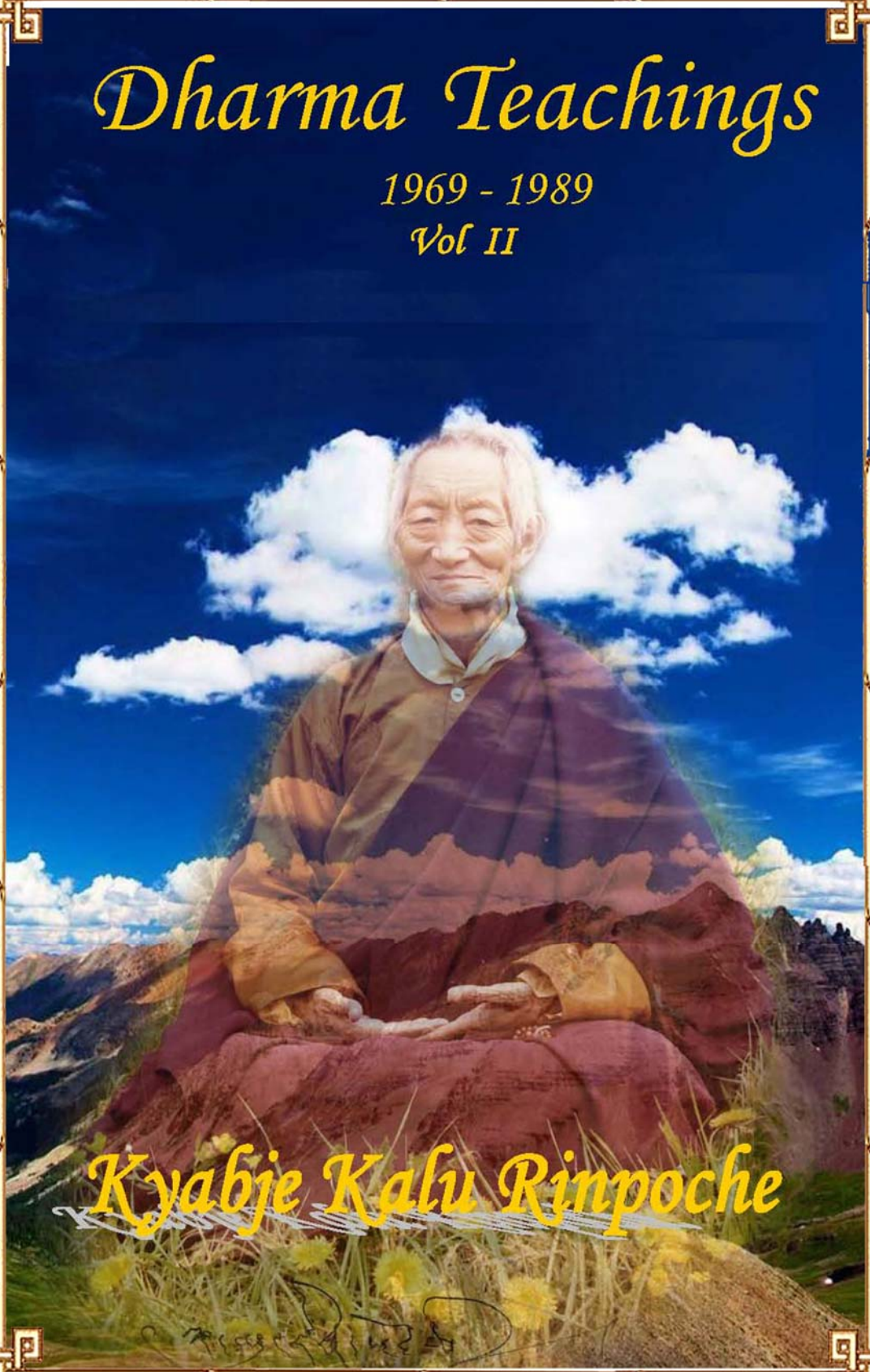
Dharma Teachings

1969 - 1989

Vol II



Kyabje Kalu Rinpoche

Dharma Teachings

Given by Kyabje Kalu Rinpoche

Between 1969 and 1989

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Oral Teachings

by the

Very Venerable Kalu Rinpoche

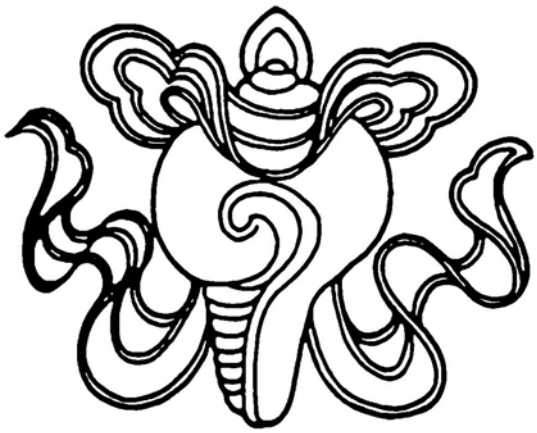
Foreword by His Eminence the XIIth Tai Situpa

Compiled, edited and annotated
by Elizabeth Selandia, O.M.D., C.A.

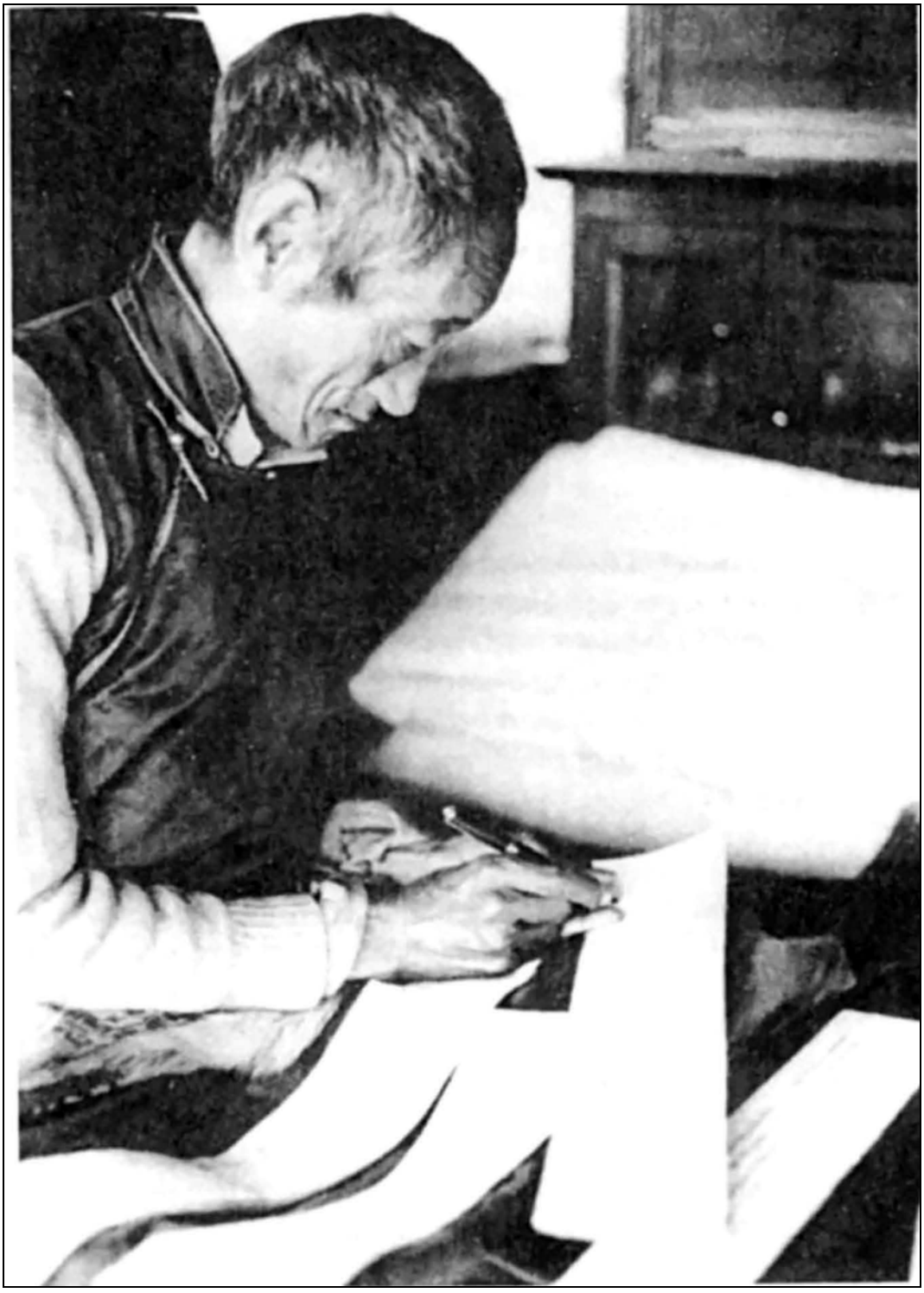




Dorje Chang, surrounded by the founding fathers of the Karma Kagyu lineage: Tilopa, Naropa, Marpa Lotsawa, Milarepa, Gampopa, and Dusum Khyenpa (the first Gyalwa Karmapa) (Traditional Tibetan painting with cloth framing by unknown artist, mid-20th century.)



Dedicated to the impeccable perpetuation
of the glorious Kagyu lineage
and to the success of its leaders and followers
in accomplishing their commitment
to bring all sentient beings
to the state of enlightened awareness.



Kalu Rinpoche copying a text while seated in his room at the monastery in Sonada, India, in early 1970 (Photography by J.G. Sherab Ebin)



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From Bokar Tulku Rinpoche, Lama Gyaltsen, and Khenpo Lodro Donyo, 15 May 1989

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As translated from the illustrated letter of H.E. Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche

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Afterword & Prayer for the Continuation of the Kagyu Tradition

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His Eminence the Tai Situpa Rinpoche

The Very Venerable Kalu Rinpoche is one of the most outstanding teachers of Tibetan Buddhism whose meditative experience and profound wisdom are appreciated by all that come in contact with him. It is most appropriate, at this time, that the opportunity to have his valuable Dharma teachings translated into English makes the study of the Buddha Dharma more accessible to a larger group of practitioners and students of religion and philosophy.

I am very pleased for the time and effort that has been dedicated to this work. I would like to thank the editors and publisher for the many hours of time they have spent to bring about this book.

May this teaching bring happiness to all of those who will read and study this work. With my humble and sincere dedication for your well-being.

XIIth TAI SITUPA

PREFACE

It was supposed to be the summertime, but, far away from my California homeland, I was weathering the force of the monsoon, feeling swallowed by dense cloud banks that wholly neglected my presence inside them and that retreated only sometimes in the chill of nights made darker by the distant lightning. The promise of precious initiations into vajrayana had brought me to the monastery known as Samdup Tarjee Choling, which is located in the Himalayas, an hour's drive down the hill from Darjeeling. Gathered together were more than a thousand followers of Tibetan Buddhism who had come to receive the transmission of Rinchen Terdzod, one of the five great treasuries compiled by Jamgon Kongtrul the Great. Together we were to spend six months packed into a shrine room decorated with beautiful murals of deities important to the practice of vajrayana, watching the lineage holders of the Karma Kagyu receive the initiations directly from the vajra master, Kalu Rinpoche. We all waited the moment that these tulkus (recognized reincarnated teachers and mahasiddhas) would wind their way through the crowd to bestow the blessing of the day's teachings upon all present.

As I watched Kalu Rinpoche seated for hours on end while he recited the teachings and initiations contained in the collection, I found it easy to admire him for his unending diligence in perpetuation of the Dharma. Truly, in all my travels in search of sacred and occult teachings, I have never met another person quite like him. His tireless efforts to bring benefit to all beings made a strong impression upon me. Needless to say, I hold him in the highest regard, for it is he who has demonstrated to me my potential for enlightenment in this precious human existence.

It was here that a desire arose within me to enable Kalu Rinpoche's teachings to reach a wider range of audiences by offering my skills in communication so that readers might better explore his teachings. And it was here that his quiet whispers and gentle voice encouraged me to firmly believe that faith in the vajrayana, devotion to a genuine lineage, and confidence in the teachings of the Buddha would eventually enlighten anyone who desired such solace.

Drawn from many sources of notes and lectures, from many different translators' versions of Rinpoche's teachings, and from many impromptu talks he has given, this book is an attempt to give a thorough presentation of Kalu Rinpoche's teachings on the important topics of the four veils of obscuration, the bodhisattva vows, the practice of Chenrezig, and the vehicles known as the three yanas. This work has been compiled topic by topic, and, as a result, no one translator is wholly responsible for any one chapter. Further, the chapters are compiled from teachings given over a period of more than two decades, from the late sixties (before Rinpoche had begun his world travels) through the mid-eighties, and the locations where these teachings were given are so widespread as to be worldwide.

The material has been arranged so as to allow the reader to gain a gradual insight into the intricacies of approach and structure of the Tibetan tradition of

Buddhadharma. It is, therefore, suggested that the chapters be read in sequence. The first three chapters contain many foundational thoughts, and while these might seem somewhat perplexing to the beginner, they are required for a thorough understanding of the material in the chapters that follow.

It should be noted that Rinpoche tended to repeat various ideas, and to continually refer to ideas already presented by giving brief recollection to those thoughts. At first I considered that these continual references detracted from a smooth flowing, polished style of communication. But, as the process of compilation continued, I came to realize that many of the repeated explanations were not simply rhetorical; rather, they were being given from varying viewpoints. The best example of this insight is reflected in Rinpoche's varying descriptive renditions of the qualities of the nature of mind, which he discusses at varying lengths in three different chapters. Each discussion is flavored with one of the concepts inherent to the differing approaches of the hinayana, the mahayana, and the vajrayana, and, thus, each rendition gives a fresh insight into the most perplexing problem facing the sentient being longing for liberation, namely, what is the true nature of mind?

To assist the reader unfamiliar with Tibetan Buddhism, the technical terms, foreign language terms, and religious terminology are indicated by italics upon first occurrence of mention. Diacritic marking of Sanskrit words is found only in the glossary. Further details specific to the glossary will be found at the beginning of Appendix C.

Permission was granted by His Eminence the XIIth Tai Situpa for the inclusion of a detailed explanation of the visualization and prayers contained in the sadhana of the Yidam Chenrezig. Since devotional practice to this yidam was publicly encouraged by Lord Buddha in the Surangama Sutra, the yidam practice is considered to be immediately employable by anyone interested, with no special permission or initiation required. Additionally, a prayer for the swift rebirth of Kalu Rinpoche written by His Eminence Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche has been included in this section in response to his personal request to me. Details concerning the sadhana and the commentary will be found at the beginning of Appendix B.

The direct concern and special interest of His Eminence the XIIth Tai Situ in seeing this book reach the public has been most beneficial. Devoting some of his valuable time to the several questions this work presented, he has willingly and openly helped this project reach maturation, indulging the many perplexing considerations of syntax, contracts, and karmic consequences. His blessing to this endeavor is gratefully and most respectfully acknowledged.

Several devoted students with an interest in seeing Rinpoche's teachings reach many peoples and nations have diligently applied themselves to the mastery of either the English language (being Tibetan speaking originally) or the Tibetan language (being of other linguistic backgrounds), and without their translations, Rinpoche's words, while pleasant in their sound, would have no meaning to populations lacking the understanding of the Tibetan language. The indebtedness to all who have assisted in the task of

translation during Rinpoche's world tours is incalculable. Specifically, in relation to this collection of teachings, Richard Barron (Chokyi Nyima), J.G. Sherab Ebin, and Jeremy Morrell are gratefully acknowledged for their remarkable translations of Rinpoche's wisdom.

To assure that this compilation of Kalu Rinpoche's teachings has remained true to the Buddhadharma, I requested a few of the original translators (both those who were responsible for a major share of the translation represented in this work and those who have frequently translated for Rinpoche over many years) to read the final draft to make sure that the transmission was not lost. Their extensive training in Dharma helped confirm that this effort of compilation of translations has made the step from Tibetan into English with accuracy.

Still, it was with a joyous relief in seeing a goal accomplished that I received the following secretarial note accompanying the foreword written by His Eminence Tai Situpa Rinpoche. "I am writing to you on behalf of His Eminence Tai Situpa. Thank you for your letter and the main body of the text for Gently Whispered by Kalu Rinpoche. Tai Situ Rinpoche was very pleased with all of your efforts and is most happy to send you his foreword for the book. It is composed in the form of a open letter to all those who read the book and has his seal impressed upon it. He would like his foreword to appear as you receive it on his stationery. Rinpoche sends you his blessings and best wishes."

It is with gratitude that the following are acknowledged for personally giving me access to various materials additional to my notes for use in this edited and annotated compilation of Rinpoche's teachings: the translators Richard Barron (Chokyi Nyima), J.G. Sherab Ebin, and Jeremy Morrell; Tsering Lhamo, Tsewang Jurmay, and Tinley Drupa. Additional thanks are due to Phillip Shaw and Michael Dergosits of Limbach & Limbach of San Francisco for their generous help.

Several people close to the Dharma read the draft and made valuable suggestions according to their expertise. Diane Thygersen added to the contextual perspectives necessary for communicating the Dharma "in a strange land," Wendy Jester provided invaluable support and editorial assistance/ and J. G. Sherab Ebin contributed greatly with his ability to communicate in Buddhist Dharma languages as well as his understanding of the historical circumstances in which Buddhism came to both Tibet and the Western world.

Conerning the help received in the physical manifestation of this book,]. G. Sherab Ebin has also made several additional and invaluable contributions. His photographs, taken both recently and many years ago when he lived with Rinpoche in India, have added greatly to the visual format. His understanding of computer installation and software implementation has enabled me to move from archaic parchment copying to illuminating state of the art productions. And, most importantly, his pure devotion to Rinpoche has definitely served as a continual inspiration to me in making Gently Whispered become a reality. Michael Ingerman has generously provided the much needed technical support, and Peter Ingerman performed the painstaking

task of sorting the text and editing that data to provide the framework upon which the index is based. Many others have been of great personal assistance in questions of grammar, approach, and proper phrasing of polite respect, etc. Rather than my naming some and not others, may they all be gratefully acknowledged for their contribution that has enabled this teaching to reach the general public.

Undoubtedly, this work would not have been possible had it not been for the dauntless efforts of the Very Venerable Kalu Rinpoche. In his bringing the Dharma to the West, in his opening the door of compassionate, loving kindness to all those unaware of the true nature of the mind, and in his lending encouragement to those countless sentient beings anywhere and everywhere along his path, he continually demonstrated the bodhisattva ideal. His willingness to bring immediate and lasting benefit to all with whom he comes in contact, both near and far, has definitely demonstrated his interest in the welfare of sentient beings as a continual and genuine concern.

When I started this book in an effort to help bring this truly wonderful teacher's insights into enlightened awareness to a widening audience, Kalu Rinpoche was still pursuing an active schedule that included world travel to administer to the several centers and three-year retreats he had founded. Some years later, while I was still deeply working on the final draft, I learned from His Eminence the XIIth Tai Situpa that Kalu Rinpoche had passed quietly into his final meditation late one May afternoon in 1989 at his Sonada monastery. Two weeks later I received a personal letter from Kalu Rinpoche's secretary in which he requested that I share with everyone an enclosed open letter concerning the events surrounding Rinpoche's passing. That open letter, plus a letter from His Eminence the XIIth Tai Situpa in which he writes concerning Kalu Rinpoche's passing, form Appendix A.

It is my prayer that the effort that has been put into making this book possible has its truest reward in your own personal realization of Kalu Rinpoche's fondest aspiration: "enlightenment for all sentient beings, our mothers, limitless as space."

Elizabeth Selandia, O.M.D., C.A.

San Simeon

16 March 1992

INTRODUCTION

I am very happy to be able to share with you the Buddha's teachings known as Dharma. Your interest in these teachings is a positive sign of the power of a great accumulation of virtuous activity gathered in previous lifetimes coming to fruition at this moment. This is very wonderful, and my greetings to you! I am an old man of eighty-four years now, the first fifty-two of which were spent completely isolated from the rest of the world in the land of Tibet. Several of those years I spent studying and practicing the Dharma and principles of vajrayana in solitary retreat. Since I have left Tibet, I have traveled worldwide to bring the truth of these teachings to all sentient beings ready and capable of receiving them. I welcome you and pray that a continuous rain of benefit comes to you for taking the time and effort to understand that upon which I am discoursing.

For many centuries, the Dharma of the Buddha has been preserved in the snowy, mountainous land of Tibet, where all the pith instructions, traditions of practice, and resultant realizations were widespread. Although this Dharma is often called Tibetan Buddhism, it is not originally Tibetan, for it comes directly from the Lord Buddha Shakyamuni. Once a noble prince, Lord Shakyamuni became the historical Buddha of our time when he attained enlightenment in the place called Bodh-Gaya in north-central India. Through his activities during his lifetime and his teachings during the historical occasions of turning the wheel of Dharma, all the vast array of Dharma teachings (numbering eighty-four thousand collections in all) came into existence. This Dharma was originally widespread in the land of India and was later faithfully translated into the Tibetan language by erudite scholars who had endured great hardship to gain these teachings. These translators thus allowed the Dharma to survive in the impenetrable mountains of Tibet long after Buddhism was all but destroyed in the Indian subcontinent.

By virtue of the power and blessings of this faithfully preserved tradition of Buddhadharma in Tibet, a great number of practitioners have become realized saints and siddhas. They are said to be so numerous that they equal the number of stars in the sky. The efforts and practice that brought realization of the true nature of the mind has allowed this tradition, which is quite profound, to become very advanced.

In Tibet, the teachings of the Dharma include five disciplines, known as the five great branches of learning. These branches incorporate the very important and extensive studies of medicine, astrology, and art, which were brought together as a single unified doctrine. Thus, in our tradition, the basic spiritual teachings of the Buddha also have the enrichment of these other approaches. The branches of learning to which I refer are known as the outer branches of learning, and the many Tibetan traditions present different formats of these outer forms. The basic Dharma taught by the Buddha comprises the inner branch of learning. Within these five great branches of learning are subdivisions called the five lesser subdivisions, which incorporate the traditions of astrology, debate, poetry composition, language,

linguistics, and philosophy. Thus, there are ten branches, both the greater and the lesser, which form the whole of Buddhadharma as taught in the Tibetan tradition. Both the inner and outer form comprise what is commonly referred to as Tibetan Buddhism.

While in the West, I have noticed Westerners who are very educated and developed in their own particular academic traditions. I feel that many outer traditions with which I have become acquainted are quite similar, either in content or approach, to those taught in the traditions of the five lesser branches of learning in Buddhadharma. In the great libraries and universities of this modern world, several different philosophical discourses are available that are identical in many points with the Buddha's doctrine, and I often feel that these are the same, as though the Buddha himself had taught them.

Buddhadharma is now establishing itself in the West and a process of integration and adaptation has begun. Similar processes of adaptation were made centuries ago in several Asian countries. While traveling, I have observed the practice of Buddhadharma in a number of countries, such as Japan, Thailand, Burma, Sri Lanka, and so on. Each of these Buddhist societies has emphasized and focused on specific aspects of the Buddhadharma, aspects which have become very developed and which are widely practiced within their countries. For example, in Japan the Buddhist tradition relies heavily upon the Prajna Paramita Sutra, which teaches the nature of emptiness. The Japanese have developed their practice along that perspective of approach. In China and Taiwan, Buddhism has focused on the pure land sutras, which inspire devotion and reverence to Buddha Amitabha. Although the characters or letters of Japanese and Chinese texts appear somewhat different from Tibetan, I can see from the practice and application of their meaning that, regardless of the language used, the teachings are identical.

Time and time again, I have seen that all the different Dharmas that were preserved in Tibet have appeared in different forms throughout the world. I have observed that, in particular, the Christian and Islamic traditions [of charity] have developed one whole aspect of Buddhadharma and put this widely into practice. I see how wonderful it is that the Buddhadharma has spread throughout the world in many different ways, with various aspects of it being understood and developed through practice, whether it is called Buddhadharma or not. I have great faith in all these traditions and regard this as the flourishing of Buddhadharma.

Those of you who have a great interest and enthusiasm for learning the nature of Dharma and who are trying to understand its meaning by practicing meditation and visualization techniques are definitely doing so because of past karmic endeavors. The result of your previous lifetimes' practice of the ten virtuous actions has created a very powerful development of positive karmic trends, as evidenced by both your presently having a precious human existence and your interest in Dharma. This is a theme I will return to many times throughout my discourse, as the fruition of these positive trends and habitual patterns that you established in previous lifetimes is indeed very wonderful. In the same way as the waters of the world flow into rivers which

flow into the great oceans, all the teachings of the Buddha were widely spread throughout India, yet they were preserved in whole in the land of the old sea, Tibet. Thus, Buddhists who were so fortunate as to study and practice in Tibet were able to practice the entire doctrine, the whole sea of Buddha's teachings, without having to be limited to any one particular aspect. Therefore, you who are interested in following the practice as taught by the Tibetan lamas will be able to understand the entire meaning of the Buddhadharma. By bringing the entire meaning of Buddhadharma into your practice, you will be able to attain your goal of realizing complete liberation from samsaric suffering very quickly.

Kalu Rinpoche
Los Angeles
29 December 1988

1
First Refletions

Introduction to the Nature of the Mind

Three kinds of mentally projected phenomena are constantly experienced by sentient beings because they believe that these projections are real. One projection is quite familiar. It is called the *fully ripened body*, or *fully ripened corporeal existence,* referring not only to the physical form, but also to the whole world in which sentient beings take rebirth. This world of corporeal existence, which is experienced as a whole environment (with landscape, mountains, etc.), is called fully ripened because it is the ripening of karmic accumulation that gives rise to such an experience.

Another projection is that which is perceived as the dreamer within the dream. During the dream, one believes one has a body that actually experiences the various episodes conceptualized while in the dream state. This dream body is the result of the constant and endless tendency of believing in a self. In believing, "I am" and in constantly clinging to external appearance as being something other than self, one clings to duality. The dream body, or the body of habitual tendency, is but a second type of mental manifestation.

Third, there is the mental body that arises after death. One's familiar form, or body of karmic fruition, is composed of five elements, which at the time of death, dissolve into one another. Finally, the residue of this dissolution again dissolves into a base consciousness which then falls into a kind of oblivion where there is no cognition. This state is like a very thick, heavy sleep, which usually lasts about three days, after which the consciousness re-arises and immediately projects a vast array of illusory images.

These mental projections have a haunting similarity to the way one is in one's dream and waking states. Such projections are, however, very different in that the appearances occur instantaneously and will arise and disappear immediately and very rapidly. Additionally, there is the tendency of the disembodied being that is experiencing this display to believe that it is something real. This, of course, furthers the habitual clinging to a duality of self and other, which complicates the after-death experience. Because the mind is caught into a misbelieve of self and other during these illusory, bewildering appearances, such non-recognition causes the experience of a great deal of fear and suffering.

All three bodies are continually manifesting in samsara because of this misconception; in the death bardo, or the interval (bardo) between dying and being reborn, this habitual misconception eventually compels one to experience rebirth again. However, bardo appearances, just like corporeal and dream appearances, are completely illusory. They have no foundation in

absolute reality. It is this tendency of clinging to self and other that is inferred when the mental body is mentioned.

To liberate themselves from these delusions of misguided projection that are the source of suffering, the Lord Buddha Shakyamuni and many other realized beings have recognized the true nature of mind as having the quality of empty, unimpeded clarity. All sentient beings, without exception, have this same mind. This itself is the seed of buddhahood, the actual buddha nature that is inherent in all sentient beings. However, the ignorance of clinging to a self has obscured this inherent nature, for by clinging to a self, one necessarily defines an other, and therefore one clings to duality. This duality results in the obscuration of emotional reactions and the obscuration of karmic accumulation. This clinging, and these resultant obscurations, is the difference between samsaric existence and enlightened awareness.

According to the teachings of the Lord Buddha, the obscurations that keep us from true liberation are considered to be four in number. First, in the same way as one is unaware of one's facial image without a reflective surface demonstrating it, so the mind also does not see itself and is thus fundamentally ignorant in that it is not directly aware of its own nature. Second, through this ignorance, the mind develops habitual tendencies of dualistic relativeness of a self and an other. Third, unaware in its ignorance and force of habits while confronted by these dualistic projections, the reaction of the mind is that of emotional affliction, producing bewilderment, aversion, and/or attachment. Fourth, this emotional confusion produces accumulative karmic results that manifest in physical, verbal, and mental reactions which, in turn, further the karmic consequences of ignorance.

Despite its having become deluded, this same mind has yet another quality. In its empty, clear, and *unimpeded awareness,* it has a *primordial (or base) wisdom.* This primordial wisdom, and the primordial consciousness, are indivisibly mixed together, resulting in the state of sentient beings. Yet, occasionally, in just the same way that the weather produces openings in a thickly clouded sky allowing shafts of sunlight to shine forth, the primordial wisdom (or buddha nature) will somehow shine through the veil of ignorance. At that moment, no matter on what level of existence, sentient beings will experience some kind of feeling of compassion, of faith, or of some altruistic motive. This feeling motivates sentient beings to perform virtuous acts. Such virtuous actions will cause a higher rebirth, which will allow for more opportunity with which to mature Buddhadharma.

All of you who are coming in contact with this discourse have accumulated a great deal of positive karmic trends throughout many previous lifetimes. In these lifetimes, you have definitely developed faith in the *Three Jewels*—Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. You previously established a connection that is ripening in this lifetime. It is evident that this is true because you are someone who is naturally inclined to acts of virtue and you have an interest in the Dharma. This is a very great attainment. That is what is meant by the *precious human existence*, which is a special type of human existence that has a number of specific conditions. It is extremely difficult to obtain, due to the propensity of the ignorant to cling to ignorance. Thus, by doing that which continues to increase your virtuous accumulation, you can continue to attain

a precious human existence and to experience rebirth in higher states of existence, which encourage the flourishing of the Dharma. With such an opportunity, you can liberate yourself from the ocean of samsaric suffering and place yourself in the state of buddhahood. Now that you have this golden opportunity, it would be a shame to waste it or to lose it!

The opportunity of attaining a precious human existence is quite rare. It is often compared to the incalculable chance that a blind sea tortoise, which rises to the surface once every hundred years, would be snared by a single golden yoke afloat on an ocean as vast as space. You might wonder how it is possible for beings in the lower realms to attain a precious human existence when it is not possible for them to understand the Dharma. As well, you might wonder how it is they can ever escape from these lower realms. Since they cannot hear the teachings and are thus unable to put them into practice to free themselves, how is it they are not stuck there forever? I will develop this topic for fuller understanding in a later chapter, but for now I will give a brief answer. Even though sentient beings experience the lower realms as hell denizens, hungry ghosts, and animals, all of which lack the capabilities of understanding the meaning of the Dharma, they can form a connection with the sound of spoken Dharma and with the visible forms of Buddhadharma. These demonstrations of its truth will eventually lead to a rebirth in a higher state of existence in the human realm. Also, the mind of those experiencing the lower realms might feel a kind of virtuous impulse which, at some later stage, will ripen into rebirth in the human realm. Then, as a human being, it is possible to acquire the merit that will allow a rebirth in a precious human existence.

It is therefore possible that you can bring great benefit to all sentient beings through your prayers and good actions. You can be of direct benefit by having contact with beings in the animal realms, especially those that have close contact with the human realm, and you can help these beings progress to a higher rebirth. For example, if you were to explain the Dharma to an animal, or even to groups of animals, the blessing of your action would result in their experiencing a rebirth in a higher realm at some future time, although at the time of your explanation, they would have no understanding of what you had said. You can also speed up their progress by showing them a form or image of the Buddhadharma, or by reciting the sound of sacred mantra into their ear. And, of course, by doing these virtuous actions you increase your own positive karmic accumulation which helps assure you of future precious human existences.

There is a wonderful and simple illustration recorded in the sutras. Before the era of our historical Buddha, Lord Shakyamuni, there was that of the third Buddha of the present kalpa, namely, Buddha Kashyapa. In that epic of time past, there was a shrine, or a stupa, which is considered sacred to the Buddhist tradition in that it has many special symbolic meanings. On a leaf hanging from a branch of a tree growing near this stupa were seven insects. During a strong gust of wind, the leaf broke loose and sailed through the air, taking the seven insects with it. As the wind carried the leaf and the insects around the stupa several times, the insects performed the highly meritorious

action of circumambulation of a holy place. By this karmic connection, the seven insects were reborn in a celestial realm in their next lifetime.

Yet another example from times past is that of a land tortoise who enjoyed drying off in the sun after a morning of wallowing in the mud of the shore hidden in the shade by the tall tree. The tortoise's sunning spot was on the opposite side of the nearby stupa, which had a crack in its base. Longing for the warmth of the sun, the land tortoise walked daily to his sunning spot, using the stupa as his landmark to guide him there. As his eyesight was not the best, the landmark would all too soon become the stumbling block, causing the tortoise to rub his mud laiden body against the stupa's base. Over time, this caused the mud he had carried to fill in this crack. By the virtue of such a positive karmic action, the land tortoise was reborn in one of the gods' realms. These are not contrived tales to delight an audience; these were taught by the Buddha and were recorded in the Buddhist sutras.

All sentient beings have body, speech, and mind. And, although we think of them all as being important, body and speech are like servants of the mind. Continuing the thought further, they are wholly the manifestations of the mind. Therefore, knowing the nature of the mind is important. Let me take a moment to illustrate how the speech and the body are like servants of the mind. If the mind has a wish to go, the body will move; if the mind has a wish to remain, the body will be still. If the mind has the wish to communicate pleasantly, the speech will convey pleasant sounds; if the mind has the wish to communicate unpleasantly, the speech will reflect this.

In order to benefit all sentient beings, the Lord Buddha Shakyamuni taught the great vastness of the Dharma which is extremely profound. It is said that his reason for doing this was solely to enable sentient beings to realize the nature of mind. Hence the entire corpus of Dharma teachings, numbering eighty-four thousand collections, was given essentially to benefit the mind.

I would now like to clarify what is meant by nature of the mind with an illustration based upon your own experience in a meditative setting. To begin with, completely abandon any preoccupation with things past and any preoccupation with things yet to come. Rest the mind without any distraction, for just a few moments, allowing clarity to become the mind's most apparent quality. Now in this clarity, call to mind cities that are not too far away and not too close (such as New York or Los Angeles), and actually see them with your mind. Were the mind something substantial, something real and existent with the quality of non-interdependence, then, before the mind could visualize a distant city, it would have to cross many mountains, rivers, plains, and so forth. However, because the mind is emptiness — insubstantial and interdependent — it is able to call to mind a distant city (like New York) without any arduous effort.

Now, taking our example of these cities further, try calling to mind the vision of New York and Los Angeles simultaneously. If the mind was substantial, something tangible, and self-existent, then in order to see both places the mind would need to cover the distance between New York and Los Angeles, which is many hours by airplane, many months by walking. Fortunately, the

mind's insubstantial nature (which is emptiness) allows us to be able to see New York City and Los Angeles in the same instant.

Continuing further in this illustration, consider that the entire sky, or the whole of space, is infinite. Now, let the mind become vast like space. Completely embrace the whole of space, completely fill the whole of space. Let it be so vast. The ability to mix the mind indivisibly with space is also due to the mind's essential nature of emptiness. Emptiness means being completely devoid of any descriptive characteristics, such as size, shape, color, or location. The sky is completely vast, having no limit; and space, like sky, has no boundaries, no periphery, and no limit. Mind, itself, can experience itself as being inseparable and indistinguishable from space itself. This awareness is recognizable during meditation.

However, who recognized this awareness? What is this awareness? What size does it have? What color is it? What can you say about it? Take a moment to consider this. Consider that if formlessness or emptiness itself were the mind, then we would conclude that the whole of space, or the emptiness of this room, or wherever any emptiness existed, would be mind. This is not the case because the emptiness, which is mind, also has clarity. The very ability of being able to call to mind the view of New York or Los Angeles, or/whatever, demonstrates this aspect of clarity. Were there no such clarity or luminosity, it would be equivalent to the complete absence of sun, moon, stars, or any kind of light. This, however, is not our situation; our experience of emptiness demonstrates luminosity and clarity.

Were emptiness and luminosity (or clarity) the mind, then, when the sun is shining in the sky, this empty space and light of the sun would be mind. But this is not our experience, because not only does the mind demonstrate emptiness and luminosity, it also has awareness, or consciousness. This awareness is demonstrated in the ability to recognize that when you call New York to mind, you know, "This is New York City." This actual recognition is awareness, or consciousness. Furthermore, this awareness is the same awareness that is able to determine that the mind is empty and has clarity. This fusion of emptiness, clarity, and awareness is what is meant by mind, what has been termed mind.

Although the indivisibility of these three qualities of mind has been variously labeled mind, consciousness, awareness, and intellect, whatever name is given, mind is nevertheless the union of emptiness, clarity, and awareness. This is the mind that experiences pleasure; this is the mind that experiences pain. It is the mind that gives rise to thought and notices thought. It is the mind that experiences all phenomenal existence. There is nothing other than that. The Lord Buddha taught that, from beginningless time, sentient beings have taken innumerable, uncountable rebirths, and it is this emptiness, clarity, and awareness that has taken these rebirths, time after time. This is undoubtedly true.

Until the realization of enlightenment, in which the mind's true nature is recognized, this emptiness, clarity, and awareness will continue to take rebirth. There is no need to have any doubt that the mind is insubstantial in its empty, clear awareness. This truth can clearly be illustrated. Consider, for

instance, when a child is conceived, nobody actually sees this emptiness, clarity, and unimpededness enter the womb. There is no way that the mother or father can say that a mind of such-and-such a shape or size or substance just entered the womb and has now come into being. There is no form to be seen or measured to demonstrate that a mind has entered the womb at that time.

Right now we all have mind, but we cannot find it. We cannot say that our mind has a particular shape or any particular size or some particular location. The reason we cannot find it and/or define it in this manner is because it simply does not have any characteristics of shape or size, etc. Likewise, when an individual dies, no one actually sees the mind leave the dead person's body. No matter how many people, whether in the hundreds, thousands, or millions, examine a dying or dead person with microscopes, telescopes, or whatever instruments, they are unable to see anything leaving the body. They cannot say that the corpse's mind has gone in any specific direction, neither "up there" nor "out here." This is because the mind is devoid of any form. The fact that nobody can see what another person is thinking is evidence, in and of itself, that the mind is empty. This evening we have a large gathering of people. The lights are on and everybody present can see very clearly. In this room everybody is thinking a great deal and, although there is a vast array of mental discursiveness, nobody can see anybody else's discursive thought.

This non-seeing of the mind's true nature occurs because the mind has no form, no shape, etc.; also, non-recognition occurs as a result of the obscuration of ignorance. Such non-recognition causes one to constantly take rebirth, time and time again. The Lord Buddha has said that because of the non-recognition, sentient beings not only do not recognize the mind's true nature, they also do not perceive the law of karma (the law of cause and effect) and they continue to create and accumulate karmic causes for future rebirths without being aware in any way of the effects of their actions.

If you recognize that mind is emptiness, clarity, and unobstructed awareness, then you should recognize that the you that performs an action, that accumulates karma through action, is emptiness, clarity, and unobstructed awareness; and the you that experiences some consequence as a result of that action is also emptiness, clarity, and unobstructed awareness. Additionally, the way that cause is carried to effect is also by means of the empty, clear, and unobstructed awareness. If you can see that, and fully understand that, you will attain the state of buddhahood. In that state, you will be completely free from any further karmic fruition, as buddhahood is completely beyond any further reaping of past action. And, this freedom is still emptiness, clarity, and unobstructed awareness.

The nature of karma and the true nature of the mind are essentially the same. However, what is recognized and experienced by sentient beings is the karmic cause and effect of ignorance, while what is experienced by a buddha, who has completely gone beyond the cause and effect of action, has no karmic fruition. This is why enlightenment is called true liberation.

One characteristic of sentient existence is that the veil of ignorance limits the experience of sentient beings to the samsaric realm then being experienced. As a result, there are many who may believe that there is no such thing as a hell realm experience. Many think that it is impossible that such a realm of suffering exists. Further, this disbelief carries over and becomes an unbelief in the existence of the hungry ghost realm or the gods' realms. People tend to believe only in the human and animal realms because everything they can see is of those realms. However, to exemplify the limits of this perception, let us consider not only the teachings of the Lord Buddha, but also those of such teachers as the third Gyalwa Karmapa, who repeatedly emphasized the illusory nature of all appearance and all the realms. Let us consider the situation of the dream. While dreaming, one conjures up all kinds of seemingly real experiences, and one can seemingly experience a great deal of happiness and/or suffering. All the various emotions and experiences of the dream appear to be real. Yet, although one believes the experience to be something completely real and existent during the dream, it is obvious that this belief is delusional. As insubstantial, arising mental projections, dreams have no reality whatsoever. One recognizes this when one awakens from the dream.

Compare this example of the dream to the perception of the six realms of samsara. Sentient beings continually experience one or more of these realms, rebirth after rebirth. Not all of these realms appear to the five human senses, yet this does not validate their lack of existence. In one sense they do exist, in that these are the realms in which the deluded nature of the mind reincarnates. Bound by the ignorance of delusion, sentient beings experience these realms, in one lifetime after another, believing their illusory experience to be real. However great the delusion of sentient beings, this does not ultimately substantiate these realms to be anything more than mere mental projections. From the viewpoint of absolute reality, the six realms of samsara are completely without independent reality.

In a very poetic verse, the Buddha Shakyamuni questioned who made all the hot iron pavement, with its incessant flames and burning fire, in the hell realm. Was there any blacksmith who made that iron pavement? Was there any store of wood that caused the continuous fire? No, it is caused by karmic fruition, by the individual karmic accumulation, which results from misconceived clinging to the illusion of self and other as being substantial. If we are to avoid the suffering of continual reincarnation, we must apply ourselves to practice and recognize, to a degree at least, that the mind's true nature is emptiness, clarity, and unimpeded awareness. Then can we begin to understand and recognize the truth concerning the way in which phenomena are experienced in the realms of samsara. If one does not have the understanding of mind's true nature, then this truth is really difficult to grasp or understand, and one continues to suffer from this delusion of conceptual reality.

All sentient beings have body, speech, and mind, foolishly clinging to these three facets as being the illusory self. If one practices negative actions, then the fruition of these actions takes place in one of the lower realms through the gates of body, speech, and mind. If one practices virtuous action, or

positive karmic trends, then it is these same gates that experience the result as rebirth in the superior states of the three higher realms. Also, it is practicing the path of Buddhadharma with body, speech, and mind that allows one to recognize the enlightened nature of body, speech, and mind, for it is these same three gates that are bound in samsara and that are also liberated through enlightenment. In recognizing that the development and experience of all sentient beings are not concurrent or universal, nor even necessarily similar, the Lord Buddha taught broad overviews, termed the triyanas, to help open these three gates to liberation.

If one wishes to construct a three-story building, then one must start with the ground floor, continue by adding the next story, then the third, until one has completed the building. If one wishes to practice and understand the full meaning of the Buddhadharma, one can utilize the three yanas — the hinayana, the mahayana, and the vajrayana. By practicing the tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, one can utilize these three vehicles in unison.

One of these three yanas, namely the hinayana, deals with controlling personal behavior and emotionality through the rejection, abandonment, and avoidance of erroneous and mistaken behavior. Erroneous behavior of the body is killing, stealing, or harming others, specifically through sexual misconduct; mistaken behavior of the speech is lying, causing disharmony and/or discord; and so on. One must completely spurn and abandon such behavior. Refusal to practice any form of harmful behavior towards others helps one to maintain the discipline of meditative absorption while employing the practices we term in Tibetan *zhinay* (Skt: *shamatha*), which stills the mind, and *lhatong* (Skt: *vipashyana*), which observes the mind's nature. Thus, the whole principle of the hinayana doctrine lies in the abandonment of all harmful actions, and in the maintenance of meditative absorption.

No doubt you have seen that many Tibetan lamas wear robes of maroon and saffron colors, which are similar to the robes that the Lord Buddha once wore. These robes are a sign of their having taken special ordinations. Householders, persons who have a responsibility to their families, will seek less restrictive ordination, which, in Tibetan, are referred to as genyen. Depending upon his or her circumstances and the desire to follow ordination, the householder's vows can number three, four, or five. The basic three vows forsake killing, stealing, and lying. Additionally, one can vow abstinence from intoxicating substances, and/or abstinence from sexual activity. The novice monk and nun take vows that are thirty-six in number, which include the basic genyen vows. Beyond this level exists the ordinations of the fully-ordained monk and nun, which number in the several hundreds. Both the novice and the full ordinations are based upon the hinayana approach of practice; a person demonstrates they are observing these ordinations by the wearing of robes.

One's Dharma practice should be based in the hinayana (regardless of whether or not one wishes to take special vows to demonstrate one's practice of the hinayana vehicle), as this is the basis of all practice. It is perfectly alright if one chooses not to be ordained as a monk or nun, because one accomplishes this path not by wearing robes, but by completely abandoning the ten negative actions and by instilling virtuous, wholesome

behavior through the practice of the ten virtuous actions of body, speech, and mind. One does this with an understanding of karmic consequences and by knowing why it is better to lead a life based on positive rather than negative action. One actively employs this vehicle as an outer discipline, which equates to having constructed the foundation for one's house. Or, in the case of the three story building, one has completed the lower story. However, even if one were to perfect this practice, the complete realization of buddhahood would still be very distant. One needs to construct the second story of our illustrative dwelling, which in this case is the path of the mahayana.

With a foundation of hinayana purity derived by completely abandoning any harmful activity, one begins upon the path of the mahayana, which is the path of unifying emptiness and compassion. Let us again consider the meaning of emptiness. All sentient beings have mind and all identify with this mind. So, one thinks, "I am this mind/' and one thinks, "I am/' thereby contributing to the formulations of a variety of likes and dislikes, of aversions and attractions to different phenomena. Although it has absolutely no self whatsoever, this mind has an incidental clinging to a self as being something or someone real. Observing the true nature of mind and discovering that it is devoid of any descriptive characteristics (such as size, shape, color, or location) is to recognize that mind, in essence, is emptiness.

In the hinayana practice, little emphasis is placed upon the recognition of the emptiness of all phenomena; instead, this view of emptiness is attained by seeing the emptiness of personality. It is simply not enough to recognize the emptiness of personality, however, or to recognize that mind itself is empty and devoid of any substantiality. One needs to recognize the void nature of all phenomena, and in so doing, one proceeds to enter the path of the mahayana.

The *Prajna Paramita Sutra*, or the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*, is the primary source of the teaching on emptiness in Buddhadharma. Basically, this sutra points out that mind is emptiness in categorically stating that " there is no form; there is no feeling; there is no sensation; there is no taste; there is no touch." In presenting the teaching that all these things are actually empty, this sutra is regarded as the core of elucidation on this topic. Its concept is the basis of the meditative practice that has developed in several schools, most notably in the Buddhist orders in Japan. Emphasis is placed on recognizing the emptiness of form, the emptiness of sound, the emptiness of feeling, the emptiness of smell, and so on. In short, all sensory appearances are recognized as being empty. This realization is achieved by seeing that the mind itself, that all appearances perceived and/or experienced by the mind, are, in fact, mental projections. They are the mind's play; as mind itself is insubstantial, so too are these projections.

The main line from the *Prajna Paramita Sutra* describing this says, "Form is void, void is form; form is no other than void, voidness is no other than form/' If someone were to say to you, "There is no sound, no form, no feeling; there is truly nothing real" then you might not believe that. You will reply that you have these definite, real experiences of these sensory sensations: you hear sound; you actually see form, etc. This term void does not imply nothingness, but, rather, it infers the interdependence and insubstantiality of all

phenomena. In this sense, all phenomena are considered empty or void of any absolute reality. The dream is frequently used as an example of this.

While in the dream state, one can dream up an entire experience with a total environment, and one can experience that as having form, feeling, sound, etc. The dream appears extremely real. Still, there is no reality whatsoever in the dream existence, for with the moment of awakening, it all completely vanishes. The dream experience is believed to be real during the time of the dream, yet it is obviously a projection of the mind. The aim of the practitioner is to recognize that the experience of present phenomena is also merely a projection that has no substantial being.

Let me remind you that the basis of this discourse lies in the teachings of the Buddha Shakyamuni and the third Gyalwa Karmapa [Rangjung Dorje, 1284-1339]. Both taught that all phenomena are insubstantial, like a dream, like a reflection in a mirror, like an illusion, like a rainbow. In seeing that all appearance (not only one's mind and emotions) is luminous, unimpeded suchness, one recognizes that all external appearance, which is also arising from the mind, is only mental projection.

The basis of the mahayana practice differs from the hinayana in that one does not practice abandonment, rejection, etc. Instead, in mahayana, one deals with one's behavior in a manner of transformation. For example, if the desire to harm another sentient being arises on the crest of a wave of great anger, then one immediately applies the antidote of compassion; the energy of the anger is thereby transformed into compassion. One does not deal with an emotion simply by cutting it off; rather, one uses compassion to transform it on the basis of its inherent insubstantiality.

In their ignorance, sentient beings think all that they experience is real, and their misconception entails their experiencing a great deal of suffering. Ones sees that all sentient beings are experiencing the illusory manifestations of the three bodies (the fully ripened, the habitual tendency, and the mental bodies), and that they are completely locked in these illusions. Recognizing the habitual clinging of these three categories of sentient phenomena as being only illusory appearance, then one recognizes emptiness. By recognizing that one's delusion and habitual clinging cause suffering, an intense compassion can arise. The recognition of emptiness itself is referred to as wisdom, and the arising compassion is referred to by the term means. The path of recognizing the emptiness of these three categories of phenomena, and of developing compassion for all those experiencing such delusion, is the path of mahayana, and this path has its pinnacle in the union of means and wisdom.

Having attained both great compassion and wisdom, one has then finished constructing the second floor of this three story building. The full attainment of buddhahood is still very distant, however, since one must still practice the six perfections (paramitas), (generosity, moral conduct, patience, diligence, meditative contemplation, and wisdom) for many lifetimes, for many kalpas, progressing slowly and steadily through the stages of bodhisattva development, until one finally attains buddhahood. This takes considerable effort and an unimaginable amount of time, yet practicing mahayana is very

beneficial. During the great lapse of time before one attains buddhahood, one can benefit a great number of sentient beings, and, of course, oneself. But the only way to achieve rapid progress along the path to enlightenment is to practice vajrayana.

In vajrayana, one goes one step further and does not apply any specific antidote of abandoning or of transforming. Instead, one merely recognizes the true nature of the mind. By recognizing the nature of action, emotion, and so on, there is instantaneous liberation. This is why the vajrayana path is very rapid and is a most powerful method. How does one apply this path of recognition? First, one recognizes that the body is the form of the deity. The form of the deity being the union of void and appearance, one recognizes that this body has the clarity of the rainbow, has the unimpededness of the reflection of the moon in water, and has the insubstantialness of the reflection in a mirror. In this recognition, one has realized the nature of the body as being devoid of form.

Second, one recognizes that all speech and all sound is the sound of mantra. In hearing all sound as being mantra, one recognizes that all sound is devoid of substance, insubstantial like an echo.

Third, one recognizes the mind with all the thought, concepts, cognition, awareness, emotion, etc., as being similar to a wavering mirage in the distance that the deer, thinking it is water, come to drink. One recognizes that all mind, all cognition, is like a mirage which is vacant of consciousness. If one realizes the form void, the sound void, and the consciousness void, then one has completely liberated clinging.

This is the basis of the path of the vajrayana. If one applies oneself to this path in the same way as Jetsiin Milarepa and many others, then one can attain complete enlightenment in this very lifetime. Even if one does not realize enlightenment in this lifetime, the blessings of the yidam and the power of the mantra enable one to realize liberation in the after-death bardo state. In either case, enlightenment transpires because one has developed and established a good habit in the practice of recognizing all phenomena as having the true nature of the form, mantra, and samadhi of the yidam.

This habit can quickly instill one with the ability to realize all visual phenomena as form void, all sound as sound void, and all levels of the skandas as being inherently void of causal reality. In the bardo state after death, the mind is exactingly potent and extremely powerful. By applying the vajrayana method, one can instantly accomplish a deep state of meditation and thus gain liberation from suffering in the six realms of samsara. One can end the cycle of karmic rebirth and gain the threshold of mastery of the three yanas, thus enabling one to move in and out of substantial phenomena at will. To illustrate the way vajrayana accomplishment has been demonstrated by a great teacher, I will now tell you a story about Jetsün Milarepa.

One time Jetsün Milarepa, the yogi saint of Tibet, was meditating in an isolated cave, absorbed in samadhi. Some extremely hungry hunters, who had been unsuccessful in their hunt, came to this cave. As they entered, they saw an emaciated Jetsiin Milarepa sitting there. Somewhat frightened, they inquired, "Are you a ghost or are you a man?"

Jetsiin Milarepa replied quietly, "I am a man."

"If you are a man, give us something to eat. We are all very hungry and our hunt is fruitless."

"But I have nothing to offer you. I have nothing to eat. I am just sitting here absorbed in meditation," replied Milarepa.

"Nonsense," they said, "you must be hiding some kind of food here somewhere. Give us some food!"

They were extremely hungry and became very angry when Jetsün Milarepa again replied that he had absolutely nothing to eat. The hunters decided to torment and abuse the great yogi Milarepa. Firing arrows at him, they were astounded to see that the arrows could not penetrate him. Some of the arrows were deflected straight upwards, some to the left, and some to the right. Some even deflected directly back at the hunters, who became even more infuriated. They then tried to topple him over and injure him by throwing rocks, but somehow Milarepa floated up into the air, like a very light piece of paper. When they threw water on him, the water miraculously vanished. Trying with all their might to throw him into the river nearby, Jetsün Milarepa foiled their efforts by floating in the space above them. No matter what they did to inflict harm, they were totally ineffectual.

This illustrates Milarepa's realization of form void. They had no success because his physical being was form void, his speech and melody were sound void. Additionally, their experience of his unperturbability during this incident demonstrated his being void of karmic fruition. If we have the diligence and the wisdom to apply the skillful means of vajrayana, then we too can realize liberation while we still have the opportunity of this precious human existence.

If one has a precious human existence enabling one to understand mind's true nature, and if one's understanding is of the most excellent degree, the result will be the realization of the *mahamudra*. Even if one does not gain this full level of understanding, the slightest understanding of the nature of mind can give one the ability to meditate with comfort and ease. In fact, even without an average degree of understanding, simply hearing and knowing a little bit about mind's true nature can be extremely beneficial. It enables one to apply oneself to all kinds of worldly activity that benefits many beings.

We have now discussed several different methods (or vehicles) for obtaining buddhahood. But the best method of all is that which leads to the understanding of the meaning of the mahamudra. If the nature of the mind is recognized, one is a buddha. If it is not recognized, one is confused and is a sentient being. Although the basis of mahamudra is easy to understand, putting it into practice can be difficult because one clings to one's obscurations. Due to ignorance, the obscuration of knowledge causes habits of mental afflictions and/or of emotionality to arise, which in turn give rise to karmic action. The presence of these four veils of obscuration that cloud our enlightened awareness is similar to the presence of clouds in the sky which prevent the sunlight from brightening the day.

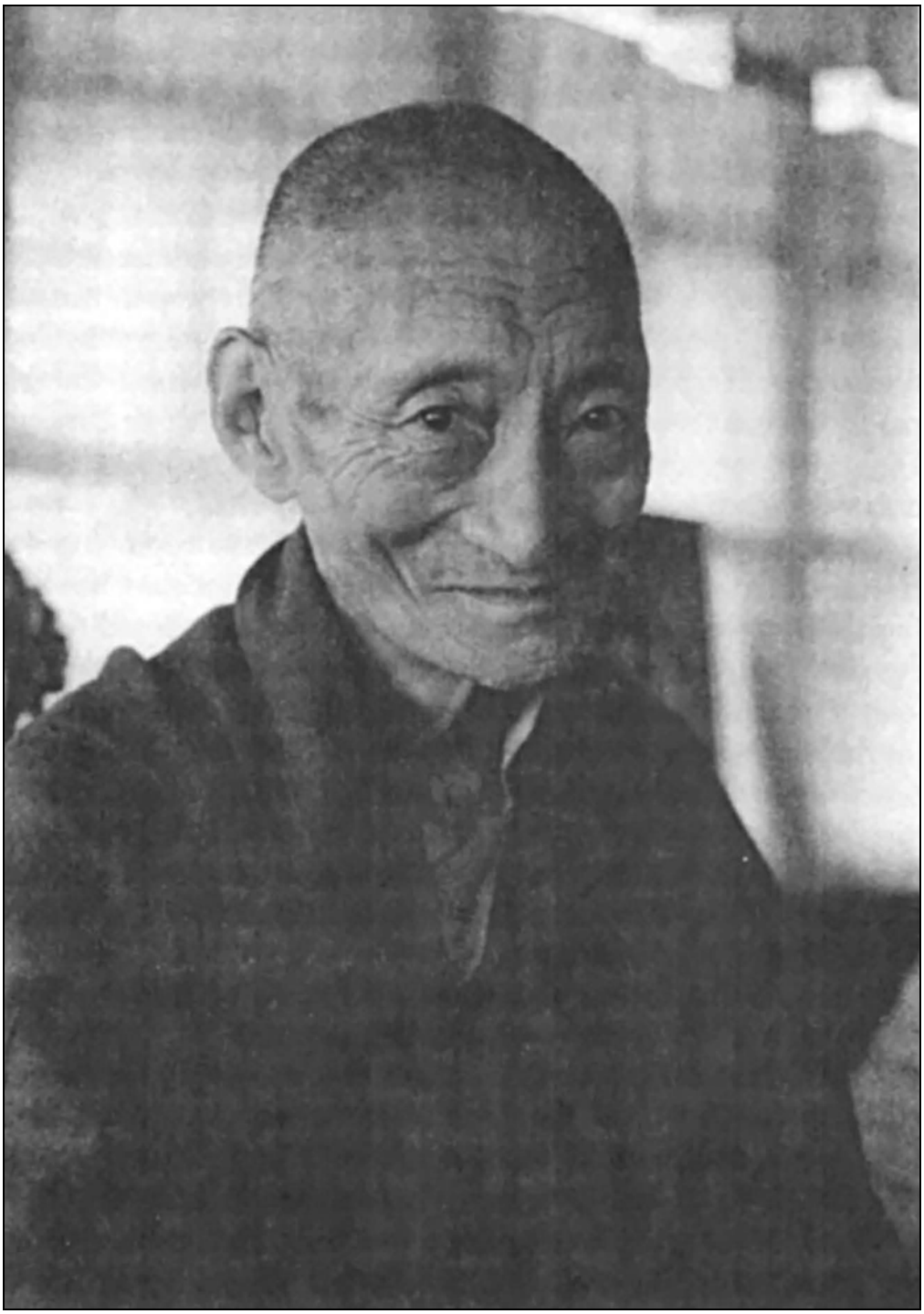
In the Hevajra Tantra it is said that sentient beings are buddhas, but, because of their obscurations they do not recognize this. If sentient beings

can dispel these obscurations, they will become buddhas. There are two ways to do this. One way is comprised of four practices that are called the foundational practices in Tibetan Buddhism. These involve an accumulation of prostrations, refuge vows, purification mantras, mandala offerings, and supplications to the tsaway lama. Additionally, this way focuses upon bringing the visualization practice through the development and completion stages of vajrayana meditation. The other way was evolved in the hinayana traditions. It involves various methods of meditation that fall into two main categories: zhinay (shamatha), or tranquility meditation, comprised of methods with and without support; and lhatong (vipashyana), or insight meditation, which includes many different methods of meditative approach. Either way, these methods can lead to the realization of mahamudra, or true liberation.

In either approach, it is important to meditate using zhinay, translated into English as tranquility. In defining the two Tibetan words that represent the concept of zhinay, we find the terms pacification and abiding. These refer to the pacifying of the mind of its mental afflictions or emotions, and through this the gaining of the ability to abide with the mind resting one-pointedly. It is considered that without some development of tranquility of mind, one will not be able to perform any other kind of meditation. This is the reason why zhinay is important. According to one tradition, one begins by meditating upon zhinay before one performs the foundational practices of Tibetan Buddhism, while another tradition says that one should begin by performing the foundational practices and there-after meditate upon tranquility and insight. The reasoning upon which both methods are based is equally correct, thus either method may provide results.

The effectiveness of the first tradition lies in one beginning with mastering, or at least experiencing, tranquility before commencing the foundational practices; this procedure allows one to gain control over one's mind so that the objects of meditation appear very clearly. The other tradition states that one will not be able to perform zhinay properly without first dispelling one's obscurations through practices of purification, thus accumulating the merit and wisdom gained from the foundational practices. If one performs the zhinay practice after the foundational practices, then one will be able to perform excellent and effortless zhinay. Both viewpoints are correct.

In introducing these approaches to recognizing the true nature of the mind, it is appropriate to encourage you to strive within your abilities to grasp these concepts and to apply them in your life. Knowing a little of the mind's nature can be very beneficial, even in a worldly sense. You can generally improve any meditation practice you use by recognizing that the intense clinging to a belief in a self (with its emotions, thoughts, etc.) as being something real makes it almost impossible to meditate. If you wish to hold the mind in equipoise and meditate one-pointedly, such clinging prevents this from happening. Even if you wish to give rise to the very clear visualization of the yidam, this clinging also veils your view. If, however, you recognize and see mind's true nature as emptiness, clarity, and unimpeded awareness, then all meditation becomes easy.



Pausing in his meditation, Kalu Rinpoche patiently listens to the question posed by the photographer. (Photograph by J.G. Sherab Ebin)

2
Changing Tides and times

Examination of Alaya and Karma

Throughout the world, there are many religions and spiritual traditions that make the assumption that there is something beyond death. On this basis, they form many teachings. Certainly, there would be no purpose in practicing or propagating their teachings if, in fact, the mind actually died with the body. Regardless of the particular dogma, propagation of their moral code hinges upon the asserted belief that what one does now can influence one's experience in the after-death state.

Indeed, in Buddhism the continuity of the mind is an important point. Mind is not something that comes into being at the beginning of the life of the physical body, nor is it something that ends with the physical body's death. Its continuity, from one state of existence to another, has a great influence on and definite connection with each successive state. In the sense that this empty, clear, and unimpeded nature of mind has always been experienced and always will be experienced, mind itself is eternal. There always will be mind, just as there always has been mind, and, continually, this mind experiences various states of confusion and suffering. This is what the Buddha termed samsara, or the cycle of conditioned rebirth, from one state of experience to another.

In samsara, that which is always being experienced is the content of the mind, rather than the nature of mind itself. Such contents are derived from a fundamental confusion or ignorance that projects both the physical body and phenomenal experiences. Far from being permanent, the projections of mind are impermanent and unstable. These projections are always changing, falling apart, and being replaced by some new projection.

For those of you who are longing for something else, it is important to understand that the mind, with its dynamic, empty, and unobstructed luminosity, contains not only the delusion of causal phenomena, but also the potential for liberation. In this empty, clear, and unimpeded nature of mind itself is the very potential or seed for obtaining enlightenment. This inherent quality is referred to as tathagatagarbha, or buddha nature. Each and every living being has buddha nature as part of its make-up because this is the inherent nature of its mind. This is true regardless of whatever realm, state, or situation of rebirth a being finds itself experiencing. Although there is no doubt that each being has tathagatagarbha, the mind expresses itself through a fundamental ignorance, in ways which generate more or less merit, and which are positive or negative in terms of the actions one commits physically, verbally, and mentally.

As the mind is "no thing" in and of itself but is essentially empty, it should not be misconstrued to be something tangible, or something limited. It cannot be

said that the mind was put together at one point and that it falls apart at some other point. Mind does not behave in that way. There always has been mind; there always will be mind. Because it is not something created at one point and destroyed at another, mind continually expresses itself through an infinite series of rebirths in the different states of samsara in a great many differing and particular ways.

As long as fundamental ignorance remains in the mind, the sources of samsara will continue to exist. Samsara is endless in the sense that the mind will continue to experience its own projections and confusion again, and again, and again, in an endless cycle. This appears to be a rather grim perspective, unless, of course, a means for liberation exists. The situation, however, of a sentient being attaining enlightenment does not imply that this liberation should be interpreted as mind disappearing. It is not as though the mind comes to an end at this point of enlightenment.

Rather, the confusion in the mind comes to an end. Instead of eternally experiencing its own confusion, enlightened mind eternally experiences its own true nature as tathagatagarbha, wholly and without any confusion. In fact, the only reason we can say that samsara is a temporary state that can be ended, is that it is possible to eliminate this primal confusion. Quite literally, samsara is the experiencing of that confusion and, if this confusion is eliminated, then samsara has been eliminated. If, however, that confusion is not eliminated, then samsara remains an endless process. Consequently, it will never exhaust itself.

The whole karmic process has been briefly summed up in a quote from the traditional teachings: "If you wish to understand what has taken place, look at your body; if you wish to see what will take place, look at your actions." This saying is an attempt to indicate that any particular state of rebirth and/or the experiences that currently affect one are due to tendencies that were established at some previous time. Additionally, what the mind will experience in the future is currently being conditioned by how it is expressing itself now in physical, verbal, and mental action. Past, present, or future karmic tendencies are a continuing cycle that, once established, are continually reinforced.

At this time, we all have the common quality of being human, as we share this collective experience of a human rebirth. This is an indication that we share a certain collective karma which has brought us to this particular nature of our experience, instead of to some other form of life experience in some other realm, or to some other human circumstances that proscribe interest in the Dharma. Due to our positive and meritorious physical, verbal, and mental actions, certain meritorious tendencies were reinforced in previous existences that have given us this current result. Such collective experience is easily demonstrable; however, there is another fact that we have to consider. The great variety of ways that human beings experience the human realm is due not to collective karma but to the individual aspects of karma.

For example, in the human realm there are people who die very early, who experience continual poverty, who suffer from the inability to become prosperous, who fail to accomplish their aims, and who suffer from ill health.

On a karmic level, all of these frustrations can be traced back to the negative karmic tendencies that were established in previous existences when the mind expressed itself in ways that led to some kind of unskillful action. Perhaps these beings killed many other sentient beings. This action, as complicated or uncomplicated as the circumstances might have been, will give a karmic reaction that will reappear in a retributive way in some future life. Persons who have behaved in such a manner will experience a shortness of life, either through illness or by being killed before their natural time of death. Or, it might be that in a previous time a person may have stolen or robbed a great deal of wealth from others and therefore will experience a resultant poverty in some future time.

Basically, the law of karma describes all causal phenomena as the effective result of previous action, whether this result is positive or negative. Beyond the context of only this lifetime, we are able to trace both positive and negative karmic tendencies that were established in previous existences which directly lead to our present lifetime's experience. If strong positive karmic tendencies were developed through the practice of generosity or cherishing and guarding of life, etc., the result would lead to the experience of longevity, health, prosperity, and the ability to become successful and to obtain one's goals. Consequently, while we indeed share the common experience in being human, our experience of the human realm remains very much a personal one, being individual to each person.

Many people, even those from various spiritual traditions, feel that there is no such thing as previous or future existences. Undoubtedly, they take this opinion because these former or future existences are not apparent and because this truth lacks an empirical basis for substantiation. Their disbelief is very understandable because neither the past nor the future is something that can be seen at the present moment. But then, the mind that experiences the past, the present, and the future cannot be seen either. If karmic fruition propagates this succession of rebirths and is something that originates and arises from the mind, it should not be surprising that it is as intangible as mind itself. Forget about previous and future existences; we do not even see our mind right now! Mind is not some thing that we can take out and examine. It is not some thing we can pin down and say, "This exactly is the mind." In lacking this capability, it should not surprise us that we also lack the potential for validating or verifying the continuity of future or previous existences. Thus, even though we can only see this body right now, our blank memory of having had other bodies should not surprise us. Ultimately speaking, the physical body that we are experiencing at any particular point is only a projection of the mind and, as such, arises from tendencies in the mind, to be experienced by the mind.

Take two people; if one of them goes to sleep and the other observes the sleeper, regardless of how incredible and complicated the dreams of the sleeper are, the other person cannot see them. The observer has no way of seeing what the other person is experiencing because it is intangible. It cannot be seen empirically, nor is it possible from the point of view of the observer to validate empirically any dream with any other sense faculty. This does not mean that the dreamer is not dreaming! For the dreamer, the dream

(while lacking tangibility) is perfectly valid. Similarly, any attempt to validate the karmic process empirically is simply a waste of time. Although the dream arises from something intangible, this does not mean that the process of cause and effect does not work. Even though the physical senses do not enable one to validate the law of karma, one can see this truth through spiritual insight. As one's realization develops, one becomes directly aware of cause and effect, which gives an awareness of the process of rebirth. Ordinarily, one is accustomed to verifying the truth or the falsity of something before giving it credence. In the instance of karmic fruition, however, the lack of empirical verification should not be taken as either an indication or absolute proof of its non-existence. Rather, one needs to recognize that one is not necessarily consciously aware of it right now.

Earlier we were discussing the concept of the empty, clear, and unimpeded nature of mind as being the inherent nature of one's self. Due to the several levels of confusion and distortion that take place in the mind, our present unliberated situation manifests. The first of these delusions is a simple lack of direct experience and awareness of the nature of mind. Rather than experiencing the mind's nature in clear awareness, the experience is impregnated with the distortion of a not-knowing, or of an absence, on the most fundamental level, of awareness. This most subtle and most fundamental level of confusion is technically termed ignorance or unawareness.

This distortion obscures the direct experience of emptiness of mind so that, rather than the mind directly experiencing its own intangibility, the mind experiences the self. This I, the subject which is taken to be something ultimately real, is, in fact, merely a distortion of the true experience of the emptiness of mind. In a similar manner, the direct experience of the luminosity of mind is distorted or frozen into the experience of being something other. This object, the frozen or distorted other-than-self, is taken to be ultimately real, but, in fact, is a clouding of this direct experience of the luminosity of mind. A dualistic split thereby develops that recognizes subject/object and self/other as seemingly being ultimately separate and independent. In our confusion, we habitually reinforce this dualistic framework.

The picture is further complicated by the unobstructed quality of mind, that awareness which tends to arise only in certain limited ways. If, in this dualistic framework, there arises a positive relationship between subject and object, such experience is usually expressed in terms of an attraction or attachment of subject to object, thereby giving a perception of something good and attractive. When something is perceived as bad, or when the subject takes the object to be something threatening or repulsive, then there arises a negative emotion of aggression or aversion. Ultimately speaking, subject, object, and the emotional response that results are wholly the activity of the mind. It is the mind which conceives of the subject. It is the mind which conceives of the object. It is also the mind which conceives of the split between the two. Although it is the mind which initiates attraction or aversion, somehow this is not perceived by sentient beings. Instead, everything is treated as though it were very solid. Subject is here, object is there, and the

relationship between the two is separate and distinct. We believe each is existent in and of itself; we also believe that they are totally independent of mind. This is the delusion caused by the fundamental stupidity (or dullness) of the mind. Basic attachment, aversion, and the quality of stupidity are the three primary emotional responses of sentient beings; they are the source of all suffering.

From these primary delusions spring secondary developments, causing things to become much more complex. Mere attachment can develop into avarice (or greed) and grasping. Stupidity develops into pride and self-aggrandizement. Aversion develops into envy, jealousy, etc. But it does not stop there. With these basic emotions, further developments and ramifications take place until there are literally thousands of emotional responses and emotional situations. To indicate the complexity of this level of confusion and distortion of the mind and emotions, the sutras speak of eighty-four thousand emotional and mental discursive situations. The resolution of these emotions is a topic we will address more at length further on; for now, let us continue to attempt to see the source that affects our emotional response.

Because one has mental and emotional conflicts, one naturally acts in certain physical, verbal, and mental ways. Through such actions, which are again based upon dualistic confusion, one reinforces karmic tendencies, either positive or negative. Generally, however, one tends toward the negative because it is out of this confusion that further confusion reinforces itself. Any overtly negative actions, such as killing and stealing, reinforce this confusion, and these negative karmic patterns will produce even further suffering. This is the fourth level of obscuration which I mentioned when I began this discourse. Actually, the situations we are now experiencing can be described in whole by referring only to those four veils of mind's confusion: fundamental ignorance, dualistic clinging, emotionality, and karmic tendencies.

In the Buddhist tradition, the empty, clear, and dynamic state of awareness (which is the fundamental nature of mind itself), is technically termed the alaya, meaning the origin (or source) of all experience and of all transcending or intrinsically pristine awareness. To use a metaphor, take the example of transparently clear, pure water, without any sediment or pollutants, into which a handful of earth or mud is thrown and stirred round until dark clouds of earth particles obscure the water's transparency. The water is still there but there is something that is hiding or masking that transparent clarity. In the same way, what we experience in samsara is rather like this clear water being obscured by pollution, as our inherent, ever-present buddha nature is masked by these four veils of obscuration. This situation of obscuration is also termed alaya. Alaya, then, is not only the fundamental or original state of consciousness, but it is also the discursive consciousness, the confused awareness from which arise all of the illusory or confused perceptions common among sentient beings.

On the one hand, one has the pure alaya, which is the inherent nature of mind itself as pristine awareness, this pure water. On the other hand, one has the practical situation of this impure alaya, which is the fundamental

source of confusion and illusion due to the four different veils of confusion of the mind, this impure backwater. At this moment we are unenlightened sentient beings, which means that what we experience is an admixture of both the impure and pure alaya. Simultaneously, samsara is both the inherent (but obscured) buddha nature of mind and also the levels of confusion that result in this impure alaya, or the phenomenal world. Nirvana, however, is unobscured awareness having no confusion or karmic fruition to give rise to phenomenal causality.

This concept of pure and impure alaya is important to comprehend. To use another metaphor, take the concept of the sun shining in a cloudless sky, an image of clarity and spaciousness, as the fundamental nature of mind. It is entirely possible that the sky can be obscured by clouds, fog, or mist, all of which can prevent the direct perception of the sun shining in the clear sky. Indeed, these clouds can also give rise to all kinds of other developments, such as lightning, thunder, hail, rain, or snow, which can completely obscure the sky's clear spaciousness. In the same way, these levels of ignorance and confusion of the mind give the result of all of the illusory projections that are ultimately unreal experiences which we, as unenlightened sentient beings, undergo in the belief that this is real. Because these delusions obscure true clarity, the result is sentient suffering and pain. In this case, the complication (such as the hail, the rain, and so forth, in our metaphor) is that pain, suffering, and confusion are experienced as a result of this mixture of the pure and the impure alaya.

The fundamental approach of Buddhadharma is to eliminate all of those complications caused by the four veils of ignorance, and so forth, so that the inherent nature of mind can simply shine forth. The aim of Buddhadharma is to allow the mind's nature to manifest itself so that there is nothing hindering or limiting that direct perception. This is what is meant by attaining buddhahood. Enlightenment can be understood to be the complete elimination of all that confusion and distortion of impure alaya, so that the pure alaya, that which is already there, can be experienced in its fullest.

It is interesting to examine this admixture we are currently experiencing, this blend of pure and impure alaya that preoccupies our current perceptual existence. When the pure aspect of alaya is predominant, there arise qualities, attitudes, and aspects of our being that we can term positive or virtuous qualities that generate feelings of faith, confidence, compassion, loving kindness, generosity, etc. All the attitudes conducive to spiritual development arise when this pure alaya is making its presence felt most strongly. When the impure alaya is dominant, however, the results expressed are only the emotional confusion of attachment and aversion syndromes; all the complexities of the emotional conflict that develop in the mind are thrown in as well. Because the continual interplay among the pure and impure alaya produces positive and negative karmic patterns that are then reinforced, this is basically the source of the distinction one could make between a positive and a negative (or a virtuous and a non-virtuous) karmic tendency, action, or attitude.

If we are to continue to explore this topic and to examine this concept of virtuous karmic tendency, then this becomes more complex because there are different aspects at play. Most importantly, there are certain karmic tendencies that are virtuous and positive in nature, which arise and are reinforced by simple moral choices. For example, the decisions not to kill, steal, commit sexual misconduct, cause disharmony with one's speech, lie, gossip, abuse others with harsh language, develop malevolent or injurious attitudes towards others, covet or grasp at the possessions of others, and entertain confused ideas about the nature of reality are all simple moral choices. These choices, however, are virtues that are temporary in that they are exhaustible. The merit generated by these positive karmic tendencies reinforces a very pleasant but unstable picture, although, in the short term, it is certainly very beneficial. This merit gives rise to rebirth in any of the various gods' and human realms, which are superior states of rebirth within the cycle of samsara, but such rebirth does not, in itself, constitute any ultimate attainment of liberation. Rather, it merely provides the temporary circumstances for a rebirth (or state of experience) which is comfortable and reasonably happy, thereby allowing a certain amount of individual freedom. Such a rebirth is not ultimate or liberated.

On the other hand, there is the kind of virtue or positive tendency established through states of samadhi. Samadhi is a deep state of absorption one develops in meditation, or it is the absorption in a transcendental experience, either of which produces a particular state of mind. Samadhi can be of two different kinds. One is a completely mundane samadhi which exhibits a kind of inexhaustible nature in that it is not so unstable and is less likely to break down. This samadhi is defined as mundane because it does not liberate the consciousness from the conditions that produce the cycle of rebirth. Nevertheless, something more significant than mere moral conduct is taking place.

The other kind of samadhi is transcendent samadhi resulting from the culmination of a long spiritual process motivated by faith, compassion, and wisdom. Such progress indicates the deepening of wisdom to the point where the mind can attain liberation. This transcendence is inexhaustible because it remains a stable element of one's experience until the mind attains enlightenment and is thus liberated from the cycle of rebirth.

To examine this question of virtuous actions and attitudes and of positive karma, we therefore need to consider these three distinctions: the practical stage that has a temporary (but not ultimate) benefit, the intermediate stage of mundane states of meditation, and the ultimate state of meditation that is truly inexhaustible in that it leads the mind to a state of experience beyond the cycle of rebirth. What exactly is this transcendental kind of meditation that allows the mind to become totally liberated? I am here referring to the pure practice of zhinay (tranquility and stability of mind) or lhatong (insight into the nature of mind). These practices culminate in what is termed in the tantras the mahamudra approach. The term mahamudra (supreme symbol) refers to the ultimate and direct experience of the nature of mind and all phenomena, a culmination that results from maturing one's meditation with zhinay and deepening it into lhatong. This topic of mahamudra is the focus of lengthy

discussion much later in this discourse. For the time being, we need consider only that there are two stages paramount to experiencing liberated awareness.

Tantric meditation, in the more formal tradition, is considered to have two phases. In Sanskrit, these are termed utpattiakrama and sampannakrama, and their meanings refer to a stage of creation or development, on the one hand, and one of completion or fulfillment, on the other. We will discuss these in more depth later; now you should know that regardless of the technique being used, the teachings on meditation as presented in vajrayana are essentially concerned with this transcendental aspect of virtuous activity and karma. This transcendental quality itself establishes inexhaustibly stable elements which bring the mind to a state of realization beyond the limited framework of the cycle of rebirth.

In examining the karmic process, then, regardless of whether the activity is positive or negative, virtuous or non-virtuous, the focus is on a process of fruition. Once an action is committed, a tendency is established that remains a latent part of one until such time in the future (however distant) when there is a coming together of circumstances that permit the tendency to mature, ripen, and express itself as an aspect of one's experience. This is primarily a mental process because the physical body and the speech act as the mind's agents for committing actions and accumulating karma. Ultimately speaking, these tendencies are established on the level of mind, even though they may be due to physical and/or verbal action. Although the result might also be experienced on these same physical and/or verbal levels, it is on the mental level that these tendencies are stored and remain latent.

To illustrate, take the analogy of soil into which one plants seeds. These seeds may not germinate for a long time, but as soon as the right conditions are present (such as moisture, warmth, and so forth), they will germinate and mature to fruition. In the same way, committing an action or similar kinds of actions establishes tendencies that remain latent in this fundamental state of awareness, later to emerge as conscious experience. They do not emerge until conditions dictate and conducive circumstances come together, and one's latent karmic tendency becomes one's experience in relative reality.

There is one outstanding characteristic of the karmic process, namely, its infallibility. Not only can karmic fruition take place, it does. Additionally, there is a certain predictability in that certain tendencies will always give rise to certain kinds of experience. Never can it happen that a virtuous action gives rise in some future circumstance to an experience of suffering, nor can a harmful action ever give rise in the future to a personal experience of pleasure.

The distinction between a virtuous and a non-virtuous action is whether the resulting experience of the agent is one of happiness or suffering. The equation is very simple. Virtuous actions result in positive karmic tendencies that emerge as happiness, that give some kind of physical or mental well-being. Non-virtuous actions establish negative karmic tendencies that emerge as the experience of pain and suffering, either physical or mental or

both. It may take a lifetime, or several lifetimes, for any given tendency to actually emerge; nonetheless, it is an infallible process.

Suppose we take an example that illustrates a singular, predominant karmic force or tendency in an individual being's makeup. What if a person gave freely of whatever wealth, money, and possessions he or she owned, but was not especially attached to their luxury? No doubt this person would be considered a generous person, but in this instance such giving is not particularly altruistic; it has no spiritual quality. Now, generosity has a basically good moral quality about it. It also has a mundane quality, in that the karmic results it establishes are eventually exhaustible. This does not mean that it is not beneficial, at least on a temporary level, for the law of karma rewards the tendency of generosity with rebirth in the gods' realms, where the enjoyment of wealth is comparatively far greater than that experienced in the human realm.

Temporary rebirth as a god is an incredibly enjoyable, comfortable, and pleasant state of existence and is the result gained from having formerly shared one's wealth. Since such mundane karmic result is not inexhaustible, the resultant tendency will begin to exhaust itself, which usually results in one experiencing yet another rebirth, but in a lower realm of existence. Perhaps the hypothetical person in our example could be reborn in the human realm where there might still be some experience of wealth as evidenced by some prosperity and comfort on a material level. But this, too, will slowly exhaust itself and, eventually, other karmic tendencies will begin to predominate in the general picture of that being's experience. Either in that lifetime or some future lifetime, the merit gained from the original act of generosity will have exhausted itself, and a change will transpire; the whole experience of that hypothetical person will reflect the ripening of other latent tendencies, which will now rise to fruition.

On the other hand, suppose the attitude towards wealth is just the opposite. Our example now is of a person who is very grasping and who is known to be avaricious and miserly. Let us consider that our hypothetical person has gone to the point where wealth has been taken from others by robbing or cheating, and that the person continually grabs and hangs onto this wrongly gained wealth. Such actions establish karmic tendencies that result in the experience of loss and poverty which can lead to a state of rebirth in what is termed the hungry ghost realm. In that realm the beings have an intense hunger, unquenchable thirst, and a sense of deprivation, with such experiences being the main source of suffering in that realm. Even when the negative karma begins to exhaust itself and the mind is perhaps able to attain some slightly higher state of rebirth, possibly even a human one, it will be as a human being experiencing poverty, deprivation, and want. There will be this continual sense of loss, of something lacking that is sorely missed. Gradually that pattern will exhaust itself and, depending upon the ripening of conditions, some other positive or negative tendency will take over, causing the experience of that being to change again.

Things can be different, however. When the correct motivation is present, then any virtuous action performed within the context of that motivation

begins to set the mind in a direction from which it does not deviate. Suppose that our person's generosity, rather than merely demonstrating a non-attachment to wealth (however great or small that wealth might be), has instead a spiritual element to it. Suppose that the motivation is truly compassionate and altruistic, thereby giving it a spiritual quality. Such generosity has an inexhaustible result for correct motivation gives much more stability and effectiveness to each action. Not only does correct motivation contribute to a higher state of rebirth, it contributes to the furthering of altruistic qualities and to one's enlightenment eventually! Thus, when one acts from this pure motivation, what is taking place on a karmic level (through the actions that one commits physically, verbally, and mentally) reflects one's altruistic attitude. In this way, karma is no longer unending and self-perpetuating, but rather its refinement through altruism and transcendent samadhi resolves it into its quintessence, that of pure alaya.

This idea of karma and the resulting karmic process as being the basis for our experience is fundamental to Buddhism. In all of the eighty-four thousand collections of the teachings that the Buddha presented, the most essential is the understanding of the karmic process. It is important because it elucidates in great detail how what one does and what one experiences have an infallible connection. Yet, this perception is not uniquely Buddhist. It is fundamental to monotheistic traditions as well. The concept of karmic results being experienced in future reincarnations is, however, particular to Eastern traditions.

In the monotheistic traditions, there exists a basic foundation for making moral choices; however, the framework is different from Buddhism in that these traditions are theistic. Such traditions share the idea of a supreme intelligence or a supreme creator, and whatever they call this concept, each dogma has an idea of faithfully acting in accordance with, and not against, its will. Through compliance, a human being experiences the grace and the benevolence of the creator, which results in its essential nature being drawn to a higher state of existence. (A Buddhist would term such a higher state of rebirth as being that of the gods' realms, while in other traditions it is referred to as a kind of heavenly realm.)

Conversely, if a person of these faiths chooses to act contrary to the will of the creator, these traditions insist that such actions incur misfortune. Thus, the essential nature of the person is forced to lower states of rebirth where there is increased suffering, confusion, and pain. Although these traditions do not recognize the Buddha's teachings, nevertheless they have an appreciation that in everything one does (whether physical, verbal, or mental) there is a positive or negative quality that has some kind of causal function that leads to a correspondingly positive or negative effect. While the basis upon which one makes distinctions for moral choice may be very different in theistic and non-theistic traditions, the actual deportment and way in which one goes about enforcing or establishing morality is very similar. Thus, these traditions share with Buddhism the recognition that certain actions are harmful and certain actions are helpful.

Of all the different kinds of actions that one commits with body, speech, and mind, it is the mental action that is the most crucial. From the point of view of one's spiritual development, the most serious action one can commit is to hold a kind of perverted or wrong view concerning the nature of reality. To make basic errors in judgment or to reject certain aspects of the nature of reality that are crucial for one's understanding can render one's spiritual practice ineffective. To doubt that one has tathagatagarbha is a very serious mistake. Even to doubt that the nature of mind itself is empty, clear, and unimpeded in dynamic awareness, that this nature can be realized as complete enlightenment, can be equally serious. Why? The rejection of these ideas means that one has absolutely no basis from which to work. If one rejects the idea of enlightenment, then one has no basis even for attempting to put effort into spiritual practice. Why would one bother doing practices or making efforts in any spiritual tradition if one would not be rewarded?

Thus, the potential for enlightenment must exist for one to consider going about spiritual practice, let alone for that practice to be effective. So, first and foremost, one needs to come to that conviction; one needs to assure oneself that the potential exists and that it is inherently part of one's makeup. Furthermore, if one were to misunderstand or to reject ideas of causality, then one is actually influencing one's experience and one's development through misguided actions. Such misunderstanding is a fundamental error of judgment and has a very negative effect. With such an attitude, no benefit can be derived from spiritual practice because there would be no process to actualize the potential for enlightenment. Without a fundamental reasoning that allows for a development towards a final goal, there would be no point either in beginning or in continuing spiritual practice. This is why considering the true nature of mind and examining the causality of reality are essential in bringing about the clarity of awareness necessary to end ignorance and suffering.

3

Clear Dawning

Explanation of the Wow of Refuge

When anything and everything that can be experienced in the human realm is compared to the joy, bliss, happiness, and pleasure that comprise experience in the gods' realm, there is no parallel. Take the most intense form of consummate bliss that can be imagined in the human realm: this is only a fraction of what a being normally experiences in the gods' realm. From a spiritual standpoint, however, the human rebirth is far better than a godly rebirth because it is only in the context of human rebirth that one can transcend the cycle of samsara and attain enlightenment.

This does not mean that each and every being currently residing in the human realm is going to become enlightened as a natural consequence of being human. Indeed, while it is true that every human being has such a potential, and certainly every human being has a mind that gives the basis from which to work, some people are not predisposed by nature to do anything at all positive with their lives. In fact, some people are relatively evil by nature and unfortunately spend their whole human existence creating such negative karma through their evil actions that to talk of them becoming enlightened in the present human existence is a joke, something quite impossible. They will have wasted this precious opportunity, for their evil only serves to reinforce their negative karma, which causes their minds to go straight to a lower form of rebirth where even more intense suffering and confusion exist.

From a spiritual standpoint, the vast majority of human beings waste this opportunity and do not make any use of it at all. Either they have no understanding of spiritual development, or, even if they do, they do nothing about it and allow life to pass quietly in a very mediocre way. Nothing very bad happens, but then nothing very good happens either, particularly from the perspective of the opportunity that could be realized if only enlightenment were the goal.

As we have discussed earlier, one's experience in any realm of samsara is a result of positive and negative accumulations of karmic tendencies. One's potential is seemingly dictated by one's own past actions, and when this is recognized, one could possibly become overwhelmed and might even feel guilty or have regrets. But are these feelings of any use on the spiritual path? Actually, regret is a very necessary and mature quality to have, for being able to recognize fault in oneself means that one wants to do something about it. Regret is pure and simple and has a very healthy quality to it. Guilt, however, has the sense of hanging onto a feeling of being a faulty person or of punishing oneself for having a fault, without making any effort to do something about it. Guilt is a bit senseless and is not useful in spiritual

development because feeling guilty does nothing to eliminate the cause of the situation.

In some situations, however, it is possible that regret might arise when such a response is not required. This can be a problem. For example, suppose in a particular situation one has feelings of wanting to share and to be helpful by being generous, so one gives and shares a great deal. If one starts regretting this, one might say, "I really should not have been that generous as now I am going to be broke for the next week. That was a really stupid thing to do." Here is a situation where one is really destroying the good of what one has done. Although the recipients still reap the benefit of the generosity, one has turned a very positive act into something that lacks any virtuous quality, because one has regretted one's own goodness. That is a misuse of regret. So, you see, one needs to be careful about how regret is used because although it is an extremely healthy and necessary quality for any kind of spiritual or moral development, it needs to be used in its proper context. Regret brings to light what might be referred to as the one virtue of non-virtue, meaning the potential for non-virtue's possible elimination. If non-virtue were something solid and unworkable, this situation would then be hopeless. Non-virtue can be purified, however, and it can be eliminated; the way one is motivated to eliminate it is by having true regret. There is a story from the lifetime of the Buddha that may illustrate this proper context of regret.

There lived a woman in India who had a son, a young man for whom she had great hopes. She wanted him to marry well, to a girl whose family was in a very good social position and who would include a good dowry along with the bride. This mother watched her son like a hawk, making sure that he would not fall in love with some woman who did not meet with her approval. She was so determined to engineer a perfect marriage for her son that she manipulated his everyday doings and kept a close eye on any and all of his associations.

At a certain point, however, the son became drawn to a girl who was from a lower caste family. He and the girl were both very personable and easily became attracted to each other. One day, as he met his new love in the streets of the village to talk of their many interests, someone else saw their interchange and went directly to the mother. The report went something like this: "You know, you had better watch your son! He has met so-and-so and everybody knows what she is like; you do not want him to fall in love with her!" When the son returned home that evening, the mother insisted on his sleeping in an inner room that had no windows and only one door. With the words, "You are not going anywhere tonight!" she went to sleep right in front of his barred and locked door.

This went on for some while. He was guarded at night and was never out of his mother's sight during the day. Finally, by means of a go-between, the young man was able to arrange a meeting with his girlfriend. As usual, when he went into the inner room that night, his mother shut and bolted the door and then lay down to sleep. Some time passed before he got up, tapped on the door, and said, "Mother, I have to go to the toilet; please open the door."

Awaking with a fright, she said, "Stay in your room; I am not going to let you out!" But he kept insisting, "Let me out . . . open the door!" She steadfastly refused, until finally he broke down the door. Undaunted, she skittered about trying to bar his way. By this time he was in such a rage that he struck her with a blow that killed her. He was shocked and upset at what he had done; he had just committed matricide, one of the most serious negative actions. But the only thing he could think of was to go to his girlfriend's house, since, after all, she was expecting him.

When the girlfriend saw him, she was disturbed by his shaken manner and the distressed look in his face. She asked, "Why are you so upset? Are you not happy to see me? What ever could I have done to offend you?"

Her words took him aback slightly and he contemplated quickly: "If I tell her the truth, she will probably be impressed. She would know I cared so much about her that I let nothing prevent me from coming to meet her. If I lie or say nothing, she will be upset when she learns what has happened. No, I must let her know how much I care for her and tell the truth." He took a deep breath, squared his shoulders, and answered, "My dear, I wanted to see you so badly, but when my mother would not let me leave, I became upset and, in my rage, I inadvertently killed her. True, I am shaken by the regrettable loss of my mother, but nothing can stand in the way of my love for you."

When the girlfriend heard this, she was absolutely horrified, and thoughts raced through her mind. "What kind of a monster am I involved with? If he has gone and killed his own mother, what is he going to do to me?" Giving him a reassuring touch on his arm, she modestly begged a moment's leave to go to tend to her toiletry, asking that he await her return. He sat down to wait. His wait continued until the early morning light, for with it dawned the awareness that his girlfriend was long gone. At this point, he was completely remorseful and completely torn Not only had he committed the worst act imaginable in killing his mother, but he had also lost the girl who was the object of his dreams. Not only did he have very negative residue from the karma of his action, but he was also totally bereft of his sweetheart.

His spirit was now so broken that, with a real regret in his heart and mind, he went looking for a spiritual teacher. Eventually he came to stay with Shariputra, who was one of the Buddha's main students. Having taken ordination as a monk and received instruction in meditation, the young man began to practice as Shariputra had suggested. As his intent and regret were sincere, he progressed quite well. His motivation was an essential ingredient in his development, and things appeared to be going better. He was not intent on hiding his past and theretofore nobody at the monastery had ever inquired about his past. But one day, word of his mother's death got out. Being honest, he answered a monk directly and told of the circumstances surrounding his renunciation of worldly life. When the monk heard the tale of matricide, he was horrified that Shariputra would let a murderer into the monastery and proceeded to inform all the other monks. One thing followed another, and before too long the repentant man was ostracized by the monastery and forced to leave.

