightenment ourselves. So, this enemy who has cut our body countless times in the past is even more precious than the infinite buddhas.

The root of all happiness is therefore the enemy. If we examine this, we'll see that this is true. Can anybody be more precious than the enemy?

The twelfth reason is that *we must not harm any living being* because enlightenment depends on the development of bodhicitta, which depends on meditating on every sentient being without exception, including the enemy. To live as a bodhisattva, we need the strong will that is able to renounce the body and anything else in order to give the enemy even a little happiness. This is exactly the opposite of our usual reaction. Such understanding is the medicine that sees the extreme importance of the enemy, how they are most precious. It's not enough to only know the words; it must be done by training the mind, through meditation. But meditating on this point of the enemy alone is inadequate; we must gain the other understandings too.

The thirteenth reason is that we can't blame the enemy because when they harm us, *they are under the control of their negative mind*. If we are being verbally or physically abused, before we can let anger overtake us, we should hold onto this point and there will be no harm. This kind of harm is only a concept. Just as we don't get angry at the stick someone uses to beat us because the stick is under the power of that person, so too we shouldn't get angry at the person wielding the stick because they are under the power of their delusions. As Shantideva says,

[6:41–42] If I become angry with the wielder
Although I am actually harmed by the stick,
Then since the perpetrator, too, is secondary, being in turn incited by hatred,
I should be angry with the hatred instead.

Previously, I must have caused similar harm
To other sentient beings.
Therefore, it is right for this harm to be returned
To me, who caused injury to others.

Any situation in which we experience hurt because of a physical or verbal action is our own karmic result, and at this point uncontrolled. We should not create any more negative karma with anger.

The fourteenth reason is *when we harm others with anger, we are harming ourselves with that same anger*. This is something we could see if we had the wisdom.

The fifteenth reason is that *the enemy, as well as every other sentient being, is the object of the Buddha's compassion*. His teaching to us is that we too must have equal compassion for all sentient beings. These are instructions from the perfect guide to enlightenment. Therefore, if we are angry with or hate any other sentient being, who is the object of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's compassion, we are opposing the Buddha. Unless we understand his compassion and strive to also have that compassion, these are only words.

Seeing every being's suffering with his compassion, he wants to release them from suffering right now. Therefore, if we feel anything but compassion for any being, we are in direct opposition to the wish of the Buddha. Even though of course at this stage our compassion can't match his, we must still not oppose him. To do so is also to oppose all the infinite buddhas. Therefore, we must help our enemy out of suffering and help them to reach enlightenment. Any kind of help we give them must have their enlightenment as the ultimate goal.

This doesn't mean we must always follow the enemy's orders. Because of their ignorance, what they would want us to do will probably harm them and us, so we must be skillful. We must help them not to create negative karma. We really need to know the level of their mind so we can most skillfully help them, so that means we must develop our own mind to the highest possible level.

The sixteenth reason is that *the Buddha always considers all sentient beings, even enemies, as more important than himself*. When we consider we are more important than our enemy, we are therefore placing ourselves above the Buddha. That is a truly ignorant mind!

The seventeenth reason is that *all the infinite buddhas are servants to all sentient beings*, including our enemy, so we, who are still ignorant, must also be a servant and never harm any sentient being.

[The eighteenth reason is that *harming the external enemy while not trying to harm the internal enemy*, our own ignorance, is like shooting a friend and not the enemy because we mistake the target. The only real enemy is our self-cherishing thought. That is what we must determine to destroy. The one we call "enemy" is the enemy only of our self-cherishing, therefore to see the enemy as our teacher is to oppose the self-cherishing thought.]

[The nineteenth reason is that *a bodhisattva sees no enemy because of their great realizations*. Even if all the beings of this world should rise up and kill the bodhisattva, they would still feel great compassion for them. The *Guru Puja* says,

The mind that cherishes mothers and places them in bliss
Is the gateway leading to infinite qualities.
Seeing this, I seek your blessings to cherish these transmigratory beings
More than my life, even should they rise up as my enemies. [\[31\]](#)]

[The twentieth reason is that *both friend and enemy are unfindable* when we examine them with our wisdom, the wisdom that seeks the ultimate truth. The concepts of "friend" and "enemy" are merely concepts of the ignorant mind. With the wisdom realizing emptiness, we can see how not a single atom of these can exist.]

To attain realizations, we must depend on meditating to create some positive karma and on purifying our negative karma accumulated since beginningless lifetimes. This can be done by such

means as prostrating, offering, cleaning holy places, confessing past negative actions and praying to Guru Shakyamuni Buddha for realizations. But to attain them, we must have determination. The Buddha said that to meditate without recognizing our own mind is faulty, leading to confusion and suffering at the time of death.

The explanation of these meditations might seem simple, but to think that meditation is easy is very mistaken. However, it's good to find our practice easy, otherwise we tend not to do it. By taking time to attain their realizations, the ancient meditators experienced far fewer difficulties. So should we.

The Seven Techniques of Mahayana Cause and Effect

[WFGS pp. 183–96]

Even if we don't attain realizations, meditating and practicing the seven techniques leaves an impression on the mind and brings us closer to realization of bodhicitta. Then in future human lives when we hear the explanations again, we can understand them more easily and achieve realizations more quickly. We must keep the practice of the equilibrium meditation close to the heart. In order to receive realizations, it's very worthwhile to spend several years or the whole of our life on this; though this varies with the person. Understanding depends on the level of mind and is related to previous karmic impressions from practices in past lives and to the amount of merit.

1. The Kindness of the Mother

How are all sentient beings my mother? When meditating on this point we should visualize our mother, father, enemy and a stranger in front of us surrounded by all sentient beings. All are equal.

Remember, when a relative gives us a gift, we should not be attached; and when we see an enemy, we shouldn't get angry.

Our father has also been our mother in countless previous lives, as have our enemies and strangers.

The Buddha sees everything that exists. The very beginning of our mind, which is the time that sentient beings began to be our mother, doesn't exist. Not even the Buddha can see the beginning of our mind with his omniscient mind. The time our present mother began being our mother has no beginning either.

2. Remembering the Kindness of All Mother Sentient Beings

Whatever happiness we experience, we should always remember that this is due to the kindness of our mother. We can see this is true when we examine everything we have ever done and understand that any happiness is due to causes and conditions coming together. Positive karma

ripening is the cause that allows us to receive our mother's kindness. She is the cooperative condition.

One of the kindnesses of the mother is that she willingly created negative actions in order to help us. Because of that, she has been reborn in the lower realms. This can be the reason for many of the beings suffering in the hell realm. All have been our mother and all have suffered in other realms because of their kindness to us.