Going to a distant place where no one knew him, he became a teacher and, because he had gained some realization and had a good understanding of the Dharma, he attracted many students. He was a totally changed man; he had become very pure and was quite a sincere spiritual practitioner. Many of his students attained the level of arhats, which is a very significant level of realization, albeit not total enlightenment.

As he approached his last years, this great teacher embarked on a project to heat the buildings of the monastery that had sheltered him for so many years. Located in the shadows of the mountains, the monastery was extremely cold much of the year, which made it very difficult for the monks to practice. Recognizing the difficulty in developing one's meditation under such circumstances, he became completely absorbed in providing a warm, comfortable atmosphere for the monks. He wanted to complete this project before he died, yet he died just before it was finished.

Even though his practice had been quite effective, it had not been totally successful in eliminating the karmic residue from the negative act of killing his mother and this produced a rebirth in a hell realm, where he would have gone anyway had he left his karma untouched. Fortunately, he experienced only a few moments of an intense, hot hell and, interestingly, once there, he made a connection between his experience of intense heat and his desire to heat the monastery. The first conscious thought that emerged from the mind experiencing this karmic reward of hell was, "Gee, it is a little hotter than I expected/' At that point, the mental body perceived a denizen of hell walking towards him while saying, "What do you mean; why would it not be hot in hell?" So saying, the denizen immediately clubbed him. The negative residue of matricide, having been dissipated through purification in his recent human life and through this brief visit to hell, vanished; the positive result of his activities as a monk surfaced. This virtue caused him to take rebirth again, this time in one of the gods' realms.

The point of this long story is that recognition of a fault committed, regret over associated actions, and a sincere desire to motivate spiritual practice can, in fact, alter the fault's resultant negative karmic tendency. True regret can be of a very real benefit in bringing one closer to enlightenment!

Returning to the idea of precious human existence, in order for it to be truly precious, one is not only provided with the opportunity and freedom for spiritual development, one must also make use of that opportunity. A person with a precious human existence is someone who, by nature, is not only drawn to spiritual teachings, but who actively gets involved in spiritual practice. Through study and application, one not only recognizes that one indeed has such a spiritual potential, but one is also able to use it and to bring it to some level of realization. Of course, proper development depends on the individual's perspective. One needs to be looking beyond the context of this current life and this present world in order to generate the motivation to best use the opportunity of precious human existence.

A person who is very wise in the ways of the world, for instance, could spend a whole life amassing a huge fortune. It is possible to own millions of square miles, to own enormous palaces, to be worth billions of dollars, and to have

hundreds of people at one's command. Everyone might say, "What a wonderful person; what an amazing thing to do with one's life." From a Buddhist point of view, if that person were going to live for a hundred million years, the merit acquired from such activities may be worth the effort, but, in fact, that person is going to live a very short time; all too soon death will approach. When that person dies, the mind is removed from that situation. It is impossible to take any wealth, palaces, land, or servants beyond death's door. Furthermore, the process of gaining wealth and manipulating power is often corrupt, which means that a person in such a position often gets involved in negative activity, reinforcing negative karma, thereby furthering confusion and suffering that, as death dawns, will drag the mind down to a lower state of rebirth. Was that person actually so clever, and was such wonderful use made of that lifetime?

If, instead, that individual sets his or her goal on enlightenment and/or developing the mind through a particular process that would ensure a continual progression towards enlightenment in the future, this would be very beneficial. Or, if this individual had matured absolute bodhicitta, actually attaining enlightenment through spiritual practice, then this would have been even better. From this perspective, there are really marvelous and incredible things to do with one's life, with one's precious human existence.

In one of the tantras it says, "Each and every living being is buddha," but as we have already discussed, incidental obscurations of impure alaya prevent direct experience of pure alaya. Once those incidental stains or obscurations are removed, the potential is actualized; enlightenment prevails. One gains the direct experience of enlightenment, rather than simply having the potential for that experience. As unenlightened beings, we lack direct experience of pure alaya. However, once the potential unfolds, we become enlightened. The whole point of the teaching of Buddhadharma is to bring the tathagatagarbha potential to full actualization.

In order to discover this buddha nature through the practice of Buddhadharma, Tibetan Buddhists follow a particular path. The first step or the entrance to this path is known as taking refuge. This implies that one understands that in one's present situation one does not see the nature of mind, does not have an existence totally free of all suffering and sorrow, and does not have the direct experience of enlightenment. The Tibetans translate the Sanskrit term buddha as sangye, two syllables that roughly translate as elimination and unfolding, respectively, referring to the idea that there are presently levels of confusion in the minds of sentient beings that prevent the direct experience of enlightened awareness.

As we have previously discussed, sentient beings are obscured by the four veils. Sentient beings are subject to a fundamental level of ignorance, dualistic clinging, emotional confusion, and karmic tendencies which are reinforced through physical and verbal actions. All of these veils prevent the direct experience of enlightened mind. By definition, the state of enlightenment of a buddha or enlightened being is a state which, when attained, gives that direct experience that sentient beings presently lack. To proceed with a path of spiritual development is to remove those layers, which

then permits this potential to actualize. Such purification allows the tathagatagarbha to express itself completely, without any limiting or hindering factors.

In practicing Buddhadharma, one is taking refuge in the Buddha, confident that the Buddha Shakyamuni attained the state of direct experience, and confident that one has the ability to attain this same state. When one takes refuge, one openly declares that one's spiritual goal is the state of enlightenment. Now, the state of enlightenment to which one aspires expresses itself inherently and automatically as supreme compassion. This, in and of itself, is a source of incredible blessings; but whether or not one is able to receive such blessings depends upon one's own particular situation. Specifically, does one have faith in the source of blessing? Does one have the confidence and faith in Buddha Shakyamuni? If one does have such faith and confidence, then this provides a kind of opening and space in which blessings can enter.

The traditional texts speak of the buddhas' compassion being like a hook, and the practitioners' faith and confidence being like a ring which the hook can catch. Once that connection is made, it is possible for the recipient of the vow of refuge to begin to experience the benefits of the connection. One receives actual blessings and begins to develop toward full realization of enlightenment. If, however, the person's mind remains closed from lack of faith and confidence, then the ring does not open and the mind can be compared to an iron ball; there is no way for the hook to make its connection. The only way one can definitely experience such blessings is by providing the opening in oneself for the hook to make its connection. In taking refuge, one is creating the open space in one's mind so that the blessings and compassion of all the buddhas, which are inherently there, can be felt.

When one takes refuge in Buddha Shakyamuni, one is additionally taking refuge in his teachings, known as the Dharma, and in the close adherents practicing Buddhadharma, known as the sangha or monastic community. These three sources of refuge Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha — are termed the Three Jewels. One takes refuge with the basic confidence that the Three Jewels represent a source of blessing, of inspiration, and of spiritual development. Once the connection has been made and the faith and confidence continues in a person's mind, this connection remains valid. The benefits of the connection are not something limited to the context of this life. It can be said that those who take refuge, acknowledging faith in the Lord Buddha and in their own potential enlightenment, are guaranteed enlightenment at some point, because the first step has been made.

The process of becoming enlightened might be felt as a direction or guidance by some unseen force or principle. However, it is not that one is being led anywhere (in the sense of the hook pulling the ring); rather the individual simply comes to a particular state of attainment. On a practical level, there is a sense of being given guidance and of having found a safe refuge, a source of benefit in helping the practitioner overcome and eliminate the fears, sufferings, and problems in this life and in the future states of existence that the mind will experience. Once a positive connection exists in this life, then

the mind can be guarded from lower states of rebirth. There is a sense of being guided towards purity of being, which is, by definition, the attainment of enlightenment.

Once having taken refuge, the whole wealth of the teachings becomes available to the practitioner. Henceforth, a teacher may have confidence when giving teachings to the student. It is understood that through this gesture the student has proved his or her worthiness and regards the teachings as being a source of benefit and blessing. Thus, in taking refuge, one makes oneself accessible to the teachings; or rather, one makes the teachings accessible to oneself.

In each of the three yanas, the principle source of refuge is the Three Jewels. However, if one intends to practice the vehicle of the vajrayana, then one also takes refuge in the Three Roots. The root of all blessing is the Tsaway Lama; the root of all accomplishment is the Yidam; and the root of all activity is the Dharmapalas (the Dharma protectors).

The person who bestows the vow of refuge is the lama. When one receives the vow of refuge, one visualizes the lama surrounded by innumerable buddhas and bodhisattvas, all of whom are giving refuge. There is a mundane aspect, in which one prostrates and recites the vows before a physical spiritual teacher of Buddhadharma. As well, there is a transcendental aspect, in which one connects to the force of blessing and compassion of all the buddha fields and levels of accomplished bodhisattvas. If, after having taken this vow, one keeps it unbroken, then, in this very lifetime one will be protected from fear and suffering. Furthermore, throughout all future lifetimes (until one attains complete enlightenment), one is also protected from the fears and suffering of samsara.

The root of keeping the vow of refuge intact is to maintain faith. This is very easily accomplished: by remembering the great blessing, great compassion, and great power of the activity of the Three Jewels and the Three Roots with love, faith, and devotion, one simply recites the refuge prayer seven times each day. This repeated recitation takes less than five minutes of one's busy day, yet the prayer has strong benefits associated with it. The verbal recitation clears away obscurations of the door of speech, while the mental attitude of devotion clears away obscurations of the mind. There are several versions of refuge prayers, some shorter and some longer, but their meaning is all the same. Usually one is encouraged to recite a seven-line refuge prayer; but if this is difficult to remember when beginning, one may also say seven times the simple line, "I take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha until I attain enlightenment"

In the West, when one formally takes vows of refuge with a lama in the Kagyu tradition, one is usually given a Dharma name. This gift provides a strong memory of the day on which the lama bestowed his blessing. Furthermore, the name itself has a very auspicious meaning and signifies an auspicious connection with the Dharma. Thus, in wholly regarding what takes place on this auspicious occasion of taking the vow of refuge, it can clearly be seen that this simple action is the basis of all one's future Dharma practice and thus is extremely important.

Taking the vow of refuge is not limited by age. Even someone who is very old and incapacitated can still think and come to the conclusion that taking refuge is a beneficial step. But what about a child too young to understand the concept? Due to a number of factors, a certain blessing is imparted to the child taking part in a refuge ceremony. One factor is that parents who bring their child to a refuge ceremony are doing so out of faith. They wish the child to receive some kind of blessing and are acting with a sincere desire to help the child's spiritual development. Further, the teacher has a certain compassionate concern with intent to benefit the child. The child has buddha nature and the potential for enlightenment and thus directly benefits from making this connection with the teacher. Lastly, there is a certain blessing in the transmission of energy that takes place during a refuge ceremony which potentially furthers the child's spiritual progress.

But, if someone misinterprets the concern of parent and teacher for the child's future spiritual pathway and feels this example gives them an authority to go around proselytizing the teachings, or a permission to try and force the teachings on people who, although they have attained the age of reason, have not yet personally indicated a willingness in that direction, then a difficulty is created. Instead of benefiting them spiritually, the teachings may cause a great deal of harm, because the more a person has to resist unwelcome ideas, the more a person is not willing to listen, and the more a negative reaction begins to surface. Such disinclined persons may soon start to reject what is being said and, in so doing, only increase their own confusion and spiritual ignorance. They can end up worse than before, or in an even more acute state of spiritual deprivation.

In taking the vow of refuge, a person is not restricted in his or her actions nor barred from any kind of ordinary worldly activity. Furthermore, there is no conflict in having faith in or practicing another spiritual or religious tradition. Quite the contrary, it is entirely appropriate within the context of taking the vow of refuge to maintain one's association with the faith and belief of one's personal choice. So long as the conviction is held that the Three Jewels are a source of blessing and compassion, the refuge vow remains intact. If, at any point, a person rejects that faith and confidence, then that rejection has terminated the vow of refuge. Such rejection would close that source of benefit; the hook and the ring disengage, so to speak.

When looked at from a more ultimate perspective, while various methods and approaches in different religions and spiritual traditions exist, they all have a common purpose of providing some means of eliminating confusion and suffering. The Buddha himself stated that his followers should consider all religions and spiritual traditions as being none other than emanations of the tathagatagarbha. In presenting eighty-four thousand collections of Dharmas, the Buddha recognized the varying needs of all sentient beings. After all, we are individually stamped with our own personal karmic responsibility. These different expressions of spiritual tradition and religion are also of the same inclination, in that they serve to facilitate the varied spiritual growth of many sentient beings.

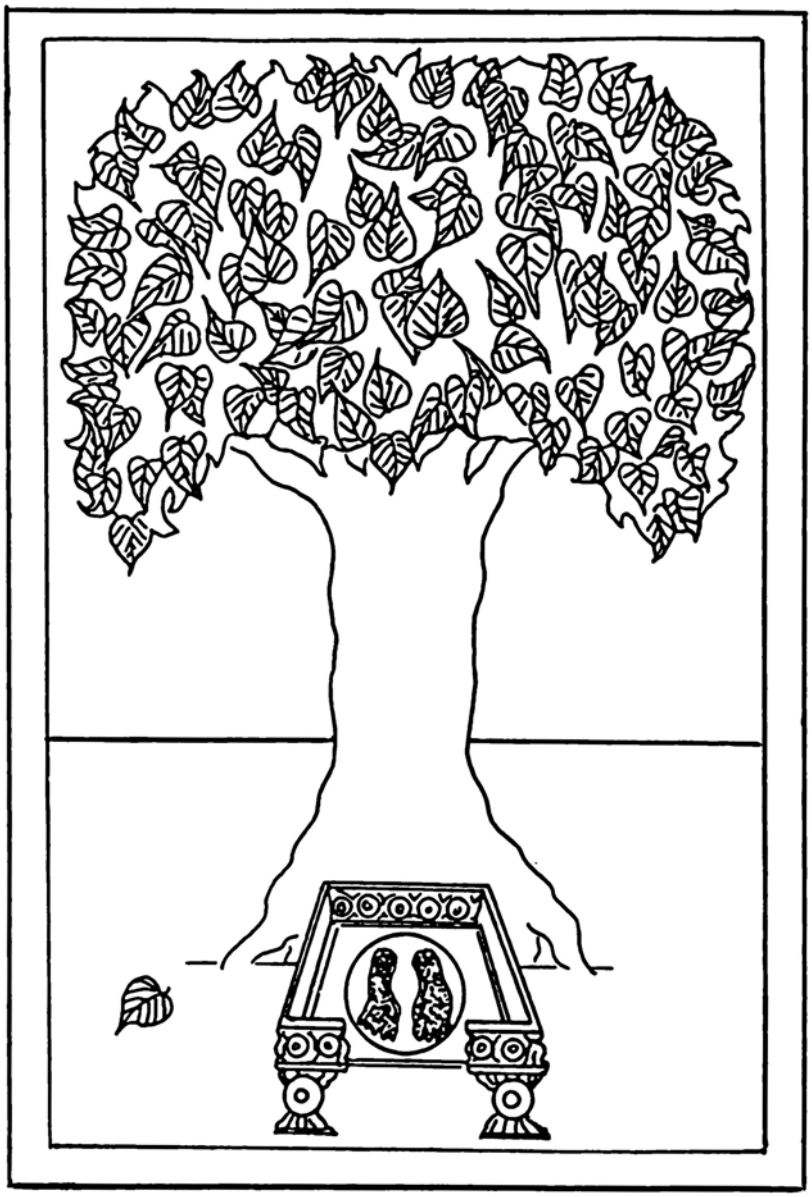
The Buddha also stated that one should not make judgments with sectarian bias concerning the truth or falsity of other spiritual approaches, nor reject them out of hand. While these approaches might not work for all people, this does not mean that they do not work for some; while Tibetan Buddhism is known as the quick path to enlightenment and other paths may take longer, there is only one goal. Therefore, taking refuge is the expression and formalization of one's overall faith and confidence in the path of attaining liberation.

I would therefore ask you to fully consider this and the teachings presented herewith. When the opportunity presents itself, I urge you to take refuge formally with a qualified lama. Furthermore, I pray that all mother-like sentient beings benefit by your decision to set forth on a path that leads to true liberation. Please join me now in reciting the seven line refuge prayer.

Refuge Prayer

From this moment onward, until the heart of enlightenment
is reached, I, and all sentient beings
limitless as the sky,
Go for refuge to all glorious, holy lamas;
We go for refuge to all yidams gathered in the mandalas;
We go for refuge to all Buddhas, conquerors gone beyond;
We go for refuge to all supreme Dharmas;
We go for refuge to all noble sanghas;
We go for refuge to all dakas, dakinis, protectors and defenders of the Dharma, who possess the eye of transcending awareness.

Let us dedicate the merit from this recitation to the benefit of all sentient beings that they might attain the true liberation of enlightened awareness.



The "Refuge of Enlightenment" Tree: The Budddha Shakyamuni was not represented iconographically until the second century A.D. Theretofore, only four symbols were used to represent his life and works: the Bodhi Tree, the Wheel ofDharma, the stupa, and his footprints. Lord Buddha described the bodhi tree as "my permanent abode" in the Divyavadana. In vajrayana, the bodhi tree is visualized replete with the lineage holders, with yidams and dharmapalas on the lower branches. (Pen and ink drawing, courtesy of the artist, Diane Thygersen)

4

Gathering Clouds

Resolution of Emotional Subjectivity

Having been raised in the high remote reaches of a desolately barren country, I find that the Western world has a standard of living and a level of comfort that is quite incredible. The degree to which those born here are well-housed and comforted helps shape their experience, just as ruggedness shaped mine. This incredible standard of living, with all the control over environment (that is, central heating, air conditioning, and so forth), plus the comparative personal wealth that individuals here generally enjoy, makes this Western realm seem like a gods' realm. People abroad look at the West and say, "People there must be laughing night and day, their happiness must be so great." Yet upon closer look, we find that, despite all the modern technology, gadgetry, and luxury, an intense mental suffering exists that can cause equally incredible anguish.

Why is this? Direct observation does not provide a reason for this as, obviously on a material level, everything that is needed, and often more, appears to be provided through this high standard of living. However, underneath this exterior there is a great deal of emotional confusion, which is where the problem lies. In general, the Western mind is subject to the conflicting, confusing aspects of emotionality that give rise to suffering. This is surprising, for it seems that anyone in such a materially abundant environment should be perfectly content. Westerners certainly have few needs that are not answered on a material level. Yet, life in any modern country leaves one highly susceptible to such emotional confusion.

How can we approach this question of emotionality? Can we do away with it completely, impractical though this may seem? Actually, there are a number of ways or approaches that are perfectly valid and lie within the Buddhadharma, allowing various means to overcome emotionality. It is entirely appropriate to adopt an approach that tends to cut off or arrest negative emotions so that they cease to arise. Another method is to transform negative emotional energy into positive emotional energy. The third approach, which is perhaps the most practical and direct, is simply to appreciate the nature of what is taking place when an emotion arises in the mind. Here one is regarding the nature of the experience without especially regarding the content. Understanding the nature of mind itself as being the origin or place from which all emotionality arises is the basis for this approach. Thus, the more one understands about the nature of mind itself as the origin of each emotion, the more one understands emotionality in general, and the more one is effectively able to deal with arising emotions.

To examine emotionality, we start by reducing it to the fundamental, or primary, emotions. In Buddhist theory, we speak of six primary emotions; or even more basically, we consider the emotional tendencies in the mind as

being three in number: desire (or attachment), anger (or aversion), and ignorance (or dull stupidity). Within this delineation of emotionality, we are speaking of things that are common to the human condition. They are not emotions upon which any one race or any one country has a particular monopoly, as all human beings suffer from the various effects of these different emotions. For example, it would not be accurate to say that Tibetans have fewer emotions or have less emotionality than Westerners. Nor would it be accurate to state that they have more. If we were to put the emotions of one culture on one pan of a scale, and those of another culture on the other pan, the scale would swing to a more or less even balance. Everybody has problems with emotionality. It is obvious, however, that emotions do express themselves in different ways in the world's various cultures. Whether or not any one emotion is encouraged or discouraged in any culture can create some slight differences, but the emotional raw material, common to everyone, does not differ throughout the world. Part of being alive in the human realm is one's subjection to the three (or six) basic emotions.

It is interesting to distinguish different forms that these emotional tendencies take on the cultural level. For example, the idea of ignorance as an emotion takes into account states of dullness of mind. Furthermore, although it may not seem to be an emotional activity, sleep is in fact part of the emotive quality of mind, for during it, the mind experiences a state of dullness. It is true that some differences in people's sleeping habits exist. Asians generally go to bed about eight o'clock in the evening and arise by five o'clock the next morning. People in the West seem to stay up until quite late at night, often until after midnight, getting up long after the sun has risen, sometimes as late as ten or eleven o'clock in the morning. In the East, our habitual emotional pattern of sleep might well have to do with the fact that we do not have widespread use of electricity or artificial light. When the sun goes down, so does everyone; and when the sun comes up, everyone does the same. On a very superficial level, one can distinguish different patterns that develop in the cultural expression of emotional tendencies, but the amount of emotion does not differ in various cultures in terms of potential.

We each suffer from emotional complexes that confuse the mind. In the case of anger and aggression, there has been a frequent tendency in the Asian cultures to hold up aggressive, fighting behavior as an ideal in proving strength and masculinity. The whole idea of being a warrior, of being an expert in martial arts, of lauding aggression and anger as something praiseworthy, has general cultural implications. It seems, especially nowadays, that Western people actually have fewer of these problems than Eastern world cultures; the tendency to praise physical violence or macho behavior is becoming outmoded in the West. In Eastern world cultures this attitude is still a problem. People continue to have a fixation or fascination with anger and the way it expresses itself in physical violence, in the prowess of one person over another, in defeat or victory in combat, and so forth. From an Asian's point of view, the culture of the Western world appears to be far more interested in putting down aggression and anger, rather than in reinforcing it, because persons who are very aggressive and pugnacious in

killing and fighting are not as highly regarded in that society as they might be in Asian cultures.

In the instance of another basic emotion, namely that of desire or attachment, it appears that by comparison the balance is the other way around. In Asian countries, modesty is encouraged and there exist social restraints in the expression of desires, particularly sexual desire. These cultures tend to be far more modest, by and large, than Western cultures. While there is no real guilt about sexuality, there is a great sense of shame and modesty concerning one's behavior in such matters. One is not very open in the expression of sexual desire. This tends to contribute to sexual fidelity because, on the general cultural level, there is still a strong sense of shame attached to being unfaithful to one's marriage partner. In a country like Tibet, marriages were extremely stable. Even if one of the partners was away for years at a time (as occasionally happened when a man went on a trading excursion to another country or another part of Tibet, or when a wife paid a return visit to her family some distance away), the husband and wife would become celibate for that period of separation. This worked to create a very stable sense of commitment, even if it was only because they were ashamed to consider anything else. The sense of modesty in expressing sexual desire did not mean they did not have it; it is not as though sexuality caused them no problems. People did experience and suffer from sexual desire but, because of social restraints, there was less encouragement of its free expression. Quite simply, there was virtually no cultural support for committing adultery in an expression of this desire. The strictures in Tibetan society allowed few avenues for human sexual expression and de-emphasized its importance.

Additionally, a very strong monastic tradition existed in many Asian countries, including Tibet, which prompted large numbers of people to take vows of celibacy. Such a way of life was highly respected in these cultures and was held up as an ideal role model, especially in Tibet. Monks and nuns developed a firm sense of commitment to a modest monastic lifestyle, at times only out of a sense of shame. The cultural morality dictated that it would be extremely embarrassing and shameful for oneself and one's family if a monk or nun were to break or to give back vows. In fact, when a son or daughter had taken vows, parents in Tibet would often be heard to say, "I would rather my child die than break these vows as it would be too shameful to live having broken them/' This attitude does not appear as consistently in the West. In comparison there is far more encouragement in Western societies to stimulate an expression of one's sexuality, and/or of personal desires and attachments.

Many of the laws in the West focus upon the control of aggression and in curbing actions committed through aggression and anger. Desire, on the other hand, is not as widely legislated. It remains something that the society not only tolerates but often openly encourages. In the West, one is generally encouraged to stimulate and give rise to all kinds of desire (sexual or otherwise) and to play out these sense-gratifying desires to their fullest. Even among those people who observe in their lives a strict interpretation of the monotheistic traditions, many indulge in satisfying a broad range of desires.

In the current general cultural milieu of the Western world, expression of desire allows emotions to be actively encouraged, actively stimulated, and over-blown, all within the contextual appreciation of this as something healthy. If one has a desire, one is encouraged to fulfill it. If one has an emotion, one is encouraged to stimulate it, to bring it to development by expressing it. Generally, this is seen as a healthy thing to do, while actually, in terms of karmic development, this approach tends to create a disproportionate exaggeration of desire and attachment. In and of itself, desire is one of the least harmful of emotions. It is that to which desire gives rise that is the real problem. It is the breeding ground for all kinds of other, more complicated emotional states. The simple arousal and playing out of desire (whether it is sexuality or any other kind of desire and attachment) will bring other things along with it — greed, jealousy, anger, quarreling, envy, etc. — wherein the problem lies.

In presenting different approaches for dealing with emotionality, Buddha Shakyamuni taught the three yanas or vehicles. The hinayana (or lesser vehicle) emphasizes abandoning or rejecting certain kinds of emotionality that are productive of confusion and suffering. This path places emphasis on the practice of a personal lifestyle and is formulated by various levels of vows or ordinations to be taken by the lay person, the novice, the monk, or the nun. These specific life styles are chosen to allow only certain activities in one's life and to cut off others simply through rejection or abandonment, because these activities are perceived as sources of samsaric suffering. The hinayana idea is to turn off unnecessary, counterproductive parts of one's life: one simply does away with activities that accumulate negative results. In many Eastern countries, where life still goes at a much slower pace and modernization is far from being complete, this path is easier to follow and is still currently in practice. For most Westerners, however, this approach is perhaps too severe, as the modern lifestyle makes it difficult to stop doing things that are considered to be within the social norm. It may not be feasible to exert such an exacting precision in shaping one's own morality without strong social support.

Another path that the Buddha presented was the mahayana, the great vehicle. In this approach, the energy of a negative emotion is rechanneled or transformed into the energy of a positive quality. For example, take a person who is an extremely angry individual, continually giving rise to anger, hatred, and aggression. In the mahayana approach, such a person would be encouraged to develop meditation to channel that negative energy into the development of benevolence, compassion, and loving kindness towards others. Regardless of the emotion, proper use of meditation gives a sense of transmuting and transforming the way in which emotionality expresses itself. Again, this is a fairly involved process. It takes time and commitment, and it may not be the most practical means to solve quickly the problems of emotionality.

There is another option given by the Lord Buddha, that of the vajrayana. This tantric approach seeks to get to the root of emotional experience without worrying about the superficial contents of the situation. In getting right to the root, in seeing directly into the nature of an emotional experience, the

liberation from emotion itself is spontaneous and simultaneous with the experience of the emotion. Vajrayana is an extremely direct path, but extremely profound as well. On a practical level, this approach is difficult to explain in so elementary a presentation. In order for it to be beneficial to the general public, an appreciation of the tantric method must necessarily be developed to enable one to understand the truly profound nature of this approach.

What, then, do we have left? We have just eliminated the three basic choices. There is yet another approach that we can try, and this method is not concerned so much with seeing into the nature of the emotion in any profound or mystical sense. Rather, one can automatically gain some understanding, some perspective as to the thoughts, emotions, and so forth, that arise in the mind through understanding the nature of the mind itself. Through examination of the origin of those forces (or those thoughts and emotions), one begins to understand their nature. This approach seems to be reasonable in that we are trying to effect the most benefit in one short lifetime. Additionally, this is an approach that is extremely convenient, very easily explained and understood. Used properly, this method is remarkably effective. It does not require a long term commitment to a learning process or restrictions in life style. Nor does it require any profound insight. It does, of course, require intelligence and understanding of what is being said.

The basic problem is that one believes that everything is real, and thus everything is treated as such. "I am real and solid, my body is real and solid, and these emotions I am feeling are real and solid/' Given this belief, we have no choice but to play out the emotions and to follow them to their conclusion. We are totally at their mercy. We experience situations where attachment, aversion, anger, stupidity, desire, and jealousy arise. We treat such subjective phenomena as being so very concrete that we automatically surrender to them. We invest this whole concept with such a validity and reality that we fail to recognize these qualities as absolutely false. We feel,"Well, there's no choice, because everywhere I turn, everything is so real; what can I do?"

So, we just play out our delusion. We are totally at the mercy of this projection of the mind.

What is really taking place? As human beings, we experience mind and body, we function in a combination of mind and body. We have a physical form and we have a mind experiencing through that physical form. There is a strong and subtle connection between the two. But, when we experience an emotion, whence is it coming? Does it really have anything to do with the body? Suppose we feel anger. Based upon that anger we might shout at someone, or beat up somebody, or even kill them; but these physical actions occur because we have the mental motivation to enact them. The body acts as an avenue or channel for emotion to be developed and expressed. If we think that emotion is purely and simply a physical manifestation, we should take a look at a corpse, a human body disengaged from its mind. Without a physical form, where is the mind's ability or avenue to express its emotional reality? A corpse is obviously unemotional because the mind no longer uses

the physical form to channel its emotional delusions. It can no longer continue to express anger or any other emotion, because the mind does not have the solidity it once had to make this possible.

Understanding this gives one more perspective. It enables the individual to realize that one does not have to give in to the mind's emotional delusions or to surrender to an emotion when it arises. Why? Because ultimately speaking, other than this wave of thought or emotion on the surface of the ocean of mind, nothing is happening. The mind is so fluid, so flexible; these qualities allow any situation to become workable. Mind is emptiness; it has no tangibility. One cannot ascribe any limiting characteristics to mind itself. The only statement we can make is to say that metaphorically mind is essentially empty. Yet, that is not all; we also know that the mind has an illuminating potential and the quality of an unimpeded manifestation of dynamic awareness. Now this is not to say that the emptiness is empty and yet phenomenal things are solid, because the manifestation of nirmanakaya is rather like a rainbow. A rainbow, as a whole spectrum of color, is very apparent and very clear, but it is not solid. You can put your hand right through it. This example of an appearance that is essentially empty but not substantial serves to give the idea that all perfectly apparent and clearly present phenomena lack an ascription of true tangibility or any ultimate reality. In a similar manner, the nature of mind, while being intangible, expresses itself as luminosity, as unimpeded dynamism.

What is really taking place when one has a single emotion? The empty, clear, unimpeded, and dynamic awareness is manifesting in a particular emotional form, without there being the necessity to ascribe any reality to that expression beyond the moment in which it arises and then fades away again. Since the emotion has only a very conventional kind of reality, no ultimate, substantial, or tangible reality need be (or even can be) ascribed to it. This makes the situation much more workable. One does not have to feel totally at the mercy of one's emotion. It is only when acquiescing to the emotion, or investing the emotion with the falsehood of reality, that one is forced to play out the consequences. And this is where the trouble really begins, because playing out emotions is an inexhaustible process. As long as one is willing to ascribe reality to emotions, they are continually self-perpetuating. It is like trying to exhaust the Ganges or any other large river; they just keep on coming.

To the extent that one allows desire (or any other emotion) to express itself, one correspondingly finds out how much there is that wants to be expressed. It is such an unending, bottomless well of emotionality that one can spend an infinite amount of time bringing it into expression, which is where the real trouble starts and wherein the real suffering lies. No matter what surfaces into expression as experience, there will be still more emotions and thoughts produced by the mind manifesting essential emptiness in an unimpeded way. In absolute reality there is nothing there. If there were something fixed or solid, you could chip away at it until nothing was left. However, because this is merely a manifestation of an intangible, dynamic state of awareness, it can keep on coming as long as you are willing to allow it. At that point then, the problem is not, "Shall I give up this emotion or not?" "Shall I stop having this

emotion or not?" Instead, the question becomes, "Shall I surrender to this emotion or not?" "Do I have to play out this feeling?"

In answer, when an emotion arises in the mind and no relentless need to play out the whole thing exists, one is then free from having to make crucial decisions of right or wrong. One comes to appreciate what is really happening when an emotion arises in the mind, be it desire, anger, or whatever. One experiences that emotion as a manifestation of mind arising from, and dissolving back into, the mind. It becomes more transparent, and the need to exhibit the emotion becomes less. Getting involved in all of the complications to which emotionality can give rise happens only as long as one is willing to ascribe an independent reality to an emotion (or a thought) that arises in the mind.

Emotion and discursive thought are not new to you, yet all this vast array of emotional conflict is not residing in any special place. You cannot store it in a cupboard and bring it in and out at will, for it is of the mind itself; being of the mind, it is insubstantial with absolutely no self-existence. As you have had emotional and mental discursiveness in the past, so too will these arise again for you in the future. They are not lost in some drawer or forgotten in last year's move, or even left in your therapist's office. These processes are a part of your being sentient.

I can say, "Emotions arise from the mind and the mind is empty/' and you now have an understanding of the meaning of those words. Such comprehension is important, as it is the first step to true understanding. But it is not enough, because nothing of ultimate benefit really comes about exclusively through intellectual comprehension. That is only the first step. Comprehension can become a deeper, more intuitive understanding and should ideally be carried through to a stable realization, or to its direct experience. The second step comes when such an understanding is translated into a living and stable experience. It is only then that any true benefit of spiritual teaching can be felt to enhance the practitioner's development, as it allows for the attainment of a greater state of happiness, of balance. Thus, in order for the present discussion to become meaningful, it is important that a process of deepening the understanding of the emptiness of mind begins through meditation and personal experience.

By maintaining a correct and erect posture in meditation, one can reach a point beyond which one does not have to direct the mind in any way. One does not have to look within, one does not have to look without. One does not have to direct the mind in any way but can just let it relax in its own natural state. The authentic experience of this nature of mind is characterized by a spacious, intangible quality, which we term the emptiness of mind. It is further characterized by a clarity and a transparency, which is the luminosity of mind. The fact that there is an experience of this emptiness and clarity, that there is a state of awareness at all, is the third aspect of mind — its unimpeded, unobstructed, dynamic manifestation as awareness.

Beyond assuming a correct posture and letting the mind relax naturally, there is no need for the mind to be forced, held, or controlled in any way during this meditation. Quite the opposite, the mind is simply allowed to experience its

own true nature without any distraction, without any artifice or contrivance at all, and without this spark of awareness being dulled or lost. This experience, then, is the authentic experience of mind itself. Although the nature of mind is characterized by spacious, intangible, empty essence, it exhibits an extraordinary potential at the same time. The mind could know anything. This potential for experience is none other than its luminosity and its clarity coupled simultaneously with an awareness, or a direct experience, of the intangible, insubstantial nature of mind, which has an omnipotent, transcendental, all-knowing quality. In calling attention to these three different aspects, which in fact are not different things at all, we are able to describe the mind effectively. These three different aspects of the mind are the unique experience of nature of mind itself.

Without wavering from this empty, clear, and unimpeded state of dynamic awareness, let us now try the following. You, no doubt, have emotions. No doubt you feel sexual desire from time to time. Now, allow yourself to think of someone that you find extremely attractive, either romantically or sexually; call the image of that person to mind and watch what happens. Watch the response of the mind to that image as you call it forth. The image called to mind is conditioned by thoughts of things that have happened in the past. There are certain tendencies in the mind, certain habits that dictate the way in which we think. To think of somebody one finds very attractive and appealing is generally a gratifying, pleasing experience. One starts to glow; mind and body begin to warm with that perception. There is a certain blissful quality in that initial experience of calling forth the image of that person, the object one takes to be the source of the emotion. At this point in the exercise, one remains or dwells in the perception of one's individual initial response — without having to indulge further, without having to elaborate, without having to construct anything. Simply experience that first glow of bliss within this empty, clear, and unimpeded spacious state of awareness into which that glow of well-being arises.

Let us now shift the emphasis. Rather than thinking of someone who is attractive to you, think of a person you hate, or who hates you, someone with whom you have a very negative relationship. Call to mind the reason why you are so angry at that person. But instead of playing out the whole range of animosity this evokes, before indulging in it, just be aware of what happens when you call to mind such an image of hostility; simply watch. Take note of the response that occurs when this anger begins to emerge.

What is important here is that regardless of the emotion being experienced — be it desire, anger, pride, jealousy, envy, greed, or whatever — what is really going on is a shift in attention. The mind is expressing itself in a different way. Nothing implicitly requires one to presume that this emotion has any reality in and of itself, that it has any tangibility at all, or even that it has any form, shape, size, location, or any solidity at all. It is just that the mind is expressing itself in a different way than it was a moment ago.

If one does not recognize the mind's true nature, one continues to be completely bewildered by emotional conflict and discursive thought. This can be an endless situation. When I first came to the West in the early seventies,

I stopped in Geneva where I met an exotic sheik who had thirty wives; I have since heard that he now has even more. This person obviously has to deal with many conflicting emotions in such a broad-based form of relationship. In recognizing that all this emotional conflict is arising from the mind, one realizes the mind itself is insubstantial and empty. If the force of emotional conflict is removed by one's attaining this recognition, the individual can live peacefully, no matter how many wives or husbands one has.

There is an illustrative incident that occurred between the great saint, Jetsün Milarepa, and one of his students, a young woman referred to as Paldenbum, who had came to him for instruction in meditation. As recorded in The Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa, Paldenbum's devotion to the Dharma was first tested by Milarepa. Finding she had faith, he proceeded to give her refuge vows. Then he began instructions in meditation. "Meditate on the sky," he said, "and meditate on space which is beyond any limitation, having no center or circumference or limit. Meditate on the ocean; meditate on an ocean so deep that the concepts of surface, depth, and bottom become meaningless. Meditate on your mind; meditate on the nature of mind so that concepts of luminosity or non-luminosity, clarity or lack thereof become irrelevant."

Paldenbum came from a wealthy family where everything was done for her by servants; thus, she was lacking in the physical strength usually required for becoming a student of Milarepa. However, her devotion to Milarepa was extremely great. Courageously, she renounced her worldly life and, with Milarepa's inspirational meditation instructions, went to the rock caves to meditate. Later she returned for clarification. "Milarepa," she said after she had respectfully prostrated several times, "it was fine when I meditated on the sky, but clouds began to fill it and move across it. It was fine when I meditated on the ocean, but waves began to cover the surface. And it was fine when I meditated on the nature of my mind, but thoughts and emotions began to crowd the clarity. I need a way to meditate on the sky, the ocean, and the mind which does not give rise to these problems."

Milarepa replied with a wonderful song, which instructed: If you meditate on space or the sky, clouds are merely a manifestation in space, within the space. Simply concentrate on space rather than on its manifestation. If you meditate upon the ocean, waves are merely a manifestation of the ocean; again there is no problem. Simply be aware of the ocean rather than paying special attention to the waves. When you meditate upon the nature of the mind, thoughts and emotions arise; these are merely a manifestation of mind. Simply be aware of the mind, rather than being caught up in the details of the manifestation.

Encouraged by Milarepa's clarification, Paldenbum continued to practice diligently. At the time of her death, she went to the dakini realms without abandoning her physical body because she had been able to resolve all aspects of emotional and mental discursiveness, going beyond the causality of karmic fruition through thoroughly recognizing the true nature of the mind.

This method is quite useful in allowing one to approach meditation in respect to the thoughts and emotions that arise in the mind. Mind, which produces

the thought, is essentially empty; therefore, thought is essentially empty. It partakes of the intangibility of mind. The same is true of emotions. This means is that the emotions we experience are completely insubstantial, completely unstable. There is nothing solid or dependable or reliable there at all. Everything is continually changing, precisely because these manifestations are empty and have no independent existence in and of themselves. They are mere momentary manifestations of mind, presently apparent but about to pass away. We see signs of this all the time.

A man falls in love with a woman and has incredible attraction for her until she turns around and goes away with another man. Then all of that attraction becomes anger and hatred. Quite simply, it is the manifestation of mind that has changed. It is not that there was ever anything real that was the attraction, or anything real that was the anger. In one instance the mental energy manifested in one particular way, and later it manifested in another. The emotion the mind presents can change just as quickly and as variedly as the wind changes the pattern of clouds in the sky. In understanding the experience of emotions in this way, one sees that there is very little need to think that they are so important. With this grasp of the situation, there is no need to think of emotional states as being so worthy of our attention that we surrender our mental balance and give in to emotion. There is no need for that at all!

One can continue to employ this approach and then analyze each experience. When something arises in the mind, be it thought or emotion, what is taking place? This can be a perfectly valid pursuit for meditation, especially when it is coupled with a more intuitive approach to the state of bare awareness. On the one hand, the practitioner is spending some time in meditation, consciously analyzing experience and looking for the source of emotion by such analysis, while on the other hand, he or she is employing the approach of just letting the mind rest in the state of bare awareness, of raw experience. This uncontrived state of empty, clear, and unimpeded awareness, is, as I have said many times, the nature of mind itself.

Through this kind of approach, one will find that when experiencing a very strong emotion of desire, anger, or whatever, something does indeed arise strongly in the mind. This can allow for the discovery of the tools to enable one to look into the real nature of that experience. Perhaps one will forge an appreciation of the mind itself, without the particular manifestation being a problem. Perhaps one will focus directly on that thought of desire, anger, pride, or whatever, to see exactly what it is. In either case, the result can be a greater calmness and deeper perspective on what is taking place in the mind when a thought or emotion emerges. The effects of this approach can be dramatic. It is as if one had a pot of furiously boiling water and dashed a cupful of cold water into it. The agitation immediately calms down. Emotions experienced in a solid way make the manner and whole being very coarse, gross, or clumsy. Some people become wrathful or unpleasant simply because there is a barrage of emotional energy. The individual can develop an appreciation for the perspective that allows a seeing of things for what they truly are and not for what one had assumed them to be. This approach calms the clinging of the mind, just as the cold water calms the boiling pot.

In Western society, there are a great many learned psychologists, psychoanalysts, psychiatrists, etc., who profess that the actual expression of emotions encourages those emotions to subside. They believe such expression will alleviate bothersome and perturbing emotional disturbances, and that this can free one from imbalances. But when the true nature of the mind is considered, this viewpoint is extremely erroneous because emotion itself is insubstantial. It arises from insubstantial mind and it continually arises when mind's true nature remains unrecognized. The impossible attitude and approach encouraged by some therapists that attempts to exhaust emotional discharge resembles the misconception of believing the full flowing river will come to a halt given enough time to flow.

Clinging to reality as being something substantial and real is like having a serious illness. The antidote that cures this dilemma is the recognition of its insubstantialness and of its true emptiness. Expressing an emotion cannot stop the flow of karmic consequences, nor does it successfully stem the flow of ignorance that blinds one to the true nature of the mind. The intensity of clinging to oneself as being substantial, of believing one's emotional conflict to be something substantial, can be exaggerated to the point of suicide, a fruitless result of emotional distraction. By recognizing mind's true nature as emptiness and by seeing that emotional conflict, discursive thought, and everything of the mind is indeed illusory and without self-nature, we can transform our constant preoccupation with emotional conflict, bringing about immediate calm. It is the recognition of emptiness that calms and completely removes the power, force, and bewilderment of emotional conflict.

When one experiences the emotions in a much gentler and more transparent way, this awareness really can transform one's entire way of being and the way in which one experiences life and relationships. There evolves a far gentler, more balanced quality of being. A balanced perspective and an equipoise emerge that give a sense of calmness and precision. Even on a very practical level, one's character development and approach to life change. At this point, then, the question is not whether or not one has emotions, or whether or not one should abandon certain emotions. Rather the challenge is to understand the nature of emotional experience more thoroughly, more precisely. The benefits that come about can be quite practical, as evidenced in the general well-being experienced and in the general sense of equipoise and gentle calmness with which one can go about one's life.

5
Eye of the Storm

Teachings on the Bardos of Death and Dying

The idea of rebirth, of the mind's endless continuity from one state of existence to another, rebirth after rebirth in the past, present or future, hinges upon the mind's essential deathlessness. While involved in the six realms of samsara, the mind is continually involved in the varying stages of rebirth, known in Tibetan as the six bardos (or intervals). The bardo cycle is said to be endless and is often compared to a wheel that turns unceasingly. This seeming endlessness happens because the mind is not subject to cessation or to being created at any given point, being no thing in and of itself. Intrinsic to the Buddhist teachings is the awareness of cyclic samsaric suffering, the desire to end this suffering (not only for oneself, but for all sentient beings), and the assurance of liberation being possible through the attainment of buddhahood.

Consider for a moment one's present rebirth as a human being. How is it that such a rebirth transpired? Try for a moment to think of the state of previous existence. In whatever physical form or realm of experience that had previously transpired, it would seem obvious that death occurred because one no longer takes part in that realm of existence. In between the death of that prior physical embodiment and the birth in this present embodiment several of the six bardo stages fashioned the experiences of dying, death, and rebirth. It is especially interesting for the Dharma student to examine those intermediate stages that transpire in the interim between one lifetime and the next; it also can be quite helpful in understanding the true potential for attaining enlightened awareness.

Following the bardo of the dying process (the physical death of a former body), there is a relatively brief period of unconsciousness that is due to the shock of the death experience. This interval is technically termed the bardo of the ultimate nature of phenomenal reality. Following this interval, there is a phase known as the bardo of possibility. The after-death experience of the bardo is every bit as real as the bardo between birth and death we are now experiencing. To elaborate, the projections of mind, the hallucinations, and so forth, that take place in the bardo of possibility are as solid as what we now experience in our daily lives. Additionally, emotional experiences of pleasure, pain, confusion and so forth, that take place in the bardo state are as real as those that we now feel. The only difference is that in the bardo of possibility there is no physical basis for consciousness; it is merely an experience of a mentally projected body without self-existence.

Manifesting in many different ways, the possibilities of all the six bardos, whether of the living, the dying, or the after death, are determined by one's particular karmic tendencies. At the point that the physical body dies, the

basis of experience currently employed is removed; the mind experiences in a purely mental way. Nevertheless, this experience has the flavor of embodiment because there is a compulsion (or habitual tendency of the mind) to embody itself in order to experience. Yet this bardo has no physical basis for the consciousness, even though the conditional subject/object clinging weaves a web of myriad forms, all the while believing mind cannot exist without body. Thus, this mental body appears as though there were a physical body, even though there is no physical substantiality.

Despite the delusional qualities of the mental body, the experience is very real to the mind experiencing the after-death state. When the mind is caught up in experience, this is the reality, this is what is real! At this point, then, this mind (which is essentially clear, dynamic, and unimpeded in its manifestation) is experiencing a disembodied state. There is absolutely no physical basis for consciousness, yet the obscurations that cloud the mind tend

to embody themselves as though there were. These obscurations tend to perceive (or to project) this quasi-physical buffer between the mind and the physical outer environment, believing both to be existent. From a subjective point of view, the perceived external embodiment is the receptor for all the pain and pleasure that one's mind can experience in the bardo of possibility.

At a certain point, the karmic tendencies producing the intermediate state begin to fall away, moving the mind to rebirth in any of the six realms, through any of the twelve links of dependent origination (nidanas in Sanskrit). In our case, our karmic accumulation manifested as an embodiment in the human realm. The mind we once knew as a prior reincarnation has traversed the bardo and has taken rebirth as the human being we now know ourselves to be.

The mind incarnates into a realm of rebirth, wholly dependent upon the karmic tendencies directing that process. Considering all the possibilities, rebirth as a human being is a relatively superior form of existence. On a karmic level, such a rebirth indicates that the positive tendencies (which are reinforced through virtuous or positive actions) tend to be in predominance, and the negative karmic tendencies (which are produced and reinforced through non-virtuous or negative actions) tend to be less dominant. This description is the generalization that can be made about existence in the human realm. This higher realm of human experience has considerably more happiness and fulfillment, and considerably more potential than many other realms of existence.

As human beings, we not only share a collective aspect of karmic existence, we each experience an individual aspect as well. Simply stated, the collective aspect is that predominance of positive tendencies that brings certain individuals together. In addition to shared experience, we share a perception of the human realm, including the physical environment. Activities that go on in the human realm imply a certain shared experience because we share the common karma to pursue those things; we agree on their existence in our world. This collective aspect of karma is reflective of the fact that there exists

a certain percentage of shared experience between beings in this human realm.

There is, however, an aspect of karma that remains a completely individual experience. For example, some people live longer than others and may be generally happier throughout life. They may have a more stable or well-balanced personality; they experience physical and mental well-being, good health, and prosperity, with the ability to be successful and fulfill themselves in what they do. Other people, while still taking rebirth in the human realm, may experience something quite different, like a short life and/or a great deal of sickness; they may have considerable unhappiness and instability (mental or physical), and know poverty, want, deprivation, etc. Whether positive or negative, all of these experiences will arise because of habitual tendencies that are the individual aspect to the karmic process.

Even the conception and development of the fetus in the womb will be dependent upon whether or not that being has positive or negative karmic tendencies in his or her makeup. In some cases, for both mother and child, the pregnancy can be a very easy one; it can be a pleasant experience. The birth can be a relatively straightforward, painless affair; the child is born without complications and is healthy, complete with all of its faculties. In the other extreme, it is a miserable experience for the mother and the child. Sometimes the child can be conceived in such a way that deformation, retardation, or any variety of impairment (or lack of normal makeup of a human form or mind) results. The birth process itself can be an extremely painful, traumatic one, and the child takes his or her first step into the world with suffering, complication, and pain. Again, this is an aspect of individual karma.

A good example of how both collective and individual karmic tendencies combine to produce unique experiences is that of the individual's entry into any of the six realms of collective experience. It should be obvious that not every sentient being goes through the same birth process as that of a human being. In fact, there are certain realms in which a kind of miraculous birth takes place, in the sense that the being enters fully developed into that realm of experience, without a gestation period; for such an entity the stages of fetal development are totally unnecessary. The mind simply incarnates in a particular form as a complete entity. This is a characteristic of the hell realms and the gods' realms. In the case of the hell realms, the mind of the being incarnates immediately in a form that experiences the intense heat or cold of any one of the eighteen states that come under the classification of hell realm. In the case of the gods' realms, there is again an immediacy to the mind's incarnating. The mind finds itself in a body surrounded by a pleasant environment in one of the various levels of the heavens. There are descriptive passages in various texts that tell of a being immediately incarnating to a heaven in the center of a flower that immediately opens to reveal the gods' realm to that being.

In the human realm, and in the realm of pretas (or hungry ghosts), however, birth has many conditions. It is based upon sexual polarity, upon union between a father and a mother, upon the conception of a child in the womb of

the mother, upon the gradual process of development of the physical structure in the womb, and upon the child then being born to become part of that realm. This can often take very strange turns. In the human realm, we are familiar with a woman giving birth to one or two children at the same time, while in certain preta realms, it may be possible for a mother to give birth to hundreds of children, hundreds of pretas, at a single time. As an example of shared or collective karma, these newborn pretas entered into their realm through the same womb door.

In the case of the animal realm, including insect life, there is a variety of possible birthings. There is birth from the womb (as with mammals), birth from eggs (as with birds and insects), and some kinds of immediate birth where the being emerges fully developed into that realm of experience (as with larvae). There are also certain kinds of generation which are based upon the right conditions, such as heat, humidity, etc., that cause life to multiply. In all, there are four basic processes whereby beings come into their respective realms and particular karmic situations; and all four of these are found in the animal realm.

It is interesting to note that prior to conception, while the individual's mind is still experiencing the last stages of the bardo of possibility, a perception (a quirk of karma) is produced that causes a prescience of who the future mother and father will be.

In the case of a sentient being taking rebirth in the human realm, there is an image or experience of seeing the mother and father in sexual union immediately prior to conception. Tied in with the conception process, then, is not only the sperm from the father and the egg cell from the mother joining together to create a physical basis; there is also the consciousness of the bardo being, in its disembodied state, as an involved third element. There are thus two physical elements and one mental element that come together for the complete conception of the human individual.

Furthermore, it is an emotional response of the future child, as part of the propelling force on a psychic level of conception that determines whether the child will be male or female. If the karmic tendencies are to result in a female rebirth, there will be a positive attraction toward the father, the male energy, in the mind of the disembodied being and a repulsion or aversion to the female energy. This attraction and aversion will be part of the conception process. If the opposite is to occur and the child is to be born male, then an attraction to the mother, with a repulsion or aversion to the masculine energy, will be the emotional component of that conception. In either case, the conception takes place when the physical cells of the two elements from the father and the mother and the consciousness of the being come together. From that point onward, the mind, having gained a physical basis for that consciousness, expresses itself through the growth of the fertilized egg, maturing as a fetus in the womb of the mother until the full term of pregnancy is reached and the child is born with the form and sense faculties of a human individual, as a human baby.

What is significant for us to examine at this point is not so much what takes place during phenomenal life, but that which inevitably happens at the end of

it, or death. This is something we are all going to have to face, sooner or later. The very fact that a birth has occurred indicates that a death will occur. Indisputably, they define each other. No one is born who does not die, and nothing comes into being that will not, at a certain point, fall apart. This is as true in the human realm and its phenomena as it is with anything that arises interdependently in any samsaric realm. Our existence as humans, the mind's experience of the human realm, will eventually come to an end.

Death has several phases or intervals. Actually, the whole of life is a process of dying; when the time of surrendering the physical form dawns, there is the interval known as the bardo of the dying process, which begins whenever the particular cause of death strikes. Whenever a fatal disease or accident, or some other element that causes the organism to be afflicted beyond reparation is encountered, the process of dying begins. The bardo of the dying process then continues to the point that a being actually does die, as evidenced by the stoppage of breath, the cessation of heart activity, etc., indicating that the mind and body are separating and their bonding is falling apart. The bardo of the dying process is but another aspect of the concept of bardo, or interval stage, between one state and another.

Regardless of the cause of death, the dying process indicates that the elements that compose one's physical body and one's psycho-physical experience of the body are breaking down. Traditionally, this is viewed as the dissolution of several different essential forces. The earth element is not earth as an object hanging in space, but rather pertains to the earth-like quality of the solidity of the body. The fluidity of the body's blood and fluids comprise the water element. The biological warmth of the organism is the fire element. The respiration and circulation within the channels comprise the wind (or air) element. The process by which these various qualities begin to break down is experienced on a psychic and a mental level. There are signs involved with the varying stages of the dying process that happen both subjectively, in that they are purely the experience of the dying individual, and objectively, in that someone else can watch or feel them happening.

When the actual death process begins, the least subtle element, the earth element, dissolves and becomes absorbed into the next most subtle, which is water. When this happens, the person's body appears to become very heavy and is very difficult to move. The dying person is then unable to sit up or to lift the legs and arms; there is a steady loss of bodily movement and control as this element dissolves. As the ability to coordinate and to move the body effectively subsides, the inner subjective experience is that of being crushed by a great weight, as though a mountain were sitting on one's chest. When the breaking down of the earth element reaches the psychic level, there is an experience as though the physical body were being squeezed or crushed, which is very terrifying.

The second stage is the dissolution of water into the next most subtle elemental quality, that of fire. The external sign of this is the inability of the person to control urination, salivation, or mucous discharges. Fluids begin to leak from any and all of the body's orifices, without the person being able to control them through musculature. This sign indicates that the water element

is being absorbed into the fire element. On a subjective level, the dying person feels as though he or she were drowning or being inundated with water or carried away by a flood or torrent. Again, this is a very traumatic and terrifying experience.

The third stage of the process is the dissolution of the fire element into the air element, the next most subtle quality. On an inner level, this is experienced as though one were flushed with fire, as though the body was being subjected to incredible heat. To someone watching the process, the objective phenomenon is the gradual loss of bodily warmth from all the extremities. First the fingers and toes begin to become cold, then this cold moves up the legs towards the heart. Overall, there is a gradual loss of body heat. This is a sign that the fire element is dissolving and being absorbed into the air or wind element.

Following this, the wind or air element dissolves into the element of space, which is one's consciousness itself. At this stage, the objective observer would notice the dying person's difficulty with respiration as the most significant symptom. Perhaps there is rapid, shallow panting, or long, sobbing breaths that are hard to hold and are immediately expelled. As soon as the breath has left, the person has great difficulty inhaling the next lungful. Here the process of respiration is being interrupted. The subjective experience is one of being caught in a maelstrom of air, as though a tornado or hurricane were tearing at the fastenings that are binding one, until the process of respiration finally ceases. This cessation indicates that all the elements have broken down and have been absorbed into consciousness itself.

At this point, a rapid three-stage process occurs. You will recall that at conception there are feminine and masculine forces (or energies) present, which were received from the mother and father and were connected with the physical structure of the body. These are technically referred to as the white and red bindus. Bindu is a Sanskrit word meaning drop or essence, implying something that is concentrated. The white bindu is considered masculine; the red is feminine. Regardless of whether the individual is male or female, the white bindu is the energy received from the father. At the point of dissolution of the element of space, this bindu is considered to be concentrated in the crown of the head. The red bindu is the feminine energy received from the mother and is concentrated at a point below the navel, in the genital region.

Once the elements have completely dissolved into one's consciousness, the death process continues when the polarities of the red and white energies begin to move toward a common center. The first process is that of the white bindu (or force) moving down from the crown of the head to the heart region. For the dying person, this phenomenon is connected with a visual experience of seeing a field of white light. It is as though one were suddenly flooded in moonlight or with clear white light. It is extremely brief, as this happens in just a fraction of a second while the energy is dropping to the heart region.

The white bindu reaching the heart cakra implies that the mind is then incapable of experiencing anger or aggression. Emotions having an aggressive or angry quality are temporarily (but not ultimately) blocked, so the mind cannot experience them. The texts say that even if the dying person

were to see someone murdering his or her own father at that time, one could not get upset.

Immediately following this (again, very quickly), the red bindu or feminine energy moves up from the genitals to the heart to meet the white energy descending from the crown of the head. The consciousness of the dying person, which at this moment is poised just at the point of death, now experiences a flash of red light. It is as though the sun suddenly rose in front of one's face, directly confronting the individual with a red brilliance. At this stage, all the emotions having a flavor of desire, attachment, or attraction are effectively severed. Even if the most tempting and beautiful goddess, or the most handsome and wonderful god appeared, there would be not the least thought of attraction in the dying consciousness. The mind simply cannot experience those emotions at this point.

It is when these red and white forces meet in the heart region that death truly occurs. At this point the physical body and the mind separate. The energy structure has broken down completely; there is no longer an avenue for that physical basis to maintain consciousness, as it is no longer part of the life experience.

There is a technique in Tibetan Buddhism known as phowa, which in Tibetan means consciousness transference, developed to exercise a certain degree of control over the way in which the consciousness leaves the body at the moment of death. The proper time to use the phowa technique is when the white and red bindus come together at the heart. A skillful adept can transfer the consciousness to some higher state of realized awareness, to a realm of pure experience, rather than having the mind plunge into the naturally occurring state of unconsciousness that follows death. Without the use of this powerful technique, the mind will black out; even the coarser levels of ignorance and dullness are blocked, so that the mind experiences a brief but total quality of ignorance.

As you have just seen, the bardo of the process of dying is one in which the elements dissolve into each other in progressive stages and the mind loses contact with the external phenomenal world. Here the senses begin to break down—the eyes dim and are not able to see; the ears cannot hear clearly; additionally, the senses of taste, touch, and feeling are lost. Gradually, as the moment approaches when total oblivion looms, the mind itself loses the ability to think consciously. At this moment, when the mind enters into the total oblivion of complete unconsciousness, the potential also exists for a very different kind of experience, again depending upon whether one has developed advanced spiritual practice during life.

In vajrayana, one of the techniques of the six yogas of Naropa, which is termed radiant light (or luminosity), is designed to allow the practitioner to develop a state of clear awareness that can be experienced during this stage of the death process in lieu of the normal experience of unconsciousness. It is also possible to develop this state through the mahamudra meditation approach of directly experiencing the nature of the mind, regardless of content. If, during this lifetime, the practitioner has developed these approaches and techniques in meditation, tendencies have been established

that hopefully will appear just at that moment. If these habits carry over beyond the physical death to the ordinary experience of total oblivion, the mind can instead experience a state of awareness that is in direct contact with its own true nature. The attainment of this potential level of direct insight approximates the definition of the realization of the first of the ten levels of accomplished bodhisattva. There are ten of these levels or degrees of realization; whatever is beyond the tenth level is the enlightenment of complete buddhahood. In this very subtle experience of bare awareness, it is possible for extremely rapid spiritual progress to take place. One may, in fact, make the transition from the first level to complete enlightenment in that short period of time. Indeed, even a movement from the first to second level, the first to fourth level, or any other leap could produce very dramatic results if this yoga of Naropa has been developed.

The period of unconsciousness after death is generally three and a half days at the most. If one's practice has developed well in this life, the potential exists for one to make dramatic spiritual progress. For the untrained human being, however, dying presents a different reality. We can recognize objectively that once the respiration has stopped and the heart has ceased its activity, the physical body is no longer relevant to the dying person. What we do not see, however, is the subjective experience of intense shock or trauma, the reaction that plunges the mind into a state of unconsciousness. Once the death has occurred, the mind goes blank for a period of time, not unlike ordinary deep sleep. The traditional rule of thumb measures this period as being three and a half days, though it is by no means restricted to that.

Eventually, the consciousness begins to arise and stir anew. As the consciousness begins to become cognizant again, the reawakening individual confronts the projections of the mind. In the Tibetan Book of the Dead, this encounter is termed the experience of the mandala of the peaceful and wrathful deities and is experienced in a variety of ways by different beings. The predominant quality of the experience, however, is that it is misunderstood and misinterpreted by most mental bodies, for, when a mental body sees a mandala of deities, it is usually experienced as some kind of threatening, repulsive external force. The mind shies away, as though these projections were something actually outside the mind itself rather than a hallucination taking place in the mind. One can definitely benefit by receiving empowerment into the cycle of practices known as the Bardo Thodol, of which the Tibetan Book of the Dead is one text. The blessing and the understanding gained through such practice establish tendencies that can allow the experience of the bardo hallucinations to be rather attractive, or at least the confusion can be lessened so that the potential to progress spiritually might be perceived.

If the consciousness of the deceased person does not perceive the experience of the peaceful and wrathful deities as being a pure projection of enlightened mind, but rather draws back from it, then the mind, in continuing the after-death experience, is propelled further into another bardo. This next stage is termed the bardo of possibility, because, quite literally, anything can happen in that state. It is a state of immediate experience because there is absolutely no physical basis for consciousness. This means that whatever

arises in the mind is immediately externalized and experienced as though it were actually happening. Simply thinking of something is to experience it directly and immediately.

Perhaps this would be like thinking of India and being immediately in India. And with each thought that followed, one would find oneself instantaneously in that environment, for example, from India, to America, to Canada, to the family home, to Nepal, etc. Or one could think of a person one likes and immediately be in his or her presence, and in the next moment, one can think of a hated person and poof! be in that presence. We do not now experience such immediacy of experience because there is a physical basis for consciousness which slows the process down. In the bardo of possibility, however, anything can happen, and does. The mind is tossed from one experience to another, on a second-by-second basis, or even on a fraction-of-a-second basis. Things jump from place to place, with no coherence and no continuity; whatever pops up is experienced.

Again, in the teaching of the six yogas of Naropa, there is another practice, termed the bardo yoga, that specifically relates to the after-death state of the bardo of possibility. Using this technique, one can take advantage of the immediacy of the experience to completely transform it. Given that instability permeates the entire situation, the positive potential exists to enable one completely and instantaneously to transform the experience. If one practices this kind of meditation technique during this life, at the moment the bardo appears, tendencies can arise to permit one to make a complete transformation. For the skilled practitioner, the experience itself can be the antidote to suffering because the tendency established by the practice of bardo yoga can effect a complete transformation, allowing the mandala of deities to be perceived in its true nature.

Even without having perfected this yoga, one can obtain liberation in the bardo of possibility. Any meditation, such as a meditation on Chenrezig (the Bodhisattva of Compassion), in which one identifies with the form of the deity, recites the mantra, and uses the various visualizations, helps develop the ability to recognize the peaceful and wrathful deities because one of the main benefits of such yidam practice is the tendency to recall the practice. If the yidams' images or their mantras arise in the mind strongly enough while in the bardo of possibility, and if one's devotion is sufficient, then a complete transformation of physical, verbal, and mental experience comes about instantaneously upon recognition of the true nature of the bardo experience. If the tendencies developed in daily meditation arise in the mind while there is no longer a gap between the arising and its experience in this bardo, then one will directly experience the purified awareness of sambhogakaya.

Development of such potential is the main idea behind the pure land practices, which foster the aspiration toward rebirth in a realm of pure bliss, of pure experience. The form given for expressing this motivation is devotion to an enlightened being named Buddha Amitabha. The virtue of devotion to Buddha Amitabha is that his pure land is directly accessible through faith/ motivation, and aspiration. If the aspiration to attain the pure blissful experience of Dewachen is strong enough, then during the bardo state where

there is no physical body as a hindrance, the process can happen instantaneously. Before the mind is required by karmic patterns to take physical rebirth, the process can be started that will culminate in the experience of the realm of pure awareness. Through the development of faith, motivation, and aspiration to Buddha Amitabha in this life, one can short circuit all established patterns, allowing the mind to break through the individual's enmeshing karma.

With such an approach, one can attain a state equivalent to the realization of the first level of an accomplished bodhisattva. This incredible experience is described in the texts with such phrases as " taking birth in a flower in a beautiful realm of supreme bliss/7 The eloquent way in which it is presented in several texts has provided a basis for the aspiration and devotion that is the center focus of the pure land school. Practicing Amitabha meditation definitely establishes the tendencies which will allow the transformation to take place in the bardo of possibility. Practice of other yidams can also effect the same result. When the mind is no longer subject to the limitations of the physical embodiment, the complete instability of mental projections provides unusual potential for complete transformation, to the extent that liberation can come about in a very short period of time, even instantaneously, if one's practice is stable enough.

No matter the quality or quantity of one's practice, there is no guarantee that the bardo experience will bring about enlightenment. One complication that can occur is a carry-over of the attachment and clinging from life into the after-death experience. For example, in the bardo of possibility, it is not only possible for the consciousness to recall the home in which the individual had lived, but it is also possible for it to attempt communication with those remaining members of the family, as though those beings were actually present. The limitations of the bardo state, however, do not permit actual communication. There is the appearance of the home and family, but any attempt at communication is ineffectual, as it is wholly the mental body's projection.

It is also possible that the consciousness experiencing the bardo may perceive others speaking about his or her death. In any case, some kind of realization eventually dawns that death has occurred. When the awareness of death becomes conscious, it is too much for the mind to accept, again producing a kind of shock or trauma. The mind can again blank out temporarily; when it subsequently re-arises, another bardo of possibility experience takes over.

It is indeed entirely possible to have an attachment remembered from a previous life, of wealth, possessions, or something similar. Such images emerge in the bardo while recent attachments are still fresh in the mind. The consciousness may similarly perceive that recent wealth or possessions are being taken or divided among other people. Being unable to recapture that wealth, a feeling of pain and suffering arises that can be a real impediment to the aspiration inspired by yidam practice. On the one hand, the individual may be sincerely aspiring to obtain a realm of pure experience through

transformation, while, on the other hand, he or she may be holding back due to a sense of all that has been left behind.

With the mind still trying to recapture what happened earlier, the experience can take very strange turns. The mind can perceive, for example, a loved one calling, "Do not go, come back!" This is just a projection of attachment to a person or situation; even though one wishes it, nothing can be recaptured. Thus, instead of aspiring completely, one can be continually looking back. This can be a real problem, a very great obstacle in affecting complete transformation.

The bardo of possibility, this interval in which anything can (and generally does) happen, has an earlier and a later phase. The early phase is more connected with impressions from the recent life, or the immediately preceding state of existence, because these impressions are the freshest in the mind. They play a dominant role in what kinds of impressions and experiences the mental body has. From time to time throughout this phase, situations arise where the mind of the deceased individual understands that death has occurred, again producing the stupor of traumatic shock.

The later phase of the bardo of possibility begins when the impressions from the previous existence begin to fade. Clinging to the past is no longer the object of conscious recollection; the mind begins to forget. What takes predominance at this moment are impressions connected with future destiny and the shaping of whatever physical rebirth the mind will take next. The impressions of the later phase, and the way in which the mind perceives, tend to be conditioned by tendencies of karmic fruition that lead an individual toward a state of rebirth in a particular situation.

The standard length of time traditionally accepted for this whole process of intermediate states between death and rebirth is thought to be roughly forty-nine days. It may be longer or shorter, but this is the standard reference for the amount of time spent by the disembodied consciousness in the three bardos.

If liberation has not been attained, then at a certain moment (regardless of the duration of the bardos) the mind will be propelled by the forces of karmic fruition into a state of rebirth. The circumstances of all rebirths will be individual, for this is the process of samsara. The term samsara implies "going around and around and around/' referring to the cyclic state of birth and death, from one form to another, from one realm to another. It is not a cycle in the sense of coming back to the same place each time; rather, it suggests moving continually from one state of limited existence to another, with the experiences of disembodied consciousness of the bardo filling the gap between rebirths. The process is that of the mind experiencing one state after another, and/or one realm after another, with varying successive karmic accumulations. As long as the individual does not attain enlightenment, the process is endless. Samsara does not exhaust itself of its own accord. It does not run out of bodies, nor does it run out of possibilities of confused awareness. It goes on and on and on, continually renewing itself as it exhausts itself.

Only one context provides the opportunity to transcend all this ceaseless suffering and to step out of the whole vicious cycle. That is the opportunity of the precious human existence. What is most significant about having such an existence is the karmic fruition that allows one to encounter spiritual teachings, have an interest in them, and to develop the faith and confidence to employ them.

When such opportunities are activated, the individual can actually make the necessary steps to become free of the endless and relentless cycle of rebirth.



In the courtyard of Rumtek Monastery, Kalu Rinpoche poses before going into the shrine room for the Mahakala puja. (Photograph by J.G. Sherab Ebin)

6

Distant Shores

Introduction to the Vajrayana Practices

As living beings, our experience of existence occurs through means of five (or six) elements. Furthermore, all sentient beings, not only human beings, have variable concentrations of the elements of earth, water, fire, wind, and space, each of which contributes towards the substantiation of physical form. As you may recall from our earlier discussion, the element of earth, or the sphere of earth, manifests as the solidity of bodily existence. The sphere of water is present in the body as its fluids. The sphere of fire is its warmth. The sphere of wind is associated with the breath. The orifices and spatiality of the body are representative of the sphere of space. Additionally, all sentient beings have the sphere of wisdom. In all the realms except human, however, this wisdom element is likened to one of the other five, such as fire or water. This similarity obscures the essential quality of wisdom, making wisdom an indistinct and unrevealed quality for the beings manifesting in those realms. These beings function as though they have only five essential elements. It is extremely fortunate that human beings have the separate and distinct element of wisdom in addition to their quintessential physical being.

The element of wisdom is one's inherent buddha nature, and, as we have discussed, is present within all sentient beings. As you may recall, this buddha nature may be likened to perfectly pure water, and the obscurations of ignorance and stupidity may be likened to mud. The nature of the water is undiminished when it becomes mixed with the impurity of the mud. Similarly, insubstantial obscurations veil our innate, inherent buddha nature, yet it is the wisdom element that enables one to recognize the mind's true nature. Unfortunately, sentient beings in the three lower realms are so heavily obscured, mostly by ignorance and stupidity, that they have no recognition or experience of the wisdom element or buddha nature.

Within the human realm of our experience, the wisdom element makes its presence known to varying degrees. The degree of revelation is a result of one's previous positive accumulations that allows partial purification of the obscurations veiling the mind's true nature. The unveiling of this awareness is known as "the dawning of our innate wisdom element." Such awareness distinguishes itself in our recognition that the human ability to understand certain things differs from that of beings in the other realms, most notably and observably from the capabilities of those beings in the animal realm.

Further, this wisdom can be developed and increased, especially if one uses the path of Dharma. To illustrate this, remember that in the middle of the night there is such total darkness that it is impossible to see or to discern anything except the state of darkness. But, come the earliest part of dawn, the outlines of mountains and different landscapes can be vaguely perceived,

and as the sun continues to rise, the details of the environment become clearer. This comparison illustrates the character of the wisdom element which awaits the clarity of perception, the dawning recognition of mind's true nature. With the practice of Dharma, this wisdom element increases, flourishes, and becomes fully illuminated; much like the sun's gradual rise into full daylight, it allows all phenomena to be seen with great clarity.

Although the wisdom element is a sixth and separate element in the human realm, still it is obscured by the discursive consciousness, the element of consciousness. Even though one may hear the Buddha's teachings on the nature of mind and of all phenomena, the obscuration of discursive consciousness prevents the element of wisdom from fully manifesting and, without this full wisdom, one is unable to recognize fully the true nature of the mind. With meditation practice, however, the obscuration of discursive consciousness decreases and the sphere of wisdom increases, becoming more apparent, and thus more powerful. This is the process of the path of Dharma.

As we have discussed, the discursive element of consciousness is thought of as being of four types. These are the obscurations of primordial ignorance, dualistic clinging, emotional distraction, and karmic accumulations; all four obscure the element of wisdom. Fortunately, through the practice of Dharma, these four veils may be completely purified. When the clouds that obscure the light at noon have vanished, the sun appears completely brilliant in the mid-heaven; similarly when the four mental obscurations are eliminated, primordial wisdom is completely present and shining. This is what is meant by the Tibetan word sangye, meaning completely purified, opened, and accomplished. This is the Tibetan term for buddha.

Once a sentient being has purified the four obscurations and has attained the state of sangye or buddhahood, then his or her wisdom is completely developed and open. At that point, tremendous power and qualities of great compassion, great wisdom, etc., spontaneously arise. Such qualities are totally beyond any similar mental qualities that are ordinarily attainable by gods or human beings. Traditionally, it is recognized that there are thirty-two great qualities of enlightened mind ascribable to the historical Buddhas.

The speech of a buddha also has immaculate qualities that are totally beyond any qualities of speech available or attainable by gods or men. For example, if a buddha is speaking to a large audience with several different language backgrounds, all present understand the meaning perfectly. Furthermore, all present are able to hear the words carried over great distances without a buddha ever raising his or her voice. In all, a buddha has sixty such immaculate qualities of speech.

The body of the historical Buddha possessed thirty-two major and eighty minor signs of perfection that are totally beyond the marks of perfection attainable by any gods or humans. A historical buddha's being is completely free from any kind of physical faults and is able to manifest in a dazzling and wondrous form, which is incredibly beautiful by anyone's standards and has one hundred twelve immaculate qualities.

Through the perspective gained by having these truly amazing qualities, a historical Buddha displays remarkable compassion. Seeing all sentient beings in the same way that a mother looks at her only child, the Buddha Shakyamuni gave teachings on each of the different paths of the Dharma, compassionately designed according to the various predispositions of karmic capacities of each individual sentient being. Of these several different paths, such as the path of the bodhisattva, the pratyekabuddha, or the arhat (to name but a few), all were manifested by the generosity of Lord Buddha's compassion towards sentient beings.

While all sentient beings differ in the degree of their positive and negative accumulations, in general they may be grouped into three categories: excellent, average, and inferior. For sentient beings of the excellent or average type, the Buddha Shakyamuni taught the path of the yidam. The yidam practice allows those of excellent capacities and of great meritorious accumulations to attain complete realization in this very lifetime. Through the practice of this same yidam path, those of mediocre or average capacities and moderate merit accumulations may attain complete liberation at the time of death, or in the period after death. Designed especially for those beings having the qualities to practice it, this path comprises the pith teachings. The yidam deities are called transcendent deities. This means that they are deities through whom one may attain the ten levels of accomplished bodhisattva and the ultimate level of buddhahood. They were emanated by the Buddha Shakyamuni to help speed those of excellent capacity towards the goal of final liberation.

The fact that all the yidams are emanated by Buddha Shakyamuni does not mean they are all identical. Instead, they have different appearances, physical characteristics, ornamentations, colors, and attributes. There is a reason for this. In much the same way that a restaurant menu has a wide variety of choices because not everybody eats the same thing, sentient beings have many differing desires or requirements. Each person discriminates and has obvious preferences, be it food, clothes, music, or approach to spirituality. Acknowledging varying types of sentient discrimination, the Buddha Shakyamuni emanated myriad yidam deities.

To understand why the path of yidam practice is important, let me now refresh the discussion of the nature and function of the three yanas. As you recall, the three yanas are the hinayana (or the lesser vehicle), the mahayana (or the greater vehicle) and thirdly, the secret vajrayana (or supreme vehicle). We can think of these three as being a process, in that one starts with the lesser vehicle, increases gradually by attaining more superior levels, and finally reaches the secret mantra vehicle. These can also be considered three different vehicles, each of which may be approached in its own right.

A fuller explanation of the nature of the three yanas has already been given, but let us now briefly review them. Basically, the hinayana is that path which emphasizes outer activity, wherein one completely abandons all manner of causing harm to others. With the development of pure conduct underway,

one absorbs the mind into one-pointed samadhi in which one can recognize the emptiness of self and, thus, come to realize the state of an arhat.

The recognition that not only the self but all phenomena are empty is the basis for the path of mahayana. This path views all phenomenal appearances as mental projections that are empty of any independently existent characteristics. Furthermore, one recognizes this emptiness and sees that all sentient beings are foolishly clinging to that which is emptiness as though it were something real. They cling to that which is suffering as being pleasure, and cling to that which is impermanent as being something permanent. Aware of the totally erroneous viewpoint to which sentient beings cling, those practicing the mahayana path experience very intense compassion. The development of compassion and emptiness based on the practice of the path of the six perfections (the six paramitas) is said to be the two wings of this path. By using these wings, those practicing mahayana will attain the fully enlightened state, having passed successfully through all the bodhisattva stages. This is the path of mahayana.

In the vajrayana, or the secret mantrayana, the view held is that the mind itself is emptiness, and that all appearance is emptiness.

This recognition of mind and all appearance as being innately empty is termed wisdom. All appearance of form, sight, sound, and all kinds of sensory appearances are termed skillful means. Thus, in vajrayana, the whole of samsara and nirvana is recognized as being the union of wisdom and skillful means.

For example, consider the use of the organ of the eye to see. With our eyes we see the realm of form; we perceive form and actually believe that there is something that we are seeing. This demonstrates the quality of unimpeded luminosity, which is, again, termed skillful means. However, the mind that sees is emptiness. And thus, these two — the emptiness of mind itself, and the actual manifestation of appearance that we think we are seeing — are totally the union of means and wisdom.

Similarly, when we hear sound with the organ of the ear, we seem to be hearing something. It is as though there is really something that is being heard. This is also considered to be skillful means. At the same time, however, the one that is hearing and the sound itself are completely empty and have no substantial existence. This phenomenon is the union of means and wisdom, as well.

When considering the total of all the five sense organs and their objects of sensory consciousness — such as eye consciousness, the eye itself, and the vision of form (and similarly throughout the remaining senses of hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling) — know that these are none other than dharmata itself.

Remembering that the basis of all this is the nature of mind itself, if we call to mind the view or imagination of perhaps a mountain, possibly a lake, or something less distant like the physical appearance of our parents, can we not recognize our ability to do so instantaneously? Being able to see anything instantly and having the ability to call such images to mind is again what is

referred to as means. Recognizing that these images themselves are emptiness — that there is actually nothing there, that there is no substantial existence, and that mind itself is devoid of any substantial existence — is what is referred to as wisdom. Thus, quite simply, all appearances, all phenomena are the union of means and wisdom. Even in a single lifetime, one is able to manifest completely as an enlightened being and attain true liberation without any obstacle on the path when one realizes the actuality of the union of skillful means and wisdom.

In order to attain this realization, one performs the yidam practice; therein lies an easy method to recognize all appearances as the union of skillful means and wisdom. It is the yidam itself that has the power and blessing to bring about this very realization. In previous times, this approach to practice, this tradition of mantrayana, was extremely secret. The practices of the yidam were very closely guarded and were not generally available. Rather, only those with a certain degree of understanding and with the good quality of capacity actually received these teachings. Nowadays, we lamas give these secret precepts and yidam practices to whomever attends the teaching or initiation. We understand that without the karmic accumulation to be initiated into such practices, then you would not be reading this book or hearing this lecture, or even be fascinated enough to inquire about this path.

In this kalpa of one thousand historical Buddhas, only three will publicly teach this vehicle of secret mantrayana, which is also known as vajrayana. Buddha Shakyamuni, our historical Buddha who is the fourth of this kalpa, is one of these three. This is essentially why vajrayana teachings are being offered to the general public without there first being an extremely long association between the teacher and the student. In the lifetimes of historical Buddhas who will not give vajrayana teachings to the public, these teachings will be given only to a few close and selected students. Therefore, it is extremely auspicious that you have the karma to receive these teachings and that you are instilled with the desire to use the insights of vajrayana to gain the liberated awareness of mind's true nature.

Let me return for a moment to continue an earlier discussion on the various capabilities of sentient beings, namely, that within the human realm there are inferior, average, and excellent types of human beings. Such distinctions have nothing to do with any sexual gender, racial, religious, or economic considerations; rather, these are levels of positive and negative accumulations. We find that the inferior type of human rebirth, which consists of those who have a natural inclination to cause harm and to destroy, etc., is extremely abundant. Such beings have no actual faith in the Dharma or any type of morality, and furthermore lack the ability to gain faith in the Dharma. This is called an inferior human existence, because once these humans die, they are again subjected to the experience of constant suffering in the painful lower realms.

Average human existence refers to those beings who are not particularly moved by any type of inspiration and who spend their human lifespan in distraction, doing various things of little account. They are not developing

positive trends. As a result, their next rebirth will not be in any way superior to that experienced in this lifetime.

The excellent human existence is also called the precious human existence. It belongs to those beings who have interest in the Dharma, who listen to the Dharma, and who, in gaining an inspiration from it, wish to establish positive karmic trends. In comparison to the other kinds of human existence, the level of precious human existence is extremely rare. In illustration, if you were to take a great number of people, perhaps more than a thousand, in that number there may be only a handful, perhaps five at most, who have this preciousness.

Primary to having a human body are the bases of consciousnesses associated with the organs of sense, i.e., eye consciousness, ear consciousness, nose consciousness, etc. In the Tibetan tradition, the consciousnesses are seen as subtle organs shaped as described. The basis of visual consciousness is like a flower. That of the olfactory consciousness is like two copper tubes. The basis of auditory consciousness is like the rolled bark of a tree. The basis of the gustatory consciousness is like a crescent moon. The basis of tactile consciousness is like the very fine down of a baby bird. And, the organ of mind is like a clear mirror. We Tibetans also liken the five or six sense functions as similar to windows in a house. Here the consciousness associated with each organ is thought of as being an individual, making five or six beings in that house, each with its individual sense consciousness. It is by the means of the sense organs, each with its associated consciousness, that the sphere of sensation is experienced. It is from the eye organ and visual consciousness that the experience of the realm of form is derived. Similarly, the other organs and their associated consciousnesses allow the experience of the sensation of phenomenal existence. Perhaps it would be possible to consider that the six consciousnesses experiencing this realm through the six sense organs are indeed separate consciousnesses/ in that each has some degree of distinction or separation because each has a different function. In essence and in meaning, however, together these comprise one consciousness, that of our human experience.

That which is perceiving the realm of form through the sensory organs is the base consciousness of pure and impure alaya. With a constant, habitual tendency of clinging to the experience of the sense consciousnesses as being something real, one could well believe that, without the eye organ, there can be no perception of form (and so on, with each of the other organs). In fact, this is not the case. The view that leads us to this conclusion is illustrated by examining the mind's experience of the state of dreams while asleep. During the dream time, the mind will project all the different consciousnesses very clearly, so that one will perceive form, will hear sounds, and will experience pleasure, pain, and a whole array of phenomenal concepts, including the whole environment contained in the dream. At the time of the dream, these are perceived as being absolutely real. When one wakes up, however, they have completely vanished.

You will recall that this very moment (in which you are open to the entire possible range of human sensory experience) is the experience of the body of karmic fruition. During the dream state, by means of the body of habitual tendencies, you are open to the realm of the dream's sensory experiences. Further, in the after-death bardo state, you will undergo the realm of bardo's sensory experiences by means of the mental body. In cycles of one following the other, you (and every other sentient being) have these bodies going through these various states. With the various bodies, every sentient being endlessly wanders in samsara. Certainly, this is a dilemma; but it is one that is resolved in recognizing the mahayana view as valid and useful. Resolving the issue of duality — of self and other, and of self-phenomena and the totality of other phenomena — one employs emptiness to gain liberation. Through meditating, one gains some experience of the emptiness (or non-self) of the individual personality, and the non-self (or emptiness) of phenomena, and by actually seeing the indivisibility of these two non-selves, one attains great realization. Then, just like Jetsün Milarepa, one can manifest many miracles, similar to those given in various examples in the book of his one hundred thousand songs.

Taking this step towards liberation, one encounters the experience of the mahamudra, a Sanskrit word meaning great gesture, which has been translated into Tibetan as chakja chenpo. The nature of emptiness that comprises the whole of samsara and nirvana, this entire sphere of becoming which contains the entire universe and all possibility of experience, is represented by the first syllable, chak (the honorary prefix to ja). The fact that all of samsara and nirvana, and all possibility of experience throughout the whole universe, does not go beyond this emptiness is represented by the second syllable, ja (literally, seal). Chakja indicates that in meditating upon this seal of voidness, one attains the wonderful perfection of complete liberation as a fully realized buddha. By traveling on the path of refinement and employing the recognition of this seal of emptiness, one attains what is called in Tibetan chenpo (literally, greatness). So, this is what is meant by mahamudra in Sanskrit or chakja chenpo in Tibetan.

In order to recognize this seal of voidness, this mahamudra, the student must first meditate to recognize the nature of mind. Then, when a certain amount of development in meditation is plainly evident, the tsaway lama, out of his great kindness and blessings, will give the student the explanation of the nature of mahamudra. If the student is of the most excellent capacity or acumen, then simultaneous with the very moment of this nature being pointed out, instantaneous liberation can occur. Literally, the whole path of purifying obscurations, of great accumulations of merit and wisdom, and of the blessing of wisdom occurs right at that very moment of revelation between teacher and student. The great leap from samsara to nirvana is covered completely and spontaneously, right then, right there! However, a student of such excellent capabilities is extremely rare; most students who hear this explanation must first apply the methods of purification, of accumulation of wisdom, and of supplications to the tsaway lama in order to realize the fruition of the mahamudra.

On the other end of the scale is the inferior student who simply cannot understand the nature of the Dharma. However it is explained, it really makes no sense in his or her mind. Within the range of contact I have had in the Western nations that I have visited, I have seen very, very few inferior students, as just about every one seems to fall into the category of average, an assessment based on apparent intelligence, insight, application, and so forth. Average students progress naturally along the path, but they need to supplicate their tsaway lama with devotion, so that they might receive the blessings of the lama. Further, they need to do the practices to purify obscurations and develop an accumulation of merit and wisdom in order to attain liberation from samsara through the mahamudra.

How is it known for certain that the efforts just detailed will lead one to the fruition of mahamudra? The Lord Buddha himself, in referring to it, said that the absolute truth of co-emergent wisdom (meaning mahamudra) is only attained through the accumulation of merit and the purification of obscurations, combined with intense longing and devotion for the tsaway lama. The coming together of these two qualities (that is, one of accumulation and purification, the other of devotion) gives rise to the mahamudra experience; there is no other possibility for such occurrence. In accordance with this teaching of the Buddha, the whole approach of Tibetan Buddhism (under the guidance of one's tsaway lama) is based upon purifying obscurations and developing accumulations of merit and wisdom. Once beginning this path by taking refuge, one can quickly proceed through what are termed the foundation practices, or one can do yidam practice directly.

First, let us consider the benefit of doing the foundation practices. These are powerful practices designed to eliminate obscurations and defilements, plus they are useful in developing an accumulation of merit and wisdom. Inwardly, these practices work by primarily developing faith and devotion in the Three Jewels — Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. With this faith firmly established, through the power of the blessing of the Buddha Shakyamuni, the root of all blessings manifests as the tsaway lama, the root of all accomplishments manifests as the yidam, and the root of all buddha activity manifests as the dharmapalas, or Dharma protectors. Thus, one has faith in the Three Jewels — Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha — and in the Three Roots — Lama, Yidam, and Dharmapalas — which are visualized with great devotion, resting in the blue expanse of sky in front of one. Keeping this visualization stable, one then offers prostrations so that the body and speech, acting as servants of the mind, fulfill the intention of paying homage to the visualization of the enlightened sources of refuge. By reciting the refuge prayer while performing prostrations, one is developing faith in the Three Jewels and the Three Roots visualized before one.

A prostration is a wonderful action that allows one to offer faith by means of the body. By joining the two palms together and placing them on the forehead, one offers the world of form. To offer devotion by means of speech, next the joined hands touch the throat; and to offer devotion with the mind itself, the hands then touch the sternum of the chest, directly over the heart. Then, with the thought, "I offer devotion with this body, speech, and mind," one offers a whole prostration by lowering oneself flat on the ground. The

Buddha said that even a single prostration will give benefits, such as robust health, good complexion, and handsome features, an influential position with the quality of affection from gods and men, and influential speech and a goodly accumulation of wealth, a higher rebirth having the companionship of holy men, and most importantly, liberation. By performing even, a single prostration, one gains the amount of merit equal to the number of atoms in the piece of ground over which the five limbs are extended, from the surface straight down to the golden ground of the universe. By offering this simple physical action, the effects of negative actions accumulated through the body, speech, and mind are purified and eliminated, so that instead one realizes the qualities of the body, speech, and mind of the historical Buddha. By this foundation practice, a deep and profound accumulation of merit and wisdom is thus developed and realized.

If there were no such thing as the Three Jewels or the Three Roots, then there would be absolutely no benefit in having faith and devotion in them, and absolutely no benefit in doing this practice. But have no doubts, because the Three Jewels and the Three Roots are the essence of buddha activity to benefit all sentient beings. In having the very powerful qualities of blessing and compassion, the Three Jewels and Three Roots act just like a hook. Because a hook can not catch anything if there is no ring, one's devotion and faith are like putting up a ring. Thus, the blessings and compassion of the sources of refuge catches one's ring of devotion and faith, turning one away from the bewildering confusion of the lower realms and towards liberation.

Despite my assurances, you may well doubt this because you cannot see the compassion and blessings that emanate from the Three Jewels and Three Roots at work. While it is true that there is no actual way to see this, such doubt is unnecessary because the visualization practice works by interdependent arising. To illustrate what is meant by interdependent arising, the technology of the Western world offers some useful examples. An especially good illustration is that of remote control TV, whereby one can alter the picture on the screen simply by pushing a button. Similar devices have a wide range of exact usage (e.g., garage door openers, [cordless telephones, etc.]), yet all have the quality of affecting an action for no apparent reason. There being no connecting wire, one cannot see a direct connection between the remote control device and the mechanism the device triggers. But this makes no difference; such devices definitely work.

To carry this illustration further, given a remote control TV, one can not operate it from a distance unless one has the control device. Given an incompatible brand of device buttons, the TV cannot be switched on remotely, no matter how many buttons one pushes. Given only a remote control device, pushing all the buttons does not allow one to bring about a TV image if there is no TV present. It is the interdependent arising of this device and the TV that enables such phenomenal expression to take place. In the same way, interdependent arising enhances the connection to the Three Jewels and Three Roots through the visualization practice.

Most of you receiving this teaching have adequate possessions and can provide your physical comforts, and so forth. By means of this wealth, you

can be generous and, for instance, can buy butter lamps as an offering of devotion, or can give support to the poor and needy. These acts are exemplary of the means by which generosity can actually help in the elimination of negative accumulations and can aid in the acquisition of accumulated merit. In the foundation practice termed mandala offerings, one conceptualizes and visualizes a mandala (or arrangement) of great iron mountains ringing a vast sea containing an even higher Mt. Sumeru, itself surrounded by four major continents and eight minor islands. Together, these represent our universe. By mentally arranging these into a beautiful mandala, and by mentally offering all the wealth and possessions of the whole universe of gods and men, time and time again, one develops a very great accumulation of merit.

In the foundation practice known as Dorje Sempa (Sanskrit: Vajrasattva), one does the practice of purification. Consider for a moment an item, perhaps some clothing or a piece of cloth, that is stained and dirty. To cleanse it, one employs soap and water, scrubbing and rinsing it in many different ways until the blackness or stain has been removed. Consider that from beginningless time until present, each sentient being has a vast accumulation of negative trends and tendencies. The easiest and best way to purify such negativity is the cleansing process in which Tibetan Buddhism specializes, namely the meditation of Vajrasattva. By meditating that Vajrasattva rests upon the crown of one's head as the essence of the tsaway lama, and by reciting his one-hundred syllable mantra, all the while visualizing the descent of his purifying blessings washing away negative accumulations, one actually uses this process of karmic washing to purify and cleanse stains of one's faults, broken vows, transgressions, etc. In a manner similar to rinsing the dirt and soap from a dirty cloth, by reciting the one-hundred syllable mantra while visualizing this nectar-like blessing rinsing away karmic accumulations, one is illuminated and purified. This practice successfully removes all previously accumulated negative karma.

I should note here that one usually begins the foundation practices by first taking refuge and doing prostrations. Then one does the purification of Dorje Sempa, followed by mandala offerings, before one supplicates the tsaway lama in guru yoga. However, one may begin with the purification practice of Dorje Sempa, especially if one is having a problem with the visualization technique.

In the fourth foundation practice, one does guru yoga, whereby one develops unshakable devotion to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas, lamas, yidams, and dharmapalas, plus one supplicates their great blessings, great compassion, and great power. In the actual practice, one visualizes and thinks that the tsaway lama is the united essence of all buddhas and bodhisattvas, to whom one prays with great faith and devotional homage. By means of the merit thus accumulated, and by having purified one's negative karmic accumulations in doing the first three foundation practices, the great wisdom of the mahamudra is then quickened by guru yoga. Now, you might well wonder, "Who is the guru?" In inner essence, the guru, or tsaway lama, is none other than Dorje Chang (Sanskrit: Vajradhara), the primordial buddha. However, in external phenomena, the nirmanakaya body of the guru

for those associated with the Karma Kagyu lineage is most likely that of His Holiness the Gyalwa Karmapa, or one of his four spiritual sons, Their Eminences Tai Situpa Rinpoche, Sharmarpa Rinpoche, Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche, and Gyaltshap Rinpoche.

Actually, whatever well-known and recognized lama of any lineage one chooses as one's tsaway lama is the person from whom blessings and teachings will be received. Additionally, one's tsaway lama is that being who clarifies and demonstrates the true nature of mind, so that one rests assured not only in the qualities, but also in the capabilities of one's tsaway lama. To make a comparison, if there is a very large deposit of gold above ground that gives off a light that shines into the sky, then any one who is interested knows exactly where to locate that deposit of gold. In the same way, the great qualities of the spiritual sons of the Kagyu lineage and of its great lamas have a similar light that shines forth proclaiming the great qualities of these realized ones. This field of attraction is the activity or work of the dakinis who want to benefit beings by illuminating the Dharma to allow all to see its essential nature. Obviously, there are many other qualities apart from fame that connote great lamas; however, the most important quality is the teacher's having an unbroken lineage.

From the primordial buddha Vajradhara, the realization of blessings, of empowerments and instructions, and of spiritual authority should be transmitted in an unbroken manner through the succession of realized masters, generation by generation, until it currently rests with the tsaway lama you have chosen. With this assurance, one can rest steadfastly in the belief that the tsaway lama's power of realization and transcendence goes directly to the source of the buddha fields, that of dharmakaya itself.

If, however, one does not have the time, the ability, or the inclination to do the foundation practices at this moment, then the other method to accumulate very great merit and wisdom, to purify negative obscurations, is to regularly perform yidam practice. In the various Dharma centers scattered around the world, one can become familiar and comfortable with the yidam recitation and visualization practices, especially the practice of visualizing one's body as the deity, one's speech as the mantra, and recognizing mind's nature as the profound samadhi of the deity. Doing these yidam practices is extremely beneficial and, in the beginning, one can develop this habit by frequenting a nearby Dharma center, taking visualization instruction, and doing this practice together with others as a group.

Meditating with visualization, whether employed in the yidam or the foundation practices, can present some stages of development that are important to recognize. Within one's daily experience, one constantly experiences many emotions, discursive thoughts, and so forth. These, however, are constantly dissolving into emptiness; actually, they are as much non-existent as they are existent. Just imagine the amount of discursive thought or emotional types of experience that happen during a conversation lasting six hours. Yet for half that time, the mind is totally at rest, although the individual does not see that because the mind is obscured by ignorance.



Dorje Chang (Skt: Vajradhara) is traditionally visualized as a rich dark blue in color, seated in vajrasana on a lotus and moon disk, adorned with silken garments, with his hands crossed over his chest, holding a bell and dorje (the symbols of wisdom and skillful means, respectively), and crowned with the five-jeweled crown (symbolizing the transcendence of the five skandhas). He is also visualized resting in the center of the foliage of the Karma Kagyu Refuge tree. (Pen and ink drawing by unknown artist, 20th century)

When one is asleep and not dreaming, the constant arising of discursive thought and emotions does not occur, for in sleep one is meditating in some kind of thick, unconscious type of samadhi where the mind is quite still. One does not recognize this natural meditation because of the obscuration of ignorance. Actually, half the lifespan is normally spent developing emotional conflicts and discursive thoughts, and the other half is spent wallowing in ignorance. Were one aware of the natural meditation, however, one's life could be spent in the realization of enlightened awareness.

Immediately after death, the mind is usually absorbed in a state of total oblivion without any consciousness, any thought, or any type of awareness for three days. This type of oblivion is, however, even more overwhelming than that experienced during sleep or during one's active life because it is the experience of ignorance itself.

The antidote to this state of affairs is known in Tibetan as kyirim (Sanskrit: utpattiakrama), which is the generation stage of visualization. This arising yoga stage deals directly with the individual's deeply rooted clinging to the world of form, sound, and all sensory experiences in one's daily experience. One's tendency as a sentient being is to cling to these as being completely real, and to have a great attachment to all these sensations. So, the antidote of kyirim is to visualize all experiences as being the bliss realm of Dewachen, or the pure realm of the yidam, and to understand all sound as being mantra. Additionally, in recognizing that all phenomena are like a reflection in a mirror, like an illusion, like a cloud, like an echo, then one actually transfers one's clinging to something that is insubstantial, thus allowing such clinging to be overcome. This is the function and reason for kyirim and, when one attains this realization, one can practice meditation clearly and can awaken from ignorance. Such awakening leads to the realization of the mahamudra itself.

As an example, let us suppose that half of one's life is spent in a state of stupor, and let us compare that stupidity to the empty space in a room. When the lights in the room are out, it is totally dark and one is unable to see anything. Liken this darkness to one's ignorance. The completion stage of meditation, termed in Tibetan dzogrim (Sanskrit: sampannakrama) is the further antidote that leads to the accomplishment of meditation. In our example, this is comparable to one's switching on the lights, where everything can be seen in absolute clarity; here the first stage of mahamudra can be obtained.

In bygone times, when beings in the human realm were not experiencing emotional bewilderment to the degree being experienced now, the practice of hinayana (or the lesser vehicle) was very applicable. Practitioners were able to perform the hinayana practice of meditating one-pointedly (termed zhinay) and were able, even as beginners, to meditate one-pointedly for a day, a month, or a year. With less emotional bewilderment, they were able easily to attain a level of mental stability and find that whatever meditation practice was attempted became easy. In the past, the practice of the hinayana method was indeed most suitable.

In these current times, however, there is a pervasive and powerful emotional bewilderment, with its very strong reactions. The practice of the zhinay is difficult to develop and turn into something beneficial. For this reason, there exists a method that is very useful in overcoming emotional conflict: develop the bodhisattva attitude of emptiness and compassion, and practice the six paramitas (or six perfections) of giving generously, guarding one's morality, developing patience, applying energy, attaining samadhi, and reflecting on wisdom. Although the mahayana path is suitable even to this present day, it is becoming more and more difficult as time goes by to be successful with it, because the emotional conflict and discursive thinking have reached an intense and pervasive state. As a result, even though someone might claim to be a great meditator and will meditate on emptiness perhaps one whole day, actually only a few moments of true meditation will be experienced.

This state of emotional and discursive darkness weighs heavily upon us all at this particular time in our kalpa. In the encroaching darkness, there remains but one sure path — that of vajrayana. Because the Lord Buddha Shakyamuni publicly demonstrated the power of this vehicle on different occasions (and is thereby considered to be one of the three Buddhas of our kalpa that will do so), the Indian panditas, the first Tibetan translators, and the successive generation of enlightened masters in Tibet were thus enabled to transmit the invaluable vajrayana insights, empowerments, and teachings. The rarity of this occurrence should not be overlooked; the vajrayana is a path so sacred, so revered, and so secret that in the future only the closest and well-chosen students of the coming nine hundred and ninety-six historical Buddhas of this kalpa will receive the teachings and have this powerful path demonstrated to them. We are indeed extremely fortunate to be living in the time of such accessibility to this valuable vehicle. We must not waste this precious opportunity, this precious human existence; instead we must take it upon ourselves to gain true liberation through practicing the vajrayana.

7
Rainbow Skies

Insight into the Mantrayana Practices

From our previous discussions, you should now understand what is meant when it is stated that mind in essence is emptiness, in its fundamental characteristic is clarity, and in its manifestation is unimpeded. In the conscious awareness of sentient beings, however, this whole essence is obscured (somewhat like wallowing in some kind of thick sleep), which causes sentient beings to be ignorant of the mind's true nature. Consequently, in these dark times, we are extremely fortunate that we have available a powerful and rapid path to help speed our accomplishment of buddhahood. The quick path of vajrayana has its success because it encourages meditation on the human body and all substantial phenomena as being the body of the deity, all sound as being its mantra, and all mental phenomena as being the samadhi of the deity. Meditating in this way, the individual is dealing effectively with obscuring emotionality and discursive thought by recognizing their truer nature. Simply recognizing mind's true nature as emptiness, clarity, and unimpededness can completely and instantaneously destroy emotional distraction, mental discursiveness, and so on. This kind of instantaneous power of recognition completely crushes one's emotional and mental imbalances.

The vajrayana path is undoubtedly the most suitable, the most applicable, and the most powerful for this day and age. One may compare it to getting all one's belongings together, putting them in a great ship, and traversing the great ocean in comfort and ease, all without having to leave anything behind. With this path, there is no abandoning as there is in hinayana; instead, this is the path of transformation by recognition of the inherence of dharmakaya in sambhogakaya, and of sambhogakaya in nirmanakaya.

In employing the techniques of vajrayana, one will use the visualization techniques according to the particulars of each sadhana while one recites the mantra of that deity. It is important to note that such a mantra has not only a very great blessing, but also a profound and beneficial effect, having been blessed with the power of all the buddhas and bodhisattvas. Before I go further into the topic of liberation through mantrayana, I would like to discuss the nature of mantra as it relates to our present state of existence. Right now, we all have a human physical body that belongs to a higher samsaric realm. Within this body, there are three principal channels, or pathways, of both pure and impure alaya as it is connected with the physical body. These course from below the navel to the crown of the head. They are known as tsa-u-ma, (which is the central channel), ro-ma, and kyang-ma (which are to the right and left, respectively, of the central channel). Situated along the length of these three main channels are five cakras (a Sanskrit term meaning wheel, referring to the spinning vortexes of energy situated along the

channels, with their location in ascending order being genital region, navel, heart, throat, and crown of one's head). In turn, spreading out from these five cakras are other channels (or nadis in Sanskrit) that support twelve minor cakras, which are primarily located in the body's extremities. Altogether, the human body has seventy-two thousand energy pathways, or channels, in which one's vital energies course, a phenomena that, if properly cultivated, can serve to lengthen to one's life, health, and state of well-being.

In closely examining these nadis, we will find that, exactly at their needle-point openings, there appear sacred letters, which arise due to the power and potential of the wisdom element flowing within these channels. Unbelievable as this may sound, the power of the wisdom element manifests itself as these very small letters within the nadis. Additionally, we find that the energies (or winds) of the wisdom element and the winds of discursive consciousness blow (or flow) within and throughout the nadis. This movement causes the creation of the experience of sound. We, as humans, experience sound and are able to make sound; as well, we are able to express whatever thought may cross our mind by the use of sound, all because the wisdom element as sacred letters (or sounds) is present at the tips of the nadis. Furthermore, the potential of the many sounds of our everyday life are heard due only to the presence of the energy potential of the wisdom element within the nadis.

Although it might seem a bit beyond our daily thinking, nevertheless, each level of the ten levels or bhumis of an accomplished bodhisattva has special powers associated with its degree of development. Let us consider a moment the first level of attainment, which results from the complete and total eradication of the grossest of the four veils, that of the obscuration of karma itself. Once a being has attained the complete eradication of the obscuration of karma, the ability is gained to delve instantaneously into the depths of a hundred different samadhis and to manifest in a hundred different forms to benefit beings. Actually, a first of the ten bhumis of accomplished bodhisattva attains twelve such amazing qualities. Even so, the ability to perceive the power of the dharanis and mantras has not yet arisen.

An accomplished bodhisattva of the second level has a much more profound realization than a bodhisattva of the first bhumi. For instance, here an evolved being is able to see clearly into the past for one thousand previous lifetimes and to see into the future for one thousand lifetimes, plus he or she is able to manifest one thousand bodies and experience one thousand samadhis. Likewise, on each of the third through sixth levels of an accomplished bodhisattva, the different powerful qualities that these evolved beings possess increase tenfold. Then, at the seventh bhumi of accomplished bodhisattva, the last vestige of the obscuration of emotional distraction is completely eradicated. Despite such accomplishment, however, even seventh level bodhisattvas are not able to see the mantras and dharanis.

It is only when a bodhisattva attains the eighth bhumi that these amazing qualities result in the ability to begin to perceive and to recognize the mantras, the dharanis, and the power of these sounds. At that time of recognition on this eighth level, such a being would attain what are called the

ten powers. One such power is the ability to see into the stream of consciousness of immeasurable sentient beings and to be able to recognize clearly and to sense accurately what is going on with any individual. Another such power is being able to completely control the environment, so as to control the weather and to thus bring about whatever weather is required to benefit the land, the people, or whatever. Or, there is the power of being able to have complete control over the life force itself; thus such beings have the ability to extend their life, and that of other beings, completely at will.

On the ninth bhumi, these powers are even more developed than at the eighth level, and it is on this level that the obscuration of dualistic clinging is totally eliminated. Finally, on the tenth bhumi, all that remains are the subtle remnants of the veil of ignorance itself, or the remaining obscuration preventing full knowledge of the nature of mind. Throughout the path of completion of the tenth level, this veil of remaining ignorance is gradually purified until it is eventually and completely eradicated. At that time, there occurs the realization of the state of buddhahood where there is absolutely no obstruction; rather there is total knowledge of the true nature of reality.

Because buddhas and high level bodhisattvas have imbued mantras with unique and individual power, certain mantras have powers to do specific things. For instance, some mantras have the power to extend life. Other mantras have the power to provide different kinds of accomplishments, such as health, wealth, protection, success in study or learning languages, and so on. Thus, different mantras have different kinds of powerful impact on the individual's being and existence. There are some mantras that convey several different powers that can be used by one and all, such as the mantra Om Mani Padme Hung. And, there are some mantras that are so specifically designed that they are suitable only to certain types of beings.

The mantras and dharanis that originated from Buddha Shakyamuni's completely unobstructed and completely unveiled state of perfect enlightenment were transmitted over the generations in India by the great saints and great learned pandits of old, who carefully kept them in perfect condition. Later, during the time of translation of Buddhist works into the Tibetan language, a great number of extremely erudite Tibetans gathered together to work on the various translations and wrote with great accuracy the sound of these mantras and dharanis. To this day, the sounds of the various mantras, such as the six-syllable mantra of Chenrezig, the hundred-syllable mantra, etc., have been kept in perfectly accurate and original form in Tibet. There is no need to have any doubt that these mantras are indeed those that originated from this completely perfect state of buddhahood.

As you have a precious human body endowed with all the great qualities, such as great inner intelligence, etc., the whole path of mantrayana (or vajrayana) is available and open to you. From this vantage, you are able to practice several techniques to further your understanding. This is very wonderful! However, it is important not to allow yourselves to develop any kind of erroneous view about this path. In performing the practice of any yidam, there are three essential requirements of meditation skill, termed the three characteristics. Firstly, there is the characteristic of clarity; secondly,

there is the characteristic of recognition of mudra; and thirdly, there is the characteristic of vajra pride. In referring to the first characteristic, during the meditation practice one visualizes the deity's form very clearly as being radiantly brilliant and complete, with the correct colors and the correct ornaments; one develops this visualization in stabilized clarity. In vajrayana meditation practice, this is the first important principle of visualization.

The second characteristic of vajrayana practice is that of recognition of mudra, or symbolism. This characteristic requires that one is able to call to mind the various meanings of the deity's form during the meditation. Please understand that the form of Chenrezig (or any other yidam) is not something that appears due to some kind of karmic accumulation. Clearly, the yidam's manifestations, such as beauty, clarity, etc., have nothing to do with karmic fruition. While meditating on Chenrezig, for example, in remembering the symbolic meaning of Chenrezig's one face, recall that this represents samsara and nirvana as having one taste. Additionally, his white color symbolizes his complete purity and absence of any kind of stain or defilement. His different ornaments (jewels, silks, etc.) symbolize the complete realization of all the Dharma qualities, both worldly and other-worldly; etc. [See Appendix B for further symbolism.] Thus, all the numerous and differing aspects of the deity's form have a very important symbolic meaning that one needs to hold in mind during the visualization practice.

The third characteristic is that of vajra pride, which means that in clearly visualizing the yidam form, and in effortlessly remaining cognizant of the yidam's symbolism (as in the first and second characteristics explained above), one takes wholesome pride in perfectly performing vajrayana visualization practice. I will speak more of this later.

Most tantrayana or vajrayana visualization and mantra practices require that an initiation and subsequent authorization and instruction be given by a qualified lama before the sadhana, or ritual practice, can begin. However, a few practices, those that were given publicly by Lord Buddha Shakyamuni, do not fall under such restrictions. Very definitely, all the practices given in the sutras have the full blessing of the Buddha and therefore can be practiced if one has the aspiration to do so. Such practices include those of the noble Chenrezig and of the mother of the buddhas, Green Tara.

Naturally, whenever it becomes possible for you to take the vajrayana initiation of Chenrezig or Green Tara, you are encouraged to do so. Right now, however, the practice in which I am giving you instruction can be practiced straight away, due wholly to the blessing of Buddha Shakyamuni. When you finally do get around to receiving the Chenrezig initiation, it will deepen your practice and strengthen your connection with your tsaway lama and with Yidam Chenrezig.

Prior to sitting down to meditate, a vajrayana practitioner has usually taken the time to arrange a shrine to give a special, distinct wholeness of presence of the Three Jewels and the Three Roots. Generally, ritual objects are arranged above waist level. The variety of ritual items that can be arranged on a shrine is virtually endless, but an adequate shrine includes a picture of thelineage lamas, and/or a representation of Chenrezig (either on paper or

canvas, or in metal), and the seven offerings of water, fruit, lights, incense, and so on. The practitioner is mindful and respectful of this part of the ritual, so one keeps the shrine area clean and is respectful of this area during any activity that might occur. Also, one regularly offers incense and flowers; in behaving in this way, one thus increases positive accumulations.

One begins meditation by first lighting fresh incense, making three prostrations in front of the shrine, and sitting comfortably in a cross-legged position. The hands rest either together with palms upwards at the navel, or covering each knee, palms downward.

Giving rise to the supreme motivation to establish all sentient beings (as vast as space, all of whom have been my mothers in the three times of past, present, and future) in the supreme state of buddhahood, which is free from all suffering, I now wish to offer you this teaching on the sadhana of Chenrezig. Through practicing and realizing the fruition of the practice, one may realize the essence of all practices, of all the yidams, thereby fulfilling the vajrayana commitments. This practice is very easy and of great blessing in that it can liberate you from the endless cycle of samsaric suffering. Adapting yourself to doing this practice is not difficult.

Now, who or what is Chenrezig? In Sanskrit, the name of Chenrezig is Avalokiteshvara, which means the one who sees with compassionate eyes. The name indicates that the mind of Chenrezig is supreme, all-embracing compassion, and that his greatest wish is one of loving kindness and compassion in establishing all sentient beings in the state of buddhahood. The Tibetan expression for the qualities of loving kindness and compassion is termed chenrezig. Coincidently, there are many forms of Chenrezig; there is Buddha Chenrezig, Bodhisattva Chenrezig, and Yidam Chenrezig. Furthermore, many different emanations of Yidam Chenrezig (the white, yellow, red, etc.) can appear, each with a differing appearance, some with many faces or arms, some only in conventional appearance, and so forth. All these differing aspects are different emanations of this deity. The teaching I am offering here is the practice of visualizing white Chenrezig with one face and four arms, which is the essential practice of all Tibetan Buddhists.

One of the most important features of this practice is that the mantra employed in the sadhana is extremely powerful. So powerful, in fact, that merely by hearing its words, "Qm Mani Padme Hung," a beginning has been formed, the connection and continuation of which will result in the eventual realization of buddhahood, if not in this current lifetime, then in a future existence. In taking the empowerment of Chenrezig and practicing the appropriate sadhana, the practitioner will have great aid and assistance in the process of realizing the true nature of the mind and may thus transcend this cycle of samsaric suffering. Such transcendence is possible in this very lifetime, or at the time of death or thereafter, especially in the bardo of possibility. Therefore, I urge you to consider this teaching very intently and to recall that the most beneficial thing you can do with this precious human existence is to become enlightened. You should be thankful that, in this age of darkness, one of the easiest ways to become enlightened is to practice the sadhana of the Yidam Chenrezig.



ABOVE: The sacred symbol HRI. (Courtesy of Tinley Drupa)
BELOW: Four-armed Chenrezig (Woodblock print from Nepal, 20th century)

To begin any vajrayana practice, we begin by visualizing that in the sky in front of you is a great cloud filled with all the sources of refuge, in the center of which is the yidam, in this instance Yidam Chenrezig, surrounded by all the buddhas and bodhisattvas. Develop the thought that we are taking refuge in order to establish all sentient beings, without exception, in the perfect state of buddhahood. Give rise to this thought of enlightenment while reciting the liturgy of refuge and bodhicitta that accompanies this refuge visualization. [The liturgy or sadhana is given in entirety in Appendix B.]

The actual practice of Chenrezig begins by visualizing that upon your own head and upon the heads of all sentient beings without exception, there appears a white lotus blossom upon which a white moon disk rests. Upon this moon disk is a white letter "HRI," [refer to illustration, figure 1], which instantaneously transforms into the form of Chenrezig, who is white, with one face and four arms. He rests on the moon disk, and his back is also supported by a moon disk. He is replete with all qualities, all the ornaments, and so on, of a sambhogakaya buddha. This form being insubstantial, it has an empty, translucent appearance, like a rainbow in the sky or the image of the moon reflected on water. It is very clear, apparent, and present, yet there is no tangibility, solidity, or reality to this appearance. [For additional explanation of this and other visualizations of this practice, see the commentary in Appendix B.]

Visualize very clearly the Lama Chenrezig seated upon not only your head, but that of all sentient beings. As you see this completely clear and luminous visualization, recite the prayer requesting that great, immeasurable love and compassion may arise in the stream of your being, and that all sentient beings may recognize the true nature of mind to be that of mahamudra.

Prayer

Lord, whose white body is not clothed by fault,
And whose head is adorned by a perfect Buddha,
You look upon all beings with the eyes of compassion.
To you, Chenrezig, I offer homage.

Now visualize that an immeasurable number of offering goddesses emanate from your heart, all of whom make offerings to Chenrezig and to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas. Visualize them offering homage, prayers, etc, while you yourself also offer homage by reciting the seven branch offering prayer.

After you have recited the seven branch offering prayer and the prayer of aspiration composed by the nun named Palmo, next you visualize that a five-colored light radiates from the Chenrezig resting on the top of your head and from those resting on the heads of all sentient beings. This light serves to eradicate negative accumulations in the whole of sentient existence, causing the outer world to be transformed into the pure land of Dewachen. Now, you and all beings become undifferentiated from Chenrezig's three doors of body, speech, and mind.

Visualization

Through this one-pointed prayer, light radiates
from the body of the sublime one, purifying
impure karma, impure appearances, and the deluded mind.

The outer realm is the pure land of Dewachen,
and the body, speech, and mind of beings therein

are the perfect form, sublime speech, and
pure mind of mighty Chenrezig, the indivisible
union of appearance, sound, and vivid
intelligence with emptiness.

Next say a session of mantras, while counting them on a mala, which is a set of one hundred and eight prayer beads symbolizing the number of sutras. While doing this recitation, there are several visualizations you can use to discipline the mind's awareness of the union of wisdom and skillful means, the essential principle of tantrayana. You might, for instance, concentrate on seeing Chenrezig sitting on your head, while in your heart you pray for compassion and the realization of the emptiness of self and all phenomena. Sometimes you can concentrate on Chenrezig sending out light from his luminous body, which pervades the universe and transforms all sentient beings into forms of Chenrezig, following which you think of the whole universe as being his pure land. Or, while saying the mantra, you can rest the mind without any contrivance or effort in its natural state; or, you can begin to develop an intense compassion for all beings. Generally, start by thinking of one of these aspects and then try to remain with that thought or prayer for a while before trying another. At first, this will be tiring, but as you develop your capabilities, it will become relaxing and you will find your mind is calm and peaceful. After you have confidence in these beginning visualizations, please ask a lama to instruct you in more advanced visualization techniques.

When you have finished reciting the mantras, whether you said several hundred or thousands, visualize that all sentient beings are being transformed into Chenrezig, that they all melt into light and that this light is fully absorbed into the form of Chenrezig resting on top of your head. You should then visualize that you become inseparable from Chenrezig. When one pours milk and tea together, one loses the blackness of the tea as it becomes white like the milk; so too, you lose yourself in Chenrezig when you join your body, speech, and mind with his. Next, visualize that, in this inseparability, all form dissolves into the lotus and moon disk resting in Chenrezig's heart.

Concentrate and clearly see the letter HRI resting on the moon disk, surrounded by the six syllables of the mantra, each resting on one of the six petals of the white lotus. Visualizing this brilliantly white sacred letter HRI, you can see it is comprised of five parts that are known in Tibetan as the tsedrak, the a-chung, the rata, the ha consonant, and the gigu. Now, watch as these dissolve one into another. Starting on the left side of the HRI is what we Tibetans call the tsedrak, (namely, the Sanskrit aspirate comprised of two circles, one on top of the other) which dissolves into the lowest letter of the syllable HRI. This letter (a-chung) then dissolves upwards into the nearly horizontal stroke that is the rata. This, in turn, dissolves upwards into the main body of the syllable, the Tibetan letter ha. This main letter then dissolves upwards into the vowel sound that is known as gigu.

Visualization

My body, the bodies of others, and all appearances
are the perfect form of the sublime one;
all sound, the melody of the six syllables;
all thoughts, the vastness of the great *jnana.*

This last bit of dissolving vowel continues to dissipate until it is a tiny speck; this small speck or sphere of light gradually decreases in size, getting smaller and smaller, until it completely dissolves into emptiness. At that point, maintain your alert awareness, free of any conceptual discursiveness or thought. Be completely and extremely empty; feel for yourself this empty clarity. Meditate in this way. This is the stage of consummation that is the basis upon which you may realize the mahamudra in this lifetime if you have excellent capabilities, or with which you may gain liberation during the process of dying if you are of average capabilities and disciplines.

Then, to arise from this emptiness, again visualize yourself in a form of Chenrezig having one face and only two arms, and recognize that his body arises as the union of form and emptiness, his speech arises as the union of sound and emptiness, and his mind arises as the union of consciousness and emptiness. Having reappeared in the standing form of Chenrezig, you now dedicate the merit accumulated by doing this practice.

Dedication

Through this virtue, may I quickly achieve
the realization of mighty Chenrezig
and may I bring every single being
to that same state.

Traditionally, the practice of Chenrezig is followed by the prayer to Chenrezig's tsaway lama, Buddha Amitabha, in which you pray that you might be reborn in the state of the great bliss of the pure land called Dewachen.

You can always recite the mantra, anytime and anywhere, while you are driving, walking, talking, thinking, etc. I assure you that the compassion of the Three Jewels, in meeting with your faith and devotion, will definitely lead to your finding the path and in your having the ability to travel this path to enlightenment.

Another practice, encouraged by the Buddha Shakyamuni and open to one and all (with or without prior vajrayana initiation), is that of the deity known in Tibetan as Jetsiin Drolma, commonly referred to as Green Tara. One can develop great faith by praying and meditating upon Green Tara and by very clearly visualizing her form before one in the sky. In praying to Green Tara for blessings and accomplishments, and by then visualizing them descending, one receives these blessings. It is said that through praying and developing faith in this way, whatever one requires or wants somehow arises because of the power of her blessings. It is also said that if one wants to have a child, the child will come; if one wants to have wealth, then wealth will come; if one

wants to have spiritual attainments, then these will arise, all from the power of having faith in her.

In such a short presentation, I am unable to give detailed descriptions of the visualization of Green Tara or of the other yidam practices taught by the Lord Buddha. Should your interest need satisfying, please contact the lama in a nearby center to direct your inquiry.

Now that you understand that perfection requires effort, you might well wonder, "Why bother?" If you had the existence of a cow, a dog, or a cat, you would not be able to practice the Dharma. You would not have even the degree of understanding required to enable you to recognize the need to practice the Dharma. Because you have obtained a precious human existence, replete with its many qualities and its many freedoms, you now have the opportunity to practice the Dharma in this very lifetime. You have no idea when this might happen again, and therefore you should bring this precious human existence to its full meaning right now, because it is through this existence that it is possible to realize full enlightenment.

Making no effort does not in any way offset your previously accumulated negative actions, and these will definitely ripen, if in not this lifetime, then in the ones to come. Therefore, even if one is carried away and constantly distracted by worldly activity for which one has a responsibility, then one can still practice the Dharma by considering the/our noble truths [see glossary] and by reciting Om Mani Padme Hung. Even such a simple approach will allow you to attain some positive accumulation in this lifetime. In recognizing that this lifetime is very impermanent, it is important to consider future lifetimes and to take the steps toward rebirth in a higher state of existence, especially in the human realm. If only the present life were important, then one might just as well be concerned only with eating and drinking, like animals.

8
Lingering Sunset

Commentary on the Bodhisattva Wows

During the lifetime of the Lord Buddha, there lived a relative of his, a married man named Chungawa who had great faith and interest in the Dharma. However, he was prevented from developing this fascination by his very jealous wife, who forbade his curiosity and who continually connived and contrived to keep him from pursuing his interest. She guarded him so jealously that she accompanied him wherever he went.

Seeing Chungawa's predicament, the Buddha Shakyamuni decided to help him, and one day he came begging close to Chungawa's house. When Chungawa realized that indeed it was the Lord Buddha who was walking down the street outside his home that mid-morning, his whole instinct was to rush out to fill the begging bowl Lord Buddha held. This time his wife was neither able to stop him nor to go with him, as she was enjoying her bath. Deeply concerned at the news of Lord Buddha's presence and of her husband's eagerness to offer him food, she slung a pot of water at Chungawa, thoroughly wetting his shirt, and demanded that he return by the time his clothes had dried (which in the warm sun of India requires but a minute or two). Agreeing, Chungawa took his offerings to Lord Buddha and filled the waiting bowl.

"That is very fine" said Lord Buddha, "now follow me"

So overcome by the Lord Buddha's presence and aura of compassion, Chungawa agreed and proceeded to follow for quite some distance. They were far from the town before his mind began to remember his promise to his wife. Anxious about returning to her, yet feeling compelled to remain with the Buddha, he pondered his dilemma as they walked together. Eventually, they arrived at a monastery quite distant from all other habitation. Once there, the Lord Buddha led him directly to his chambers, and, before excusing himself, he requested that in his brief absence Chungawa should sweep the shrine room. Although Chungawa expressed his nervousness about his wife's concern as to his whereabouts, he agreed to perform this simple task. Each time he swept the room, however, more dust than ever before appeared and it seemed that he was getting nothing accomplished. Further, the Buddha, who had said he would be but a minute, still had not returned.

Eventually, Chungawa gave up and set off for home. Leaving the monastery by the lesser used road that ran through the jungle, he hoped he would soon be home and that he would avoid meeting with the returning Lord Buddha. But, while rounding a bend in the road, he saw to his dismay that the Lord Buddha was approaching by the same road. In his chagrin, Chungawa sought to hide himself beneath a tree whose branches touched the ground.

This was to no avail, however, for as the Lord Buddha walked passed, the branches lifted by themselves to reveal Chungawa's hiding place.

"Chungawa, where are you going?" asked the Lord Buddha.

"Well... er,... I am going home,... or,... I was going home ...," replied Chungawa.

Lord Buddha said once again, "Well, come, follow me."

Once they had returned to the monastery, the Lord Buddha then pointed to his monastic robes and instructed Chungawa to take hold of them. When Chungawa questioned why, the Lord Buddha replied that he had some sightseeing in mind. Still puzzled, Chungawa complied and no sooner had he clasped the fine saffron drape than they were flying into the sky. At last, they came to rest upon a very high mountain. There they found an old, wrinkled, bent woman.

"Well Chungawa, what do you think? Who is more beautiful, this woman or your wife?"

Chungawa replied, "Lord Buddha, there can be no doubt about it. My wife is a hundred thousand times more beautiful."

Humored by Chungawa's answer, the Lord Buddha again requested that they continue on this journey. Again they flew, and through the Lord Buddha's miraculous powers, they arrived in the Heaven of the Thirty-Three in the gods' realm.

Encouraged by the Lord Buddha to explore this wonderful place, Chungawa was amazed in his wanderings by all the beauty he saw, not only of the gods and goddesses, but of the surroundings as well. Eventually, he arrived at a place of great activity where several gods and goddesses were preparing a magnificent throne. Their absorption into completing this task made Chungawa think that perhaps an important event was about to take place. Curiously, he approached the group and began his inquiry.

"Excuse me, can you tell me for whom this truly wonderful throne is being built? Will the enthroning ceremony take place today?"

The god turned to Chungawa, smiled a warm greeting, and replied, "Oh, this throne will not be occupied immediately. We are preparing it in expectation of the arrival of a human named Chungawa. He will keep his ordination as a monk so purely that he will be reborn here in the Heaven of the Thirty-Three. Such great virtuous activity and pure moral conduct are seldom attained, even though they are often attempted. So, in joyous acknowledgment of his eventual great success, we anticipate his arrival and are working here today."

Chungawa was speechless. The beauty of the throne and of this wondrous heaven were overwhelming. The fact that such a reward would await him was exhilarating. Chungawa reeled at the thought of eventually living in such a fortunate place and promptly dismissed from his mind his former life on earth. He lost all thought of his wife and of returning to her. Once the Lord Buddha had returned him to the earthly monastery, Chungawa requested and received monk's vows at the feet of the Lord Buddha.

One day, while addressing all the monks at the monastery, the Lord Buddha grew serious and voiced a concern. "Most of you have taken ordination because you wish to benefit all beings by attaining full enlightenment. You wish to transcend the misery of samsaric existence, a most wonderful and worthwhile endeavor. However, there is one among you who has taken ordination solely because he believes that, in keeping his vows purely, the reward of rebirth into the Heaven of the Thirty-Three awaits him. This monk's name is Chungawa. Henceforth, do not speak or associate with him in any way. All of you who have set your sights upon the goal of enlightenment are traveling a very different path than he is."

From that time onward, Chungawa was excluded by the monks in their daily activities. Yet, Chungawa persisted in his strict observance of his moral code, uncaring and unconcerned at his ostracism, as he was indeed intent upon being reborn in that wonderful heaven.

One day the Lord Buddha invited Chungawa on a tour of the hell realms. Chungawa again took hold of the Lord Buddha's robes, and through the Lord Buddha's miraculous powers, they were soon standing in hell. Overwhelmed by the intense and immense suffering the beings there were enduring, Chungawa became deeply disturbed and cast his eyes downward to avoid these gruesome sights. Clinging closely to the Lord Buddha as they walked through one hell after another, Chungawa eventually noticed a large mansion filled with several horrific beings and implements of torture. In the center of this large room was a huge cauldron full of molten copper, into which more and more copper was being thrown. Stoking the fire to heat it to an even higher temperature were several beings, all intently involved in this task. Yet, unlike the other cauldrons Chungawa had seen on this horrific tour, this cauldron was without an occupant. His curiosity overcame him and he approached a denizen who was standing nearby.

"Excuse me, could you tell me why such care is being given to a cauldron that has no occupant?"

The denizen turned and sneered his reply. "We are preparing it for a human who is at that moment living in the southern continent. He is currently busy with preserving his moral conduct with such exceptional devotion and observation to his vows that he will be reborn in the Heaven of the Thirty-Three/'

This had a ring of familiarity to Chungawa, but it made no sense. Therefore, he inquired, " Why are you preparing a cauldron here in hell if the person to whom you refer is going to be reborn in the Heaven of the Thirty-Three of the gods' realms?"

The denizen laughed deeply from his belly and replied, "I would have thought you would know. The natural consequence of a throne in that heaven is a throne in hell. No heaven lasts forever, and when the glamour and lights have faded, all the former gods get their chance to live here with us!"

The smoke from the fire that now blazed, the sweltering heat, and the impact of the denizen's reply made Chungawa feel weak and near to fainting. But, his curiosity persisted and he managed one more important question. "Who

is this virtuous monk, this god-to-be who might, as you say, end up here in this cauldron one day?"

The denizen replied, "Chungawa." Mortified to hear that this was the fate that awaited him, Chungawa became panic stricken at the thought of having to swim in a cauldron of boiling copper. Fleeing to rejoin the Lord Buddha, who had gone on without him, he pleaded that the Lord Buddha quickly return him to the earthly monastery.

I am sharing this story with you to illustrate that the concerns and activities of a buddha or a bodhisattva are boundless and are not limited to any one individual. Their intentions continuously translate into actions to help all sentient beings come to an understanding of the limitations of suffering in samsara, limitations that can become transformed into the bliss of liberation in enlightenment. In the instance of Chungawa, once the Lord Buddha had made all these efforts to help him correctly establish a true path in the Dharma, Chungawa devoted himself not only to keeping his vows purely, but also to practicing the Dharma in order to benefit all beings by becoming fully enlightened. So strong and determined was his effort that Chungawa completely terminated all desire in each of the five senses. And, upon reaching enlightenment, his great accomplishment was duly acknowledged and he was then named "the one who terminated desire through the five senses/'

Another incident that is also illustrative of bodhisattva activity is the story of a demoness who constantly harassed the countryside by taking the lives of many humans and animals. The Bodhisattva Chenrezig, concerned not only for the demoness' negative accumulations but also for the harm she brought others, emanated in the form of a demon. In this form, he courted the demoness, and soon they were cohabitating. In the course of his daily life as a demon, Chenrezig would recite "Om Mani Padme Hung," and, eventually, the demoness inquired what he was saying.

"Oh, it is simply an excellent mantra that gives me everything I want, especially everything I want to eat," replied Chenrezig.

Finding this amusing, the demoness decided to see if there was anything to it and began reciting the mantra. Having confidence in her lover, she placed similar confidence in the mantra he favored to the extent that even though she often grew hungry for flesh and thirsty for blood, she said the mantra rather than indulge her appetite. Gradually her stomach began to shrink and she lost her craving for sentient beings. Additionally, from the blessing of the mantra, her mind began to change, so that, eventually, she no longer had any wish to eat or drink freshly killed corpses. Simply saying this mantra caused her whole mind to change; she even began to practice the Dharma, proceeding to become enlightened. All this transpired because Bodhisattva Chenrezig's activity planted the seed of bodhicitta.

The importance of the buddhas' activity becomes apparent when we again recall that we are all sentient beings and that we all wander in samsara. We are fortunate enough to have the precious human existence, but if we do not make good use of it, what result awaits us? We know for certain that those beings in the superior realms of the gods and demi-gods are experiencing

the fruition of their virtuous karma. We, ourselves, can also experience the gods' realms by performing virtuous deeds in this lifetime and by failing to correct our attitudes of jealousy and pride. However, we can also go to the lower realms where suffering is even more intense. In the hot hells, there is the experience of intense pain while being constantly burned and consumed by fire, or while molten metals are being poured upon the body. In the cold hells, there is the experience of intense shivering cold that splits the body, cracking it open and giving a great sensation of pain. These hells are not a short excursion, as they were for Chungawa. Rather, the experience endures for a great length of time; so long, in fact, that it seems like an endless experience in which the beings therein are completely consumed by their own anguish and suffering.

We know that the hungry ghost realm is a slight improvement over the hell realm; yet, hungry ghosts experience intense craving and hunger that they can never satisfy. This insatiable appetite is due to the obscurations of miserliness and greed accumulated from former lifetimes that result in bodies with immense stomachs continuously demanding food, together with tiny mouths and throats that can never consume enough to satisfy them. Even worse, the food is often searing, making consumption a totally unpleasant task. This experience of constant craving, of being starved and thirsty, is also very long lasting; it is many aeons longer than it would take to cross and recross the great deserts of this world.

In the slightly higher state of the animal realm, we know that the majority of animals live in oceans and jungles, far from our observation, making our understanding of their suffering somewhat limited. It is obvious, however, that they are suffering intensely from stupidity and from fear of being eaten by larger predators; they are in a constant state of needing to run somewhere to gain refuge. Even in the realms of the nagas, those serpent-like animals who dwell beyond our perception, there is very intense suffering. Though there are many, many different varieties of animals with different lifespans and kinds of suffering, it is obvious that all have lives pervaded with suffering. Additionally, one can remain in this realm a very, very long time, taking rebirth in various forms of animal and insect.

In seeing that all sentient beings do not recognize that the cause of happiness is the practice of virtue, that they cause their own suffering by the practice of non-virtue, and that they wander endlessly through the six different realms experiencing the accumulated results of the combinations of virtue and non-virtue, how can we not give rise to compassion like the countless buddhas before us? How can we not give rise to love for all sentient beings? The understanding and recognition of the plight of our fellow wanderers is essential to the development of compassion, and the key motivation behind buddha activity.

It is said in the Buddhadharma that all sentient beings, without exception, have been our mother at least once or twice, if not many more times. We can acknowledge that our own mother kindly brought us into this world, gave us sustenance, taught us the ways of the world, and so forth. We must also recognize that our very own mother, and all our mothers throughout all our

lifetimes, are also suffering as wanderers in samsara. Realizing this, compassion rises naturally.

Unfortunately, we do not recognize our own mother in all other sentient beings, nor does the mother recognize her child in all other sentient beings. The reason for this is our obscuration, the great veil of ignorance that keeps this truth of interrelatedness from being recognized. Once we recognize the truth that all sentient beings are our very own mothers, then it is inevitable that we give rise to great compassion. It is also inevitable that we come to the determination that we must, under any circumstances, establish all sentient beings, our mothers, in the supreme state of buddhahood. We must liberate them from the cycle of samsara. This is the nature of compassion and the ultimate goal of loving kindness.

An example of this perception of samsaric existence is contained in the story of the Arya Katayana, who was one of the great arhats living during the time of the Buddha, As Arya Katayana approached a village one day, he saw a woman sitting by the roadside. She was cuddling a small boy to her breast while eating a grilled fish. Throwing down the waste of bones and fins, she became annoyed by a dog that was trying to eat the scraps. The arhat watched as she shooed the dog away, using foul language, wild kicks, and large rocks. With his great super-knowledge, or clairvoyance, Arya Katayana could see that this angry woman's father (having recently died) had been reborn as the fish, and that the woman's mother (also deceased) had been reborn again as the dog.

He also saw that during this woman's lifetime she had an enemy who had made an oath to constantly cause harm, bring disturbance, arouse irritation, and actually injure this woman in any way possible. The enemy, having died with the power of this oath in mind, had been reborn as this woman's child and was now suckling at her breast. Thus, in seeing all this, Arya Katayana perceived that this woman's experience of samsara was in eating the body of her late father, offering abuses to her late mother, and snuggling up to her late enemy in her great ignorance. In realizing this, the Arya Katayana gave rise to unfathomable, immeasurable compassion for the whole of samsara and was able to proceed beyond the stage of an arhat to reach full enlightenment.

It is obvious that, within all the realms of existence, we have attained this special level of precious human existence because we have the intelligence to be able to perceive the state of samsara. Additionally, we understand the need to meditate and to give rise to compassion; we definitely have the abilities and powers to apply ourselves to that practice. These qualities of character are rarely found within samsara, so thick are the veils that obscure pure view. In the six realms of suffering, there are more sentient beings than can be calculated or conceived by our limited minds; they are absolutely numberless. Thus, if we can give rise to the desire to free all countless sentient beings from the ocean of suffering, with the intention of conveying them to the supreme state of buddhahood — if we have that wish to any degree whatsoever — then that wish itself vivifies the bodhisattva vow.

The adoption of the bodhisattva attitude is required in the path and practice of the bodhisattva vow. Through giving rise to great love and compassion for all sentient beings, and by wishing to establish them in the state of buddhahood, which is completely free from all suffering, one has the correct disposition for the bodhisattva approach. Both the relative and absolute aspects of bodhicitta are contained in this remarkable vow. The absolute (or ultimate) bodhisattva attitude holds to the absolute view that all phenomena and all sentient beings are devoid of any substantial reality. Within this bodhicitta attitude, there are two divisions or approaches: the first being the bodhicitta of intention, the second being the bodhicitta of actualization. Basically, the bodhicitta of intention is the desire to liberate all sentient beings from their delusions; with this developed attitude, one then must actually apply the intention. In abandoning all habitual non-virtuous activities, in taking up the habit of all virtuous actions, and in developing the practice of the six perfections (the six paramitas), one is able to apply oneself especially to the path of the bodhicitta of actualization. In fulfilling the bodhicitta of actualization, one can accomplish the fulfillment of the bodhisattva vows by becoming enlightened, an immense, immeasurable benefit to all deluded sentient beings.

To illustrate this point, let us now consider another story. Once there was a dakini who was married to a dull-witted and simple man. Yet, simple as he was, his faith in his wife was unshakable; with great devotion and conviction he would do whatever she asked, unquestioningly. Moved to compassion by his dull wit, his wife resolved to help him and, at last, devised a solution. She innocently requested him to recite the mantra of the Yidam Lord of Knowledge, tne noble victor known as Manjushri. So, every day the husband would pray to Manjushri, repeating "*Om Ah Ra Pa Tsa Na Dhi,"* time and time again.

Time passed. Then, one day the dakini instructed her husband to go to the shrine on the following morning. There he was to prostrate before Manjushri's statue and to pray on bended knee for initiation. She instructed him to hold out his hand following his prayer, and to eat whatever Manjushri gave him. She assured him that were he to do so, Manjushri would bestow the blessing of wisdom and knowledge, which would be of great benefit, not only to him, but to all beings as well. Because the husband had great devotion to her, he had no doubt whatsoever concerning her instructions, and the next morning he did exactly as she had requested.

The dakini hid herself behind the large statue of Manjushri; from this vantage she watched as her husband entered confidently, prostrated himself devotedly, and prayed his request with great fervor. Then, closing his eyes, he held out his hand. When she saw this, the dakini removed from her mouth a piece of fruit that she had been chewing and placed it in his outstretched hand. Devotedly he ate it, whereupon he immediately received all the blessings of Manjushri. Due to his faith and conviction plus the actual blessing of Manjushri, the husband was no longer a dull-witted man. Soon after this incident, he actualized his bodhicitta of intention and became a great scholar, a mahapandita, famed throughout all of India for his wisdom.

His insights were to be of immediate and immense benefit to all beings, indicative of his bodhicitta of actualization.

By recognizing that the mind in essence is emptiness, one recognizes that this mind thinks, "I am suffering/' if some unpleasant or painful experience arises, or will think, "I am happy/' if some pleasant or satisfying experience arises. When one does not understand the true nature of the mind, then in essence what is not understood is emptiness. This mind that we think of as being real is actually devoid of any descriptive characteristics, such as size, shape, color, or location. Because all phenomena arise from mind, and mind itself is empty, it follows that all phenomena are empty. Our intention to develop awareness to benefit others means that we need to recognize the emptiness of all phenomena. This recognition matures relative bodhicitta into the ultimate liberation of enlightened awareness.

Our body of karmic fruition, which, from our previously accumulated karmic acts, allows us the experience of these corporeal phenomena, is a projection of the mind. Causal karmic acts were committed by the mind; the seed of such karmic acts were stored within the mind, and therefore this body is the karmic fruition of the mind. Furthermore, when we fall asleep, we dream of another body, our body of habitual tendencies; while in the dream state, we actually perceive this as being our own self. After we die, we have a mental body that again is just another mind projection that has no substantial reality. As we do not recall our last bardo of death and rebirth experience while simultaneously experiencing this moment, it is difficult to illustrate its delusion without first making an analysis of the dream state.

When we conjure up the dream environment, it will seem just as real as any waking experience. Any experiences of happiness or suffering that the habitual body believes to be real during the dream state are recognized to be totally empty by the fully ripened body upon awakening. Each new day begins with an awakening from this dream state; we wake up with an awareness that all the habitual body's sensations, all those dream visions and phenomena, are empty and have absolutely no self-existence. These experiences are not to be found anywhere in the sleeping room, nor can they be found anywhere else. Even the faint tracings these dreams leave behind serve only to remind the fully ripened (physical) body that there is another body, a habitual body. These dream memories soon vanish, like clouds dissipating into a clearing sky.

During the time of the Buddha Shakyamuni, there lived a great arhat named Shariputra. His mother, who did not like the Dharma at all, would not agree with anything he said to convince her of the truth of the Dharma, despite the fact that he was a realized saint. Undaunted by his mother's disbelief, Shariputra devised a discipline for her. He strung a bell over the door so that, as she went in and out of her room, the bell would ring. He requested that she pay heed to the bell's ringing by saying "Om Mani Padme Hung" every time she heard the bell's sound. As she could find no mental reasoning not to indulge her son's insistence, she reluctantly began to comply with his seemingly harmless request

When she died, she was destined through her negative accumulation to be reborn in hell realms. There is one hell in which one experiences the vision and sensation of being dropped into a great cauldron of melting metal, similar to the cauldrons Chungawa saw when he had his brief visit to that region. As Shariputra's mother arrived and was approaching this destiny, the hell denizens, who were stirring the molten metal, banged the side of the cauldron with the stirring spoon, making a bell-like sound. Immediately, she responded with her habitual tendency and said, "Om Mani Padme Hung," whereupon the whole hell experience completely vanished. Her son's compassion had thus helped her deluded mind and had liberated her from untold suffering. In every moment of our precious human existence, we too should recognize the need to liberate sentient beings compassionately from believing phenomena to be self-existent, when in absolute truth all phenomena are empty.

In death, the mind discards the empty fruition body and goes into a kind of oblivion with a complete loss of any memory or consciousness for a period of approximately three days. The mind remains in this state of oblivion until consciousness awakens and begins to project myriad illusory appearances, all believed to be just as real as we believe this current phenomenal appearance to be real. The appearances that manifest in the after-death state — landscapes, environments, whole cities, and so forth — and the intense sensory experiences — pleasure, pain, fear, and so forth — are all projections that the mental body of the bardo believes to be real. In the same way that the fully ripened body of wakeful life and the habitual body of the dream state experience reality through delusion, so too is the bardo experience but a mere mental projection having no self-nature, having no reality in and of itself. In recognizing the mind's nature as being void of any substantial existence, one must conclude that self-conceptualization is, as such, unproduced and uncreated. All appearance, being mere mental projection coming from the mind, which is essentially emptiness, is likewise unproduced and uncreated. This view, this recognition, is itself absolute bodhicitta.

In seeing that all sentient beings do not recognize their own illusory nature or the insubstantiality of all appearances, one recognizes that these beings falsely cling to appearances, believing their bodies to be real. It is apparent that clinging to the insubstantial reality of both body and phenomenal appearances gives the experience of intense suffering. In seeing that all sentient beings do not recognize ultimate bodhicitta and are locked into clinging to a false reality, then in no way can we not give rise to immeasurable compassion. Having compassion for all sentient beings from both the absolute and the relative viewpoints (described earlier), one joins compassion with the recognition of emptiness, just as two hands that work together help each other. It is by these means — recognition of emptiness and an immeasurable compassion — that bodhisattvas acquire the merit of skillful means and the wisdom necessary to attain buddhahood.

In the ten directions of space, there are innumerable buddhas and bodhisattvas. At some time or another, all of them have taken the bodhisattva vow. By employing this vow and the relative and absolute bodhicitta attitudes,

they traverse the ten levels of bodhisattva development. There is absolutely no instance of any buddha or bodhisattva who has not taken the bodhisattva vow, or who has not given rise to relative and absolute bodhicitta. It is impossible to reach such attainment without fulfilling these commitments.

You who are reading this discourse have attained a precious human existence. You have all the freedoms and material possessions required for your needs in this lifetime. Because you are able to traverse the path of the Dharma, you have arrived at the door of the Dharma and are standing at the threshold. This arrival is very wonderful, is very remarkable, and is unfathomable in its greatness. Therefore, I will solve your quandary and hesitation at this threshold — a threshold that will eventually lead you to full liberation as a fully realized buddha — by telling you that to reach this goal you must accumulate a vastness of virtuous activity so as to develop a vast accumulation of meritorious karma. This is the most effective thing to be done in this lifetime. This is the easiest way to walk the path that lies before you. Taking and keeping the bodhisattva vow helps instill the habit of virtuous activity, and all of this has meritorious karmic accumulations.

In former times, when individuals requested the bodhisattva vow, they would perform great meritorious actions in making offerings to the buddhas and bodhisattvas as well as to the lama from whom they were to receive this great vow. For example, an aspirant might supply the community of monks and nuns with meals, construct temples where the Dharma could be practiced, make several hundred thousand circumambulations, and so forth. Making these vast offerings to the buddhas and the sangha developed great positive virtue, so much so that, eventually, an individual would arrive at the point where he or she could naturally and unhesitatingly receive the bodhisattva vow. In this age of jet travel and modern technology, where things happen a lot more quickly, we can use very simple and quick methods of amassing vast accumulations of merit. Examples of these are sponsoring persons doing a three-year retreat; going on pilgrimages to the shrines and temples in Tibet, Nepal, and India; sponsoring the construction of stupas, shrines, and temples; giving land that can be used and developed for Dharma activity; sponsoring ganacakra ceremonies or initiations; and so forth.

As you all have some connection with the Buddhadharma, it is probable you have taken the bodhisattva vow many times before, in this and in several different lifetimes. One maintains one's vow not only through one's virtuous actions for the benefit of all beings, but also by regularly reciting the bodhisattva vow, ideally on a daily basis. Therefore, if, in your own circumstances, you find yourself far distant from a Dharma center, or without a lama in your life who has the permission from his superiors to give this very important vow, this does not prevent you from reciting the vow daily, from meditating upon its meaning, and from applying its virtue in your life! However, I urge you to take this sacred vow formally with a qualified lama at your earliest opportunity.

When you recite this prayer (which is also your vow), your motivation is very important. Pausing a moment to think about the buddhas and bodhisattvas in

the past who have taken and kept this vow, emulate their motivation. Make firm your resolve that you will attempt to put your vow into action, just as they have done. This not only connects you to their efforts, but at the same time it allows them to know that you have the determination to mature this commitment for the benefit of all beings.

Now that you have set your motivation properly, visualize very clearly that in the sky in front of you there is a lama surrounded by a vast array of innumerable buddhas, bodhisattvas, and arhats who are filling all space. Next, visualize yourself makings offerings to this entourage, offerings of everything in the universe that is good. Offer oceans, mountains, and wonderful things, such as beautiful palaces in which it is pleasant to reside. Conjure up a vast array so that the sky is completely filled with offerings of flowers, music, butter lamps, incense, candles — in short, all kinds of auspicious offerings. Visualize yourself offering these wonderful riches to the lama and his attendants with the inner prayer, "I pray that the lama, the buddhas, and the bodhisattvas of the ten directions accept this vast array of offerings, so that all beings may benefit from my intentions and motivation to take and keep this vow." Having given rise to the conviction that you are accepting the bodhisattva commitment, just as the lama, the buddhas, and the bodhisattvas have done, recite this vow, either in English (as follows) or Tibetan.

Bodhisattva Vow

Until the heart of enlightenment is reached,
I go for refuge to the buddhas, and in the same way,
I also go for refuge to the teachings of the Dharma and
the assembly of bodhisattvas.

Just as the previous transcendent buddhas developed the
thought of enlightenment and practiced the ten
successive stages of bodhisattva training,
In order to benefit beings, I also will develop the
thought of enlightenment and follow these
successive stages.

Recite three times

Now, my life is fruitful. I have obtained the most
excellent human existence.
Today, I am born into the lineage of the buddhas and
have become a child of the buddhas.
From now on, in all possible ways, I will make my actions
conform to this family, so that this faultless,
noble lineage will not be defiled.
In the presence of all the refuges, I have invited all
beings to come to happiness until they have attained
the bliss of buddhahood.
Gods, jealous gods, and other beings, rejoice!
May the precious thought of enlightenment which has not

arisen, arise! Wherever it has arisen, may it
not be destroyed, but increase more and more!
Without being separated from the thought of enlightenment,
may we strive to practice the bodhisattva conduct!
Having been given complete protection by the buddhas, may we abandon wrong actions!
May all that the bodhisattvas intend for the benefit of
beings be realized!
Through the intentions of the protectors,
may all beings attain happiness!
May all beings have happiness!
May all the unfortunate realms be emptied forever!
May all the prayers of the bodhisattvas at all levels
of enlightenment be realized!

Recite one time

May all beings have happiness and the causes of happiness!
May all beings not have suffering nor the causes of suffering!
May all beings never be without the supreme bliss which is
free from all suffering!
May all beings live in great equanimity, which is free
from all attachment and aversion!

Recite three times

Bodhisattva Vow

JANG CHUP NYING FOR CHI KYI BAR
SANG GYE NAM LA KYAP SU CHI
CHO DANG JANG CHUP SEM PA YI
TSOK LANG DE SHIN KYAP SU CHI
JI TAR NGON GYI DE SHEK KYI
JANG CHUP TUK NI KYE PA DANG
JANG CHUP SEM PAY LAP PA LA
DE DAK RIM SHIN NE PA TAR
DE SHIN DRO LA PEN DON DU
JANG CHUB SEM NI KYE GYI SHING
DE SHIN DU NI LAP PA LANG
RIM PA SHIN DU LAP PAR GYI

Recite three times

DENG DU DAK TSE DRE BU YÖ
MI YI SI PA LEK PAR TOP
DE RING SANG GYE RIK SU KYE
SANG GYE SAY SU DAK DENG GYUR
DA NI DAK GI CHI NAY KYANG
RIK DANG TUN PAY LAY TSAM TE
KYON ME TSUN PAY RIK DI LA
NYOK PAR MI GYUR DE TAR JA
DAK GI DE RING KYOP PA TAM CHAY KYI

CHEN NGAR DRO WA DE SHEK NYI DANG NI
BAR DU DE LA DRON DU BO ZIN GYI
HLA DANG HLA MIN LA SOK GA WAR GYI
JANG CHUP SEM NI RIN PO CHE
MA KYE BA NAM KYE GYUR CHIK
KYE PA NYAM PA ME PA DANG

The Bodhisattva Vow written in phonetic Tibetan.

GONG NAY GONG DU PEL WAR SHOK
JANG CHUP SEM DANG MI OREL SHING
JANG CHUP CHO LA SHOL WA DANG
SANG GYE NAM KYI YONG ZUNG SHING
DU KYI LAY NAM PONG WAR SHOK
JANG CHUP SEM PA NAM KYI NI
DRO DON TUK LA GONG DRUP SHOK
COM PO YI NI GANG GONG PA
SEM CHEN NAM LA DE JOR SHOK
SEM CHEN TAM CHAY DE DANG DEN GYUR CHIK
NGEN DRO TAM CHAY TAK TU TONG PAR SHOK
JANG CHUP SEM PA GANG DAK SAR SHUK PA
DE DAK KUN GYI MON LAM DRUP PAR SHOK

Recite one time

SEM CHEN TAM CHE DE WA DANG DE WAY
GYU DANG DEN PAR GYUR CHIK
DUK NGAL DANG DUK NGAL GYI GYU DANG
DRAL WAR GYUR CHIK
DUK NGAL ME PAY DE WA DAM PA DANG MI
DRAL WAR GYUR CHIK
NYE RING CHAK DANG DANG DRAL WAY DANG
NYOM CHEN PO LA NAY PAR GYUR CHIK

Recite three times

What does this vow mean to one's life? Its basic meaning is that the attitude of caring only for oneself, of cherishing one's own requirements, and of acting only for one's own benefit while not being concerned about the benefit of others is completely gone, completely abandoned. One develops the attitude of altruism and considers that the benefit of others is far more important than the benefit of self. As a bodhisattva, one gives rise to this attitude.

When you have the opportunity to receive this vow formally from a qualified lama, you must think that you have received this vow not only from the lama but also from all the buddhas, the yidams, and all the accomplished bodhisattvas. You will then have formally become a bodhisattva. You may have occasion when receiving certain initiations to be asked to use your bodhisattva name. If no special name was given to you when you formally took the bodhisattva vow, use the word "Bodhisattva" at the beginning of your refuge name; however, one should not use this prefix, "Bodhisattva," in a bragging or light-hearted manner under any circumstances.

If you plant a seed of rice or barley in good soil which has warmth, moisture, and nutrients, you are able to watch it grow as it spreads its roots, sends up a stem, and produces the stalk and shaft of grain. In just the same way, I have planted in you the seed of bodhicitta that will definitely grow, continuing to mature until you blossom into full buddhahood. Not only myself, but all the buddhas and bodhisattvas are determined to protect and help you with their great compassion, to help you give rise to this bodhisattva attitude. Additionally, there are many different beings on this same great path that have great love for the Buddhadharma. These are your friends and associates who will help and protect you while encouraging you to develop this bodhicitta. When one has requested and received this vow, then one works for the benefit of all sentient beings until they all attain buddhahood. A bodhisattva strives as much as possible to develop this altruistic attitude.

Keeping and maintaining this commitment is accomplished by considering two perspectives and their resultant conclusion. First, it is possible to develop mental exhaustion that makes delivering all sentient beings to buddhahood seem impossible. Rather than becoming disheartened and fearful that one will not satisfy the vow (and thereby abandoning the good intention) one should understand that such abandonment would break one's vow. Second, if in this lifetime (or another) an enemy arises who spreads maliciousness, the bodhisattva commitment is broken if the practitioner excludes that person from his or her bodhisattva intention. In thinking of excluding this enemy and in not working to help bring this person to enlightenment, one reduces the bodhisattva intention. This would also break the vow.

We are beginners on the path and are bound to continue experiencing anger, hatred, dislike, and so forth; these feelings will arise from time to time. However, because we have taken the bodhisattva vow in this or other lifetimes, we must recognize that if these negative emotions arise, we should immediately (or as soon as possible) try to make amends by realizing the mistake. We should not allow these negative emotions to hold sway when practicing and keeping the bodhisattva vow. At the same time, we should also remind ourselves of the intention of commitment, resolving definitely to work for the benefit of those beings who cause us anger, hatred, and so forth.

Our enemies must be saved just as much as our friends. By making such a resolve and by making amends, even though the vow was damaged by negative emotions, the commitment is reinforced and the vow can become stronger. Failure to compensate by correct forgiveness constitutes breaking the bodhisattva vow. It is important to remember that whether a sentient being is known or unknown to you, is an enemy or a friend, is human or inhuman, that each is, in fact, your own mother from previous, present, and future lifetimes. Thus, by simply remembering that our mothers, as limitless as space, need our help to deliver them from confusion and suffering, we are keeping the bodhisattva vow intact.

Should we feel so inspired as to practice the foundations of mahamudra by undertaking the practices of prostrations, mandala offerings, etc., each of these practices includes prayers that allow us to retake the bodhisattva vow

again and again. Repeatedly renewing this vow has the great quality of enhancing understanding. Additionally, when performing yidam practices, such as Chenrezig's sadhana, the aspirant renews both the bodhisattva vow and the refuge vow. Whether in longer or shorter form, these two very important concepts always begin such practices. Even though these are often with different wording, the concept and the action of their recitation always has the same effect.

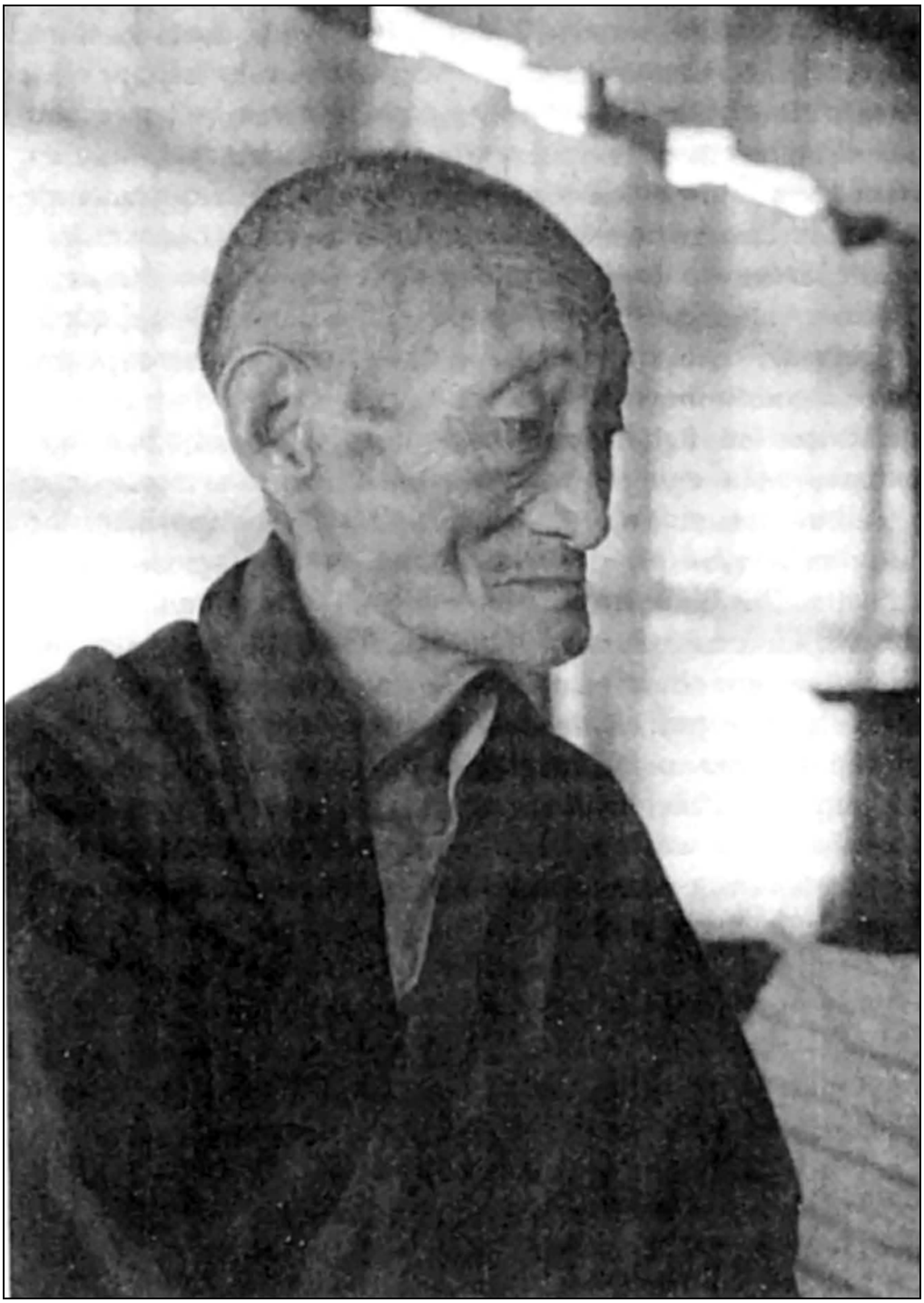
It is said that if the benefits of keeping the bodhisattva vow were to have some kind of substantial form, the whole of space could not contain them. Specifically, even if a person commits an action so negative that the effect is rebirth in hell, by taking and keeping the bodhisattva vow, the resultant negative karmic accumulation can instead be immediately, completely eradicated. If many such negative actions have been committed, the keeping of this vow with pure motivation will eventually eradicate all negative karmic accumulations. The life story of Jetsiin Milarepa illustrates this point.

To help maintain and expand your understanding and the power of the bodhisattva intention, you can do the meditation of giving and receiving, known in Tibetan as tonglen. Visualize that while breathing in, you take away all the sufferings from all sentient beings, removing confusion, lack of clarity, and so on. This suffering is transformed into a kind of smoky black light that is absorbed through your right nostril into your heart center. While absorbing this suffering, think, "I have completely absorbed all the pain and suffering of sentient beings into myself, freeing them so they can have all the happiness that they could desire/' Then, while breathing out, imagine that a white light leaves from the pure intention of your heartfelt prayer and carries with it all your goodnesses and pleasures, carrying these to benefit all the other sentient beings. This simple practice of giving and receiving is very powerful; it is considered to be an important part of development along the path to liberation. It not only benefits all beings by its efforts at purifying their suffering, but it also helps to eradicate the massive amounts of negative accumulations of the practitioner. Its practice will definitely strengthen your bodhisattva intention.

In the future, when you attain the first level of an accomplished bodhisattva, you will then experience a clairvoyant wisdom. You will be able to remember that in the distant past you received a teaching on the bodhisattva vow from an old man in some ancient city; in remembering this, you will be very happy. With the realization of the first blooming of the first level of an accomplished bodhisattva, you can manifest remarkable qualities. For instance, in an instant, an accomplished bodhisattva can emanate one hundred emanations to teach, train, and deliver one hundred sentient beings to liberation in single moment. As the stages of an accomplished bodhisattva progress, these powers and qualities increase tenfold with each level, becoming even more immense and immeasurable.

It is auspicious that you have the desire to become a bodhisattva. You have begun your bodhisattva path and this is acknowledged by all buddhas and accomplished bodhisattvas. You have the ability to increase your understanding and to develop your bodhicitta. This is a time of great

rejoicing! You should remember with kindness the lama who has bestowed upon you the bodhisattva vow (in this and in other lifetimes) and offer prostrations to him and all the buddhas and bodhisattvas. I will continue to make auspicious prayers for your rapid realization, your long life, all benefits, and happiness. Always be comfortable and at ease, and work to develop a pure bodhicitta attitude. I pray this teaching will quickly liberate you, for the sake of all sentient beings, our mothers.



Kalu Rinpoche in the late 1960s, meditating in his audience room at his monastery in Sonada, India (Photograph by J.G. Sherab Ebin)

9

Brilliant Moon

Elucidation of the Mahamudra

Presently we possess excellent bodies, bodies that are characteristic of the human realm, giving us the physical freedom to move about pretty much as we wish. We do not, however, have any mental freedom, meaning our minds are controlled by our karma, our emotionality, and our ignorance. Until we destroy this control and eradicate these obscurations, we can not say that our minds are truly free. To illustrate the manner in which we lack mental freedom, simply consider our basic human tendencies. If we have a single thought of desire or attraction for something that pleases us, this easily gives rise to aggression, pride, jealousy and so forth. A whole net of different thoughts arises based on our one simple thought, yet usually we are helpless to stop or control this process.

When one begins to practice the Dharma, one is typically and immediately confronted with this lack of freedom. For example, when one practices tranquility meditation, it is very difficult to get one's mind to sit still for more than a minute without having a thought. Then, too, when one tries to meditate upon a yidam, such as Chenrezig (who is white in color), one continually experiences thoughts of a black Chenrezig, a yellow Chenrezig, and so forth. Different colored Chenrezigs appear and one cannot maintain a stable visualization of the white yidam. Therefore, to develop freedom of mind, it is very important to first recognize the actual nature of the mind whereby one can gain control over its operation. In that way, undisturbed and unobscured by what arises and subsides naturally, the mind is free. Those humans who enjoy their precious human existence and are able to understand this perspective are also able to examine this teaching and determine the truth of the nature of the mind. Knowing that one has such an existence might, however, produce a kind of pride, causing one to think, "I have this superior existence and all this superior wisdom/' or "I know the nature of mind." In actual fact, it is very difficult to know precisely the true nature of the mind; apart from thinking, "I am," or "I exist/' it is difficult even to observe the nature of mind, let alone recognize it. There are several reasons why such obscurations occur, reasons worth reviewing before discussing the mahamudra.

First, in not recognizing the mind's nature, we all believe in ourselves and our ego. We naturally think we see a "self." Yet the mind, being completely formless and lacking the characteristics of shape, size, etc., is devoid of a "self." If one were to observe the nature of mind through meditation and were to see the nature of mind, then were there a "self," one would be able to place a descriptive characteristic upon the mind. One would be able to say, "It is this size," or "It is located here," or something equally descriptive. If you yourself could find something definitive about this mind, then you would be

perfectly entitled to say that there is a "self" that is self-existent. But, if you cannot, then you must recognize the truth of the mind's emptiness.

Second, we cling to this "self" as being something real. Such clinging is merely a conceptual clinging that associates a "self" with some kind of form. If there were any kind of shape or place that could be said to be "mind," then this intellectual, conceptual supposition of there being a "self" would be valid. However, this is completely without basis in any reality. The mind is emptiness without a "self."

Third, despite this, we cherish and love that "self" and are very concerned with preventing any kind of harmful occurrence, wishing only for pleasant experiences. Failure to recognize clearly the nature of this "self" is called the cloudiness or ignorance of self, which we have discussed at length throughout this entire discourse. Simply stated, having these three states of ego clinging — seeing, believing in, and cherishing a "self' — yet being totally unaware of its true nature gives us what we think of as being "I."

The entire body of the teachings of the Buddha is concerned with alleviating this erroneous view. The existing methods and varied instructions for pointing out this mistaken idea are extremely extensive. Through applying these teachings and the commentaries by the great tantric masters, by developing an understanding, and by gaining a good habit through meditation, one is able to do wonderful things. For example, visualization can be used to calm the mind through meditation. This may be done in the following way. Begin the meditation by visualizing a clear sphere of light in the heart. Once stability has been gained in that visualization, meditate on the sphere of light expanding and moving far away in front of you. When stability has been gained again, meditate simultaneously on both the distant sphere of light and the sphere of light in the heart.

Having gained stability in meditating on both lights at the same time, next visualize another sphere of light as being very far behind you, and gain stability on this visualization. Then meditate with clarity and stability on the visualization of the spheres of light in front, way behind, and in your heart. Through the development of this meditation, you will find that not only have you calmed the mind, but such stability of focus will additionally prove to be beneficial when you attain the first level of an accomplished bodhisattva. Applying concentration at that moment will enable you to experience one hundred samadhis, or different types of meditative absorption, the very instant this level is achieved!

From the point of view of Buddhism and Buddhist practice, the discovery of the true nature of mind must be established for Buddhadharma to be fully practiced. However, this does not mean that any meditation practiced before such realization arises is bad or useless; rather, it is just not as effective as it could be. Understanding the true nature of mind brings with it a benefit, in that anything done with the mind in meditation is far more effective and beneficial. Indeed, while it is true that the mind of each and every one of us possesses all the qualities of a buddha, these are unapparent because of obscurations and our clinging to an inherently existing ego, or "I," which binds our obscurations together like a chain. Clinging to egoistic self-perception

prevents recognition of the inherent qualities of buddhahood, qualities which we naturally possess. Until the obscurations of ego clinging are cut through, we will never realize these transcendent qualities inherent in the pure alaya.

Generally, our qualities are masked or completely covered, as though they were held bound in a solid vessel, as in a clay pot. In many of the tantras, the Buddha has said that there are only two methods or techniques by which coemergent wisdom can be realized or attained. The first is dispelling the four obscurations, in combination with the gathering of the accumulations of merit and wisdom. The second is attaining the blessing of the tsaway lama who has this realization. However, it is very difficult in these dark times to find a lama of such a caliber, one who has not only all the good qualities of a superior teacher but also has the perfection of the mahamudra. Therefore, such an option is rare — there are few who can give such a blessing. Furthermore, for the student to benefit from such a blessing, he or she must have accumulated a great amount of positive karmic accumulations and have an insatiable desire for the mastery of the mahamudra. Fortunately, however, there are many lamas who have the ability to help one on the path by answering questions and sharing experiential awareness accumulated in their own development towards this goal.

In finding someone to help, most importantly one needs to locate a lama that has an unbroken lineage (of blessing, empowerment, literary authority, experience, and so on) and is able to give the initiations of vajrayana. Secondly, the lama should have a demonstrable great compassion for all sentient beings. Instead of having an attitude of wishing to gain wealth and self-aggrandizement in order to build up his or her own dharma empire, the lama holds but one main thought in mind, namely, leading sentient beings away from the confusion of samsara.

It may happen that some students with exceptional qualities come seeking the lama's guidance. Interestingly, whenever the Dharma is explained to such students, they have the kind of intelligence that can understand it automatically and with very deep comprehension. Furthermore, they are able to put the teaching into immediate practice. Within this world, the occurrence of such excellent students has nothing to do with their gender. The real reason for being able to step beyond obscurations so easily is that they have gathered accumulations of merit and wisdom for many, many lifetimes. Additionally, they have worked on dispelling the four obscurations in their stream of experience. In the case of such students hearing a lama explain the meaning of the mahamudra, the solid vessel of their obscurations develops tremendous cracks and holes in it through which their innate buddha nature can shine forth. Thus, along with the realization they experience when hearing such an explanation, such students of excellent capacity will immediately give rise to tremendous, genuine compassion for sentient beings who do not have this same realization. Furthermore, a tremendous faith arises in them for the lama from whom the transmission of the mahamudra was received. There are few people like this, however, and their rarity might well be compared to the rarity of snow on a summer day.

In the past, when faced with such an individual of excellent capacity, it was the custom among the great gurus of India and Tibet to recognize the student as having such potential, and to give this special type of teaching. I, however, do not have the kind of super-knowledge that can recognize such exceptional people. Instead, I teach everyone what will benefit anyone. Some people will be benefited by the explicit meaning, and some people will be benefited by the implicit meaning; therefore, I teach both.

In our beginning attempts to gain liberation, we are all like young babes. We have to be protected, guided, and helped along the path of the Dharma. We need assistance in overcoming our illusory bewilderment, confusion, and so forth, and so we need the help and guidance of the lama. A lama having an authentic lineage, a great compassion for sentient beings, and the ability to explain the Dharma of the Buddha without error is the helper we all need. As babes in this path of the Dharma, it is the help of the lama and the Three Jewels that gives us what we need to enable us to find the correct, straight, and rapid path of vajrayana, the path that will lead us to the perfect realization of buddhahood.

However, all the help in the world will not take us any farther along the path to liberation if we do not apply the lama's good advice and sincere instruction. You must practice in order to proceed; such practice can be as simple as sitting quietly to examine the nature of the mind. I have spent a lot of time telling you many things about the true nature of the mind, something that indeed has no substantiality, but it is up to you to see for yourself if the words I have spoken are true. In itself, such examination has gradations of progress that are useful in uncovering, or discovering, the mahamudra. Therefore, let us take a moment to detail such procedures.

First, sit correctly in a meditation posture with relaxed breath and an open, uncontrived mental awareness. Remain in that state, and simply watch what happens. Before too long, you will begin to be aware of thoughts that arise out of nothing, which have no substantiality in and of themselves, and which will again lose themselves to either the next thought or the next dull moment of being. Does this thought arise from inside or outside the body? Does it come from north, south, east, or west? If it is internal, does it come from the heart, the stomach, the legs, the arms, or the head? It is important for you to take the time to examine this issue and to know whence thoughts arise. Also, where does the thought stay while your are occupied with it, and where does it go when it fades from your attention?

Continuing with this approach, are the thoughts separate from the mind, being distinct entities in and of themselves, or are they the same as the mind, having no distinction other than demonstrating the nature of the mind? Pause a moment and reflect on this point. If you have a thought of some place near to you, for instance your closest big city, is that thought the city itself or is it the product of the mind? Or, take a far, distant city, like Bodh-Gaya in India; is the thought of Bodh-Gaya something different than the mind itself? Is the thought of Bodh-Gaya and the mind the same, or are the two separate? Look again and see if, in giving rise to the thought of a place very near and a place very far, it is the same thought, or are these two different thoughts?

It is necessary to meditate on these concepts for some time until you come to a decision about whether the mind and thoughts are the same or different, and whether thoughts come from outside or inside. You have to decide on this issue/ and then you should consult with the lama for verification of your findings. If you are correct, the lama will then give you further instruction to help you proceed/ and if you are incorrect/ the lama can address issues presented by your answer and can direct you toward correct understanding.

In order to proceed with this introspection, it is useful to know that in the extensive writings that comprise the whole of Tibetan Buddhism, many sources state that the mind and the thoughts are the same, that thoughts arise out of the mind like waves rise out of the ocean. Further, these texts state that the mind is empty, that it has no form or color, and that, therefore, thoughts are the same in that they are empty and without form or color. It is the mind's quality of clarity that allows thoughts to arise, and although thoughts are insubstantial, they continue to arise due to the unimpeded nature of mind.

The next phase of this examination involves looking at the natural state of the mind, at the change occurring in the mind, and at the awareness of the mind. By now, you should recognize that we constantly have this mind and that changes transpire in it, but you should also be able to rest the mind in its natural state and, when thoughts arise and the mind changes, you should be aware of that change. Awareness is very important. A mind resting in a place where there is no awareness is no different from gross ignorance, and a mind ignorant of change gives no benefit because it is held in the sway of delusion. If there is awareness, there is meditation; if there is no awareness, there is no meditation. When the level of mahamudra is finally reached, one's awareness allows meditation to happen effortlessly. This is referred to by the Tibetan and Indian masters of tantra as being one of the five paths, also known as a 'state of non-meditation' in that it occurs spontaneously and without contrivance.

Let us carry our consideration of the nature of mind a bit further by comparing the mind with the ocean. If the state of mind is the ocean, and if changes in the mind are waves on the ocean, are the waves and the ocean the same or different in essence? Alternatively, if the state of the mind is compared to the ground, and if changes in the mind are compared to trees, are the trees and the ground of the same quality of being, or are they different? Furthermore, are the state of the mind, the changes of the mind, and the awareness of the mind the same, or are they different? If they are the same, in what way are they the same? If they are different, where is the state of the mind, where is the change of the mind, and where is the awareness of the mind?

It is important that this examination be followed in sequence, with several weeks or months beings spent in its investigation. First of all, you must examine the arising of thoughts, the duration of thoughts, and the cessation of these thoughts. After having meditated on these considerations some time, you should go to a lama for further instruction. Later, you should take into consideration the state of the mind, the changes of the mind, and the awareness of the mind. After meditating on these topics for some time, again

return to the lama to gain further instruction to help you mature the mahamudra experience.

In making this examination, I am sure you will recognize for yourself that the mind does have a state of naturalness without thoughts, and that this natural mind state has no color, shape, or form. You will fathom for yourself that the mind is empty and vast; in fact, it is so expansive that it can be compared to the sky or the sphere of space. But, the mind is also tiny because even insects as small as dots have minds. So, the mind does not have size; rather it accords itself to thoughts. Vast or tiny, the mind appears to be all-pervading like space. The nature of the mind is experienced when it is resting in its own state, without thought. When thoughts arise in the mind, the mind changes, but these changes are also the mind itself. For instance, when waves arise out of the ocean, waves are in one sense different from the ocean, but they are the same in that they are the same body of water.

Hence, in the Kagyu tradition, thought (Tibetan: namdok) is said to be the change of the mind. But in essence, thought is none other than the dharmakaya because the thought itself is essentially suchness. Thus, one who is aware of both the state and change of mind is said to be mind itself. If there is no awareness, then there is no meditation, and this is delusion. Without awareness, resting in the state of the mind is stupidity and the change of mind is simply thoughts. If, however, there is awareness, then the state of mind is meditation and the change of mind is also meditation, all because the state of the mind, the change of the mind, and the awareness of mind are one and the same.

When you meditate, do not try to have good thoughts, do not try to keep away bad thoughts, do not try to stop thoughts, and do not try to go after them. Rather, rest in a state of being aware of the thoughts as they arise. This way, when bad thoughts arise, they arise out of the emptiness of mind and fall back into the emptiness of mind. The same is true for good thoughts. This same process of examination can be applied to the many other traps of personality and physiology. For instance, are your emotions of desire and anger coming from the same mind, or from different minds? And, as to the sounds, tastes, sights, smells, and sensory experiences which can be so pleasing or displeasing to you, are these coming from the same mind, or from different minds?

When you take the time to thoroughly examine such issues, you will eventually come to conclusions that help formulate later stages of realization. In realizing the inherent emptiness of all reality, you will realize that the essence of the mind (which is also empty) pervades all things; as such, it is the seat of dharmakaya. When you recognize that the clarity of the mind is also its natural state of being, you will realize that clarity as such is the seat of sambhogakaya. For a buddha, who rests in natural liberation in dharmakaya, the clarity of mind, the seat of sambhogakaya, allows knowledge of the three times of past, present, and future. In recognizing that the many thoughts that arise in the mind are essentially unimpeded, you will realize that unimpededness as such is the seat of nirmanakaya. It is wholly because of the unimpededness of pure mind that buddhas manifest in forms

of ordinary and supreme incarnations in the nirmanakaya state in order to benefit all sentient beings.

Our great teacher, Tilopa, the father of the Kagyu lineage, condensed the teaching of mahamudra into these words, "No distraction, no contrivance, and no meditation/' What did he mean? Well, "no distraction" refers to the total awareness of the mind in the state of rest. Whatever it is, whether or not it is changing and having thoughts, the mind is not distracted; it is always aware. "No meditation" means there is no thought of either good or bad, and nothing at all is being forced or structured. The awareness is totally spontaneous. "No contrivance" means there are no requirements and nothing to be done when letting the mind rest in its natural state.

If you can meditate in this manner, purifying your defilements and accumulating merit and wisdom, then when you receive the blessing of your tsaway lama, all your efforts soon will combine to bring your mahamudra practice to fruition. However, there are several pitfalls along the path of meditation. Meditation here means that you first begin your practice by taking refuge in the Three Jewels and the Three Roots; you then engender bodhicitta, and with sincere devotion perform the yidam practice of Chenrezig. Following the recitation and visualization practice of Chenrezig, focus upon the tsaway lama seated on the crown of your head; with intense devotion, pray for his or her blessing so that you might experience the spontaneous arising of non-causal awareness. Next, watch the tsaway lama dissolve into light and melt into you, and in this state of inseparability with the tsaway lama, you may begin your examination and observation concerning the true nature of the mind. And, finally, of course, conclude each meditation session with the dedication of merit and with prayers of good wishes for all sentient beings.

It can sometimes happen that, after having meditated by watching the mind for a period of time, you may find that thoughts and emotions follow each other so quickly that there seems to be no space in between them. When this occurs, cut through this confusing process with one motion of the mind, remaining in the state of non-distraction. Or, perhaps while performing this meditation, you may find yourself in a state where no strong thought process happens, where no awareness is present, making the mind dark and cloudy. This is the arising of stupor, and you should deal with it by instantly cutting through it. You should then strengthen or tighten awareness and remain undistracted in a state of inseparable emptiness and clarity.

Sometimes while doing this sort of practice, a state will arise that is almost like sleep, in which the mind becomes completely dark. This kind of state, or meditation, is of no benefit, either for the practice of zhinay (shamatha) as tranquility, or for the practice of lhatong (vipashyana) as insight. If you can arise from that state and let the mind rest without distraction in a state of clear emptiness, with a very precise yet elusive clarity, then this is a useful form of tranquility meditation. This progressive stage will bring about the attainment of many qualities.

If, while meditating, the aspirant has gained a certain understanding indicative of knowing something of the mind's true nature, fathoming a

glimpse of true wisdom, then this is the practice of Ihatong. And, if while meditating in such a manner, the student becomes aware and recognizes that the mind's essence is empty, that it is vast like empty space, and that the quality of this emptiness is clarity or lucidity, then in seeing this, he or she can take a great step forward. In such understanding, recognition dawns showing that both clarity and emptiness are inseparable and that their essential nature is unimpeded awareness. If, while recognizing this, the aspirant does not remain in conceptualization, but rather, in a state that is completely apart from any kind of manipulation or contrivance within the mind, then this is the beginning of the practice and realization of the mahamudra. Maturing this view culminates in the full blossoming of buddhahood. This can have a number of implications. Considering the different aspects of the nature of mind that become full blown at the moment enlightenment is achieved, then to say that the mind is essentially empty and intangible like space is to say that, when experienced directly, mind is everywhere, and so too is the consciousness of a buddha. The awareness of an enlightened being extends everywhere; there is no limit to it. It has no center or circumference, as it does not obey such rules. Hence, it connotes an all-pervading, omnipresent awareness. This has been termed dharmakaya.

As well, there is a luminous potential of mind that gives the ability to know. This, again, has an all-pervading quality in the sense that wherever there is space, that space is illuminated. Wherever there is mind, there is clarity. Wherever there is intangible awareness, there is luminosity. The unimpeded or dynamic manifestation of the mind's awareness becomes full blown as a kind of transcendent (or panoramic) awareness experienced by the being who attains the full level of buddhahood. This has two aspects. One is a qualitative experience that is aware of the essential nature of all experience and all phenomena. The other is a quantitative awareness that is aware of all the little details. Omniscience is not only knowing definitively the distinctions of samsara, it is also the understanding of the underlying essence.

All our definitions are just mental constructs/ simply ideas we have concerning the nature of enlightenment. There is no way we can really talk about what it is like, because enlightenment is beyond any kind of mental concept. Not to come to some conclusions about what conshtutes or contributes to liberation, however, is to avoid the issue and to keep endlessly turning the wheel of samsara. Therefore, it is useful that we try to describe enlightenment. In so doing, we are naturally forced to say that it is both a universal and an individual experience, yet it appears to be neither one nor the other, partaking of both. Each and every being that attains enlightenment experiences essentially the same thing. Buddhas are involved in the same state of being; their awareness has the same omniscient, all-pervading, luminous, unimpeded experience of both the essence and details of everything. Otherwise, enlightenment could not be said to be omniscient, and therefore one would have to conclude that enlightenment was not full and complete; this is simply not the case.

With regard to mahamudra, there are said to be three stages, namely, ground mahamudra, path mahamudra, and fruition mahamudra; and the

three together incorporate or accomplish the entire array of the eighty-four thousand collections of the Buddhadharma. By recognizing the ground mahamudra, the practitioner proceeds in the practice and, after a while, this practice becomes the path mahamudra. Then, when the aspirant realizes the path mahamudra totally and fully, he or she attains the fruition mahamudra. Ground mahamudra is the basis of all mahamudra. It points out the nature of mind. Let me remind you that the word mahamudra has four syllables in the Tibetan language. When analyzed individually, the first syllable, chak, means hand, which refers to the seal of voidness and indicates that all phenomena are insubstantial. The second syllable, ja, refers to the fact that all phenomena and all experience are not beyond voidness but are none other than voidness. Because this realization is extremely vast and profound, the next two syllables are chenpo, meaning greatness. This is the meaning of the words chakja chenpo in Tibetan, mahamudra in Sanskrit.

But, attaining mahamudra is not gained by saying "all things are empty/' or "all this is emptiness/' Rather, you must recognize this seal of voidness as emptiness. It is something that has to be realized, something that must be experienced. But what is this voidness? Examinations and discourses on voidness in the Prajna Paramita Sutra explain the outer voidness, the inner voidness, the inner and outer voidness, the greater voidness, the lesser voidness, and so on. There are, in total, eighteen characteristics of voidness that need to be realized. A detailed explanation of these eighteen characteristics is beyond the scope of this discussion and is actually beneficial only after a considerable amount of time in practice has resulted in specific realizations.

Our essential problem in failing to recognize that the mind is inherently empty, clear, and unimpeded is that our experience of the mind is of something very different. If we had a direct perception of mind, then there would be no individual karma, causing, for example, heart attacks due to intense emotion, and so on. Such things only arise when we invest experiences with a reality that they do not have. Karma is based upon the illusion of duality. The only reason karma is valid is because duality is valid, either because we say or we think it is, or because we experience it as such. It is not really true that as sentient beings we are totally separated from karma nor that we exist independently, free from it. Rather, as long as we cling to "self as being something real, and, consequently, regard things other than that self as also being real, then there is a basis upon which the karmic process can develop.

In actuality, the karmic process is not something ultimately real, yet it is obviously valid on a conventional level, as long as the misunderstanding exists that allows it to develop. Once one has direct experience of the non-dualistic state of awareness, karma is not created, is not reinforced, and is no longer valid. Why? Because the delusional support is gone, and there is no ground for its existence. The same holds true for the example of physical manifestations of emotional imbalance (as in a coronary due to intense anger). Only because we think "I am real/' "This is real/' and "That emotion is real" is there any solidity to our delusions, which, of course, lend power and force to conventional situations.

Ultimately speaking, there is only the empty, clear, and unimpeded mind nature, but our experience has been complicated to the point that we exist in the dualistic framework of me, you, and them. This causes us to respond, "I am so angry at them, and my anger is so real, that I have a heart attack and I die." Obviously, we suffer the consequences of such stupidity by ascribing reality to our experiences in the first place. But, if there is no longer any need to ascribe ultimate reality to what is happening, there is no longer a problem. Although the potential for transcendent awareness does exist, without a direct experience of the unimpeded mind, we wander around feeling that everything is somehow very real.

Suppose you have a nightmare and in it you are being confronted with wild lions, tigers, and leopards who are running after you, trying to catch and devour you. We are all naturally frightened in such dreams, so frightened, in fact, that suddenly we wake up. Our hearts pound and we sweat, obviously because we take the whole thing to be very real. But, it is also possible to have that same dream experience and, when the lion comes rushing upon you, to say instead, "Oh, this is just my dream." Then, you can stick your head in the lion's mouth, and sure enough, nothing happens because it is just a dream. If we do not understand what is happening, we make errors in judgment and thus all kind of experiences and problems develop. Such is samsara. But, by understanding precisely what is transpiring, realizing it inherently and innately, there is no problem, and nirvana, or liberation, dawns.

During the training leading to the state of enlightenment, there are certain qualities of aspiration that, when generated, affect the way in which the spontaneous manifestation of enlightened energy demonstrates itself. This is not to say that a "me" and a "you" are required for that to happen, any more than the sun needs either of us in order to radiate in all directions. The sun's radiation appears similar and equal, yet east and west, north and south, receive unequal lighting. A given situation can have differing aspects, and in that sense, there is an individual quality to enlightenment. But, this is not individuality as we normally understand it. Our ordinary definition of individuality says that the something that is me is separate from the something that is you, and, consequently, I am different from you, because I am not you. We think, "If I were you, I would not be me, but because I am me and not you, then I have an individuality/' This sort of framework is wholly unnecessary for an expression of enlightened energy to take place. On the one hand, buddhahood is a universal experience and all buddhas experience the same thing, but, on the other hand, in certain instances there are particular manifestations of buddhahood. Neither of these statements is false, nor are they mutually contradictory.