While we remain in samsara, we will always have mothers and they will always create negative karma to benefit us, and thus always have to suffer like this. Therefore, the sooner we can be free from samsara, the sooner our mothers will be free from having to create negative karma for us. Looking at it like that, we are being very selfish if we keep being reborn. We might not see this, but the enlightened beings do.

Furthermore, we can also see how selfish it is to work for our own everlasting happiness alone. We must help all these suffering mother sentient beings as they helped us. They remain ignorant of the truth and rely on us.

Such realizations build a strong Mahayana practice. As our determination to only cherish others becomes stronger, we can reach the stage of the higher bodhisattva, where we can make charity of our body for the sake of sentient beings through the development of bodhicitta.

We remember the kindness of the mother, but we must be aware that our father was also our mother, as was the enemy, the stranger and every sentient being. We should consider the difficulties of the mother as a bird, as a dog, and so on, in all sorts of lives.

3. Repaying the Kindness of All Mother Sentient Beings

The limited mind might think to repay a trivial kindness, such as being offered a cup of tea, but it fails to understand that these kind mother sentient beings have been giving us countless cups of tea over countless lives. It's impossible to imagine the debt we owe all sentient beings.

We have not yet repaid them with the realization of the Dharma.

4. Equalizing Oneself with Others

The essential way to practice this meditation is to regard the suffering of other beings exactly as we regard our own and to help the others as if they were us, with no expectations, just as we would help ourselves. To live in this practice, we must completely change our old habits and actions that have controlled us for beginningless lives. Rather than living with self-interest, we must see all sentient beings as equal and equally deserving happiness, and we must work to lead them out of suffering with a sincere, generous mind. This is how the bodhisattva acts, renouncing themselves and being willing to suffer instead of the others. We are nowhere near approximating this. We must really believe that the other's body is our own and feel as if what happens to their body happens to our own. If we don't do this, the other points of the seven points won't come.

The struggle we have is not with others but with our own self-grasping and self-cherishing. Because these are delusions and not integral aspects of the mind, we can lessen and then eliminate them. At present, there feels a great divide between our body and the body of somebody else, but when we have overcome the self-cherishing thought, that divide will disappear and we will feel their body as we feel our own. At present we are well aware of our own pain; why not the pain of others?

Originally our body came from the sperm of our father and the egg of our mother, but we have learned to regard it as our own, thinking, "This is me." Why does such a concept exist strongly and why do we take best care of it? Because this thought has been habitual for beginningless lives. We have had much training in it. We take better care of this body than of our parents' bodies even though our body came from theirs. This concept originally arose due to ignorance. To overcome that ignorance and bring perfect peace to ourselves and others, the practice of exchanging oneself for others is essential. It is an essential bodhisattva practice.

Anytime we need to meditate on all sentient beings, we should just think of how many insects there are on a hill, how many tiny creatures there are in the ocean, how many humans, hungry ghosts, hell beings, gods, demigods and bodhisattvas there are in existence. Then, we should think, "Since beginningless time, of all the sentient beings in the universe, I have been taking most care of myself. In order to attain enlightenment, I must change this old attitude that was careless of others' suffering into the complete opposite. From now on, I must take less care of myself than of other beings. The object of my affection has changed from me to other."

This is regarded as a high spiritual practice that needs great knowledge but has numberless benefits. It brings perfect peace and enlightenment more quickly than the earlier meditation practices. It is the best puja and can stop hindrances to the realizations of the other Mahayana practices, such as realizations of the six perfections. This great holy thought of taking care of others more than ourselves is utterly vital for tantric practice.

The tantric path is such a quick path that can bring enlightenment in one lifetime due to this practice of exchanging oneself for others. This powerful practice is a shortcut to enlightenment. But it depends on how strongly the mind can live in this practice. It's how Milarepa and other Indian and Tibetan yogis attained enlightenment. It's the most powerful way to purify negativity.

This was the instruction given to Lama Tsongkhapa by Manjushri, the buddha of wisdom. Tsongkhapa was given many instructions, especially regarding emptiness. When he was training his mind in these practices in retreat, he created great merit and created further merits by also doing many other purification practices, such as offering the mandala and making prostrations. As he trained in absolute truth, emptiness, and so forth, Manjushri appeared many times to give him a pure view of these realizations. Therefore, Lama Tsongkhapa's views of these subjects are very pure and clear, and to study his teachings on emptiness is the best way to study, never bringing wrong realizations.

Lama Tsongkhapa was told by Manjushri that the tantric path is not quick without living in the practice of exchanging oneself for others. For such a mind, it is unbearable that sentient beings are not enlightened and are suffering for even one second. Without this mind, enlightenment in a lifetime is impossible, even if we were to spend our whole life silently in a cave. Many animals do

that. To follow the tantric path and practice it, we must take more care of others than of ourselves.

Also, any kind of heavy negative karma created, such as killing our parents and so on, can be quickly purified by this practice. Living in this practice can transform a negative action into a positive result. For example, when Guru Shakyamuni Buddha was living as a bodhisattva he took birth into the family of a leading trader who carried jewels by ship from other countries. On the ship one day, of the five hundred businesspeople, Guru Shakyamuni Buddha saw that one of them wanted to kill all the others. If he did that, besides of course harming the five hundred, he would harm himself because of the terrible negative karma he would create. Therefore, the Buddha thought it would be better if he himself suffered for a hundred thousand eons in the hell realm rather than let the other person do it. In killing the would-be killer, he renounced his own happiness for the other's due to his great bodhicitta. But since killing the other person was done with great compassion, the action became a positive one, a method of purification. This action actually lessened the length of time he had to remain in samsara by a million eons. The man he killed was actually saved from far worse suffering, due to Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's great compassion for him and the five hundred threatened people.

At another time, Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, when he was a bodhisattva, was born into a family that made clay pots. He was a celibate, living in the vows. One day, he saw a girl about to commit suicide because of incredible great greed; she was desperate because she couldn't find a man. Due to the greatly compassionate mind that cherished others more than himself, he renounced himself and, without experiencing the pleasures of a worldly life, he spent twelve years living with the girl and her family. Then he left and resumed his celibacy. But due to his pure mind, guiding the girl from suicide and living without samsaric desire, this potentially negative action of breaking the precepts became positive, and the time he would remain in samsara decreased from thirty thousand eons to four thousand.

Maitreya's disciple Asanga spent twelve years in meditation before he saw Maitreya. During this time, he developed the great compassion that one day suddenly purified his obscurations and allowed him to see Maitreya. Then, he went to Maitreya's pure realms for teachings.