A traditional verse begins by stating that the dharmakaya, the absolute direct experience of the emptiness of mind, is all-embracing and pervades everywhere like space or the sky. The verse continues by saying that the sambhogakaya, the direct experience of the clarity and luminosity of mind, is like the sun shining in that sky. The verse concludes by describing the physical form manifestation of an enlightened being (termed the nirmanakaya, or the direct experience of the unimpeded and dynamic quality

of mind) as being like rainbows appearing everywhere for the benefit of all beings. However, it is not as though space, sun, or rainbows were thinking to themselves, "I will make myself appear over there, because you are separate from me/' Not at all: for quite simply, there is a space in which the sun shines and in which rainbows appear. In the same way, there is a universal experience that all enlightened beings attain, which, nevertheless, can manifest in unique ways. Manifestation does not require our normal perspective of "self and other" in order to appear.

Here it is necessary to distinguish between absolute reality, the label for something that really cannot be conceptualized, and relative reality, which can be. Anything that can be conceptualized with the intellect is, by definition, relative reality. Whatever cannot be conceptualized is absolute reality. The dharmakaya of buddhahood is absolute reality and its experience is the absolute truth or ultimate reality, whereas relative or conventional truth is anything that can be limited by any conceptual framework. It should not surprise us that we can only approximate what enlightenment may be, because as sentient beings still bound by our delusions, we do not have the capacity to do otherwise.

We are working with a limited and confused state of awareness. If we had the panoramic awareness to describe enlightenment, we would be enlightened! But because we lack that quality, we also lack the awareness necessary to describe the experience accurately. However, we can begin to talk about it, and that is what we try to do when we use the words buddha or buddhahood. These terms give the idea of elimination of all that is limiting, hindering, negative, or obscuring in the mind, so that the potential of mind can fully blossom. This is, perhaps, the single most concise and accurate statement we could make about enlightenment.

In the Buddhist tradition, one finds reference to the state called buddhahood as being an awakening from the sleep of ignorance and an elimination of any imposed limitations. This awakening allows consciousness to extend itself infinitely, to embrace everything that is possible to be known. Something inherent becomes actualized, similar to the quality of a lotus flower opening. Beyond these explanations and descriptive phrases, the state of liberated being called buddhahood cannot really be described accurately because we are not yet in its frame of reference.

For the process of spiritual development to take place at all, certain qualities and elements are not only necessary but are extremely crucial. One of these is having faith and confidence in the spiritual principles and goals to which one is aspiring, and in the teachers who show one the way to that goal. It is the quality of compassion that allows one to hold all beings as close and as dear as one's own parents. The more energy you put into developing these qualities of faith, confidence, and compassion, the more effective your spiritual practice will become. The moral choices you make in life, those practical day-to-day decisions made between virtuous and non-virtuous actions, are also an important factor in your spiritual development and should never be underrated.

It is additionally important to inquire into the mind's true nature with either a process of analytical or investigative meditation or with an intuitive approach in meditation. The aspirant can either examine experience and analyze it so that he or she comes to a deeper understanding of the nature of mind and the nature of experience, or the student can simply allow a fundamental experience of the empty, clear, and unimpeded nature of mind itself to arise. Either way, the practitioner is developing qualities that are extremely important; a great deal of attention and effort should be focused toward these issues.

When the beginnings of the recognition of mind's true nature arise, then you should instantly think of the Buddha Shakyamuni, of all the bodhisattvas, and especially of the tsaway lama, with the recognition that they all have attained full realization of the true nature of the mind. You can then advance rapidly by simply thinking how wonderful this is. Additionally, if you then can cultivate a naturally arising great faith filled with continuous prayers and can continually supplicate the buddhas and bodhisattvas, you can have an easy path to true fulfillment of the goal.

The whole point of this sort of discussion is to make use of these concepts, so that they become the basis for a whole, on-going process of spiritual development. Thus, the aspirant can attain the true benefit of this kind of teaching, the benefit being the attainment of enlightenment itself. When that transpires, you will have a sense that the tsaway lama from whom one has received the transmission of mahamudra is more kind than all the buddhas of the three times and the ten directions. Even though this feeling arises mostly because the aspirant has not met the buddhas and has not received the mahamudra teaching from them, nevertheless, the tsaway lama is now seen as being extremely wonderful and benevolent. It is through the loving kindness and compassion of the tsaway lama that you are actually given the keys to liberation; once you have received the mahamudra instructions, it is as though you hold the key in the palm of your hand.

If one has realization of the nature of the mind coupled with complete, impartial compassion and inconceivable devotion and gratefulness to the source of the teaching, then in one instant the aspirant will be able to obtain full buddhahood. Thus, even though one might not be able to fully understand the meaning of mahamudra at the time of hearing it explained, the receiving of the teachings serves as a great blessing because it creates a connection between the student and the teaching that will eventually ripen to fruition in some future circumstance. The fact that you have the faith to read these teachings, and that you have read them, is extremely wonderful, being a source of great merit. Therefore, please join me in dedicating this merit to all sentient beings with the aspiration that all beings, without any exception whatsoever, will obtain full liberation and complete buddhahood.

10
Cloud Mountains

Challenges of Samaya and Dharma

You will live, perhaps, one hundred years. Human life is transitory and impermanent; it is completely uncertain when the moment of death will arise. The main reason for practicing diligently right now, especially with the type of mantra recitation I have explained, is that you have the opportunity to progress along the spiritual path. You have no idea when this opportunity will vanish, or when there will be another. Therefore, at every moment it is to our advantage to recognize this and to apply ourselves diligently. In daily life, the fulfillment of mundane activities, laziness, and the cloudiness of bad meditation often serve to distract us. Let us now examine each in turn.

Laziness predisposes a person to overlook the importance of carrying out a given activity, either out of naivetg or out of a lack of normal comprehension. Even if a person understands the importance of certain activities, laziness leaches away any interest in undertaking them, and so no effort is made. Laziness does not limit itself to worldly affairs but applies itself as well to spiritual affairs. One may not understand the content of spiritual practice, or one may understand it and still not really care enough to want to do anything about it. In the first case, laziness comes either from not understanding the continuity of mind from one state of rebirth to the other, or from refusing to accept or to believe this to be true. If one does not have a comprehension of the continuity of mind from one relative state of rebirth to another, then one cannot have an appreciation for how one influences what the mind experiences through what one does. Without such an understanding, one does not have the necessary motivation to practice, because such motivation is something that arises by itself if and when one understands the situation. Without an understanding of the different possibilities of higher or lower rebirth, or of the particular karmic process that leads to these states giving happiness and unhappiness, pleasure and pain, etc., then one does not have a framework in which that motivation can grow.

Motivation is found through understanding, and on the spiritual level it is through understanding that we can work most directly against laziness. The sense of being ineffectual or unable to practice can lessen because, as understanding about the limitation of sentient beings' experience (and how it can be influenced or changed through practice) increases, so does the desire to benefit others. The more one is motivated, and the more one actually goes about using the karmic process in a positive way, the better are the chances that the results of that causality will bring the benefit of progressive development on the spiritual path.

Dullness of mind during meditation inhibits progress. When a person is asleep, the alert factor dissipates as the mind sinks into a dulled state; there

is no way one can meditate in that situation. Now, even though a person might be awake in the ordinary sense of the word while in meditation, there can be a lack of alertness to the meditation. The traditional vocabulary of meditation teaching gives several different levels of alertness. The first is called thinking, which indicates that the spark of awareness that is inherent to mind has become dulled. The second is termed fog and refers to the mental condition that results when the dullness begins to thicken, causing things to get thicker and duller in the process. The third translates into the idea of nearly blanking out, which means a real obscurity exists. Thus, when meditation is obscured with dullness, the practitioner can still be awake in the physiological sense of the word but the mind appears to be asleep. There is no alertness at all. Now, if any one of these three levels is the case, then, of course, real meditation is not taking place. In fact, if there is any meditation with such mental qualities present, then it is a meditation of stupidity, because such meditation only reinforces stupidity and the dullness of mind.

In real meditation, a bare state of awareness is necessary, so that the meditation has a spacious quality, a clarity and transparency to the experience. This is the experience sought. There is no need to think, "This is emptiness; this is luminous; this is transparent/' Instead, it is easily recognizable; it is just there to be experienced. This is not to say that thought will not arise, because thoughts do arise in the mind. In fact, during meditation one is aware of thoughts arising, but one is aware without being distracted by the thought process. For it is not as though the thought arises, the mind becomes distracted, and, only afterwards, does one realize that a thought has arisen. Rather, as the thought arises, one is aware of its arising and remains undistracted by either the arising or the content.

In Tibet, there is a proverb that states that the best introduction to sleep is bad meditation, meaning that if one has a dull approach in meditation, it leads straight into a state that is not significantly different from sleep. In fact, this dullness is the bridge between sleep and waking. It is considered to be a twilight zone, an interim level of dull stupidity to which one goes while in bad meditation. Sleep is distinguished from waking consciousness by more than simple awareness, because being awake also implies physical activity. Likewise, waking consciousness differs from meditative consciousness in the quality of alertness present; implicit to the state of meditation is bare awareness.

It is remarkable and indeed very wonderful that there are many people having a strong aspiration to practice the Dharma, who wish to practice in order to realize the fruit of Dharma. Yet, the most common complaint is, "I do not have enough time!" This is perfectly true! You need money, so you have to go to work, which takes a good portion of your day. Additionally, more time is taken up by personal needs, for you have to eat and to sleep, you have to watch TV and go to the movies, plus you have to do a great many other things. And, because you definitely have to do these things, you do not have time to practice the Dharma. However, if you were to meditate on the preciousness of this human existence, the rarity of its being obtained, and the certainty of its being impermanent, then in contemplating and recognizing these truths, you would find you have a lot of time. Why? Because you would

realize the real requirements for life in our 'Southern Continent' world (Sanskrit: Jambudvipa, in the Mt. Sumeru cosmology) can be easily and simply satisfied. On a rudimentary level, one definitely needs to eat, and one definitely needs clothing and shelter. With these three basic necessities, plus a strong desire to practice the Dharma, one can become an extremely good practitioner, if one takes the time.

You might well ask yourself, at some point or another, whether you are meant to abandon the world and go off into a cave and meditate. Well, it would not be a bad idea, and it certainly would not hurt, but be practical. How many of us are ready to give up everything and go off alone to practice like Milarepa did? As a teacher of Western students, I do not consider this to be a particularly sensible approach. Such strict and continual seclusion is not necessary. It is possible that one can practice while still actively involved in the world. Such a combination of spiritual practice and worldly activity allows the aspirant to use his or her faculties in a very skillful way.

Ideally, if we were embarking on something as important as discovering the nature of mind in order to attain some kind of significant experience, then obviously this is going to take some time and effort. There should be at least a month for a student and a teacher to work together in the slow process of familiarizing the student with the experience, bringing the student through an on-going process to that experience. This amount of time would be ideal, but even a week would do. We begin by developing an approach to meditation that is of total relaxation and of an uncontrived state of awareness. This is our basis for meditation. One is inculcating the appreciation of the intangible emptiness of mind, of its luminous clarity, and of its unimpeded and dynamic manifestation as awareness as being the fundamental, inherent nature of mind itself.

At this point, we can simply touch on the experience of the fundamental nature of mind itself. Remember that physical posture is important, especially when first developing meditation, because an erect posture facilitates the arising of this experience. Now, use a process of meditation to analyze the mind; try to discover something that is the mind, try to define mind as being shaped, colored, or experienced in such-and-such a way. You could look for a year, and still you would be wasting your time. Why? Because you are not going to find any of these. You are not going to find any color or shape, or any size or location, or any limitation that you can ascribe to mind at all; so stop trying.

Rather, let the mind rest in its own nature, a state of spacious awareness. By spacious, I am referring to the way that space pervades everything, solid or otherwise. We cannot say that space begins here and ends over there. Neither can it be said that mind behaves according to such limitations. Fundamentally speaking, mind is all-pervading, in that it pervades every aspect of awareness. Thus, there is an open, spacious, intangible quality inherent in the experience of the nature of mind itself. All that is necessary for the experience to arise is for the mind to be in a state of totally uncontrived relaxation. So, without any effort, without any attempt to force the mind at all,

without doing anything with the mind, allow the mind to experience its own inherent, intangible emptiness.

The quality of this experience has a recognizable spaciousness in which there is no lack of illumination. In any given space, if there is no sun, no moon, no source of illumination, it is obscured space, and we cannot see anything in it. On the other hand, if there is a source of illumination — the sun, the moon, or some artificial source (like a light bulb) — the space is illuminated. Without being able to separate the two, we can say that there is space and illumination. Mind has an illuminated space in which one can see in perfect clarity. The point of this approach in meditation is to realize that not only is there a spacious, empty quality to the experience as indicative of its intangibility, but that the experience is also characterized by a luminosity. Such clarity is the perfectly unimpeded ability (or potential) of the mind to know, without there being anything obscured or not known. This clarity and transparency are thus part of the experience as well, and we have labeled this the luminosity of mind. It is something we also need to make note of in using this kind of meditative approach.

The nature of mind is characterized not only by its spacious quality, but also by its transparency and clarity. Despite the fact that there is this clear, intangible, and spacious quality, it is still possible to be in a kind of trance in which there is no thought or dynamism taking place. This I have referred to earlier as bad meditation, because it is such a dull experience. The dynamic, unimpeded manifestation of mind is missing, so nothing can arise. It is important that this dynamic manifestation be a part of the experience of mind's true nature, something additional to the spaciousness and the transparent clarity. Such alertness, or such awareness, can (and, in fact, does) manifest as conscious, conceptual thinking. When one is meditating properly, it is entirely possible to think, and the point is, that for the thought to arise at all, there must be an alert and aware quality of mind. Thus, when one is using this approach in meditation, given that there is a spacious and transparently clear quality to the experience, there is also the dynamic spark of awareness. To be aware of the thoughts that arise in the mind, be they nominally good or bad, is itself an expression of that spark. The specific nature or content of the thought is not the issue; it is the awareness which is important.

You will recall from our earlier discussions that, since beginningless time, it is the mind that has been experiencing rebirths, and it is mind that will continue to experience an infinite cycle of rebirth without end, given that the person does not attain enlightenment. Should, however, a being attain enlightenment and arrive at that direct experience of the mind, it does not mean that the mind disappears. Rather, all the obscuration and all the ignorance have been eliminated, and the full manifestation or unfolding of the incredible, inherent potential of mind is now possible. By no means should enlightenment be misunderstood as being an elimination of the mind. The mind does not evaporate, is not severed, nor does it disintegrate when enlightenment is attained. Whether enlightened or unenlightened in the experience of the practitioner, the mind endlessly continues to be empty, clear, and

unimpeded. For sentient beings, it is only a case of whether this will be a continued experience of samsara, or one of nirvana.

Many times during the two past decades I have been asked to visit North America and Europe. After I had been there several times and was beginning to think that perhaps I was getting too old to be traveling around the world, and wondering about the wisdom of going again, I had occasion to speak with His Holiness the XVIth Gyalwa Karmapa. He had just returned from what proved to be his last teaching tour to the West, and naturally he spoke to me about his travels. He remarked in passing on the spread of the Buddhadharma outside of Asia, saying that each time he went abroad, he saw more and more activity spreading from the teachers of all the vajrayana orders of Tibet. He noted that associated with the Karma Kagyu tradition alone, there were then more than 325 centers worldwide. He felt that these centers required an on-going source of instruction and advice, especially since interested people would need to be able to continue their practice. As his own health was already on the decline, he told me he had encouraged many important and well-known teachers to return to the West to further the teachings they had already given.

He encouraged me to return to the West with the following words. "I want you, Kalu Rinpoche, to go back to the West. I want you to undertake this, even though you are old, because there are many centers in need of instruction and guidance. It would be extremely beneficial if you could visit as many centers as possible."

There are many activities in the West that could use assistance. Thus, when these needs were coupled with His Holiness' request, it helped me make my decision to return to the West each successive time. You might well wonder what activities require my close supervision, and in answer, one of my major concerns is the establishment of three-year retreat centers. Already several exist in central Europe and along the West and East Coasts of North America. Several more are planned for Hawaii, New Zealand, and South America. There also have been requests and plans to increase the number of retreat facilities in both North America and continental Europe. In most retreat centers, ten men and ten women, plus two cook-attendants and the resident teacher for the retreat, have successfully started their three-year retreat, and they are currently involved with practices that form the content of this long and intensive program.

A three-year retreat is something that is very new to the West. It might seem strange, or at least a bit overdone. But, to the many people of Asia, it is not a strange idea at all. Among the Tibetans, retreats were a well-established part of the culture, and many Tibetans chose to devote at least some part of their lives to intense retreat and practice. Eventually, the rather formal institution of the three-year, three-month, three-day retreat developed. During such a retreat, one does not leave the retreat facility, nor do other people come to visit. The practitioner is isolated for that brief period of time, in order to devote all of his or her time and energy, without distraction, to the study and practice of the Dharma. Such application is very useful and important in the successful development of vajrayana practice.

You might well wonder what is done in such an isolated retreat for such a long time. When one is following the curriculum that is established for the three-year retreat in the Karma Kagyu and the Shangpa Kagyu traditions, the retreatant begins with the foundation practices and then proceeds through various tantric ritual practices involving yidams. This culminates in practice of the advanced tantric techniques of the six yogas of Naropa, the mahamudra approach, and so forth. During this whole three-year, three-month, three-day period, there is a carefully graded program of study and practice that enables one to be exposed to the spectrum of techniques available to the practitioner of vajrayana.

During this length of time, the retreatant does his or her best to assimilate what is given in these practices, following which the practitioner is free to decide the particular course his or her life is going to take. Some people may go on and take full monastic ordination. Some go back for another retreat. Some people choose to go on to become lamas: teachers who are qualified to guide others in meditation, to give advice concerning the practice of the Dharma, and to teach the Buddhadharma. Other people go back to the life that they were leading before the retreat. It is strictly an individual decision what one does after the retreat is finished. The point is that during such a retreat, one is devoting one's life, with intense concentration, solely to the study and practice of the Buddhadharma.

The fact that these retreat centers exist at all, and that more and more are being built, reflects well upon the growth of Buddhism in the West. When I first came to Europe and North America in 1971, Buddhism was still very, very new to most Westerners. There were very few centers and little activity, but in the past fifteen years this has changed quite a bit. In Tibet, there is another saying, "Things are as different as heaven and earth/' I would say that the situation of my first visit and the way I now find the West are as different as heaven and earth. I find that many people, despite the obstacles they encounter on a cultural and a material level, have developed an interest in the Buddhist teachings. The men and women who are working to establish this tradition throughout the Western world are not necessarily wealthy or influential people in society. Nevertheless, they have sufficient commitment to gather as groups, found and maintain centers, and involve themselves in trying to provide access to the teachings. Hence, the teachings are growing and spreading. In seeing these efforts, I am reminded of Milarepa and of the trials and tribulations he went through in his spiritual development, and I am encouraged that many Westerners are demonstrating a similar level of commitment.

In noting this spread of Buddhism in the West, there are some factors that can perhaps explain why it is taking place. The first of these is the influence exerted by the monotheistic traditions that has imbued Western cultures with concepts that are as fundamental to Buddhism as they are to these approaches. In both, there exists the same emphasis on having faith and confidence in a spiritual (or exalted) ideal. There is also a similar emphasis on compassion and loving kindness towards other beings. And, there is emphasis on the fundamental qualities of generosity and morality. Although the context may differ slightly, these concepts and ideas have resulted in a

tradition in Europe and the Americas that reflects, at least to some degree, the same intent as the practices within Buddhadharma.

Another factor is the general level of education and intelligence in Western countries. As a whole, people in these countries tend to be far more educated and intelligent than people in less developed countries. There is more opportunity to develop intellectual potential, and this is something very important in appreciating the profundity of Buddhism. The Buddhadharma possesses a logical and internal structure that is impressive, especially when one understands all of the different aspects of this tradition. And, Tibetan Buddhism especially presents a complete and profound path of spiritual development, in all its aspects of gradations and attainment that represent the development of the nine yanas or vehicles.

Westerners are very well prepared, perhaps more so than people of other cultures, to be able to understand what really is being said in Buddhist teachings and what the implications are. Therefore, it is my feeling that the influence of the values of human kindness characteristic of many monotheisist traditions, plus the general intelligence and education of Westerners, which will play really key roles in allowing the teachings to make this current transition.

During my travels in Asia, I have noticed that, in countries where Buddhism has been part of the culture for centuries, there is a sympathetic and wide-spread popular response to the Dharma. When a teacher there gives a teaching, sometimes thousands of people show up. When a teacher gives the vows of refuge, hundreds of people take refuge. There is an incredible show of popular faith and devotion to the teachings of Buddhism. There is, as well, a strong tradition of patronage by wealthy and influential individuals. Usually Asian centers are either sponsored by such wealthy patrons or come under their care, and thus the general spiritual community has very little trouble meeting the center's expenses. In the West, the centers have managed to gather necessary funds a bit differently, and although the Western centers do not maintain themselves in a manner similar to their Asian counterparts, they do function, they do offer activities, and they are growing in membership.

As I have already explained, the basis of practice is, first, the abandoning of non-virtuous actions and the practicing of virtuous actions, upon which, secondarily, rests the practice of developing compassion and recognizing emptiness, and, third, one has the swift and powerful practice of the two phases of arising and consummation yogas of the vajrayana practice. With the teachings I have given you upon these three points, you have the essence of the Buddhadharma. To further your understanding of these points, you have available centers where there is usually a lama in residence who can add to your knowledge concerning various aspects of these three paths.

No matter what your level of knowledge or insightful understanding, it is important to study continually so as to enhance your practice. A serious student will take classes and study at a university or college until he or she finally receives a degree. The student then applies this knowledge in his or

her work. In just the same way, in finding out about the basic principles of the Buddhadharma practice, you can increase your understanding by referring to the lama's teachings and, in this manner, you will develop your understanding until you have realized enough to be able to practice very easily, in a perfect manner.

The Tibetans refer to the teachings of Buddhadharma as the inner teachings, because these teachings relate to the inner level of experience, focusing most expressly and clearly there. This is not to suggest that the other outer level of experience is ignored; rather, these teachings concentrate on the understanding of mind, on working with mind.

When the inner teachings were absorbed from India into the Tibetan culture not so many centuries ago, a number of different traditions developed. Through the activities of several kings, translators, and teachers, many generations passed before the whole tradition of Buddhadharma could be successfully transplanted to a new culture in a new land, Tibet. Although all of the traditions that arose from the successive generations of absorbtion have authentic roots from the Lord Buddha himself, they differ slightly in approach and they are known by different names, e.g., Nyingmapa, Kagyupa, and so forth. The orders developed due to the particular circumstances in which the teachings were brought to Tibet. The names of the teachers who introduced them (or the names of the particular places in which they were introduced) produced superficial differences leading to identity labels/ but the fundamental approach among all the major orders remains the same. The sutras and tantras, the exoteric and esoteric teachings of Buddhism, are revered and taught by all of these orders.

In the West, a similar process has begun; and, in the beginning, it may appear confusing. It might be difficult for you to figure out where to begin, what to study, and so forth. Even more so, it might be very difficult to know what to do when, or even what to do at all, given the immensity and variety of approaches. It is my feeling that to take the best advantage of one's current and impermanent precious human existence, one must develop faith in the tsaway lama. One must have faith by recognizing that the Three Jewels are part and parcel of the tsaway lama: the tsaway lama's body is the Sangha, his or her speech is the Dharma, and his or her mind is the Buddha. Further, to recognize the Three Roots of vajrayana, one develops the view that the tsaway lama's body is the essential Buddha Vairocana, his or her speech is that of the Dakinis and Dharmapalas, and his or her mind is the Yidam. Thinking in this way, one has faith in the tsaway lama as being the combined essence of the Three Jewels and the Three Roots.

An electric wire, however long, carries current from the generator to the light fixture, thereby allowing it to provide light. If the wire is broken or cut any place, the light will be immediately extinguished, as obviously the power from the generator cannot be transmitted along a broken wire. In the same way, the power or the current of flow of spiritual realization comes through enlightened masters in a completely unbroken way, and it is able at any moment to demonstrate its full power, or its complete enlightenment.

Tsaway lama is a vajrayana idea. In the hinayana and mahayana, one relies upon the preceptor and the spiritual friend, respectively, and in these two traditions, the preceptor and the spiritual friend bring wonderful benefit as they perform a very great service for those practicing these paths. In the vajrayana, this role is fulfilled by the tsaway lama and the lineage lamas. And, what exactly is the benefit of having a tsaway lama? This is similar to putting a piece of paper in the sunlight; even though the sun is very hot, it cannot set the paper on fire. But, putting a magnifying glass in the sun's beams creates a hot spot on the paper, causing the paper to catch fire and burn within only a few moments. By connecting one with the power of the lineage, the tsaway lama, like a magnifying glass, concentrates the spiritual energy of the lineage right into the student — right then, right there, at that very moment. It is the tsaway lama who transmits the spiritual energy of the lineage and gives the blessings, initiations, teachings, and so on. Lineage refers to the lineages of blessing, the lineages of initiation, the lineages of instruction, the lineages of literary authority, and the lineages of experience of realization, and so on. If all the lamas of a lineage stem from Buddha Vajradhara, and the lineage is completely intact, then you may receive those blessings, initiations, and experiences directly through the lineage as though you were personally receiving these directly from Buddha Vajradhara himself!

The tsaway lama is that being who connects the aspirant to all these necessary lineages of transmitted knowledge, awareness, and clarity. For instance, the Karma Kagyu lineage stems from the Dharmakaya Dorje Chang (Sanskrit: Vajradhara), and the teaching of the mahamudra transmission came directly from Dorje Chang to Lodro Rinchen, then to Saraha, then to Nagarjuna, Shawari, Maitripa, Tilopa, and Naropa. These were the lineage founders whose lives were spent in India. Then, in the eleventh century A.D., the lineage came to Tibet, due to the efforts of Marpa, the translator, who was a student of Naropa. From there, the lineage was transferred from Marpa to Milarepa, then to Gampopa, from whom it was transmitted as follows:

This comprises the whole of the Karma Kagyu mahamudra lineage to date. It is said that by merely hearing the names of these great enlightened masters, a great blessing is given in that defilements and obscurations of one's being are purified. This lineage is but one example of the varying lines of transmission that weave into Tibetan Buddhist traditions. Each order has its own progression of transmission; additionally/ of all the varying aspects of sutra and tantra commentary and the vast complexity of vajrayana initiations, each has its own unique path of transmission.

The tsaway lama should have certain qualities, the first among them being an unbroken lineage. Secondly, he or she must know the meaning of the Dharma. Finally, he or she must have great compassion for sentient beings. These are the main basic qualities of the tsaway lama. The student must also have qualities: there must be unwavering faith and devotion for the tsaway lama. With the steadfast devotion of the student, and the advice of a qualified tsaway lama, the practitioner can experience the arising of great siddhis or accomplishments.



The founding fathers of the Kagyu lineage, in order of transmission of the lineage: top center, Saraha, student of Lodro Rinchen; top right Nagarjuna and top left Shawari, both students of Saraha; middle center, Maitripa; middle left, Tilopa; middle right, Naropa; bottom center, Marpa Lotsawa; bottom left, Milarepa; and bottom right, Gampopa (Woodblock prints from Tibet, early 20th century)

Dusum Khyenpa	*The First Gyalwa Karmapa*
Drogon Rechen	*Disciple of Dusum Khyenpa* (Became *Tai Situpa Rinpoche* by title given by *Yung Lo*)
Pomdrakpa	*Disciple of Drogon Rechen*
Karma Pakshi	*The Second Gyalwa Karmapa*
Urgyenpa	*Disciple of Karma Pakshi*
Rangjung Dorje	*The IIIrd Gyalwa Karmapa*
Yung Tonpa	*Disciple of Rangjung Dorje*
Rolpay Dorje	*The IVth Gyalwa Karmapa*
Kachö Wangpo	*The Second Sharmarpa Rinpoche*
Dezhin Shekpa	*The Vth Gyalwa Karmapa*
Ratnabhadra	*Disciple of Dezhin Shekpa*
Tongwa Dönden	*The VIth Gyalwa Karmapa*
Jampal Zangpo	*Disciple of Tongwa Dönden*
Paljor Döndrup	*The First Gyaltshap Rinpoche, (Main Disciple of Jampal Zangpo)*
Chödrak Gyatso	*The VIIth Gyalwa Karmapa*
Tashi Paljor	*The First Sangye Nyimpa Rinpoche*
Mikyo Dorje	*The VIIIth Gyalwa Karmapa*
Konchok Yenlak	*The Vth Sharmarpa Rinpoche*
Wangchuk Dorje	*The IXth Gyalwa Karmapa*
Chökyi Wangchuk	*The VIth Sharmarpa Rinpoche*
Chöying Dorje	*The Xth Gyalwa Karmapa*
Yeshe Nyingpo	*The VIIth Sharmarpa Rinpoche*
Yeshe Dorje	*The XIth Gyalwa Karmapa*
Chökyi Döndrup	*The VIIIth Sharmarpa Rinpoche*
Jangchup Dorje	*The XIIth Gyalwa Karmapa*
Chökyi Jungnay	*The VIIIth Tai Situpa Rinpoche*
Dudul Dorje	*The XIIIth Gyalwa Karmapa*
Chödrup Gyamtso	*The Xth Sharmarpa Rinpoche*
Pema Nyingche	*The IXth Tai Situpa Rinpoche*
Thekchok Dorje	*The XIVth Gyalwa Karmapa*
Lodrö Taye	*The First Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche*
Khachab Dorje	*The XVth Gyalwa Karmapa*
Pema Wangchuk	*The XIth Tai Situpa Rinpoche*
Khyentse Özer	*The Second Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche*
Rigpay Dorje	*The XVIth Gyalwa Karmapa*
Norbu Döndrup	*The Disciple of Rigpay Dorje*

If, however, the practitioner doubts the tsaway lama and only sometimes joins hands together in reverence to the lama, and later the same practitioner speaks disparagingly about the same lama, this actually defiles that relationship, making the task of obtaining buddhahood difficult for that student. Disparaging the tsaway lama is very serious in that it damages the samaya or bonds of commitment with the tsaway lama and also makes the practice of visualization difficult; it causes pure vajra pride to be unstable. You will remember that the authorization to practice in this vajrayana manner was originally given by the tsaway lama during the initiatory process. Disparaging one's tsaway lama is comparable to living on extensive credit without having the means to satisfy the obligations. If, however, a student maintains respect and devotion to the tsaway lama, the bond of samaya remains strong, making it is easier to stabilize vajra pride. The result of having a stable vajra pride is that it enables one to see oneself clearly as the deity, allowing for quick advancement along the path to full enlightenment.

Additionally, comprehension of the symbolism inherent in the form assumed by the deity occurs spontaneously and with apparent clarity, rather than being contrived through intellectual fostering. For example, consider the symbolism inherent in the items that the Yidam Chenrezig holds: a white lotus and a crystal mala held aloft, and a wish-fulfilling gem cupped to his chest in prayerful hands. His holding of the white lotus flower is the symbol of the absolute purity indicative of the deity's freedom from any impurity, and his ability to completely purify any sentient being. The crystal mala that he is turning is demonstrating (or symbolic of) his compassion acting as the hook that draws sentient beings out of the ocean of samsara. The wish-fulfilling jewel that Chenrezig holds is symbolic of his being able to fulfill the wishes of all sentient beings, and of his giving total fulfillment to whatever wishes sentient beings might have. His hands being joined in prayer are symbolic of his constant supplication to the buddhas and bodhisattvas to rain down benefits to help sentient beings along their path. When your samaya is pure, your vajra pride stabilized, and your visualization complete to the last detail, and if your consciousness of the symbolic meaning and your recitation of the yidam's mantra are done with the awareness of the emptiness of all phenomena, the nature of mind will become absolutely apparent! And, in this recognition of mind's true nature, you will quickly and easily become enlightened through the path of perfection of vajrayana.

As you can see from this lengthy discourse, when one involves oneself in the practice of Tibetan Buddhism, the student encounters all of the techniques and methods that are used as part of this approach. One will find many references to certain qualities that are to be developed as part of the practice. These include faith and confidence in the Three Jewels and in the spiritual teachers and gurus, the development of compassion and loving kindness towards all beings, and spiritual exercises such as prostrations, circumambulation, various prayers and mantras, and meditative techniques. All of these have a single common function — to slowly eliminate or cleanse the levels of confusion in the mind and thus permit the direct perception of the nature of mind to take place.

In the beginning, when one is first entering into the practice, there is a level of exerting oneself using physical, verbal, and mental capabilities. Using these to develop the virtuous and meritorious tendencies in oneself is a cumulative process. At the beginning of the five paths, termed the path of accumulation, the process first brings together all of the things in the student's practice that reinforce positive qualities, merit, and deepening awareness. Eventually, at a certain point, this sort of activity becomes a spontaneous and natural part of the aspirant's nature. Even in cases where efforts still must be made, aspirants are able to bring a great deal of patience and forbearance to the practice.

When the practice begins to take over and to carry itself along without much effort, one has reached a second stage, known as the path of application. When this purificatory process of cleansing the veils of confusion comes to the point where the student has a direct glimpse of the nature of mind, this first stable on-going experience is termed the path of vision. In illustration of this term, when we perceive the first sliver of the new moon, we recognize that the moon is fully there but that only a faint trace of it is being perceived. In the same way, on this path of vision, the student has had a direct experience of the nature of mind that does not vanish but remains a stable part of one's experience. However, this first direct perception has not yet grown to the fullest extent, and just as the moon will continue to grow, this experience will continue to grow. It is simply not possible to forget that experience, nor to slide back into a lower stage of development. Once one has had that significant direct experience of the nature of mind, one is at a level that is termed irreversible. At that point, the aspirant cannot lose the experience, forget it, or somehow end up as a confused, unenlightened being again, even though this realization is not yet the full experience of enlightenment.

The stage of irreversibility is recognized as the first level of an accomplished bodhisattva realization; there are ten of these levels (or bhumis) of incomplete but also irrefutable enlightenment. With this partial yet extremely important development, an accomplished bodhisattva continues toward the complete attainment of enlightenment, developing through the various bhumis, just as the moon continues to grow throughout the first phases of the lunar month. The ultimate result of that kind of process is the actual elimination of all ignorance/ confusion, faults, and obscurations of the mind, so that the inherent potential of mind can express itself completely, without any hindrance or limitation. This is enlightenment; this is buddhahood! The common comparison made to the full state of enlightened liberation is of the full moon. Realization of the potential as an enlightened being has expanded to its fullest extent, so that an accomplished bodhisattva is now fully enlightened, a buddha liberated from samsaric suffering.

With the experience of complete enlightenment, there is no limitation, no hindering factors, no obscurations, just the direct experience of the full manifestation of the inherent potential of mind. Now, what this implies is that there is a state of omniscience (or of total awareness) because, as mind is essentially empty, there is no thing that can be described in any tangible or limited way. Because there is no limit to the mind, there is an all-pervading

quality in the mind that includes every aspect of experience: samsaric and nirvanic, unenlightened and enlightened. The inherent, natural luminosity of mind, which is its ability to experience, becomes full blown at the level of buddhahood in that there is no limit to the experience of a fully enlightened being. This luminosity, combined with the mind's all-pervasiveness, means that enlightenment is a state of omniscience that is not limited by time, space, or distance. Past, present, and future pose no barriers to that kind of awareness. Additionally, there is the dynamic and unimpeded awareness that is also the manifestation of mind. It is this quality that gives rise to the compassion and loving kindness that is inherent in this enlightened experience and that gives the ability for a buddha to effectively demonstrate the four activities of buddhahood.

Right now, when we think of loving kindness or compassion, we think in a very dualistic way. If we see another being suffering, we think, "Oh, what a pity, what a shame; I should really try to help/' That is not the compassion of buddhahood, which is a completely non-referential compassion, having nothing to do with any particular sentient being feeling any certain way, or with one's sympathetic or empathetic response to that being. There is absolutely no need for a completely liberated enlightened being to even think about being compassionate; he or she just comes from that state. When the sun is shining in the sky, it simply shines. It does not think, "OK, I am going to send light down there because it needs some light/' No, the sun just shines and the light radiates in all directions. In the same way, direct experience of the nature of mind implies compassion simply radiating in all directions, without any necessary framework of reference. Thus, all of these qualities of buddhahood — the all-pervading luminous or clear omniscience, the compassion, the effective manifestation of the four activities — all arise from the fact that the potential of pure alaya is naturally inherent in the mind and is simply expressing itself freely, without any limitations of impure alaya.

It is my prayer that all of you who have read this will apply yourselves wholeheartedly in that one direction, and that you may all easily and with great certainty attain this liberation. I thank you, and bid you a safe journey! And, I ask you to remember that all beings, as numberless and as vast as space, are our mothers; I urge you to dedicate the merit from reading this discourse towards their enlightenment.



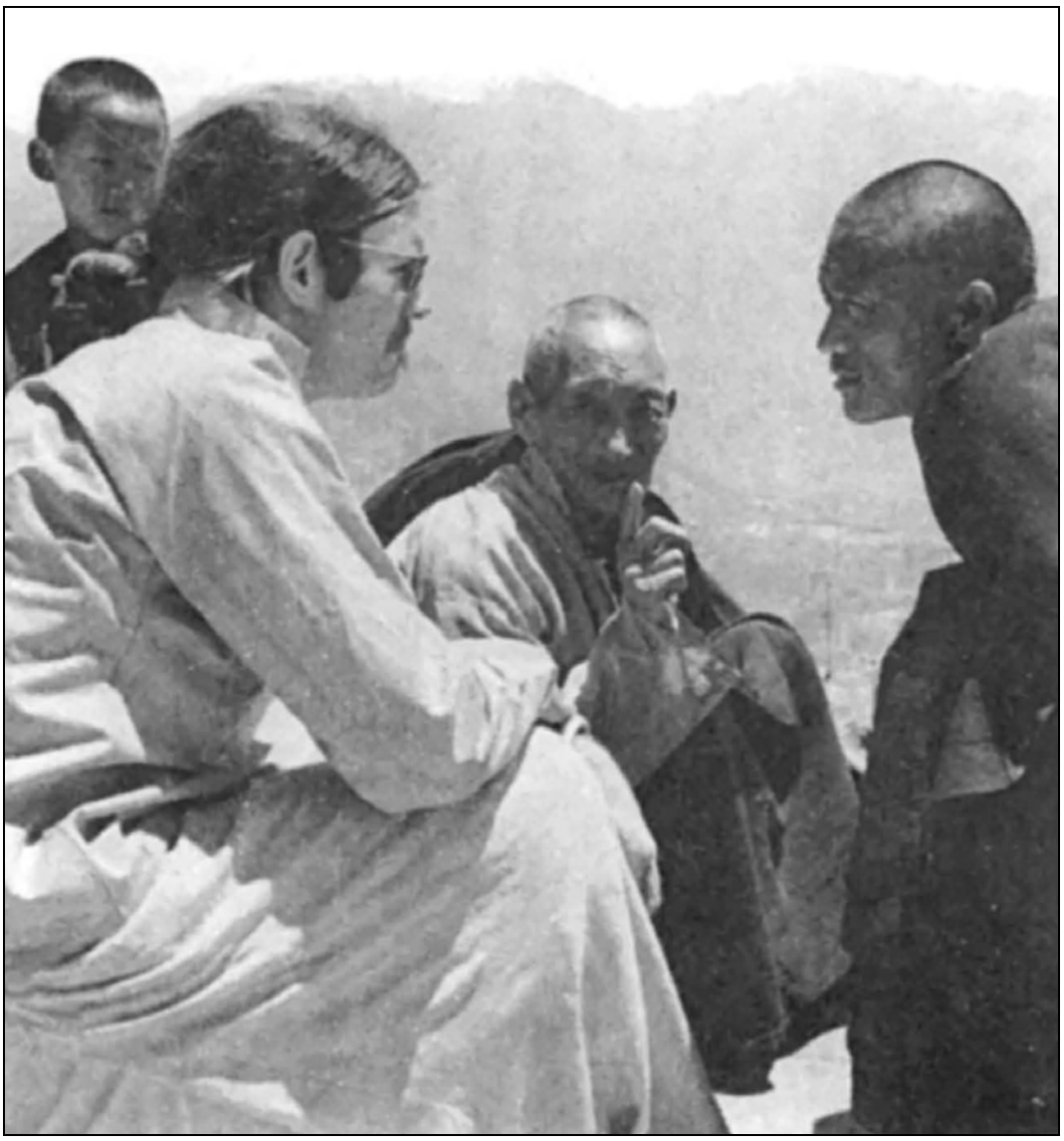
Old formal portrait of right His Holiness the XVIth Karmapa and left the Very Venerable Kalu Rinpoche flanking His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse (Photographer unknown, courtesy of J.G. Sherab Ebin)



Kalu Rinpoche seated before a shrine in Bhutan, taken shortly after his arrival from Tibet in 1956 (Photographer unknown, courtesy of J.G. Sherab Ebin)



Kalu Rinpoche in Tibet in the early 1940s (Photographer unknown, courtesy of J.G. Sherab Ebin)



During a visit to Rumtek Monastery in the late 1960s, center Kalu Rinpoche, right Lama Gyaltsen, and Rinpoche's translator left Sherab Ebin pause to talk on the monastery's upper balcony, while upper left unidentified monk observes them. (Photograph by J.G. Sherab Ebin)



During the visit by Kalu Rinpoche, Lama Gyaltsent and Sherab Ebin to Rumtek in the late 1960s, the XVIth Gyalwa Karmapa held an informal audience with their party. (Photograph by J.G. Sherab Ebin)



Kalu Rinpoche and Lama Gyaltsen, with unidentified monk, standing on the upper balcony overlooking the Rumtek Monastery courtyard (Photograph by J.G. Sherab Ebin)



Kalu Rinpoche pauses to smile for the camera in his audience room at the monastery at Sonada, India. (Photograph by J.G. Sherab Ebin)



APPENDIX A

Open Letters to Disciples and Friends of The Lord of Refuge, Khyab Je Kalu Rinpoche

from Bokar Tulku Rinpoche, Lama Gyaltsen, and Khenpo Lodro Donyo, 15 May 1989

Concerning the last moments of Kalu Rinpoche
and the religious activities following

&

From His Eminence the XHth Tai Situpa

Concerning the passing of Kalu Rinpoche



Khyungpo Naljor, founder of the Shangpa Kagyu lineage, and, floating above him, are two of his main tsaway lamas: theyoginis left, Niguma and right Sukhasiddi. (Pen and ink drawing, courtesy of Gega Lama of Darjeeting, 20th century)

Open Letter to Disciples and Friends of The Lord of Refuge, Khyab Je Kalu Rinpoche

What follows is an open letter addressed to all disciples of the lord of refuge, Khyab Je Kalu Rinpoche, from Bokar Tulku Rinpoche (Kalu Rinpoche's principal disciple and Dharma heir), Lama Gyaltsen (Kalu Rinpoche's nephew and lifelong personal attendant), and Khenpo Lodrö Dönyo, the abbot of Sonada Monastery. Written by Bokar Tulku Rinpoche, the letter expresses their shared experience.

Sonada Monastery

15 May 1989

At 3:00 P.M., Wednesday, the 10th of May 1989, our precious lama, Khyab Je Kalu Rinpoche, passed from this world into the pure realms. In the interest of bringing Rinpoche's presence closer to each of his disciples at this time of our shared loss and grief, we would like to present an account of the events of the last few months, as well as the events that will now unfold in the next several weeks.

In late November, Rinpoche traveled with the lamas and monks of his monastery, as well as with the members of his translation committee, a total of about a hundred persons, to Beru Khyentse Rinpoche's monastery in Bodh-Gaya. Rinpoche made it clear that he wanted everyone to travel together with him, and so the monastery sangha joined Rinpoche to drive in a caravan (of two busses and two cars) from Sonada to Bodh-Gaya. Having established the activities of the lamas, monks, and the translators, Rinpoche traveled to Los Angeles for a visit of a few weeks, during which he gave a number of empowerments and teachings. While there, Rinpoche was invited to stay in America to build up his strength, but he was determined to return to India to support the translation committee's work, a work that has been his principal concern for the past two years.

Upon returning to India, Rinpoche visited Bodh-Gaya briefly, encouraging his monks and translators in their activities and meeting with Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, who was completing a drupchen at the Kagyu Monastery. Then Kalu Rinpoche traveled to Sherab Ling, the monastery of Tai Situ Rinpoche. Kalu Rinpoche had been invited on many occasions to visit Sherab Ling and had been unable to go there previously. He felt this journey would allow him to both participate in the Losar (Tibetan New Year) festivities with Tai Situ Rinpoche at Sherab Ling, and also to visit His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who was in residence in Dharamsala at that time. He stayed about one week at Sherab Ling.

In fact, while there Rinpoche was able to visit His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala. They had a long visit, took a meal together, and discussed a number of subjects. His Holiness expressed his pleasure with Rinpoche's activities, promised to do whatever he could to further the work of Rinpoche's translation project, and showed his concern for Rinpoche's health by having

his own personal physician give Rinpoche a check-up. His Holiness commented that, of all the lamas working to spread the Dharma throughout the world, there was no one whose activity and kindness was greater than those of Rinpoche.

Rinpoche returned to Bodh-Gaya and stayed there another two weeks before moving all his lamas, monks, and translators back to the Darjeeling District on the 22nd of February. Since Rinpoche had embarked on the construction of a major stupa in Saluguri (near Siliguri), he remained there for a period of three weeks with all of his monastery sangha. During this time, the lamas and monks worked on painting relief sculpture adorning the enclosing wall, and on the making of one hundred thousand tsatsa for the stupa's eventual consecration. Also, the translators continued their work on the translation of Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye's *Treasury of Knowledge.* Throughout this time, Rinpoche spent several hours each day at the stupa site personally supervising the various projects, and his health remained good, his activity undiminished.

On the 21st of March, Rinpoche moved his monastery sangha back up to Sonada. Over the next several weeks Rinpoche seemed to become weaker, although medical opinion was that he had no specific illness. Lama Gyaltsen, myself, and others in Rinpoche's entourage encouraged Rinpoche to travel to Singapore or France in order to take advantage of the better conditions there, but Rinpoche steadfastly refused to travel at that time. It was difficult for Rinpoche to eat, and the weakening of his body continued. On the 15th of April, Dr. Wangdi of Darjeeling insisted that Rinpoche enter a hospital in Siliguri. Rinpoche was visited in the hospital by many Rinpoches, including Chadral Rinpoche (a great Nyingma lama and a close friend), Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche, Gyaltshab Rinpoche, and others. Rinpoche's health improved slightly while he was in the hospital, but he continued to refuse suggestions that he seek medical help elsewhere. After two weeks, Rinpoche was determined to return to his monastery in Sonada. The doctor there felt strongly that Rinpoche should remain in the hospital another three weeks. Finally, at the encouragement of myself and Khenpo Donyo, he agreed to remain one more week before returning to Sonada.

Rinpoche arrived home late afternoon on Friday the 5th of May. As he was carried up to his house, seated in a sedan-chair that was carried on the shoulders of several of his lamas, he was smiling and waving to different individuals, and it was obvious that he was happy to be home. There, Rinpoche remained in strict retreat, except for a short period during the morning following his arrival, when he received the traditional welcoming scarves from all the members of the monastery. He remained alert and engaged throughout, occasionally addressing individuals, and showing concern for their well-being.

During these few days, Rinpoche was in good spirits and his health seemed stable. Lama Gyaltsen always found that when asking after Rinpoche's health, Rinpoche would respond that he was well. Even when there would seem to be some external sign of physical difficulty, Rinpoche would

apparently be feeling no suffering. So it was during those days. When asked how he was, Rinpoche responded:

> *Daytime is the cultivation of the experience of illusion.*
> *Nighttime is the cultivation of the experience of dream.*

Lama Gyaltsen and I both felt that this was a statement of Rinpoche's own state of mind at that time.

On one occasion, Rinpoche expressed the sentiment to me that, having lived eighty-five years, he felt his life had been full and complete. While an ordinary person is never satisfied with his or her life, or craves to live on indefinitely, Rinpoche had no regrets. However, the one concern he did express was the fact that the translation of Jamgon Lodro Thaye's Treasury of Knowledge had not been completed and that perhaps his efforts to establish the translation committee had begun too late. Khenpo Donyo and I assured him that the committee was well established and the work was well underway. We both promised to see the project through to completion; even if Rinpoche were not able to see its realization, the work would be finished and would bear Rinpoche's name.

At 2:00 A.M. on the 10th of May, Rinpoche's condition deteriorated dramatically. (Only later did we discover he had suffered a heart attack; the doctor in Siliguri had said that Rinpoche's lungs were then working at 40% capacity, which, no doubt, had placed an additional strain on his heart.) Khenpo Donyo was sent immediately to Siliguri (three hours away) to call the doctor from the hospital to come to the monastery. Another car was sent to Darjeeling to call Dr. Wangdi. Also called to come were Chadral Rinpoche (from his nearby monastery) and Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche (from Rumtek). Chadral Rinpoche and the doctor from Darjeeling were able to arrive quickly. Rinpoche was encouraged to return to the hospital in Siliguri, but he refused. He indicated that the doctors could be called, but that he was not leaving the monastery. Later in the morning, after all of us had insisted that he return to the hospital, Rinpoche finally said we could do what we liked. All was prepared for the move and the luggage was in the cars when Rinpoche indicated he wanted to rest a few moments in his inner room. As he moved into the inner room he still had full mastery of his body.

In the inner room he was put on oxygen and given glucose intravenously. His bed was pulled out from the wall, and to Rinpoche's right were Lama Gyaltsen and Khenpo Donyo; to Rinpoche's left were myself and Chadral Rinpoche. At one point Rinpoche asked to sit upright. The doctor and nurse forbade him to do so. A short time later he again indicated he wanted to sit up, and again the doctor and nurse adamantly refused to allow this, no doubt fearing the action might worsen his condition. Lama Gyaltsen felt terrible, but powerless to contradict the doctor.

Then Rinpoche himself tried to sit up and had difficulty in doing this. Lama Gyaltsen, feeling that perhaps this was the time for Rinpoche to sit for the beginning of the lama's final meditation and that for Rinpoche not to sit up at that moment could create an obstacle for this, supported Rinpoche's back as he sat up. Rinpoche extended his hand to me, and I also helped him aright himself. Rinpoche indicated that he wanted to sit absolutely straight, both by

saying this and by gesturing with his hand. The doctor and nurse were upset by this, and so Rinpoche relaxed his posture slightly. Nevertheless, he assumed the meditation posture.

Tears were flowing down our faces uncontrollably and our hearts were filled with anguish. Rinpoche placed his hands in the meditational posture, his open eyes gazed outward in the meditational gaze, and his lips moved softly. A profound feeling of peace and happiness settled on us all and spread through our minds. All of us present felt that the indescribable happiness that was filling us was the faintest reflection of what was pervading Rinpoche's mind. Lama Gyaltsen also felt a passing experience of the profound sorrow characteristic of the compassionate awareness of the suffering pervading the cyclic existence of samsara. It was also felt to be a gift of Rinpoche's awareness.

Slowly Rinpoche's gaze lowered, his eyelids closed, and his breath stopped.

I have been witness to a number of people passing from this world. On such occasions their dying is accompanied with a short rasping of breath, a long exhalation, or a long inhalation. With Rinpoche, there was none of these. Rather, his was a most extraordinary passing into profound meditation.

The doctor and nurse wanted to try some extraordinary means to revive the breath, but Chadral Rinpoche indicated that Rinpoche should be left alone, resting peacefully as he was. Then the doctor performed his examination.

Chadral Rinpoche and I arranged his clothing and left Rinpoche in his *tuk-dam,* the lama's final meditation. The environment had to be kept quiet, and Rinpoche was to be left undisturbed so long as the tuk-dam lasted. An hour or two later, Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche arrived and spent a short time with Rinpoche. Later in the evening, Sharmar Rinpoche arrived and also sat with Rinpoche. Both remarked how vital Rinpoche's form was, as though at any moment he might begin to speak.

The morning of the third day, Saturday, the 13th of May, all the signs which indicate that the tuk-dam is completed had appeared. As we washed Rinpoche's body and changed his clothes, there were none of the usual traces of body waste or impurity. Also, the body had remained soft and flexible, without any stiffness whatsoever. Rinpoche's body, now called ku-dung, was then placed in a prepared case which was covered in brocade, and this now resides in Rinpoche's audience room.

In consultation with Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche and Chadral Rinpoche, the decision has been made to prepare the ku-dung as a mar-dung, rather than cremate it, thus assuring that it will always be with us. This is a practice that was a tradition in Tibet. In this way, the physical aspect of the lama's form remains as a relic, a basis for religious inspiration. The lama's activity thus continues, because, as visitors come in contact with the mar-dung through seeing, hearing, contemplating, touching, and /or praising the relic, they increase their opportunity for liberation. It is said that any connection whatsoever becomes beneficial, whether the mind of the being who has formed any degree of contact with the mar-dung is positively inclined or not. In this way, the mar-dung becomes the basis for both the spreading and

longevity of the doctrine and, thereby, it becomes a basis for both temporal and ultimate benefit of beings.

For a period of forty-nine days, disciples and students of Rinpoche will express their devotion and gratitude through the performance of a continually ongoing series of ceremonies. In the presence of the ku-dung (which still remains in Rinpoche's audience room), the schedule will be as follows: during the first week, Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche and Chadral Rinpoche will preside over the Shangpa offering to the lama; during the second week, Tai Situ Rinpoche will preside over the five tantric deities practice; during the third, Gyaltshab Rinpoche will preside over Hevajra practice; during the fourth, Sharmar Rinpoche will preside over Gyalwa Gamtso practice; during the fifth, Beru Khyentse Rinpoche will preside over Vajra Yogini practice; during the sixth, Nyengpa Rinpoche, Ponlop Rinpoche, Garwang Rinpoche, Drugram Gyaltrul Rinpoche, and Derya Druppon Rinpoche will preside over Cakrasamvara practice; and, during the final week, all the regents and rinpoches will preside over Kalacakra practice. The final culmination of this period of offerings and ceremonies will occur on the 28th of June, 1989.

In addition to these ceremonies, the higher retreat center will perform the five tantric deities during the third week, the Shangpa Cakrasamvara during the fourth, and Vajrasattva during the seventh. The lower retreat center will perform Shangpa Cakrasamvara during the third week; Vajrasattva during the fourth; and the five tantric deities during the seventh. The retreat centers are also performing the Shangpa ceremony of aspiration prayers every evening.

The monks of the monastery will be performing the Shangpa ceremony of aspiration prayers in the main temple, accomplishing ten bhumi repetitions of Samantabhadra's prayer of noble conduct during these forty-nine days. This prayer was considered very important by Rinpoche. At one point in his life, Rinpoche had sponsored ten bhumi repetitions of the prayer in Lhasa. Also, beginning the 4th of June, the annual group recitation of a thousand bhumi mantras of Chenrezig, the Mani Dung Drup, will take place in the lower temple.

As well, on the Wednesday concluding each of the seven weeks, ceremonies of offering to Rinpoche will be performed in the major monasteries of the different schools. On Wednesday, the 17th of May, the Rumtek Monastery will perform the Kagyu Gurtso. Namgyal Tratsang, the Dalai Lama's college in Dharamsala, will perform an offering to the lama on the 24th of May. Sakya Trizin's monastery will perform an offering ceremony on the 31st of May. A ceremony will be performed at Sherab Ling, the monastery of Tai Situ Rinpoche, on the 7th of June. A ceremony will be performed on the 14th of June at the monastery of Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche. On the 21st of June, all the Kagyu monasteries in Kathmandu (those of Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche, Pawo Rinpoche, Daptsang Rinpoche, Trangu Rinpoche, Tenga Rinpoche, and the Swayambunath Monastery) will perform offering ceremonies. Wednesday, the 28th of June, will be the culmination of this period of offerings and the many practices when the Kagyu regents and many other

rinpoches will be in attendance here in Sonada at Kalu Rinpoche's own monastery.

During this time, disciples of Rinpoche are welcome to come and pay their respects to the ku-dung. Each day there will be two periods — 8:00 to 9:00 A.M., and 2:00 to 3:00 P.M. — during which one can visit and make aspiration prayers before the ku-dung. This is a particularly auspicious time to do so. If, however, you are not able to travel to Sonada at this time, the ku-dung will remain here as a mar-dung, and it will be possible to pay your respects at a later time.

The departure of Khyab Je Kalu Rinpoche from this world is a moment of extraordinary sadness for all sentient beings. The world has become a darker and a poorer place in his absence. The gentleness of his being, the pervasiveness of his kindness, the brilliance of his wisdom, and the irresistiblity of his sense of humour has touched hearts in every part of the world. The subtlety of his insight and his total mastery of mind and phenomena is beyond the grasp of our ordinary understanding. It is difficult to fathom our extraordinary good fortune to have met and established a Dharma connection with such an enlightened being. Yet, there is no avoiding a feeling of a profound personal sorrow at our loss.

Through Rinpoche's teaching and our understanding of the Dharma, however, we know that all composite phenomena are impermanent and that where we truly meet our lama is in the ultimate openness of mind. The lama has never been separate from us and never will be separate from us. *What remains for us to do is to be true to Rinpoche's vision, his example, his teachings, and his advice.* This we can do through shedding our sorrow and celebrating the gifts of immeasurable kindness he has given us, through maintaining the purity of our commitments and our vajra (samaya) bonds, and through cultivating the qualities of enlightened being that Rinpoche so clearly demonstrated to us. And, we should do all this with the deepest prayers to Rinpoche that he quickly take human form and return again to be with us.

With sincere best wishes to you all,

Bokar Tulku Rinpoche
Gyaltsen Lama
Khenpo Lodro Donyo



Situ Padma Wangchuk, theXIth Tai Situpa Rinpoche, who installed Kalu Rinpoche both as the retreat leader at Kunzang Dechen Osal Ling (founded byjamgon Kongtrul the Great) and that at the Palpung monastery retreat center, positions Kalu Rinpoche held for many years before traveling in 1956 to Jang Chub Ling monastery in eastern Bhutan. (Photographer unknown, courtesy of J.G. Sherab Ebin)



The Twelfth Tai Situpa

To all followers of the incomparable Shakyamuni, the ordained and the laity, who bear the magnificent qualities of faith and diligence, I address these words:

At this time, the sublime Lord of Refuge, Khyab Je Kalu Rinpoche, supreme upholder of both the Buddha's doctrine as a whole, and of specific transmissions, has accomplished a great wave of activity meaningful to beings throughout both the eastern and western hemispheres of this world. As the magnificent protector of the teachings of all traditions and of beings, he has brought his enlightened activity to fulfillment.

On the fifth day of the third month of the female earth snake year of the seventeenth sixty-year cycle of the Tibetan calendar, at his principal seat of Sonada, his mind entered the expanse of totality amid a display of many wondrous signs.

In consideration of all those connected to this supreme being, and as an enhancement to his fulfilled vision, there will now be a gathering to recite the mantra of six syllables -- the mantra that is the very essence of Chenrezi -- 100,000,000 times. There is no doubt that this will be a great wave of virtue, beneficial both in this life and the future, for anyone who forms a connection to this practice. This opportunity should not be wasted. Participation in this gathering in any way possible is extremely important.

With my prayers to the Three Jewels, and with my completely pure aspiration, I, Tai Situpa, strongly encourage you to engage in this virtue.



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Wearing the formal hat characteristic of the lineage of Gampopa, Kalu Rinpoche is seen here in the late 1960s seated in the original temple located on his land in Sonada, India. (Photograph by J.G. Sherab Ebin)



Kalu Rinpoche and Lama Gyaltsen share the enjoyment of the moment with Sherab Ebin at Sonada in the late 1960s.(Photograph by J.G. Sherab Ebin)



APPENDIX B

Chenrezig Sadhana

Prayers and Practice of Yidam Chenrezig

With Commentary adapted from Kalu Rinpoche's teachings

&

A Vajra Melody Imploring the Swift Return of the Lord of Refuge, Khyab Je Kalu Rinpoche

As translated from the illustrated letter
of H.E. Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche



Tang Tong Gyalpo, a Tibetan yogi, one of the lineage holders of the Shangpa lineage. (Woodblock print from Nepal, 20th century)

Prayers and Practice of Yidam Chenrezig

On the following pages are the sadhana of Chenrezig together with a commentary on the stage by stage meaning of the prayers and explanations concerning the visualizations.

The commentary was derived from a lecture given by the Very Venerable Kalu Rinpoche in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, during his second visit to North America in 1974. The teaching has been condensed to allow usage of the important directions for meditation in a pertinent manner.

The translation used for the English rendition of this Tibetan liturgy is the work of J. G. Sherab Ebin.

Sections marked with a  are considered essential if performing the shortened version of the practice. Generally, all sections are said if no time restrictions are present.

Traditionally the recitation of any sadhana(s) is followed by either a prayer for the teacher's long life or a prayer the swift return of the emanation, depending upon the circumstances. Presented here is a translated version of the prayer written by H.E. Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche for the swift return of Kalu Rinpoche, included as per his personal request. The phrase "may you swiftly return" has been replaced with the phrase "may you live long" since the reincarnation of Kalu Rinpoche has been recently recognized by His Eminence the Xnth Tai Situpa. Of joyful news to his followers, this newest, young reincarnation is once again living at his monastery at Sonada!

E.S.

Commentary on the Sadhana

1) Begin by visualizing that the refuge tree is in front of you, and that on either side of you are sentient beings. Visualize this while simultaneously engendering devotion to the objects of refuge, the Three Jewels and the Three Roots.

2) Not only your tsaway lama, but all the lamas of the lineage transmission look upon all sentient beings with the same deep, passionate concern of a mother for her only child.

3) Cakrasamvara and other high tantric deities have many attendants who gather around the central yidam. These are joined to the devoted practitioner by the lama's initiations and teachings until eventually there is no distinction between yidam and practitioner.

4) The conquerors of the enemy defilements, who have all the perfect physical and verbal qualities as well as the fully awakened enlightened mind, are the buddhas.

5) *Dharmas* refers to teachings given by enlightened masters (most particularly Buddha Sakyamuni) to enable all sentient beings to find a path to reach full and complete enlightenment.

6) The sanghas comprise all the bodhisattvas, arhats, conquerors, etc., as well as the circle of disciples of the Lord Buddha, and those who have continued to observe the obligations of monastic ordination as either a monk or a nun.

7) These are your helpers in clearing away non-conducive circumstances and impediments to Dharma practice, thus enabling the creation of conducive circumstances to help you continue your efforts on the path to full enlightenment.

Chenrezig Sadhana

REFUGE

From this moment onward,
until the heart of enlightenment
is reached, I, and all sentient beings/
as limitless as the sky,
Go for refuge to all the glorious and holy lamas;
Go for refuge to all the yidams
gathered in the mandalas;
Go for refuge to all the buddhas,
conquerors gone beyond;
Go for refuge to all the supreme dharmas;
Go for refuge to all the noble sanghas;
Go for refuge to all the dakas, dakinis, protectors and

defenders of the Dharma, who possess the
eye of transcending awareness.

Commentary on the Sadhana

8) Praying to awaken from the sleep-like ignorance through the development of all forms of knowledge (the Dharma), you go for refuge in the Buddha and the assembly of bodhisattvas and arhats.

9) By the practice of the six paramitas (generosity, morality, forbearance, diligence, meditative stability, and wisdom), virtuous actions are accumulated and offered to benefit all beings so that you and all others may attain nirvana.



10) The mahasiddha Tang Tong Gyalpo was a lineage holder of the glorious Shangpa Kagyu [of which the Very Venerable Kalu Rinpoche was also a holder]. Usually, Tang Tong Gyalpo is pictured as a large, rotund, white haired man, with a long, pointed beard, wearing the loose robes of a yogi.

Chenrezig Sadhana

BODHICITTA

To the Buddhas, Dharma, and noble sangha,
I go for refuge until enlightenment.

May I, meritorious from making offerings,
Accomplish buddhahood, not forsaking any
being suffering in the six realms.



10) *The Chenrezig sadhana begins at this point. Called* The Recitation for the Meditation of the Great Compassionate One for the Benefit of Beings as Vast as the Sky, *this text was composed by the great saint, the mahasiddha Tang Tong Gyalpo and bears the blessing of his speech.*

Commentary on the Sadhana

11

Thinking of yourself and all sentient beings as reflecting the infinity of space, you visualize that on the crown of everybody's head is an eight-petaled white lotus, above which rests a flat disk of the moon. The lotus symbolizes one's rising above the mud of samsara in a stainless manner, while the moon symbolizes the totality of enlightened awareness.

12

When Chenrezig was formed as the embodiment of all the buddha´s compassion, the first appearance was that of the white letter HR7, which turned into a recognizable deity now known as the Noble All-Seeing One. HRI, therefore, is considered to be his seed syllable. More advanced meditators may visualize the following: once you see the HRI on the moon disk and lotus, visualize that brilliant light shines outward from the HRJ as an offering to all the buddhas in every direction. This light reminds them of their vows to help all beings who suffer and they rain down blessings upon all sentient beings. This brilliant light from all the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and sentient beings returns and is reabsorbed into the HRI, which instantly changes into Chenrezig. Either method is satisfactory, for HRI definitely changes into Chenrezig. Being of the purest brilliant white possible, Chenrezig is so splendorous that light of the five colors (symbolizing the attainment of the five transcending awarenesses of which he is an embodiment) radiate now from his form in all directions.

Chenrezig Sadhana

VISUALIZATION

11

On the crown of my head
and that of all sentient beings
pervading space, there rests a white lotus
and a moon seat.

12

From HRI appears the Noble All-Seeing One.
He is white,
bright, and radiating five-colored light rays.



Four-armed Chenrezig. (Woodblock print from Tibet early 20th century)

Commentary on the Sadhana

13

He smiles with inner understanding and love as he gazes with compassion upon all sentient beings, just as a mother smiles upon her child.

14

His four hands signify the four immeasurables: love, compassion, joy, and impartiality. The first pair are joined at his heart and hold a wish-fulfilling jewel signifying his prayer to all Buddhas to remain to help all beings. The second right hand holds a mala made out of clear crystal quartz. This symbolizes his drawing sentient beings upward out of samsara. In his left hand, he holds a white lotus, which symbolizes his absolute purity and freedom from samsara.

15

He is adorned with a crown, a necklace, and several brace

lets, all of which are wrought of the finest gold and studded with beautiful gems which signify his having perfected the six paramitas and his having the thirty-seven requisites for full enlightenment. His silken robes, covering his lower torso and legs, are white, gold, and red in color. Resting on his left shoulder is a soft pelt of an antelope called the krishnasara, which is found only in the gods' realm. The antelope's wholly peaceful nature symbolizes Chenrezig's total non-violence.

16

His tsaway lama, Buddha Amitabha, the Buddha of Boundless Light, rests on a lotus and moon disk above Chenrezig's head. Seated in the vajra posture of Vairocana while wear ing the robes of a monk and holding a begging bowl, Buddha Amitabha's color is red. The wheel of the Dharma marks both his palms and soles, and he has as well the 111 other marks of perfection of a buddha.

Chenrezig Sadhana

13

He smiles charmingly
and gazes with eyes of compassion.

14

He has four arms, the upper two joined at his
heart and the lower two holding a white lotus
and a crystal mala.

15

He is adorned by precious jewels and silks;
an antelope skin covers his shoulder.

16

The Buddha of Boundless Light
adorns his head.

Commentary on the Sadhana

17

Completely still and calm, Chenrezig is seated in full lotus posture (the seven postures of Vairocana), signifying that he does not rest in either samsaric bewilderment or nirvana, but acts for the benefit of beings by being both a bodhisattva and a yidam. The moon at his back, being stainless, reflects Chenrezig's total purity.

18

You should think of Chenrezig as being the union of all the sources of refuge, the Three Jewels and the Three Roots. Now, clearly see Chenrezig resting on the crown of your head and upon the heads of all sentient beings; while foster ing a tremendously deep faith and devotion, pray to him with the following prayer of confidence in his purity of being and his intentions.

19

Chenrezig's first and most outstanding quality is his complete freedom from any kind of fault and defilement. He has no vestige of dualistic clinging to objective reality or subjective existence. He is completely free from any karmic accumulation.

20

His tsaway lama, Buddha Amitabha, lord of the western paradise, the pure land known as Dewachen, crowns Chenrezig's head as a seal of his own perfection.

21

Chenrezig's compassionate concern for all sentient beings' welfare is reflected in his unceasing gaze as he looks continually upon all sentient beings.

22

One pays homage with body, speech, and mind to Chenrezig. Joining your hands together is the physical devotion, reciting his sadhana is the verbal devotion, and the performance of the visualization given in the sadhana is the act of mental devotion.

Chenrezig Sadhana

17

He sits in vajra posture, his back supported
by a stainless moon.

18

He is the essence of all the sources of refuge.

19

PRAYER

Lord, whose white body is not clothed by
fault,

20

And whose head is adorned by a perfect Buddha,

21

You look upon all beings
with the eyes of compassion.

22

To you, Chenrezig, I offer homage.

Commentary on the Sadhana

23

This prayer is beneficial whether one is engaged in the practices of the path of sutras or the path of tantras. This prayer can be incorporated into all acts of devotion, such as offering prostrations/ mandalas, and all forms of devotion and meditation.

24

In this branch, you offer homage principally to Chenrezig and also to all the buddhas and their children, the bodhisattvas, who dwell in the totality of space in the eternity of time: past, present, and future.

25

In the second branch, both real and imagined flowers, incense, etc., are offered, both by placing them on your shrine and by also imagining vast amounts of these objects filling space and being offered principally to Chenrezig as well as the other buddhas and bodhisattvas who surround him. You pray that these are accepted so that all sentient beings might derive direct and indirect benefits.

26

In this third branch, you offer confession by remembering the unwholesome actions committed since beginningless time. By fostering regret and remorse, you openly admit these, while you pray that the blessings of the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and compassionate Chenrezig will purify these karmic accumulations. You should think, "I vow not to repeat these unwholesome acts/' and then you should consider that all this unwholesomeness has now been cleared away and removed.

27

In this fourth branch, you develop an attitude of rejoicing in the good works of others. The shravakas and pratyekabuddhas, the arhats, the bodhisattvas, and ordinary beings are all oriented to achieving liberation from samsara, and all this virtue, accumulated in the past, present, and future, makes one extremely happy and joyous.

Chenrezig Sadhana

23

SEVEN BRANCH OFFERING PRAYER

24

To the sublime one, the mighty Chenrezig,

to the buddhas and their children,
who reside in the ten directions
and in the three times, I pay homage
with complete sincerity.

25

I offer flowers, incense, butter-lamps, perfume,
food, music, and other real and imaginary
offerings, and beseech the noble assembly to
accept them.

26

I confess all the unskillful actions done from
beginningless time until now,
that were caused by the power of
conflicting emotions — the ten unvirtuous deeds
and the five sins of limitless consequence.

27

I rejoice in the spiritual merit of whatever virtue
has been gathered by the shravakas,
pratyekabuddhas, bodhisattvas,
and ordinary beings,
throughout the three times.

Commentary on the Sadhana

28

In this fifth branch, you pray that the teachings be given (as symbolized by the turning of the wheel of the Dharma) so that the particular attitudes and motivations of sen tient beings might find immeasurable benefit when these are employed and put into practice.

29

In this sixth branch, you beseech the buddhas not to pass into parinirvana, but to stay and to help, until the cycle of sentient existence is completely emptied of all sentient beings. One pleads for their compassion and assistance in eliminating the tremendous suffering of all beings.

30

In this seventh branch, you pray to dedicate all the merit you have accumulated throughout your Dharma practice to becoming the primary cause for the enlightenment of all sentient beings. You also pray to become a

buddha or bodhisattva, an excellent leader who can really bring sentient beings to full enlightenment in a direct and immediate way.

31

This portion of the prayer was composed by a nun named Palmo, who had great devotion to Lord Chenrezig. She was accustomed to spending the summer months fasting totally every other day and eating but one meal on the interim days. It is said that she prayed throughout her whole life to Chenrezig and had many visions of him. In the prayer, she expresses her understanding of his total ity of representation, his embodiment of love and com passion, and his universality as a source of refuge.

Chenrezig Sadhana

28

I pray that, in accordance with the wishes and
aptitude of beings, the Dharma wheel of teachings
common to both mahayana and hinayana
be turned.

29

I beseech the buddhas not to pass into nirvana as
long as samsara is not emptied, but to look with
compassion upon sentient beings who wallow in
the ocean of suffering.

30

May whatever merit I have accumulated be the
cause for the enlightenment of beings; may I
quickly become a splendid leader of beings.

31

PRAYER

I pray to you, Lama Chenrezig;
I pray to you, Yidam Chenrezig;
I pray to you, perfect noble Chenrezig;
I pray to you, Lord Protector Chenrezig;
I pray to you, Lord of Love Chenrezig.
Great compassionate victor, please hold us with
your compassion! For the numberless beings who
wander endlessly in samsara, experiencing unbearable
suffering, there is no other refuge than you!
Protector, please bestow the blessings to obtain
omniscient buddhahood!

Commentary on the Sadhana

32

Here, one begins to consider the six realms of samsara that sentient beings have endured since beginningless time. The lowest realm is that of hell, where one undergoes karmic retribution of anger by experiencing extreme heat or cold. In thinking about this suffering, you pray to end the suffering of hell beings, that they might be born in Chenrezig's presence. Then, after the consideration of each of the six realms in turn, you say his mantra.

33

In the next lowest realm of samsaric suffering, hungry ghosts suffer greatly from their prior actions of greed. You pray they be liberated to be reborn in Chenrezig's pure land and again recite Chenrezig's mantra.

34

The realm highest in the three lower realms (and that which is closest to the human realm) is that of the animals who suffer domestication, dullness, and stupidity as a result of past gross ignorance. You pray they might all be liberated and come in contact with the presence of protector Chenrezig.

35

The human realm is the lowest of the three higher realms, and, while it enables one to develop a precious human existence, few humans have the interest to do so. As a result, they lead lives of constant and continual struggle and frustration, all because of their desires. Here, you pray that all human beings be fortunate and that they might be reborn in Buddha Amitabha's pure land of Dewachen.

Chenrezig Sadhana

32

In accumulating negative karma from
beginningless time, sentient beings, through the
force of anger, are born as hell beings and experience
the suffering of heat and cold. May they all
be born in your presence, perfect deity.
OM MANI PADME HUNG!

33

In accumulating negative karma from
beginningless time, sentient beings, through the
force of greed, are born in the realms of pretas
and experience the suffering of hunger and thirst.
May they all be born in your
perfect realm, Potala.
OM MANI PADME HUNG!

34

In accumulating negative karma from
beginningless time, sentient beings, through the
force of stupidity, are born as animals and experience
the suffering of dullness and stupidity. May
they all be born in your presence, protector.
OM MANI PADME HUNG!

35

In accumulating negative karma from
beginningless time, sentient beings, through the
force of desire, are born in the human realm and
experience the suffering of excessive activity and
constant frustration. May they all be born in the
pure land of Dewachen.
OM MANI PADME HUNG!

Commentary on the Sadhana

36

The beings of the demi-gods' realm suffer disputation due to the past karmic accumulations of jealousy, and they are born into a realm where they continually bicker, quarrel, and fight. You pray that they might be reborn in Chenrezig's pure land.

37

The gods' realm derives its population from those beings who have performed many countless good deeds but who have failed to reach enlightenment because of their pride. While in the heavenly gods7 realm they experience great pleasures, but these are of no lasting value as eventually they must leave (change) and fall into the lower realms again. You pray their impermanent environment be ended and that they, too, will be reborn in Chenrezig's pure land.

38

Considering the whole of samsara, you regard your karmic accumulations, both positive and negative, and pray to maintain a bodhisattva commitment equal to that of Chenrezig's in order to liberate beings from samsara's impure realms. The sound of the six syllable mantra is perfect and beneficial, causing untold cessation of suffering and producing the causes of liberation in all directions.

39

You pray that your bodhisattva skills improve through devotion to Chenrezig so that the beings that you are trying to help will take the vehicles of hinayana and mahayana into consideration in all of their actions. You pray that all those that you help will be virtuous and that they will help spread the Dharma for the benefit of all sentient beings.

36

In accumulating negative karma from beginningless time, sentient beings, through the force of jealousy, are born in the realm of the demi-gods and experience the suffering of fighting and quarrelling. May they all be born in your realm, Potala.
OM MANI PADME HUNG!

37

In accumulating negative karma from beginningless time, sentient beings, through the force of pride, are born in the realm of the gods and experience the suffering of change and falling. May they all be born in your realm, Potala.
OM MANI PADME HUNG!

38

Wherever I am born, may my deeds, by equalling Chenrezig's, liberate beings from impure realms, and spread the perfect sound of the six syllables in the ten directions.

39

Through the power of praying to you, perfect noble one, may the beings who I am to discipline pay the greatest attention to action and result, and may they diligently practice virtue and the Dharma for the benefit of beings.

Commentary on the Sadhana

40

In response to your prayers, light radiates forth from Chenrezig's body and reaches all sentient beings without exception. Thus, the four buddha activities of (1) enriching and (2) magnetizing all their positive karmic accumulations while (3) destroying and/or (4) pacifying all negative karmic accumulations are performed.

41

With all defilements thus transformed by this light, all the general appearances of our outer delusion in which we live become the pure land of Dewachen. You see this land and all sentient beings born into it as having

the perfect form of Chenrezig, complete with his sublime speech and pure mind. In this pure realm, which is inseparable and indistinguish

able from Chenrezig, all appearances become simultaneously appearing and empty. All sound becomes mantra: the indivisibility of sound and emptiness. All mental activity becomes the indivisibility of awareness and emptiness.

42

The mantra does have a literal translation, namely, Hail Jewel of the Lotus. But its power is not bound by any mean ing, whether literal or non-literal. Rather each of the six syllables is said to close one of the doors to the six realms of samsara. Thus, OM closes the door to the gods' realm; MA, the demi-gods' realm; NI, the human realm; PE (PAD), the animal realm; ME, the hungry ghost realm; and HUNG closes the door to the hell realms. Reciting this mantra can effec tively help all sentient beings by either implanting the seed of liberation, or by helping those who have this seed to mature their development along the path to liberation.

Chenrezig Sadhana

VISUALIZATION

40

Through this one-pointed prayer, light radiates
from the body of the sublime one, purifying
impure karma, impure appearances,
and the deluded mind.

41

The outer realm is the pure land of Dewachen,
and the body, speech and mind of beings therein
are the perfect form, sublime speech, and pure
mind of mighty Chenrezig, the indivisible union
of appearance, sound, and vivid
intelligence with emptiness.

The mantra Om Mani Padme Hung in Tibetan sacred script. (Courtesy of Tinley Drupa)

42 in this meditative state, say the mantra Om Mani Padme Hung as many times as you are able. Finally, let the mind remain absorbed in its own essence without making distinction between subject, object, and/or action.

Commentary on the Sadhana

43

Light goes out from the heart of yourself (as Chenrezig), and the whole of Dewachen and all sentient beings (also in the envisioned purified form of the Yidam Chenrezig) dissolve into light and are absorbed into your own form (still visual ized as being Chenrezig). Then, this form also dissolves into light and is absorbed into your heart where there rests a six- petaled lotus. Atop the moon disk resting on the lotus is the letter HRI surrounded by the six syllables of the mantra, each on a petal of the lotus. Next, the lotus and mantra dissolve upwards [as described in Chapter Seven]. In this way, you let the mind come to rest completely, without contrivance or discursiveness, in its own natural state of luminosity, clarity, and unimpededness. You rest as long as possible in this state of natural mind. You conclude this meditation by seeing yourself as Chenrezig and the world of form as that of Dewachen, and then you dedicate the merit.

44

There are four important parts to the Tibetan Buddhist tra dition: taking refuge, the visualization of the yidam, the experience of the true nature of the mind, and the dedication of merit. Through the accumulation of merit, you can develop both wisdom and skillful means with which to experience the mahamudra. Therefore, all practices and teach ings end with this important aspect of practice.

45 No commentary.

Chenrezig Sadhana

43

VISUALIZATION

My body, the bodies of others, and all
appearances are the perfect form of the sublime
one; all sound, the melody of the six syllables; all
thoughts, the vastness of the great jnana.

*(Visualize the dissolution and rest as long
as possible in this state of natural mind.)*

DEDICATION

44

Through this virtue, may I quickly achieve
the realization of mighty Chenrezig and may I
bring every single being to that same state.

45

One traditionally concludes with the prayers for quick rebirth in Dewachen, not only because Buddha Amitabha was Chenrezig's tsaway lama, but especially because it is in Dewachen that one can easily perfect the final accomplishments of the various levels of bodhisattvas.

Commentary on the Sadhana

46

The western paradise of Buddha Amitabha, the pure land of Dewachen, is said to be the easiest pure land rebirth to attain because rebirth in other pure lands requires strict adherence in all aspects to the observance of one's vows. Here, you pray that your actions of meditation and dedication will allow you this privilege.

47

In Dewachen, one perfects the hinayana and mahayana vehicles by performing meritorious actions and by crossing the ten levels of bodhisattva development while emanating countless forms in the ten direc

tions to benefit all beings.

48

Here, again, the merit is dedicated for the recitation of the pure land prayer. The two bodies considered to be supreme are the sambhogakaya and the wholly purified dharmakaya, which naturally arise from efforts made along the path. Bodhicitta is both the beginning and end of the bodhisattva commitment and is a necessary and important inclusion in all vajrayana practices.

Chenrezig Sadhana

PRAYER FOR QUICK REBIRTH IN THE PURE LAND

46

Through the merit of reciting and meditating,
May I, and every being to whom I am connected,
be miraculously born in Dewachen when these
imperfect forms are left behind.

47

May I then immediately cross the ten levels
and, for the benefit of others, may I
emanate in the ten directions.

48

Through this virtue, may all beings perfect
the accumulations of spiritual merit
and awareness.

May they attain the two supreme bodies which
arise from merit and awareness.

Bodhicitta is precious! May it arise in those who
have not cultivated it. In those who have
cultivated it, may it not diminish.
May it ever grow and flourish!

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Seat-Holder of
His Holiness the
Gyalwa Karmapa

HIS EMINENCE
JAMGON KONTRUL RINPOCHE

ཅ། །སྒྲུབ་རྫོགས་གསོལ་འདེབས་དེ་རྗེའི་སྐུ་དཀྱངས་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ཐབ་གསལ་སོ།།

ཨོཾ་སྭ་སྟི། །མིང་གིས་སྔོང་ཆེན་ཐིག་ལེའི་གོ་ལར་བྱ། །འཇུག་གཡོའི་དྲྭངས་མ་ཁ་སྦྱོར་མ་
བའི་ངོ་མཚར་ལས། །ལེགས་འོང་སྐྱེ་འཕགས་ཡོངས་བྱལ་རྟོ་རྗེའི་གྲུ། །ལེན་
མཁས་རྫུ་གསུམ་ལྷ་ཚོགས་རྣལ་ཆུར་ཅིག །དམ་པའི་ཚུལ་དབྱངས་ལེགས་
བྱས་ཀྱིན་ལས་ཀྱི། །རོལ་པས་འཁྱོ་ཚོགས་ཡིད་དགའ་བཀྱེད་པ་ལ།།འཇམ་
མགོན་ཀུན་མའི་རྣམ་ཐར་ཡོངས་འཚང་བའི། །ལམ་ཀྱོངས་མེད་བློ་མའི་མཆོག་སྦྱིན་
སྐུར་འཕྲོན་གསོལ། །རྒྱལ་བསྟན་ཞིམས་ཀྱི་འཛོན་མར་ངེས་འཕྲུང་གི་ལྷུན་གཅིང་
རྫ་བཏུན་བསྐབ་གསུམ་ལྷག་ལུའི་དབུ། །འཁོར་ལོ་གསུམ་ཀྱི་མཛད་པས་འཕྲོ་
ཚོགས་ཡིན། །དགེ་བར་ངལ་འཚོ་བཀྱེད་པྱིར་རྒྱུར་ལྷུན་གསོལ། །ལྷུ་ཆེན་སྐྱེད་
རྗེའི་ཆུ་འཛིན་འཕྲུགས་པའི་དཀྱིངས། །ཟབ་གསང་སྤྲུལ་ཀྱི་འཕྲུག་སྒྲུལ་རྗེས་
བསྐུལ་བས། །གང་འཕུལ་མེ་ལ་ཁམས་མ་འབྱེལ་ཞིང་ལ་བྱ། །རྨད་བྱུང་ཆེས་
ཆར་འབེབས་པར་སྒྲུར་ལྷུན་གྲུབ་གསོལ། །སྐྱིགས་མའི་དུས་འདིར་སྐྱེ་བྱེད་
ཞྭམ་མེད་བས། །རྒྱལ་བའི་སྤྲན་རྒྱུ་བྱེ་ལ་མཐུ་ཐོབ་པ། །བང་སྤྱང་ཀུན་
ཁྱབ་ཞེས་གྲགས་བྱ་རྗེའི། །མཆོག་སྒྲུལ་ཉིན་རྒྱུད་སྒྲུར་དུ་འཁྱོན་སྐུར་ཅིག།

དེལྡུར་གསོལ་འདང་བཀུ་ཚེད་མཆོག་གསུམ་དང་། ཆུང་ཤེད་
སྨོན་ཚོགས་བདག་གི་ལྷག་བས་མ་ཀྱི། །མཐུ་ཡིས་དེ་བཞིན་འགྲུབ་
སྤྱི་བཅུ་བཀྲུད་ཅིང་གསུམ་ལྡན་ཁྲོ་བོ་ཆོས་སྐྱོང་ཐམས་ཅད་ཆུལ་གྱིར་
ཅིག །ཤེས་བཞིན་སྐྱབས་རྗེ་མ་གཏུམ་ཆེན་མོ་ཨཱི་ཝཾ་ཐོབ་སྐྱེ་གསོལ་འདེབས་ལའི་ཡིག།
མཆོག་གི་སྐུ་ཚེ་ཆུས་མཆོག་གསལ་རེ་བསྐལ་ཀུན། རྒྱལ་ཆུས་དཔལ་ཁང་གཙུ་ཚ་བཀྲ་ཤིས་གཡུང་
དགས་བཅུན་སྐོར་ཚོ་ལ་སྐྱེ་འཚོ་གོལ་ལྷུས་ཀྱིས་ཁེ་ཚུལ་འཕེལ་མཐོ་སྐྱེས་སྐུལ་ཤུལ་བསྐྱངས་ཤ་
དཀའ་ལེགས་འཕེལ།།

A VAJRA MELODY IMPLORING THE SWIFT RETURN OF THE LORD OF REFUGE, KHYAB JE KALU RINPOCHE

May all be auspicious!
Within the very sphere of indestructible great emptiness,
From the wonder that is the convergence
of the very essence of all that is animate and inanimate,
Arise vajra songs, completely free of origination or cessation;
Masters of such songs, assembly of deities embodying the Three Roots,
may you be victorious!

Through the display of activity,
enhanced by the nine modes of proficiency of an exalted one,
You bring delight to the minds of a multitude of beings;
You embody the continuation of the perfect qualities of
Jamgon Kongtrul, Incomparable lama,
may your sublime emanation live long!

In the ground of the discipline of the victorious one's teaching,
You plant firmly the roots of the tree of your renunciation,
a tree heavily laden with the fruit of the three trainings.
Through the three cycles of activity
you restore the minds of a multitude of beings in virtue.
May you live long!

When space is churned by the gathering clouds
of your great love and compassion,
And is shaken by the resounding thunder
of the profound vajrayana,
The rain of your marvelous Dharma falls
on the fields of those to be influenced,
without error as to their inclination or potential.
May you live long!

At this time of degeneration,
through your indomitable courage,
You have the mastery that causes the transmission
of the victorious one's teaching to flourish.
Noble lama, Rangjung Kunkhyab by name,
may your illuminating sublime emanation live long!

As I pray in this way,
by the power of the infallible Three Jewels,
By the power of the words of aspiration of the sages,
and by the power of my own noble intentions,
May these very prayers be realized,

And may the Kagyu teachings spread throughout the world.

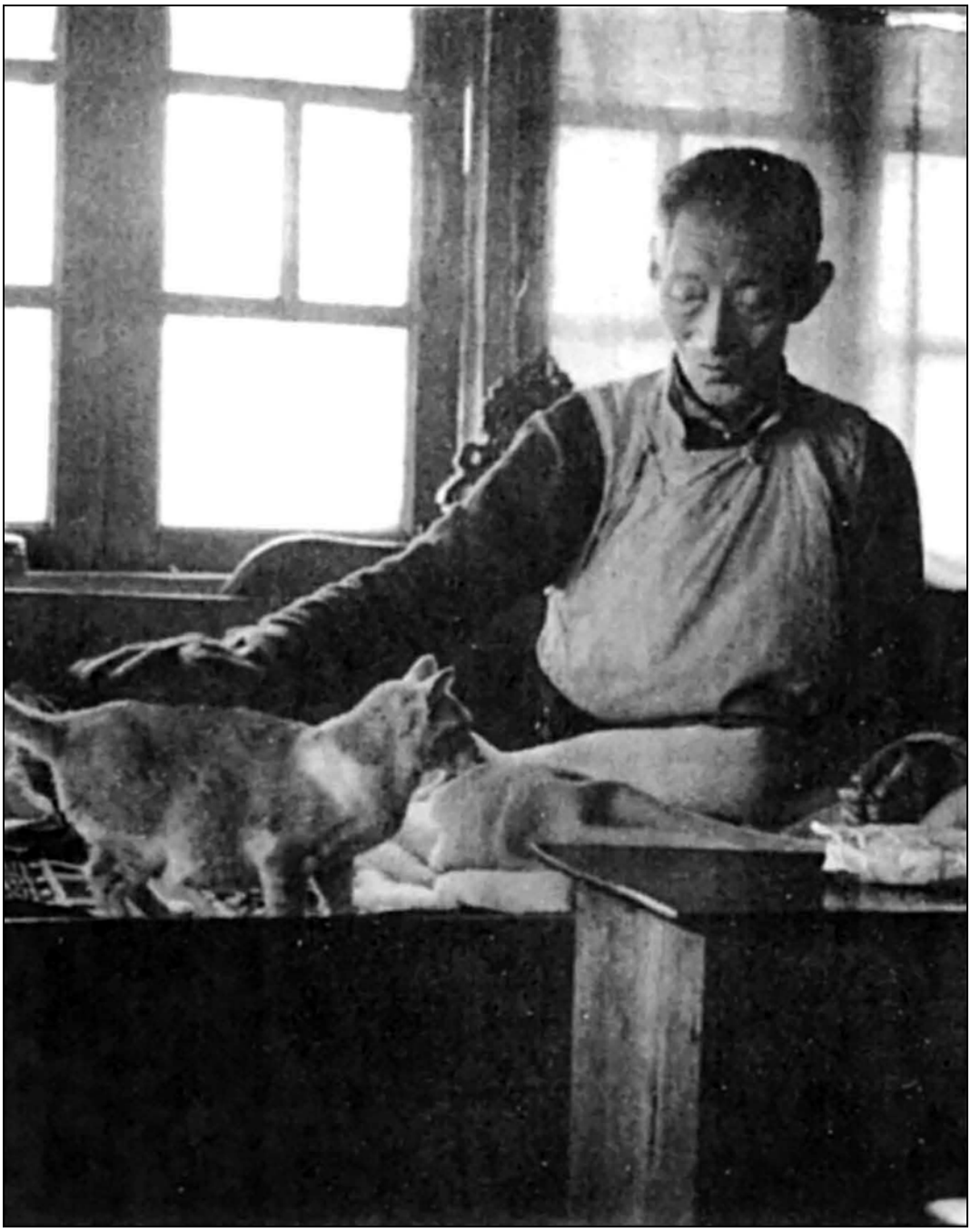
This prayer for the prompt rebirth of the lord of refuge, Khyab Je Kalu Rinpoche, is given in response to the request of Lama Gyaltsen, the sublime one's own nephew. To this end, the words of aspiration for longevity of the lord of refuge that were spoken by the glorious XVIth Gyalwa Karmapa himself, have been changed into this prayer for the swift return of Kalu Rinpoche by H.E. Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche in the third month of the female earth snake year in the seventeenth sixty-year cycle of the Tibetan calendar.

This prayer has been translated from the Tibetan by Drajur Dzamling Kunkhyab, on 20 May 1989, at Samdrub Darjay Choling Monastery, in Sonada, Darjeeling District, West Bengal, India.

May virtue and excellence increase!



Kalu Rinpoche pauses to smile for the camera in his audience room at the monastery at Sonada, India. (Photograph by J.G. Sherab Ebin)



Kalu Rinpoche, fond of domestic animals, usually had a cat for a pet. (Photograph J.G. SherabEbin)



A smiling Kalu Rinpoche in the late 1960s in his home at Sonada, India. (Photograph byJ.G. SherabEbin)



Prajnaparamita, holding a vajra and the Prajna Paramita Sutra (Pen and ink drawing by unknown artist, 20th century)

The Dharma

by Kyabje Dorje Chang

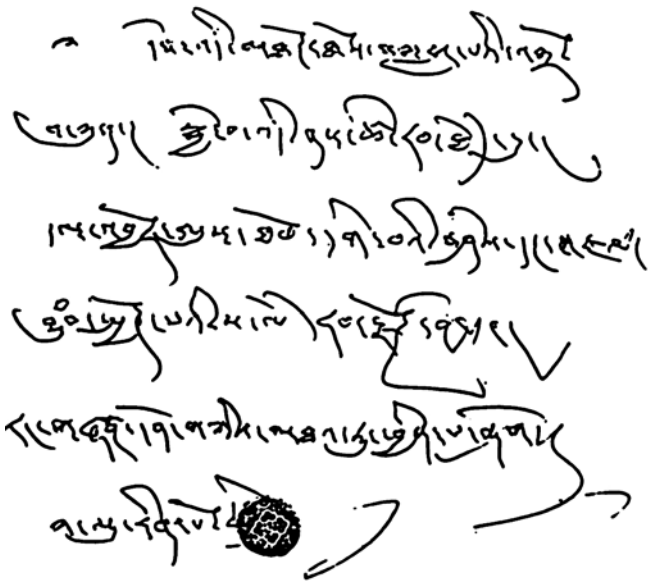
Kalu Rinpoche



Teachings given at

Kagyu Thubten Choling

in 1982



deb 'di mthong thos bklag pa'i 'gro ba kun
skye ba 'di nas tshe rab thams cad du
dal 'byor lus thob dge ba'i bshes dang mjal
byang chub spyod pa'i sa lam rab rdzogs nas
rang gzhan don gnyis mtha' ru phyin par shog.