Atisha's guru also had to develop great compassion before he saw Chenrezig and he also saw Maitreya. When Atisha purified his delusions, he saw Tara, the female aspect of Buddha, who appears in such form for the benefit of sentient beings. She gave Atisha many instructions, including the instructions that he was also to go to Tibet and give teachings. He did this and purified the corrupted Dharma there. The aspect of the Buddha that we see depends on the karma of the meditator—whichever aspect is the closest is the one we will see. We can then have discussions, ask questions and receive instructions from that buddha. There are infinite aspects of the buddhas.

The principal instruction for curing the suffering of others is to have no expectations. This wonderful teaching of taking care of others more than ourselves was kept close to the heart by Atisha and other great pandits. A most purifying practice, it was secret for a long time. Shantideva received this practice from the buddha of wisdom. It's the purest way to attain bodhicitta, stopping any hindrances and life dangers. It's the best medicine to cure suffering.

Guru Shakyamuni Buddha descended to this world before Maitreya because he attained bodhicitta first. He had such a strong, holy mind, taking care of others more than himself, that while still a bodhisattva he prayed to be born in a bad place amongst ignorant people at an unfortunate time where there was the darkness of no teachings being available. Therefore, he appeared on earth prior to Maitreya to give us the possibility of studying these teachings and purifying our negativity. Understanding the teachings of the meditation course is due to the kindness of his holy mind, taking care of others more than himself, as is finding the purpose of human life.

We should pray for the continued existence of the teachings until samsara ends, since without them there will only be far more unhappiness and suffering. Positive karma brings happiness and we need teachings to know about this. If they don't exist, we can't practice. Even the temporal happiness of a person who knows nothing of the teachings, of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, is the result of the teachings because it depends on the creation of positive karma in previous lives and was done then with knowledge of the teachings. This worldly happiness doesn't come intuitively. Thus, all happiness depends on the teachings.

We should know what a bodhisattva is and understand how they work. We should try to follow them, even though we won't be a bodhisattva in this life. But copying their actions, acting like a bodhisattva, is good training for the mind, helping us develop bodhicitta and bringing us closer and closer to becoming a bodhisattva. It also helps others.

Attaining bodhicitta is a slow process; it depends on the energy and determination we have. Of the ten levels of bodhisattvas, even a low bodhisattva without all realizations can be reborn in any place they want by praying for it. That is, they have a controlled rebirth. For example, the Tibetan race came from a male monkey (a transformation of Chenrezig) and a female cannibal (a transformation of Tara) who had children whose births were samsaric, or uncontrolled.

Appendix: The Eight Mahayana Precepts

The benefits of keeping the eight Mahayana precepts for a day, when taken with a bodhicitta motivation, are infinite. Mahayana ordination includes these eight precepts.

Ordination means protecting the mind from negativity and from the problems or suffering that arise from the negative mind.

Taking ordination is the best way to purify the negativity that has already been created. Generally, ordination is an action that counters the eight worldly dharmas, which are the cause of suffering. Ordination causes them to not arise or helps to destroy those that exist. It protects the mind from greed, hatred and ignorance and diminishes what is already there.

Plans and actions are required in the war against suffering. Essentially, ordination means avoiding negative actions. So, it's important to *know the benefits*, or else it is harder to keep precepts, and to *know the shortcomings of the negative mind*. These two understandings make us more interested and build the courage to keep the precepts.

The Benefits of Taking Vows

As the earth is the basis of this world, ordination is the basis of all the realizations of meditation, Dharma practice and so forth. Keeping the vows correctly is a quick way out of ignorance, and it's an action with immediate benefits. This means that because we live in a discipline that avoids having a negative mind, we avoid the suffering results. That means not being born in the three lower realms.

It's the best perfume, a natural smell that is incomparable to any chemical perfume. Ordination is the best water to cool us from the heat of suffering. A great Indian pandit said, "Keeping the eight precepts for a day gives greater benefit than one hundred years of charity." Following the precepts correctly is a serious action, it fights the negative mind. We can do many things insincerely, such as saying prayers or reciting mantras, but without a pure motivation, that can't become a positive action.

The benefits are greater than making offerings to the Buddha, who said in the *King of Concentration Sutra*,

One may, with cleansed mind,
Honor ten million buddhas with food, drink,
With parasols, banners, and rows of lamps
For as many eons as there are grains of sand in the Ganges;

But whoever, at a time when the holy Dharma is utterly destroyed,
When the Sugata's teachings will end,
Practices a single training day and night
Will receive much greater merit. [\[32\]](#)

Taking precepts is the cause of becoming a disciple of Maitreya in the future. He said, “Any being following the eight precepts and listening to the Dharma of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha will be reborn as one of those who surround me.” In this situation, in such a perfect human rebirth, we get the greatest chance to hear the teachings and attain enlightenment.

The Eight Mahayana Precepts

The eight Mahayana precepts are eight vows we keep for twenty-four hours. We gain so much benefit keeping these precepts for a day, so much so that in ancient times in India the kings made a law that everyone had to take these precepts. By keeping them, we can become an arhat, a bodhisattva or an enlightened being. At the very least they help us to attain another perfect human rebirth.

Keeping vows means protecting ourselves from the negative mind arising and therefore from creating negative actions. It's one of the quickest ways to progress spiritually. It's like the fuel of a jet plane, like the spring of a watch. Keeping these vows is the source that brings liberation and enlightenment much more quickly. With them, we can definitely be born in an upper realm where we will meet the Dharma again; it's the quickest way to escape from samsara. We think such goals are too distant, but they can be very close. In only three or seven years, we can attain liberation or even enlightenment, or we can achieve the state of an arhat. There is no need to build a rocket or special machines; this is purely a mental activity. It all depends on our present mind and the strength of our determination.

Besides causing all these realizations and future lifetimes of happiness, keeping our vows purely also brings peace. Whenever we make a vow and are willing to keep it, because we are trying our best not to let a negative mind arise, we immediately have peace. The purpose of the vows is to overcome the negative mind. It's our job alone to take and keep any of the vows within Buddhism and the strength of that responsibility helps hold us from creating any negativity. It stops all the suffering results of each negative action that would have to be experienced in the three lower realms.

We always experience a happy result, such as being born in the human realm again and only meeting conditions conducive to developing our mind. Besides stopping all future dangers, it also purifies all the negative karmas that have been created in past previous lives until now. This is the best purification, because just as the mind is beginningless, our past negative karmas are numberless. Just creating a few positive karmas is not enough to overcome all the negative karmas on our mindstream; they are too great. Keeping our vows, on the other hand, can really purify all our past negative karmas.

If we keep the eight Mahayana precepts all day, for that whole twenty-four-hour period we are continuously purifying our mind and ceasing our negative actions. When the cause of suffering is eliminated, we feel perfect peace. The cessation of the whole of samsara can't happen immediately; it must come gradually, but these vows give us a taste of liberation. Without this discipline, we continually create further suffering.

This is the best way to bring peace. All the sufferings of sentient beings until now are due to not having subdued the mind. When we sincerely determine to keep the vows we have taken, we are

truly practicing the Dharma in the purest way. Our mind is utterly uninvolved with the eight worldly dharmas. Our motivation is the complete opposite of the normal one of chasing samsaric pleasures and being attached to samsaric comfort. And so, this is a very powerful practice, having many benefits.

There are eight Mahayana precepts we take for twenty-four hours:

- to refrain from killing
- to refrain from stealing
- to refrain from lying
- to refrain from sexual contact
- to refrain from taking intoxicants
- to refrain from eating at an inappropriate time
- to refrain from sitting on high seats or beds
- to refrain from singing, dancing, and wearing perfumes and jewelry

Because we create so much negative karma through lack of awareness, the precepts are a discipline to make us conscious of our actions. They make the mind a spy, spying on itself.

The first vow is to *refrain from killing*. This means not killing not just human beings but all sentient beings with any of the three poisonous minds of greed, hatred or ignorance. For an action of killing to be complete, we need four factors: the *object* of the act, the one we intend to kill; the *motivation* to kill; the *act* itself of killing; and the *conclusion*, which for killing means the other being dies before we do.

Not killing causes us to have a longer life in the future and be without sickness. We look very strong. It also becomes the cause to receive the Buddha's holy vajra body, which is indestructible. If we break this precept we will have a short life. For example, we may die in the womb or have many diseases.

Then, there is the vow to *refrain from stealing*. We don't steal anything of value possessed by another being. Neither do we take anything with force. We don't borrow something for a long time, hoping the owner will forget about it.

The four factors of stealing are the object, something possessed by somebody else; the motivation, we want to take it without permission; the act itself, taking the object, and the conclusion, we feel the object is ours.

Not stealing results in becoming wealthy, enjoying the happiness of future lives and not having others take our possessions. When we become enlightened, it results in the appearance of thousand-spoked wheels on our hands and long webbed fingers. If we break this precept, even in this life our own things get stolen.

The vow to *refrain from lying* results in not being lied to or betrayed in the future, and in our words being trusted by others. Some people's words are so powerful that those who hear them naturally trust in what they say. Similarly, by not lying our speech is more powerful and our prayers are

more successful, helping ourselves and others. On the other hand, when we lie or gossip, our speech loses all power and we are not respected.

This precept applies to lying ourselves or getting somebody else to lie for us. It can also be a physical action such as a shrug for no or avoiding answering a question and thereby lying by implication, such as if someone asks if we are out of samsara and we don't reply, implying that we are. Another person has to hear the speech or see the action to complete the lie. The worst thing is to lie to holy beings or to our parents.

We take vows to help all sentient beings. Although this is such vital work, we can easily feel that other jobs like being a government minister are more important, because we get money for them. But generally, these jobs are not done to take care of all sentient beings, to lead them from ignorance. Such people as kings, ministers, and so forth are supposed to take care of the population of a country, but if we check up their motivation, almost always self-interest is the motivation. It's done for reputation, only to gain worldly comfort. Ambition drives them higher and higher until they try to obtain the top job, the president or prime minister or whatever. They have no thought of helping others.

The goal of those jobs is limited. Taking vows is the highest and most beneficial job we can do, but it's dangerous, because when we vow not to lie, we are vowing to all sentient beings and the consequences are terrible if we break that vow.

When we take vows, we become like a helper for the enlightened beings. We are not just taking care of our family, which only involves our own comfort and is so limited, but taking care of all sentient beings. In an ordinary job, only our worldly needs are fulfilled, maybe our reputation or the acquisition of wealth, which may be useful until death, but this has nothing to do with other future lives or liberation or enlightenment.

I'm not complaining. This is just how it is with a samsaric life, doing work without a Dharma motivation. With an unsubdued mind, not actively trying to overcome our delusions, we just end up continually circling around in samsara forever, one suffering body after another.

But by taking vows, we can attain perfect peace, the cessation of suffering, and we can attain enlightenment. If we only have very limited understanding, we might even feel practicing the Dharma is suffering. How we feel about the Dharma is something created by our own mind, not by other people. This job is the most important job on this earth but it's something we must choose to do.

Refraining from sexual contact includes masturbation and so forth. The object is the other person we want to have sex with; the motivation is the wish; the act is the actual act of sexual intercourse; and the conclusion is sexual happiness, having achieved orgasm. This is what we refrain from.

The worst things are sexual intercourse in a holy place, where there are gurus or holy objects, intercourse with a female arhat, a celibate person or our mother, or oral and anal intercourse. This precept includes anything that causes loss of sperm. Nocturnal emission in dreams and so forth is not exactly the same as if it is done consciously, but we still create some negative karma.

Whereas discharging our seed causes the mind to become unclear, the senses to lose power and the body to lose color, the benefits of keeping this vow are that in many future lifetimes our body will always be beautiful with a fine complexion and body color and with perfect organs. This is the natural result of following morality and patience.

Generally, the action that is the opposite of keeping the vow brings the opposite negative result, taking us further from enlightenment and keeping us longer in samsara. Even if we are near to attaining a realization, by breaking the vow we lose that realization and continue to suffer, mostly in the three lower realms. This is the basic complete result of breaking any of the vows.

It's the same thing for sexual intercourse. If we have taken the vow to abstain from sex for a day, breaking it takes us further from enlightenment and makes us more attached to worldly happiness. Even if we manage to be reborn in one of the upper realms, because we are still attached to worldly happiness, it gets stronger and in future lifetimes our body will be ugly, with imperfect organs. Also, in the present lifetime, this attachment to worldly pleasure can be the greatest disturbance if we want to meditate. We may think that by doing the action a great deal we will get bored with it and we will eventually stop, but that is a big mistake. We have been doing this action for an unimaginable length of time and we only get more habituated to it.

Actually, this action is not new. There is not one sentient being that we have not had sexual intercourse with countless times—our current friends, enemies, the animals and insects we can see and so forth. It's something with no beginning, something we should have become bored with a long time ago, but because of our limited mind, we have forgotten all this and so we think this is a new thing. It's because of the habit, because of the attachment that arises from the fundamental ignorance, that this action has not stopped.