Kalu rinpoche

May all beings who see, hear, or read this book
In this life and all successive lives
Obtain the precious human body and meet with Friends of Virtue.
Having completely perfected the paths and stages of Bodhisattva conduct,
May they complete the Two Objectives: benefiting themselves and others.

Kalu Rinpoche

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Introduction: Kalu Rinpoche

Kalu Rinpoche was born in the district of Treshö Gang chi Rawa in the Hor region of Kham, Eastern Tibet, in 1905. This mountainous area, bordering on China, is known for the independent spirit of its people. His father, Karma Lekshe Drayang [ka rma legs bshad sgra dbyangs], the thirteenth Ratak Palzang Tulku, was noted for his skill in the practice of medicine, as well as for literary accomplishments and mastery of Vajrayana meditation practice. He and his wife, Drolkar Chung Chung [sgrol dkar chung chung], Rinpoche's mother, were students of Jamgon Kongtrul Lodrö Taye ['jam mgon kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas], Jamyang Chentse Wangpo ['jam dbyangs mkhyen brtse dbang po] and Mipham Rinpoche, all founders and leaders of the ri may [ris med] movement which revitalized the religious life of Tibet towards the end of the 19th Century by minimizing the importance of sectarian differences and emphasizing the common ground of the lineages and stressing the importance of meditation.

Both husband and wife were devoted to practice, and immediately after their marriage undertook a religious retreat. They saw little of each other during this period, but one night together each dreamed that they were visited by the great meditation teacher and scholar, Jamgon Kongtrul, who announced that he was coming to stay with them and asked to be given a room. Not long afterwards Drolkar Chung Chung discovered she was pregnant.

The dream had been auspicious; the pregnancy passed joyfully, without complications. Drolkar Chung Chung continued to work with her husband, and was gathering medicinal herbs with him one day when she realized the baby would soon be born. As they hurried back to their house, they saw the sky full of rainbows.

Such signs were interpreted in the neighboring countryside as portending the birth of a special incarnation. Conventionally, a tulku would have been taken to be raised in a monastery at the earliest possible age, but Karma Lekshe Drayang refused to follow this course. If the boy were not a high incarnation, he said, the training would be wasted; if he were, he would be quite capable of seeking the appropriate teachers and education for himself. That is just what he did.

"In his early years," the young man, "when he had awakened the excellent habits of virtue, and abandoned concerns for possessions and pleasures of this life, wandered at times in the wilderness of mountains and gorges, cliffs and crags. Spontaneously, uncontrived longing and resolution arose in him to nurture Dharma practice." Traveling freely in the mountains, Rinpoche would chant mantras, blessing the animals, fish or insects he might encounter.

At home, his education was supervised, rather sternly, by his father. After a preliminary training in grammar, writing and meditation, Rinpoche

began his formal studies at Palpung [dpal spungs] monastery at the age of thirteen. At that time, the eleventh Tai Situ Rinpoche, Pema Wangcho Jalpo [pa dma dbang mchog rgyal po], gave him getsül [dge tshul] ordination, naming the young monk Karma Rangjung Kunchap [karma rang byung kun khyab]. The prefix "Karma" identifies Rinpoche as a practitioner of the Karma Kagyu tradition, and "Rangjung Kunchap" means "self-arisen, all-pervading."

At Palpung and elsewhere in Kham, Rinpoche studied the teachings of the sutras and tantras, receiving both instruction and empowerments from many of the great lamas. At the age of fifteen, during a yarnay [dbyar gnas], the traditional rainy-season retreat instituted by Buddha Shakyamuni, Rinpoche gave a profound and instructive discourse on the three vows before an assembly of a hundred monks and lay people.

At sixteen, Rinpoche entered Kunzang Dechen Ösal Ling, the retreat center (drup khang [sgrub khang]) founded by Jamgon Kongtrul Lodrö Taye, one of the two retreat facilities associated with Palpung monastery. Here he completed the traditional three-year retreat under the direction of the retreat master, his Root Lama (tsa way lama [rtsa ba'i bla ma]) the Venerable Lama Norbu Tondrup [nor bu don sgrub], from whom he received the complete transmission of the Karma Kagyü and Shangba Kagyü traditions.

At the age of twenty-five, Rinpoche departed to do an extended solitary retreat in the desolate mountains of Kham, wandering without possessions, taking shelter wherever he could find it, seeking and needing no human company.

For twelve years he lived like this, perfecting his practice and offering everything to develop impartial love and compassion for all beings. "There is no higher siddhi than Compassion," his Root Lama had said. In this manner of life he would have been content to continue, had Situ Rinpoche not finally sent word that it was time for him to return to the world and teach.

Kalu Rinpoche returned to Palpung and assumed duties as director (drup pön [sgrub dpon]) of the three-year retreats. At this time Rangjung Rikpay Dorje, the late sixteenth Gyalwa Karmapa, recognized Rinpoche as the activity emanation (tin lay till ['phrin las sprul]) of Jamgon Kongtrul Lodrö Taye. It was recalled that Jamgon Kongtrul had prophesied that his activity-incarnation would be a ri may master, dedicated to promoting practice and retreat.

In the 1940s he began visiting monasteries, traditional centers of many schools and lineages, all over Tibet, and on a visit to Lhasa gave teachings to the Regent of the young Dalai Lama.

In 1955, a few years before the full Chinese military occupation of Tibet, Rinpoche visited the Gyalwa Karmapa at Tsurphu, who asked him to leave Tibet in order to prepare the ground in India and Bhutan for the inevitable exile. Rinpoche first went to Bhutan, where he established two retreat centers and ordained three hundred monks. Proceeding to India, he made an extensive pilgrimage to all the great Buddhist sites. In 1965 he established his own monastery, Samdrup Tarjay Ling [bsam sgrub dar rgyas gling], at Sonada near Darjeeling, where he now resides. A few years after

founding the monastery, Rinpoche established a three-year retreat facility there, and has founded others elsewhere in India.

There were at the same time four other incarnations of Jamgon Kongtrul, those of his body, speech, mind, and qualities. Of these the incarnation of mind, Jamgon Chentse Öser [mkhyen brtse 'od zer], was a resident tulku at Palpung and, along with Tai Situ Rinpoche, a root guru of the Gyalwa Karmapa. Jamgon Chentse Öser was also a teacher and friend to Kalu Rinpoche, as was Jamgon Pema Trimay [pa dma dri med], another of the five Jamgon Tulkus and a teacher at the Nyingma monastery of Shechen in Eastern Tibet.

Since 1971 Kalu Rinpoche has travelled four times to Europe and North America, establishing Dharma centers and facilities for Westerners to undertake the traditional three-year retreat. At Sonada in 1983 he gave to the four great heart-sons (tuk say [thugs sras]i.e., close disciples or successors) of the late Gyalwa Karmapa, as well as to thousands of tulkus, lamas, monks, nuns, and lay people, the great cycle of empowerments called the "Rinchen Ter Dzö" [rin chen gter mdzod], one of the "Dzö Chen Nampar Nga" [mdzod chen rnam par nga] or "Five Great Treasuries" of teachings and empowerments gathered by Jamgon Kongtrul Lodrö Taye. Kalu Rinpoche's recent activities, and particularly his four trips · to the West, are discussed in the first chapter of this book.





1
Kalu Rinpoche on Teaching in North America

I have been four times now to the North American continent. My first visit was in 1971; the Venerable Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche was already teaching here and the characteristic style he had found it necessary to adopt was to present Buddhism from the point of view of Americans. Instead of teaching in the traditional manner, he found many skillful ways of presenting the teachings in the light of worldly fields of knowledge, so that people unacquainted with Buddhism could adapt their thinking to the Buddhist view. In this way he was gradually able to introduce the teachings to a large number of people.

This was a splendid undertaking, made possible by his own personal qualities, his superb command of English, and the fact that he was to reside regularly in the United States. For my own part, I was only staying here for about a year at most, that first time, so I felt very strongly that if I were going to accomplish anything, I would have to teach the Dharma in a traditional way, without combining it with any other viewpoints.

To do this as clearly as possible, I gave teachings that I felt were basic to the understanding and actual practice of Dharma. So I taught extensively on the Four Thoughts that Turn the Mind the four basic contemplations in Buddhist practice and, in particular, on the concept of karma, the law of cause and effect that shapes our experience.

Before the introduction of the Buddhadharma to Tibet, the Land of Snows was a very barbaric place; there was little difference between its people and cannibal demons or primitive savages. Then a king arose among

the Tibetan people whose name was Song-tsen Gampo [Srong btsan sgam po] and who is believed to have been an emanation of the Bodhisattva of Compassion, Chenrezi. Because of his miraculous powers, this king was able to bring the entire region we know as Tibet under his control, and from that political base he spread the Dharma throughout Central Asia. He was particularly devoted to meditation on Chenrezi, and under his influence that teaching spread very widely. As a result, Tibet became a sphere of activity for the Bodhisattva of Compassion, and Chenrezi became so embedded in the Tibetan consciousness that any child who could say the word "mother" could also recite the mantra OM MANI PADME HUNG. Through this widespread meditation on Chenrezi, many people came to Realization.

From this beginning, the entire corpus of Buddhist teachings, both sutra and tantra traditions, with all the root texts and commentaries, was gradually brought from India to Tibet, and was translated and transmitted effectively and completely, without any element missing, to the Tibetan people.

In the great hope that this same sort of transmission will occur in the United States, Canada, Europe and all the countries of the West, I taught the Four Thoughts, the four contemplations that turn the mind from samsara towards practice. With this as a foundation, I taught extensively the Buddhist concept of Refuge and gave the Refuge vows. I also encouraged practice of Chenrezi meditation by giving the initiation (wang [dbang]) and instruction (tri ['khrid]) for it wherever I went. The results I felt to be very favorable.

The concept of Refuge and actually taking Refuge are fundamental to Buddhist practice; without this initial commitment, any further level of ordination or involvement is impossible. Refuge is the indispensable foundation for travelling the Buddhist path to enlightenment. During the actual refuge ceremony I gave 'Refuge Names' to the participants, each beginning with "Karma." This is like a family or generic name, and indicates not only that these men and women had become Buddhists and had accepted the Three Jewels as sources of inspiration, but that they were connected, in particular, with the Karma Kagyü lineage. To the present day I have never changed my custom of giving this kind of Refuge name along with the vows of Refuge.

Because all meditational deities *(yidams)* are emanations of enlightenment, not one of them is without blessingthe power to aid and benefit beings. The form of Chenrezi, however, represents the quintessence and union of the love and compassion of all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, of all enlightened beings. Meditation on Chenrezi can arouse that love and compassion in practitioners and thus can create a movement towards the realization of Emptiness and meditative absorption. That is why I chose this particular yidam to present to Western audiences.

The second journey I made to North America was in 1974. Because of the groundwork laid on my previous visit, I was able to present the Extraordinary Preliminary practices, the *Ngöndro* [sngon 'gro]. (These involve five practices each performed 100,000 times.) This stage of the teachings was emphasized during my second trip.

All the main schools of Tibetan Buddhism Sakyapa, Gelugpa, Kagyüpa, and Nyingmapa teach the Four Ordinary Foundations (the four thoughts that turn the mind towards Dharma practice) and the extraordinary preliminaries. I chose to teach the particular form of Ngöndro belonging to my own lineage, the Karma Kagyü; these practices are known as the preliminaries for the development of Mahāmudrā . In doing so, I encouraged people to focus on four aspects of meditation:

_To develop their devotion and sense of taking Refuge in the Three Jewels, and to develop bodhicittathe enlightened or altruistic attitude of benefitting others which is based on love and compassion for all beings;

_To purify themselves of negative factors and obscurations through practicing the Dorje Sempa [rdo rje sems dpa'] meditation;

_To accumulate merit and deepen their awareness through the mandala offering; and

_To open themselves to the blessing of the lineage through Guru Yoga.

Another practice I introduced during this second visit was the practice of the Green Tara Meditation. This particular form of Tara is associated with her ability to protect and deliver us from fears and sufferings in this life and to aid us in our Dharma progress. With this threefold structure of formal practicethe preliminaries, the Chenrezi and the Green Tara MeditationsI established many centers that have continued to grow to the present day.

Although in each of the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism there are lineages leading to complete enlightenment, and although there is no difference at that ultimate level between the schools, I felt very strongly that it was important to maintain the identity of the Kagyü lineage. There were several reasons for this. First, the transmission of blessing is likely to be broken if the lineages are confused or if there is a sudden breakdown in their continuity. Secondly, I felt it important for people to understand exactly each transmission of the teaching they were practicing, so that they could receive the particular blessing associated with that lineage. To keep this Kagyü Mahāmudrā lineage very clear, then, I composed a prayer to allow an unending identification on the disciple's part with the actual lineage of the Mahāmudrā teachings.

During my third visit, in 1977 and 1978, I felt it was time to take one more step in presenting the teachings, and I decided to emphasize especially what in Tibetan we call *shi nay* [zhi gnas] and *lha tong* [lhag mthong], respectively tranquility meditation and the meditation that develops insight into the nature of the mind. I emphasized both ordinary techniques, common to all schools of Buddhism, and also some special instructions which are particular to my lineage. This was the main focus of my third visit.

Up to this point quite a lot of ground had been covered. There had been a presentation of the particular preliminary practices associated with the Mahāmudrā lineage, and of the teachings of the Chenrezi meditation, and of the techniques of *shi nay* and *lha tong.*

When His Holiness the sixteenth Karmapa arrived in India from the West in 1980, he landed at Siliguri airport before travelling by car to Rumtek in Sikkim; everyone from my monastery came down from Darjeeling to meet him. He spent the night in a hotel in Siliguri, and that evening said something along these lines to me: "If we add them all up, we now have some three hundred twenty Kagyü centers throughout the world. Every one of them needs guidance and support so that the people associated with them can come to a pure and sincere practice of Buddhadharma. Now, even though you're quite old, you're presently enjoying good health, so it's necessary for you to go to the West again, to visit these centers and give them all the help and guidance you can."

His Holiness then insisted that I perform the Kalacakra Empowerment in New York City in order to aid the general process of transmitting the teachings to the West. He was quite firm about this. He wouldn't accept any answer but yes and wanted me to return to New York as soon as possible for this purpose. So I agreed and came here as soon as I could.

That Empowerment has now been given, and through receiving it, people have made a good connection with the teachings, since the Kalacakra may be considered a summit of the Vajrayana tradition. I feel, therefore, that at least one good foundation has been established for the presentation of Mahāmudrā , the pinnacle of Kagyü meditation. But in order to present these Teachings properly, I need first to discuss the concept of emptiness, or *Sunyata*, and must first say something about the nature of consciousness. Without this I don't feel that actual Mahāmudrā teaching will be very effective or that people will be able to perceive its profundity or relate to it effectively. Nonetheless, certain foundations have been laid and I believe we can begin to think about the presentation of Mahāmudrā teachings. I sincerely hope that the benefits people have experienced so far will continue and help them benefit from further teachings that discuss the nature of mind.

In presenting teachings like these, I speak about anything and everything I can, as much as I can, in order to transmit what I understand about Dharma.

If we have a piece of white cloth and we want to dye it another colored, yellow, green we make a pot of dye and we dip the cloth in. Now if that dye is effective, if it takes, the cloth changes color so that when we pull the cloth out it is no longer a white cloth but a green cloth or a red cloth or a yellow cloth. If we pull it out and it's still white, we know something's gone wrong, the dye hasn't taken. I feel the same way about teaching: if I teach and my teaching influences people's minds, changing their lives and benefiting them, then I feel that it has taken, that it has been effective. If on the other hand I teach and people don't understand, or having understood don't do anything about it, if they listen and don't practice, then the dye has not taken.



2
The Four Noble Truths

The First Turning of the Wheel of Dharma

Two thousand five hundred years ago, after the Buddha achieved Enlightenment at Bodhgaya in India, he decided to present the teachings we now know as Buddhadharma to all sentient beings in order to liberate them. But he also understood that even if he did present these profound teachings, very little benefit would arise, since few would listen and accept what he said. In fact, seeing that people were unfit to receive the nectar-like teachings of the Dharma, the Buddha at first chose to avoid teaching altogether and went into the forest to rest and meditate alone. For three weeks he remained absorbed in the experience of Enlightenment and gave no teaching at all. But then two of the highest gods in the realm of samsara, Indra and Brahma, approached him; Indra presented him with a large white conch shell and Brahma presented a golden wheel with a thousand spokes. These gifts were symbols of the turning of the wheel of Dharma, and also signified a sincere request to present the teachings for the benefit of all beings. In response, the Buddha left the forest and at a place known as the Deer Park, in Sarnath, near Varanasi, India, he gave his first formal teaching. This teaching we now know as the teaching on the Four Noble Truths (pak pay denpa shi ['phag pa'i bden pa bzhi]).

Although the Buddha was completely aware of all the teachings that would ultimately be needed to discipline and lead beings to Enlightenment, and even though he was fully capable of presenting them, he also realized that the time had not yet come to introduce people to the profound concepts of the higher vehicles, the Mahayana and Vajrayana. He saw that serious misunderstandings would follow if he began by telling people that all phenomena were empty, that all experience was essentially empty, and that

everything was really a projection of mind. Without proper preparation people might simply adopt a nihilistic approach and conclude that nothing was meaningful or made any difference. They might think that whatever they did had no real consequence, and that they therefore were free to do whatever they wished. Furthermore, if everything was just a projection of mind, there was nothing they could do to improve their situationthings simply had to work themselves out. All such misunderstandings, the Buddha saw, were likely to occur if people heard the profound teachings of the Bud-dhadharma without proper preparation.

Even today, many people develop such erroneous views when they hear Mahayana teachings, and the very profound transformative techniques of the Vajrayana tantras are equally open to misinterpretation. If these people hear, for example, that in the Vajrayana there is theoretically no need to suppress or alter emotional confusion, because simply seeing the nature of emotional conflict is sufficient for Liberation, they can easily misunderstand, and take this to mean that nothing has to be done about the emotions. Some people even think the Vajrayana teaches that lust and anger should be indulged when they arise in the mind. So, even though the Buddha was capable of providing all Mahayana and Vajrayana teachings, he recognized that beings had not been suitably prepared to accept them, and chose, in his first formal teaching, the basic and simple Hinayana approach. Half of this teaching is devoted to our situation in the world, and half to the transcendence of samsarathe achievement of Nirvana (nya ngen lay day pa [mya ngan las 'das pa]). First, he examined thoroughly what we experience as the world, and discerned ignorance as its basic cause, and emotional confusion and suffering as the results. Then, after stating this first Truth of Suffering (du ngal ji denpa [sdug bsngal gyi bden pa]) and the second Truth of the Origin of Suffering (kun jung gi denpa [kun 'byung gi bden pa]), he examined the next two: Enlightenment itself, which, because it brings about the cessation of all suffering, is known as the Truth of Cessation (gok pay denpa ['gog pa'i bden pal) and the Path we travel toward Enlightenment, the Truth of the Path (lam ji denpa [lam gyi bden pal).

The First Two Noble Truths:

Suffering and the Origin of Suffering

The first two of the Four Noble Truths, then, deal with the nature and cause of samsara. The Buddha describes the basic, world-producing cause as fundamental ignorance in the minds of all beings. This ignorance and its consequences can be analyzed as Twelve links of Dependent Origination (ten drel chu nyi [rten 'brel bcu gnyis]) that form the basis for a description of our experience of the world. The sequence of these links, or *nidanas,* in the cycle of our experience is (1) fundamental ignorance, which leads to (2) karmic formations. These become expressed in (3) dualistic consciousness, which in turn is translated into (4) a sense of identification, and the initial differentiation of consciousness into (5) the various sense fields. Through these sense fields there is (6) contact with the phenomenal world; from contact arises (7) sensation. Based upon sensation arises (8) craving for

experience, followed by (9) grasping. On the basis of this, the mind harbors a sense of (10) becoming, a will to be, and this causes an actual physical incarnation. Once incarnate in a physical body, the mind experiences the various stages of human existence: (11) birth, and (12) the aging process and the stages of life that eventually lead to and end in death. At death the mind is immersed in basic ignorance again, and the cycle is complete.

It should be noted here that the Buddha did not describe this cycle of rebirth as something that he had created: he made no claim to be the originator of the universe. Nor did he accept the idea that any god had made the universe. The universe is a projection of mind.

In the Mahayana and Vajrayana teachings we find mind described as being in essence empty (ngo wo tong pa [ngo bo stong pa]), but nevertheless exhibiting natural clarity (rang-shin selwa [rang bzhin gsal ba]) and unimpeded manifestation (nam pa man ga pa [rnam pa ma 'gag pa]). This teaching, however, is found only in the Mahayana and Vajrayana. In the Hinayana teachings, the Buddha did not speak of it immediately, but rather introduced a more easily understood approach in which he simply stated that the mind is empty, and has no limiting or defining characteristics such as color, shape, size, or location. Thus, at the Hinayana level, mind was described as fundamentally empty, and ignorance as the failure to experience that emptiness. From this ignorance develops the whole cycle of events known as the universe, as samsara, the cycle of rebirth.

The First Four Nidanas

The structure or pattern of the Twelve Nidanas or links of Dependent Origination can be applied to any aspect of the universe, macrocosmic or microcosmic, or to the experiences of beings in the universe. This is a complex topic, but if we look at the situation of a single individual in the context of one lifetime we can perhaps understand the process more clearly. Let us take the example of a being who dies.

At the moment of death a separation occurs between the individual's physical body and mind, and the mind is plunged into a state in which there is no conscious mental activity. In other words, the mind simply dissolves back into its own fundamental state of unconsciousness, the first nidana, which we term ignorance (ma rik pa [ma rig pal). This is the first link in the chain of Dependent Origination. After this there is a gradual stirring of mental activity. This is the second link, which is termed du che ['du byed], the formations now beginning to arise in the mind. These patterns of stirring consciousness find full expression in what we term nam she in Tibetan [rnam shes], discursive consciousness, the ability of mind to recognize something other than itself as an objectto decide, this is this, this is that, and so on. This level of dualistic discursive consciousness is the third link in the chain of Dependent Origination. Thus, from a fundamental state of ignorance there arises in the mind a gradual stirring of formations which finds full expression in discursive consciousness.

From this basic dualistic or discursive consciousness there arises the sense of self, of "I." At the same time, whatever forms are seen, whatever sounds are heard in short, whatever phenomena are experience dare perceived as some version of "other." In this way there occurs a definite split into self and other. At this point, although there is no physical basis for consciousness, there is nevertheless a sense of embodiment, of an identity coalescing. There is also the sense of naming things in the phenomenal world. So the fourth nidana is termed *ming zuk* [ming gzugs], which means "name and form."

All of this is just a mental experience for a mind in the second phase of the after-death experience, the si pa bardo [srid pa bar do], since it completely lacks anything tangible. We cannot see a being in this bardo. Moreover, the mind of this being is also completely imperceptible: no one else can see its ignorance, its stirring, its manifestation of discursive consciousness, or the experiences of subject/object labeling. This unique state in the si pa bardo, a completely internal experience imperceptible to others, is termed ming shi pung po [ming bzhi phung po] in Tibetan. This means "the *skandhas* (or aggregates) of the four names," and refers to the first four stages of the si pa bardo: its stage of ignorance, the stage of the stirring of conscious formations, the stage of fullblown discursive consciousness, and the stage of labeling the world in terms of subject and object.

All this is merely a projection of mind. There is not, for example, a thing called "ignorance" that we can take out and dissect and examine; we can say only that "ignorance" is a label we put on a particular phase of the si pa bardo experience, and that such a phase does occur. These four stages have no concrete or tangible qualities whatever.

Because the bardo consciousness has no physical basis, a being in the after-death state is not subject to the normal physical limitations. No mountains, walls, oceans, or forests present barriers to the consciousness in the bardo. Whatever arises in the mind is directly experienced, and wherever the mind decides to go, it goes. So, in a certain sense, the Four Names is a rather miraculous state it certainly transcends the ordinary physical limitations and the properties of the world we're used to. However, it is an entirely automatic or blind result of our previous actions or karma, and nothing that occurs here is a conscious decision on the part of the being; we are simply buffeted around by the force of karma.

During this period of the bardo, there is a certain kind of clairvoyance, very rudimentary and not really under conscious control, but nevertheless an ability to perceive the thoughts of others. There is also a certain new sense of the mind's power, although this power is also not consciously or intelligently controlled. Furthermore, a great variety of experiences hallucinations occur during the *si pa* bardo. For a person with virtuous karmic tendencies these experiences can be very pleasant and comfortable. But for beings with unvirtuous karmic tendencies the experiences can be terrifying.

This force we term karma is not a conscious process. An example of it is the growth of a child from infancy to adulthood. The child does not have to

sit down and decide: "Tomorrow I'm going to grow this much. The next day I'm going to grow that much." Without our doing anything about it and, indeed, without our being able to do anything about it, growth simply happens. In a completely unconscious way a force causes the organism to grow. In the same way, the aging process simply happens unconsciously, without, and even against, any intention on the part of the person concerned. These are two examples of what we mean by the force of karma at work in our experience.

During the first week or two of the *si pa* bardo the first third of it the impressions that arise in the mind of the deceased person are very largely related to his or her previous existence. If a man dies, he will have the impression during this part of the si pa bardo of being a man, with his own former personality and state of existence; a woman will have the impression of still being a female existence, and so forth. In each case there will be impressions relating back to the previous life. This is why the consciousness of a bardo being is said to experience returning to its former home and being able to see in some way, but usually not to make contact with, the people it left behind. There will be the experience of arriving at the home and of announcing, "I'm here, I'm home again." But then there will be a feeling of not being able to make contact with the people still living there, and this can produce intense pain, frustration, and rage. Or the understanding that one has died may arise, and that trauma can produce immediate unconsciousness: the shock is too great to endure and the mind simply blanks out.

After the first week or two of the after-death experience, the impressions one has of a body and an environment begin to relate more and more to the future existence towards which one is being impelled by one's karma.

The actual length of the si pa bardo experience varies a great deal from person to person. In general terms, the longest period is held to be roughly forty-nine days. The Buddha referred to this particular period in many different scriptures as the length of time that the consciousness could be expected to remain in the si pa bardo before physical rebirth occurred. After existence in a physical form is established, the possibilities for change are more or less exhausted, for the time being, and this is why the Tibetan custom arose of employing any means possible to aid the dead person during this period of forty-nine days after death. The family might ask a Lama to perform rituals for the benefit of the dead person, because during that seven-week period there is always the possibility that the blessing of the Lama and the merit of the deceased will permit some beneficial change to take place. This is why we have a particular ceremony in which the teacher is presented with the name and an effigy of the deceased, and attempts through meditation to attract that person's consciousness (which still relates to its previous existence), and to influence it through bestowing empowerment, instruction, and prayer; in short, the teacher makes every effort to effect a favorable rebirth for the person.

The Fifth through Ninth Nidanas

The next *nidana*, or link, the fifth of the twelve, is termed *chem che* [skye mched], which can be translated as "sense-field." Altogether, there are held to be twelve sense-fields, one for each of the six senses and one for each of the objects of the six senses. (The mind is considered a sixth sense because in and of itself it produces thoughts, though not necessarily related to the sensory environment.) Thus, there is sight and the form which is seen; there is the ear, and the sound which is heard, and so forth, making a total of twelve sense fields. The Tibetan word chem che means to "originate" and to "spread," meaning that the origin of each of these senses is in the sense organ, and the spread is the field of perception in which that particular organ operatesform for sight, sound for hearing and so forth. Although a being in the si pa bardo has no physical organs for vision, hearing, and so on, there is, nevertheless, the mental impression that all the sense fields are complete. Consequently, the mind of such a being can see, hear, smell, taste, touch, and think just as we can now, even though these perceptions are all projections of mind with no physical basis.

The sixth *nidana* is termed *rek pa* [reg pa], which literally means "touch," or "contact," in just the same sense that the hand makes contact with an object it touches. In this case the word means that there is contact between the six sense subjects and the six objects for example, between the faculty of seeing and form; in a certain sense, mind touches form with this faculty of sight, it touches sound with the faculty of hearing, and so forth. Even though this is a mental state without any physical basis, it is also accompanied by tactile sensation, a feeling of actually being able to touch and make contact with some kind of embodiment.

Formed upon this initial contact is the seventh nidana, which we term tsor wa [tshor ba], meaning sensation or feeling. To see is to make contact with the form through the eye; then follows a sense of the attractive or disagreeable nature of what we see, and some value judgment about the experience. Thus the initial experience doesn't remain a simple contact. Physical contact, for example, is accompanied by the sensation of roughness or smoothness, heat or cold, and so forth. In addition, some thought or value judgment arises: "That's beautiful, I like it," or "That's horrible, I don't like it." All such feelings, arising from the initial contact, belong to the seventh *nidana, tsor wa.*

The eighth *nidana* is termed *se pa* [sred pa], which means "craving." If one is very hungry and sees delicious food, a craving develops for that food; likewise, in the consciousness of a being in the si pa bardo, once there is contact between the sense fields and their objects, there come to be feelings and sensations that lead to a further clinging to and craving for that kind of experience. This leads to the further state which we term len pa [len pa], the ninth *nidana.*

Len pa literally means "to take," and the image traditionally used is of someone picking fruit, actually taking fruit in the hand. Among the twelve *nidanas,* the stage of len pa, or grasping, is the one in which the will to take physical rebirth impels the mind toward incarnation. For a being about to be

reborn as a human, this results in a perception of the future mother and father engaged in sexual intercourse. A tremendous attachment, a blind will to incarnate, draws the mind of the si pa bardo being towards the couple in union.

Becoming, The Tenth Nidana

The process of attraction to physical rebirth finds its completion, for a human being, when conception takes place in the mother's womb. This is the tenth *nidana*, si pa [srid pa] which means "becoming" or "existence." At this point there is a physical basisunion of the sperm from the father and the egg from the motherand, as a third component, the entrance of consciousness. Thereafter, according to the teachings of the Buddha, we are speaking of a human individual. A monk or nun, for instance, vows not "to take the life of a human or a conceived entity that will develop into a human being." To take the life of even a fetus in the womb is to take the life of a human being. Conception represents the final outcome of the urge possessing the disembodied consciousness of the being in the si pa bardo to inhabit a particular realm. Once conception has taken place, the being has entered the human realm and will, in due course, be born, raised, and fully accepted as a human being among humans.

So when we have a blending of the two physical elements, the sperm and egg, and the one immaterial element, the consciousness of the being in the after-death state, a human individual is conceived. The consciousness has taken rebirth and is in a physical realm again. One might ask, "How does this come about, this blending of the material and the immaterial?" The point is that mind is fundamentally empty: mind itself is immaterial and has no solidity or corporeality. But because of fundamental ignorance, there is an inability to experience that immateriality, and a tendency to conceive of it in material terms such as "some thing" or "I," "me," and "mine." This mental tendency to solidify finds its fullest expression in physical rebirth the conjunction of consciousness and the physical element brought about by fundamental ignorance.

Within the teachings of Buddha, the subsequent stages of fetal development are described in detail. During the first week or two an amorphous mass of cells (described in the traditional texts as being something like a small white blob of yogurt) grows slowly larger in the uterus. During the next stage the various parts of the body begin to differentiate, and the fetus, which now consists of two cellular masses connected by a narrow filament, is said to resemble an ant. Appendages begin to grow, organ systems develop and eventually, at the full term of the pregnancy, we have a fully developed human baby in whom all the complex processes of differentiation are complete.

There are definite experiences during the period of fetal development, a period of relentless growth during which the five bodily appendages (two arms, two legs and the head) emerge from the torso, and the five sensory organs and various organ systems are formed. In general, these are experiences of great suffering, and suffering, indeed, characterizes the entire

period of gestation. Because growth within the mother's womb continues from conception to birth, and because during this period the embryo generally becomes a complete human individual able to survive outside the womb, the whole period of gestation belongs to the nidana of becoming. The Sutra of Entering the Womb (ngal juk pay do [mngal 'jug pa'i mdo]), which is basically a study in embryology, describes the whole process in considerable detail.

The Eleventh and Twelfth Nidanas

Towards the end of pregnancy the baby begins to become dimly aware of the confined, cramped conditions within its mother's womb, and directly before birth experiences a sense of oppression and claustrophobia. The karmic process of human birth entails a force in the mother's body which turns the child's head downwards in preparation for birth, and then labor contractions that force the child into the world. This brings us to the next *nidana,* the eleventh, that of actual physical birth, which is termed *che wa* in Tibetan [skye ba].

The final link in the chain of Dependent Origination is aging and death, *ga shi* [rga shi]. Aging begins at the moment of birth and continues up to the moment of death, regardless of the age at which one dies. Attendant on this relentless aging process are all the sickness, suffering, sorrow, and pain that a human being experiences.

The final *nidana* is this aging and death. The moment of death is followed by the separation of mind and body, and the arising of the fundamental state of unconsciousness ignorance. So arriving again at the first nidana, this one lifetime has brought us full cycle. Following the state of unconsciousness, the cycle of twelve links continues with the stirring of the mind, the reawakening of discursive consciousness, and so on. This is one aspect of samsara, which literally means a cycle or wheel: it makes a complete cycle from lifetime to lifetime.

The Five *Skandhas* and The Three Aspects of Suffering

Having taken physical existence, we have a body composed of flesh and blood, and at a more fundamental level, of atoms. Through this vehicle we experience the world. Whereas in the si pa bardo state we referred to the *skandhas* of the Four Names as being purely a mental experience, here we have to add a fifth element of physical existence, which we term the skandha of form. In our present human condition there are five *skandhas*: the physical existence plus the four purely mental states of sensation, perception, mental formations, and full discursive consciousness which is able to decidethis is a sound, this is a formand to arrive at value judgments this is good, this is bad, and so on.

The word *skandha* literally means "a heap" or "pile," and one understanding of the term is that as long as we have physical existence, we not only have these five aggregates, but also a heap of trouble. On the basis of our physical existence all kinds of suffering sickness, pain, aging, death,

happiness followed by unhappiness are possible. This fundamental potential, intrinsic to all compound things, is *chap pa du che chi du ngal* [khyab pa 'du byed kyi sdug bsngal], meaning "the Pervasive Suffering of Composite Things." It is the most subtle kind of suffering because it exists simply in the fact of being alive. It may not be experienced directly as suffering, or be seen as something tangible or threatening, but it is nonetheless inseparable from the five *skandhas* in physical rebirth.

In traditional texts it is said that the difference between a noble (pak pa ['phags pa]) individual and an ordinary person is that the first perceives and the second does not perceive this subtle aspect of suffering. To illustrate this the following example is used. If you place a hair on the palm of your hand, you have no sensation of it. If, however, the hair is in your eye, it hurts and you are aware of it very promptly. An ordinary person, who has no sensation of the fundamental aspect of suffering, is like the palm of the hand in response to the hair; the noble person is like the eyevery much aware.

In addition to the Suffering of Composite Things, there is the Suffering of Change (jut way du ngal ['gyur ba'i sdug bsngal]. When a person in perfectly good health suddenly takes a turn for the worse, that change that loss of something good is the aspect of suffering called the suffering of change.

When we actually experience pain, suffering, and frustration, or one pain laid upon another, such as death following severe illness, then we speak of a third kind of suffering: actual pain, or, the Suffering of Suffering (du ngal ji du ngal [sdug bsngal gyi sdug bsngal]).

This, then, is a general account of the Buddha's teaching of the first two Noble Truths, the truth of the causes of suffering and the truth of the suffering we actually experience.

The first Noble Truth is termed the Truth of Suffering, and the second the Truth of the Origin [of Suffering]. The origin meant here is the ignorance that gives rise to the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination. The consequence of this cycle is suffering, and a traditional illustration of the samsaric process is a tree whose root represents ignorance and whose fruit is suffering.

The Suffering of the Different Realms

In the Buddhist tradition another way of looking at the universe is in terms of the three realms (kam sum [khams gsum]):

The Realm of Desire (dö pa'i kham ['dod pa'i khams]), the Realm of Form (zuk pay kam [gzugs pa'i khams]), and the Formless Realm (zu me chi kam [gzugs med kyi khams]). The Realm of Desire encompasses everything from the lowest hell up through the desire gods' realms. The six kinds of beings in the Realm of Desire are hell-beings, hungry ghosts, animals, humans, *asuras* and gods. Beyond it lie the seventeen levels of gods in the Realm of Form, and beyond that are the four levels of gods in the Formless Realm. But whatever the realm, and however subtle or gross the level of experience, it is included in the cycle of samsara, where no individual being is in any way

separate from the three kinds of suffering, where no being finds a complete solution to any one of them.

The fact is that suffering is the fundamental, central experience of all life, in whichever realm of samsara it occurs. In the hell realms, for instance, beings experience intense heat and cold. In the hungry ghost realm, suffering is due to hunger, thirst, and affliction by the elements. In the animal realm stupidity and ignorance lead to blind, instinctive behavior and to the preying of one species upon another.

The situation and sufferings of beings in these three lower realms are mostly invisible to us. There are descriptions of them in the teachings of the Buddha, but we have no personal, direct evidence of them, except for what we can observe in a small part of the animal realm. If we examine animals in the ocean, or domesticated or wild animals, we can see the kinds of body these creatures inhabit and the kind of mentality they have. In this way we can gain a little understanding of what this lower realm of existence is like, and what kinds of suffering the beings in it may experience.

The Buddha once said, if we were really aware of suffering, if we weren't so ignorant, if we even understood the pain and suffering a fetus experiences in its mother's womb, then we would work hard in this lifetime to become enlightened and never experience such suffering again.

For example, if we remembered the pains of fetal development, we would remember that during the development of the different orifices and sensory organs, the pain is as though someone were sticking a finger into a open wound, probing it, and ripping it open. And we would remember that when the various appendages, the arms, legs, head and so forth, are developing, the pain is as though a very strong person were pulling our arms out of their sockets while someone else was beating them with a club. The development of the different organ systems nerves, bones, muscles, digestive tract and so on entailed similar pains, which would also be remembered.

Moreover, the mind of the fetus is very sensitive to the mother's physical condition. If the mother eats food which is very cold, the child feels as though it's being thrown naked onto ice. If the mother drinks or eats something extremely hot, the child feels as though it's being boiled or scalded. If the mother does not eat, the child feels as though it's suspended in space; if the mother eats too much, the impression is of being crushed by a mountain. If the mother engages in sexual intercourse, the child feels as though it's being beaten with thorns. If the mother runs or jumps or engages in any violent physical exercise, the child feels as though it's being thrown over a cliff, and bouncing down a mountainside. In addition to all this, there is the suffering of simply being in the womb: of being in a dark, cramped, oppressive space where there is also a sense of uncleanness, and a disagreeable smell arising from waste fluids.

The actual process of birth is extremely painful. In Tibet we have a certain device, a metal disc with a small hole in it, through which a large thread can be drawn to make it smaller and tighter. When a baby is compressed in the narrow space of the vagina and thrust into the world, it

feels as though it were being drawn through just such a device. And once the baby has been born, it is extremely sensitive to the touch of anything in the outer world; it feels, as it comes into the world, like a small bird being attacked by wolves or hawksan immediate, overwhelming experience of being handled, grabbed, and spun around in various ways. When the child is washed, it feels as though it were being flayed; and when it's laid down, however soft the cover that it's put on, it feels as though it were being stretched on a bed of thorns. Children invariably cry when they are born, a sign of suffering and distress; if the birth process were not painful, one would expect babies to be born smiling and laughing.

We have all experienced the various sufferings of the rebirth process described by the Buddha, but we don't remember. Most of us, though, and more especially doctors and people involved in medicine, are aware of the suffering of growing up and being alive in the world. We've experienced illness and various physical and mental problems, and we know that these are always followed by the pain and suffering of death. This is where we are sitting now: in the middle of all this suffering.

Within the context of human existence, however, there is a great range of individual experience. Some people experience great pain, suffering and hardship in life, while others live fairly comfortably, without much pain or distress. For example, the Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje, once said that his experience in his mother's womb had been very pleasant: he had felt like a god in one of the high desire realms, enjoying a most pleasant existence throughout the whole term of pregnancy. As for the Buddha himself, his power and realization were so strong that even in the womb of his mother, Queen Mayadevi, he was able to benefit many creatures through a certain kind of transmission of the Dharma.

Although in general we can say that suffering and pain attend all experiences, our own karma must always be taken into account. For those with especially virtuous karma, there will be a preponderance of happiness in any experience, and a lessening of suffering. Such circumstances are the results of the individual aspects of karma, as distinct from the common karma of human existence.

The realm of existence above ours in samsara, that of the *asuras,* approximates, in terms of splendour, wealth and enjoyment, the state of the gods. There is, however, such a strong element of envy in the minds of these asuras that they live in continual strife, always fighting and quarreling with each other and with the gods in an effort to rob them of their wealth. Strife and quarrel are the dominant characteristics of this realm of existence and attendant on them are constant suffering and pain.

The last of the six realms in the Realm of Desire is that of the gods. From a relative point of view this is the superior realm of existence, since it is marked by the greatest degree of happiness and contentment, and by a level of prosperity and sensual enjoyment we cannot begin to imagine. The most intense feeling of contentment and happiness a human can experience probably amounts to less than one percent of the total physical and mental bliss a god enjoys.

Nonetheless, the relative state of ease and comfort in the god realm is impermanent, and when the causal factor the merit that has led to rebirth there is exhausted, the gods fall to a lower state of existence. This fall is forecast by certain premonitions that begin seven days before the god will die and pass to a lower state. At first, the gods hear a voice speaking of impending death; then they begin to resemble a withering flower: the garlands of flowers they wear begin to decay and lose their fine scent; the body for the first time begins to sweat and smells disagreeable. Their companions, the gods and goddesses who shared the pleasures of the god realm with them, are utterly repelled by these signs of dying and flee, offering no more help or encouragement than the rain of flowers that they scatter behind them, and a sincere prayer that their future rebirth be used skillfully to regain the godly state and join them again. Beyond that, they simply abandon dying gods, leaving them to spend their last week alone, contemplating, with the limited prescience that gods have, their future state of rebirth. The dying gods feel great distress because that state will inevitably be a lower one. Moreover, this seven-day period corresponds to seven hundred of our years, so the gods experience this suffering of change for a very long time.

For these reasons the Buddha, after examining the various realms, said that no place in the cycle of rebirth is free from sorrow: suffering is the central and fundamental experience of unenlightened existence.

The Importance of Studying the First Two Noble Truths

These, then, are the ideas the Buddha presented as the first two of the Four Noble Truths: the truth of the suffering we experience in the cycle of rebirth and its origin. The Buddha taught these subjects extensively and in great detail, and it is important for us to understand them in order to recognize the limitations of our present situation. We have to understand our circumstances and know that, given the nature of cause and effect, or karmic relationship, we can look forward to nothing but suffering. We have to realize that we are enmeshed in the various factors of cause and effect, which lead first to one state of suffering and on that basis to another, and so on. When we have seen the inherent limitations of this situation, we can begin to consider getting out of it. We can begin to look for the possibility of transcending samsaric existence and all its attendant sufferings, limitations, and frustrations.

If we have not examined these questions, our basic approach to existence will be naive. As long as we are happy and things are going well we think, "Oh, everything's fine. What's all this talk about suffering? Samsara's a nice place to be." From this attitude comes a general tendency to let things slide. But as soon as something untoward happens, the minute there is any kind of pain, or suffering, or trouble, we become completely unnerved. We think, "Oh, I'm dying. Oh, I'm sick. Oh, things are falling apart. Everything's going wrong." We may then make some ineffective and rudimentary attempts to remedy the situation, but we have no real recourse to anything that will allow us to transcend our suffering.

We are caught in samsara. As long as things go well, we ignore the situation; when they go badly, we are helpless to deal with them. But once we have understood the situation, we will begin to look for a way of dealing with the suffering and frustration we inevitably meet. The techniques and methods of the Buddha dharma provide the means for this positive development.

Ultimately speaking, the causes of samsara are produced by the mind, and mind is what experiences the consequences. Nothing other than mind makes the universe, and nothing other than mind experiences it. Yet, still ultimately speaking, mind is fundamentally empty, no 'thing' in and of itself. To understand that the mind producing and experiencing samsara is nothing real in itself can actually be a source of great relief. If the mind is not fundamentally real, neither are the situations it experiences. By finding the empty nature of mind and letting it rest there, we can find much relief and relaxation amidst the turmoil, confusion, and suffering that constitute the world.

Moreover, when there is a complete understanding and experience of the mind's Emptiness, we transcend causality: being beyond the cause and effect of karmic tendencies, we are a Buddha. But until this happens, simply thinking "It's all empty" is not going to do any good; we are still entirely subject to the unfailing process of karma.

Therefore, we need to understand not only the concept of the ultimate Emptiness of all experience, but also the conventional validity of karmic cause and effect. With this kind of approach, we can achieve Enlightenment. But if we fall into either extremeeither naively assuming the ultimate reality of everything (the error of the eternalists) or else denying everything (the error of the nihilists)then we cannot achieve Enlightenment.

The Third and Fourth Noble Truths:

The Truth of Cessation and The Truth of The Path

After the Buddha had described the Truths of Suffering and the Origin of Suffering, he went on to examine the other side: the factors of cause and result in the context of Nirvana. The cause here is the Fourth Noble Truth, known as the Truth of the Path. The result is the achievement of Enlightenment, and in the context of the Four Noble Truths this is called the Truth of Cessation, the Third Noble Truth. Enlightenment here is seen from the Hinayana viewpoint as the cessation of emotions that confuse and trouble the mind, and the cessation of the sufferings they cause.

The Beginning of the Path

Just as the first two Noble Truths describe samsara as arising from ignorance, from unknowing, so it follows that the enlightened experience arises from awareness (rik pa [rig pa]) instead of ignorance (ma rik pa [ma rig pa]). But such awareness is not easily experienced; we have to work towards

it, and this is what constitutes Dharma practice. We adopt a virtuous and skillful way of life, avoiding actions harmful to ourselves and others, and engaging in actions that are helpful and positive. Then, motivated by the inclination to establish a connection with the Three Jewelsthe Buddha, the Dharma (his teaching), and the Sangha (the community of his followers), we take Refuge, and continue to take Refuge, motivated by faith, devotion, and our ongoing experience of the Path. All these aspects of Dharma practice contribute to our experience of that awareness from which Enlightenment develops. The Seed of Enlightenment, this potential for Buddhahood, which we term Tathagatagarbha, is latent in every one of us, though in our present circumstances we cannot perceive it directly.

A rough analogy of our situation can be found in the process of sleep. When we go to sleep there is an initial period of complete unconsciousness, a very deep sleep in which there is no dreaming, no conscious activity at all. This state corresponds to the causal factor of fundamental ignorance. During the night, however, there is from time to time a certain reawakening of conscious activity, which produces the many kinds of illusion we call dreams. These can sometimes be very frightening, nightmarish experiences, which correspond to the suffering in samsara produced by ignorance. In the dream state, as in the waking experience of samsara, there is mental activity, which arises out of unawareness. In the morning, before we actually wake up, the body begins to stir, and consciousness starts to approach the waking state. For the purpose of our analogy, we can say this period corresponds to the arising of such virtuous tendencies in the mind as faith, compassion, energy, and exertion in Dharma practice. Then follows the actual awakening, when we stretch in bed, get up, begin to move around, and start our activities for the day. In our analogy, this corresponds to achieving Enlightenment we have completely awakened. We are not just in the dream state, which is our present condition, and not just half awake in Dharma practice, which is instilling and developing these good qualities in us; instead, we are totally awake, able to get up and be effective.

Part of the fundamental process of turning our minds away from samsara and towards Enlightenment is understanding samsara for what it is. Understanding suffering, and recognizing the limitations of our present situation, we begin to seek a way out. This initial turning of the mind is the foundation of the Path in its aspect as a causal factor leading to Enlightenment. Our ability to follow the Path by actually undertaking Dharma practice has a twofold basis. First, because we have fostered virtuous tendencies and rejected unwholesome ones, we have achieved the basic state of a human being. Second, because of the efficacy and compassion of the Three Jewels, we have established a connection with the Dharma which is bearing fruit in this life: we are not only human beings, but humans who are in contact with the teachings of Dharma, and have developed some certainty or conviction in them that leads to practice. Our actual practice taking Refuge in the Three Jewels, continuing to take

Refuge, developing Bodhicitta (our concern for the Liberation of each and every living being), developing different meditation techniques constitutes the

real pith or essence of the cause leading us towards the goal of Enlightenment.

Aspects of the Path

There are various aspects of the Path. For instance, we can look at the different levels of ordination starting with the vows of Refuge, then the vows of a layperson, a novice monk or nun, a fully ordained monk or nun, the Bodhisattva vows, and so on. Another aspect of the Path is *ngöndro* practice: the 100,000 recitations of the Refuge prayer accompanied by physical acts of prostration, the 100,000 recitations of the purification mantra of Vajrasattva, the 100,000 mandala offerings and the recitation of 100,000 prayers in the Guru-Yoga meditation. Both aspects the levels of ordination and the graduations of *Ngöndro* practice belong to what we term the Path of Accumulation (tsok lam [tshogs lam]), because this first stage of the Complete Path to Enlightenment is the gathering of what we need for the journey.

Yet practice aimed only at purifying our obscurations and developing merit is unstable because its benefits can be lost. Meditation practice provides the stabilizing factor by producing a benefit that will not be lost, but continues as a stable element of our experience. In particular, the practice of *shi nay* is important because whatever merit we accumulate, whatever virtuous tendencies we reinforce, all gain a degree of stability when the mind has been calmed. Moreover, whatever sort of meditation we attempt to develop is given a firm foundation by this initial phase of shi nay meditation. Therefore, when this stabilizing element has entered the picture, we speak of a superior degree of the Path of Accumulation.

There are various ways of examining the Complete Path. For example, we can speak of the Five Paths constituting its different levels: the Path of Accumulation, the Path of Application, the Path of Seeing, the Path of Meditation, and the Path of No More Learning, or Buddhahood. At a more extensive and detailed level are the Thirty-seven Elements that contribute to complete Enlightenment. All of these are different ways of examining the same phenomenon all detail different aspects of Enlightenment.

Among the Thirty-seven Elements conducive to Enlightenment are four essential recollections, four proper attitudes towards what one should renounce and what one should accept, four bases for the development of supernormal power, five faculties, and five strengths which are developed in one's Dharma practice. All these elements pertain to the first two Paths, those of Accumulation and Application; they do not include the first level of Bodhisattva Realization, which corresponds to the Path of Seeing, the third of the Five Paths.

At present, when we talk about mind being empty, clear and unimpeded, we are simply expressing an intellectual concept. But as your Dharma practice progresses and develops, there comes a point where you actually have a direct experience of the mind as empty, clear and unimpeded. When this direct experience is stable, we refer to it as the first

level of Bodhisattva realization. In Tibetan this is termed rap tu ga wa [rab tu dga' ba], meaning "complete joy." At this point you enter the Path of Seeing, because now, instead of seeing things in the ordinary sense, you actually see the nature of mind, and experience it directly. This moment of insight, therefore, lends its name to the Path at this particular stage.

The first level of Bodhisattva realization is termed a state of utter joy because the nature of mind, which is now experienced directly, is supremely blissful, supremely illuminating and, in the sense of not being anything ultimately real in and of itself, supremely empty. Although empty, the experience is one of complete bliss. The term used for this state is de wa chen po [bde ba chen po], "supreme bliss""supreme" because there is nothing in our ordinary experience we can compare it to. So, accordingly, direct experience of the nature of mind in its intrinsic purity is known as the state of complete joy.

At this stage of realization, since you are no longer concerned with conceptual thought but with direct experience, you have greater freedom of mind. At the first level of Bodhisattva realization there is a freedom from the limitations of clinging to a self (dan dzin [bdag 'dzin]). This is why we can speak of the one hundred emanations a first level Bodhisattva can manifest in a single instant, or of the ability to recall a hundred previous existences, or to foresee a hundred future ones. These abilities belong to a partial, not a complete, freedom of the mind from the limits of ignorance, and we traditionally refer to the twelve aspects of this freedom as the Twelve Hundreds.

Moreover, a first level Bodhisattva has transcended the karmic process, and is no longer completely subject to its obscuring limitations. Awareness has replaced ignorance. Since fundamental discursive consciousness, *kun shi nam she* [kun gzhi rnam shes], is based on that ignorance, it too no longer obtains. *Kun shi nam she* functions as a kind of store-house for the karmic process, which is reinforced (1) by the obscuration of the emotional afflictions (nyön mong pay dri pa [nyön mongs pa'i sgrib pa]) that develop from dualistic clinging, and (2) by the physical, verbal and mental activities (lay chi dri pa [las kyi sgrib pa]) based on that obscuration. Without fundamental ignorance, the karmic process has no basis. Thus a first-level Bodhisattva transcends the obscuring limitation of karma.

In Tibet we use a lunar calendar. On the third day of any month the moon is just a thin sliver, which gradually increases until on the fifteenth day it attains complete fullness. This gradual waxing of the moon provides an image for the different levels of Bodhisattva realization. The first glimmering of awareness is like the thin sliver of the moon. It's there, but not fully developed. Where development takes place is in the continued deepening and extending of awareness, and in the increasing freedom of mind experienced at the ten different levels of Bodhisattva realization.

In the context of the increasing freedom of mind, the qualities known on the first level as the Twelve Hundreds are increased tenfold on the second level. So there we speak of the Twelve Thousands, of the ability to manifest a thousand emanations in a single instant, to recall a thousand previous

existences, to foretell a thousand future existences, and so forth. This increase in depth and scope of awareness continues as we progress through the different stages of Bodhisattva Realization.

The waxing moon of the eleventh day, when the moon is not quite full but is rapidly approaching fullness, corresponds to the seventh level of Bodhisattva Realization. Here the increase in positive tendencies and the deepening of awareness accompany a diminishing of the negative aspects of one's being. In particular, emotional afflictions have been mostly eliminated at the seventh Bodhisattva stage.

At the eighth and ninth levels of Bodhisattva realization habitual dualistic clinging (bak chak chi dri pa [bag chags kyi sgrib pa]), which is the next most subtle level of obscuration, is gradually eliminated.

At the tenth Bodhisattva level, fundamental ignorance, the final level of obscuration (she jay dri pa [shes bya'i sgrib pa]), is almost completely removed, and the mind is almost completely without limitation. An enormous capability to express the positive qualities of mind arises. At this point we speak not of a hundred or a thousand emanations, but of one hundred thousand million emanations, previous lifetimes, future lifetimes, and so forth.

These ten levels of Bodhisattva Realization constitute the third and fourth Paths, the Path of Seeing and the Path of Meditation. Within this framework further levels are distinguishedthe inferior, medium and superior levels of the Path of Seeing, and the inferior, medium and superior levels of the Path of Meditationbut in sum they coincide with the ten levels of Realization. Among the Thirty-seven Elements conducive to Enlightenment, the seven Branches of Enlightenmentmindfulness, investigation of dharmas (phenomena), diligence, joy, purification, samadhi, and equanimityand the Noble Eightfold Path are experienced at these levels.

On the tenth level of Bodhisattva Realization, the final step to complete Enlightenment is accomplished by the particular state of meditation known as the Vajra-like samadhi (dor je ta bü ting nge dzin [rdo rje lta bu'i ting nge 'dzin]), where "vajra" has the sense of something invincible, something that can cut through anything else. And what is being cut through here are the final and most subtle traces of ignorance about the ultimate nature of reality. When this finest veil has been rent asunder by Vajra-like samadhi, we are completely enlightened. We have reached full and complete Buddhahood, sometimes called the eleventh Bodhisattva stage.

Our present circumstances are like those of someone who has been bound in chains and locked in a dark prison cell. The cell is samsara, and we are bound up and confined in it by our own ignorance. On the Paths of Accumulation and Application, up to but not including the first level of Bodhisattva Realization, there is a growing sense of freedom, just as if a person in prison were to have these bonds and manacles removed and, though still imprisoned, were free to move about the cell. The experience of first level Bodhisattva Realization, the Path of Seeing, resembles the opening of the prison door, after which we can walk out and go anywhere.

In this analogy, the prison represents the confining nature of samsara. The manacles and chains represent the limitations imposed by our own ego-

clinging; regardless of which realm of samsaric existence we experienceregardless of where in the prison we may bewe are still chained by the impression of being a self, by the conviction that this ego ultimately exists. With the experience of the first and subsequent Bodhisattva levels we are freed from the shackles and then freed from the prison.

The Three Kayas

Buddhahood, complete Enlightenment, is described in terms of the Three Kayas (three bodies) (ku sum [sku gsum]). These three aspects of complete Enlightenment are known as the Dharmakaya, Sambhogakaya and Nirmanakaya. The three are related to the fundamental nature of mind in the following way. The mind's quality of being in essence empty corresponds to the Dharmakaya. Its clear nature corresponds to the Sambhogakaya, and its quality of unimpeded manifestation corresponds to the Nirmanakaya. These qualities, which express the basics nature of mind, are what we term Buddhahood, which is also called, "the embodiment of the Three Kayas."

The Dharmakaya, or ultimate aspect, is described in a number of ways. For example, there are traditional references to the Twenty-one Flawless Aspects of the Dharmakaya that represent a state of mind not subject to change or degeneration. There is an omnipresent aspect, in that the Dharmakaya pervades both samsara and Nirvana. There is also the permanent quality, because the Dharmakaya is beyond form, beyond all limiting characteristics, and has no origination or cessation; being beyond dualistic or conceptual frameworks, it is without highness, lowness, happiness, sadness, or any kind of change. In such ways the texts attempt to describe the Dharmakaya's unchangeable nature, subject neither to degeneration, exhaustion, nor impairment.

The Sambhogakaya is also described from various viewpoints, and most commonly in terms of the Five Certainties. The first of these concerns the form encountered at the Sambhogakaya level. Here, the form of the Teacher has a permanent quality; it has no origin and no end, and therefore differs from all phenomena that are subject to changediffers even from the form in this world of the Buddha Shakyamuni, who took birth, grew old and died. Secondly, although we have a localized perception and speak of particular Buddhas and Buddha-realms, there is, nevertheless, an eternal quality to the environment of the Sambhogakaya that is not subject to change, degeneration or impairment. Thirdly, the transmission of teachings at the Sambhogakaya level of Enlightenment is always that of the Mahayana or Vajrayana. The unending continuity of this teaching is the third certainty. The fourth certainty concerns the retinue or audience of these teachings, which is always composed of beings on the eighth, ninth and tenth Bodhisattva levels, the three highest, purest levels of realization. Finally, there is the certainty of time, the fact that the Sambhogakaya is not subject to normal temporal limitations. These Five Certainties, pertaining to teacher, environment, Doctrine, entourage, and temporal mode, all belong to the level of Pure Form and such form is permanent.

It has been said that the mind is in essence empty and by nature clear, and that there is a third quality, unimpededness, which we experience in our present state as all the emotions, thoughts, concepts, experiences of pleasure and pain, and so forth, which arise without obstruction in our minds. All these are the unimpeded manifestation of mind in the unenlightened context. From the enlightened point of view, however, this unimpeded manifestation is termed the Nirmanakaya: the manifestation of Enlightenment in physical form in the physical world. Various levels and aspects of this phenomenon are described. For example, we can speak of supreme Nirmanakayas, such as the completely enlightened Shakyamuni Buddha, and we can speak of what are termed literally, "birth incarnations" beings who, although not completely enlightened, nevertheless represent some degree of Enlightenment working through physical form or through various arts, crafts, sciences and so forth. The physical manifestation of Enlightenment is not a deliberate undertaking on the part of the Buddha nature; it is not the result of some determination like "Now I will emanate in this particular realm in this particular form;" rather, it is a spontaneous expression, just as light radiates spontaneously from the sun without the sun issuing directives or giving any conscious thought to the matter. The sun is, and it radiates. Dharmakaya and Sambhogakaya simply are; they radiate, and the radiation is the Nirmanakaya.

Hinayana and Mahayana Views of the Path

What has so far been described as the Truth of the Path pertains equally to Hinayana and Mahayana: At both levels of teaching we find the same concepts of the Five Paths, the Thirty-seven Elements conducive to Enlightenment, and so forth. The difference lies in the scope of the interpretation of these topics. For example, from the Hinayana point of view, generosity involves giving up all one's wealth and, ideally, taking monk's or nun's vows, leading an extremely simple life, with only robes and a begging bowl, and getting only what is necessary for the present day, and no more. In short, the Hinayana ideal of generosity involves a complete rejection of acquisition, a total abandonment of one's attachment to wealth, and the pursuit of a very simplified way of life. From the Mahayana point of view, this ideal is extended to include a continual sharing of whatever wealth comes our way; even our own body is considered worthy as an offering. In one way or another, whatever appears is continually dedicated, either to the Dharma or to the benefit of other beings.

From the Hinayana point of view, morality means very much what we might normally thinkliving a good life by avoiding harmful or negative actions. This view of morality is also found in the Mahayana, but it is greatly expanded through the emphasis on developing good qualities and virtuous tendencies in ourselves, and by the dedication of our lives for the benefit of other beings. In this way, the scope is greater.

The Hinayana and Mahayana do share views of the Path to Enlightenment but what has been said here about Enlightenment itself pertains particularly to the Mahayana and Vajrayana. For the Hinayana, the

goal is the cessation of negative factors; only at the Mahayana and Vajrayana levels does one speak of the development of the mind's positive potential. We can get a clearer idea of the difference between the two views of Enlightenment by examining the words used to describe it in each system. The Hinayana goal is the attainment of the level of an Arhat. This term is translated into Tibetan as *dra chom pa* [dgra bcom pa], which means, "having conquered the enemy." The enemy here is the emotions and the ignorance that keep us locked in samsara, and the intention is to overcome or eliminate those factors. This is where the principle of Cessation the other term used to describe Enlightenment in the Hinayana comes in. Cessation refers to stopping the emotions that confuse the mind, and stopping discursive thoughts fixations on materiality and immateriality, reality and non-reality, and all such conceptual frame works that limit awareness. When Cessation is achieved, all of these have been arrested, and the mind is simply absorbed in the experience of Emptiness, without any wavering or distraction. This is the Hinayana ideal, and it will certainly lead to complete Enlightenment. However, the length of time it will take to do so is immense, and during this almost interminable period, there is virtually no ability to help others. That is why the term Hinayana, "the lesser vehicle," is applied, because the scope is relatively narrow. Cessation does, however, represent at least a degree of Liberation from samsara, because an individual who experiences it has no need to reincarnate: the power of karma to cause rebirth in the cycle of samsara has been transcended.

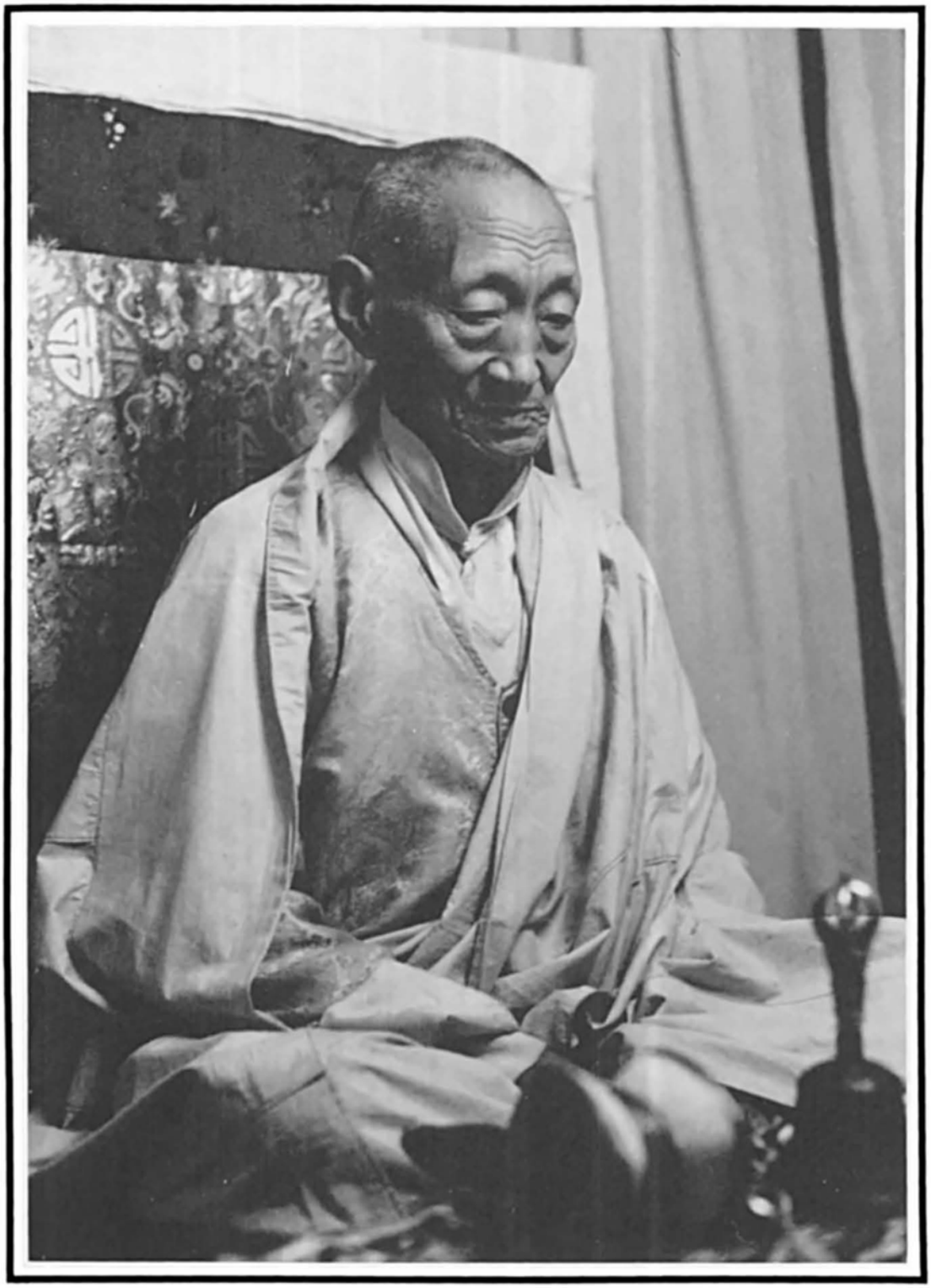
Perhaps the understanding of all these concepts the Five Paths, the Ten Levels of Bodhisattva Realization, the Thirty-seven Elements conducive to their realization, the different qualities of the Three Kayasis not strictly necessary; if we are diligent in Dharma practice and meditate, we are going to experience them all anyway. They will not fail to arise just because we don't know what to call them, or necessarily arise just because we do. On the other hand, there seems to be something very important in giving guidelines to help people understand more about the elements of Dharma practice and the enlightened state towards which they're working.

Reasons to Study the Four Noble Truths

The value of understanding our situation from the point of view of both samsara and Nirvana is this: to understand the cause and result of samsara motivates us to seek an alternative: once we have realized the limitations of our situation, there is the possibility of seeking something else. And if we understand the cause and result aspects of the Path, then this fuels our motivation not simply to reject samsara, but to seek Enlightenment. Moreover, to understand the great qualities of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas inspires one with faith in, and awe at, what is possible. Faith, energy, and motivation are very helpful in developing an understanding of the Four Noble Truths.

Having achieved this precious human existence with its opportunities and freedoms, and in having met with the teachings of the Dharma, we are pivotally poised. On one side is the possibility of continuing to wander

ignorantly in the cycle of rebirth, and on the other the possibility of transcending samsara and actually achieving Enlightenment. Both possibilities stem from the mind that each and every one of us has and experiences. It is this mind we already have that is essentially empty and illuminating by nature, that can and does experience the different levels of Bodhisattva Realization; it is this same mind that can achieve and experience complete Enlightenment.





3
The Four Dharmas of Gampopa

Our precious human birth affords opportunity and leisure for Dharma practice and gives us access to the vast and profound tradition of the teachings of the Buddha dharma. Among these, the Four Dharmas of Gampopa provide a concise survey of the entire Path, divided into four levels.

The First Dharma: The Mind Turns Towards Dharma

This first teaching involves a thorough understanding of our situation in samsara and the different destinies within the cycle, the six states of rebirth: three lower onesthe hell realms, the hungry ghost realm, and the animal realm; and three higherthe human, asura, and god realms. Through this teaching, we learn the consequences of virtuous and unvirtuous actions, which tendencies lead to these various rebirths, and the sufferings which the beings in these realms undergo. We come to understand that although a particular karmic process may lead from higher to lower or lower to higher rebirths, samsara itself provides no means of escape, and if we rely on it, we can make no progress towards Enlightenment. At the beginning of the Path, this understanding of samsara is necessary to turn the mind towards the Dharma, and to do this we contemplate the Four Ordinary Preliminaries.

The first of these concerns the unique value of the human life we are now experiencing. Because of the blessing of the Three Jewels and their influence in previous lives, we have, at some point, developed a virtuous tendency that has brought about our present human birth, with all its opportunities, leisure and freedom to practice Dharma. Very few beings preserve this virtuous tendency (by avoiding negative actions, thoughts, and

speech and encouraging positive ones), and very few achieve the resultant state of a precious human birth. If we think of the stars in the night sky as representing the multitude of beings in samsara, then a star in daytime represents the precious human birth it is something possible, but most unlikely. Human birth is an extremely rare occurrence. The second of the Four Preliminaries concerns impermanence. Now that we have the precious opportunity of human birth we should make the best use of it and actually realize the full potential of being human. This can be accomplished through our efforts to transcend completely the cycle of rebirth and achieve Buddhahood. In addition we must understand that mortality and impermanence are part of our existence, and that our human birth, obtained with such difficulty, will pass away. In everything we experience, there is moment-by-moment change and instability. Like a candle flame blown by a strong wind, our human existence may be extinguished at any moment; like a bubble on the surface of water, it may suddenly burst; like morning dew on the grass, it soon evaporates.

Next, to realize the full potential of being human, we must examine the concept of karma, the process of cause and effect, especially the relationship between our actions and their results. We need to recognize fully the unfailing connection between what we do now and what we experience later.

The fourth contemplation that turns the mind towards Dharma deals with the unsatisfactory and painful nature of samsara. Without an appreciation of impermanence and our own impending death, we are likely to be distracted by the pleasures of the world and indulge ourselves in emotional conflict and confusion. When that happens, we become exhausted by the life we lead and do not get to what really matters. We neither really see what is actually happening in our lives, nor make good use of our situation. Before we know it, our life is finished and it is time to die. If we lack the foundation of a stable practice, we go to death helplessly, in fear and anguish.

By contemplating these preliminaries the potential of a precious human existence, impermanence and the inevitability of death, the karmic process of cause and effect, and the sufferings and limitations of samsara we turn our minds to the Dharma, and thus fulfil the first of the Four Teachings of Gampopa.

The Second Dharma: The Dharma Becomes The Path

Once involved in the teachings, we come to the second of the Four Dharmas: the teachings of the Dharma become our way of life, our path. Our attitude towards what is superior to usthe Three Jewels begins to change, and so does our attitude towards the beings in samsara who are equal or inferior to us. The first attitude is expressed when we take Refuge, with faith, devotion and respect, in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. We realize that in Buddhahood one is omniscient and omnipresent, endowed with infinite capabilities. We see that the teachings of the Dharma, which proceed from this enlightened state, are the Path that every being can follow

to Enlightenment. We recognize that the Sangha, or assembly of practitioners who realize and transmit the teachings, are companions or guides who can show us the Path. In the Vajrayana tradition, we add the Three Roots Lama, Yidam and Dharma Protector to the Three Jewels as sources of Refuge.

When the Dharma becomes our Path, we develop a second attitude, that of compassion. In contemplating the beings who are in samsara with us, we consider that space is infinite, pervading all directions, and that the realm of sentient beings extends as far as space itself. At some point in the past, every one of these numberless beings has been our mother or our father. Through innumerable cycles of lifetimes we have developed an extremely close karmic connection with each one of them. When compassion develops we see that all life is the same, and that every single being wishes to be happy: in every form of life a fundamental search for happiness goes on but in a way that contradicts and defeats the aim of this search. Few beings understand that real happiness is the result of virtuous conduct. Many are involved in actually destroying their chances for happiness through confused and harmful actions and thoughts. When we see this we develop real affection and compassion for other beings. This infinite compassion for all forms of life is the second attitude involved in making the teaching our Path. Through faith and compassion the teaching that has attracted us becomes an entire way of life.

The Development of Compassion

Although we realize the necessity of working not only for our own benefit but for the welfare of all beings, we need to be honest about our own limitations and recognize that we have little power or ability to be truly effective in helping beings to free themselves. The way we become effective in this is through achieving Buddhahood or, at least, by reaching some level of Bodhisattva realization. At these higher levels we gain the ability to manifest for the sake of guiding beings out of their confusion.

The attitude of altruism is called Relative Bodhicitta; the desire to develop it is the foundation of Mahayana practice and the vessel for all virtue.

One method for developing Bodhicitta is called tong len [gtong len], which literally means "sending [and] taking." The attitude here is that each of us is only one being, while the number of beings in the universe is infinite. Would it not be a worthy goal if this one being could take on all the pain of every other being in the universe and free each and every one of them from suffering? We therefore resolve to take on ourselves all this suffering, to take it away from all other beings, even their incipient or potential suffering, and all of its causes. At the same time we develop the attitude of sending all our virtue, happiness, health, wealth and potential for long life to other beings. Anything that we enjoy, anything noble or worthy, positive or happy in our situation, we send selflessly to every other being. Thus the meditation is one of willingly taking on all that is negative and willingly giving away all that is

positive. We reverse our usual tendency to cling to what we want for ourselves and to ignore others.

We develop a deep empathy with everything that lives. The method of sending and taking is a most effective way of developing the Bodhisattva's motivation.

The kind of compassion we have described so far is called "compassion with reference to sentient beings" (sem chen la mik pay nying je [sems can la dmigs pa'i snying rje]). A dualism lingers here, however, because we are still caught by the threefold idea of (1) ourselves experiencing the compassion, (2) other beings as the objects of compassion, and (3) the actual act of feeling compassion through understanding or perceiving the suffering of others. This framework prepares our path in the Mahayana. Once this kind of compassion has been established, we arrive at a second. The realization begins to grow that the self, which is feeling the compassion, the objects of the compassion, and the compassion itself are all in a certain sense illusory. We see that these three aspects belong to a conventional, not ultimate, reality. They are nothing in themselves, but simply illusions that create the appearance of a dualistic framework. Perceiving these illusions and thereby understanding the true emptiness of all phenomena and experience is what we call "compassion with reference to all phenomena" (chö la mik pay nying je [chos la dmigs pa'i snying rje]). This is the main path of Mahayana practice.

From this second kind of compassion a third develops, "non-referential compassion" (mi me nying je [dmigs med shying rje]). Here we entirely transcend any concern with subject/object reference. It is the ultimate experience that results in Buddhahood. All these three levels of compassion are connected, so if we begin with the basic level by developing loving-kindness and compassion towards all beings, we lay a foundation that guarantees that our path will lead directly to Enlightenment.

The Third Dharma: The Path Dispels Confusion

The third Dharma of Gampopa states that by traveling the Path our confusion is dispelled. The principal theme of the teaching here is the experience of emptinessthe realization of the ultimate nature of mind. In meditation we realize that our mind and all the experiences which it projects are fundamentally unreal: they exist conventionally, but not in an ultimate sense. This Realization of Emptiness is known as Ultimate Bodhicitta.

An analogy can be drawn between the ocean and the mind, which is essentially empty, without limiting characteristics or ultimate reality. This empty mind, however, has its projection, which is the whole phenomenal world. The form, sound, taste, touch, smell, and inner thoughts, which constitute what we experience correspond to waves on the surface of the ocean. Once we see, through meditation, that the nature of mind is fundamentally empty, we become automatically aware that the projections of mind are fundamentally empty too. These projections are like waves that

arise from and subside into the ocean; at no point are they ever separate from it.

Although we may have some understanding that mind is essentially empty, it may be difficult to relate this idea to phenomenal existence. An example may help. At the present moment we have a physical body, and during our waking existence we are extremely attached to it. We take it to be real, a self-existent entity. But during dreams, we inhabit a different kind of body, and experience a different state of being. A complete phenomenal existence is associated with this "dream body." We see, smell, touch, hear, feel, think and communicate we experience a complete universe. But when we awaken it becomes obvious that the universe of the dream has no ultimate reality. It certainly is not in the outer world as we know it, nor in the room where we sleep, nor inside our body; it cannot be found anywhere. When the dream is over, its 'reality' simply disappears it was only a projection of mind. It is fairly easy to understand this in relation to the dream state. What we must also comprehend is that our experience in the waking state is of the same general nature and occurs through the same process.

Realized Mahasiddhas, such as Tilopa and Naropa of India, or Marpa and Milarepa of Tibet, were able to perform miraculous changes in the phenomenal universe. They could do so because they had realized the entire phenomenal world as essentially empty and a projection of mind. This allowed them to manifest miracles and actually change the phenomenal world. Such transformation is not possible when our mind clings to what we experience as ultimately real and immutable.

The present phase of our existence ends in death, when the karma which directs the course of this physical existence is exhausted.

At death there is a definite and final separation of consciousness from the physical body, which is simply discarded. What continues is the individual consciousness, the mind of the being entering into the bardo experience. During that after-death state, we experience another kind of phenomenal universe. Though lacking the basis of a physical organism, the mind is able to see, hear, smell, taste, touch, think, and perceive in much the same way as it does now. Though there is nothing more than a state of consciousness, the mind continues to follow its habits and to manifest in set patterns. Thus our habitual conviction that experience is ultimately real continues after physical death, and what happens there resembles what happens in the dream state and waking consciousness.

A story about a monk in Tibet illustrates this. It happened not very long ago, in fact, during the lifetime of my father. Near my home in Tibet there is a Nyingmapa monastery called Dzokchen. A monk from this monastery decided that he did not want to stay there any more, but preferred to go into business. He left and went to the north of that region to become a trader, hoping to accumulate a fortune. He actually did become fairly successful. Because of his former relationship with a monastery, he was also considered something of a Dharma teacher, so he had a group of followers as well as the wealth amassed through his trading ventures. One day he met a magician who was able to exercise a certain mental control over people. The

trader didn't realize the power of this person, and the magician cast a spell that caused the trader to experience a powerful illusion in which he met a woman, married and had children; he acquired a large estate and family to look after, and engaged in many trading ventures that brought him vast riches. He passed his whole life this way and became old with white hair and few teeth. Then the illusion disappeared: he was back where he had been, and perhaps only one or two days had passed. During that time the magician had stolen everything he possessed, and the trader woke without a penny in the world. He had only the memory of his long fantasy of a lifetime's activities, distractions and projects.

Just like the trader's fantasy, our own daily experiences have an illusory quality. In the Mahayana sutras, it is taught that everything we experience is like a reflection, a mirage, a rainbow in the sky, or the moon shining on the water's surface; everything we experience has only conventional reality and is ultimately unreal.

We experience the third Dharma of Gampopa when, first, we become convinced that we must dispel our confusion through understanding and experiencing the essential emptiness of mind, and, second, when this reveals the illusory nature of all phenomena; then the Path dispels confusion.

The Fourth Dharma:

Confusion Arises as Primordial Awareness

The fourth Dharma of Gampopa is the transformation of confusion into Primordial Awareness. This fundamental transformation is effected on the level of Anuttarayogatantra, the highest of the four levels of Vajrayana teachings.

This transformation is not difficult to explain theoretically. In an ordinary state awareness is clouded and confused; if we recognize the mind's nature, then we experience Primordial Awareness. On a practical level, however, this does not happen automatically: a certain kind of skillful means is needed. To transform discursive into enlightened awareness, we use the wealth of techniques available in the Vajrayana, especially the Development and Fulfillment stages of meditation (che rim/dzo rim [(bskyed rim/rdzogs rim]). In our present situation as unenlightened beings, our three faculties of body, speech, and mind are obscured by basic ignorance. To transform that confusion into awareness, we must become physically, verbally, and mentally aware, so in Vajrayana practice we utilize these very faculties of our whole being to effect a complete transformation.

Considering our physical body, we can see how we are attached to it as something permanent, pure and real. Yet this physical body is temporary, composed of numerous impure and decaying substances. It is conventionally, not ultimately, real. Our habitual and instinctive clinging to it obstructs the arising of Primordial Awareness. We must come to realize that this body is simply something that appears and that it has no self-nature. Based on the projections of the mind, the body represents the heart of the form aspect of consciousness. Until we realize this, the transformation of

confusion into Primordial Awareness will not happen spontaneously or easily.

In tantric practice, the body is transformed by a meditation that leads us to identify with a pure or enlightened form, for example, Chenrezi, the Bodhisattva of Compassion. Here we put aside the fixation on our own body and instead identify with a pure form. In doing so, it is important also to realize that the deity is pure appearance, and does not partake of substantiality in any way. In meditation we become completely identified with this form, which is empty, without solidity, without self-nature or ultimate reality beyond its pure appearance. This experience is called "The Union of Appearance and Emptiness" (nang tong sung juk [snang stong zung 'jug]).

Such a transformation is based upon understanding that all our experience is a subjective projection of mind, and therefore our attitude towards things is decisive. Through changing our attitude we change our experience, and when we meditate in the way described, transformation is possible. This is especially true when we focus on an enlightened form such as the Bodhisattva of Compassion. The image of Chenrezi itself is a real expression of the state of enlightened compassion. It is not a fabrication. There is actually an enlightened being called Chenrezi, able to confer blessing and attainment. To experience this, certain conditions must come together. An analogy would be taking a photograph of someone. We put film in the camera, we point it at whomever we're photographing and take the picture; the image of the person is projected onto the film, and when it's developed, we have a certain image of that person. Something similar happens when we meditate on an enlightened form. There is an "external" expression called Chenrezi. Through our efforts in meditation, we come to identify with this pure form, to have faith in it, and to realize the intrinsic compassion and state of awareness Chenrezi represents. In this way we can become a "copy" of the deity and receive the blessing of the Bodhisattva of Compassion. This is the first aspect of the transformation of confusion into Primordial Awareness based on meditation upon our body as an enlightened form.

The second aspect of transformation concerns our speech. Although it may be easy to consider speech as intangible, that it simply appears and disappears, we actually relate to it as to something real. It is because we become so attached to what we say and hear that speech has such power. Mere words, which have no ultimate reality, can determine our happiness and suffering. We create pleasure and pain through our fundamental clinging to sound and speech.

In the Vajrayana context, we recite and meditate on mantra, which is enlightened sound, the speech of the deity, the Union of Sound and Emptiness (dra tong sung juk [sgra stong zung 'jug]). It has no intrinsic reality, but is simply the manifestation of pure sound, experienced simultaneously with its Emptiness. Through mantra, we no longer cling to the reality of the speech and sound encountered in life, but experience it as

essentially empty. Then confusion of the speech aspect of our being is transformed into enlightened awareness.

At first, the Union of Sound and Emptiness is simply an intellectual concept of what our meditation should be. Through continued application, it becomes our actual experience. Here, as elsewhere in the practice, attitude is all-important, as this story about a teacher in Tibet illustrates. The teacher had two disciples, who both undertook to perform a hundred million recitations of the mantra of Chenrezi, OM MANI PADME HUNG. In the presence of their Lama, they took a vow to do so, and went off to complete the practice. One of the disciples was very diligent, though his realization was perhaps not so profound. He set out to accomplish the practice as quickly as possible and recited the mantra incessantly, day and night. After long efforts, he completed his one hundred million recitations, in three years. The other disciple was extremely intelligent, but perhaps not as diligent, because he certainly did not launch into the practice with the same enthusiasm. But when his friend was approaching the completion of his retreat, the second disciple, who still had not recited very many mantras, went up on the top of a hill. He sat down there, and began to meditate that all beings throughout the universe were transformed into Chenrezi. He meditated that the sound of the mantra was not only issuing from the mouth of each and every being, but that every atom in the universe was vibrating with it, and for a few days he recited the mantra in this state of samadhi.

When the two disciples went to their Lama to indicate they they'd finished the practice, he said, "Oh, you've both done excellently. You were very diligent, and you were very wise. You both accomplished the one hundred million recitations of the mantra."

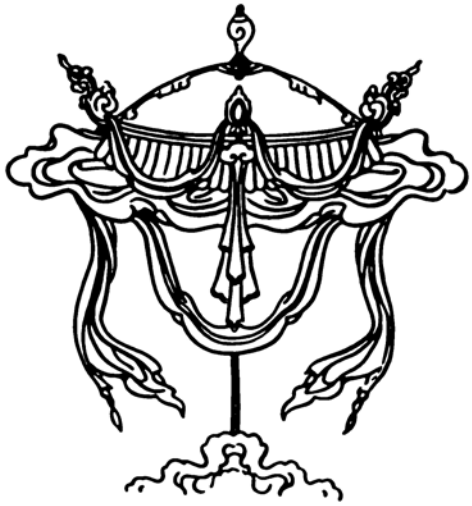
Thus through changing our attitude and developing our understanding, practice becomes far more powerful.

The six syllable mantra of Chenrezi, OM MANI PADME HUNG, is an expression of Chenrezi's blessing and enlightened power. The six syllables are associated with different aspects of our experience: six basic emotional afflictions in the mind are being transformed, six aspects of Primordial Awareness are being realized. These sets of six belong to the mandala of the six different Buddha families which become manifest in the enlightened mind. The mantra of Chenrezi has power to effect transformations on all these levels.

Another way of interpreting the mantra is that the syllable OM is the essence of enlightened form; MANI PADME, the four syllables in the middle, represent the speech of Enlightenment; and the last syllable HUNG represents the mind of Enlightenment. The body, speech, and mind of all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are inherent in the sound of this mantra. It purifies the obscurations of body, speech, and mind, and brings all beings to the state of Realization. When it is joined with our own faith and efforts in meditation and recitation, the transformative power of the mantra arises and develops. It is truly possible to purify ourselves in this way.

The mind aspect of the Chenrezi meditation centers in the heart region where the mantra and seed-syllable HRIH are located. Light is visualized as going out from these and making offerings to all the Buddhas, purifying the obscurations of all beings, and establishing them in Enlightenment. The mind aspect is also connected with formless meditation, simply resting the mind in its own empty nature. After practicing this for some time, a change will occur: we will have the experience that anything arising in the mind, any emotion or thought, arises from and dissolves back into Emptiness. For that duration we are nowhere other than in Emptiness. In this state, we experience mind as the Union of Awareness and Emptiness (rik tong sung juk [rig stong zung 'jug]). This is Mahāmudrā.

The threefold Chenrezi meditation thus utilizes meditational techniques relating to body, speech, and mind. At the end of a session of practice, the visualization dissolves into a formless state, and we simply rest the mind evenly in its own nature. At this time we can experience body, speech, and mind as arising from basic, empty mind. We recognize this mind as the fundamental aspect and body and speech to be secondary projections based upon consciousness. This represents the gathering of all aspects of our experience into onethe Emptiness of mind from which everything arises. Through this, we have realized the fourth Dharma of Gampopa: confusion has arisen as Primordial Awareness.



4

Bardo

The word bardo literally means "an interval between two things. Bar means 'interval and do means 'two.' We can think of this interval in a spatial or temporal way. If there are two houses, the space between them is a bardo. The period between sunrise and sunset, the interval of daylight, is a bardo. A bardo can be of long or short duration, of wide or narrow expanse.

To a large extent our experience is made up of intervals between one thing and another. Even in the case of the momentary thoughts that arise in our mind, there is an interval between one thought arising and fading and the next thought appearing. Such a gap, even if infinitesimal, is a part of every process. Everything we experience has this quality of intervals between states.

The Six Bardos

Certain aspects of bardo are more important than others. One of the most crucial is our waking existence, from the moment of birth to the time we die. This waking existence is the first great bardo in our experience, the Bardo between Birth and Death (che shi bar do [skye shi'i bar do]).

The bardo of the dream state, which lasts from the moment we go to sleep at night until the moment we wake in the morning is another example. The state of consciousness that obtains during that interval is termed the Dream Bardo (mi lam bar do [rmi lam bar do]).

For an ordinary person, the trauma of death produces a state of unconsciousness, which lasts for an indefinite time: it may be very brief or quite long. Traditionally, this period of blackout is considered to last three and

a half days. Afterwards, the consciousness of the individual begins to awaken again and experience things in a new way. The interval of unconsciousness into which the mind is plunged by the trauma of death, and which lasts till the awakening of consciousness again, is referred to in Tibetan as the chö nyi bardo [chos nyid bar do], the interval of the ultimate nature of phenomena; here the mind is plunged into its own nature, though in a confused or ignorant way.

The next phase of the after-death experience is the reawakening of consciousness, which includes the many days that can be spent experiencing the fantastic projections of mind, the hallucinations produced and experienced by the mind in the after-death state. From the moment of this reawakening of consciousness (the end of the chö nyi bardo) to the moment we take actual physical rebirth in one of the six realms of samsara, is known as the si pa bardo [srid pa bardo], the Bardo of Becoming. Another way of interpreting the Tibetan is as the bardo of possibility, since at this point we have not taken physical birth and there are numerous possibilities for various kinds of existence.

These are the four major instances of the Bardo principle. Another example is a state of meditation: when someone who practices begins to meditate effectively, there is a certain change in consciousness; when that person rises from the meditation and goes about worldly activities again, there is a cessation of that state of consciousness. The interval of actual formal meditation is called the Bardo of Meditative Stability, sam ten bar do [bsam gtan bar do]. The sixth bardo we distinguish is the Bardo of Gestation, che nay bar do [skye gnas bar do]. This interval begins at the end of the Bardo of Becoming when the consciousness of the being unites with the sperm and egg in the womb of the mother and lasts until the time of physical birth, the beginning of the Bardo between Birth and Death.

These six kinds of bardo that we experience as human or sentient beings in samsara can be changed for the better, but the power to do this lies in the waking state. It is in the bardo of our present lives that we can make the most progress in developing the ability to deal effectively with all the others. What we usually mean by the word, bardo, however, is the Bardo of Becoming, the phase of hallucinations before new physical conception.

The Five Elements and the Nature of Mind

Our present unenlightened state is based on a fundamental state of ignorance, a fundamental discursive consciousness, kun shi nam she [kun gzhi rnam shes]. It is the fundamental consciousness that is distorted and confused. There is, however, a possibility of experiencing the true nature of mind, and when that pure awareness is present we no longer have kun shi nam she but kun shi ye she [kun gzhi ye shes]. That change of a single syllable from nam to ye, makes a tremendous difference, because now we are referring to fundamental Primordial Awareness rather than fundamental ignorance.

In both cases we are talking about mind, which essentially embodies what in our physical universe we term the five elements. The potential for these elements exists in the mind and always hasit is not something created at some particular time. In its inherent nature, mind always has the five elemental qualities, and it is from this potential that the experiences of the after-death state arise.

When we speak of mind, we speak of something that is not a thing in itself. In its most fundamental sense, mind is not something we can limit. We cannot say it has a particular shape, size or location, color or form, or any other limiting characteristic. The element we call space, which in our perceptual situation also has no limiting characteristics, is this very emptiness of mind; this is the elemental quality of space in the mind.

But mind is not simply empty; it has the illuminating potential to perceive anything whatsoever. This unlimited ability of mind to perceive is its illuminating nature, and corresponds to the element of fire.

This mind, essentially empty and illuminating, gives rise to all experience which, whether of samsara or Nirvana, is rooted in mind just as plants are rooted in soil. This function of the mind as the origin of all experience corresponds to the elemental quality of earth.

Another aspect of the mind is its dynamic quality. Mind is never still: no single experience in it lasts, but quickly passes to another. Whether one is undergoing an emotional reaction, an experience of pleasure or pain, or a sensory perception such as seeing or hearing, the contents of the mind are always in a state of flux. This continual activity of mind is the elemental quality of wind.

Mind with these four elemental qualities has always been so and always will be. This very continuity, and the fact that mind adapts itself to different situations, corresponds to the element of water. Just as water sustains its continuity and adapts itself to every contour as it flows, the mind too is fluent, continuous, and adaptable.

The Five Elements and the Physical Body

The origin or basis of all experience is mind, characterized by the five elemental qualities. Our particular situation at the moment is that of physical waking existence, in which we experience what is termed the body of Completely Ripened Karma (nam min ji 1ü [rnam smin gyi lus]). The meaning here is that completely ripened karmic tendencies have given rise to this seemingly solid, concrete projection of mind that is our physical body.

The connection between the body we now experience and the mind which produced it is as follows. The solid elements of our body, such as flesh and bone, represent the element of earth, just as the "solidity" of mind its function as the basis and origin of all experience reflects the element of earth. Similarly, the bodily fluids such as blood, saliva, urine, lymph and so forth, represent the element of water. The biological warmth of the body is the element of fire, while the element of space is represented by the orifices of the body, and by the spatial separation of the organs, which, instead of

forming a homogeneous mass, are distinct and separate from each other. Finally, there is the element of wind, which is connected with the breath, and maintains the organism by way of the respiratory process.

In short, it is from mind, which embodies the five elemental qualities, that the physical body develops. The physical body itself is imbued with these qualities, and it is because of this mind/body complex that we perceive the outside world which in turn is composed of the five elemental qualities of earth, water, fire, wind, and space.

The Five Elements in the Bardo

Right now we are at a pivotal point between impure, unenlightened states of existence and the possibility of enlightenment. For ordinary beings the *chö nyi* bardo is experienced as a period of deep unconsciousness following the moment of death. There is no mental activity or perception, only a blank state of fundamental unconsciousness. This bardo ends with the first glimmer of awareness in the mind. In the interval between the end of the *chö nyi* bardo and before the beginning of the *si pa* bardo there arises what is called the Vision of the Five Lights. The appearance of these is connected with the five elemental qualities.

The different colors which the mind in the bardo state perceives are the natural expression, the radiance, of the fundamental, intrinsic qualities of mind. The element of water is perceived as white light; space as blue light; earth as yellow; fire as red; and wind as green. These colors are simply the natural expression of the elemental qualities in the mind when the first glimmer of consciousness begins to appear.

As consciousness begins to develop and perceive more, the experience of the elemental qualities also becomes more developed. What was formerly the simple impression of different rays or colors of light now undergoes a change. The light begins to integrate itself and cohere into *tig le* [thig le], points or balls of light in varying sizes. It is within these spheres of concentrated light that we experience the Mandalas of the Peaceful and Wrathful Deities.

In this context we speak of the five realms of existence in any one of which we may be reborn, because of the impure level of our experience. The usual description is of the six realms of existence, the six principal emotions that lead to them, and the six Buddhas who appear in them. In the context of the five-fold mandala pattern, however, desire and avarice are combined, because they share the same basic nature of clinging, and so the realm of the asuras is eliminated, the higher asuras being re-classified with desire gods in the god realm, and the lower asuras included in the animal realm.

The Mandalas of the Peaceful and Wrathful Deities

From an absolute level, the mind that perceives a deity and the deity itself are not two separate things, but are essentially the same. As long as we have no direct realization, however, the mind has the impression of being an "I" which experiences and takes as "other" that which is experienced. During

the after-death experience, this split results in a tendency of the mind to feel threatened when the first mandala of the peaceful deities arises: the Mandala of the Five Buddha Families, their consorts and attendant deities, and a sixth family, that of Dorje Sempa, like a canopy over the whole mandala. At this time, we perceive enormous spherical concentrations of light, in which we see the Mandala of the Peaceful Deities emanating a most brilliant radiance. To the confused mind, this radiance is quite overpowering, and to confront the Peaceful Deities is rather like trying to stare into the sun. With the peaceful deities, we also simultaneously perceive the six light rays connected with the six realms of samsara. These are far less intense, so the mind that is repelled by the experience of the pure forms tends to be attracted by the subdued light rays leading to the various states of rebirth in samsara. In this way the confused mind is drawn towards samsaric rebirth.

After the mandala of the Peaceful Deities comes the Mandala of the Wrathful Deities. Ignorance again causes the brilliance and power of these forms, spontaneous expressions of the mind's own nature, to be perceived as something external and threatening. At this point the after-death experience becomes terrifying and repellent, instead of an experience of the unity of the perceiver and the perceived.

The Possibility of Enlightenment in the Bardo

The cycle of teachings known in Tibetan as the Bardo Tödröl [bar do thos grol] and the empowerments connected with it are designed to help practitioners receive the blessing and develop the understanding that will benefit them in the after-death experience. With this support, when the pure forms are perceived, they will be seen for what they areprojections of mind essentially identical with it and neither external nor threatening. Liberation arises at that moment in the after-death state when consciousness can realize its experiences to be nothing other than mind itself. The teachings and empowerments connected with the Bardo Tödröl cycle introduce us to the deities and explanatory concepts and so prepare us for what happens after death.

The possibility of enlightenment in the after death state rests upon three things. The first is the fundamentally enlightened nature of mind, the seed of Buddhahood, without which nothing would be possible. The second is the blessing inherent in the pure forms of the deities. The third is the connection we have established with those deities through empowerment, and the understanding we have, both intellectually and intuitively, of what is actually taking place. When all these three elements come together, the possibility exists of achieving liberation during the instant of confronting the mandalas of the deities.

If this liberation does not happen in the interval between the chö nyi bardo and the Bardo of Becoming, the benefits of receiving empowerment and understanding teachings about the nature of the after-death experience continue into the subsequent phases of the after-death experience, that of

the Bardo of Becoming. This means that we can either experience a positive rebirth in the cycle of samsara or, in some cases, achieve existence in what we term the Buddha Realms, a great and sure step towards ultimate Enlightenment.

The Bardo of Becoming

The experience of confronting the mandalas of the deities takes place only briefly and if the opportunity is lost, then the mind enters the Bardo of Becoming. Here the situation becomes roughly analogous to what we experience nowmany varied impressions continually arise in the mind and we cling to them, taking them all to be ultimately real. This hallucinatory state is traditionally said to last for a period of forty-nine days before the consciousness takes physical form again as an embryo. At the end of each week there is the trauma of realizing that we are dead and our minds plunge into another state of unconsciousness like the one immediately after death, but not quite as intense. After each of these very short periods of unconsciousness, consciousness returns, and once more the mandalas of the deities present themselves, but now in a fragmentary and fleeting way. The successive opportunities afforded by these appearances are not as great as at the first stage, but the possibility of Liberation does recur throughout the after-death experience.

The Symbolism of the Mandala of Deities

The purity of enlightenment is embodied by the mandala of deities. For example, what we normally experience as the five *skandhas* (the aggregates of the mind/body complex) we recognize on the pure level as the Buddhas of the Five Families. The mind's elemental qualities, which we experience as the elements in our physical body and the outer universe, on the pure level are the five female consorts of the five Buddhas. On the ordinary level we experience eight types of confused consciousness, while on the pure level these are eight male Bodhisattvas. On the impure level we speak of the eight objects of those different kinds of consciousness, and on the pure level we speak of the eight female Bodhisattvas. Each one of these pure forms expresses an enlightened perspective of a part of our impure experience. It is not only possible to connect the different aspects of our impure consciousness with the pure forms, but also to connect these pure forms with the nature of mind itself.

There has been and could still be much commentary on the relationship between these different levels of expression and our own experience. For our present purposes, it is sufficient to understand that the six bardos we've discussed briefly are the six major phases of experience for any being wandering in the cycle of rebirth. In every one of them the practice of Dharma is of the greatest possible value, for through it we can purify ourselves of confusion, obscurations, and negative emotions, and further develop our awareness and merit.

Questions and Answers

QUESTION: Aren't the Mandalas of the Peaceful and Wrathful Deities related to one particular cultural tradition? How do those schooled in other traditions perceive them?

ANSWER: In the tradition of these teachings it doesn't matter whether you're a Buddhist or not: you will still have the experience of the wrathful and peaceful deities. The advantage of being a Buddhist or having practiced this particular approach is that you will recognize the experience for what it is. But the experience is fundamentally the same, even for non-humans. Every being that goes through the bardo has some perception of the lights, of the concentrated spheres of light, and the mandalas appearing within them. Usually, however, there is no recognition and no attempt at recognition, just a feeling that the experience is threatening and repellent. The mind is terrified and retreats from the experience.

In the traditional texts it is stated that even the consciousness of an insect in the bardo state has the same experience. Each and every being in the six realms of existence has what is called Tathagatagarbha, the Seed of Enlightenment, which is fundamental awareness of the ultimate nature of mind. It is from this that bar-do experiences arise as natural projections of mind, not as something produced by cultural conditioning.

QUESTION: The mind is traditionally described as having three aspects; are the three elements that correspond to these aspects more important than the remaining two?

ANSWER: In the presentation of mind as having three aspectsits essence is empty, its nature is clarity, and its manifestation is unimpededwe reckon the Emptiness and the Clarity of mind as the elements of space and fire. The element of wind, the continual movement of mind, is the third aspect, unimpeded manifestation. Now the element of earth is the function of mind as the origin and basis of all experience, and the element of water is the continuity of mind. These two functions (continuity and basis) apply to all three aspects. Thus, the mind is essentially empty (space), has Clarity (fire) and the ability to manifest unimpededly (wind), and throughout all three there is continuity (water) and the ability to provide a basis (earth).

QUESTION: I've heard that the body should not be disturbed for three or four days after death. In the West the custom is to embalm the body very soon after death. How important is it that the body be undisturbed, and for how long?

ANSWER: Generally speaking, it's good to leave the corpse undisturbed as long as possible. But in many circumstances this is difficult, because we simply don't have the attitude towards death reflected in the bardo teachings. Once a person has died, we feel that the mind no longer has any need for the corpse. We don't have the same kind of respect for the corpse that Buddhists in Tibet did.

But it's not easy to explain these ideas, and if you simply say, "Don't move or touch the body," without giving any reason, you may only make

people angry. On the other hand, perhaps you could explain some of these ideas. People might at least appreciate the importance to you of what you're saying, and since they have some feeling of respect towards the corpse, might do their best not to disturb it. It's hard to tell. The general principle of not disturbing a corpse for a short period after death could be encouraged. It is beneficial.



5
Mandala

The third of the Kagyü Preliminaries (see pages 9-10), the Mandala Offering, is connected with the accumulation of merit and the deepening of awareness. It is similar to other gestures such as placing flowers, incense, or lamps on a shrine as an offering to the Three Jewels. A lay person might give an offering to a monk or a nun to support their practice, or a disciple might give an offering to a Lama. Such offerings accumulate merit for those who make them, and therefore help to deepen their understanding and awareness. The practice of the Mandala Offering, however, is concerned with offering nothing less than the universe. The structure of the meditation presents the whole universe, with everything worthy of offering, whether material or imagined, including, for example, the physical environment, whose natural beauty does not have to be fabricated, but is simply there to be offered. The Mandala Offering integrates all these perceptions into a single meditation. If this is done with an attitude of faith and devotion, the meditator's mind becomes extremely powerful, and the merit and awareness that result are no different from what could result from actually offering the whole universe to the Three Jewels.

Mandala is a Sanskrit word which the Tibetans translated by chin khor [khyil 'khor], which means center and circumference. In the Mandala Offering, a center with its surrounding environment forms a complete system, and constitutes an ideal conception of the universe. Its cosmology is based upon the conception of the central mountain, Sumeru, [ri rab] as axis of the universe, with its continents, mountain ranges and so forth, concentrically arrayed.

For the physical offering we use a metal plate on which to heap up grain, perhaps with precious stones mixed in, in a symmetrical pattern on the plate. This is used to focus the mind on the meditation and to provide a support for the very complex visualization of the universe being offered.

The Variety of Cosmologies

This symbolic cosmology disturbs many people in the modern world because they take it to contradict what we experience with our own senses and with the technology we have now developed. These days we have a conception of the universe that includes our solar system and our own realm as a spherical planet turning around the sun. People have evidence of this, and therefore see a discrepancy between the present world view and the world view presented in the Mandala Offering.

Buddhahood is a state of omniscience; from that omniscience the Buddha spoke of this cosmology but not as the only one. Different beings, because of their different karmic tendencies and different levels of awareness, experience the universe in different ways. So in many of the Buddha's teachings, especially in the vast sutra known as the Avatamsaka, various cosmologies are presented. Some involve only a single continent. Others have a multiplicity of worlds, such as the Mandala Offering pattern. Others involve planetary systems, spherical worlds, and so forth. Any one of these various cosmologies is completely valid for the beings whose karmic projections cause them to experience their universe in that way. There is a certain relativity in the way one experiences the world.

This means that all the possible experiences of every being in the six realms of existence, shaping the ways in which each perceives the universe, are based upon karmic inclinations and degrees of individual development. Thus, on a relative level, any cosmology is valid. On an ultimate level no cosmology is absolutely true. It cannot be universally valid, given the different conventional situations of beings.

We have quite a number of people here today. If we all lay down to take a nap and had dreams, and if someone said on waking, "My dream was the only true one. All the rest of you had false dreams," how plausible would we find that? We all have different perceptions based on our individual karmic tendencies.

In order to accumulate merit and develop awareness, it is most effective to offer what is most beautiful. Because of our dualistic clinging, we feel attraction to what we consider good, wholesome or beautiful and aversion to what we consider ugly or disgusting. When we choose what to offer, we should acknowledge that we have this dualistic clinging and only offer what pleases us. Of all the possible cosmologies, the most beautiful, the most pleasing as an object of meditation, seems to be this mandala pattern of the central mountain with four continents. Since we wish to offer only the best, this beautiful model of the universe is used.

Making Pure Offerings

In India, during the time of the Buddha, there was an old couple who were very poor and had only a small plot of land, barely enough to get by. One day they realized they were growing old and were coming closer and closer to death. They felt they should make use of the precious opportunity of being human by performing at least one gesture that would accumulate great merit and develop their awareness before they died. They discussed what particular formal act would be most appropriate. As it happened, Shariputra, one of the wisest of the Buddha's disciples, lived nearby. They decided to invite the Venerable Shariputra to their home and serve him a midday meal as an offering. They would then make prayers of aspiration in his presence to receive this blessing.

The old couple made their preparations, invited Shariputra, offered him the meal, formulated their prayers, and received his blessing. And afterward things went on much as before, except that when the growing season was finished and they went along with everyone else to harvest their rice, they found that all the grains in their small paddy were not rice at all but pure gold.

Soon everyone was talking about the field of golden rice, and the news quickly reached the ears of Ajatasatru, a famous king of Buddhist India. He said to himself, "This is entirely improper. I'm the king, I should have control of that field." He ordered his ministers to confiscate the land from the old couple and to give them another rice paddy of equal size elsewhere. His messengers duly went out, found the old couple, and moved them to another plot of land. But when this had been done, the confiscated grains of gold turned to rice once again, and the rice on the couple's new land became gold. Word of this got back to the king and he said, "Go, do it again. Take the golden rice."

This happened seven times. Each time the messengers took the land from the old couple and gave them another plot, the same change took place; the king was left with rice and the old couple had the gold.

By now people began to wonder why this was happening. They went to see the Buddha and described the situation. The Buddha explained the karmic connection between the meritorious act and the result the old couple were experiencing even in the same lifetime. The event became a famous example of the unfailing nature of the karmic process. It did a great deal to establish people's understanding of karma as a factor in all that happens, and revealed the connection between what is done and what is experienced.

The old couple's action was extremely meritorious for two reasons. First, the object of their respect and devotion was Shariputra, an extremely pure and holy being. This is what is technically termed the "field." If the object of our devotion and offerings, the field upon which we are working, is a pure one, it is very fertile in blessings. The second reason was the couple's pure motivation in making the offering out of respect and faith. The double purity of field and motivation made the offering powerful and great merit was accumulated.

In the case of the Mandala Offering, these elements are at work as well: what is chosen as the field, the object of our offerings, is the Three

Jewels, which are completely pure and embody inconceivable blessing, and our own pure motivation in making the offering to develop merit and perfect awareness. It is the coming together of these circumstances that make the practice so effective.

With reference to the merit involved, the Buddha said that the wish to offer the mandala (to say nothing of actually offering it) or making the offering plate used during the practice, if done properly, would accumulate merit that would give dominion over the world.

Now all of you are intelligent people, and no doubt it has occurred to you that there seems to be a difference between the formal Mandala Offering piling rice on a plateand what the old couple offered to Shariputra, which was almost everything they had. Indeed, you may feel that there is a fundamental difference between these two kinds of offering. But there isn't. There is actually a great similarity between them, and the link is our motivation.

The Importance of Motivation

During the Buddha's lifetime there lived in India a Buddhist king who planned to sponsor an assembly wherein the Buddha and five hundred of his disciples, all realized Arhats, would spend the three months of the summer retreat. The king would provide them with a park to stay in and offer them all the food and clothing they needed. When the Buddha came to stay in this grove with his disciples, it was their daily custom to dedicate the merit of their activity for the benefit of all beings. Following the midday meal the Buddha would recite a prayer to this effect: "May all the virtue and merit achieved by the King through sponsoring this summer retreat be shared for the benefit of all sentient beings."

Now there was an old beggar woman who lived in the town. Though poverty-stricken, she had a wholesome frame of mind; when she saw the king undertaking this project, she thought to herself, "Wonderful! Here is a man who because of his previous accumulation of merit has a fortunate rebirth as a powerful king. Now he's utilizing that opportunity to render service to Buddha and his attendants. He is ensuring continuous accumulation of merit, development of awareness, and definite progress on the path to Liberation. How wonderful this is!" The old beggar woman was truly thankful and glad to see the king undertaking this virtuous work; she had a deep sense of joy that someone was accumulating such merit.

One day after the midday meal, the Buddha turned to the king and said, "Your majesty, should I share the merit as usual using your name, or should I insert the name of someone who has more merit than you?" The king thought to himself, "What's he talking about? There can't be anyone with more merit than I." So he said, "Your Reverence, if in fact there is a person with more merit than I, then please by all means share the merit on their behalf." So the Buddha proceeded to dedicate the merit accumulated by this old beggar woman for the benefit of all sentient beings. This went on for a number of days. Every day the Buddha would use the name of the beggar woman instead of the king's name, and the king grew depressed.

The king's ministers now began discussing how to cheer him up. One of them, who was very bright and rather crafty, thought of a plan. He organized an offering of food to the Buddha and his five hundred attendants, a fine feast of fruit to be brought on platters. Then he told the servants who were to carry the fruit into the shrine room, "While you're still outside the shrine, spill the food on the ground."

So when they were bringing the food to the temple, they spilled it. Just as there are many beggars in India today, so there were then too, and the beggars came hurrying to take some food for themselves. The minister ordered the servants to beat the beggars back and, pointing out the old beggar woman, said, "Be especially rough on her." The servants began to beat and kick the old woman to keep her away from the food. She became so angry at this that she completely lost her sense of rejoicing in the king's merit: her rage utterly destroyed her positive attitude.

That day when the Buddha dedicated the merit at the meal, the king's name was back in the prayer.

Now there were many disciples present who were very disturbed at this and entertained a great deal of doubt; they could not understand why the Buddha had in the first place replaced the king's name with the old woman's, then later replaced the old woman's name with the king's. They asked the Buddha, and thus gave him an opportunity to explain that situations are not only shaped by the karmic process, but also demonstrate the extreme importance of our attitudes. In fact, our mental attitude is the most crucial factor in any situation.



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Vows

For the practice of Dharma to be truly effective, two things are necessary. First, you must see that the essential nature of samsara is suffering and, on the basis of a thorough understanding of this suffering, desire to be liberated from unenlightened existence. Second, you must come to an appreciation of Enlightenment, or Buddhahood, and generate the desire to attain it. In this way, you make a choice between samsara, which you abandon, and Enlightenment, which you determine to achieve.

Although it may seem contradictory, in order to practice Dharma, we actually need to be just as concerned with the world as we are with Dharma practice not in the sense of being caught up in worldly projects and schemes for making money, but in thinking about what it really means to live in this world. For example, we are human beings and subject, therefore, to the sufferings characteristic of our condition: birth, old age, sickness and death. We also belong to one of the six realms of samsaric existence, which encompass the experience of every being in this world. We must meditate again and again on the sufferings that attend each one of these states. This is the kind of concern with the world that is crucial for the practice of Dharma.

The Three Levels of Vows

Those who take ordination (dom pa [sdom pa]) as monks or nuns do so because they understand that involvement with the world is difficult and essentially fruitless. They take ordination to simplify their lives and direct themselves toward practice Ordination is most important because it forms the vessel for our practice of Dharma. If we think of the Dharma as nectar, fine beer, or cream that is being poured into a bowl, then clearly, the vessel must

be clean and without leaks. If not, whatever is poured into it will be spoiled or lost

There are three levels of taking vows: the Hinayana or outer level; the Mahayana or inner level; and the Vajrayana or secret level. The ordination described above corresponds to what the Hinayana teachings call Pratimoksa , the vows of individual liberation, (so sot tar pay dom pa [so sot that pa'i sdom pa]). It is the outer level of commitment to practice. The inner level corresponds to the contents of the vessel, which is the Bodhisattva vow in the Mahayana tradition This is the development of compassion for all other beings and the deepening awareness of emptiness as the ultimate nature of all phenomena. The secret level is Vajrayana practice, like adding something to enrich the liquid in the vessel and make it even more delicious, as we might add milk, sugar, or salt to tea.

Many of us have taken a certain step in committing ourselves to the teachings, whether or not this is reflected in formal ordination We may have vows of the layman, of the novice nun or monk, or of a fully ordained nun or monk. Many of us have taken the Bodhisattva vows, and all of us who are involved with the Vajrayana path have some commitment to the tantric vows, samaya [dam tshig].

We often fail to live up to vows we have taken, and when we fall short, Dorje Sempa meditation is very beneficial. It is also helpful to have a clear idea of just how difficult the vows may actually be to keep. Many people feel that a monk's vows or nun's vows, for example, are very difficult to keep, while the Bodhisattva vows are easy to keep and the Tantric vows involve no effort whatsoever, as if they kept themselves. Actually, the reverse is the case. If you are looking for vows that are easy to keep, the easiest by far are the monk's and nun´s.

The famous Indian teacher Atisa, who brought the teachings of the three yanas to Tibet, once said that when he undertook the practice of Buddhism, he first took the vows of a novice and then full ordination. By being scrupulously aware of the various rules of monastic conduct, he was able to preserve these vows without a single infraction. Later he went on to take the Bodhisattva vow only to find that he was breaking it quite regularly several times a day he would catch himself in a particular thought or action contrary to its spirit. But he would not let an hour pass before he had recognized this, openly confessed it, and reconfirmed his dedication to the Bodhisattva vow. Then after he had taken the tantric vows he compared the number of times he fell short to the particles of dust that would collect on a polished metal plate in a dust storm, or to the drops of rain in a downpour. His infractions were continual.

When people heard of Atisa's report, they began worrying: "You seem to be saying, Lama, that once we have begun Vajrayana practice, there is no hope of achieving Enlightenment, because our vows will be continually broken."

Atisa replied, "No, that's not the case at all. In fact, through the blessing of the Buddha we have skillful means to purify all our shortcomings, and many of our other negativities and unwholesome qualities as well." Then

he taught the meditation of Dorje Sempa and its associated visualizations as an extremely effective way to purify not only infractions, but also our whole stream of being.

If we are aware of our body, speech, and mind as identical with the body, speech and mind of the Yidam, then all the tantric vows are included and fulfilled. When form is pure form, all sound is intrinsically mantra, and the mind is absorbed in the samadhi associated with the deity, then all vows are perfectly kept.

It is not the case that you must take ordination in order to be able to practice. You can develop compassion, meditate effectively, and realize Emptiness without any kind of formal commitment; but without that commitment you are far more likely to encounter many obstacles. With some commitment, such as ordination, or a disciplined way of life, there is a greater chance that your meditation will be effective, and that you will be able to carry it through to completion without many obstacles arising.

The Five Basic Commitments

Five vows are fundamental to all monks, nuns, and ordained laypersons. The first of these is the vow not to kill. If you have no such vow, it is more difficult to guard against the negative action of taking life. The act of killing creates a tremendous obstacle and contributes to hellish rebirth in future lives. Even in this life, we can see that people who kill others incur mental and physical suffering, loss of wealth, legal punishments, even the death penalty. So even on this obvious level, not taking life has benefits: peace of mind, avoidance of injury or the loss of wealth and freedom. If you are committed to the preservation of life, you avoid all these dangers.

The second vow is not to take what is not given. In one Tibetan word for thief, kun ma [rkun ma], the syllable 'ma' can mean "low" or "debased." It implies that stealing debases your own existence and makes you increasingly poor; it has a degenerative effect on your mind, wealth and enjoyment of life. The more you steal, the more you are deprived of what you are trying to get. In this life, there are penalties for theft: fines, jail sentences, and suffering. Furthermore, stealing contributes to states of deprivation and poverty in the future, and to rebirth as a hungry ghost. The vow not to steal helps you to avoid these unfavorable situations.

The third root vow is not to lie. Any lie you speak has a negative effect on your progress towards Enlightenment. It also gives you a reputation for never telling the truth. The one verbal action, however, that completely breaks the ordination is a lie regarding your attainment. You might present yourself as someone who has deep realization, when you have not, or give extensive and profound teachings as though you understood Dharma, when you do not. To confuse beings in this way is an extremely negative act, and the most serious kind of lie. In the Buddha's words, to commit this kind of lie is a greater negative action than to kill all the beings in the universe, because you cause beings to deviate from the Path of Liberation, lead them to lower states of existence, prolong the time they spend in samsara, and postpone

their enlightenment. By lying about your attainment, you commit an action far worse than simply taking their lives. The third vow, therefore, commits us to avoid untruthful speech as much as possible and, especially, not to lie about our attainment.

In a monk's, nun's or celibate layperson's ordination, the fourth vow is to avoid all sexual activity. People are very attached to and concerned about sexual activity and take it to be a kind of bliss. Perhaps this is true on a relative level, but the ultimate state of bliss, of stable and permanent happiness, is incomparably beyond sexual experience; and, in a certain sense, sexual activity keeps you from this realization.

Vajrayana physiology describes the creative energy of the body as white tig le and red tig le [thig le] which are intimately connected with the experience of orgasm. If their potential is lost during sexual activity, this causes a state of discomfort or unease in body and mind that prevents us from achieving a stable state of bliss.

Celibacy is not abnormal repression or great hardship. On the contrary, it contributes to the achievement of true and stable happiness. The Buddha said that ordinary people take sexual enjoyment as the pinnacle of human happiness. But that kind of bliss only produces a certain sense of unease and discomfort in mind and body, because it can never be complete. This unfortunate state is like that of a old dog gnawing on a bone: the dog has no teeth to chew with and the hard bone actually cuts his gums; but he tastes the blood, and thinks, "Oh, this is delicious. I want to eat even more." So he continues chewing and chewing, not realizing that the delicious taste comes from his own blood. He gnaws the bone with bleeding gums and makes the wounds deeper and deeper; eventually, they become infected and turn into sores. What the dogs takes as ultimate happiness becomes pain.

In general, the problem with sexual attachment is perhaps not so much sexual activity in itself, but the fact that it leads to other things that are even more negative. For example, if a man and a woman are very attached to each other, and if the woman is attracted by another man, jealousy, anger, and obsession immediately arise in her lover's mind. As long as there is attachment, such emotions are present, like servants who follow a master. The point is that desire leads to many things that are far more negative and detrimental to your religious progress. The other problem, of course, is that when people have sexual relations they very often have children, and then find themselves completely involved in raising them, leaving much less time for Dharma practice. With the practical aims of simplifying your life, therefore, a celibate ordination is considered important for intensive practice.

In general, our emotions are such that the more we indulge them, the more we need to; the more we pay attention to them, the more inexhaustible they become. There is, however, a solution: we can simply cut off attachment and say, "Finished." We should approach the vow of celibacy with the attitude that sexual activity is no longer a part of our lives. There will be no difficulty as long as we have that total commitment. But as long as we pay

attention to the emotions and indulge in them, they will continue to arise inexhaustibly.

After ordination, monks, nuns, and celibate laypersons should avoid any kind of frivolity games, movies, television, dancing or singing. We may ask, "What's the harm in them? What's the benefit of giving them up?" First of all, they waste a good deal of time and promote various other activities which distract from practice. Secondly, they actually contribute to increasing the emotions. For example, while we are watching television, we are not practicing Dharma. Furthermore, what we see usually stimulates and encourages emotional responses, and thus works against the purpose of our ordination.

The fifth vow concerns the use of intoxicants, specifically alcohol, which obstructs the mental clarity that is so important in meditation, particularly for someone who is practicing the Vajrayana. In this tradition, it is said that if one is engaged in tantric practice, the loss of clarity through alcohol sows the seeds for rebirth in hell.

Alcohol is often referred to as the root of other problems. A traditional story tells of a pure and disciplined monk who went out one day to beg for food. He came to the door of a house where a woman invited him in for the noonday meal. Once she had him in the house, she locked the door and pointed to a goat standing in the corner of the main room and to a bottle of alcohol on the table. "You can either kill that goat, make love to me, or drink that alcohol," she said. "Unless you do one of the three, I won't let you out of this house." The monk thought to himself, "I'm an ordained monk. I can't make love to the woman. I can't kill an animal voluntarily, for I can't take life. I'm not supposed to drink, but it seems to be the least harmful of the actions." So saying, "I'll drink the alcohol," he downed the bottle. Becoming thoroughly intoxicated and consequently sexually aroused, he made love to the woman, became hungry, and killed the goat for food. In this way, intoxication leads to many other things that can be more negative than the simple fact of intoxication itself.

Implicitly rejected in the fifth vow are also all kinds of drugs such as marijuana. The actual wording proscribes the use of fermented liquor, distilled liquor, and anything that intoxicates; it seems fairly obvious that something like marijuana intoxicates the mind. Some people think it produces a kind of bliss, and that may be true in an extremely brief and limited way, but basically it makes people stupid and lazy. They spend a lot of money for no purpose and get little done either in their worldly work or in Dharma practice. Eventually, they become very unhappy mentally and encounter many physical problems too. In short, marijuana robs the mind of clarity, causing it to wander and become distracteda situation that is most detrimental to the development of effective meditation.

Tobacco, too, has a very detrimental effect on the body and mind. Padmasambhava, and many of the Nyingmapa ter tons [gter ston] who discovered his concealed teachings, were unanimous in saying that substances that are smoked contribute to lower states of rebirth even when the smoke touches the body of someone not actually smoking. So if you have

taken the vow to abandon intoxicants, you should avoid the use of alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, and all drugs that cloud the reason or otherwise impair the functioning of mind and body. For someone who doesn't have formal ordination, to avoid the use of intoxicants as much as possible is in itself a step forward. To be able to do without all these distractions, and concentrate our efforts on Dharma practice is a wonderful thing.

In the Buddha's teachings, we often find reference to the importance of moral discipline. "Morality is like the earth. It supports everything, animate and inanimate. It is the foundation of all positive qualities." Having moral discipline, another text says, we engage in study and contemplation of the teachings in order to enter into the effective practice of meditation. Some level of discipline is absolutely essential for our practice to be effective.

That doesn't mean that people who lack a high degree of discipline should feel discouraged or think, "I'm useless, I can't do anything. Without ordination I'm hopeless." That is not the point. Even for an ordinary person without formal ordination, the most important thing is to deal with life in as sensible a way as possible, so that we do not give rise to a great deal of anger, aggression, clinging, or greed. This is the crucial point.

For those who have taken ordination, another critical point is to guard against pride. Whether it is based upon your ordained status or on your erudition and intellectual understanding, pride goes against the purpose of practice and destroys its benefits. To think, "I'm a monk. I'm special, these people aren't. They're lower than I am," is an attitude completely contrary to the spirit of the ordination. It destroys the virtues you would otherwise develop by following the ordained way of life.

If you are quite intelligent, and your learning causes arrogance, you may think, "I'm superior to these simpletons. They don't understand as much as I do." Such intellectual pride runs contrary to a true understanding of Dharma, and, in fact, destroys much of the benefit of your practice. The Buddha compared pride to a hard rock on which drops of water can make no impression. These drops represent the positive qualities you develop through practice. If your pride has solidified to this extent, then there is no way for positive qualities to penetrate. Much the same thing happens if we regard Dharma simply as an intellectual pastime. If we merely accumulate information without practicing or experiencing what we have learned, our faith and compassion will diminish. We then become very indifferent to the teachings and think, "I've heard that before. I understand that already." If we persist in this callous attitude, we reach a state where we cannot be helped. We have cut ourselves off from all possibility of being rescued from our stupidity. The Buddha said that even the greatest evil-doer can be saved, but a person who has become apathetic towards the Dharma cannot be helped, because such a mind has become petrified and closed to the teachings. On the other hand, a Bodhisattva has gained a complete understanding of all aspects of Dharma as presented in the Sutras, the Vinaya (discipline), the Abhidharma, and so forth. In all descriptions of the Bodhisattva, however, there is never any reference to pride. Pride and realization are mutually exclusive.

When opportunities to practice Dharma occur, you should know that they arise from previous merit and that they afford a chance for you to accumulate further merit and develop awareness, and thus help other beings. You should also understand that it is because of the blessing of your Lama and the Three Jewels that you have such opportunities.

The focus of this teaching is to encourage people who are in a favorable situation, and not to discourage those who are not. There is no need to feel, "I'm only a layperson, just a householder (chim pa [khyim pa]). I haven't taken any vows, so I can't get enlightened. I'm hopeless." The point is to be encouraged to concentrate on what you do have, because at the very least you have the Seed of Buddhahood. You have the precious human birth, which provides the opportunity and the leisure to realize fully this inherent potential. You have met with the teachings of Dharma and, in particular, the teachings of the Vajrayana, which give you the means to realize the Enlightened Mind. Everything depends upon understanding what you have, recognizing the blessings of the situation, and then making diligent, intelligent use of them. This is the way to approach Enlightenment.

Is this to say that there is no difference between someone who holds ordination and someone who doesn't? No. There is a difference, which can be explained in the following way. Suppose there are two houses filled with identical treasure, exactly the same, except that one has a single door that is firmly bolted, and the other has many doors, all wide open. The house with the one door firmly bolted is in little danger of thieves, but the house with many open doors is always in danger of losing its precious contents. This is the difference between someone who has a formal discipline and lives up to it and someone who has not. Commitment to discipline through ordination gives the means to guard against faults and the loss of the benefits of Dharma practice. Without this formal commitment, one must have great diligence and intelligence, since the danger that mistakes will occur and benefits be lost is always present.

Questions and Answers

QUESTION: Some people are reluctant to take vows because they are afraid they may inadvertently break them, and then be in a worse situation than if they had never taken the vows. For example, a person might accidentally step on an insect.

ANSWER: Any act of killing breaks the vow, but the only act of killing that destroys the ordination is the willful murder of a human being. Even inadvertent killing would not break the vow completely. Aside from homicide, any other act of killing, intentional or not, is an infraction of the vow. In any case, killing is a negative act, whether or not you have taken the vow. You do not escape the consequences of even inadvertent killing and a certain element of bad karma is still involved. The purpose of the vow is to make a definite commitment to avoid killing.

Four considerations determine the gravity of any action. The four considerations are the object of the action, the intention, the act itself, and

the completion of that act. In the case of killing, there is the person being killed, the intent to kill, the act of killing, and an actual death. These four elements must be present for the vow to be completely broken. If only three are present, the act is less serious. If there are only two or one, the repercussions diminish accordingly.

In the case of killing an insect, for example, there is initially the perception of the object, the thought "That is an insect, a living thing. It has consciousness." Second is the motivation. One thinks, "I want to kill it." The third stage is actually to kill it. And the fourth is that the insect dies and one thinks, "Ah, good, it's dead." That completes the action. This act of taking a life is serious because all four elements are present; that makes it a conscious act and fully carried out.

QUESTION: There are people who don't take vows but behave in accord with them, and other people who take the vows and keep them. Is there a difference?

ANSWER: There is a difference in the power of the virtue and merit accumulated by someone who is following a discipline without vows and someone who has actually taken formal ordination, because the latter has done so with a conscious intention and in the presence of their teacher and the Three Jewels. This adds an element of power to the situation that can be extremely effective. The difference is between natural virtue and deliberate virtue, which involves the conscious practice of a certain conduct. While the virtue of someone without ordination and someone with ordination, both living a good life, is more or less the same, what seems to be different is the degree of strength, real stability, and power to practice.

QUESTION: How can we develop discipline?

ANSWER: To develop a disciplined way of life, you need to look at your own situation. If you are a monk or a nun, a discipline is clearly defined, but for an ordinary person some examination is necessary. You need to look at the way you are living, and, when you realize that certain acts, killing for example, are negative, you no longer want to do them. At this point you are your own witness, and abstaining from a particular negative action like killing or stealing gives a great deal of benefit. If you do not feel you can be celibate, you can at least be faithful in your relationship, not deceiving or harming the other person. You make your own decisions and are your own witness for that kind of commitment. On the other hand, someone who has taken formal ordination has the best witnesses the Three Jewels and the Lama; they make any action more powerful.

QUESTION: When I am taking a vow I get very nervous. I am afraid I will break it, and the presence of witnesses makes the whole thing even more unnerving.

ANSWER: It is not bad to feel nervous, because it means that you recognize you're undertaking something significant in the presence of an important witness. There is a sense of power and reality in the situation; it may frighten you, but it's not bad. It means you perhaps do not thoroughly understand the nature of what is going on, but at least you have some idea of

the significance of the commitment. Still, if you feel that it would be detrimental at this time to undertake any formal commitment now, that does not mean that your own personal commitment isn't good enough. Human rebirth comes about as result of discipline, and discipline is not just a monk's or nun's vows: discipline is a certain commitment, whether by yourself or through formal ordination, to a way of life that pursues certain kinds of activity and avoids others. Perhaps in the present circumstances it would be better for you to avoid committing yourself to something that makes you nervous. Whether it is in the context of formal ordination or not, a vow is still effective and your own personal commitment to vows like not killing, lying or stealing, is important and very beneficial.

QUESTION: I have an extreme problem with discipline and an organized way of life. I'm afraid of the methods you describe, because I know they go against my own nature. On the other hand, I think I am sincerely open to the teaching. How can I keep on being open to the teaching, even when the idea of discipline is so distasteful?

ANSWER: That is the purpose of the Four Contemplations that Turn the Mind towards Dharma practice: they automatically give rise to commitment. Instead of trying to force the commitment, you simply meditate in such a way that commitment becomes the only choice open to you. Given the situation we are in, how else could we behave except to have this commitment? Having seen things clearly, commitment tends to develop by itself. Perhaps a story will illustrate this point.

During the lifetime of Buddha Shakyamuni, there was a young man who was one of the Buddha's cousins. His name was Chungawo [gCung dGa bo]. Chungawo was married to a very beautiful woman. They were extremely happy together, but overly attached to each other. They simply could not bear to be out of each other's presence: wherever they went and whatever they did, they were always together. One day the Buddha saw that his cousin was ripe for training, so he went on his begging rounds as usual, holding his bowl, and stood in the road before the gate of his cousin's house waiting to receive anything he might be offered.

Chungawo had great faith, and when he saw the Buddha standing there, he said to his wife, despite his extreme attachment to her, "I must go and make an offering to the Buddha."

As he was going out the door, his wife grabbed him and said, "Where are you going? Don't leave me." and he said, "No, I'm just going down to the end of the road. The Buddha's there. I'm going to offer him some food and I'll come right back." She reluctantly agreed, but taking part of the hem of her dress, she licked it and said, "I want you back before that's dry."

Chungawo said, "Yes," and went out to make his offering. When he had filled the Buddha's bowl, the Buddha handed it back to him and said, "Here, you carry this," and started walking away slowly down the path. Chungawo was torn for a moment because he longed to get back to his wife, but simply could not ignore the instruction of someone like the Buddha, so he began following him. The Buddha led him along a road up into the forest, to the place where he was staying, a small hermitage with a shrine. All along

the road Chungawo could think of nothing but his wife, yet he was aware of his obligation to carry the Buddha's bowl, and at least hand it to him before he could run back home.

When they got to the hermitage the Buddha said, "Put the bowl down there. I'm leaving for a while, you stay here while I'm gone, and maybe sweep up a little. It's dusty, and there's a broom." Chungawo was in a quandary; a long time had already passed, it was getting later and later, and he wanted nothing more than to be back with his wife. But once again he felt some obligation to the Buddha, so he began to sweep as quickly as he could to get all the dirt out of the door so he could run down the road to his wife. But the more he swept the dirtier things seemed to get. As soon as he thought he had cleaned it all, he turned around and there was more dirt and dust on the floor than ever. So he started sweeping again, and again the dirt grew. This happened a number of times and finally he gave up, threw down the broom, and walked out of the hermitage.

There were two paths leading from the hermitage down to the village. One was the main broad path up which he had come with the Buddha and the other was an overgrown back path which wound down the hill. Chungawo thought, "I'll take the back path. I won't run into anybody and I'll get home as quickly as possible." But as he was going down this path, who should he see coming towards him but the Buddha. He thought, "I can't let him see me here," and ducked underneath a nearby bush. The branches of this bush hung down by the side of the road and formed a sort of little cave, into which Chungawo crawled, hoping to hide from the Buddha's gaze. But as the Buddha came up the path, the branches simply lifted up and there was Chungawo, crouching on the ground. The Buddha said, "What are you doing? Come with me." He took him back up the hill, and once again Chungawo found himself being led away from his wife and towards the hermitage.

This went on for days, as the Buddha continually found ways to keep him from returning home. Finally there came a point when Chungawo insisted that he simply couldn't stay any longer. So the Buddha said, "Well, all right, but just before you go, let me show you something. Take hold of my robe." Chungawo had no choice but to take hold of the Buddha's robes. All of a sudden he was flying through the air and then found himself on top of a high mountain, surveying a magnificent view in all directions.

While he and the Buddha were there enjoying the scenery, a very decrepit, wizened old woman approached them. The Buddha called Chungawo's attention to her and said, "Who is more beautiful, your wife or this old woman?" Chungawo exclaimed, "What do you mean? My wife is a hundred, no, a thousand times more beautiful than this old woman." The Buddha just said, "Let's go to the god realms. Take hold of my robes."

Chungawo did so, and immediately found himself in the god realms, a splendid environment of celestial palaces, with gods and goddesses enjoying sensual pastimes. Everything was so blissful that Chungawo was quite distracted from thoughts of his wife. Finally, after showing him the god realms, the Buddha took Chungawo to a palace inhabited by five hundred

beautiful goddesses, where a central throne stood vacant. Then the Buddha said to Chungawo, "Who is more beautiful, your wife or these goddesses?" Chungawo said, "These goddesses are a thousand times more beautiful than my wife." And the Buddha said, "Find out what's going on here." Chungawo approached one of the goddesses, and said, "Why is there no one on the central throne?" She replied, "There's no one to occupy it just yet. A human named Chungawo is thinking about taking ordination. He will become a monk and practice Dharma very strenuously. The virtue he accumulates will earn him a rebirth in this god realm. This is the seat he will occupy."

Chungawo went back to the Buddha as quickly as he could and said, "Could I take ordination now?" The Buddha said, "That would be fine." They returned to the human realm and the Buddha bestowed the vows of a fully ordained monk upon Chungawo, who became a member of the Buddhist community and began practicing diligently.

One day the Buddha called all his monks together and said, "All my disciples are very good monks. You are all dedicated to attaining complete Enlightenment for the benefit of all beings. Except one, Chungawo the only reason he keeps his vows is to gain rebirth in the god realms, where he wants to enjoy worldly pleasure. You should have nothing to do with him. I don't want you to talk to him, or share a seat with him. Ignore him completely."

Now Chungawo was doing his best to be a very pure, disciplined monk, a good disciple of the Buddha. His memory of the goddesses had made him forget all about his wife, and he was busy trying to keep his vows as well as he could. Suddenly he discovered he was being ostracized. Nobody would speak to him. As soon as he spoke, people turned their backs and walked away. They would neither sit with him nor eat with him, and he became extremely depressed. Finally, he went to the Buddha and said, "What's wrong with me? Why does everyone ignore me?"

The Buddha said, "Don't worry, let's go visit the hell realms this time. Take hold of my robe." Chungawo did so and they soon arrived. The Buddha took him through one of the hells, where they saw beings burned, boiled, sawn in half or undergoing other tortures as a result of previous karma, and then they came to a vast pot full of molten metal. Fiendish-looking beings were stirring the pot, although no one was actually in it. So Chungawo went up to one of them and said, "Why are there beings in all the other pots, but this one is empty?" And the fiend said, "There is a monk named Chungawo, who thinks he is keeping his discipline very purely. That merit will earn him rebirth in the god realms, but once that's exhausted, this is going to be his home." Chungawo became extremely frightened and the Buddha took him back to the human realm.

At that point, Chungawo realized that any concern with the world was pointless, and that he should really be completely focused on attaining enlightenment. He became a very accomplished meditator who was noted for his ability to absorb himself completely in meditation, to rest his mind one-pointedly without any sensory distraction.

The point of the story is that by understanding death and impermanence, the sufferings of samsara and the karmic process, you spontaneously discover a commitment to pure Dharma practice.

Ordination, which helps to cut off certain activities that are harmful to oneself and others, is one way of dealing with the emotions, and a very effective one. But not everyone has to take ordination; indeed, it is very difficult for most people to undertake something as drastic as monastic ordination, where one leaves one's family and so forth, and becomes a monk or a nun. It is not possible or practical for most people, and they should not feel that ordination is absolutely necessary: there are other ways of dealing with the emotions. Thanks to the kindness and blessings of the Buddha, we have instructions regarding Bodhicitta, the love and compassion for all other beings. There are also ways of skillfully transmuting the emotions without having to cut them off or suppress them. So one does not have to sever connections with family and friends. The last words the Buddha spoke before he passed into Nirvana were: "I have shown you the way to Liberation. Actually achieving it is up to you." The teacher can show the way to Liberation, but we have to experience it for ourselves. The path of Bodhicitta is open to all of us.

QUESTION: How is the merit of virtuous action lost?

ANSWER: The causes of losing merit and the benefits of our practice fall into three principal categories. The first is pride in what we have accomplished. It is detrimental to think, "I'm a wonderful person to have been so virtuous and accumulated this merit. I must be quite special." A second way of impairing the effectiveness of merit involves regret, for example, following an act of generosity with the thought, "Oh, I shouldn't have given all that away, that was stupid." The third way is through anger. Giving rise to very strong malevolent emotions destroys or impairs the merit of virtuous practice. We guard against this loss by sharing the merit. As long as merit remains our own, it may be destroyed, but once we have sincerely and without attachment shared it with everyone, it cannot be impaired even in these three ways. Through the simple act of sharing we guard against all these negative emotions.





7
Women, Siddhi, Dharma

Women and men, children and adults, all share, to some extent, the opportunities and freedoms of our human condition (see Glossary, "Precious Human Birth"). By contrast, animals and those in other states of existence lack these opportunities and freedoms. The distinction between human and beast wild carnivores living in the jungles, deep sea creatures or insect life is made precisely on the basis of this opportunity to practice the Dharma.

Even among human births, there is a tremendous variety in our capacities to recognize and use this opportunity. The most excellent kind of human birth is called precious; in it, a person can make meaningful use of his or her life. This has nothing to do with social standing or any of the ordinary ways in which we judge people; it certainly makes no difference, for example, whether one is a woman or man: the only question is whether or not the advantages of a human rebirth are appreciated and employed.

Regardless of whether you are a man or a woman, regardless of your particular situation in this life, if you have faith, confidence, and diligence, if you have compassion and wisdom, you can become enlightened. If you are merely caught up in your emotional confusion and continue to let that dominate your life, no matter whether you are a man or a woman, Enlightenment will be difficult to attain. But if you have the necessary qualities for Dharma practice, the kind of body you have makes no difference at all.

The Ultimate Nature of Mind is Neither Male nor Female

The reason for this total equality of opportunity is the nature of mind itself, which is neither male nor female. There is no such thing as the intrinsic nature of one person's mind being better than someone else's; on the

ultimate level the empty, clear and unimpeded nature of mind exhibits no limiting qualities such as maleness or femaleness, superiority or inferiority. On the worldly level, of course, there are situations in which one person's mind suffers more obscurations than another's. This has more to do with karma than with gender or social standing. Even in the various realms of rebirth, there is no ultimate difference between one mind and another. The profound teachings of the Buddha dharma provide ways to eliminate obscurations and arrive at a direct experience of mind.

On a relative level, however, there are differences, including the way in which the physical embodiment is formed at the subtle level of energy channels and energy centers. According to the teachings of tantra, the way in which a mind incarnates in a male body is subtly different from the way in which it incarnates in a female body. In the psycho-physical make-up of a male, there is more force, more concentrated and direct energy, whereas in that of a female there is more spaciousness, signifying Wisdom. These relative differences should always be understood in the context of the ultimate nature of mind.

If in studying and practicing the Buddha's teachings, women understand what is being said, they will attain Enlightenment. If men understand, they will attain Enlightenment.

In the Vajrayana tradition, the lives of the Mahasiddhas of Buddhist India represent models of Dharma practice. Among these are men such as Tilopa and Naropa and women such as Sukasiddhi and Niguma whose Enlightenment came about because they made the fullest possible use of a human birth, not because they were in a particular kind of body.

Tara, the Protector

One great Bodhisattva, however, is always associated with the female form. This is Tara, the Liberator. Of her origin, this story is told.

Many millions of years in the past, there was a certain universe in which lived a princess, a young woman who was the daughter of the king of the realm. Her name was Yeshe Dawa [ye shes zla ba], which means "Moon of Primordial Awareness." And at that time in that world there was a Buddha whose name was Tönyö Drupa [don yod grub pa]. The princess developed a great faith in this Buddha and received teachings from him. In particular she received instructions in generating Bodhicitta, the compassionate concern for all other beings. The special vow the princess made was that until she achieved Enlightenment she would continue to incarnate as a woman, always taking a female form to benefit beings through her Buddha activity. Having made this initial vow, through her Bodhicitta, she donned the armor of this commitment. Overcoming all obstacles, she worked courageously to accumulate merit, to deepen her awareness, and to make herself more effective in helping sentient beings liberate themselves from confusion.

When teaching the root tantra associated with Tara, the Buddha praised this great Bodhisattva: "Tara is she who frees and protects beings from all possible fears and sufferings that they can encounter. Tara is she

who closes the doors to the lower realms of existence. Tara is she who leads them on the path to higher states of being." With these words, the Buddha extolled the virtue of Tara in granting us protection and deliverance from all the fears that are part of the human condition.

Another way of conceiving of Tara is as an emanation of Chenrezi, the Bodhisattva of Compassion. At one time, Chenrezi, viewing the suffering of all beings throughout the world, was so moved that he shed two tears; the tear that fell from his right eye turned into the green form of the Bodhisattva Tara, and the tear from the left eye became the white form.

Machik Drupay Gyalmo and Tipupa

Amitayus is the Buddha of Immortality. One great Siddha noted for her practice of Amitayus was a woman called Machik Drupay Gyalmo [ma gcig grub pa'i rgyal mo]. She meditated upon this deity and attained not only Enlightenment, the ultimate goal of such practice, but also the more mundane accomplishment of prolonging her life. Tradition has it that she lived five hundred years through her practice of Amitayus.

While Machik Drupay Gyalmo was still alive and teaching in India, there flourished another celebrated teacher, Tipupa. His interesting history goes back to southern Tibet in the area of Lodrak where Marpa the Translator lived. Marpa had a number of sons; to the eldest, Tarma Doday [dar ma redo sde], Marpa intended to pass on his transmission. Marpa was thwarted by the untimely death of Tarma Doday, who was thrown from his horse and suffered a fatal concussion. Before the young man died, however, he was able to make use of a technique his father had taught him: he was able to transfer his consciousness, not from the physical body to a state of enlightened awareness, but into another physical body, a corpse. The practice required that the body, whether human or not, have only recently died and be fit to receive life. The mind of the dying person could then be projected into that corpse and reanimate it to carry on life as before.

The problem, of course, is that a new corpse is not always easy to find. When Marpa's son died, the whole area was searched and all that could be found was a dead pigeon. Someone had seen it struck by a hawk in the air and knocked out of the sky; it was dead when it fell to the ground. So he picked up the warm corpse of the pigeon and went running back to Marpa. They placed the pigeon on Tarma Doday's breast, and as his body began to die, the pigeon came to life, shaking its feathers and sitting up.

Marpa kept the pigeon for several days, feeding it well, and taking good care of it. While he was meditating, he realized what needed to be done. Marpa told his son, now incarnate as the pigeon, about a charnel ground in India. Having been there himself, Marpa knew the directions and outlined the way very clearly. Marpa lived near the southern border of Tibet, where the journey to India is relatively short through the low passes over the Himalayas. "Fly to India," he said, "and find this charnel ground. The cremation of a young man is about to take place. You will be able to transfer your consciousness from the pigeon's body to his, and thus experience

human existence again." Then he let the pigeon go. It circled three times around Marpa and his wife, and flew off south.

When the bird reached India, it found the funeral procession, led by a Brahmin couple whose fifteen-yer-old son, bright and full of promise, had contracted an infectious disease and suddenly died. As the mourners laid the corpse out for cremation, the pigeon landed on the head, and immediately fell over dead. Right then the boy began to wake and move again. At first the onlookers thought a ghoul had taken possession of the corpse and ran away in fright. But the boy was able to speak to them, and soon convinced the Brahmin family that their son had indeed come back to life, and without the help of demons.

In time this boy grew up to become a famous Buddhist meditator and teacher. Because of the pigeon that landed on his corpse, people called him Tipupa, meaning "Pigeon Boy," but his personal name was Trimay Shenyen [dri med bshes gnyen] which means "undefiled spiritual friend."

Tipupa was still alive and teaching in India when Milarepa's student Rechungpa [ras chung pa] decided to go there to seek out teachings the lineage had not yet received. He met and studied with Tipupa, and one day was going through a bazaar when someone approached him out of nowhere and said, "Well, if it isn't the young Tibetan yogin. You're in a lot of trouble. You have only seven days to live. Such a pity!" and then disappeared. Rechungpa was shocked, and wondered if the omen was genuine. He hurried to his teacher, Tipupa, who said, "It appears that this was an accurate prediction. A big obstacle to your life is coming, and unless you can deal with it skillfully, you will die. The most effective thing I can recommend is for you to go to see the woman teacher who is very skillful at transmitting the practice of Amitayus, the practice of immortality and longevity."

The woman was Machik Drupay Gyalmo. She was called Machik, "one mother" or "only mother," since she was maternally affectionate towards her students, who came to regard her as a mother. Drupay Gyalmo means "Queen of Siddhas." Tipupa sent Rechungpa to take teachings from her; by receiving the Amitayus empowerment and practice, Rechungpa was able to forestall the threat to his life. Through his connection with Machik, he received the teachings he would bring back to Tibet, where they entered into all the lineages of Tibetan Buddhism, especially the mainstream of the Kagyü school. To this day we find reference to the Longevity Empowerment of the Queen of Siddhas.

Gelongma Palmo

During the early development of Buddhism in India, before its transmission to other countries like Tibet, there lived a princess, daughter of an Indian king, an unusually beautiful and intelligent girl, a most promising heir to the kingdom. At a certain point in her youth, however, she contracted a particularly virulent form of a disease resembling leprosy. Open sores began to cover her entire body and her flesh started to fester. As terrible as this was, doctors could find no cure. Gradually it became obvious that she

was becoming a dangerous source of contagion and, as the disease progressed, she became disgusting to see. So cutting off all ties with her life as a princess, she left the palace and went into a forest hermitage. She took the vows of a nun in order to devote the last years of her life to intense Dharma practice.

During this time, she met a teacher who became very fond of her and was deeply moved by her situation. This teacher gave her the empowerment and the instruction for meditation on the eleven-faced, thousand-armed form of Chenrezi. For several years this was her main practice. During this time her disease got worse and worse; her extremities began to rot away, and her whole body was so completely covered with open sores that she couldn't even sleep at night; she was in extreme pain and dying. Then, in the semi-waking state that was her fitful way of sleeping, she had a dream, or vision: the impression that somebody dressed in brilliant white came into her room with a large vase filled with pure water and poured it all over her body. She felt that the disease was being shed like the skin of a snake, and that her body was being made whole again. When she woke up, she found her body renewed, as though nothing had ever troubled it. There was no sign of disease. Instantly she was filled with intense devotion and the conviction that her cure was due to the blessings of Chenrezi. At that moment she began to pray and meditate, and was blessed with a direct vision of the Bodhisattva, who dissolved into her. With this experience she attained a very high state of Realization and the direct experience of the nature of her mind.

The nun's name was Palmo [dpal mo], which means Lady of Glory, and she is known to the tradition as Gelongma Palmo. "Gelongma" [dge slong ma] simply means a fully ordained Buddhist nun. The teachings connected with the fasting ritual of the thousand-armed, eleven-faced form of Chenrezi were principally developed and spread by this nun; in fact, this popular practice is still referred to as the method or tradition of Gelongma Palmo. Many people used it as one of their main practices and now that Tibetan Lamas are bringing this meditation to the West, many westerners have also been inspired by it, and have taken part in nyung nay [smyung gnas], the fasting ritual.

Niguma, Chungpo Naljor, and Sukhasiddhi

Because of the great wisdom, learning and skillfulness the Buddha embodies, he gave appropriate teachings to counteract all our emotional afflictionseighty-four thousand different ones are mentioned. To eliminate them, he gave eighty-four thousand teachings, traditionally known as the Eighty-four Thousand Collections. Twenty-one thousand emotional afflictions arise from the root poison of desire. As an antidote for these, the Buddha explained the teachings of the Vinaya collection, the prescriptions for ethical behavior. To eliminate the twenty-one thousand emotional afflictions arising from hatred, he gave the twenty-one thousand teachings that make up the Sutra collection. The twenty-one thousand teachings given in the Abhidharma, the third collection, were designed to annihilate the twenty-one thousand emotional afflictions arising from the root of ignorance. Yet there

remain twenty-one thousand which result from the complex intermixture of the threedesire, hatred and ignorance. As antidotes to these, the Buddha gave the twenty-one thousand teachings which make up tantra, the teachings of the Vajrayana.

At this point the text follows a teaching by Lama Norlha on three teachers fundamentally important to the Shangba Lineage and, through it, to other traditions of practice in Tibet.

The teachings given by the Buddhas are not intellectual speculation, but are based on their personal experience of absolute Enlightenment. Having given up all that concerns "me" and "I," and having committed themselves to the benefit of all beings, whatever the difficulties, Buddhas continually experience perfect Enlightenment. These enlightened beings manifest in skillful ways to liberate beings, using whatever forms or appearances are appropriate.

Thus Buddhas and Bodhisattvas take all sorts of births: sometimes they come as kings and queens, princes, ministers, sometimes as commoners, peasants, animalswhatever is most practical to benefit beings, whatever is necessary to present the Dharma. Sometimes they appear as men. Sometimes as women. I will tell the story of two women, Niguma and Sukhasiddhi, who took the responsibility of demonstrating the Dharma in such a way that their teachings continue to benefit sentient beings to this day.

Nigurna

Niguma was born in Kashmir, a Muslim country, in a region called the Land of Great Magic. During the time of the previous Buddha, this land had been covered by water, and a naga king was in possession of it. An arhat, who was a disciple of the Buddha of that time, longed to erect a temple there, so he went to ask the naga king for a piece of solid ground. The naga king promised one, but only as big as the arhat's body could cover when he was sitting in meditation. The arhat gratefully accepted what was offered, and when the time came to take possession of the land, he performed a miracle: his sitting body covered the whole of that land. The naga king kept his promise, and the whole new land was offered to the arhat, whose name was Nyimay Gung.

With his miraculous power, the arhat made all the water disappear, and a magnificent temple and monastery were soon built there. People in the surrounding regions began to take notice of this new landscape and, especially, its most beautiful temple. They wanted to live there and discussed how to go about it. They finally decided to invite a great magician who could create a city all round the temple. Once he had done this and before he could undo his magical creation (as magicians are wont to do), the people destroyed him. So the settlement continued there, and the district acquired the reputation of a land of great magnificence and great magic.

This special place later became the birthplace of many mahasiddhas, among them Naropa. And here too was born the great female Bodhisattva

Niguma, who by auspicious coincidence happened to be born as the sister of Naropa, in a virtuous, noble family. In former lives she had generated the enlightened mind and followed the path of the Bodhisattvas. She now chose voluntary birth as a woman who would benefit and liberate others. During her lifetime as Niguma, the experiences and profound teachings that she had made her own in many previous eons were now further enlarged and reviewed with the other learned Mahasiddhas of her time. As Niguma, she experienced the perfect state of the ultimate awakened mind. Enlightenment manifested through her so that her entire being, including her physical form, transcended mundane existence, and experienced perfect Buddhahood within her lifetime.

Niguma received the ultimate teachings directly from Vajradhara, the primordial Buddha, in the form of personal initiation into all levels of the teachings Sutra, Abhidharma, and Tantra. As a result, she manifested as a tenth stage Bodhisattva; this means that even the subtlest obscurations were dispelled, so that her mind became one with the mind of the Buddha, attaining the Three Bodies of perfect Enlightenment. From her lifetime to this present day, she continues to manifest whatever subtle or more material form is necessary to benefit beings over limitless time.

Her foremost disciple was the Mahasiddha Chungpo Naljor [khyung po rnal 'byor], who was born in Tibet and travelled to India to receive the full transmission from her. In granting him the empowerments, Niguma also confirmed that not only he, but all his successors and followers would in the future have the good fortune to receive the blessing of dakinis, encounter enlightened beings, and perfect Liberation.

Chungpo Naljor

Chungpo Naljor was born in a year of the tiger in the southern part of Tibet, into a distinguished family. Chungpo is the family name the clan of the khyung, or Garuda, the legendary great bird that is guardian of the north. His father's name was Chungpo Chu-jar, and his mother's, Tashi. Thus, his own name meant "the yogin of the Garuda clan."

A portent marked his birth: The great Mahasiddha Amogha came flying through the air from India and made the prophecy that this newborn child, who was already highly realized, would in time come to India and there receive the profound transmissions that would make him a greater guide of beings.

The qualities of Chungpo Naljor began to manifest while he was still very young. When he was five years old, he told detailed stories about his past existences, and revealed insight into his lives to come, and into the future in general. By the age of ten, he had completed the secular curriculum, the studies any learned person would undertake: philosophy, astrology, astronomy, and so on. By his twelfth year he had commenced the study of religion, beginning with Bon. He then began studying and practicing Nyingma teachings, including the core practice of Dzok chen [rdzogs chen], the Great Perfection.

At this point Chungpo Naljor journeyed to India, where he studied with many learned and highly realized beings. Foremost among them were the two dakinis, Sukhasiddhi and Niguma. From them he received the ultimate pith instructions which led him to experience the highest stages of the Bodhisattva's path and established his mind in the enlightened state of Dorje Chang.

His meeting with Niguma came about in this fashion. After he had received teachings from many great Siddhas, Chungpo Naljor again searched for highly realized teachers from whom he could receive more advanced instruction. The most realized teachers he encountered told him that one with his qualities should seek the great Bodhisattva who was not separate from Dorje Chang in her realization and in the profound teachings she could skillfully transmit.

Chungpo Naljor asked where he could meet such an enlightened being and was told that her presence could manifest anywhere to highly purified beings. Unfortunate beings, those still caught in emotional afflictions, would find it very difficult to encounter her at all, since she had dissolved her physical form, attained the rainbow body, and achieved the level of Dorje Chang. Every now and again, however, she would visit the most sacred cremation grounds and, leading a host of dakinis, would preside over great ritual offering feasts, ganacakras (tso chi kor lo [tshogs kyi 'khor lo]). There someone might have an opportunity of seeing the great Niguma.

As soon as Chungpo Naljor heard the name of the great dakini, he felt such devotion, like an electric shock, that tears welled up in his eyes. Immediately he set out to find her at the great charnel ground called Sosaling [so sa gling]. As he traveled, he continuously made supplications to the Three Jewels. When he reached the cemetery, he saw above him in space at the height of seven banana trees, a female deity bluish in appearance, who wore elaborate bone ornaments and held a trident and a skull. As he gazed at her, he sometimes saw one deity, and sometimes many; some were in meditation posture, and some were dancing or making graceful gestures. He felt sure that this was the great Bodhisattva Niguma, and began to make reverent prostrations to her, sincerely imploring her for transmission of the teachings.

Niguma mocked his request and sneering, warned him, "I am a flesh-eating dakini and I have a large retinue of other dakinis like myself. When they come, we may eat you. Run away before it's too late!"

But her words did not dismay Chungpo Naljor or make him retreat. Again he proclaimed his longing to receive the transmission from her. After his second plea, Niguma made this stipulation: he must offer gold if he really wished to receive teachings from her. Fortunately, Chungpo Naljor had five hundred gold pieces with him, and these he took out and tossed up to her as an offering. As the gold came into her hands, she scattered it into the air, so that it fell all over the forest. This behavior just increased Chungpo Naljor's confidence that she was indeed the great Niguma. A flesh-eating dakini would certainly have felt attachment to the gold and kept some.

With deepening conviction he continued to beseech her for the teachings; Niguma turned her head from side to side, and looked into the different directions with her blazing eyes. So summoned, a great throng of dakinis surrounded her, all busily at work. Some were building palaces, some constructing mandalas, and others were making preparations for Dharma teaching, and for the ganacakra that would follow.

On the day of the full moon, Niguma gave Chungpo Naljor the empowerment and transmission of the teachings of the profound Dream Practice. In the middle of this, she said to him: "Son from Tibet, arise!"

Suddenly Chungpo Naljor found himself in midair at the height of three banana trees. Looking up towards Niguma, he saw that the great being was on top of a golden mountain, surrounded by a vast retinue of dakinis. Down the four sides of the mountain, rivers fell. Chungpo Naljor wondered out loud if this amazing mountain was truly there or whether he was witnessing a miraculous performance by the dakini.

Niguma answered, "When the ocean of samsara is turned over, when all attachment and ego-clinging are totally uprooted, then every place and every thing is covered with gold, forming a golden field of non-attachment. The actual nature of samsara, this phenomenal world, is like a play of dreams and illusion. When you have realized experientially that the play of the phenomenal world is nothing but a dream, or is like the illusion created by some magician, then you have gone beyond the ocean of samsara. This requires the greatest devotion to your Lama. Understand this. Now you must leave here. Go and grasp your dream!"

Chungpo Naljor understood her instructions and entered the dream as he had been taught. In the dream state he was given full empowerment for the Five Golden Dharmas of Niguma. Three times in the dream he received the empowerments, including those of the Six Yogas of Niguma. At the end, Niguma told him this: "In this land there have been no other beings except yourself who received the total transmission of these doctrines three times in one dream."

On the following day, Niguma once again gave him three times the complete transmissions, with the detailed explanations of these doctrines; this time the transmission took place in the waking state. One commitment she asked him to keep was this: only he and another Mahasiddha, by the name of Lavapa, had had the transmission into the six doctrines of Niguma; the teachings should be kept secret until seven generations had passed in an unbroken line of transmission from one Lama to one chosen disciple in each generation. After the seventh generation, it would be appropriate to give these teachings more widely for the benefit of all beings. Niguma's prayers of aspiration and her blessing would be directed toward that end.

There is really no essential difference between the Six Yogas of Naropa and the Six Doctrines of Niguma. The notable difference is in the transmission lineage. The Six Doctrines of Naropa came from Naropa to Marpa and his successors, while the Six Doctrines of Niguma came through the great Mahasiddha Chungpo Naljor. Thereafter, the two doctrines were transmitted by the successive lineage holders so that there is to the present

day an unbroken line in the Kagyü tradition of both doctrines, Naropa's and Niguma's.

Sukhasiddhi

At another point in his career Chungpo Naljor questioned the Mahasiddha Aryadeva about those who would be able to advance his understanding. Aryadeva said that he himself had received teachings for seven months from a highly realized dakini, whose instructions had brought him to the eighth Bodhisattva level. Then, urging Chungpo Naljor to search her out for himself, he told the story of how the dakini, whose name was Sukhasiddhi, had herself achieved realization.

In that same area of India where Niguma had lived, there was a great city in which lived a family: a father, mother, three sons, and three daughters. A time came when that land suffered such a terrible famine that this family's provisions were reduced to one small jar of rice, which they were keeping as a last resource. In desperation, the three sons left home and went towards the north, the three daughters towards the west, and the father towards the south, all searching for food, but all in vain. While they were away on their futile search, the mother stayed at home. One day there came to her door a great Siddha, who by his clairvoyance knew that she had a jar of rice tucked away. He told the mother that he had not eaten for a very long time, and begged her to offer him some of the rice. Moved by his plea and by his virtue, she offered him the rice, cooking it for him and eating a little herself. When the sons, daughters and father came back empty-handed, exhausted and famished, they told the mother to bring out the last of the rice, so they could have at least one meal. Then she had to confess that there was no rice, that she had given it to a Siddha who had come begging. She explained that she had been certain that at least one of them would bring some food home, so she had felt it proper to offer the rice.

They were all outraged and turned her out of the house; she would have to go her own way and take care of herself.

She had never been away from her family before. She went among her neighbors asking for advice. Everywhere she got the same suggestion: she should go to the west, to Oddiyana, a rich country whose people were understanding and generous. There she might find the basic necessities of life.

So the mother went to Oddiyana and found that its people were indeed sympathetic. She had come at an auspicious time, the season of the harvest, and the people gave her quantities of rice. She took that rice to a town called Bita and used it to make chang, a kind of beer. She sold the chang, bought rice with the proceeds, made more chang, and so gradually began to make her living as a brewer. She was soon able to open an inn, and amongst the people who came to buy her wares was one regular customer, a young girl who came every day to buy chang and meat. The mother became curious about this girl, who never ate or drank anything, but carried it all away. Where was she taking it? One day she ventured to ask the girl. The young woman

answered, "Quite a way from here in the mountains, there is a great Mahasiddha, Virupa, who is constantly in meditation. Every day I take this as an offering to him."

The mother thought about this, and said, "In that case, I would certainly like to make my chang an offering to the great Mahasiddha."

She went on to tell the young woman the story of her misfortunes, her exile from her family, and how now in her declining years she was realizing the futility of involvement with material existence. As a way of accumulating merit, she wanted to make offerings of her chang to the Mahasiddha.

From that time forward, she regularly offered the best chang to the Mahasiddha, and the young attendant brought it every day to the master. One day Virupa happened to ask how she was able to bring chang and meat every day without ever having to pay anythingwho was making these offerings? The young woman explained that an elderly woman, new to the town, seemed very devoted to him and wanted to make regular offerings.

The great master Virupa said, "Today this elderly woman, who must already be someone of great merit, should be brought to me in person. I will guide her to complete Liberation." When this message was brought by Virupa's young attendant, the mother grew excited, and taking along generous offerings of chang and meat, went to visit Virupa.

When she came into his presence, Virupa bestowed Empowerment upon her. She was ripe for such an experience and in many ways was nearly a realized yogini already. The transmissions Virupa gave enhanced her Realization, with the result that she became a great Dakini. This woman, who was to be called Sukhasiddhi, was fifty-nine years old when she was banished from her family, and it had taken her a year to establish a livelihood, so when she received the profound instructions from Virupa she was sixty-one. With one-pointed conviction and commitment she received the totality of the empowerment and became an enlightened Dakini not only in essence, but also in form and appearance. She took on the form of a sixteen year old maiden.

Sukhasiddhi was completely dedicated to practice and had surrendered her ties to the phenomenal world. Through practice and devotion she in time equaled in Realization other great yoginis such as Niguma. Like them, she had visions of Dorje Chang from whom she received complete transmissions. After attaining such Realization, she devoted her profound abilities to manifesting in ways that would help and guide other beings. For over a thousand years since then fortunate beings have been and still are able to perceive Sukhasiddhi, in the form of an unchanging, youthful woman.

This was the story Aryadeva told Chungpo Naljor about the life and Liberation of Sukhasiddhi. Aryadeva went on to explain that sometimes on the tenth day of the month, Sukhasiddhi could be seen in the thick of a certain forest, surrounded by a retinue of Dakinis. Fortunate beings sometimes encountered her there, if she made herself visible to them.

So Chungpo Naljor, carrying gold to offer, went towards the forest as he had been directed. There, above a most beautiful juniper tree, a great Dakini was to be seen, brilliantly white, her hand in the "unborn" mudra. She was surrounded by a retinue of other Dakinis in the midst of a vast cloud of light. At his first sight of this great being, intense devotion was born in the heart of Chungpo Naljor; his hair stood on end, and tears sprang to his eyes. The presence of the Dakini brought immense joy like that at the attainment of the first Bodhisattva level.

He made offerings of flowers, and circumambulated the tree below the great Dakini and her retinue. With a one-pointed mind, he begged her to teach. Sukhasiddhi said that the teachings she held were the highest in the Vajrayana, transmitted to her directly by Dorje Chang; to be worthy of receiving them, he must have an accumulation of merit, and make offerings of precious substances such as gold. Then, with palms joined together, he must generate intense devotion in order to receive the Empowerment, the Scriptural Transmission and the Instruction (wang, lung and tri, the three phases of preparation in the Vajrayana). Chungpo Naljor was directed to sit in the most respectful position to receive the profound teachings. Looking at him, Sukhasiddhi said that the experience of the precious human birth, and the opportunity of receiving the supreme Dharma in her presence was a great wonder.

In this way Chungpo Naljor made offerings and received her instruction. Sukhasiddhi told him that in the future he would be the main lineage-holder of the teaching she had transmitted, and that the teaching itself would continue to exist and be available for the benefit of beings. Chungpo Naljor received the four empowermentsof body, speech, mind, and the union of all threeinto the Six Doctrines of Sukhasiddhi, which are similar to the Six Doctrines of Niguma. Then, she prophesized that he would attain supreme Enlightenment and, from the pure realm of Amitabha, his activities would benefit all. Sukhasiddhi's Realization as embodied in her teachings has continued to this present day through practitioners in many countries of the world.

Deeds of Bodhisattvas Awaken Confidence

Stories about the lives of enlightened beings provide us with examples of conduct that will inspire us and, especially, arouse a confidence that we too can follow in their footsteps. Our commitment to Dharma and our practice of it can result in exactly the same sort of Enlightenment we see manifested in their lives. A strong sense of conviction and of dedication is essential, as we can see in the life of the great yogi Milarepa. After all the exhausting tasks Marpa had set him were completed, Milarepa was finally able to see the manifestation of Marpa as the Yidam Hevajra in form as well as essence. After Marpa had appeared with all the splendors and ornaments of the Yidam, he asked what Milarepa had experienced. Milarepa said that devotion had arisen in him, and confidence that such a state as Marpa had manifested could be realized. Milarepa then made a one-pointed aspiration to achieve it himself.

In our own situation as intelligent beings able to communicate, listen, make sense and explain, we have to understand clearly the distinction between samsara and Nirvana, learn what really needs to be done, and then take practical steps to do it. That is the real teaching and intention of the Buddha.

The greater our involvement in samsara, the greater our suffering. That is how things work. The Buddha said, "The greater the power, the greater the misery; the greater the wealth, the greater the miserliness; the more caught up we are in samsaric situations, the greater our self-deception." We have to realize that what we want to experience, and can experience, is ultimate happiness, a state that is indestructible, beyond circumstances and conditioning factors. To attain this we must give up temporary satisfactions, which in any case are full of false promises and pretense. We go to restaurants and social spots to have fun, to try to cheer one another up and grasp some measure of good feeling and security. Even if we don't mean it, we say how good everything looks, how well everything is going, and so on. But eventually we have to face reality, and that's very painful. The more we try to run away from suffering by pretending that it really doesn't exist, the more suffering we bring ourselves. That is not the way of Dharma. If you have recognized your need for Enlightenment, you will give up these deceptive pursuits and work towards ultimate happiness, which involves a total commitment to the practice of Dharma.

Enlightened beings, whether from long ago or in our own day can inspire admiration and then devotion. Therefore, we should take their examples sincerely to heart, and follow them by working towards Liberation for our own benefit and the benefit of all beings.



8

Mahāmudrā

The vast body of teachings we know as the Buddhadharma is traditionally said to consist of eighty-four thousand collections, and each one of these is said to contain as many texts as could be written with all the ink an elephant can carry on its back. The Buddhadharma contains an inexhaustible wealth of teachings and techniques; and every one of these has the same fundamental purpose: to benefit beings in their many conditions by helping them to understand the nature of mind.

According to the Buddhadharma, Enlightenment has three aspects (see pages 36-38). One of these is the Dharmakaya, which is often represented by the figure of Vajradhara or Dorje Chang [rdo rje 'chang]. It is from the level of awareness expressed by Dorje Chang that the teachings known as the tantras have been promulgated among human beings. In the Secret Heart tantra, called in Tibetan the Sang way nying po [gsang ba'i snying po] and in Sanskrit the Guhyagarbha-tantra, we find a prayer of praise to mind itself:

I pay homage to the mind
which is like a wish-fulfilling gem,
through which one can realize all one's aims.
Mind-nature is the basis for everything;
There is nothing in samsara or Nirvana that does not come from it.

The four main orders of the Buddhist tradition in Tibet Sakyapa, Gelügpa, Kagyüpa and Nyingmapause many techniques of practice. Each has preliminary practices that consist initially of taking Refuge in the Three Jewels, then formalizing that commitment by acts of prostration and recitation, offering, purification, and meditations that identify us with our Lama. Each school has techniques for calming the mind and developing

insight into its nature; each employs Vajrayana meditation practices that involve the stages of Development and Fulfillment. All of these many practices are geared towards deepening an authentic understanding of the nature of mind; they exist for no other purpose.

In the Kagyüpa school one of the main cycles of teaching is termed the Six Dharmas or Yogas of Naropa, six techniques through which we can begin the profound transformation of all aspects of our experience. All these techniques employ a rapid approach. They are a supremely effective path to Enlightenment, and involve Mahāmudrā meditation and the cycle of teachings concerned with the Mahāmudrā Realization.

Mahāmudrā is a Sanskrit word meaning "supreme symbol" or "supreme seal." In Tibetan it is translated as *cha ja chen po* [phyag rgya chen po]. Cha is an honorific word for hand, which in turn is a code word for the Emptiness of mind and all phenomena. The second syllable, ja, means seal, as on a document. It signifies something that gathers everything under one heading and seals it in its embrace. It refers to the all-embracing nature of Mahāmudrā Realization: no aspect of experience falls outside it, for it is the all-embracing awareness of the essential Emptiness of experience and phenomena. Chen po means great, and signifies that this experience is ultimatethere is nothing greater.

Mahāmudrā Realization and the teachings leading to it can be considered the quintessence of all Buddhist practice. The doctrine is profound and difficult to grasp; the experience is intangible and cannot be demonstrated to the senses. A stanza from the teaching of the Buddha praises Prajnaparamita, the Perfection of Wisdom, who personifies this experience.

The first line says that the Perfection of Wisdom cannot be spoken about, cannot be described, cannot be conceived of. The traditional comparison is with a mute person tasting sugar: the experience cannot be communicated to anyone else. In the same way Mahāmudrā must be experienced personally to be understood: one cannot describe it clearly and effectively to another person, but one can make an attempt, and this is what the quatrain does.

The second line specifies that although realization of the nature of mind, the Perfection of Wisdom, is indescribable, we can say that it is not subject to origination or cessation. There is an eternal quality to the nature of mind, which is empty, like space.

The third line identifies the realization of mind as the province of one's own awareness; it is properly understood only in one's own awareness and experience, not in someone else's description. Primordial Awareness is the direct and authentic experience of the mind as empty, clear and unimpeded, as dynamic and intelligent. This can only be verified through personal experience and the use of one's own intelligence.

The fourth line is a personification: "I pay homage to the mother of the Buddhas of the three times." In this metaphor our realization of the nature of mind, as well as that nature itself, is described as the origin of Enlightenment,

because it is through this direct Realization that we experience Buddhahood. This is how enlightened beings experienced it in the past, how they experience it now, and how they will experience it in the future. Any being that achieves, has achieved or will achieve Enlightenment, realizes the same nature of mind, personified here as the mother of the Victorious Ones, the Buddhas. As a mother gives birth to a child, so the mind, once its nature is discovered, gives birth to enlightenment. As surely as we are born from a womb, so surely can we give birth to Enlightenment by directly realizing the empty, clear and unimpeded nature of mind; other than that, there is no means. Iconographically, this supreme feminine principle is represented by such deities as Prajnaparamita herself, Dorje Phagmo, and many others whose female forms symbolize this state of awareness, Mahāmudrā Realization.

Approaches to Mahāmudrā

In all the schools of Buddhism in Tibet, a threefold approach to the Dharma is recognized. The first stage involves intellectual study, listening to the teachings and understanding their meaning. The second stage is one of contemplating what has been learned in order to deepen one's understanding. The third stage involves meditation and direct experience of what has been understood. Given this similarity in approach, however, each school tends to develop its own style, favoring either a predominantly intellectual or academic approach, (shay pay ka bap [bshad pa'i bka' bab]), or a more intuitive, meditative one, (drup pay ka bap [sgrub pa'i bka' bab]). The Sakyapa and Gelügpa schools, in particular, are noted for their intellectual skill in the doctrine. They maintain that to attain the state of awareness, one first must understand thoroughly what has been written and taught by those who have experienced it. One therefore approaches the direct experience of mind on the basis of a very thorough and far-reaching intellectual understanding of the nature of reality, experience, mind, and so on. For such persons, the first stage of hearing involves thorough intellectual preparation.

The other, more pragmatic, meditative approach is stressed by the Kagyüpas and Nyingmapas. Although these schools do not deny the validity of an approach based on vast intellectual understanding, their view is perhaps best summed up in the words of Atisa , who brought transmissions and teachings from India to Tibet, and from whom all lineages derive inspiration. Referring to the Indian myth of the swan that can extract pure milk from a mixture of milk and water, he said: "The field of knowledge is incredibly vast, and life is very, very short. Thus, the most important approach is to extract milk from the water, like the swan, and to practice what is most relevant to one's situation." This is the approach the Kagyüpas and Nyingmapas aspire to when they emphasize involvement in meditative development without the preliminary requirement of extensive intellectual training. There is not always enough time for that, since there is no guarantee that we shall live long enough to cover all the necessary ground. But if we can extract the essence of the teaching and apply it to our lives directly, we have a valid approach to Dharma practice.

Despite these differences in emphasis, however, all schools have the same ultimate goal, and all agree that the threefold approach of intellectual study, contemplation, and meditation is necessary for true Realization.

The intellectual approach to the three-fold process emphasizes a thorough understanding of Buddhist scriptures and commentaries on them. In the Sutra tradition, one studies the Vinaya, or rules of monastic discipline; the Sutras, or discourses; and the Abhidharma, which is sometimes termed the psychology of the Buddhist tradition. In the tantric tradition one studies the four levels of tantras, Kriya, Carya, Yoga and Anuttarayoga, the Action, Performance, Yoga, and Highest Yoga tantras. For a person taking the intuitive, meditative approach, sufficient intellectual preparation consists of first finding a qualified Lama, someone of exceptional accomplishment, to give authentic and accurate instructions in meditation technique, and, secondly, studying the technique thoroughly.

Whether we follow the scholastic or meditative approach really depends on our inclination, but regardless of how extensive or specialized our own interest may be, some intellectual basis is certainly necessary. It is said that someone who tries to meditate without a conceptual understanding of what he or she is doing is like a blind person trying to find the way in open country: such a person can only wander about, with no idea how to choose one direction over another.

On the other hand, we also have a saying that one who studies a great deal without ever applying it in meditation is like a person without hands trying to climb a rockface; one can see it, know how to get to it, know exactly what route to take, but without hands it's useless.

Although Mahāmudrā is not a vast subject, its meaning is very deep. To understand what is said about it is necessary, but not in itself sufficient. We must reflect on the teachings, and analyze them, asking, "Is this really true or not? If it is true, how and why is it true, and how do I know?" Such examination, in which the mind comes to some certainty, is the second phase of the process. Once we have recognized something in the teaching as true and valid for our situation, then we try to apply it in meditation.

The Nature of Mind

The fact that appropriate questions about the teaching arise in the mind at all indicates a considerable accumulation of merit brought about by virtuous thoughts and actions in the past. Nonetheless, we have only a vague, naive understanding of the mind. We know that we have a mind, but there is a great deal of ignorance about its nature.

What is mind, then? Mind is that which is aware, which gives rise to thoughts, emotions and feelings such as "I'm happy," or "I'm sad." Mind is what experiences all this. In Buddhism we term the nature of mind Emptiness. By this we mean that mind is devoid of, empty of, any limiting characteristics. It has no form, no color, no shape, no size, no limitation whatsoever. Analogous to this is the open space in a room. Like this space, mind is intangible and cannot be described; just as space itself is intrinsically

empty just as one never says "space is empty up to this point, while beyond it space is no longer empty "so mind is intrinsically empty.

If we take the illumination in the room into account, we have a further analogy, because the mind has its own kind of clarity, though not in a visual sense. This illuminating capacity is mind's inherent ability to experience. No thing in and of itself, mind nevertheless experiences everything, and that ability is Clarity. We experience this when we sit quietly by ourselves and, thinking of some far away place like New York or San Francisco, find we can call it to mind immediately. In speaking of mind, then, we can refer to its Emptiness fundamental intangibility and to the illuminating Clarity it demonstrates. Like the space and light in the room, these are not things separate from each other, but are two aspects of a single experience.

The properties, Emptiness and Clarity, do not complete our description of mind. Mind is more than empty, illuminated space; it is also the awareness that can decide "this is form, this is sound, this is a shape." The intelligence that allows us to make judgments and recognize particular details is a manifestation of mind's Unimpededness.

Although the mind's Emptiness, Clarity and Unimpededhess are inseparable, we can examine it from different perspectives, and speak of them separately or in combination. The mind's essential Emptiness and its clear nature taken together are what we call its Unimpededness, its power to experience. The fundamental threefold nature of mind empty, clear and unimpededis Tathagatagarbha , the Seed of Enlightenment, possessed by every living being, human or otherwise. Tathagatagarbha is the fundamental purity of the mind's intrinsic nature. In the words of the Buddha Shakyamuni: "This Tathagatagarbha, this Seed for Enlightenment, pervades all forms of life. There is not a single being that does not have it." A tantric text states that all beings are innately enlightened but that adventitious obscurations block the experience of Enlightenment. If through practice we begin to recognize the inherent nature of mind we can become completely enlightened.

The Nature of Experience

Although the concept that mind is empty of any limiting characteristic may be at least superficially understandable, many people find great difficulty in the idea that what we experience is likewise empty. What does it mean to say that the phenomenal world this animate and inanimate universe we perceive is empty? How is that true for this world full of rocks and trees and houses, earth, water and all the elements, living creatures moving about living their lives?

There is actually no contradiction in saying that something that appears to be so real is essentially empty. We can illustrate this by an example, the dream state.

When we go to sleep at night we dream. The mind is active in the dream, there is perception of form that is seen, sound that is heard, odors that are smelled, tastes that are tasted, textures that are felt, thoughts that arise. All these happen in the dream state, but when we wake it is obvious

that nothing real was experienced. What occurred had a conventional reality during the dream, but no one will maintain that what took place in the dream happened in the same way things happen in our waking state. The dream was a series of mental projections: it had a conventional, temporary reality, but not an ultimate one. Because the dream lacks an enduring self-nature, we can say that it is empty.

We can think of our perception of the waking world in just such a way. All sorts of ideas, emotions, concepts and reactions arise in us. Things we experience can make us happy, sad, or angry, can increase our attachment or aversion. But even though all these thoughts and responses arise, none has any nature of its own: we should not take them to be realthey are simply ongoing mental projections produced by particular circumstances. For this reason we can again say that our experience is empty, because it lacks any ultimate self-nature. We can say that no aspect of our experience, of the outer phenomenal world or the inner mental world, has one atom of reality. Nothing we experience is anything more than the mind's perception of its own projections, the reality of which is only conventional.

By understanding this and coming to experience it, teachers such as Milarepa can demonstrate miracles and make things happen contrary to the normal laws that govern the universe. If the universe were something ultimately real in its own right, its laws would be inviolable, and miraculous events impossible. In fact, the laws governing conventional reality are flexible, and once we realize this we have at least some limited power to manipulate the phenomenal world.

If it is the case that all experience is only the projection of mind, what determines the way in which our perceptions take place? The force that influences the way in which mind experiences the world is karma, actions and their results.

On the basis of fundamental ignorance about the real nature of mind, karmic tendencies and other obscurations develop. The fundamental state of unawareness is like the earth, in which seeds can be planted. The seeds represent karmic predispositions, which are reinforced by physical, mental and verbal actions. Once a seed is planted, it needs support from the earth, and nourishment, water, light, heat: without these, it remains inert. When all the requisite circumstances are present, the seed germinates, grows, flowers and multiplies. In the same way, the tendency established and reinforced by an action is stored in the fundamental state of confusion and remains latent until circumstances in the environment or in the mind itself provide a channel by which the tendency emerges and comes to fruition as an active part of our experience.

As human beings we exist in a relatively superior state. This is a result of positive karmic tendencies reinforced by virtuous actions mental, verbal and physical in countless previous lifetimes. All human karma is similar enough for all of us to experience more or less the same world: we have engaged in actions that result in similar, if not identical, impressions of what the world is like.

In addition to this general karma, there is also individual karma, which accounts for the particular variations in the experience of each and every being. To be greedy or to steal establishes a tendency which, if reinforced, results in experiences of poverty and want, often in a future lifetime. On the other hand, to be generous, materially or otherwise, establishes conditions which, if reinforced, result in prosperity. Deliberate acts of killing establish a tendency which, if reinforced, results in a great deal of sickness and shortness of life, whereas to protect and respect life is conducive to good health and longevity. In short, while human beings share general qualities that are common to the human condition, some are richer or poorer than others, happier or unhappier, healthier or unhealthier, longer or shorter lived.

So, karma has both general and specific aspects, which together account for our group and individual experience. To understand the nature of that experience, however, and how the karmic process of cause and effect works, we have to understand the nature of mind. To understand the nature of mind, and to attain direct experience of it Mahāmudrā Realization we have to meditate.

In Mahāmudrā practice there is an advanced level of realization called ro chik [ro gcig] in Tibetan, meaning "one taste." At this point the sameness of subject and object becomes apparent, and causality becomes empirically obvious. We can see a given cause leading to a given effect.

How is it that we do not have this experience already? What prevents us from directly apprehending the nature of mind right now? There are four basic reasons, the Four Faults.

The first reason is that for us the mind is too close (nye drak [nye drags]) to be recognized. Since the moment we were born and began using our eyes, we have never seen our own faces directly. In our present situation mind can experience anything but cannot see its own nature.

The second reason is that the experience is too profound (sap drak [zab drags]) for us to fathom. We are like people looking at the surface of the ocean: we guess it to be deep, but we have no idea how deep it actually is. If we could fathom Mahāmudrā , we would be enlightened, because to fathom it would be to realize it and to realize it means to be a Buddha.

The third reason is that Mahāmudrā is too easy (la drak [sla drags]) for us to believe. For someone who has really understood and experienced it, Mahāmudrā is the easiest thing in the world. There is nothing to do: we don't have to cross oceans to get to it, there are no mountains to climb. The only thing necessary is bare awareness of the ultimate nature of mind, which is always there. Beyond that, there is nothing to do but we really can't believe Mahāmudrā can be so easy to do, or rather not do. It requires only that we rest in the nature of mind.

The fourth reason is that enlightenment is too excellent (zang drak [bzang drags]) for us to accommodate. Buddhahood is the complete unfolding of the mind's infinite potential, which can take an infinite number of different forms and has qualities we never find in an ordinary person. The

immense potential of Buddhahood doesn't fit into our narrow way of thinking, and we really cannot accommodate the notion that such a state is the real nature of our mind.

Given these difficulties, what must we do to experience the nature of mind directly? There are two fundamental elements in this transformation: (1) our own efforts to purify evil actions and obscurations, and to develop merit and awareness; and (2) devotion to our Lama, who plays an indispensable part in bringing about our transformation. These two elements together bring about Mahāmudrā Realization.

The pure, fundamental nature of mind, without confusion or obscuration, is known as Co-emergent Primordial Awareness (len che ye she [lhen skyes ye shes]). Primordial Awareness, inherently the nature of mind, and free of obscuring factors, is co-emergent with consciousness (nam she [rnam shes]). One text tells us that the only means of realizing Co-emergent Primordial Awareness are our own efforts in purifying faults and developing merit and awareness and our devoion to and reliance on a qualified Lama. Any other approach is a waste of time. These two elements, of effort and devotion, must go together, and that is why they are combined in physical practices like prostration, verbal practices like prayer and mantra, and mental practices like visualization and meditation. To use these faculties is to eliminate the fourth karmic level of obscuration; we counterbalance negative tendencies, and eventually remove them as sources of confusion. Specifically, through shi nay meditation we develop stability or calmness of mind; that means that our mind can rest in a given state without distraction or confusion. At that point we begin to eliminate the third level of obscuration, emotional afflictions.

The next phase of meditation is insight into the nature of mind using the techniques of lha tong. This is often called the experience of selflessness which has two aspects: the absence of a personal self, and the non-existence of all phenomena as independent entities. We begin to realize that the self and the objects we perceive as external lack any ultimate reality. With experience of this insight, the second obscuration is eliminated, that of the habitual tendencies to dualistic clinging.

Now through the practices of Mahāmudrā meditation we move from a state of ignorance to a state of direct perception and experience of the fundamental nature of mind. When ignorance has been transformed into Primordial Awareness the first, most subtle level of obscuration, the obscuration of the fundamental ignorance, is removed. This is complete Enlightenment.

These terms and practices seem formidable, but this is not to say that it necessarily requires a great deal of work to attain enlightenment and realize Mahāmudrā. It depends on circumstances. If a person has matured through lifetimes of purification and development, with a great accumulation of Merit and Awareness, then an instantaneous transformation can take place when a skillful, enlightened teacher is met.

Devotion to the Lama

An important stage in the practice of Mahāmudrā is meditation upon the Lama, who is conceived of as the union of all blessing and inspiration. The teacher is visualized either in the sky in front of us or on the crown of the head. We pray one-pointedly for the Lama's blessing, and afterwards meditate that the form of the guru dissolves into us. Thereafter, we simply let the mind rest in its natural state. By that point we actually are in Mahāmudrā meditation.