This is one of the greatest disturbances to meditation. With the attachment to worldly happiness, we can't overcome the agitated mind, always distracted, seeking out thoughts of other people and places. Memories always flood the mind, causing us to have unclear visualizations, even making us forget entirely the object of our meditation. Besides this, it's one of the greatest disturbances to opening the chakras and gaining control over the winds. It's like pouring water into a cloth that can't retain it. From the Mahayana tantric yoga practice point of view sexual intercourse is the worst disturbance.

The vow to *refrain from taking intoxicants* includes hallucinogenic plants and drugs. This doesn't include tea, which can stimulate the mind. Keeping the vow results in clear wisdom and senses and improves our consciousness.

If we don't abstain from taking intoxicants, unless we have a Dharma reason, we become less and less able to remember and our wisdom dulls. In future lifetimes, we easily forget things due to this cause.

There are different kinds of intoxicants. Smoking wasn't included in the original proscription but only because there wasn't smoking in the Buddha's day. The story of tobacco is that about a hundred years after Guru Shakyamuni Buddha passed away, an evil female spirit dropped her monthly period on the ground and it became a plant. As it became a plant, the spirit prayed that it would be enjoyed by all people in the future and that the smoke produced would destroy hundreds of the cities of the gods above the earth and hundreds of the cities of the nagas under

the earth. She also prayed that with the smoke from this plant there would always be fighting and sicknesses, famines and hells in the world. The plant spread all over the country due to her prayer.

When Padmasambhava was invited by the king of Tibet to subdue the negative minds of the evil interferers and make them protectors of the people, he put all of them under his control except one. The rest were under his order, accepting his demand that they no longer disturb other beings, knowing that if they ever tried to cause harm, terrible things would happen due to the power of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. But the one spirit who had escaped secretly told them, "Brothers, don't worry. I shall transform the tobacco in China and other places into a cigarette."

There are all kinds of poisons that cause a person to have hallucinations but tobacco is recognized as the worst one. This evil spirit said that it would grow all over Tibet and that most people would enjoy it, and that due to that the five negative minds would arise, causing the Tibetans to practice the ten nonvirtues. As the smoke went down to the earth, it would destroy so many cities of the nagas, stopping the rains from coming and causing so much famine and sickness. As the smoke went up into the sky, it would destroy many cities of the gods, causing inauspicious stars to appear, like showers of comets, bringing very inauspicious times of fighting and disaster.

Anyone who smokes loses their pure vitality. The inability of the channels to operate properly causes the body to become weak and the chakras to remain closed. It also causes the four hundred and twenty-four sicknesses to happen. Without purification or practicing the Dharma, smoking causes us to be born in the three lower realms. Even those meditators who try to practice the Dharma for a hundred eons can't reach enlightenment. Also, when the body has died and passes into the intermediate state, it can't be guided. It's also very easy for a smoker to get sick because the other spirits can easily give interference; they find an easier place to enter. Generally, it's very difficult for the smoker's virtuous actions to create benefit.

This also generally refers to wine and alcohol. In Tibet they have a powder like yeast they use to make beer. This creates many problems. Maybe you have seen this with drunk Tibetans in Kathmandu.

When we take the vow to *refrain from eating at an inappropriate time*, which for the eight Mahayana precepts means only one meal taken before noon and fasting other than that until the following sunrise, the result is always enjoying delicious and abundant food, obtained without much effort. All forty of our teeth will be very white and our sense of taste will be excellent, bringing us great happiness even if we eat kaka.

The reason for fasting is that Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's followers existed on one meal a day in order to better practice the Dharma. Because eating more than is necessary only develops greed, fasting in this way can help stop that and decrease the negative mind. Also, eating at night makes it difficult to meditate in the evening. Having one meal a day only enhances our Dharma practice.

When we take the eight Mahayana precepts, there are certain foods that we can't eat, such as meat, eggs, garlic, onions and radishes, which are called black foods, because they inhibit the psychic energy channels from properly functioning. Eggs easily arouse the negative mind, disturbing the mind because it's the seed of a chicken. If we eat a lot of radish, our bodily smell

becomes worse. The element is bad and causes gas in the stomach; it also affects the power of the body.

If we are only concerned about the body, it's OK, but for a person practicing the Dharma and following the precepts, the reason is to keep the body clean without attachment. These foods destroy the power of the body and the power of the mind, making us sleepy, unconscious, and so on. If we don't follow any vows, we probably won't even notice this, but when we have been keeping the vows for a while and then stop, eating black foods again, it's very noticeable. The body feels so heavy and sluggish in comparison.

White foods include curd, fruit, vegetables, wheat, rice, milk, cheese and butter. We can eat these.

Food can be taken before twelve noon but there can only be one meal, taken for the purpose of taking care of life to practice Dharma. This precept is mainly for the purpose of not letting attachment arise and not creating negative karma through attachment.

But if we are genuinely sick, we won't be able to practice the Dharma, so we should first recover and then take the precepts. Taking food in the evening may be more beneficial depending on our inner realization, how much control we have of our mind, such as having the achievement of bodhicitta and a fully renounced mind. But at the moment, as long as we don't have these realizations, it's better to take precepts, although it's not always definite. If we follow our desire to eat, it disturbs our meditation practice and there is no discipline. And if the stomach is full, it's difficult to digest the meditation because of the food.

The next precept is to *refrain from sitting on high seats or beds*. The bed should be no higher than the length of the forearm plus the hand. The bed shouldn't be expensive, such as those made of jewels and so forth, or covered with animal skins such as tiger skins, because the skins have a bad energy due to the animal's mind—proud, angry and so on.

Keeping this precept prevents us from acquiring an expensive bed and becoming attached to it. When we sit on a high seat, there is the tendency to feel pride if we have any negative mind at all. The benefit of keeping this precept is that in future lives we will have respect and admiration. And any bed we sleep on will be comfortable.

The final precept is to *refrain from singing, dancing and wearing perfumes and jewelry*. Keeping this precept makes our mind and body well subdued. Because these actions are usually done with great attachment, we are kept from creating negative actions and have more time to study the Dharma. When we are enlightened, we attain the thirty-two holy signs and eighty holy exemplifications of a Buddha's holy body.

The result of avoiding perfumes and jewelry is that our body always naturally smells good and we attain a beautiful shape in the future. This helps the minds of other people.

We should always keep in mind that we have taken the precepts for the purpose of getting ourselves and all sentient beings out of suffering. Whenever we see people, animals and insects, we should recall that we are keeping precepts for their benefit.