The importance of the Lama is characteristic of the Vajrayana, and is not found in the Hinayana or Mahayana. It is true that praying to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and taking Refuge in them is an effective way to attain Enlightenment, but it is more gradual than the Vajrayana way of establishing a working relationship with a Lama. The Vajrayana contains teachings that can take one to the experience of complete Enlightenment in this lifetime. The Lama is the one who bestows those teachings. That is why the Lama is so crucial in tantric practice, and why Mahāmudrā teachings, which are part of tantric practice, place such emphasis on the student's relationship with the Lama.

Someone of the highest abilities, engaged in Mahāmudrā practice, has intense faith in his or her Lama, and intense compassion for all other beings. He or she understands that while every sentient being has the potential to become enlightened, all the confusion and obscurations preventing the direct experience of mind create endless suffering and frustration. That understanding is the source of compassion. In all practice of Dharma, whatever technique or meditation is employed, taking Refuge with great faith should be followed by the development of Bodhicitta.

Every Buddha who has achieved Enlightenment in the past has done so through first giving rise to Bodhicitta, the deep wish that our practice be not only for our own benefit, but for the benefit and eventual Enlightenment of every sentient being. In fact, it is because we are so concerned with our own interests, and so little with others' welfare, that we continue to wander in confusion, reinforcing our involvement with samsara. That is why concern for the happiness and Liberation of others is crucial to Dharma practice.

Finally, this best type of person has intense dedication and diligence in practice, so that any task required is carried through with ardor. If all these qualities come together in the practitioner, a very rare transformation can take place. Most people, however, are not of such superior capabilities. How does someone, matured through previous lifetimes, but still at a lower level of preparation, go about attaining ultimate awareness? Just as clouds keep us from seeing the sun, thick levels of obscuration in our mind keep us unaware of the nature of mind. The function of our practice is to dispel those obscurations until direct experience of the mind can take place.

You need not give up in despair, thinking, "It's hopeless. I have so many obscurations it will take me lifetimes to get rid of them." We are not meant to feel like that. Rapid transformation is the purpose of the wonderfully effective teachings of the Buddha. If you practice regularly, even for a few hours, even a few minutes, you can eliminate the confusions and

obscurations that took aeons to accumulate. That is the special blessing and efficacy of the Dharma.

Practice

For Mahāmudrā meditation to develop properly, our physical posture should be as straight as possible not tense or rigid but erect and relaxed. In fact, relaxation of body, speech and mind is very important in meditation. With reference to speech, the jaws should not be clenched, nor should any of the associated muscles be tight. The lips should not be moving. The mind should not be tense or forced in any particular direction.

Once we have assumed a properly relaxed posture, we can try the following technique, searching for the "Origin, Location, and Direction" of mind, (jung nay dro sum ['byung gnas 'gro gsum]). In this context mind means that which experiences everything we perceive, think, and feel. Being aware of this mind, we inquire: Where does it come from? Can we find any origin for it? And where is mind located? Is it anywhere inside or outside the body? Is it located in any physical organ, any particular part of the body? Or is it in the external world? When the mind moves, does it actually go anywhere?

Does mind move in any particular direction? If so, how does it move? As long as the mind is at rest, simply dwelling in a state of clear, transparent awareness without any thought, what rests and what experiences that rest is nothing other than mind itself. When a thought arises, the mind adopts some form of expression, takes some direction. How does that come about? In this technique, we try to maintain awareness of the process by which thought arises and takes form; we try to understand the nature of the actual experience of thought arising in the mind. The point is not whether the thought is a good or bad one. We are not concerned with the content of the thought, but the nature of it. How does a thought arise in the mind? Having arisen, where is it? How and where does it stay? When it disappears, what direction does it go in? North, south, east, west, up, down? Where does it disappear to? What is the cessation of a thought?

When there is no thought in the mind, but the mind is resting in a state of clear undistracted awareness, where exactly is it? Can we locate the mind anywhere? How does the mind dwell when it dwells in this state? When we examine the mind at rest, does it have any size of shape or limiting characteristic that we can discern and define?

In this approach, then, we seek to understand the mind in terms of its origin, location and direction. In its arising, staying, and passing away, is there anything we can describe other than empty, clear and unimpeded mind? Exactly how would we describe it?

If we use this technique again and again until there is some certainty about what constitutes mind and how it works, it is entirely possible that we will come to some degree of authentic realization. On the other hand, there is also the danger of fooling ourselves, of getting lost in our own confusion and coming to what we think is a definite understanding when in fact we really

have not understood anything. This is precisely where a relationship with a qualified meditation teacher is important. We need someone who can explain the process, evaluate our experiences, and give advice. If we refine our meditative technique in this way, by our own efforts and with the help of a skillful teacher's advice, our experience will become stable and authentic.

It is traditionally said that when mind is not contrived it is spontaneously blissful, just as water, when not agitated, is by nature transparent and clear. This is a most accurate description. In Mahāmudrā meditation we should maintain a bare awareness of the nature of mind as it is, without any effort to force some particular state of consciousness, to contrive a particular experience. In that sense, the goal is to be totally relaxed in a state of naked awareness, without distraction or dullness, alert to the nature of mind.

When the mind is resting in such a state and a thought arises, has the mind which was at rest become the mind in action? Or has something else been added to the mind that was at rest, something separate from mind? Are mind and thought the same? These are questions we need to be aware of while meditating.

When the mind is resting in this clear state of undistracted awareness, without any actual thoughts arising, the capacity that is aware of that state of being (and which is aware of mind in motion when mind is active and thoughts arise) is the mind's own Awareness. Are the mind at rest, the mind in motion, and the mind's Awareness different or identical?

These questions belong to another approach recognized in the Mahāmudrā tradition known as "The States of Rest, Movement, and Awareness," (nay ju rik sum [gnas 'gyu rig gsum]). If you work with this approach and come to what you feel is a significant experience, you can then consult the Lama whose judgment will help you determine whether it is authentic or not, and whether or not you are working in the right direction. As in the previous approach, a certain "pointing out" (ngo trö [ngo sprod]) of your experience by a skillful Lama will be very beneficial.

Mistakes and Misunderstandings

If you understand the nature of these teachings and practice them well, there is perhaps no single more effective approach to the attainment of complete Enlightenment. But without understanding and effective practice, you are open to all sorts of errors. Without thorough understanding you may overemphasize one aspect or another of the teaching and thus distort it. For example, you might isolate the statement that phenomena, mind and experience are all empty, and develop a nihilistic view, thinking that nothing matters because everything is empty; that karma, virtuous and non-virtuous action, Enlightenment, and non-enlightenment do not exist. This is perhaps the single most harmful wrong view you could possibly develop.

It is true, of course, that the teachings say that mind and all experience are empty. But the proper approach is to understand first the subjective

nature of experience that everything we perceive of the outer world, the physical body and the inner workings of our mind, is a projection and expression of mind. Having understood that, we return to the mind to determine that it is indeed essentially empty of limiting characteristics. But simply to understand this is not enough. You have to experience it through meditation. Only then, when you have directly realized the emptiness of mind and all experience, might you perhaps say: "Now I am not subject to the karmic process, the causal relationship between action and experience." Until you have had the direct realization of Emptiness that cuts the karmic process, karma is still unfailing and inescapable. Positive deeds will continue to give rise to positive results, and negative deeds give rise to negative ones. This is not something you can change in any way. It is simply the way the karmic process unfolds as long as you have not had the Realization of the Emptiness of mind and all experience.

In following the Mahāmudrā path of meditation, there are many other possibilities for error. For example, if the mind lacks alertness, the result is not pure meditation at all, but stupidity. To reinforce this situation by taking it as the basis of meditative experience leads to rebirth in the desire realm as an animal, especially one given to lethargy, like a crocodile, or creature that hibernates for months on end.

Even positive signs in the development of our meditation can become obstacles. In Mahāmudrā practice we can distinguish three basic forms of positive experience: states of bliss (de wa [bde ba]), states of clarity (sal wa [gsal ba]), and states of non-conceptual awareness (mi tok pa [mi rtog pal).

If, for example, an experience of bliss arises and we cling to it or reinforce it, we fall into an error of limitation. Such practice will definitely contribute to a higher rebirth, among the gods of the Desire Realm, for example. But the meditation is unstable, and its results subject to exhaustion; it will not take us to a pure state of Realization beyond the cycle of rebirth.

If experiences of clarity arise, clinging to them leads to rebirth in one or another of the seventeen levels of gods in the Form Realm, still in the cycle of samsara. Should the experience of non-conceptual awareness arise in meditation, and Emptiness itself become an object of clinging, this kind of meditation, if reinforced, will still lead to rebirth in one or another of the four levels of the Formless Realm of samsara, and we will remain in the cycle of conditioned existence.

Such errors are possible until we actually attain Liberation from samsara. It is, therefore, important not to abandon the practice of purifying ourselves by eliminating negative tendencies and developing positive ones such as compassion, wholesome aspiration, and so on. All these are very important.

Perhaps the best way to conclude this brief introduction to Mahāmudrā is with the words of Tilopa when his student, the great pandit Naropa, had his first experience of Mahāmudrā Realization under Tilopa's guidance:

"Naropa, my son, never be separate from practices which develop your Merit and deepen your Awareness. Merit and Awareness are like the two wheels on the chariot that is taking you to Enlightenment."

Questions and Answers

QUESTION: If mind is intrinsically pure, where do obscurations come from?

ANSWER: In Buddhism, we do not try to ascribe an origin to ignorance. We do not say that at some point the mind became unable to see itself and lost the direct experience of its own pure nature. Rather, we speak of the beginningless cycle of existence, and accept that as long as there was mind, there was ignorance, co-emergent (len chik che wa [lhan gcig skyes ba]) with mind itself. As mind arises, so does ignorance, and in our present state we cannot speak of mind separate from ignorance. Further distortion takes place; the essential Emptiness of mind is distorted into a subjective leaning toward something that appears existent in itself. Rather than experiencing directly the essential Emptiness of mind, we experience a self.

Buddhist texts do not exaggerate when they say that our greatest enemy is clinging to a self. Why? We are caught in a situation where mind is incapable of directly experiencing its own essential emptiness, and instead posits a self that must be sustained. We thus develop all the needs and wants that must be gratified in order to maintain such a self. Suffering comes from the endless search to satisfy that which cannot be satisfied. "I" leads to "I am" which leads to "I want" and so on.

The fundamental level of ignorance, the first level of obscuration in the mind, is the mind's inability to recognize its own nature. Moreover, mind is not simply empty. It has another aspect, its Clarity, which is its ability to experience all sensory impressions, thoughts, emotions and ideas. Because of fundamental ignorance, this aspect of the mind is also taken to be something different: the objects we perceive are seen not as expressions of the mind's Clarity, but as existent in and of themselves, separate from the mind. A dualistic split has occurred between the self which is posited, and an object understood to be separate from it. This duality and the clinging to it is the obscuration of habitual tendencies, the second level of mental obscuration.

Thus in our present situation, we already have a degree of ignorance which causes us to experience a self as something ultimately real. Further, the Clarity of mind has been distorted into something objective, seen as completely separate from the mind and ultimately real.

This condition will continue forever if we do not attain Enlightenment. We cannot expect it simply to fade away. On the contrary, if we do not transcend the obscurations which led to this distortion, the state is permanent. It will continue to reinforce itself as long as we do not attain Enlightenment. Even when we go to sleep, this dualism carries over from the waking state. In an entirely different realm, where the projections of the mind arise in dreams, there is still the perception of "I" and "other," the self and something outside it. This division permits all the other more complex aspects of the dream state, such as pleasure, happiness, pain and so on.

In the future, when each of us comes to die, and our physical bodies are gone, even in that totally disembodied state, where there can be no physical basis for consciousness, there is a continued impression of embodiment, and the dualistic habit of mind continues: experiences arising in the mind are projected into an environment, and experienced as something other than mind itself.

The third aspect of mind is its Unimpededness. In a pure state this is simply the mind's spontaneous cognitive activity, but when we are caught in the split between subject and object, the thought arises, "That object is good, I want it," and so attraction and attachment form. Or we think, "That threatens me, that's bad," and repulsion and aversion develop. There is also another possibility that of simple stupidity, of not understanding the situation at all, but being caught up in the whole illusion. The three fundamental poisons or patterns of emotional reaction attachment, aversion and stupidity enter here, and from them develops an abundance of emotions, which we traditionally call the eighty-four thousand emotions that afflict the mind. The distortion of the Unimpededness of mind forms the third level of obscuration, the obscuration of emotional afflictions.

When we speak about the three realms of the universe the Desire, Form and Formless Realms we are talking about the distorted side of the pure nature of mind, which itself is essentially empty, clear in nature and unobstructed in manifestation.

What pertains on the general level to the universe also applies to the individual unenlightened being: the experience of a self is a distorted perception of the direct experience of the essential emptiness of mind; the experience of speech is the distorted perception of the clear nature of mind; and the experience of the physical body is the distorted perception of the unimpeded manifestation of mind. With this threefold distortion we produce not only samsaric existence in general, but also the body, speech, and mind of an individual being.

Because of these distortions, we behave in various ways. Physically, verbally and mentally, we react through emotional affliction, which through repetition becomes habitual. Once habits are established, they lead to yet further actions which, like all actions, lead to specific results later on. Causality connects our experiences with our actions. This is karmic obscuration. In this way, our basic confusion, our ignorance of the fundamental nature of mind is harmful to ourselves and others.

We can think of these four levels of confusion (fundamental ignorance, duality, emotional afflictions, unskillful action) as dependent upon one another. Basic ignorance is the mind's failure to experience the Primordial Awareness that is its own nature. From this fundamental ignorance develops the dualistic clinging to self and others as separate, independent entities. This is the second level of obscuration. The third level of obscuration, the mental afflictions, emerge from dualistic clinging. Finally, based upon emotional afflictions, the fourth level, karmic obscuration, develops, wherein all these unskillful, negative tendencies are reinforced through physical, verbal and mental actions.

In our present condition as unenlightened beings, we experience all four levels at the same time. The inherent purity of mind has not been lost, but it is so veiled that we experience a great mass of obscuration. Confusion covers the pure nature of the mind as clouds cover the sun. The single element binding all this confusion together is the clinging to the reality of a self.

Until all these levels of confusion and obscuration are eliminated, Enlightenment cannot arise. We must recover the original purity and transparency of water now polluted by sediment; we must disperse the clouds veiling the sun, so we can see clearly and receive its warmth directly. Once we understand through meditation the Emptiness of mind, its Clarity and Unimpededness, the intense constriction produced by clinging to self and phenomena begins to diminish.

QUESTION: My emotions seem as real as my body and the world around me. They interfere with my practice. What can I do about it?

ANSWER: At present, we are instinctively sure that we exist and have a mind. We are intensely aware of the physical body. We think, my body, and tend to regard the two, body and mind, as one. So we tend to experience emotions on the physical and mental levels simultaneously, as if they were somehow inherent in both. In fact, the origin of all emotion is mental. Ultimately speaking, the way these emotions arise in the mind has nothing to do with the body. We have simply conditioned the mind to experience them as if there were some physical origin for any emotion. In fact, the mind is like a stern king, and the body like a humble servant. It is the body's function to follow the orders of the mind, which it does without any identity of its own. If there were no desire in the mind, there would be none in the body. Likewise, if the mind is without anger, so is the body.

Our problem now is that we experience mind and body as a unity, so whatever comes up in the mind we wish to translate immediately into physical action. When desire or anger arise in the mind, we hurry to express it on a physical level. Our sole mode of experience seems to be that emotions arise in mind and body simultaneously. Yet this is not the case. If it were, then when the mind and body are separated at death, the corpse would continue to feel desire and anger, and act accordingly.

What is necessary is to understand how emotions arise in the mind, and how the physical body is based upon the projection of mind. We must understand more about the nature of mind itself, and see the intangibility of thoughts and emotions that arise from an essentially empty state of mind.

Since thoughts and emotions attachment, aversion, envy, pride, and so onare insubstantial and intangible, then we need not go to all the trouble of expressing them physically or verbally. Even if we do not have direct meditative experience, a great deal of difficulty can be eliminated simply by intellectually understanding that mental projections are as intangible and empty as mind itself. Nagarjuna, the great Indian siddha and scholar, said: All things are realized when Emptiness is realized.

Nothing is realized when Emptiness is not realized.

If one has this basic understanding of the Emptiness of mind and its projections, then any method of meditation will be effective. Without it, no technique will work.

QUESTION: Doesn't the desire for Enlightenment contradict the teachings that say desire is a bad thing?

ANSWER: We have to want Enlightenment, because we must start from where we are right now afflicted with a great deal of dualistic attachment. Since our experiences are governed by a sense of "I" and that "I" therefore wants "things," let us at least make what we want something worthy Enlightenment. As we actually get closer to that Enlightenment, the need to want it becomes less powerful. As we progress through the first, second and third Bodhisattva levels, we experience an increasing awareness of the Emptiness of the self, and of the true nature of mind. This brings a gradual lessening of our desire for Enlightenment.

We can illustrate this rather simply. When you started this morning from wherever you were in New York to come here, you first had the strong thought in your mind, "I'm going to the teaching." The closer you got, the less you needed to worry about it, because you were getting closer. When you finally arrived here, there was no point in thinking, "I've got to get to the teaching," because you had already arrived. Dualistic desire for Enlightenment is gradually dispelled and need not be considered an obstacle; in a certain way, it is essential.

QUESTION: How can one practice Mahāmudrā if one does not have regular contact with one's Lama?

ANSWER: If we are not able to be in close proximity to our Lama, it does not mean that we cannot receive blessing and inspiration and guidance from that teacher. If we really have faith in our teacher, it does not matter how far away we are or how seldom we see our Lama. It is our own faith, devotion and prayers which bring about the benefits. If such faith is lacking, we could sleep at the Lama's feet and derive no benefit.

QUESTION: When I try to meditate, my mind keeps wandering. What should I do?

ANSWER: In order to meditate properly, it is necessary to have practiced shi nay, tranquility meditation. This will pacify all disturbing emotions and allow your mind to remain in onepointedness.

When you first start tranquility meditation, the experience is like water rushing from a mountain top: the mind just keeps running, full of many thoughts. Later, at the second stage, the mind is like the same river when it reaches the plains, running slowly and steadily. Later still, in the last stage, the water in the river reaches the sea and dissolves into it.

Diligence and devotion will help you calm the mind in this way, and then you will be able to meditate properly.

QUESTION: I'm not very strong physically, and it's difficult or impossible for me to sit cross-legged, let alone do prostrations and so on. Does that mean I can't learn to meditate?

ANSWER: For people who are young and healthy, it's important to keep strict meditation posture; the physical discipline will help strengthen both the body and the meditation. But older people, or those in poor health, or with some infirmity, can do their meditation in many different postures, even lying down. The meditator is mind, not body. So if you can properly meditate with the mind, your meditation will be fine.

QUESTION: I have so many responsibilities in my life that I don't have much time for practice. What should I do?

ANSWER: There is a story in Tibet about two young men. One was quite intelligent and had thought a lot about samsara, and about the enlightened state, and what these two conditions meant. The other had a basic understanding that the world was not such a good place, that Dharma practice was very good; beyond that, he did not have a clear understanding of the situation at all. Once the intelligent fellow and he were talking and he said, "Dharma practice really seems difficult, it's something you've got to put your mind to. It takes too much effort. It really is hard and bothersome to commit yourself to it." His friend answered, "It's not so difficult. You accumulate virtue and evil all the time, in everything you do; just as you walk along, what you say or what you do with your hands can be acts of virtue. Simply walking can take the life of some creature, if you step on an insect and kill it. We're always involved with virtue and non-virtue. Virtue doesn't have to be a huge projectyou can simply be aware of what you're doing at each and every moment."

As you walk along, if you come to a garden that is particularly beautiful, your experience of its beauty can be an offering to the Three Jewels or to your Lama. It can be offered with the sincere intention that thereby all beings may develop merit, deepen Awareness, and progress on the Path. In this way an ordinary aesthetic experience can be transformed into an offering which your motivation can make very great, very powerful. If you meet an animal, you can do something very simple, like saying OM MANI PADME HUNG so it hears the sound; some seed has been planted. That takes no effort beyond repeating those six syllables, yet it is beneficial.

QUESTION: What are indications that higher levels of Realization are being reached? What happens?

ANSWER: Through Realization, freedom of mind increases. That's really all that takes place, but this freedom expresses itself in a variety of ways.

Imagine a hundred different images of the Buddha, each showing a multiplicity of colors, postures and so on, in a hundred different places around the world India, China, America, Canada, France and so on. Imagine trying to meditate on all these varied images of the Buddha simultaneously. We would be doing well to visualize even one clearly. This is because our

present mind is so limited. At the first of the ten Bodhisattva levels, mind can encompass all those one hundred objects of meditation in a single instant without confusion, with no detail missing. This is freedom of mind.

As this freedom of mind begins to express itself, it retains certain limitations, but its capacity is far greater than what we experience now. A story may illustrate this. A Mahasiddha named Jalandhara held a particular lineage of the Hevajra Tantra. He gave a disciple the empowerment and meditation instruction for visualizing the form of the Yidam Hevajra. Then Jalandhara sent him into retreat.

Now Hevajra has sixteen arms and is quite a complex figure. The disciple meditated on this form and identified himself with it in meditation. He attained success in his practice to the extent that he felt he was the Yidam and could in actuality manifest those sixteen arms. At that point Jalandhara came to see how his student was doing. When he got there he said, "You should wash my feet." India is often very hot and dusty, so that when someone comes to visit after a long journey, it is a mark of respect and courtesy to wash the visitor's feet in cool water. Indeed the Lama did seem hot, tired and dusty from the trip. The student brought the water in a basin to wash his Lama's feet. The Lama said, "Wash my feet; use one hand for each foot." So with his left hand the disciple began to wash Jalandhara's right foot and with his right hand the Lama's left foot. All of a sudden he looked down and the guru had four feet. That posed no problem. He simply emanated two more hands and washed the four feet. Then there were eight feet. Again no problem; he emanated eight hands. Then there were sixteen feet, so he emanated sixteen hands. All at once, though, he found himself looking down at thirty-two feet, and then he was stuck: he had treated his meditation on sixteen hands as so real, so substantial, that he couldn't get beyond that number.

QUESTION: Is the discussion of Emptiness unique to the Mahāmudrā teachings?

ANSWER: The doctrine of Emptiness is fundamental to Buddhist teachings. In the Prajnaparamita, the literature dealing with the Perfection of Wisdom, we find detailed analyses of Emptiness from different viewpoints. Eighteen aspects of Emptiness are enumerated to facilitate an understanding of the Emptiness of phenomena and of mind.

In both Japanese and Tibetan traditions, we find great emphasis on the principle of Emptiness, and on experiencing it in meditation. In both traditions the Heart Sutra is chanted. The languages differ, but the essential concepts remain:

There is no eye, there is no ear, there is no nose, there is no tongue, there is no body, there is no mind.

Here is a denial of the ultimate reality of all aspects of our experience. At face value, it seems absurd. Here is a monk solemnly reciting that he has no eyes, no tongue, no earsand he patently has them. What is he talking about?

Think of a dream. In dreams we hear, see, taste, smell, touch, and think, yet no sense organs are being used. The mind relays the impression of sensory experience, but there are no sense organs involved. One wakes up and the scene disappears. Later, we treat the memory as something the mind invented. If we extend that analysis to the waking state, we will understand that all phenomena and experiences are essentially like those in dreams in that they partake of the same illusory nature. When we meditate, we will run into difficulties if we lack a basic understanding of Emptiness and the in-tangibility of ideas and emotions. That is why the Perfection of Wisdom teachings were given by the Buddha, and why the Wisdom sutra is still recited.

Consider someone working with a meditation practice such as that of Chenrezi. Meditating on the form of Chenrezi, we visualize ourselves in that form. When we lie down to go to sleep, does the Bodhisattva also lie down and go to sleep? Meditators can make problems like this for themselves if they treat appearances as substantial or self-existent. Once they have apprehended the Emptiness of mind, however, no such confusions occur. Emptiness does not get up or lie down. It is not subject to limitations. There is an immense freedom in the way one can use the mind through the understanding that it is essentially empty.

The Heart Sutra concludes wiah a mantra, TAYATA OM GATE GATE PARAGATE PARASAMGATE BODHI SOHA, which is the mantra of the Perfection of Wisdom, a mantra which pacifies all suffering. It condenses the experience of Emptiness into a verbal formula. The mantra signifies the experience of Emptiness: there is no basis from which suffering can arise, because one has seen the essential Emptiness of mind and all its experiences.

QUESTION: Rinpoche has spoken about conventional and ultimate reality. Doesn't such designation just reinforce dualistic thinking?

ANSWER: Until we have directly experienced the ultimate non-reality of self, of mind, and of causality, it is very important to accept both reality and non-reality. That is, until we are enlightened, we have to adopt two stances. We can take the position that all phenomena are ultimately unreal, even now. Since they are ultimately unreal and essentially empty, all phenomena are only conventionally real; they are not ultimate but deeply and mutually interrelated. This is the Dependent Origination of all things. On the other hand, it is essential to respect the way things work on the conventional level, because we are still bound to it. Once we achieve the ultimate level, it will be pointless to talk about conventional or ultimate we will be beyond both terms, beyond any dualistic mode of thought. Until we get to that stage, however, it is beneficial to accept the ultimate non-reality of phenomena, and also to acknowledge the unfailing conventional reality of things.

QUESTION: Does the intelligence of mind produce the thoughts of which it becomes aware?

ANSWER: If we posit a watcher, such as intelligence watching the thoughts it creates, we split the mind from what it produces; and if we posit

such an initial dualism, we can compound it into an infinite series of watchers watching watchers. The mind isn't like that.

In the same way that this light source, this lamp beside me, is spontaneously expressed by the light it radiates, so the mind, which is essentially empty and clear by nature immediately and spontaneously comes to expression as mental activity. Intelligence is simply that aspect of mind which is simultaneous with mental activity, and aware of it: what arises in the mind is the awareness, mind radiating its spontaneous activity.

QUESTION: What connection is there between Mahāmudrā Realization and compassion?

ANSWER: Through understanding the nature of your own mind, you begin to understand more about the situation of every being in samsara. This kind of understanding, automatically and without any effort at all, gives rise to compassion for every other living being. Appreciating the nature of mind in general, you also come to understand in particular the way mind operates on the impure and the pure levels. Through understanding the impure and the pure as two aspects of the same mind, you give rise to compassion for beings trapped in the impure state of experience, and to faith in beings who have realized pure states of Awareness. There is an automatic development of faith and conviction in the Buddhas and Bodhisattva, and in the goal of Enlightenment for the sake of all beings.

Moreover, by understanding the nature of mind, you will be better able to deal with the sufferings, fears and frustrations you encounter. Once you have this basic understanding, you can deal with everything more effectively. For example, suppose you had a large, painful boil on the back of your hand. You could try various remedies: massaging it, or gently rubbing cream into it, and over a period of time you might cure it. Or, you could take a needle, lance the boil and remove the pus immediately. Whereas other kinds of practice are like a gentle, slow, and gradual approach, understanding the nature of mind cuts directly to the core of the problem. Why? Because you come to understand that all thoughts and emotions, all fears and mental turmoil are nothing but a projection of the mind.

Kalu Rinpoche

The Crystal Mirror

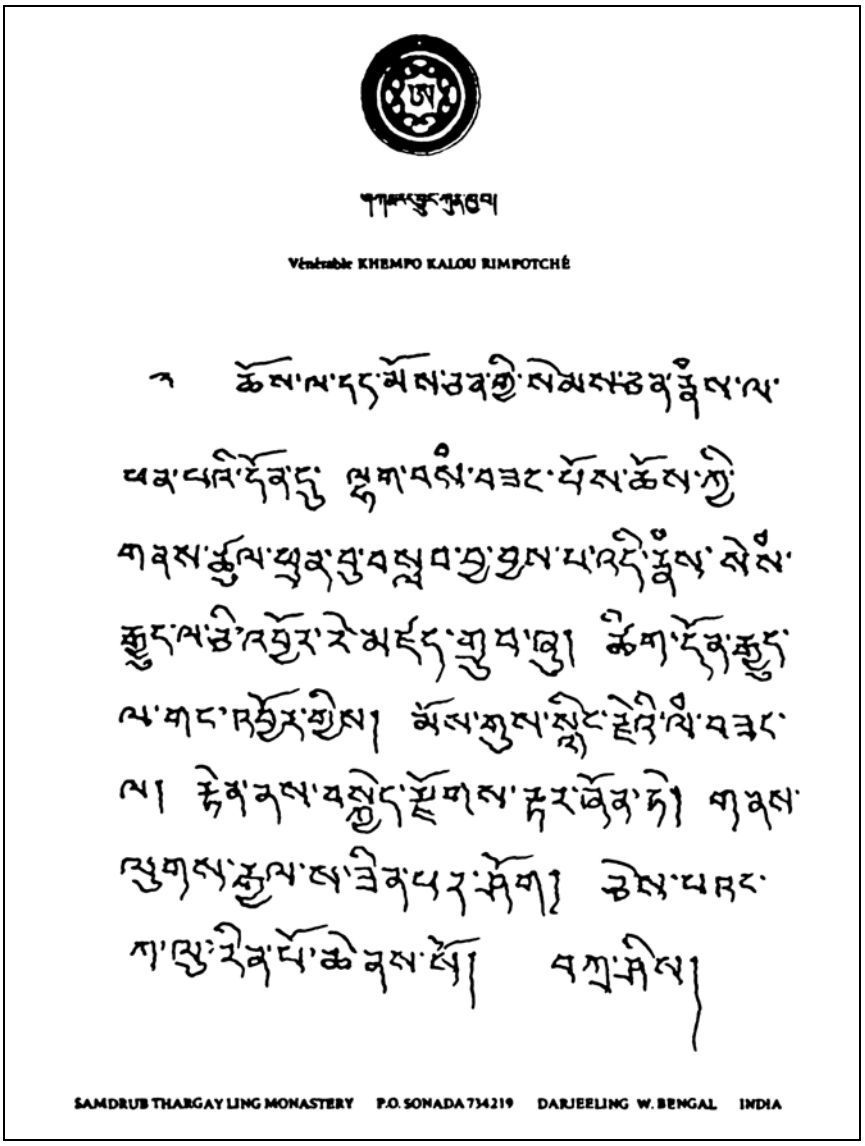
Clearly Showing All The Steps
By Which The Path of Liberation is
Traversed In This Fortunate Kalpa



Kagyu Thubten Chollng
New York, 1982



The Venerable Kalu Rinpoche



ཀཱཀཱཛཱཏཱཀུཏཱ་ཀུཏཱ་ཤུཏཱ།

Vénérable KHEMPO KALOU RIMPOTCHÉ

SAMDRUB THARGAY LING MONASTERY P.O. SONADA 734219 DARJEELING W. BENGAL INDIA

I have presented these brief introductory explanations of Buddhadharma from a sincere wish to benefit those who have faith in and devotion to these teachings. I would ask everyone to take them to heart and to apply them.

May any effect the sense of these words
has on our experience
Place us on the noble path of devotion
and compassion,
Where, riding the steed of the stages of
creation and fulfillment in meditation,
We arrive at the destination of ultimate reality!
With auspicious best wishes,

Kalu Rinpoche Kagyu
Thubten Chollng
New York State
March 17, 1982

Kalu Rimpoche was born in eastern Tibet in 1905rin the Hor Treshe district of the province of Kham. His father, Nakchang Lekshe Drayang, was a 13th Kagyu incarnation, and was learned in medicine, literature and grammar. He had many yidams, whom he often met face to face in meditation. His teachers included Jamgon Kontrul Rimpoche, Ghentse Rimpoche and Mipham. Rimpochefs mother was Drunkar Chung Chung; she was also a strong Dharma practitioner, and had the same teachers as her husband.

After Nakchang Lekshe Drayang and Drunkar Chung Chung were married, they went into retreat. One night, they both had the same dream. In it, Jamgon Kontrul told them that he was coming to stay with them, and asked to be given a room; after this, he dissolved into them, as did Guru Rimpoche and many Dharma protectors.

Drunkar Chung Chung's pregnancy was joyful for her, and she was never troubled by sickness. One day, when she and her husband had climbed a mountain to pick medicinal herbs, she felt the baby move, and realized that he would soon be born. They hurried home, and when they got there saw that flowers were raining down on their house from the sky, and that many rainbows had appeared above it. As soon as Rimpoche was born, he sat up in the meditation posture and chanted OM MANI PADME HUNG; then he said that he had come to benefit sentient beings. His parents were very happy, and everyone in the neighboring countryside soon realized that a special incarnation had been born.

When Rimpoche was young he loved all sentient beings, and had great compassion for them. He would go to the lakes to bless the fish, and would give mantras to the animals; he felt devotion for all the lamas he met; he studied writing, spelling and meditation with his father, and often said that he would spend his life as Milarepa had, meditating in the mountains. He was very intelligent and well-spoken; his yidam was White Tara.

When he was 13 years old, he went to Karma Kagyu Thubten Cho Korling — Palpung — monastery to study. Situ Rimpoche gave him the getsul vows there, and the name Karma Rangjung Kunchab. " Karma" is a name given to all those in the Karma Kagyu tradition; "Rangjung" means self-originating, or self-arisen; "Kunchab" means all-pervading. The name made everyone happy, because they knew it truly described Kalu Rimpoche. (The name Kalu is an informal one; it conveys friendliness and respect, but has no particular meaning.)

At Palpung, Rimpoche studied the sutras and tantras with his teacher, Khenpo Tashi Chopel, and was given a special Mahayana Bodhisattva vow and tantric initiations by the 10th Trungpa Rimpoche. Every lama he met was impressed by his intelligence, and when he was 15 years old, he gave a lecture before an audience of several thousand monks.

When he was 16 years old, Rimpoche entered the three-year retreat. His Lama, Norbu Dondrub, inspired him with much faith and devotion, and, diligently following his instructions, he fully completed the practices of the Karma- and Shangba-Kagyu lineages, and received in full all the learning transmitted to him.

When the retreat was finished, Situ Rimpoche, Palden Jamgon Chentse Ozer, Tsaptsa Drupgyud, Dzogchen Rimpoche, Chentse Chochi Lodro, and nany other lamas, gave Kalu Rimpoche initiations and teachings, and took him as their son.

When he was 25 years old, Rimpoche left the monastery and began to lead the life of a solitary hermit, wandering the high mountains, taking shelter wherever he might be, needing and finding no human company. For 12 years he lived in this way.

In his dreams, Kalu Rimpoche traveled to Buddha realms, met Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and received initiations and teachings from them; he visited the lower realms, to benefit beings by giving them mantras; he went to Jamgon Kontrul's house, where he received four initiations, and where Jamgon Kontrul himself dissolved into him. In one dream, he was transformed into Guru Rimpoche, and many gods and goddesses came to him, offering flowers and nusic, and promising to help him. One day, when he was sick, Rimpoche dreamed that he was Hayagriva, and subdued the demons; in another dream, Tara appeared to him and told him that she would remove all obstacles to his work of benefiting sentient beings; he flew in the sky, and prayed for many different countries. But when he told his root-lama about these dreams, he was told that they were unimportant: the only important thing was to purify his mind and reach a state of enlightenment.

Kalu Rimpoche cared nothing for food or clothing, only for his practice. Whatever he possessed, he offered to the Dharma. Everyone was very friendly towards him, but he had no attachment, even to his own five senses; for all beings, without exception, he had only compassion.

Rimpoche's outer practice was that of an Arhat, observing monk's vows; inwardly, he practiced the path of the Mahayana Bodhisattva; secretly, he practiced cherim and zogrim meditation. He wished to remain in his solitary way of life, like Milarepa, but at length Situ Rimpoche said that he should return to the world to teach, and he went back to his old monastery.

Many of the most eminent lamas — Situ Pema Wangchuk, Sechen Kontrul, Zongsa Chentse, Chochi Lodro, Seche Kongtrul, His Holiness the 16th Karmapar Zogchen Rimpoche — now recognized Kalu Rimpoche as truly being the activity-incarnation of Jamgon Kontrul. But they remembered that Jamgon Xontrul had said his activity tulku would be a rimay geshe, and therefore did nothing to interfere with the simplicity of his life and title. ("Rimay" refers to the non-sectarian movement led by the great Jamgon Kongtrul in the 19th century; a geshe is a high rank of teacher.)

At Palpung, Rimpoche became the principal teacher in the three-year retreats. After doing this for many years, he asked Situ Rimpoche if he might visit Lhasa to some lamas there. In Lhasa, he taught the regent of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Redung Rimpoche, Kangdo, Lhapsten and many other high Gelugpa lamas; he also visited Thupcho Namgyal's monastery, to the west of Lhasa, where he gave many initiations. During this period Situ Rimpoche also visited Lhasa, and asked Rimpoche to return to eastern Tibet. Rimpoche did this, and taught retreatants for many more years, during which he also built many chortens, or stupas.

In 1955, a few years before the Chinese occupation of their homeland drove many Tibetans into exile, Rimpoche returned to Lhasa to see his Holiness the 16th Karmapa at Tsurphu monastery. There he bestowed the Kalachakra initiation. Afterwards, His Holiness asked him to go to Bhutan and India as his representative, with the task of preparing the ground for the coming years of exile.

In Bhutan, where Rimpoche's first stay was at Korthup Chang Chub Choling Monastery, he established two three-year retreat centers; during this period, he gave vows to 300 monks.

In 1964, Kalu Rimpoche met His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Dhaarrnsala, India, and, at his request, gave teachings to such eminent Gelugpa incarnations as Chudmay Rimpoche and Namgyal Tratsam; in particular, he gave them in tantric practice, in the Dorje Purba cycle of teachings, and Mahakala initiation.

As he had in Bhutan, Rimpoche built two three-year retreat centers in India, a Tsopema and Dalhousie. Then, in 1965, he built his own monastery at Sonada, near Darjeeling, and built a three-year center there, too.

His Holiness Karmapa gave Kalu Rimpoche many initiations, and told him that in future he would give the Kagyupa teachings of the Six Yogas of Naropa, the Mahamudra teachings, and the teachings of Chungpo Naljor ana the Shangba lineage to Shamar Rimpoche, Situ Rimpoche, Jamgon Kontrul and Gyaltsap Rimpoche.

By now, Kalu Rimpoche had become an irreplaceable source of transmission fortte Kagyu and Shangba-Kagyu doctrines, and in 1971 the Karmapa asked him to travel to the west as his representative. Henceforward, Rimpochefs work would not only be to preserve the Vajrayana doctrines in pure form during a period of upheaval, but also to gradually introduce non-Tibetans to the ancient teachings.

His first journey took him to Europe, the United States, and Canada, where, in Vancouver, he established Kagyu Kunchab Chbling. During this, and subsequent journeys which took him to many countries in Asia, Europe and back to North America, Rimpoche established more than 50 Dharroa Centers, whenever possible arranging for one of his own lamas to live a"& work with their members. He also established three-year retreat centers in France, Sweden, Canada and the United States. Many thousands of people have heard him teach during these journeys, and many hundreds have taken refuge with him and received initiation into the practice of Chenrezig, the Bodhisattva who embodies compassion. For some, these initial contacts have led to further practice and a deeper understanding of Buddhist teachings; for others, the initiation remains, as it were, a seed planted but still waiting for the right conditions to germinate.

Before his fourth visit to the United States in 1982, which he made by way of Thailand, the Philippines, Taiwan and Canada, His Holiness Karmapa urged Kalu Rimpoche to give the Kalachakra initiation in New York City. In agreeing to perform in public the greatest cycle of tantric initiations that can be so performed, Kalu Rimpoche brings his work in North America to a new

level, which will undoubtedly be marked, as all his previous efforts on behalf of sentient beings have been, by unfailing generosity, and by unyielding truthfulness to the tradition he embodies.

At the beginning of the cosmological cycle for this world-system, there was at first only space. Then winds moved in the space, and on this mandala of wind, rain eventually fell; from the earth element, the central mountain and sub-continents were formed.

At this stage, there was no human life on earth. But after vast ages of time, owing to a partial exhaustion of their merit, certain gods of the desire realm began to visit this planet, and found it congenial. At first, they returned to their own realm for nourishment. But as time passed, their merit decreased still further, and they became too lazy, or lacked the skill, to return to their own realm. Gradually, they began to look for food here on earth. At first, they were foragers; later they began to gather food in an organized way, and settled where natural harvests were abundant.

Just as the merit of these former gods decreased, so their way of life worsened, and their emotions became more turbulent. At first, the desire of a man for a woman, and vice versa, was fully satisfied by merely a glance; then, certain flirtatious exchanges became necessary; after that, some physical contact — the holding of hands, say — became the means of satisfaction; in the fourth, and final, stage of deterioration, desire could only be satisfied by sexual intercourse.

During this period the stages of tantric practice appeared on earth, inspired by Vajradhara, the primordial Buddha whose form is the one that enlightenment takes when transmitting tantric teachings to human beings. These stages, or classes, of tantra, from highest to lowest, correspond to the four stages marking the deterioration of the relationship between men and women. The first, and lowest, class of tantras is called kriya, meaning action; the second class is called carya, meaning behavior (that is, patterns of action); the third class consists of the yoga, or union, tantras; and the fourth, and highest, class consists of the anuttara, or unsurpassable tantras.

In the so-called new school of Tibetan Buddhism, to which the Kagyupa, Sakyapa and Gelugpa lineages belong, the anuttara tantras are divided into the father, mother, and non-dual tantras, making (with the Kriya, Carya and Yoga classes) six classes of tantra in all.

The characteristic of the father tantras is to emphasize skillful means and the development stage of meditation; the mother tantras emphasize wisdom and the completion stage; in the non-dual tantras, means and wisdom, development an completion, are stressed equally. The Kalachakra tantra belongs to the non-dual class, the pinnacle level of tantric practice.

The word Kalachakra means "cycle of time", and is interpreted in two ways. First, and mundanely, as referring to such recurring periods of time as hours, days, months, seasons, and to such longer periods as the 12-year and 60-year cycles. Second, and at a pure level, Kalachakra is the name of a deity.

In the first, mundane, sense, the cycles of time expressed in the Kalachakra tantra are connected with the 12 links of interdependent causation, those elements which make up, or contribute to, our situation as unenlightened beings in the cycle of rebirth: being ignorant, we develop karmic tendencies; out of these consciousness arises, and we develop name and form; thence dualistic impressions occur, experienced through the various senses that make contact with the external world; in consequence, feeling, craving and grasping arise, and follow becoming, birth, old age and death. This causal chain appears in each cycle of incarnation.

Throughout the Kalachakra cycle, three ways of viewing one's experience are stressed. First, in terms of the physical world around one; second, in terms of one's own vajra body; and third, in secret terms connected with the mandala of divinities. This third perspective forms a bridge between the mundane and pure aspects of the Kalachakra tantra*

Although the Kalachakra was originally transmitted by Vajradhara, it was promulgated in this age by the Buddha Sakyamuni when he gave tantric teachings on the mountain called Malaya. The Kalachakra was the first tantra he taught then, and the principal figures in his audience were the Bodhisattva Vajrapani and a king of noble birth of the kingdom of Sharabala named Dawa Zangpo, which means "Noble Moon."" After receiving the root-transmission of the tantra, Dawa Zangpo wrote a commentary on it called Drima Mepa, meaning "Stainless." Both the transmission text and the commentary are contained in the Tibetan canon known as the Tangyur.

For eight generations of Shambala kings the teachings of the teachings of the Kalachakra tantra were very influential. These kings are not regarded as ordinary men, but as emanations of Bodhisattvas, each one reigning for 100 years. The present king, whose name means "Victorious One," will be followed by four more, of whom the last, Dagpo Korlo Chen, will unite the human realm under his influence. During his reign there will be a new flowering of .£he Buddha's teachings (and, especially, of the tantras), and many hundreds of millions of sentient beings will benefit.

After the reign of Dagpo Korlo Chen, his two sons will reign together, since neither will have sufficient power to take his father's place alone. The world at that time will be divided into 24 regions, and each son will govern 12 of them. In subsequent generations, the rulers of Shambala will have less and less power, each one coming to rule over a smaller and smaller number of regions. The influence of the Buddha's teachings will similarly decline, until, eventually, they will have vanished altogether. This will continue to be the case until the Buddha Maitreya appears.

Many saints and siddhas — for example, Nagarjuna — have gained enlightenment through the Kalachakra practice. In the best case, those who have received the initiation can become enlightened in one lifetime, or in the bardo after death; failing this, they can reach enlightenment in three, seven or 16 lifetimes, or be reborn in the Pure Land of Shambala. If the connection between the practitioner and the royal lineage of Shambala is not defiled, he or she may be reborn in close connection with Dagpo Khorlo Cen.

The Kalachakra teachings were first brought to Tibet by such enlightened scholars as Marpa and Atisha. Other especially effective translators were Ra Lotsa, Nu Lotsa and Tsa Lotsa. Amongst those who codified the teachings, the names of Buston and Dopo Sherab Gyaltsen are pre-eminent. Through the work of these and other lamas, the Kalachakra teachings were adopted by all four schools of Tibetan Buddhism, entering the Kagyu lineage mainly through the work of Thuptup Orgyenpa and the 3rd Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje. From Rangjung Dorje they passed in an unbroken line to the great Jamgon Kontrul Lodrothaye, whose birth had been prophesied by the Buddha, who received the transmission from Pema Nyinche, in the Lotus and Samadhirajah sutras.

Kalu Rinpoche's root-lama, Norbu Dondrub, received the Kalachakra transmission from Jamgon Kontrul himself when he was eight years old, and later from Tasho Ozer, the abbott of Pepung monastery, where the Kalachakra rituals and meditation were regularly performed. Jamgon Kontrul had established a three-year retreat center, Kunzal Dechen Ozal Ling, near Pepung, and the vajra master of the retreat, Katen Rinpoche, also gave the transmission to Norbu Dondrub, who himself later became the retreat's vajra master. Then, when Kalu Rinpoche made the three-year retreat, he received the transmission from Norbu Dondrub.

This afternoon, Rimpoche is going to give teaching on the Kagyu Mahamudra preliminary practices. The preliminary practices consist of the four ordinary preliminaries and the four extra-ordinary preliminaries. The ordinary preliminaries consist of certain meditation practices which can be undertaken by anyone who is following one of the Buddhist vehicles - the Hinayana, the Mahayana or the Vajra-yana. These meditations are the four contemplations which turn the mind.

As sentient beings we take re-birth in one of the six realms of existence in Samsara. There are many beings in the cycle of existence who are afflicted by the passions and disturbing emotions and who commit negative actions. The most numerous of these beings are in the hells. The hells have the largest number of beings and the Buddha has taught that the number of beings in the hells can be compared to the total number of atoms contained in all the countries in the world. The cause for being re-born in the hells is the practice of extremely negative and non-virtuous actions to a great intensity.

There are fewer beings in the hungry ghost realm than in the hell realms and it is taught that the number in the hungry ghost realm can be compared with all the numberless grains of sand contained in all the oceans in the world. The cause for being re-born in the hungry ghost realms is again the practice of negative actions with the body, speech and mind, but the intensity of the actions is not as great as would produce re-birth in the hell realm,

There are fewer beings in the animal realm than in the other two realms and the number of beings in the animal realms compares to the number of raindrops which would fall during a rainfall which lasted a day and a night all over the world. The reason for being re-born as an animal is the practice of many different kinds of lesser negative actions and bad karma. The main

reasons which cause re-birth in the lower realms are - through the power of anger and hatred one is re-born in the hells - through the power of desire and greed one is re-born in the hungry ghost realm - through the power of ignorance and stupidity, one is re-born in the animal realm.

The total number of beings in the three higher realms are very few compared with the number in the lower realms. It Is said that the numbers in the three higher realms can be compared to the number of stars that can be seen in a night time sky. Furthermore, it Is taught that those who have a precious human body, endowed with the freedoms and conditions for practice, are extremely few and their number can be compared to the number of stars visible in a day time sky. To explain about the rarity of those who have a precious human body - if we consider the number of people who are in this room at this moment, it looks like ajlot. But remember that in countries like China and Russia, Dharma has been completely extinguished and there is no one who is able to practice Dharma, and there are many people in these countries. Futhermore, consider that there are millions of people in NYC, and from these you can see that there are only very few who are interested in Dharma and who wish to practice. So, all of you have the precious human body which is extremely rare and difficult to obtain. This body is endowed with the eight freedoms and the ten conditions for practice. Perhaps, you can read about these in the Jewel Ornament of Liberation and study all of these in detail with a lama.

It is necessary for you to know and realize that you have this precious human body with these special endowments and that it is very difficult to find a body like this. If you know about this precious human body you have achieved and about the conditions, then you can practice Dharma and make it meaningful. If you do practice Dharma, you yourself will be freed from the cycle of existence and you will achieve enlightenment. Once you have reached enlightenment, then you have the ability to lead and help limitless beings on the path to enlightenment. If you don't use this precious human body to practice Dharma, then it has been of no use to you because due to impermanence, you will eventually die and at the time of death, you can't do anything positive. So, if you think seriously about this acquisition of a precious human body and the difficulty of achieving it, you will understand the real meaning of it, then you will conclude that there is no other means but that you should practice Dharma and you will acquire great discipline and diligence to do so. The acquisition of the precious human body in this lifetime is not something which has come from nothing there has been a reason for it. The reason is that in previous lifetimes, you practiced positive actions to a great degree and gathered merit. That, together with the compassion and kindness of the Three Jewels has produced this human body at this time. If we donft practice Dharma in this lifetime, then it will be difficult to get another body as good as this one in a future lifetime. Even for those who may wish to practice Dharma, it can also be difficult to do, because often there are times when Buddhist Teachings do not exist in the world. If we don't have the practice of Dharma now, in this lifetime, then in the next lifetime, it's going to be difficult to hear the Teachings of the Dharma, to find a Lama and also to practice.

At the very beginning of this universe, nothing existed except space. Due to Interdependent causes and conditions, the universe gradually took form over a period of 20 kal-pas in time. Different elements came together to produce the different forms of this universe. Once the universe took form, there was another 20 kalpas when it remained static. Then it takes a further 20 kalpas for the universe to disintegrate. Gradually, the elements, the mountains, rocks, water etc. fall apart and beings go into non-existence. Once the universe falls into non-existence, there is a further 20 kalpas when there is only empty space. These four periods, of 20 kalpas each make-up 80 kalpas or what is called a "great kalpa".

At the time when the universe falls into non-existence, all beings who have been there are re-born into another universe. In our kalpa (which is the first of the 20 kalpa time spans) there will appear 1 000 Buddhas. Already in this small kalpa, three Buddhas have appeared and the fourth one was Shakyamuni. Another 996 are still to come. If we have complete and strong faith in the Three Jewels and go for refuge, then if we are not enlightened in this lifetime, we still have the possibility to be enlightened in future lifetimes when there .is the appearance of a Buddha. When this "large kalpa" consisting of 80 small kalpas is finished, the next "great kalpa" will come during which 10 000 Buddhas will appear. After that there will follow an extremely long period of time during which no Buddhas will appear and the Dharma will not be heard at all. This period of time will be 700 "great kalpas".

In view of this, the times when a Buddha and the Teachings of a Buddha do not exist are much longer than the times when they do exist. It is only very occasionally in fact, that a Buddha appears. Therefore, it is very Important that we listen to the Teachings and try to understand the meaning and practice Dharma. And the meaning of these Teachings is contained in the contemplation on the acquisition of the precious human body.

The second meditation is on impermanence. The subject of impermanence must be contemplated in order to acquire the ability to practice Dharma. We should think that all external existence will gradually disintegrate and disappear and that all beings who are alive will eventually die. Everything external is subject to impermanence. In addition, we ourselves and all sentient beings who live in the world die. When they die, then they do not exist anymore. They are all subject to Impermanence.

For example, in America, everyone who has gone before us has died. Our forebearers are now dead and in the same way, we will eventually die.

Impermanence is manifested in the constant changes which take place. You are born and then you become a small child, and year by year you change and grow older. Meditate well on impermanence, then you will develop an understanding that impermanence will come to me, myself. There is no-one who can say that this year will be alright; I won't be affected by impermanence. Impermanence is something which strikes suddenly and we never know when we will be here. Therefore, it is very important to practice Dharma now in order to benefit the future.

There is a story about a greatly realized yogi in Tibet called Jigme Kingpa. This yogi lived in a cave and outside his cave, there were many bushes

which made it difficult to walk about. Also, the steps leading from his cave were in bad condition and it was difficult to go up and down. This lama thought to himself that it would be difficult to get around with the bushes the way they were and that he should do something to facilitate his movement. Then he thought about impermanence and he decided to stay inside and simply meditate. Each time he went in and out, he thought about the bushes and the steps and thought he really should do something about it. But then he thought about impermanence again and he realized that it was really better that he should sit. and meditate. So he continued his meditation without cutting down the bushes and mending the steps. This lama achieved the level of a slddha. So when you meditate on impermanence, all laziness disappears and great diligence arises.

At this time, we all think that we have a lot of work to do, we will always exist, we have no time to practice, we can't practice etc. To go into great detail on the teaching of impermanence would not be possible right now as there are so many teachings on this subject. However, you can find more detailed teachings in the Jewel Ornament.

The third contemplation is on karma. The meaning of karma is that whatever action is performed, it has a result. The actions we perform are either positive or negative and we perform these actions with our body, speech and mind. The first negative action of the body is to kill. Killing is extremely negative, because if you stop to consider a situation in which you, yourself, are being killed, you can imagine the kind of suffering, fear and pain which you would experience. It is considered a very great sin to kill because you produce that same kind of suffering, fear and pain in another being.

The second negative action of the body is stealing. This is considered a very great sin because if you, yourself, had any of your own possessions stolen, then you can see how it would produce great unhappiness and suffering in your mind.

The third negative action of the body is sexual misconduct or adultery. This is considered negative because if a man and a woman are together in a harmonious way, and one of them goes off with another partner, this causes a lot of trouble and suffering. It is very negative to do this because it causes one to experience great anger, jealousy, greed etc.

Then concerning the negative actions of speech, the first is to lie. This is negative because if you lie to someone, then it confuses them and can cause a lot of unhappiness.

The second negative action of speech is to use divisive talk or cause people to be out of harmony with each other. For instance, to go between people saying, "He doesn't like you" - this kind of thing. This produces unhappiness and it produces suffering in both of their minds.

The third negative action of speech is to use harsh words. For instance to say to someone, "You are a bad person" or, "Your work is no good", or "You're ugly". Words like that which cause the other to be unhappy, angry or experience suffering in their mind.

The fourth negative action of speech is gossip or idle talk. This is considered negative because if you speak words which do not have much meaning, and you speak a lot to others, then in your conversation you are using the emotions of anger, jealousy and pride etc. This causes unhappiness to others and also it makes your own disturbing emotions and defilements increase.

There are three negative actions of the mind: covetousness, ill will and wrong view. There are two kinds of covetous-ness or envy. The first arises from oneself - it is that whatever possession we have, we think they are our possessions and we cling to them very strongly. The second kind comes from others - and it is wishing we could have another's possessions. These feelings are considered negative because they produce greed and desire in the mind. For instance, if someone has $10,000, then covetous feelings of wishing to have one million dollars may arise. Then when we acquire a million dollars, we still wish for more. Thus the passions increase.

Then there is ill will which arises when someone wishes harm to others and is happy when others are suffering and has thoughts like - I wish to harm someone. It is considered negative because the thought of ill will towards others produces non-virtuous thoughts in the mind and the fruit of these are to experience ill will against oneself and in the future.

Then there is wrong view. Wrong view consists of not believing that the result of a positive action is happiness and that the result of a negative action is suffering. The greatest kind of wrong view is to think that there is no such thing as Buddhas and the Teachings of the Dharraa are not true. If wrong view arises, then the path to liberation is cut off.

The greatest negative actions consist of these ten - the three negative actions of the body, the four negative actions of speech and the three negative actions of mind. It is not possible to explain individually what are the results of these main negative actions. But for instance, if someone kills, then the fruit of the form result of this action is to be re-born in the hells. Once the karma period in the hells has been completed, and one is reborn as a human, one still has to experience the power of that karma and this power is manifested in the external appearance of the land in which we are born. One will be born in a land which has wild animals, bad water, a dangerous landscape and where there is a constant threat to one's life. The third karmic result of killing in a previous lifetime is manifested in the inclinations of the being. For instance, one could be re-born as a cat who enjoys killing or as a human being who enjoys killing for pleasure. The fourth kind of karmic result of killing is the karma of the experience in which if a being is re-born as a human, he has to experience a short lifetime, much sickness and unhappiness.

For each action which is committed there are four kinds of karmic results which must be experienced. If this is known, then one gives up negative actions as much as possible in order to avoid being re-born in the lower states of existence. The ten positive virtuous actions are the opposite of the negative ones. For instance, if one gives up killing and protects life, then this is the first virtue of the body. If we see someone going to kill someone else

and we prevent this and protect a life, this would be extremely virtuous and very positive.

Second, is giving up stealing. If one practices generosity this is a very fine virtue. There are two forms which generosity can take. One is to make offerings to the Lama -the other is to give to ordinary beings.

The third virtue of the body is to give up sexual misconduct and to practice morality. For instance, if one is married, then one tries to live harmoniously with that partner from the time of marriage until the time of death without going to anyone else. This is virtuous.

Concerning the virtues of speech, if lying is given up and telling the truth is practiced, then this is virtuous. Secondly, when divisive talk is given up and one uses words which bring harmony and people together, then this is virtuous. Thirdly, if harsh words are given up and one uses words which are pleasing, kind and gentle and causes others to feel happy, then this is virtuous. It is very positive to practice kind and gentle words, to speak kindly and gently. For instance, if a father speaks angrily to his son, this causes his son to be unhappy. Fourthly, in giving up gossip and if one speaks very little and meaningfully, then this is virtuous.

Then there are the virtues of the mind - giving up envy and covetousness. If one develops a frame of mind thinking, however rich or poor one is, one is content with one's possessions and wealth, then this is virtuous and causes attachment and greed to decrease and one can practice generosity and make offerings.

The second virtue of the mind is to give up ill will towards others and to meditate that all sentient beings have previously been our parents and we owe a debt of gratitude towards them. By thinking in this way, we develop a mind which seeks to benefit others. This is very virtuous.

The fourth meditation is on the sufferings of the cycle of existence. The realm of greatest suffering is the hell realm. The phenomena experienced in the hell realms are, for example, being burned by molten metal or being burned by great and high fires. The hell realm is the place in Samsara where only extreme suffering exists. For this reason, when we hear the name of the hells, we understand it to be the place where one suffers extensive sorrows. In the cold hells one experiences great cold and all the surroundings are ice. Beings have no clothes and their bodies are constantly exposed to the elements. The cause for re-birth in the hells is having hatred in one's mind. So, if one has a great deal of hatred in the mind when one dies, one will be re-born in the hells. There are eight hot hells and eight cold hells and two intermediary hells -altogether 18 hells. The span of existence in the hells is very, very long and if one wishes to find out the exact figures, one can look it up in the Jewel Ornament of Liberation.

The suffering of the second realm is the suffering of hungry ghosts. It is the suffering of not having anything to eat, drink, or wear. During the daytime one is being burned by the sun and at night time, one is freezing from the moonlight. The sufferings in this realm include the external sufferings, the internal sufferings of not having anything to eat or drink and the sufferings

which comes to the individuals. There are many other kinds of suffering which come to the hungry ghosts.

Then we have the animal realm. Many animals live in the ocean and there are also animals living on the land so that we can see them. Animals are of various kinds: some have a long life, others a short life; some are visible, but others we cannot see. For example, in the depths of the oceans, there are some animals which live for one kalpa or one aeon of time. In the sky around us, we can see insects and flies which are born in the morning and die in the evening.

A more extended explanation of these three realms - the hell realms, the hungry ghost realms and the animal realms can be found in the Jewel Ornament of Liberation.

In the three higher realms, the highest realm is that of the gods -the gods of desire, the gods of form and the formless gods. These are very pleasurable and enjoyable realms. Within the realm of the gods of desire there are six different kinds of gods. The cause for re-birth in the desire god´s realms is accumulating merit in this lifetime, practicing absorptive meditation, having the experience of bliss arising in absorptive meditation, and being attached to this bliss. Above these six realms of the desire gods, there are the 17 different kinds of form gods. Birth as one the 17 different kinds of form gods is the result of accumulating a lot of merit in a previous lifetime and experiencing a great deal of clear light or luminosity in absorptive meditation.

Above the realm of the form gods is the realm of the formless gods. There are four different kinds of formless gods and in order to be born in this realm, it is not enough simply to have accumulated a great deal of merit. One must have meditated on Voidness, at least for an instant. But having meditated on Voidness, one becomes attached to this Voidness.

If we practice absorptive meditation (shinay or samatha) and we become skilled in this practice, then we can attain re-birth in the realm of the desire gods, form gods or formless gods. If we are practicing samatha and our meditation is simply a kind of stupidity or ignorance, this is not a good kind of meditation, and the results are being born as an animal. If we practice Samatha and Vipass (insight) meditation, then we are able to progress on the path of the Pratyekabuddhas, Sravakas and Bodhisattvas.

If one is re-born in the realm of the form or formless gods, then when one dies, or finishes one's period of existence in these two realms, one is re-born in the realm of the gods of desire. When one dies or finishes one's period in the realm of the gods of desire, a sound comes from the sky and says that we will die in seven days. And so in this way, one knows that one is about to die and leave this realm. At this time, one's garments begin to smell and the garlands of flowers which one is wearing begin to fade. In the realms of the gods of desire there are many children who are always playing for the enjoyment of the gods. All the children and all the other gods realize that you are about to die, and they all leave you completely alone. At this time, since you realize that you are about to die and leave the gods1 realm, through your clairvoyant powers, you are able to see the place where you will be reborn. In this way you can see the lower realms and the realm in which you will be

born. Seeing this future re-birth and its suffering causes great suffering in the mind. It is like the suffering of a fish taken from water and placed on hot, dry sand. For seven days these gods experience very great suffering as their death approaches. The length of a day in

the god´s realms is equivalent to 100 years in our realm. In other words, for 700 years these gods remain alone, knowing they are about to die. This is called the "suffering of seeing where I will be re-born when I fall from the realm of the gods".

The realm of the jealous gods, or asuras, is also very enjoyable (like the gods' realms) but the jealous gods have a great deal of jealousy, anger and hatred. Because of this, they are always involved in fighting with one another. For this reason, they experience a great deal of suffering.

Then we have the human realm. The four great sufferings of the human realm are the sufferings of birth, old age, sickness and death. The suffering of birth is the suffering we experience in our mother's womb as well as the suffering at the time of birth. Because of ignorance, we can't remember this, but there is a great deal of suffering at this time.

We all know what the suffering of sickness is. There is also a great deal of suffering during old age and older people know what this suffering entails. We all must die and at the time of death, there is a great deal of suffering. Those who work in hospitals and see people dying would know about this.

These are the four major sufferings of the human realm, but in addition to these there are many other sufferings. For example, desiring things we can't have, and even if we are able to acquire these things, we are not able to keep them and so we suffer greatly from wanting to keep these. There is a great deal of suffering which comes from one's enemies, from being under the power of rulers etc. Amongst one's family and friends, if one is not in harmony with them, not friendly, then there is a great deal of suffering which comes to the mind. This is the suffering which we make ourselves and which we cause in our minds.

These are the six realms and the six places of re-birth in Samsara. If we practice good actions, sometime we will be born in the upper realms; if we practice wrong actions, then we will be born in the lower realms. In this way, we are constantly wandering in the six realms of Samsara and by our continuous wandering, we are beings of Samsara. This is the outer wheel of Samsara, and the outer existence through which all beings wander. Then within each being in Samsara, there is the cycle of the twelve interdependent links.

It is necessary to meditate on the sufferings of Samsara by examining closely the different kinds of sufferings which exist throughout the six realms and to think, fllf I were reborn in the hells, would I experience these or not?" Examine very closely all of these. Once one knows about the different sufferings which do exist in the cycle of existence, it is necessary to meditate on these and this will produce fear and through that fear arises the thought that if I don't practice Dharma now, there are no means for me to escape from the sufferings of Samsara. Meditating on the suffering which others

experience, produces loving kindness and compassion and this compassion can be developed.

Through contemplation on these four meditations - acquisition of a precious human body, impermanence, karma and the sufferings of Samsara, Milarepa developed such a great diligence that he meditated day and night and achieved enlightenment in his lifetime. These four meditations make up the four ordinary preliminaries which are meditated on in all schools of Buddhism and also in each of the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism. There is no way in which one can practice Dharma in any of these schools without contemplation on these four subjects. This completes the Teaching on the four thoughts which turn the mind.

At the present time in the world, in Tibet, South Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos there is much fear and suffering and we probably all know about it. Before the fear and suffering began to be manifest in these countries, there were many people who were aware of the fact that these things would come and due to that awareness they came to Europe and the West. Those who were not aware of the imminent fear and suffering stayed behind and are now submerged in it. This example is given to illustrate that if we know about the fear and suffering which can be experienced in the different realms of the cycle of existence, then we can try to escape from it. Through the practice of Dharma we escape from all fear and suffering.

At the present time we don't have any power to protect ourselves and we need to have an external protector. This external protector takes the form of the Three Jewels. If we have faith and take refuge in the Three Jewels and the Three Roots then we can receive their blessing and progress towards enlightenment at which time we will have complete control over the mind. In having control over the mind, at that stage we do not need to have an external protector anymore. It is with this meaning in mind that the first of the extra-ordinary preliminaries is the practice of taking refuge and making prostrations.

It is necessary to meditate on the refuge aspect as being those who have the ability to protect and give us refuge from the fear and suffering of the cycle of existence. First of all, meditate that in front of you there is a very vast and beautiful pasture and countryside. In the center of this land is a most beautiful lake of water having the eight different perfections. From the center of this lake arises a wish-fulfilling tree with five branches. On each branch there are many leaves and fruits etc. Then you meditate that on the central branch of the tree is a many jewelled lion throite and on top of this, a lotus flower. On top of the lotus is a sun disc and on top of that, a moon disc. Seated on the moon disc is your own root lama in the form of the Buddha Dorje Chang. Meditate that above your own real lama in the form of Dorje Chang is his root lama and above that his root lama and so forth until the whole lineage is visualized back to the time of Buddha Dorje Chang.

At the top is the Buddha Dorje Chang, and his disciple was the Bodhisattva Lodro Rinchen and his disciple was the great Siddha, Saraha. His disciple was Nagarjuna, and his disciple was the Siddha Shawaripa. His disciple was the great Maitripa. These are all Indian teachers.

Then comes the first Tibetan lama, Marpa Lotsa and his disciple Jetsun Milarepa. Then Gampopa and Dusum Kyenpa, the first Karmapa. Then these follow in a line right up to Kalu Rimpoche's root lama. This lineage is known as the Golden Rosary of the Kagyu lineage.

When we do this practice, visualize that all these lamas are present in front of you. Think that each lama is surrounded by many disciples and other lamas. Also, you should visualize that all the lamas of the other lineages (Nyingma, Shakya and Gelug) are encircling the Kagyu lamas.

Then you think that on the front branch of the refuge tree are all the yidams such as Korlo Demchok, Dorje Palmo and so on. On the left branch (as you are looking at the tree) are situated all the Buddhas. The central figure is the Buddha Shakyamuni and he is surrounded by all the Buddhas of then ten directions and three times. On the back branch of the tree are all the Dharma Teachings given by all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, as well as all the precious scriptures and Buddhist canons. On the right branch (as you are looking at the tree) are all the members of the Sangha, the Bodhisattva Chenrezig and all the Arhats, Sravakas and Prateykabuddhas. Below the tree are all the Mahakalas and Mahakalis etc. These are the objects of refuge.

The one who is taking refuge is yourself and you should think that you are surrounded on all sides by sentient beings. On your right are your fathers, on your left, your mothers. In front of you are your enemies and those who wish to harm you, and behind you are your friends and companions. Surrounding them are all sentient beings. These are the ones who are taking refuge.

What is it that you are taking refuge from? You are praying to have refuge from all the fear and suffering of the cycle of existence and you should also be thinking that in being freed from this suffering you may achieve the level of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

As an expression of your faith and devotion in taking refuge, you make prostrations with your body, you recite the refuge prayer with your speech, and you develop faith and devotion in your mind. As a sign of the great faith and devotion which is expressed by the body, you make the prayer gesture at the head; as a sign of the faith and devotion of speech, you make it at the throat; and as a sign of faith and devotion of the mind, you make it at the heart. Then as a sign of the combined faith and devotion of the body, speech and mind, you bend and place the five parts of your body on the floor, that is the palm of your hands, your knees and forehead. There are two meanings of the five places on your body with which you are expressing faith and devotion. One is with the five parts, your hands, knees atid head; the other is with the five centers of the body, forehead, throat, heart, navel and secret centers.

Then you say the refuge prayer with your speech and the first line says - I take refuge in all the glorious lamas. You direct your attention to the main figure who is your root lama. Then you take refuge in all the yidams, their retinues and mandalas and you concentrate on them at the front of the tree. In taking refuge in all the Buddhas who have gone beyond, you take refuge in all the Buddhas who are situated to your left. When you say - I take refuge in

all the holy Dharraa - concentrate on the Dharma which is visualized on the back of the tree. In taking refuge in the glorious Sangha who are assembled at the right hand side of the tree you direct your concentration to the Bodhisattvas, Prateykabuddhas and all the Sangha. Lastly, in saying that you take refuge in all the dakas and dakinis, Dharma protectors and all those who possess the eye of wisdom, then you take refuge in those who are situated under the front branch of the tree.

The Three Roots are the Lamas, Yidams and Khandros (dakinis). The Three Jewels are the Buddha, Dharraa and Sangha. It is very wonderful if you can do this practice saying one refuge prayer and making one prostration, keeping your mind completely undistracted and concentrated with faith on the objects of refuge. If you wish to finish prostrations very quickly you may make two or three prostrations as you are reciting one refuge prayer. The main point is to maintain great faith and devotion during this practice and to know about the wonderful qualities and perfections of the Three Jewels and the Three Roots who have the ability to help us escape from the suffering of Samsara. If we know about these perfections we will develop faith.

Kalu Rimpoche has tried to send Lamas to all his Dharma centers. This has been difficult to do. However, the reason for sending a lama is to teach people about Dharma - what are the Three Jewels, their qualities and perfections - what is the cycle of existence and enlightenment - what are the benefits of practicing and what are the dangers from not practicing. The lama is teaching you all in order to help you progress through the Five Paths towards enlightenment: the Path of Accumulation, the Path of Preparation, the Path of Meditation, the Path of Insight and the Path which is without obstacle.

If you are practicing the Kagyu Mahamudra tradition, then you will have to pass through the twelve different stages of meditation practice - the lower, middling and greater degrees of one-pointedness; the lower, middling and greater degrees free from conceptions; and the lower, middling and greater degrees of non-meditation.

The lama is also the one who will teach you from the sutras and Mantrayana Path, giving you different teachings to enable you to progress on the Path. If you are going to study Dharma it is very important to have some knowledge. You already have worldly knowledge, and having that will make it easy for you to acquire Dharmic knowledge.

In order to awaken diligence and patience it is necessary to meditate on fear and suffering. If you naturally have diligence and patience, then there is no need for you-to meditate on these subjects.

It is very difficult to have a clear visualization of each individual figure in the refuge tree - to be able to see each lama, Buddha and Sangha member etc. However, if you believe that they are really present in front of you then this is the same as having a clear visualization. The reason for saying that it is the same is that Buddha himself taught that whoever believes firmly that the Buddha is present, then the Buddha will be present.

In Tibet, there was an old woman who had great faith in the Buddha and she had a son who travelled to India on a business trip every year. She asked her son to bring her back a relic of the Buddha as India is the country where the Buddha appeared. He went to India twice and each time after completing his business he forgot to bring back a relic for his mother. On the third trip, his mother told him that if he didn't bring her back a relic this time, she would die. So he went again to India and on his way back he realized that he had once again forgotten. Then he noticed that lying nearby was the skull of a dead dog and he went over to the skull and pulled out a tooth and wrapped it in many colored silks. He took this back to his mother and said that this was the tooth of the Buddha. The mother put this tooth on the highest place on her shrine and continually said prayers in front of it/ and from the tooth little relics appeared. So it is said that with the greatest of faith it is possible to produce real relics from a dog's tooth. At the time of her death, due to her great faith and devotion, a rain of flowers and a rainbow appeared in the sky and the mother achieved the level of a Bodhisattva.

There is another story about a girl who was extremely intelligent and liked the Dharma and practiced it well. This girl had a husband who was a little stupid and did not have much awareness. In the girl's room there was a shrine and a large image of Manjusri. She told her husband, "It would be very good if you practiced the meditation of Manjusri as you don't have much intelligence, and you should get the initiation from a lama. The husband didn't really know how to practice the meditation. However, he had great faith in Manjusri and continually prayed to him. Then the girl told her husband, "Tomorrow you should pray continually to Manjusri and he will give you his blessing and you should put out your hand and take it and eat it without a doubt". After the husband had prayed to Manjusri, he put out his hand and the girl took a piece of fruit and put it in his hand. The husband really believed without a doubt that he had received the blessing of Manjusri,and he ate it immediately. Due to that unwavering conviction and belief in Manjusri he became a great scholar and pandit. So it is very important to take refuge in the same way,with that amount of faith and devotion. If we don't have faith and devotion, it is very difficult to benefit from prostrations. Making prostrations is almost like that insect that goes up and down all the time as it walks. Even in making one prostration with faith and devotion, it is said that the number of atoms which lie under the area of your body when you make the prostration is the same amount of merit which will enable you to be re-born as a universal monarch. The taking of refuge and making prostrations, if it is done with devotion can purify much negative karma and defilements. It enables one to accumulate a vast amount of merit and virtue. If you take refuge with great faith and devotion, then you will never have to be born in the lower states of existence.

At the end of taking refuge and prostrations, then you say the Bodhisattva prayer. You kneel on your right knee and recite the vow. In order to make the Bodhisattva vow it is necessary to know what it means. There are two kinds of vows : the vow of aspiration and the vow of practice.

An example of the vow of aspiration is to think that the Buddha appeared in India and I would now like to go to India to make offerings and pray. This is

like the vow of aspiration. The actual act of going to India, seeing the holy places, making offerings and prostrations - this is like the vow of practice. So the Bodhisattva vow of aspiration arises whenever you wish to achieve enlightenment in order to benefit others.

First of all you think, If it is necessary for all beings to become enlightened. At the present time, I don't have the means or the ability and I don't control my mind. So, I must myself achieve enlightenment so that I gain control over my mind, at which time I will be able to benefit limitless beings." So you develop this thought of your own enlightenment for the purpose of helping others. This is the Bodhisattva vow of aspiration.

So having made the vow of aspiration, whatever virtue or good practice you do to fulfill that vow, is the vow of practice or accomplishment. These are the two parts of the Bodhisattva vow but there are actually two levels of awakening this thought of enlightenment for the sake of others -this thought is called "bodhicitta". So, there is relative bodhicitta and ultimate bodhicitta.

Concerning relative bodhicitta, there are through the six realms of existence limitless sentient beings as vast in number as the sky and Buddha has taught that all these beings have at some time or another in previous existences, been our parents. So, if we consider the gratitude that we owe to our parents in this lifetime, how they looked after us and gave us their love and kindness, then if all sentient beings have at one time been our parents, then we also owe them that debt of gratitude. For those who have children of their own, and know the kinds of feelings of love and attention that one gives a child, then they know that in the same way we have been treated like this. So all these sentient beings who have been our parents are in the state of Samsara due to their ignorance and defilements which obscure the mind and cause them to wander continuously in Samsara.

There's not one of these beings in Samsara who wishes harm to himself or wishes to have a bad life. Everyone hopes that he will have happiness and a good life. Yet, not realizing that the cause of happiness is the practice of positive actions , there are only a few beings who actually practice positive actions in order to achieve the fruit of happiness. Everyone wishes to be away from suffering and fear. Yet, not realizing that the cause of suffering and fear is the practice of negative actions, beings are constantly involved with negativity with their body, speech and mind,and constantly producing their own suffering. So all of these sufferings are experienced by all beings in the cycle of existence, even up to the divine realms (the form and formless gods' realms). Everything constitutes Samsara and beings are constantly suffering.

Then there is the ultimate bodhicitta. In the cycle of existence there are limitless sentient beings who are having the experience of Sarasara,and all their experience is due to their own illusion. The "me" who experiences all these illusory appearances is the mind itself and the mind is empty. If one realizes the mind to be empty, then there is no suffering or fear and there are no disturbing emotions because all of them are realized to be empty themselves. There are 18 different kinds of emptiness which have been described by the Buddha - external emptiness, internal emptiness, greater

emptiness and lesser emptinesses and so on. The Buddha has given teachings on all these different kind of emptinesses and there are 16 large volumes of teachings on emptiness alone It is very good if one can understand about all these different kinds of emptinesses^ but it also enough to take instruction from a lama and to try to meditate on emptiness. In order to understand the meaning of emptiness, it is necessary to meditate. You begin by shinay (tranquility) meditation and lathong (insight) meditation. The realization of emptiness is the ultimate bodhicitta.

These two things, the real and the ultimate bodhicitta are the heart of the Buddhist Teaching. When one understands the meaning of these bodhisattva aspirations (the relative and the ultimate) then one practices the Six Perfections of generosity, morality, diligence, patience, meditation and wisdom. Through the practice of these six perfections, one can reach enlightenment. This is a brief explanation of the Bodhisattva vow.

So, after prostrations, you kneel on your right knee with your hands together at your heart and you recite once the refuge in the Three Jewels. Then after taking refuge, you think that in the same way as all Buddhas and Bodhi-sattvas of the past have awakened the thought of enlightenment for the sake of others and have practised, so will I awaken the thought of enlightenment. And in the same way, having awakened this thought of enlightenment for the sake of others, so will I practice and help others. You make this prayer of the Bodhisattva vow of eight stanzas, three times. At the end you think that you have received the bodhisattva vow and you should feel joy and happiness that having made the bodhisattva vow, you now become like a son of a Buddha. So having come into the Buddha's family, then you should think that you will develop the thought of enlightenment for the sake of others and practice in order to help others. Then you pray that for yourself and all sentient beings in whom the thought of enlightenment to benefit others has not arisen, may it arise; and in those in whom it has arisen, may it not decrease, but forever increase. Then you also pray that wherever beings are born in the future, may they develop the thought of enlightenment for the sake of others. You also pray that beings not be re-born in situations where they perform negative actions. Pray that whatever the bodhisattvas in the ten directions wish for all beings, may it be accomplished.

Then at the end comes the four limitless prayers- the prayer for limitless love, limitless compassion, limitless joy and limitless equanimity. This is called limitless because there are limitless beings. If one has compassion for limitless beings, then one has limitless compassion. One who has limitless compassion prays that beings may have happiness and the causes of happiness. Limitless love is the verse in which you pray that all beings may be freed from suffering and the causes of suffering which are negative actions. Limitless joy is wishing that all beings may have no suffering at all and may never be separated from happiness. Limitless equanimity is expressed in the verse which says that because of suffering and other factors, there is attachment and aversion and you pray that all beings may be away from attachment and aversion and rest in equanimity.

At the end of your meditation imagine that the refuge becomes extremely joyful and turns into light which dissolves into yourself. Your body, speech and mind become inseparable from the body, speech and mind of the whole refuge. Rest in that state of emptiness for as long as you can. Then, it is also necessary to dedicate the merit and virtue of your practice and pray that all beings be re-born in the Pure Realm.

This finishes the taking of refuge, prostrations and the making of the Bodhisattva vow and the prayers.

The second practice in the extra-ordinary preliminaries is the meditation on Dorje Sempa which purifies all defilements and impurities. When doing this meditation, it is not necessary to visualize your own body as that of the deity. You should meditate that on the crown of your head, on a white lotus and moon disc, is Dorje Sempa. Dorje Sempa is white in color, has two arms and is seated in the lotus position. In his right hand he holds a five-pointed dorje and in his left hand, a bell. He is ornamented with various silks and ornaments like Chenrezig's. The Buddhas of the five Buddha families are on his head in the form of jewels on his crown. He is wearing a very long necklace and various kinds of armlets and also anklets. He is wearing a silk lower robe and an ornamented belt; a silk scarf is around his shoulders.

You should meditate on him in this way, ornamented with silk and jewels. You can meditate on Dorje Sempa in whatever size you wish. Your visualization should not be flat like a thanka, it should also not be like a gold image which has form. The form should be non-substantial like a rainbow, the inside is bright and radiant. It is necessary to think of the mind of Dorje Sempa as being the embodiment of the realization of emptiness and compassion. If you can visualize clearly- you can meditate that on his forehead is a white letter ཨོཾ (OM) , in his throat and letter ཨཱཿ (AH) , and in his heart center, a blue letter ཧཱུྃ (HUNG), if you can't visualize this clearly, then it doesn't matter.

You should,however,meditate that in the inner heart center of Dorje Sempa, on a moon disc, is the white letter ཧཱུྃ (HUNG). You then meditate that from the heart center of Dorje^Sempa bright light radiates to all the directions and reaches all the pure lands. This creation of the visualization which you make on the top of your own head is called the "damsigpa".

In all the pure lands and Buddha-fields, there really are present many forms of Dorje Sempa and these are called the "yeshepas" the real wisdom aspect. This real aspect comes and is absorbed into your own created aspect which is on the crown of your head. Then as you visualize this you should think that your own mental creation of Dorje Sempa which is on the crown of your head is transformed into the real Dorje Sempa, the real wisdom aspect.

We have been existing in Samsara since beginningless time and during all our lifetimes we have practiced many negative actions with body, speech and mind. Even in this body which we now have, we have practiced so many

different impure and negative actions, large and small, with body, speech 6 mind.

For example, even in eating our food, we are eating many different kinds of vegetables and meat, grain etc. This is a negative action because in order to get all these kinds of food, many beings are killed in the process. For instance, we all drink tea. In Darjeeling where the tea plantations are, every week pesticide is sprayed on the bushes, killing insects etc.

Also, Rimpoche has been to Hawaii and every morning he saw airplanes flying up and down over the fields spraying the sugar plantations with insecticide in order to kill all the insects. This is a very negative action.

In addition, eating meat is a very negative action because the animals have to be killed in order to give their flesh. So for ourselves and all sentient beings, we have all committed many negative actions and we are defiled by impurities. So we pray to Dorje Sempa asking for purification of our defilements from beginningless time.

As you make this prayer, you visualize that from the mantra of Dorje Sempa, which is encircling the HUNG in his heart center, white nectar begins to flow down. Then you think that the nectar gradually fills the body of Dorje Sempa and once it is filled, then nectar flows down and enters your own body through the crown of your head and gradually fills up your whole body. Visualize that all your impurities, defilements and obscurations flow out of your body in the form of black, dirty substances. In addition, you should think that as the nectar flows on the outside and inside of your body, your own impure body becomes completely purified; that your own substantial body made of flesh and blood has been washed away. Your body becomes ethereal, non-substantial, bright, radiant and pure. As your own body is transformed, it ressembles a glass filled with milk. At this time you recite the hundred syllable mantra -

OM BEDZRA SATO SAMAYA MANU PALAYA BEDZRA SATO TENO PATITA DRI DOME BAWA SUTO KAYU ME BAWA SUPO KAYO ME BAWA ANU RAKTO ME BAWA SARWA SIDDI ME PRAYATSA SARWA KARMA SU TSA ME TSI TANG SHIRYA KURU HUNG HA HA HA HA HO BANGAWEN SARWA TATAGATA BEDZRA MAME MUNTSA BEDZRI BAWA MAHA SAMAYA SATO AH

By the power, blessing and compassion of Dorje Sempa together with your own meditation, visualization and recitation of the hundred syllable mantra, your impurities and defilements can be purified.

From where do defilements arise? They arise out of ignorance. But ignorance itself is not real; it too is empty in nature. In view of the fact that ignorance itself is empty and ignorance produces the concept of 'self1, then 'self1 is also empty. From the clinging to 'self all the defilements and disturbing emotions arise, so they too are empty in nature. And it is from the disturbing emotions and defilements that we practice negative actions with the body, speech and mind. Se these negative actions are in themselves empty. So, because negative actions and defilements are in essence empty, we have the ability to purify them. Its like having a white piece of cloth which has

become dirty. If we wash it and try to clean it, then we can take out the dirt. If impurities, defilements and negative actions were solid, then we would have no possibility of purifying them. In the same way if we have a piece of coal and try to take the blackness out of the coal, we couldn't do it. So if every day we practice the confessing of our impurities and repent our impurities and defilements, we can purify them. If we don't confess and repent our impurities and defilements, even though they are in essence empty, due to our clinging to 'self and the dualist-ic frame of mind which we have developed, then we will always have to experience the result of our negative actions.

There are four forces by which we can purify defilements and negative actions. The first is having some kind of ordination - full ordination, lay person's ordination, Bodhisattva ordination or vajrayana ordination. This makes the process of purifying defilements easier.

Second, it is necessary to have repentence and regret for a negative action which has been committed. If one does not have regret, then it's not possible to purify it.

Third, one must have an antidote to the negative actions which have been committed - something which will work against the power of negative action. The meditation on Dorje Sempa is one such antidote.

Fourth, one must feel that having committed these actions, we will not commit them again in the future and one promises never to do the same again.

With these four forces it is possible to purify negative karma. If we have these four forces, however strong your negative karma may have been, you can still purify it. If impurities and negative karma have been purified, then we will not have to be re-born in the hell realms, the hungry ghost realms or the animal realms, nor with a poor human body. If we have a piece of cloth which is white and we wish to dye it another color, then it can be dyed any color at all. In the same way, if our impurities and defilements are purified then it is easy to accumulate merit and wisdom. If there is a very filthy place or country and one wished to invite the Karmapa there, he would never be able to come there. In the same way, if we have dirty, solid and impure minds, we can never receive the blessings of the deities.

The best way to purify defilements and obscurations is through the practice of this meditation of Dorje Sempa and the recitation of his one hundred-syllable mantra.

Once impure and negative karmas have been purified, then there is happiness in the mind, energy in the body and a great ease and comfort. There are many good signs which arise once impurities have been cleared away. For instance, you can dream of vomiting many dirty substances, or of flying in the air, or of wearing white clothes. There are many dreams which arise like this which are good. The best sign of the purification of all negative karmas is that one develops greater compassion and greater understanding of emptiness, and greater faith.

At the end of this practice, we should think that Dorje Sempa himself tells us that now all our obscurations and defilements have been purified. Then think to yourself -"now they have been purified". Then at the end, you meditate that the form of Dorje Sempa dissolves into your own body and that you rest with your body, speech and mind inseparable from his body, speech and mind. Remain in this state for as long as you can. Then to finish you dedicate the merit and say the prayers.

The third part of the extra-ordinary preliminaries consists of the teaching on mandala offering. The reason for offering mandalas is in order to accumulate a vast amount of merit. The accumulation of merit is necessary because originally all the 1000 Buddhas who appear in this good age, first of all, awaken the thought of enlightenment for the sake of others and then begin the practice of Dharma. Some of the Buddhas, at the very beginning of their progress on the Path, awaken the thought of enlightenment in order to help others and are born in such situations as kings and princes, great leaders and ministers. At the time when they awaken this Bodhicitta then they make offerings of land, property, wealth, jewels and whatever they have. They offer this to the Lama and the Three Jewels. Some are born as paupers and very poor people and at the time when they awaken the bodhicitta, then with great faith and devotion, they offer whatever they can of themselves to the Lama and the Three Jewels.

In the past, the great yogi Naropa when he first requested his lama, Tilopa, to teach him, he offered everything he had - his possessions and wealth and even his wife. Because of this he was able to practice and achieve the level of a greatly realized being. In the same way, Marpa the Translator sold all his possession for gold. He carried the gold on his back to India and offered it to his lama, Naropa. After some years, he returned to India and acquired more gold and again offered all this gold to Naropa in order to receive the Teachings. And yet again, a third time, when he came back to Tibet he taught the Dharma extensively and whatever money he received, he converted it into gold,and took it to India and stayed at the feet of Naropa for some time, having offered the gold and received many deep teachings and initiations. He stayed for 16 years and seven months in the presence of his lama, Naropa, receiving many teachings and instructions and meditating on them. In that lifetime, he too became a great siddha.

In the case of Jetsun Milarepa, he had no possessions to offer, but he offered his own body, speech and mind to his lama and received many teachings and instructions which he practised continually in his lifetime. He also became a siddha in one lifetime.

For instance, Rimpoche says of himself, in his lifetime, he offered all his own possessions, not those of his parents, but all his own possessions to his lama and the Three Jewels. He has done this three times in his life. In addition, he has continually practiced making offerings to the Three Jewels of whatever possessions he has, and also giving offerings to members of the Sangha, and he has tried to practice generosity to all beings in order to accumulate merit.

Realistically speaking, it is necessary for you also to accumulate merit and to do the same thing. But at the moment it's not possible for us to do this. This is why it's important to practice mandala offerings in which you imagine everything which is precious, beautiful or pleasant in the whole universe, and you offer this to the lama and Three Jewels in the form of these mandala offerings. As all phenomena are really empty in nature, then one can accumulate merit by visualizing that there are present in front of one the Three Jewels and the Three Roots, and; before them, offer everything contained in the universe.

When you begin this practice you should visualize almost the same refuge as was visualized in the taking of refuge and prostrations. However, it's not necessary to visualize the tree and the lake. Simply, in front of oneself in the sky, there should be a most beautiful, spacious and celestial palace. Inside, in the center, should be the lama and in front, the yidams, on the left, the Buddhas, in the back, the Dharma and on the right is the Sangha. Beneath are the Dharma protectors and dakinis. Visualize these in these positions inside a celestial palace.

In the offering of everything which is in the universe, there are many different ideas about the universe itself. Many people think the world is round, many think that it is flat. The Buddha has taught that the universe in which we exist is an illusion created by the mind and, as there are so many different illusions, then there are so many different forms which the universe takes. So, because of the different illusions which arise from the mind, there are some universes which are round, some are long or flat. There are sentient beings who have the illusion of the universe in the process of creation; sentient beings who have the illusion of a universe which is static, like our present one. And, there are sentient beings who have the illusion of a universe which is in its decline. It is said that the most beautiful manifestation of the universe is the one represented by this mandala of the mountain surrounded by the continents.

This universe is described as having in the middle a very high mountain with four levels. The sun and moon encircle the mountain at its uppermost point. On each of the four different levels of the mountain, are the places in which the gods reside. The uppermost point of the mountain is the realm of the 33 gods. On top of the mountain are clouds and above that the four levels of formless gods. From the neck of the mountain down, there are seven layers of external gold mountain and the entire mountain is surrounded on all sides by a great ocean.

In the eastern direction is the continent known as Lu-pakpo; in the south is Dzambuling, which is our world; in the west is Balangcho and in the north, Draminyen. These continents or islands have different shapes, but their size is about the same. On the eastern continent there are two sub-continents, Lu and Lupak. These two sub-continents are half the size of the main continent. In the south are the two sub-continents of Ngayap and Ngayapshen, and in the west, Yoden and Lamchokdro, and in the west, Draminyen and Draminyenjida.

Surrounding these continents and sub-continents is a great ocean and encircling the ocean is an iron wall. So this universe has one mountain, four continents and eight subcontinents.

In the southern continent, Dzambuling, this world, there are many different kinds of beings. There is wealth and poverty. In the eastern continent Lupakpo, the wealth is not as great as in this world, but the people all have the same amount of wealth and lifespan. In our world, the average height is four spans called ntril!. In the eastern continent, the average height is 8 spans and the life-span is about 200-500 years. In the western continent, the average height is 16 spans and everyone lives for 500 years. In the northern continent, the average height is 32 spans and everyone lives for 1,000 years.

We are born here through the power of our karma and there are different kinds of merit which are experienced. At the very beginning of this era, people lived for many thousands of years, and in the future it is taught that due to the lack of merit, the lifespan will decrease to 10 years.

So on the earth, there are many different kinds of beings-those who have aJlot of merit, those who have little; those who are rich, those who are poor; those who have a long life span and those who have a short life span. In view of this, it is in this world that Dharma can be practiced and we can progress to higher realms towards enlightenment or, we can practice negative actions and fall back to the three lower states of existence. For this reason, the Buddha appears in this world and does not appear in any other realms in the universe.

In thinking of the universe as being extremely beautiful, we offer it to the Three Jewels and the Three Roots. "Mandala" is a Sanskrit word; in Tibetan it's "Kyilkor". "Khil" means the center and Kor" means around. The actual using of the mandala offering plate and the rice is a support for the visualization which we make. You should think that the mandala itself is the basis on which exists all the continents in the universe.

First of all, to purify the ground, you clean the plate with your wrist and make three recitations of the hundred syllable mantra of Dorje Sempa. After making three clockwise circles you make three anti-clockwise. You should think that all clinging to external appearances and all clinging to 'self1 disappears into emptiness. If you don't get rid of this clinging to external appearances and 'self, then it's not possible to think of creating the universe in the space which is made by giving up clinging to externals and internals.

When we say the first verse, you think that you create the basis for the mandala which is gold. Then you say the second verse in which you think that you create the wall of iron around the universe and you make it anti-clockwise. Then you drop the rice on to make the mountain which is in the center of the universe. Then starting from the top of the mandala (the top is east in the Tibetan way), you place the eastern continent, then the southern, western and northern. The you place the eight sub-continents beginning at the top, left and right of the main continent; then on the second continent, bottom and top; then on the third one, left and right and finally the fourth one, top and bottom.

For the next eight offerings, you place the rice twice in the four directions. First of all in the east, the precious mountain; in the south, the wish-fulfilling tree; in the west, the wish-fulfilling cow; In the north, the grain which grows without toil; secondly, in the east, the precious wheel; in the south, the precious Jewel; in the west, the precious queen, and in the north the precious minister.