In general, keeping vows with the Hinayana, such as the pratimoksha vows, is a way of subduing our mind by refraining from doing anything for temporary samsaric happiness. The vows within the Mahayana, such as the eight Mahayana precepts, are stricter and are done so that we can best benefit all sentient beings. There are also tantric vows, taken within the context of a tantric initiation. These are very subtle vows and difficult to keep. Within a tantric practice, we utilize enjoyment on the path, something impossible outside of tantra. Because of that, the tantric vows are very strict. Unless we can keep the Hinayana vows, the other two levels of vows are impossible.

These eight Mahayana precepts must be taken before dawn, when there is just a little light in the sky. We take them from one dawn until the next.

Taking the Precepts

Avoiding samsara is your decision. Be here at five a.m. Visualize Guru Shakyamuni Buddha giving the precepts, otherwise it doesn't make sense.

Keeping the precepts for a day helps our mind become that much more holy. Purity comes from a cause, from subduing the mind. Just as we must thoroughly clean our filthy body if we have fallen into a quagmire, we must thoroughly clean our mind because it is drowning in the quagmire of negativity. The real cleanliness, from a Dharma point of view, is the pure mind. The best way of being clean is to clean the mind first and then clean the body.

For beginningless lifetimes, we have been constantly cleaning the body but not the mind. If we consider this, we will probably get quite bored with having a physical body. What good has it done us without also cleaning the mind? Since beginningless time, we have taken one body after another. Just as somebody eating the same food every day will probably get fed up with it, it's time we got fed up with continuing this never-changing cycle of birth and death. But unless we can subdue the mind, we will forever be trapped in samsara, forever creating negative karma and experiencing suffering. We have this body. We have washed it countless times in this life and have washed all our other bodies in previous lives. As long as we fail to clean the mind, cleaning the body will have no end. For endless future lives, so many impure things will keep coming from this body because it is a samsaric body, under the control of karma and delusions.

Actually, our life consists of two contradictory things. We regularly clean the outside, the body, while we constantly make the inside, the mind, dirty. It's a mistake doing those two things to our mind and body. Due to this, the action of cleaning the outside hasn't yet finished. The wise person's way of cleaning is to clean the mind, which is the main creator. By cleaning the mind, the body is cleaned. This stops the continuous arising of dirt and so stops the continual action of washing. We no longer have to keep busy at this activity and no longer incur the expense of washing the body. Furthermore, it stops old age, sickness, pain and many other problems that arise due to the physical body.

At present, from birth to death all our actions are only to take care of the body. By cleaning the mind, we clean all the external impurities that appear to our view. Those impurities are not one with the body; they are separate. That's how the great yogis have the power to enjoy filthy things, to taste and enjoy kaka in complete safety, in the nature of infinite transcendental happiness,

which only increases their realizations and brings them closer to enlightenment. That is the power of their realizations. First, they cleaned their mind so that with pure view all things appeared as pure, bringing them transcendental bliss. The same thing is definitely possible for us. If we can clean our mind, all objects would appear pure, transcendental. The term “yogi” means one who can taste everything in a pure way.

The purpose of taking and keeping the precepts is to totally clean the mind and the suffering body, to clean even the objects of the senses and stop the suffering that may arise between subject and object. This is the way we bring about enlightenment. This is how the Buddha can enjoy all offerings at the same level, no matter what it is: delicious food or dirty food. Both are enjoyed by the Buddha in the same way, in the nature of transcendental happiness. This non-dualistic feeling can only arise from the power of first cleaning the mind, and the best way to do this is through subduing the mind, which comes through taking precepts.

Some people think that reading books and gaining some intellectual knowledge is all that's needed, but it's not that easy. Without cleaning the mind, while the mind remains dirty, impure, there will only be suffering. Trying to enjoy the senses with an unsubdued mind still covered with dirt is a mistake; it's a very foolish action. Unless we follow a mental discipline that cleanses the mind, we can never enjoy it in that way. That's like standing in a market and expecting food to be given to us.

Following the precepts is the best ornament. The Buddha doesn't need material ornaments, which only create problems. The Buddha has the greatest beauty but is completely free of possessions, and yet we depend on so many materialistic ornaments. The power of the Buddha's beauty comes from following the precepts. Our lack of power comes from attachment to materialistic ornaments, which cause so much worry. We are terrified that others will steal them or miserable that we still don't have enough. Precious ornaments can endanger our life—we can even be killed for them—but the precepts can never cause risk to life.

The vows are the best water, where we can keep cool and out of suffering. They are the best weapon for protection because they don't even cause one tiny danger to us or to others. Material weapons, guns, and so forth cause so much danger to ourselves and to others. The best protection is living in the vows because it protects us from all samsaric suffering and from other living beings, too.

The person whose mind is living in this ordination is the richest person in the most absolute way. The person with numberless jewels not living in ordination is externally rich and internally poor, so there is always confusion and suffering in the mind. They are like this because their riches can never continue. They might be externally rich but from a Dharma point of view they are not recognized as rich. The really rich person has inner riches that continue. The Buddha, who is internally rich, is the richest person.

As we have taken the precepts, when we see other people and animals, we should continuously remember how most sentient beings are suffering terribly. It's important to remember that we are keeping the precepts for each of them. We are working to follow the discipline not only for ourselves but also for numberless other sentient beings. We can always feel so pleased and at peace because we are working for all sentient beings to attain enlightenment and to release them and ourselves from suffering. This is the most worthwhile job.

In *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* Shantideva says,

[1:21–22] If even the thought to relieve
Living creatures of merely a headache
Is a beneficial intention
Endowed with infinite goodness,

Then what need is there to mention
The wish to dispel their inconceivable misery,
Wishing every single one of them
To realize boundless good qualities?

Guru Shakyamuni Buddha said, “Dying is easier than breaking precepts.” Which is more dangerous, dying or breaking our precepts? Dying doesn’t always cause us to be reborn in the worst suffering of the hell realm and experience the suffering for eons, but breaking our precepts can often cause much suffering in the hell realm. Therefore, keeping our precepts is more important than our life.

We should take care of the precepts as we do our own life, but that requires great determination, which can only come through a thorough understanding of karma. Only having a little understanding can only bring a tiny belief in the efficacy of the Dharma. If we break the precepts, we must know that even the enjoyment of this life will not occur, nor will we succeed in our worldly life. We will experience confusion with ourselves and others, as well as much sickness and troubles. It also always results in rebirth in the three lower realms, especially the hell realm.

Since we make the vow to Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, to break it is like telling a lie to Guru Shakyamuni Buddha and the infinite buddhas and bodhisattvas we visualized at the time of taking the precepts. Therefore, we have to beware of breaking our precepts, as fearful of breaking them as touching a fire.

An example of the result of breaking precepts is the king of the nagas who went to the teachings of the Buddha in another form. He was born a naga because he didn’t correctly follow the teachings of the Buddha. When Guru Shakyamuni Buddha was teaching, the naga came transformed, disguised as a very rich person having much material power, with many jewels and possessions. Guru Shakyamuni Buddha immediately recognized him, saying, “You criticized the teachings of the past buddha called the Buddha of Infinite Light, the protector of life. Would you criticize my teachings again? Take your natural form and listen to the Dharma.” So, the next day the naga came in the form of his own body, a snake, with a tree one *pak tse* [33] in length growing from his head. When the wind blew the tree moved, shaking the roots growing in his brain, causing so much suffering. His neck was in front of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha but his tail was down in the village a long way away. He was a very long snake.

The followers who were all taking the teachings were afraid of the snake and began to try to escape, but Guru Shakyamuni Buddha said, “Don’t be afraid, the one who was here yesterday in the form of a rich man is this snake.” Then he explained to them how this had happened. The naga had been a fully ordained monk in the time of the previous Buddha’s teaching. One day he was going around this tree called Eladama when he was bumped by the branch of the tree. He

suddenly became very angry and broke off the branch. Since the tree belonged to the Sangha he had broken this precept, and this karma caused him to be born as a naga in the form of a snake. The tree he got angry with then grew from his head, causing him much suffering. This was his own karma as a result of getting angry and breaking the precepts. There are so many stories told by Guru Shakyamuni Buddha that explain karmas and their results. Often you can see many types of animals, strange shapes and so forth. This is all due to karma.

The Benefits of Keeping the Precepts

Even if we can't do a high spiritual practice or attain high realizations during our life, we can easily keep the eight Mahayana precepts for a day. They are so few compared to the thirty-six or two hundred and fifty-three vows of a monk. If we keep them purely either continuously or alternately, it's so helpful in protecting us from suffering at the time of death or from rebirth in the three lower realms. This is due to the power of the precepts.

Just as earth is the foundation for the many people, other beings, houses, trees and so on that are situated on it, so the precepts are fundamental to all wisdom and happiness, the foundation of the practice. The precepts have the power to close the door of rebirth in the three lower realms and can bring an upper rebirth for those born in samsara. They can cause us to meet the virtuous friend again in our future life so we can receive teachings and attain realizations. Keeping the precepts creates many more benefits than creating charity and also more than making the usual offerings. Following the precepts is the best offering to the enlightened beings. Also, when we take precepts, we will be reborn as a follower of Maitreya, the future Buddha. When this eon has ended, he will appear and establish the Dharma in the next eon. He will do the same twelve deeds as Guru Shakyamuni Buddha: descend from Tushita, be born as a prince, marry, renounce his life, attain enlightenment at Bodhgaya and teach and so on.

How does taking precepts close the doors to rebirth in the three lower realms and bring rebirth in the upper three? In a previous time in the world there was a buddha called Kum Rinpoche Gingwa who traveled widely in Dharma circles and had many people as his followers. As a result of following these eight precepts, they had many upper realm rebirths—some were reborn gods, some became lower arhats, some bodhisattvas and some received enlightenment.

Eons ago, another buddha, Sangye Sheshi, also led so many other sentient beings in the eight precepts and they also achieved the same goals—the lowest ones were born in the three upper realms. After some time, when the teachings were close to degeneration, there was a Dharma king who promoted the benefits of keeping the precepts but there was no actual prayer. He invited many Sangha and brahmins and asked them to try and find the text that contained that subject recorded by Buddha. He told them if they could not find it, he would punish them. They were afraid but could not find or remember the text. However, there was an old lady who recalled that when she was a young girl, her father, who used to take the eight precepts, had put the text in a crack in an old pillar in their house. They searched the house and found it, read the text, read the benefits, and brought and offered it to the king. He was very pleased and gave them all, including the old lady, many gifts. Then he made a law that the whole population should follow the precepts on certain days of the month, the full moon day, the eighth and the fifteenth days. Due to the power of all those people keeping the precepts, even the gods were pleased because more people would go to their realm with better rebirths. There were also benefits in that country. Rain

came at the right season, fighting and epidemics ceased, crops grew well and there were no famines. Those people also had the door to the three lower realms closed.

Keeping precepts now is different than in ancient times. Those times were fortunate but the times now are degenerate. We are experiencing the degeneration of living beings' fortunes (the positive mind degenerating), of positive actions, of the teachings—there are many degenerations. In such poor times as these, with so many problems, with people unhappy, with so much fighting, so much famine, with fewer and fewer people creating positive karma, fewer people having realizations, in these times, keeping the precepts now has so many benefits, more than before, even for a day. Then, it was easier to follow precepts but now it's getting more and more difficult.

How does keeping precepts create more benefits than making offerings to the Buddha? The benefit of keeping precepts at these times is greater than that which arises from making offerings to the number of enlightened beings equal to the grains of sand in the River Ganges. Each of these precepts also brings the result of the holy signs of his body and his great knowledge.

Notes

1. During the course, Rinpoche worked from a “work copy” of his first Dharma book, *Wish-fulfilling Golden Sun*. The page numbers here and afterwards refer to the sections in the 2016 re-edit of the book, available at LamaYeshe.com. ([return](#))
2. Quoted in *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hands*, p. 247. This is commonly attributed to a quote in Prajnavarman’s *Commentary to the Collection of Uplifting Sayings*, although this is not verified. (See also *Liberation in Our Hands*, vol. 1, p. 11, fn. 11.) ([return](#))
3. The four practices used to purify nonvirtuous imprints on the mindstream. They are: 1) the *power of the object*, taking refuge in the Three Rare Sublime Ones and generating bodhicitta; 2) the *power of regret*, feeling deep regret for the negativity committed; 3) the *power of resolve*, determining not to repeat that negativity; and 4) the *power of remedy*, a practice such as Vajrasattva that effectively acts as an antidote to the negativity. ([return](#))
4. V. 30. From *Hundred Verses of Advice of Padampa Sangye*. Taken from tibetbuddhistencyclopedia.com. ([return](#))
5. Taken from *FPMT Essential Prayer Book*, p. 24. *Vaidurya* was previously translated as lapis lazuli but Lama Zopa Rinpoche suggested this was not an exact translation. ([return](#))
6. Taken from *FPMT Essential Prayer Book*, pp. 57–58. ([return](#))
7. Taken from *FPMT Essential Prayer Book*, p. 76. ([return](#))
8. Taken from *FPMT Essential Prayer Book*, p. 28. (Here, it is called *Offering the Objects of the Three Poisonous Minds*.) ([return](#))
9. See *A Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life* (LTWA). The chapter and verse numbers precede each quote. ([return](#))
10. Rechungpa (1083–1161) was also known as Dorje Drakpa; the “moon-like” disciple of Milarepa. Mara is the personification of interferences, both internal and external. ([return](#))
11. Taken from *How to Practice Dharma*, p. 181. ([return](#))
12. Taken from *FPMT Essential Prayer Book*, p. 111. ([return](#))
13. Taken from *FPMT Essential Prayer Book*, p. 117. ([return](#))
14. V. 21. Taken from Hopkins’ *Nagarjuna’s Precious Garland*, p. 96. ([return](#))
15. Taken from *FPMT Essential Prayer Book*, p. 112. ([return](#))
16. Taken from *Lamrim Chenmo*, vol. 1, p. 151. ([return](#))
17. Taken from *Lamrim Chenmo*, vol. 1, p. 147. ([return](#))
18. V. 4. Taken from *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*. ([return](#))
19. V. 55. Taken from *Nagarjuna’s Letter to a Friend*, p. 49. Translated by the Padmakara Translation Group. ([return](#))

20. V. 317. Taken from Hopkins' *Nagarjuna's Precious Garland*, p. 136. ([return](#))

21. A small hand drum used in tantric practice. ([return](#))

22. Taken from Lama Zopa Rinpoche and Kathleen McDonald's *Wholesome Fear*, p. 51. ([return](#))

23. The term actually used by Rinpoche (or those who transcribed the teaching) is "astral body," a term often used by the hippie students who helped Rinpoche with his English. ([return](#))

24. In 1973, Rinpoche generally called the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha the "Three Jewels" or less frequently the "Triple Gem." Because he has more recently shown a strong preference to the Three Rare Sublime Ones as a more literal translation of *kon chog sum* I have used this term here. ([return](#))

25. Taken from *FPMT Essential Prayer Book*, p. 111. ([return](#))

26. Taken from *How to Practice Dharma*, p. 82. ([return](#))

27. The city now called Varanasi, in northern India. ([return](#))

28. V. 169. See Hopkins' *Nagarjuna's Precious Garland*, p. 117. ([return](#))

29. In this course, the students transcribing Rinpoche have used greed more often than attachment, presumably because this was Rinpoche's term at that time (1973). Since then, attachment has become more commonly used, so I have changed it here where it seems this is the intended term. ([return](#))

30. Quoted in *Steps on the Path to Enlightenment*, vol. 2, p. 346. ([return](#))

31. V. 92. Taken from *Lama Chöpa Jorcho*, pp. 76–77. ([return](#))

32. Taken from *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, pp. 490–91. ([return](#))

33. This is estimated as the distance the sound of a conch reaches. ([return](#))

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About Lama Zopa Rinpoche

Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche (1945–2023) was born in Thangme, Nepal and was recognized as the reincarnation of the Lawudo Lama at the age of three. From 1956 to 1959 Rinpoche studied at Domo Monastery in Tibet. He then fled Chinese oppression in Tibet and continued his study and practice in Tibetan refugee camps in India, where he met Lama Yeshe (1935–84), who became his principal teacher. In 1969 the Lamas began teaching Buddhism to Westerners at their Kopan Monastery, Kathmandu, Nepal and in 1974 they began traveling the world to spread the Dharma. The FPMT, an international Buddhist organization, was founded by the Lamas in 1975. As spiritual director of an extensive network of centers, projects and services for almost forty years, Rinpoche's philanthropic work has seen a proliferation of charitable projects and beneficial activities worldwide. On April 13, 2023, Lama Zopa Rinpoche showed the aspect of passing away in Kathmandu, Nepal, after returning from a trip to Tsum Valley. More details of Rinpoche's life and work may be found on the LYWA and FPMT websites.

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The **LAMA YESHE WISDOM ARCHIVE (LYWA)** is the collected works of Lama Thubten Yeshe (1935–84) and Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche (1945–2023). Rinpoche founded the ARCHIVE in 1996.

The Lamas began teaching at Kopan Monastery, Nepal, in 1970. Since then, their teachings have been recorded and transcribed. At present the Archive contains recordings from over 2,100 teaching events encompassing approximately 18,000 hours of audio, almost 16,000 transcripts, hundreds of video recordings and over 75,000 images. Many recordings, mostly teachings by Lama Zopa Rinpoche, remain to be transcribed, and most of those transcripts have been neither checked nor edited.

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The Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT) is an international organization of Buddhist meditation, study and retreat centers, both urban and rural, monasteries, nunneries, publishing houses, healing centers and other related activities founded in 1975 by Lama Thubten Yeshe and Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche. At present, there are more than 130 FPMT centers, projects and services in over thirty countries worldwide.

The FPMT has been established to facilitate the study and practice of Mahayana Buddhism in general and the Tibetan Gelug tradition, founded in the fifteenth century by the great scholar, yogi and saint, Lama Je Tsongkhapa, in particular.

The FPMT website also offers teachings by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Lama Yeshe, Lama Zopa Rinpoche and many other highly respected teachers in the tradition, details about the FPMT's educational programs, an online learning center, a link to the excellent FPMT shop, and links to other interesting Buddhist and Tibetan pages. You can also find links to FPMT centers all over the world, especially those in your area, where you will find details of their programs.

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The Buddhadharma is the true source of happiness for all sentient beings. Books like this show you how to put the teachings into practice and integrate them into your life, whereby you get the happiness you seek. Therefore, anything containing Dharma teachings, the names of your teachers or holy images is more precious than other material objects and should be treated with respect. To avoid creating the karma of not meeting the Dharma again in future lives, please do not put books (or other holy objects) on the floor or underneath other stuff, step over or sit upon them, or use them for mundane purposes such as propping up wobbly chairs or tables. They should be kept in a clean, high place, separate from worldly writings, and wrapped in cloth when being carried around. These are but a few considerations.

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Dedication

Through the merit created by preparing, reading, thinking about and sharing this book with others, may all teachers of the Dharma live long and healthy lives, may the Dharma spread throughout the infinite reaches of space, and may all sentient beings quickly attain enlightenment.

In whichever realm, country, area or place this book may be, may there be no war, drought, famine, disease, injury, disharmony or unhappiness, may there be only great prosperity, may everything needed be easily obtained, and may all be guided by only perfectly qualified Dharma teachers, enjoy the happiness of Dharma, have love and compassion for all sentient beings, and only benefit and never harm each other.