For the four intermediate points: in the south-east is the precious elephant; in the south-west, the precious horse; in the north-west, the precious general; in the north-east, the treasure vase.

In the four directions again, starting with the Tibetan east (which is our north), are the graceful goddesses; in the south, the garland goddesses; in the west, the singing goddesses, in the north, the dancing goddesses. In the south-east, first, are the flower goddesses, in the south-west the incense goddesses, in the north-west the light goddesses, and In the north-east, the water goddesses. Secondly, In the north-east is the sun, and in the south-west the moon; in the south-east is the Jeweled umbrella, and in the north-west, the banner of victory.

In the center, all the wealth and possessions of gods and men. Also, you should think that you are offering the pleasures of the five senses - that which is lovely to the sight, delightful to hear, delicious to taste, aromatic to smell, and pleasing to touch.

You offer in this way, not just thinking that it is for your own sake, but that you are offering this to the Lama, the Three Jewels and Three Roots for the sake of all beings.

This is the elaborate form of the mandala offering which consists of 37 different offerings. When you make the mandala offering, you hold your mala in your left hand and count each time you make the offering and with your right hand you make the offerings on the mandala plate.

At the time when you make this visualization of the elaborate form of the mandala, you have to think that all the particular offerings are really present and try to visualize them and offer them to the Three Jewels and the Three Roots. When you're doing mandala offerings, the verses consist of seven offerings placed on the plate and four verses of the mandala prayer:

This base is sprinkled with water and strewn with flowers; adorned with the supreme mountain, the four continents, and the sun and moon. Trhough these imagined offerings to the Buddha fields, may all beings enjoy the completely pure lands,

Therefore, you make the mandala holding the plate in your left hand with your mala underneath and each time you say this four verse prayer, you place the rice on the seven places on the plate, that is the center, our north, south, east and west and our north west and south east. Then you wipe if off with your wrist and this counts for once.

If you can't meditate on the universe in this particular form, and you think of the world as being different from this, then its quite alright to visualize it as you imagine it.

There are many different countries in the world and unbelievable amounts of wealth and possessions, so you should think that all the wealth is offered up to the Three Jewels and the Three Roots.

This evening Rimpoche will discuss the teaching of Lama Naljor or Guru Yoga. When one does this meditation, it is possible to meditate that one's body is just one's usual human form. However, instead of this, if one imagines one's form as the form of the deity, then this sets up a condition for the blessing to arise quickly in the stream of one's being. For this reason it is better to imagine that your body is the form of the deity. This can be compared to preparing one's house for a visit of a very high person, such as a king. One prepares the house by cleaning it, sweeping it out, making it absolutely spotless and making very lavish preparations. In this way we transform our body into the form of the deity so that the condition is set up for the blessing to be born very swiftly.

When one is doing this meditation, one may imagine one's form in the form of any deity one chooses, but in the Kagyupa tradition, one generally imagines one's form as Dorje Palmo. There are two reasons why one imagines Dorje Palmo for this practice. First, Dorje Palmo is the secret yidam of many great Kagyupa lamas, such as Marpa, Milarepa and Gampopa. Second, in the achievement of complete awakened enlightenment, there are both means and wisdom. Dorje Palmo is the aspect of wisdom, that is the wisdom of complete emptiness.

One can imagine one's form as Dorje Palmo and do this very clearly, imagining the various ornaments etc. This is very good. If this isn't possible, then one thinks that I am in fact Dorje Palrpo, and simply conceiving oneself as Dorje Palmo is satisfactory for the meditation. Then when one is doing the actual meditation of Lama Naljor, one may Imagine the object of meditation to be in the sky in front of oneself. Or, the more usual way is to imagine that the object of meditation is on the crown of one's head. One imagines that either in front or on one's crown a snow lion throne rests and on top of that is a lotus, sun and moon seat. On this sits one's root lama in essence, but in outward manifestation as the Buddha Dorje Chang (Vajradhara). Upon the crown of your lama's head sits his own root lama and above him his root lama, until one reaches the source of transmission, Dorje Chang at the top. Then in a close cluster around this main line of the lamas of transmission, one imagines their close disciples and in additio: all the lamas of all the various schools of Buddhism, such as Nyingmapa, Sakyapa and Gelugpa. One imagines these all gathered around a central line. When one imagines one's lama and the other lamas upon the crown of one's head, one must develop great confidence and devotion in them.

The basis for this confidence and devotion is an understanding of the qualities of one's lama. Rimpoche has spoken before of the qualities of Buddha, of complete, awakened enlightenment itself. One thinks that compared to the Buddha, one's own lama has all these qualities, that there is absolutely no difference. And in terms of who has been kinder to us, the lama is even more kind than the Buddha. One has not had the opportunity to meet the Buddha or to receive teachings from a Buddha. Yet one has been

able to meet one's lama and to receive teachings from the lama. The lama, in fact, possesses all the qualities of the Buddha. And when one thinks in this way, there is a great feeling of faith and devotion. Buddha taught that when one thinks of one's lama as the Buddha, then one will in fact receive the blessing of a Buddha. If one thinks of the lama as a Bodhisattva, one receives the blessing of a Bodhisattva. If one thinks of the lama as an ordinary individual, then one receives the corresponding blessing. If one has absolutely no faith in the lama, then one does not receive any blessing. When one is practicing Lama Naljor, though one may not be able to visualize clearly all the various lamas, what is really important is that one has this great feeling of faith and devotion.

One also imagines that in front of the lamas upon the crown of one's head, are gathered all the yidams, to the right all the Buddhas, and behind all the Dharma teachings and to the left, the Sangha. Gathered around in the sky in a great cluster, are all the protectors, dakas and dakinis. One thinks that all these objects of Refuge are in fact different manifestations, or different aspects of one's lama. These aspects appear in order to benefit beings through different methods. In fact, they are all one's lama and not different from one's lama.

If one does not have a great deal of time to do this meditation, then one can immediately think that in fact, the objects of one's meditation are the beings of Refuge. If one has more time, then one can imagine that from the deities and lamas that one has imagined on the crown of one's head, light radiates forth and attracts the eyes, draws the eyes of the true Buddhas and deities. And having attracted their eyes, they in fact come forward and dissolve into the deities and lamas that one has imagined. One does this if one has more time to do the meditation. Meditating this way, one thinks that there are hundreds and thousands of emanations of one's own form and together, they are doing prostrations and making offerings to the assembled deities, lamas and other objects of Refuge. In addition, one imagines copious offerings which are pleasant to the senses.

To begin with one thinks that one is openly confessing all the unskillful actions that have been committed by oneself and all sentient beings. One thinks that through this confession, one becomes completely pure and all sentient beings are completely purified of their actions. One resolves that in the future one will not commit actions of this nature. One then rejoices in all the virtuous actions that have been accomplished by all beings. One offers prayers urging the Buddhas and the various emanations of the Buddhas not to pass into final Nirvana, but to continue working for the benefit of all sentient beings. One urges them to turn the Wheel of Dharma in order to help beings. And finally, one offers or dedicates all this merit that has been achieved through these six different types of service. One dedicates all this merit to the ultimate enlightenment of all beings. These are what are called the Seven Religious Services.

Then one prays that pure, impartial love and compassion may be born in one's stream of being. One does not develop love and compassion towards only certain persons, but one develops love and compassion which spreads

to all beings. One prays for the blessing to quickly acheive the realization that is possessed by all enlightened individuals; that is to quickly achieve the realization of co-emergent awareness.

When one is practicing these foundations, if one has some understanding of Tibetan, then one can make the appropriate sounds as one is reading the prayer. In addition, if one knows the meaning of the words, then one comes to understand very clearly the meaning of the prayers that one is offering.

In the actual prayers that one offers directly from the scriptures, one is offering the prayer of Mahamudra. But right now, since the meaning is very, very difficult to understand, and one cannot readily understand it, this will not be explained at this time. This prayer is, in fact, a very deep and powerful one. All those in the past who have achieved a state of realization have relied on the practice of Guru Yoga (lama naljor). The reason for this is that, by relying on this practice, one comes to understand Mahamudra.

For instance, Naropa had great faith and devotion to his teacher, Tilopa, and constantly relied on his guru and this meditation. He went through many hardships at the hands of Tilopa, and through going through these hardships, in time, he came to the complete realization of Mahamudra. As Tilopa said, he could have immediately given instruction on Mahamudra, but this would not have been effective for Naropa at that time. First, it was necessary to remove great obscurations and to acheive merit before Naropa could come to the complete understanding of Mahamudra. So he was given first: teachings, preparatory teachings, scriptural authorities, initiations and so on.

It order to demonstrate the great hardships that Naropa went through and which indicate very clearly his great faith and devotion to his teacher, Rimpoche tells the story of Tilopa instructing Naropa to go and get him some food, saying that he was very hungry. In the distance Naropa could see people working in the fields. He went over there carrying a skull- cup and asked if he could have some of their food. They gave him a bowl of soup and he returned very pleased that he had received this, and gave it to his teacher. When Tilopa had finished this he again instructed him, saying that the soup was very good and could he go and get another bowl. This time, when Naropa returned to the field, he found that the people there had gone back to work, so he had to use fairly devious means in order to get another bowl of soup. When he got this second bowl and started charging across the field with it, the people saw him making off with It, and caught up to him and beat him up, until he lay exhausted on the ground, totally disheartened. He looked around and could not see Tilopa anywhere. For one day he lay on the ground in this condition. When he came to, he could barely move, and Tilopa was peering over him saying, "Well, what seems to be the problem?" Following this, Tilopa blew air on his body and he was immediately better.

Tilopa and Naropa arrived at a very big house, and Tilopa said to Naropa, H Well, if you have great faith in me, you will climb to the top of this house and jump off, and there will be no doubt in your mind." And of course, Naropa with absolutely no doubt whatsoever, proceeded to do this. He climbed to the top and jumped off and reached the bottom in a very battered condition. He lay like this for one day. When at last Tilopa arrived on the scene, he

again applied a few medicines and his blessing and immediately his disciple was better.

Tilopa and Naropa had managed to make a number of pens with with very sharp points. This had been achieved by working bamboo down with a knife and applying them to fire. Tilopa said to Naropa, "Well now, if you can really carry out austerities that your lama is instructing you to do, then you will take these fine-pointed objects and stick them into the ends of your fingers. So immediately Naropa did this, thinking, "Well, my lama said that I should do this. There must be some purpose or benefit in it." So he applied these to his fingers and this was extremely painful. He stayed in this state until again his teacher came and applied different methods, until he was better.

Tilopa and Naropa were walking along and in the distance, they saw a great wedding party, and there was a very beautiful bride. She was dressed in a beautiful gown with flower garlands around her neck. And Tilopa said to Naropa, "Go over there and get that bride and bring her here so we can fix things up. This will be very, very good." So immediately his disciple took off in order to get the bride. While he was attempting to carry her away from the wedding party, the groom and the other attendants became quite enraged. They beat him up so that once more he way lying, exhausted and disheartened and couldn't get up. Also, his teacher was no where to be seen. After one day, Tilopa returned and again gave him various blessings and he was able to get up. Tilopa next instructed his disciple to bring him a woman — a particular woman, in fact, that he very much needed; when Naropa brought this woman, then he would be able to give him further Instruction. Naropa thought that he must accomplish this and when he he actually did bring the woman into the presence of Tilopa, Tilopa was greatly enraged and said, " What on earth are you doing? What are you doing bringing this woman here?" And in order to punish him for doing this, he beat him up, leaving him once again on the ground.

On another occasion, Tilopa instructed Naropa, when they came to a ravine, to stretch his body across the ravine so that Tilopa could walk across it, as though upon a bridge, to the other side. And while he was stretched out like this, his teacher instructed him to stay in that position until he returned and wished to get over to the other side. While Naropa was lying there, since it was a wet, marshy area, his body was subject to the attack of leaches, but he remained in that position. And when at last Tilopa returned and was walking across the top of his body, his feet slipped from the edge so that he was down into the water and his teacher was extremely angry with him for not staying in the same position. His teacher grafted him by the scruff of the neck and proceeded to beat him on the head; and from the blow on his head, the thought came to his mind that now in fact, he would fall into unconsciousness. But at this point, he in fact realized the nature of his own mind. This was in fact, the pointing-out instruction. So in this way, Naropa went through many different hardships at the hands of his teacher. Following each of these, he was given various instructions. It wasn't until he had gone through these various austerities that he could receive the pointing-out instructions. And in this same way, Marpa the Translator journeyed from Tibet to India on several occasions and stayed with his teacher, Naropa;

working with him, studying with him for twelve years and seven months. During this time he had absolutely no doubt or wrong view concerning his lama, and eventually achieved realization.

In the same way, Milarepa relied completely on his teacher, Marpa and went through various trials and tribulations, until in fact, he relied on the instructions of his teacher and achieved realization. Most of you are very familiar with the story of Milarepa. Having received instructions in meditation from Marpa, Milarepa went off to meditate in a solitary area in a cave. After meditating for a long time, he eventually realized that the conditions he was in were very poor. He had no water and no fire, and barely any food at all. He thought to himself, "Well, I think I'll go build a fire." So he wrapped his few rags around him and set off outside in order to collect some fire wood, and when he got outside, he found that there was a very stong wind. This wind blew so strongly that, through the effect of having very little food for so long.he was knocked unconscious. When he came to, he looked up and saw that some of his tattered rags were hanging from a tree, and he felt very sad and longed at this time to see his teacher, Marpa. And while he was sitting in this state, feeling very unhappy, he looked up into the sky and saw that Marpa was approaching on a great white cloud. Marpa spoke to him at this time and said that he had felt and heard his yearning and asked him what was the problem. At this time, Milarepa sang many songs expressing his joy and feelings of devotion at seeing his lama. Marpa gave him more instructions and he returned to meditate in his cave.

If one relies on the compassion of one's lama, then one can dispel the various obstacles that do arise in Dharma practice. Milarepa experienced such obstacles, but by relying on the compassion of his lama, these were quickly dispelled.

On another occasion, Milarepa returned to his cave and found that five very fierce men had arrived. He found that some of them were looking through his books. One was meditating. Another was looking through everything that Milarepa had. Others were just generally working. At first, Milarepa was a little afraid of these men, and so he tried to remove these beings by feeling love and compassion for them. However, this only increased their pride and was not successful. In fact, two more appeared on the scene. At this point, Milarepa tried to teach them Dharma, but this was of absolutely no benefit. So then, Milarepa recalled the instructions of Marpa, his teacher. All outward manifestations are but the bewilderment of one's own mind. And thinking of this, he no longer thought in dualistic terms of these outer beings and himself. And resting in this knowledge, he had no doubt and no fear. When Milarepa had achieved this realization, then these fierce men immediately dispersed in a great feeling of being upset and distraught. They quickly left his cave. Through this event, Milarepa's realization greatly increased. So in this same way, the lamas of the oral tradition of the Kagyu lineage relied on the instructions of their lamas. They followed the instruction they were given, and accomplished and carried out what they intended to carry out. And, in fact, they relied on the meditation of Guru Yoga.

The teaching of this meditation is extremely important. The one who instructed lama naljor was the Buddha himself. When one is doing the practice of lama naljor, one says "Karmapa chennofl a number of times, as many times as one wishes. One may think particularly of the lama, Karmapa, but if one has not in fact met him, one may think of one's own lama as one is saying "Karmapa chenno" over and over again. This means one is making obeisence to the one who is full of activity or has activity. The reason for that is that one's own lama is the activity of all Buddhas.

If one is doing the foundation practices and planning to recite one hundred thousand prayers to the guru, one offers the guru-yoga prayer which has seven lines and asks for six different blessings. The first is addressing one's prayer to one's lama. One thinks of the lama as being the union of all the lamas of the lineage and all other lineages, all the yidams, all the Buddhas, all the Dharma, the Sangha and Protectors. These are all gathered in the root lama. One prays to one's root lama, asking first for the blessing of being able to give up clinging to a self. That is, one no longer clings to the idea that one is an existant entity with any lasting nature. The next blessing that one asks for, is that one may be without any needs. That is, how we are in the situation of needing many different material things. We need clothes and food and friends and so on. So one prays that in one's stream of being, one no longer has need. Thirdly, one prays for the blessing that all thoughts which are not concerned with Dharma be prevented, or blocked off. And in this particular part of the prayer one is asking for the specific blessing of realizing that mind is without origination. One prays for the blessing that all manifestations of bewilderment be pacified in their own place. That is, one realizes that all illusions are in fact like dreams, having no intrinsic nature. Lastly, one prays for the blessing that one might realize all phenomenal appearance to be in fact Dhannakaya, that is, one realizes ultimately that outward manifestations in fact are empty of intrinsic value. One realizes emptiness, and this being so, one realizes Dharmakaya.

When one is saying this prayer, one can say it in an audible voice. One can say it very loud if one wishes. However if one finds that one's neighbours don't appreciate this, then one can say it not quite so loud. So, when one is doing foundational practices, one says this prayer one hundred thousand times. When saying this prayer, one's mind should not be wandering to anything else. If the mind wanders away from the prayer, then it is very difficult to accrue any benefit from saying it. Following this prayer, one offers particular prayers to one's lama, asking for the bestowing of particular initiations and then one imagines that all the lamas around the central line dissolve into light and are absorbed into the main line of transmission. These lamas dissolve into light and melt into the form of Dorje Chang upon the crown of one's head. At this time one may imagine the form of one's own lama in front of oneself or upon the crown of one's head.

One imagines that upon the lama's forehead is the letter \fcjOM, but one does not have to actually meditate that there is this letter. However, from the forehead one imagines white light coming forward, falling down and reaching one's own forehead. This light enters one's own form and one imagines that all unskillful actions that have been committed through the body are

completely purified. One receives the vase initiation. That is, one receives empowerment to meditate upon the stages of arising and ultimately achieves the state of Nirmanakaya.

Then one imagines that from the throat of one's lama, a letter ^[8 AH is emanating red light, which strikes one's self at the same place in the throat. All obscurations that have been accrued through actions committed through speech are completely purified. One receives the secret initiation and receives empowerment to meditate on channels and prajna. And one ultimately achieves the state of Sambhogakaya.

Then from the lamajj3 heart, if one is meditating on the letters, a blue *> HUNG emanates, whose light strikes one's own heart, causing all obscurations and unskillful actions accrued through the mind are completely cleared away. One receives the wisdom-awareness initiation and empowerment to do deep meditative concentration in the stages of arising and in the stage of perfection. Ultimately, one achieves the state or the fruit of Dharmakaya. Through this particular initiation one can meditate on both compassion and wisdom, meditate on both the father and mother deities. Then one imagines that siraultaenously white light comes from the lama's forehead, red light comes from the lama's throat, and blue light comes from the lama's heart and strikes one's own body at the forehead, throat and heart. And one thinks that all obscurations of body, speech and mind are simultaneously purified. One receives the fourth initiation into the meditation of Mahamudra and ultimately achieves the essence body itself. Then one imagines that the lama dissolves into light. The lama enters one's own form and one's own body, speech and mind become indivisibly united with the body, speech and mind of the lama. The lama melts into light and is dissolved into oneself, and thinking that one is indivisible from the lama, we place our mind in this state, without any contrivance, resting naturally.

Following this meditation, when one rises, one thinks that all appearance is in fact the lama; all sound is the speech of the lama and all mental activity is the very mind or heart of the lama. Following the practice of Lama Naljor, one shares or dedicates the merit for the benefit of all sentient beings. This completes the practice of Lama Naljor.

Rimpoche thinks that when you practice the preliminaries and do Chenrezig meditation, it's very good for you to do them in Tibetan. When Buddhism was first introduced into Tibet, the language of Tibet had not yet been adapted to the Dharma and all the Dharma practices were done in Sanskrit. Sanskrit was one of the languages in which the Buddha taught the Dharma and so it inherently contains a great blessing. Later many Sanskrit scholars and realized beings visited Tibet and many Tibetans visited India* Great scholars and translators appeared who were able to translate the teachings completely into Tibetan. When this had been accomplished, then the practices were carried out in Tibetan. There appeared in Tibet 108 scholars and translators who were able to translate perfectly.

Now the Dharma in its Tibetan language form is spreading and developing in the West. For the time being, it's very difficult to have a complete understanding of the Dharma together with the ability to practice it perfectly

from one language into another. Rimpoche thinks that, although the prayers are said in Tibetan, there will soon be many scholars who will be able to translate the works into English. Then it will be possible to recite the texts in English.

Another reason for reciting the texts in Tibetan is that in Tibet itself, an unbelievable number of beings achieved very high levels of realization using as their means of practice the Tibetan language. So, the Tibetan language carries with it the blessing of these practionners.

A third reason is that there are many Dharma centers in Europe and North America and in the western world. So if in all these centers the practices are undertaken in the Tibetan language, then when someone goes from one center to another, he/she will be able to continue the practice.

The fourth reason for practicing in Tibetan is that at the moment there are many high lamas such as the Dalai Lama, Karmapa , Sakya Trizin and Dudjom Rimpoche and many other great lamas and scholars who will be coming to the West. If they hear everyone practicing in Tibetan, they will think that people are really practicing the Dharma very well and it will make then very happy.

So these are four good reasons why practicing in Tibetan is good and important.

There are different levels of teaching contained in Buddhism. There are higher levels, ordinary levels and lower levels. It is likely that most of us are beginning in the practice of Dharma, so it is necessary that we should learn to progress stage by stage, like beginning on the first rungs of a ladder. If one doesn't start on the first steps of a ladder, then it is very difficult to reach the top.

The highest level, the top of the ladder we are progressing on, consists of the realization of Mahamudra and the perfection of the creation and completion stages of meditation. The middle level consists of the practice of the relative and ultimate Bodhicitta and the ordinary level of the creation and completion stages of meditation. The lower level consists of the understanding of the non-substantiality of the cycle of existence (samsara) and the perfection of shinay meditation (concentration-stilling type of meditation).

The teachings which will help us on all three levels are the Kagyu teachings which consist of the ordinary and extra-ordinary preliminary practices.

It is necessary to know that whatever kind of Dharma we practice, there are three phases: the foundation, path and fruit. The foundation in the state of an ordinary being is the all-pervading consciousness and the foundation in an enlightened being is the all-pervading wisdom. All-pervading consciousness in the state of an ordinary being consists of the mind which is obsessed by ignorance mixed up with the different kinds of disturbing thoughts and emotions, rather like dirt mixed up with water. When faith, wisdom, compassion and understanding of emptiness arise out of this consciousness, then this is basic wisdom. The mind which is mixed with passions and disturbing emotions and which is bewildered is the mind consciousness of an ordinary being. To this mind, disturbing emotions come like waves which

arise on the surface of the ocean. The name of this mind is "thoughts arise quickly and then they are gone*1.

For example, an object appears to this mind, and upon seeing the object, the thought arises in the consciousness that there is an object. This is the object of sight or nsight consciousness". Then there is the idea of a sound and it is thought of as being either good or bad - this is the object of the sense organ of the ears. Then smell comes to the consciousness and we perceive that there is a good smell or a bad smell, and these smells are the object of the sense organ of the nose. The tongue tastes different tastes; so that the tastes which we experience are the objects of the sense organ of the tongue. The clothes which we wear, we perceive as being soft, rough, warm etc.; these clothes which we wear are the objects of the sense organ of the body, or of touch. The various thoughts that come to our mind, good and bad, are the objects of the consciousness of mind. To all the senses - eyes, ears, nose, body - feelings come which we experience as liking or disliking or indifferent. We become attached to the experiences we like and want to reject those we dislike. The mind which does not realize that its essence is voidness is the mind which reacts in this way. This is the ignorance mind and it is from this mind that the passions and disturbing emotions arise.

So we have the consciousness of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind, and then we also have the "ground consciousness", the consciousness which is the basis of the ordinary mind, or the mind which is covered by ignorance. In all, there are eight different consciousnesses.

We and all sentient beings have these eight consciousnesses and if we are not able to transform them into wisdom, then we remain sentient beings wandering in samsara. Because it is very difficult to transform these eight consciousnesses into the eight wisdoms very quickly, it is very difficult to understand the meaning of Mahamudra in just one instant. For example, the roads in the United States are very good, but it was not possible to build them all in the same day. Similarly, it is not possible to understand the meaning of Mahamudra in just one day.

It is very important to know that if we don't practice Dharma but continue to wander in samsara as sentient beings, then this is very unfortunate and a great waste. But, if we practice Dharma, travel the Path and attain the level of Bodhisattvas and Buddhas, then this is very wonderful. If we are not able to practice Dharma and we continue to wander in samsara, as we have from beginningless time until now, we will be reborn in the six realms of beings and then we will see that the suffering of this continuous wandering is endless. If we don't practice Dharma we will continue to wander in the six realms and experience the suffering of these realms.

This wandering in the six realms is the outer wheel of samsara, the outer existence through which all beings wander. Then within each being wandering in samsara, there is the cycle of the twelve interdependent links. Here is a brief explanation of interdependent origination.

When one dies, one experiences great ignorance and this is what is called "ignorance". From this not knowing, one begins to have some remembrance, a sub-consciousness which comes back and this is "samskara".

From "samskara" comes the consciousness of thinking that this is good or bad, like this or like that. From this consciousness comes the four skandhas or aggregates of feeling, perception, intention and consciousness. At about the time we are born from our mother, we have the six sense consciousnesses which were explained before (the consciousness of the sense organs of eyes, ears, nose etc.). Through these six consciousnesses, for example the consciousness of the eyes, we perceive an object, through the ears we hear a sound, through the nose we smell - we have what is called "contact" with objects. From this "contact" with objects, we get feelings of liking or disliking these objects and this is "sensation". And then from these "sensations" we want to hold on to objects or get rid of them - this is "clinging" or inclination towards objects. From this clinging comes "grasping", wanting to hold the objects. One grasps objects with the body, speech and mind and in this way, one has "becoming" or in other words, 'existence1 arises. After one is born, one grows up, matures, gets old and sick. The mind becomes unhappy and full of suffering. When one dies, one again falls into the ignorance of not knowing that one has died and again goes through these twelve interdependent links - so it is continuous.

In summary, the twelve links are:

1- ignorance
2- saraskara
3- consciousness
4- perception of objects
5- the six senses
6- contact with objects
7- sensation
8- grasping
9- holding
10- becoming
11- birth to old age
12- death

If we are not able to practice Dharma and go on the Path to liberation or Buddhahood, then this circle of twelve interdependent links is continuous and one is constantly reborn and there is no end to this. If we don't know about the six realms of samsara and about interdependent origination, then we are constantly reborn.

But if we do know about them, then we don't need to be reborn again, Instead, we can practice meditation. For example, we can meditate that now in the hell realms there are many beings who are suffering tremendously. These beings have been my friends and relatives.

By thinking like this, compassion arises in our mind and the fear of being reborn into this suffering also arises. Then we can ask, "What method do we have to avoid this suffering?" The means which we can use to avoid this suffering is to follow the teachings of the Buddha, the Path of Dharma.

If we don't know about the suffering of the six realms of samsara, even if we know about Dharma, we won't be able to practice because we won't have the necessary diligence. So, we get up at eight in the morning and we have

something to eat instead of practicing Dharma. Then we work all day instead of practicing Dharma and in the evening we come home and again we eat and we talk to our friends or watch TV. In this way, we spend our whole day doing other things and not practicing Dharma. After watching TV we go to sleep and we have spent the whole day not practicing Dharma. Then after sleeping for eight hours or so, we get up again, and every day we carry on like this.

If we understand the suffering of samsara and we have fear in our mind because of this suffering, maybe there is no way we can stop eating or working, but maybe we can stop watching TV and talking to our friends so much and use this time to practice Dharma. Also, we don't need to sleep so much and in the morning we can get up at six o'clock and meditate for an hour or two. In this way we can practice virtue for an hour or two before doing anything else. Usually we work five days a week and we have Saturday and Sunday off. So maybe it's important for us to work five days a week, maybe now we spend two days going around to see the sights and enjoying ourselves. If we understand the suffering of samsara then maybe five days a week we can go to work, then for one day we can practice virtue and make alot of merit and then one day we can go around and enjoy ourselves !

For example, it's like a wild man living in the forest, picking up a stone and throwing it at someone. Then he thinks, "Oh, this is very bad", but then he turns around and doesn't want to look at it. He just forgets about it and runs off. Most people don't want to hear about suffering and impermanence, but suffering and impermanence will come to us anyway. So if we listen, this will help. If we practice the path of Dharma, we can go beyond suffering. If we don't understand or hear about samsara, then we won't practice.

Where does samsara come from? It all arises from our mind, and the essence of our mind is voidness. Our mind has no shape, no colour, no form; it is void or empty like the sky. The mind is not only empty but it also has the quality of luminosity or clear space. If the mind were simply nothing, if it were simply empty, then there would be no suffering and there would be no virtue which could be made. Not only does the mind have the qualities of voidness and luminosity, but it also has the quality of unobstructedness. This means that whatever thoughts arise in the mind, they arise unobstructed.

The mind itself has three qualities:

- its essence is voidness
- its self nature is luminosity
- its aspect is unobstructedness

The mind is the mind which all sentient beings have. It is the seed for Buddhahood. For example, if we plant the seed of a flower, then a flower will grow. In the same way, this mind is said to be the essence or the seed of consciousness-wisdom or Buddhahood. Because we all have this seed for consciousness-wisdom, if we practice Dharma, then we are able to attain the state of Buddhahood. If we didn't have this seed, then no matter how much we practiced, we wouldn't be able to attain the state of Buddhahood. But

even though we have this consciousness-wisdom, it is now pervaded by ignorance.

What is ignorance? Ignorance is not being able to see the true nature of one's own mind. It is like a tarnished piece of gold - the gold cannot be seen. Similarly, consciousness-wisdom is now covered by ignorance. If gold is pounded and purified, then it will shine and only pure gold will remain. If ignorance is removed from consciousness-wisdom, then the consciousness-wisdom will be seen clearly.

For example, if Rimpoche's hand is the consciousness-wisdom, his robe, which he Is holding over his hand, is ignorance; in a condition of ignorance, when the true nature is not recognised as being voidness, the concept of ego, or self,arises*and we cling to this self or ego. Then when many forms emanating from the mind appear, grasping to to the idea of ego, we grasp these emanations as being objects. In this way we grasp an object, or something outside the mind itself. In this way one creates the obscuration of the habits. And so on top of the first obscuration of ignorance, there is the second obscuration of habit.

Not understanding that the nature of mind is void (the first obscuration), and not understanding the luminosity arising in the mind and creating various emanation or forms, we grasp them as being objects and thus grasping to self and object we create the obscuration of habit. Because of the unobstructed nature of the mind, we don't recognize this and attachment develops. From attachment, the root passions or disturbing emotions of ignorance, desire and hatred arise.

These three disturbing emotions or passions are the root passions or disturbing emotions. From desire comes greed; from hatred comes jealousy and from ignorance comes pride. Thus there are six main disturbing emotions or passions. Also, there are many different kinds of desire, e.g. desire between man and woman, desire for food, clothing, shelter etc. Altogether, there are 21,000 different kinds of desire, 21,000 different kinds of hatred, 21,000 different kinds of ignorance, and 21,000 different combinations of ignorance, desire and hatred. Therefore, there are 84,000 different kinds of disturbing emotions or passions. The obscuration of these passions or disturbing emotions comes on top of the first two obscurations of ignorance and habit.

From these different kinds of disturbing emotions come the three unvirtuous acts of the body (killing, stealing and sexual misconduct), the four unvirtuous acts of speech (lying, slander, abusive or harsh language and gossip), and the three unvirtuous acts of mind (envy, ill-will and wrong views). Together these are called the ten unvirtuous actions. In addition, there are many other unvirtuous acts. For example, we could commit the unvirtuous act of killing an animal through desire to get skins or meat, or through hatred, thinking they are our enemy. Or we could kill through ignorance. All the unvirtuous acts of body, speech and mind which we can commit comprise the fourth obscuration - the obscuration of karma or actions.

If we can remove or dispel these four great obscurations, then we attain the state of Buddhahood - if we don't remove them, then we remain in samsara.

By meditating on Mahamudra, understanding its meaning and practicing, we remove these obscurations. But, if we are not of the excellent quality of meditator, then we cannot understand the meaning of this and we cannot meditate on Mahamudra.

Who are these excellent kind of meditators? Well, they are those who have accumulated a great deal of merit in their previous lives and have very little negative karma. They have great faith and compassion, great wisdom and all the qualities. Depending on the blessing of the teacher and the faith of the disciple, once can really meditate on the meaning of Mahamudra and purify the obscurations.

Rimpoche says that the ordinary or lesser kind of individuals can practice shinay meditation to quiet the mind, do the preliminary practices and meditate on Chenrezig and thus gradually remove the obscurations. The first obscuration to be removed is the obscuration of karma, then the obscuration of the passions or disturbing emotions, then the obscuration of habit, and last the obscuration of ignorance. When all these obscurations are removed we attain the state of Buddhahood.

Rimpoche says that he doesn't have a great deal of grasping or clinging to this center and thinking that we are his disciples. But he thinks that we will listen to what he says. By listening to his teaching, Rimpoche hopes, in the best way, that we can attain liberation in this very lifetime. If this is not possible, then at the time of death; if this is not possible, he hopes we can be reborn in the pure land of Dewachen or somewhere where we can progress on the Path of Dharma and gradually attain enlightenment. For this reason, Rimpoche will explain the meaning of the Three Jewels and going for Refuge and also the preliminary practices. Then he will explain the different kinds of meditation practices. Later on, if you come to him for Mahamudra teaching, he will be able to give you this teaching. Rimpoche could tell you that this practice is very simple, it's just like meditating that everything is empty like the sky. If Rimpoche were to say this, it would be pleasing to your ears and you would enjoy hearing it, but other than this, there would be no benefit. If it were not of benefit to you, then it would confuse you. If Rimpoche just said nice things, then everywhere he went tens of thousands of people would come to listen to him and be pleased in this way; he could become very rich. But, if he teaches you about Dharma and how to practice on the Path, then this will benefit your mind.

What does it mean to attain Buddhahood? It means that one understands the nature of the mind and gains power over the mind. Having attained Buddhahood, it is not necessary to be reborn in samsara through the power of karma, but one is born in samsara for the benefit of beings. One is able to send many emanations to benefit beings . The Buddha is the one who is free from all suffering and has gathered all qualities, strengths and good things. There are many teachings in the Buddhist Dharma such as the teachings about the six realms of suffering, faith, compassion, development and perfection stages of meditation, samadhi meditation, absorptive meditation to quiet the mind, the practice of the Bodhisattva Path etc. Rimpoche thinks

that it is very important for you to meditate on the suffering of samsara and to think about the-four thoughts which turn the mind to Dharma.

At the beginning of the practice of Dharma in order to purify defilements and in order to accumulate merit and wisdom, we practice the preliminaries with the body, speech and mind. In the practice of meditation, the preliminary practice which is done is shinay meditation, or stilling meditation. In the Kagyu tradition, it is customary first to practice the preliminaries and then afterwards, practice shinay. It is not possible to reach enlightenment if one only practices shinay. It is necessary to receive instruction in insight meditation-Ihatong, in order to progress towards enlightenment. If you only practice shinay, this produces rebirth in the three higher states of existence, the gods1 realms, the desire realms, form and formless realms. However, if you practice shinay by first taking refuge and then dedicating the merit for the sake of all beings, then you are able to progress on the Path.

In order to practice shinay meditation, we should think that in front of us in the sky are the Three Jewels and the Three Roots. Meditate that for yourself and others, you are taking refuge in front of the Three Jewels and Three Roots. You are taking refuge in order to be protected from all fear and suffering from now until the time when we all reach enlightenment. You also pray that you may develop compassion for all sentient beings and realize the meaning of emptiness. Then you think that having taken refuge with faith and devotion, the blessing of the Three Jewels and the Three Roots is absorbed into one's self.

All sentient beings who are as limitless as the sky have, at one time or another, been our parents. Therefore, we owe them ajlot of gratitude. We should think that It is necessary to free all beings from their suffering and to establish them in the state of happiness and enlightenment. At the present moment, we don't have much power and ability to help sentient beings, and so we should think that we are going to practice shinay meditation in order to help other beings. Thus you awaken the thought of enlightenment in order to help others, and you recite the Bodhicitta verses several times.

If you first of all practice this thought of enlightenment for the sake of others, then however small your virtuous practice may be, it will grow very large. With the thought of enlightenment being very vast, then through the practice of shinay meditation, the virtue becomes vast and this enables us to progress on the Path to enlightenment.

The easiest practice of shinay Is the concentration on breathing, The breathing process is made up of air which is taken in and out of the body. In the space of 24 hours, there are 21,600 breaths which go in and out of the body. The main point of entry and exit of the airs is the nose and there are five different airs which makeup the air which goes in and out.

The air is made up of five elements and there is first of all the space air which is blue in color and this air goes out to a distance of 16 hand-breadths. The second air is the air of air itself which is green and it goes out to a distance shorter than the space air. Then comes the fire air which is red and goes out*shorter distance than the air air. Then comes the water air which is white and goes out to a shorter distance than the previous one. The earth air is

yellow and only goes out a short distance in front of the face. These five airs makeup the airs inhaled and exhaled by the breathing process. However, when we are doing shinay meditation it is not necessary to think of the colour of the air or the distance it is going out. It is also not necessary to have any thoughts like "the breathing is now going or coming inft. It is necessary simply to concentrate the mind on the nose and to one-pointedly, without distraction, meditate on the breathing process as it occurs, in and out, keeping the mind fixed on the nose and without letting any thoughts arise.

The meaning of the word *shinay* is, first, "shi" which means to pacify and through this practice the disturbing emotions and discursive thoughts become purified. The meaning of the syllable "nay" is to rest in one place and the mind becomes completely rested, concentrating on the breathing process at the end of the nose. When you are practicing shinay meditation, the very best position you can take up with your body is the one which was explained in the Seven Points of Naropa. First, the legs should be in full lotus position. Second, the hands should be placed one on top of the other, the right on top of the left. The arms should be as straight as possible with the elbows tucked in. The neck should be slightly bent forward; the chin should be almost resting on the throat, slightly tucked in. The eyes should be looking at a distance of about 8 hand-breadths away. The tongue should be placed slightly on the roof of the mouth. It's alright to sit with your body as straight as possible. It is taught that if the body is kept straight, then all the channels in the body, the veins and nerves are also straight and this facilitates the easy movement of the airs. If the airs are moving freely in the body, then the mind can rest in one place quite well.

As we are Just beginning this practice of shinay, many distractions can arise from keeping the eyes open and seeing ajlot of form. So, it's alright at the beginning,if you wish, to close your eyes and avoid being distracted by form. If one can keep the mind in emptiness and clarity, then it is preferable to do this meditation for a short period, say 25 breath. Once one has perfected this practice, then one can gradually increase the period of time.

There are two ways this meditation can go. One is that the mind can be in clarity, realization and awareness. This is very good. The other is that the mind can go into a kind of darkness and stupor. This is not good. You can also practice this kind of meditation by placing a Buddha image before you and concentrating on the image, or visualize an image of the Buddha and concentrate on your visualization. You can also concentrate on the drawing of a white dot, or the visualization of a white doj. It is also alright to concentrate on a letter such as  (OM, AH, HUNG).

All 'these are methods of shinay meditation which use a support and you should use the kind of support which is easiest for you to concentrate on. There is also shinay meditation without support.

Rimpoche has already spoken about the nature of the mind - its essence is emptiness, its nature is clarity and its form is unobstructed. It is very good to practice shinay meditation, observing the mind in its own natural state, that is, in its emptiness, clarity and unobstructedness. You should try to meditate

without any artifical strain, quite naturally, resting the mind in its emptiness, without distraction and allowing thoughts to arise.

It is not good to project the mind outwards. Neither is it good to look inwards and hold the mind inside. But the mind should be just left in its own natural state, quite openly, without any stress. Let the mind rest in its state which is without form and without colour. If however, we have the mind in a state of stupor without having any thoughts arising, in a state which is almost like sleeping, then this is bad shinay practice.

In the Kagyu tradition there are three levels of shinay practice the lower, middle and higher levels of one-polntedness. In the beginning it will be seen that the mind has many different thoughts and emotions which constantly arise. These are due to our previous karma, accumulations and habits. The thoughts are not actually more than we had before, It is just that we are aware of them and it seems that there are many more. When this meditation practice is perfected, then it is possible to meditate for three days or up to a week without having to eat or go to the bathroom. If one can do this, then one can experience great bliss and joy in the body and also the mind has the experience of emptiness, clarity and great joy. In addition, there are many kinds of mundane, clairvoyant powers which will come. But if at that time, you receive teaching on insight meditation and on the creation and completion stages of meditation, then your meditation practice will really progress well. Actually, to perfect the practice of shinay, it is necessary to be alone - in a cave or remote place whithout seeing other people. Once you've found a quiet and remote place, then it is necessary not to do anything with your body, You should have no work to do but should be able to sit, resting completely in meditation. It is also necessary to keep the speech in silence, not. using the voice at all, but resting in the meditative state. If the body and speech are completely at rest, then it is also possible to put the mind completely at rest.

At the moment, it is not possible to be completely isolated and at a total rest, but if you practice one or two hours a day, this will be very good. It is very difficult to meditate in the city if you have not contemplated the four meditations which turn the mind and if you have not completely made a solid commitment in your mind to meditation practice because you will not have the diligence and discipline to do so. The reason is that in the city there are many distractions, things going on outside. Tour body has so much work to do. You also have so much talking to do and there thoughts are continually arising, thoughts of aversion and desire. If all these things can be pacified, then this meditation will come very well. Rimpoche thinks that if you can practice some discipline and try to make this meditation practice in the morning when you get up and there is not much noise, this would be good.

The teachings of Mahamudra, or the Supreme Symbol, are the essence or heart of all the teachings of Dharma. For example/ they are like the heart in a person or like the butter which is contained in milk. They are like the essence or the quintessence of all these teachings.

If we ask, what is this Mahamudra? It is simply the realization of the fundamental nature — the basic nature — of one's own mind; and on this

level there is nothing complicated, there is nothing difficult at all. But from beginningless time our minds have been obscured by various veils — for example, there is the veil of fundamental ignorance; the veil of the basic tendency (the dualistic tendency — the dualistic clinging of the mind); the veil of the conflicting emotions which trouble the mind; and the veil of karma. These four veils, or obscurations, have clouded the mind and prevented us from realizing its ultimate nature.

To take an example, the nature of mind can be compared to the sky. Even though the sun may be shining brilliantly, there may be clouds and fog which obscure the clarity of the sky. In the same way, the nature of mind has this clearness, obscured by these different veils which prevent us from seeing the nature of the mind.

Therefore, in order to realize this ultimate nature of mind, we need to purify these veils, these obscurations which cloud this basic nature; and in order to do this we practice practices which are for the purpose of gathering the two accumulations, that is of merit, or positive karma, and awareness; and also the purification of veils and impurities in our makeup. And it is for this reason that we practice, for example, the Fundamental or the Foundational Practices, the Ngondro, such as the prostrations and refuge prayers, the purification exercise of the Vajrasattva meditation, the offering of mandala, etc. All of these practices are in order to gather these two accumulations of merit and awareness, and to purify these veils.

The practice of guru-yoga, or lamay naljor in Tibetan, is to allow the blessing of the lineage to enter one's stream of being, to allow one to share in the blessing of the lineage. So, in this way, if one practices the Foundational Practices in order to gather the two accumulations of merit and awareness, to purify the veils which obscure the mind and to receive or partake of the blessing of the lineage, then one can easily come to realize the meaning of the Mahamudra, the fundamental nature of one's own mind.

There is a quotation from the Buddha Sakyamuni to the effect that if one is not able to gather the accumulations of merit (positive karma) and of awareness; is not able to dissipate the veils or obscurations which cloud the nature of mind; is not able to receive the blessings of the lineage and of the lama, it will be very difficult to realize the fundamental nature of one's own mind, to realize Mahamudra. Other than these three aspects, these three preparations, there is no other way to realize this goal.

In particular, in the Vajrayana, the two techniques which are known as che rim, or the process of visualization or development, and dzo rim, or the process of completion or perfection, are taught as particularly effective means for realizing the nature of mind, or realizing the Supreme Symbol, or Mahamudra, or the Great Perfection or Maha ati teachings.

From beginningless time our mind has been clouded by fundamental ignorance, ignorance which prevents the mind from realizing or perceiving its own nature; and because of this the mind is seized by and in the clutches of a very strong egotistical clinging, a very strong tendency to think in terms of a self or an "I".

Based on this clinging to ego, this thinking of self or of HIW, no matter what form of existence one takes in the cycle of existence or Samsara, in whichever of the Six Realms one takes rebirth, one has as well a secondary fixation to the body, a thinking of "my body, my existence"; and so there is this initial fixation on "my mind, this mind" as an ego, and based on this there is the fixation to the physical body in which one experiences rebirth, and based upon this double fixation of "my mind" and "my body", this clinging to mind and body, from this develops all the suffering and all the troubles and difficulties which sentient beings experience in Samsara, in the cycle of existence.

Because these tendencies in the mind and this fundamental error have been in operation since beginningless time, there is a very strong and deep-rooted tendency to think in this way, of "my mind" and "my body". It is not easy for one to dissipate or overcome these tendencies which are so strong and deeply rooted in the mind. However, a particularly effective technique for this is visualization meditation, such as Chenrayzi meditation, in which one identifies with the form of a yidam, of a divinity, in order to overcome this habitual fixation one has of the individual self, the individual body, and instead transfers this fixation, or this tendency, to the form of a yidam in thinking, "I am Chenrayzi, my form is Chenrayzi's form." In this way one acquires a new outlook or a new tendency of the mind to regard the forn of Chenrezi rather than the habitual patterns of self.

One should meditate on this form of Chenrezi as being an empty appearance, like a rainbow in the sky or like the image of the moon reflected on water; that is to say, although the form is clear and very apparent and present, there is nothing tangible, there is no solidity or reality to this appearance. We speak of the empty appearance of Chenrayzi, or of the form of Chenrayzi being the conjunction of emptiness and form.

This is one aspect of Chenrayzi, this form on which we meditate, this form that we develop in our individual meditations. There is, however, another aspect to Chenrayzi, which is an emanation or manifestation of all of the compassion of all the Buddhas in this principle or this form that we know as Chenrayzi. This particular aspect is what is known as the yeshe sempa or the awareness aspect, the ultimate aspect which is above and beyond our individual meditative conception of Chenrayzi.

This form on which we meditate, this personal conception of Chenrayzi, is what is known as the damtsik sempa in Tibetan; this means the symbolic aspect or the aspect of bonding or connecting. This means that through meditating on this form of the symbolic aspect of Chenrayzi, one can come to realize, one can come to experience, the ultimate aspect of Chenrayzi, which is the awareness aspect, awareness which is the manifestation of the compassion of all the Buddhas. And in this way, in one's practice one gradually comes to experience the union of these two aspects — the symbolic aspect, or the aspect of bonding or connection, and the awareness aspect. And in this way one comes to receive the spiritual influence, the blessing, of Chenrayzi.

In general we consider all form that we see as something solid and tangible. We consider all sound that we hear as something real. We consider all the thoughts which arise in our minds as something real, as something existent in themselves. Because of this fixation on the reality of things we experience — the forms we see, the sounds we hear, the thoughts we think ~ based on our clinging to the solidity in the existence of all these things, we come to experience all the difficulties and sufferings in the cycle of existence.

And so, one can think of this clinging to the reality of the phenomena that we experience as a disease; it is this disease which causes us to suffer in this cycle of existence. There is a medicine or remedy for this sickness, and this remedy is three-fold. This applies to the level of form, the level of speech or sound, and the level of mind. In this technique one considers all form which one sees as the conjunction or the coincidence of emptiness and form; that is to say, all form is the form of Chenrayzi; and to consider all sounds that one hears as the speech of Chenrayzi, which is dra tong in Tibetan, the conjunction or coincidence of emptiness and sound; and on the level of mind, one considers all thoughts and all feelings which arise in the mind as rik tong, which is the conjunction or coincidence of emptiness and intelligence or awareness. In this way one comes to view these levels in this purified way.

This three-fold technique of viewing all form as Chenrayzi's form, all speech as Chenrayzi1s speech and all thought as the awareness or mind of Chenrayzi, this triple technique is a very effective and rapid means for realizing Mahamudra. But in addition one then continues to perform the meditation in what is known as the dzo rim, or the stage of completion in meditation, in which one dissolves the meditation gradually, meditating that the outer world is absorbed into one's form as Chenrayzi; one's form as Chenrayzi is absorbed into the syllable in the heart; the syllable in the heart dissolves stage by stage into a state of emptiness in which one rests absorbed without any conception in the mind, without any visualization. This particular technique is a very rapid technique for realizing Mahamudra, the nature of mind.

If we consider the word "Mahamudra" in Tibetan, the Tibetan translation of the word Mahamudra is chaja chenpo, four syllables, and one can examine each of these syllables in turn. For example, the syllable cha is a symbol for the state of emptiness, or the state of vacuity: Sunyata. The syllable pa, the second syllable, is interpreted symbolically as Mnot to go beyond." This indicates that all the phenomena in Samsara and Nirvana do not go beyond or do not pass away from this basic state of emptiness which includes all phenomena or pervades all phenomena in Samsara and Nirvana. And so this state of awareness may be translated as a state of awareness which does not pass beyond or does not deviate from this basic state of emptiness.

All the different practices that we practice in Dharma, all the Foundational practices — Ngondro, the meditation on the che rim (phase of development) or visualization meditations on yidams, the dzo rim (phase of completion), the phase of perfection in meditation, the meditations on shamata or calming the mind, or lhak tong (vipassana), direct vision of the nature of mind, the

meditations on love and compassion and on emptiness — all of these are skillful means to lead us to this ultimate realization of Mahamudra.

We can say perhaps, that all people are the same, but in fact if we look around us there are many differences between people. There are people who have very keen faculties, very sharp perceptions, who have the capability of understanding. There are people who have middling capabilities and people who have very poor, very inferior capabilities to comprehend and realize. It is very difficult for an individual of middling or inferior capabilities to come to a quick realization of Mahamudra.

For someone who has very keen, excellent capabilities, it is possible to realize Mahamudra without any other practice, not to have to practice Ngondro or any of the other practices which are considered preparation for this realization. If such a person of keen capabilities has a very stable mind and very strong faith and confidence in his or her lama, then the lama can point out the nature of mind to this person and the person can realize it immediately. But these cases are very, very rare.

This difference between people of keen capabilities, middling capabilities and inferior capabilities is not based upon whether one is a man or a woman, on whether one is a strong person or a weak person, a rich person or a poor person. All it has to do with is whether one has in past lifetimes accumulated positive karma and the accumulations of merit and awareness. If this is the case then one will be born into an existence where one has very keen capabilities and very sharp perceptions. If one has not accumulated this positive karma, then one will achieve an existence of either middling or inferior capabilities.

What do we mean when we speak of someone with excellent or keen capabilities? This means someone who just by nature has a wisdom or an intelligence which allows him to perceive the meaning of a profound teaching the moment he hears it. No matter how profound or complex the teaching may be, when such a person is presented with it, he or she can perceive the sense, the profound meaning of it, immediately. In addition, such a person has qualities such as a natural love and compassion for all sentient beings, an inborn confidence or faith in his or her lama and in the Three Jewels, and a great deal of energy or diligence in practice. When all these qualities come together, we speak of someone having very keen or excellent capabilities.

Because these teachings of Mahamudra are the quintessence of Dharma, of all Buddhism whether it is the Sutric path or the Tantric path, this is a very profound teaching and to some extent a secret or hidden teaching that should not be discussed publicly with a great deal of publicity or a great deal of noise. This is something which is to be presented to people who are sufficiently prepared, who have sufficient intelligence to understand the teaching, who have sufficient diligence to put it into practice, who have the damtsik or connections with the lineage, who have all these natural inborn qualities in them, and who are thus considered suitable receptacles or vessels for this teaching.

When disciples who have faith in the teacher request instructions in Mahamudra, and the teacher, because of his compassion and his wish to

help the students, gives this instruction in Mahamudra, if such a disciple is capable of understanding the teachings and when the lama gives the instructions the person realizes the meaning of the teachings and is able to practice them, then this is a very beneficial situation. If, however, there are people who listen to such a teaching who are not sufficiently prepared to realize it or to put it into practice, they will not understand what is being said to them. They may hear the words but they won't understand the sense. In this way we can say that the teachings are to some extent self-secret. Rinpoche says that perhaps in this case there will not be very much harm done. The person will not derive very much benefit, but on the other hand there is very little danger to this person. There will simply be no effect through receiving the teaching.

There are certain dangers or delicate points for both the lama and his disciples. For example, if the lama gives teachings of Mahamudra not out of compassion, in order to help other beings, but simply in order to become famous or to become wealthy or from some other personal consideration, then this is a very grave fault, a very negative action on the part of the lama.

There is also a danger on the part of the disciple, because if the disciple receives a teaching which he doesn't understand, and based upon this lack of understanding he develops wrong views vis-a-vis the Dharma, or feels that he has lost his confidence in the Dharma, then this is a very negative action; because, of all the unskillful actions one can commit, to develop wrong views about the Dharma or to abandon the Dharma is the most harmful. For this reason, for one who has received a teaching which he or she does not understand to therefore consider that he must abandon the Dharma or to develop very negative or twisted views vis-a-vis the Dharma is a very grave danger on the part of the disciple.

And so, Rinpoche says, in order for such a teaching as is taking place today to take place, it is necessary that both the teacher and the disciples approach the situation in the proper way. For example, Rinpoche says, for someone such as I, a lama who is teaching about Mahamudra, it is necessary to have the view that sentient beings are lost in Samsara, that the cycle of Samsara is full of suffering and that in order to liberate sentient beings from the suffering this teaching of Mahamudra is being given. It is necessary, Rinpoche says, for someone such as I, who is teaching Mahamudra, to develop this Bodhi-citta, this enlightened attitude, to give the teaching solely for the purpose of helping other beings free themselves from their ignorance and suffering.

In addition, it is necessary for the people here today who are listening to this teaching to develop the proper attitude; that is, to consider the lama who is giving the instructions as the Buddha or as Buddha — an enlightened person —, and the teaching that is being given as nectar or elixir which can purify all the impurities of the mind. If one can meditate in this way, and one can understand the teaching, then one can consider that the transmission has taken place. But if one is unable to understand the teaching in its completeness, then it is at least necessary to maintain one's confidence in the lama and in the teaching by feeling that it is according to one's own

karma, one's own veils of ignorance, that one is not able to understand, that it is not due to a fault on the part of the lama or in the teaching. And so, if the lama who is giving the teaching and the disciples who are receiving it can develop these kinds of attitudes, then only positive and virtuous activity can take place. There will be no fault and no negative activity, no negative karma, as a result of this teaching.

When receiving a teaching on Mahamudra, it is the practice to meditate at the same time. One should experience the teaching at the same time that one receives it. One would begin by regarding the mind, by analyzing the mind. What we call mind, that which thinks, which experiences all that we experience — one examines this to determine whether it has any characteristics. Where does mind come from? Where do the thoughts which arise in the mind come from? Where do they stay? Where do they go? Does the mind have color or not? Does it have shape or form? Does it have size? One examines all these characteristics. Traditionally, one would do these meditations for a period of time — for days, weeks or even months.

For one who has meditated in this way, it then follows that one examines the mind when the mind comes to rest, when there is no thought in the mind and the mind is simply resting without any activity. This is what we call, technically, "the mind at rest" or "the rest stage of mind." In addition, thereare periods when the mind is agitated or moving, when there is motion or dynamic events are occurring in the mind. This is what is known as "the movement of mind.*1 One examines these two phases of mental activity, the passive or rest stage and the active or agitated stage, to determine whether these two phases are different or whether they are the same. If they are different, how are they different? In addition, one considers the knower or watcher which is aware of the mind at rest or the mind moving; and one considers whether this watcher or this principle which is conscious is the same as mind or different from mind. In this way one continues, for a period of time, to meditate, examining these various subjects of meditation, these various aspects of one's mental situation.

All of these techniques are employed in a close relationship with one's lama, someone with whom one can discuss one's progress in meditation. One approaches one's lama, having done these various practices, and explains to him the particular sensations, experiences or realizations one has had; and it is the lama's task to point out to the disciple which are valid experiences and which are not valid, which indicate progress and which are simply distractions. In this way, through this close relationship between the teacher and the student, the practitioner can come to a full comprehension, a full realization of Mahamudra.

This is the ideal situation. However, practically speaking this is rather difficult, because the lamas are always on the road, always moving from place to place; and disciples — the students who are studying — have a great deal of work and activity and are unable to follow the teachings in this very direct way. For this reason it is necessary to give the teachings as we're giving them today, fairly condensed and rapid.

It is necessary for people now to realize Mahamudra in the short time between coming home from work in the evening and starting to watch television.

Another method would be to meditate in order to achieve enlightenment when one gets up in the morning, in the short period before one goes to work.

We have heard a great deal spoken about mind in the past. But it is necessary for us to understand something of the situation, to understand something of the nature of mind. We speak of mind as being empty, or being void. This means that mind has no form: it has no color, no shape, no distinguishing characteristics whatsoever. In this way we can say that mind is empty.

But the mind is not simply void or simply empty. There is another aspect which we can label the clarity or the lucidity or mind. This is not the same as brightness/ or clarity in the sense of sunlight and moonlight or electric light which is bright; but is rather the aspect/ the potential capability of mind to know and to experience everything. This particular quality ~ that the mind can know or perceive anything which arises in the mind/ any experience, any thought — is what we refer to as the lucidity or clarity of mind.

For example/ if one had a piece of fruit in front of one/ the simple act of experiencing that piece of fruit/ of being aware of that piece of fruit in front of one/ is a result of this clarity of mind. If the mind did not have this lucidity/ one would not be able to experience that piece of fruit. This is a result of the lucid aspect of mind.

There is a third basic quality of the nature of mind/ and this is what is known as the nonobstructed quality of mind. For example, once one has become aware of the presence of this piece of fruit in front of one/ there are further thoughts which develop in the mind, such as "This looks good, this looks good to eat, I want to eat this," etc., various thoughts which arise in the mind based upon this initial experience of the piece of fruit. All these thoughts come up in a completely unrestricted and uninhibited way. If one did not have this quality of mind, if this unobstructedness were not a quality of mind, one would not be able to act on the basis of this experience of the fruit; one would not be able to recall or to think based upon this initial perception. This is what we have referred to as the third quality, the nonobstructedness of mind.

So, when one examines the nature of mind, we see it has these three aspects -- the emptiness of mind, the lucid aspect of mind and the nonobstructed aspect of mind. All of these are not three separate things but three aspects of one basic nature, which is the nature of mind. This is very often referred to as the Tathagatagarba, or the seed or essence of Buddhahood.

If one is able to recognize, to realize and experience directly this nature of Buddha, this seed of Buddha which is the nature of mind, then one is enlightened. This is the state of Buddhahood. If one is not, however, able to recognize this state of mind/ this potential of mind/ then it becomes the basis

for all of the confusion and suffering in Samsara. For this reason, the difference between a Buddha and a sentient being, between an enlightened being and a non-enlightened being, is simply the presence or absence of the recognition of this basic nature.

And so it is necessary for us to recognize, to realize, this basic nature of mind, because it is based upon this realization that the experience of enlightenment takes place. One can consider all practice of Dharma, every element and every technique in the practice of Dharma, as being a means toward this ultimate realization of the nature of mind. One can begin on a very practical, physical level. It is said traditionally that if one employs the proper physical posture, then this can greatly benefit the realization, or the experiences which arise in the mind. So, the first element in the practice of meditation is the proper posture. The first element of this proper posture is to maintain the body in an upright, straight position.

Tibetans employ the posture of the, Buddha Sakyamuni, who is depicted as being seated with the legs crossed in what is called Vajra posture. However, people in the West, because we have a little more material prosperity and a great deal of skillful means, have provided ourselves with chairs. And so we can use what is known as the posture of Maitreya, the Coming Buddha, who is depicted as seated in a chair.

Keep the physical posture straight, keep the body straight, but nevertheless relax. The body should be kept upright but relaxed, and the mind, as well, relaxed.

It was Gampopa who said that if water is not troubled or is not agitated or stirred up then it is clear. If the mind is not held tight or constrained then it is happy. This particular instruction regarding meditation indicates that when one is meditating, it is necessary to keep the mind relaxed and not to force or constrain the mind, not to hold the mind too tightly. In this way the mind will gradually come to rest in a state of happiness.

When one is meditating in this relaxed state, one should not follow after thoughts of the past, after what has arisen in the mind before or what one has done in the past. Similarly, one should not anticipate or hope for the future, thinking, HI have to think about this; I have to do this in the future." One should simply let the mind rest in the present moment, completely relaxed, without concern for the past or the future, simply aware and precisely present in the present moment.

It is not necessary for the mind to pay attention to or to focus on anything outside the body, anything in the external world. Neither is it necessary for the mind to concern itself

with anything inside, with any internal experience. Simply let the mind rest in its natural state, just as it is, just as it happens in the present moment, without any contrivance, without any artificiality.

When one is meditating, letting the mind rest in this state, which is called rang bap in Tibetan (which means simply, the mind as it is or as it happens in the present moment without any contrivance"), one should not consider the mind as an object of inspection or meditation, or the state of emptiness,

Sunyata, as an object of meditation. For the purposes of this meditation, the mind is not to be considered as something to be meditated upon or something to be regarded. One simply lets the mind rest as it is, in its natural state. In addition, it is not advisable, as part of this meditation, to suppress or to interrupt the stream of awareness, but simply to allow the natural intelligence or awareness of mind to continue with vigilance or precision*

If one meditates in this way, then the mind comes to be empty and transparent. One has this experience in which there is no consciousness of anything taking place in the mind. There is simply this transparent mind-essence. On the level of the body, there is no consciousness of any particular sensation. There is simply the experience of this transparent mind-essence. This is the experience of what we call the empty nature or the empty essence of mind.

When one is experiencing this meditation of the transparency of mind, the mind should not fall therefore into obscurity or dullness. Also, it is not necessary or advisable to watch the emptiness of the mind or to be conscious of the emptiness or the lucidity of mind in any contrived manner. There is a natural intelligence or natural awareness of mind, which is simply aware, simply the bare awareness of this experience, and this third aspect, this natural or basic intelligence of mind, is what corresponds to the nonobstructedness of mind.

And so we have an experience in which one experiences the essential emptiness of mind, this transparency of mind. One experiences, as well, the lucid nature of mind, and in addition there is this bare awareness or bare intelligence which perceives this situation, which perceives this mind-nature.

And this is the third element, which is the nonobstructedness of mind. To rest in this state, with these three aspects of mind being experienced in this way, is what is called meditation.

To speak of all this is just words. These are just the sounds of the words; and one can consider these words as the conjunction or coincidence of sound and emptiness. What remains to be done is to realize this basic emptiness or basic nature of mind. And so now we will all together meditate for some time on this basic mind-essence, letting the mind rest simply in its basic nature, without any contrivance.

We rest with the body held gently but firmly erect, and the mind resting in a state of bare awareness, without any contrivance, without any artificiality in the mind, simply letting the mind rest in this transparent lucidity.

Because we are beginning meditators, it is difficult for us to have a clear meditation at this point; but it is sufficient when one meditates simply to let the mind rest in this clear, transparent state, just barely aware of the state of mind, of the ultimate essence of mind. One simply has to remain alert. As long as there is this perception which allows the mind to remain alert, this is sufficient.

Again because we are beginning meditators, it is impossible for us to meditate in this way for any length of time. There are always thoughts and emotions which arise and stir the mind, agitate the mind. But at the very

least, when one is meditating in this way, one should not have to reject or repress these thoughts as they arise in the mind, nor to indulge in them when they arise, to follow them. Better to remain vigilant, to remain precisely aware of the moment while one meditates, so that one knows or is aware of what arises in the mind, one experiences the thought as it arises in the mind without following it. In this way one lets the mind simply rest without repressing thoughts but without indulging in them or following after them. In this way thoughts come to be perceived like bubbles on the surface of water or a rainbow in the sky. Just as the bubbles are reabsorbed into the water and the rainbow dissolves into the sky, whatever arises in the mind is naturally liberated into the mind-essence,

If one is able to let the mind rest in this way, in this state of transparency, lucidity and spaciousness, where there is the emptiness, transparency and lucidity of mind, and there is the bare, naked awareness of this experience, of the mind-essence — if one can rest the mind in this state without distraction — then one can say, after a fashion, that one is very close to the realization of Mahamudra.

We can think of the ignorance of sentient beings that exists in our minds now as like a room or a house in which all the doors and windows are closed shut, and even though the sun is brilliantly shining outside, no light can penetrate the obscurity of this house or room. Then when one begins to meditate and has just the slightest flash of this mind-nature — the empty essence, the lucid nature and the non-obstructed manifestation of mind — it is just as though one has made a tiny hole in the wall of this building, and a very tiny beam of sunlight is able to enter and just to begin to illuminate the room to the slightest possible degree. In this way we have just the slightest inkling of what the significance of Mahamudra is.

If one can do this kind of meditation regularly — daily, as often as one can and as much as one can, then gradually one will come to develop this meditation, one will come to a clear realization of the empty essence, the lucid nature and the non-obstructed manifestation of mind; and in this way, the mind will become clearer and clearer, and one's meditation will develop more and more.

If one can meditate in this way, then all of the thoughts, all of the experiences which arise in one's mind are neither beneficial nor harmful, but simply like waves on the surface of water. They come from the water and they are absorbed back into the water. Thoughts and emotions arise in the mind and are absorbed back into the mind. They arise from this emptiness and are absorbed or dissolved back into this emptiness. If one can meditate in this way, there is no difficulty presented by anything that arises in the mind.

So, fundamentally speaking, the practice of Mahamudra is a very simple thing. There is nothing complicated or difficult about it at all. There is no visualization one has to perform, there is no exercise one has to do, there is no difficulty physically such as with prostrations, there is nothing basically to be done. One simply lets the mind rest in its natural state, just as it is, without any contrivance, without any force, without any tension in the mind. In this way, the practice of Mahamudra is very simple.

In the minds of various sentient beings arise various emotions and passions, various feelings — desire, hatred, jealousy, stupidity, etc. When one practices the meditation on Mahamudra, there is no need to abandon, reject or repress such thoughts which arise in the mind. There is also no need to indulge in these thoughts or to follow them. One simply lets the mind rest in bare awareness of the moment, just conscious or aware of what is arising in the mind without any repression or indulgence, just allowing the mind to rest in its natural state.

At the present moment our minds are like a pot of water boiling on a fire: there is continual agitation, continual activity, bubbles continually rising to the surface. If one takes cold water and throws it into this boiling pot, immediately the water becomes lukewarm and the activity ceases. In the same way, if one can practice the meditation on Mahamudra, whatever passions, emotions and thoughts are troubling the mind — all of this activity, all of this agitation and destruction — are immediately appeased and pacified.

The practice of Mahamudra can be condensed into three brief instructions: not to be distracted, not to meditate and not to contrive anything artificial in the mind. We will examine each of these in turn. First, to be distracted is understood as the condition that exists when the mind first begins to follow a sensory experience such as a form, a sound, an odor, a taste, a tangible experience, etc. The mind begins to follow and become seduced by this experience. This is one form of distraction. In addition, if the mind loses its clarity, its vigilance, its acuteness in meditation, this is another, a subtle, form of distraction. It is necessary for the mind to be free of these two forms of distraction.

The second point is not to meditate, that is, not to make any effort to meditate. This means that when one is practicing Mahamudra there is nothing that needs to be produced. There is no state of meditation which needs to be forced, created or developed. Simply, one lets the mind rest undis-tracted, without any wavering, in this natural state. This is what is meant by "nonmeditation".

The third point is that there should be nothing artificial, no contriving in the mind. This means that when one is meditating one does not have to do anything in order to make the mind any better, any worse, any different than it is. Mind in itself is essentially empty. This is the level of Dharmakaya, or the "void" aspect of Buddhahood. In addition, the nature of mind is clear or lucid. This is the Sambhoga-kaya, or the level or body of enjoyment or glory of Buddha-hood. Then there is the third level, the nonobstructed manifestation of mind. This is the Nirmanakaya level or emanation of Buddhahood. The mind embodies these three aspects and is intrinsically pure, intrinsically the best thing possible. And so there is absolutely nothing that needs to be done in meditation in order to create or improve the situation.

Having understood a little of this, it is necessary now for us to implement it in practice, to experience it personally. So it is necessary for one to practice this meditation as much as one can, to develop one's faith and confidence in

the teachings and in the Three Jewels, to pray to one's lama and the Three Jewels for blessing, help and support in one's practice. In this way one can gradually come to realization.

If one is not able to understand this teaching or put it into practice, this is an indication that one's karmic obscuration: are too strong. So it is necessary for one to engage actively in purification, in gathering the accumulations of merit and awareness and in purifying the veils which obscure the mind, in order to bring oneself into a state in which one can begin to practice Mahamudra. If one realizes one does not have sufficient preparation to begin to practice this teaching, it is necessary to purify and to prepare oneself, and eventually gradually, to develop this realization of Mahamudra.

An English translation of this text by the ninth Karmapa, Wangchuk Dorje, which is called Marik Munsel in Tibetan, has been published under the title The Mahamudra Which Dissipates the Darkness Of All Ignorance. People can now receive this teaching, which has very powerful blessings connected with it. They can read this book and discuss the ideas contained in it with a lama and gradually come to an understanding of Mahamudra. This is a very beneficial book which has been translated.

In all of the Dharma centers now, it is a regular habit to practice the Foundational Practices as a daily ceremony, but the recitation of these prayers and practices takes some time. It is difficult when people have a lot of work, a lot of commitments, to do this on a daily basis. There does, however, exist an abridged version of the Foundational Practices, and Rinpoche is now going to give us the scriptural authorization to practice these. If people find in the future that they have not the time to practice the longer version of the Foundational Practices, then as a daily practice one can use this abridged version.



TREASURE VASE

Vajrayana and Kalachakra Practice

Ven. Kalu Rinpoche



Karma Triyana Dharmachakra
Translation: N.T. Burkhar.
April 1982

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Venerable Kalu Rinpoche

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I feel very fortunate and pleased to be here this evening and to meet with all of you about such faith and commitment to the teachings of the Lord Buddha. It is a very fortunate opportunity we have to come together particularly in this the Gyalwa Karmapa's seat here in North America in order to share teachings of the Dharma.

To begin with a little introduction and something of my own personal background I have been some four times now to the North American continent. The first time was in 1971 and at that time the Venerable Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche was already in North America teaching. The particular style, which he found it necessary to adopt, was to present Buddhism from the point of view of American Buddhists. The idea being rather than speak in a very traditional fashion, very straightforwardly per se he used many skillful means to present the teachings in light of worldly fields of knowledge in North America. This was so people in this culture who did not have former knowledge or acquaintance with Buddhism could adapt their way of thinking to the Buddhist view. In this way he was able to gradually introduce the teachings in a very skillful way. This was a very marvelous activity he undertook from his own personal qualities and his superb command of the English language. Because of his own personal situation he was going to remain in North America as a permanent resident. All of these were factors in his quite unique and marvelous approach to presenting the teachings.

I myself was only staying for about a year this first visit so felt very strongly that if I was to accomplish anything during that visit was to teach the Dharma straight and simple. I would set out the teachings in a pure traditional way without mixing it with any other viewpoints; simply present the teachings as Buddhism per se. In order to present, as clearly as possible and without any embellishment the teachings, which I felt, were basic to people understanding the teachings of Dharma and to actually practice these teachings, I presented teachings based on the Four Thoughts Which Turn the Mind. These four basic contemplations of Buddhist practice and in particular I taught extensively on the concept of karma of cause and effect in one's experience.

Previous to the introduction of the Buddhadharma to the country of Tibet, the Land of Snows, it was a very barbaric region. There was very little difference between the people there and cannibal demons or very primitive savages, as they had no concepts of anything as refined as the Buddhadharma. At that

point there was a king who arose among the Tibetan people named Songtsen Gampo and who is considered to have been an emanation of the bodhisattva of compassion, Chenrezig. Because of the miraculous powers this king manifested particularly his martial force which largely depended on his charisma and spiritual power, he was able to bring the entire region of Central Asia know known as Tibet under his dominion. In this way he formed the political basis which enabled him to spread the teachings of Dharma throughout the Central Asian area. In particular this king was devoted to meditation on the bodhisattva of compassion, Chenrezig and this teaching spread widely under his influence.

In this way Tibet became a sphere of activity for the bodhisattva of compassion and this has become so entrenched in the Tibetan consciousness that there was no child who could say the word mother, who also could recite the mantra OM MANI PADME HUM. This is basic and fundamental to the Tibetan outlook. Because of this intensive and widespread practice on the bodhisattva of compassion, countless numbers of persons came to spiritual attainment through this kind of meditation.

From this beginning of the process of transmission, gradually the entire corpus of Buddhist teachings of both the Sutra and Tantra traditions, all of the commentaries, all of the root texts were able to be brought from India to the land of Tibet. It was transmitted and translated completely without any element missing to the Tibetan people. In the great hope that the same kind of transmission process can occur in the United States, Canada and all of the countries of the West I taught the foundation of the Four Thoughts which turn the mind away from samsara and towards spiritual practice. Based upon this I also gave the vows of refuge and taught widely about this concept and also promulgated this practice of the meditation of Chenrezig, both the instructions and initiation wherever I went. The results I found were very favorable.

The reason why this concept of refuge and the actual taking of refuge is so fundamental to Buddhist practice is that simply without this initial level of commitment and engagement in Buddhist practice, any further level of ordination or commitment of involvement in the Buddhist path is impossible. Taking refuge forms a foundation which is absolutely necessary to traveling the Buddhist path to enlightenment. Furthermore I would give names to people during the actual ceremony of taking refuge and these names all begin with karma which is almost like a family name. This was to indicate not only that these people became Buddhists by accepting the Three Jewels as the source of their inspiration but that they were also connected to the Karma Kagyu lineage and His Holiness the Gyalwa Karmapa. Simply coming into contact with this name and this transmission in this small way is very beneficial indeed and carries an incredibly strong spiritual blessing with it. This is why from the very beginning until the present day I never changed my custom of giving this kind of refuge name when I give the vows of refuge.

Because all meditational deities or yidams are emanations of enlightenment, there is not one of these forms that lack spiritual blessing with the potential to aid and benefit beings. However the form of Chenrezig, the bodhisattva of

compassion, represents the quintessence and the union of the love and compassion of all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. The benefits of this meditation in arousing this love and compassion in the experience of the practitioners of such meditation as well as the realization of emptiness and meditative absorption which develops upon this practice are felt to be very beneficial indeed. This is why I chose this particular meditation out of the entire range of tantric meditations available in order to present to Western audiences.

The second journey I made to North America was in 1974. Because of the basis, which had been laid in my previous trip through teaching the four contemplations, the Four Thoughts Which Turn the Mind to Spiritual Practice, I was able to present the extraordinary foundational practices. These practices are commonly called the ngondro or the foundation involving five practices that are performed 100,000 times each. I laid particular emphasis on this stage of the teachings during my second trip.

All of the main schools of Tibetan Buddhism, Sakya, Gelug, Nyingma and Kagyu all have these introductory foundations which are the Four Thoughts That Turn the Mind Towards Spiritual Practice and the extraordinary or special foundations which are represented in each school. Although all of these schools have these similar or parallel teachings, I chose the teachings from my own lineage, the Karma Kagyu lineage. It was this particular ngondro or foundation practice set which I taught which are known as the foundations for the development of the Mahamudra experience. This is particular to the Kagyu School or lineage of teachings. I spread these teachings as widely as I could and encouraged people through practicing these teachings to develop their devotion and their sense of taking refuge in the Three Jewels. I also stressed developing their bodhicitta; their enlightening or altruistic attitude for the benefit of others based on love and compassion for all sentient beings. I also wished for them to purify themselves of negativity and obscuration through the practice of the second foundation, the Vajrasattva or Dorje Sempa meditation, to accumulate merit and deepen their awareness through the offering of the mandala and to open themselves to receiving the blessings of the lineage through the Guru Yoga practice.

In presenting all of these I tried to insure that there would be many practitioners. I feel that this was very successful and that indeed many people did come through my teachings to engage in these practices and to gain the respective benefits. Another that I introduced at this point was the meditation and sadhana connected with the Green Tara. This particular form of Tara is associated not only with the ability to protect and deliver one from the fears and sufferings of this life but also to aid one in one's accomplishments and spiritual progress. I introduced the Four-Mandala Sadhana of Green Tara, which is commonly known as the Green Tara Puja or Sadhana. Using these three practices; the foundational practices, the Chenrezig meditation and the Green Tara Sadhana as a bases I established many centers. It was upon this basis of formal practice, this structure that I built these centers and these centers have continued to grow from then until the present day.

In the fourth of the foundational practices, guru yoga, there is a lineage prayer which traces the Kagyu lineage called the Golden Rosary of the Kagyu Doctrine from the Dharmakaya Buddha Vajradhara or Dorje Chang down to the present lineage holders. As the text is presented in the original Tibetan for the first half of this lineage there are prayers of four lines each and each line mentions the name of a lineage holder. Following this for the second half of the lineage there is one name per quatrain. This extended the prayer quite a bit to the point where a number of people found it very hard to incorporate such a lengthy prayer into their daily schedule. Most of the people associated with my centers have regular jobs and the only time they had to practice was in the early morning before they went to work and in the evening when they came home. I thought to shorten this prayer, condense it somehow so that they would be able to fit it more easily into their daily routine. So in this way, I rewrote the second portion of the prayer including as previously one lineage holder per line of verse. In this way I condensed it to make it easier for people to incorporate it into their daily schedules.

Another innovation that I introduced at this point was the inclusion of a Mahamudra lineage prayer to the Kagyu lineage preceding the Chenrezig meditation, which was normally done. So before the sadhana was recited I felt that it would be very beneficial for people to recite the names of the lineage holders of the Kagyu Mahamudra teachings as a kind of supplication to the gurus of the lineage. Again I composed a prayer that incorporated the name of one lineage holder for each line of verse. This was instituted as the prayer preceding the Chenrezig sadhana.

This reason I composed this prayer was in consideration of the following. Although in each school there are authentic lineages of teachings leading to complete enlightenment and there is no difference in this level between the different schools of Buddhism, I felt very strongly to maintain the identity of the lineage for two reasons. The first was that the actual uninterrupted transmission of blessing was likely to be interrupted if a mingling of lineages or a sudden breakdown of the continuity of different lineages. Furthermore I felt that it was very important for people to understand exactly which transmission of teaching they were practicing and identifying with in order to be able to receive the particular blessing associated with that lineage. So for these reasons in order to keep it very clear what this particular lineage was, what we refer to as the Kagyu lineage of the Mahamudra teachings, I composed this prayer with this idea in mind. There would be an unerring identification on the disciple's part with the actual lineage of the Mahamudra teachings.

In this particular prayer to the Mahamudra lineage one will notice that after the name of Rangjung Rikpay Dorje, the XVIth Gyalwa Karmapa, there is the name of a lama who is called Norbu Tondrup. There are a number of reasons for including Lama Norbu Tondrup's name in this lineage. The first and foremost to me is that he was my main teacher and root guru. He was a lama of incredibly high spiritual attainment and he lived to be seventy-four. During his whole life he practiced much, as did the venerable Milarepa during his lifetime. When this teacher of mine, Norbu Tondrup, passed away his physical remains shrunk in size to those of a seven or eight-year-old child,

which was, considered a sign of very high attainment. Furthermore when the remains were actually cremated the sky that day was full of rainbows and other miraculous signs. After the fire had burned out it was found that his eyes, tongue and his heart remained and had not burned. Furthermore there hundreds of thousands of relics of different color, white, green, yellow, blue and red which were left behind at the cremation. If people wish corroboration of this they only need ask my nephew Umsala who is here tonight, as he was at the same monastery which my guru lived at.

This guru of mine Norbu Tondrup was a personal disciple of the XVth Gyalwa Karmapa, Khachup Dorje, and furthermore he had the honor of offering teachings and initiations to the XVIth incarnation when he was quite young. He functioned as both a disciple of the Karmapa and a guru of the Karmapa. This was one reason why I inserted Lama Tondrup's name into the Mahamudra lineage because I felt that the benefit for anyone that prayed to and supplicated to such a holy being would definitely receive his blessing. I also felt on my own part that I would accumulate some merit through inserting his name into this prayer.

Another reason was that if I simply left the prayer ending with Rangjung Rikpay Dorje, His Holiness the XVIth Gyalwa Karmapa, many people would no doubt insert my name after his as the final guru in the lineage. I do not belong in this lineage of Mahamudra teachings so in order to prevent such a fault from occurring I put my guru's name as the last lama in the lineage. This is because it simply does not fall to me to be entered into this Golden Rosary of the mainstream Mahamudra transmission. Who it does fall to after H. H. the XVIth Karmapa? Any of the remaining four incarnations of the school; that is to say His Eminences Situ Tulku, Shamar Tulku Jamgon Kongtrul and Gyaltsap Rinpoches. At some future date this will be clarified and it will fall to one or more of them and their names will be inserted into the mainstream lineage, the Golden Rosary of the Kagyu School.

At this particular point at the time of my second visit, this was also the occasion that saw the first visit of His Holiness the Gyalwa Karmapa to the West. At this point a number of centers had been established and suitable preparations could be made to receive the main teacher of the Kagyu lineage. Under the patronage primarily of the venerable Chogyam Rinpoche and the venerable Namjayl Rinpoche, His Holiness the Karmapa was invited to the West and was able to visit North America and spread his activity throughout North America like the sun spreading out throughout the sky.

His Holiness the Gyalwa Karmapa is the bodhisattva of compassion. He is an emanation of Chenrezig. Simply to see him or meet him is to be liberated. He has been able to visit this continent several times and this is why we can say his influence has been universal as so many have come into contact with him in this beneficial way.

Previous to my first visit in 1971, it was extremely difficult for Tibetan gurus to come to the West in order to teach. It was very difficult to make the necessary preparations to come; it was difficult for people in the West to relate to someone from such a foreign culture. In a certain way the cultures were a little afraid of each other and also there was the problem of language.

There simply were communication and cultural barriers, which at that point were almost insurmountable. Since the first time I have been to the West I have seen a more gradually deepening understanding between these two cultures and have seen a great deal of activity in terms of the Four Schools of Tibetan Buddhism coming to the West and spreading the teachings very widely. The merit of the people in the West has been definitely increasing, as there is this continuing, ongoing deepening and spreading of the teachings.

During my third visit in 1977-78 I felt I should take one more step in the teachings I was presenting. Previously I had covered much ground with the ordinary foundations, the Four Thoughts Which Turn the Mind to Spiritual Practice, the extraordinary foundations known as the ngondro, the teachings of Chenrezig and so forth. At this point I decided to emphasize particularly the teachings of what we term shinay and lhatong in Tibetan or samatha and vipasyana in Sanskrit. Tranquility meditation is a meditation to develop into the nature of mind so I emphasized both ordinary techniques, which are common to all schools of Buddhism and some special instructions, which are particular to my lineage. This was the main thrust to my third visit to the West.

Up to this point quite a lot of ground has been covered. There was a presentation of the ordinary or common foundations of the Buddhist practice, which are common to all traditions and are formulated in the Kagyu lineage as the Four Thoughts Which Turn the Mind Towards the Dharma. There has been a presentation of the particular foundational practices associated with the Mahamudra lineage, the Chenrezig meditation and the teachings on samatha and vipasyana meditation which are two aspects of tranquility and developing insight.

This brings us to my present visit, the fourth. When His Holiness the XVIth Karmapa returned from the West the last time passing through Southeast Asia, he arrived slightly more than one year ago in India. When he arrived at the airport near Siliguri, which is the closet point before taking a car up to Sikkim, his seat in Rumtek, my whole monastery came down from the Darjeeling area to receive him. He spent the night in a hotel in Silguri nearby.

At that time His Holiness made a statement which if I think about it now seems to have been quite prophetic. He said to me even though he was younger than I at that time he said to me that now we have quite a number of centers connected with the Kagyu lineage throughout the world was. If we actually add up all the centers we consider part of this lineage, we have three hundred and twenty Kagyu centers throughout the world. All of these require guidance and support so that the people associated with these centers can come to a sincere and pure practice of the Buddhadharma. So His Holiness said to me that even though you are quite old, you are enjoying good health presently and it is necessary for you to go once more to visit these centers in the West and give them all the support and guidance that you can.

Furthermore in order to aid in this general process of transmitting the teachings to the West, His Holiness insisted that I perform the Kalachakra empowerment in New York. He was quite firm about this and would accept no reply but yes. He insisted that I go to New York as soon as possible and

give this empowerment. The General Secretary and others supported him in his efforts to persuade me. So acquiescing to the requests I came as quickly as possible. The first leg of my journey to North America took me to Southeast Asia where my presence there produced a great deal of benefit for the centers.

At this particular point I consider that having covered the foundation, the basics of the path it is time to look at the actual practice, the fruit. We can begin to think about Mahamudra at this point and what this means, this goal, this pinnacle in meditation. But I feel in order to present these teachings properly I first need to discuss the concepts of emptiness or shunyata and also something about the nature of consciousness. Before these particular ideas are presented I don't feel that an actual teaching on Mahamudra would be very effective, that people will be able to perceive it's profundity and relate to it in a very effective way.

The Kalachakra empowerment can be considered the pinnacle of the Vajrayana tradition. In one has a forest this is like the fruits on the very tops of the trees. The Kalachakra is considered the pinnacle teaching of all of the four classes of tantra in the Vajrayana. Now this empowerment has been given and people have made this connection through receiving this empowerment. So I feel that this is a very good introduction to the presentation of Mahamudra teachings and I sincerely hope that this will be the case. I hope the benefits people felt will continue and will help them to feel the benefits of such teachings on the nature of mind.

We can think of the Vajrayana as something precious, which must be contained in a proper vessel. There must be a proper vessel or container for such teachings. What this means in terms of our own experience is that there must be a firm commitment in terms of our faith. There must be unwavering faith which is not subject to one rejecting it or allowing it to degenerate at any point but continues to be firm and ongoing. There also needs to be the concept of samaya or commitment in the sense of a commitment to the tantric teachings. There needs to be this unwavering concern and approach in order to prepare the vessels for the teachings, in order to prepare the vessels for the contents.

This is something, which is quite important. If we pour something precious into a defective vessel the vessel will break and the precious contents will be spilled and lost. In approaching something like the tantric teachings we need to remember that the preparation of the vessel, of we as vessels to receive such teachings, is extremely important particularly with reference to the Kalachakra cycle as one of the pinnacle cycles of the tantric teachings. In order to explain the essential teachings of both the phase of development and the phase of fulfillment in this kind of meditation it is traditionally said that the finest vessel is a fully ordained monk or nun. Someone who has the vows of a novice monk or nun is second to that and someone who is a householder or layperson is below this.

The reason why this was traditionally stated to be the case that novice or fully ordained monks or nuns formed the finest vessel for these teachings was due to the level of commitment that such people had in their practice of the

Dharma. Through the taking of this kind of ordination they were deliberately guiding their actions in a way which cut off many, many kinds of faulty or negative actions. Also it simply simplified their lives, they did not have spouses, children, homes, property or businesses to take care of. In order to receive sincerely the ordination of a monk or a nun it is necessary to put oneself into a very intensive way of practice, in some sense. So this very commitment that was involved in this level of ordination was considered to indicate that the person was a superior vessel for such teachings. *(End of side 1)*

Question and answer session. Questions are inaudible.

This is true that the purification of one's obscurations and negative karmic tendencies and so forth can very often be attended by pain and suffering, either physical or mental. In fact this is something which we can find expressed clearly in the scriptures. It is said that it is like sweeping dirt or dust out of a room. When you first start to sweep it, it looks like there is more dirt than ever as you are stirring it all up. Eventually you do get it out the door. In one particular sutra of Lord Buddha it is stated that for someone who is practicing Dharma the power of the practice is such that the karma that would have resulted in a rebirth in hell can be extinguished or exhausted through simply a practitioner having a headache. The point being that even though one has to go through a certain amount of suffering and pain perhaps as a consequence of one's practice, this is a substitute for something which would have been far worse. So the actual benefits of the practice are that they allow one to purify this karma to a far more manageable level than one could ever hope for if one was not involved in the practice of Dharma.

OM HAM KSAH MA LA VA RA YA SVA HA

There are doubtless a number of clever, capable people who have translated the import of the mantra from Sanskrit to Tibetan. The whole point though is that regardless of the actual words one uses, the spirit of what is being embodied in this mantra is the relationship between the physical world or the physical environment one inhabits, the universe, one's own physical body as an individual and one's inner experience of states of consciousness. So the relationship between all of these is what is expressed in this single mantra.

There are explanations of different combinations of seed-syllables for recitation in this practice. All of these are fine as long as they are supported by tradition. In the particular example that I gave, the first syllable OM refers to body or the level of body. The HAM KSAH MA LA VA RA YA, the middle part of the mantra is the speech aspect and the SVA HA at the end of the mantra is the heart aspect. So this particular form of the mantra also represents the unity or integration of the body, speech and mind.

The difference between intellectual understanding of emptiness and intuitive understanding is that in the first case one simply hears an idea, understands what is being said but without it being implied that one has actually experienced that state of being. One simply understands the concept as being presented. This is something, which is unstable; this is not part of one's

actual experience. The way one comes to a realization that is a part of their being or intuitive experience is through meditation. One takes the intellectual concept and working with it in meditation, one approaches a state of direct experience of that state. Rather than thinking about it or understanding what is being talked about, one is actually experiencing it directly. At that point there is an element of stability which enters the picture and there is no longer the chance that one will forget or lose the benefit of that experience. Whereas intellectual understanding can be lost, it is unstable.

The term alaya-pure-and –simple which in Tibetan is translated as kun gzhi, the basis of all or the foundation of all, refers to the ultimate nature of mind which is the origin of both samsara and nirvana. It is the origin of all experience be it enlightened or unenlightened. When we speak of the eight aspects of discursive consciousness, the alaya, which is here, is the alayavijnana, which is discursive consciousness; there is already an element of confusion or ignorance present. It is like the mother from which the children, the other seven aspects, proceed. It is like the original source from the unenlightened aspect pure and simple. But the word alaya-pure-and-simple represents the origin of both enlightened and unenlightened experience, the totality of the picture. Whereas alayavijnana is the original discursive consciousness, the fundamental discursive consciousness from which the other seven aspects proceed like children from a mother.

Not only the role of meditation in transforming these eight aspects of consciousness into … but actually the role of all Dharma practice, of any element of one's Dharma practice whether it be meditation in a formal sense or not.

This particular divinity, Kalachakra, is essentially of the same eternal nature as the ongoing, uninterrupted flow of time. Because regardless of how we divide time into periods or cycles in our experience, for example we have four seasons in a year which always follow each other in a cycle, regardless of the changes within the cycle, the cycle itself is ongoing. It is eternal in a certain sense. The eternality of time, the ongoing aspect of time, is what is basically the essence of the divinity of Kalachakra.

For someone who actually practices the Kalachakra, what is held to be the goal or the resultant state of the practice is the experience of the equanimity of, the equality of the four times; past, present, future and an element of time termed uncertain. It is uncertain in that it can bear a relationship to any one of the previous times without necessarily falling into a classification of past, present or future. This is what is called the uncertain element of time. All of four times or the four aspects of time are seen as being of essentially the same nature. The state of being which is characterized by this perception of time has two aspects. One is the experience of emptiness which is not a mere emptiness but which is the emptiness of complete potential for everything positive and is inherent in the nature of mind. The other is completely stable and unchanging bliss, supreme bliss. These are the two elements of this particular state of being, which is characterized by the experience of the equality of the four times.

It is quite all right to continue using the pronunciation SVA HA. There are these slight differences in pronunciation but the essential meaning of the mantra does not change regardless of slight eccentricities in the pronunciation. There are actually different systems for explaining how this mantra should be pronounced because of the way the syllables are linked in the logos. Some actually say that the nasal sound the “m” should be attached to all of the consonants in the middle so one would have HAM KSHAM MAM LAM VAM RAM YAM. Whereas others would say OM HAM KSAH MA LA VA RA YAM and put the “m” on both the HAM and YA. Others say simply put it on the YA at the end. Any one of these combinations provided it is something established by tradition is fine.

It may have been that the translator erred in his understanding of the colors or that you heard wrongly. It does sometimes crop up that there are differences in colors but this does not reflect a difference in the actual essence of what is being talked about. The colors are superficial characteristics when compared to the actual essence of what these six centers represent. What they do represent are the different aspects of one’s being in terms of body, speech, mind, qualities, activities and the experience of supreme bliss which is the fundamental nature of enlightened awareness in the tantras. In this case regardless of the particular configuration of the colors which is being used the essential point was the same.

The term Empty Body and the term Vajra Body are synonymous. It is simply that vajra is a synonym for emptiness or shunyata from the point of view of its immutability or unchanging nature. This is why in a particular context as the Vajra Body, the unchanging state of being. Basically it means the same thing as the empty nature or shunyata.

The word cycle was chosen because it is a word in English, which is used to describe a set of teachings, an integrated series. The literal word in Tibetan is cho khor or Dharma rotation or Dharma wheel. What it refers it is an integrated set of teachings. The word I use to translate is a cycle of teachings and has no connection with the idea of a cycle like the cycle of time. It means an integrated group of things related to the same subject.

The ten syllables [All-Powerful Ten] are symbols, which reflect on two aspects. On the worldly level of experience, the different elemental qualities not just the usual four or five (wind, fire, water, earth and space) but in this particular set of teachings references to ten principals or ten quintessential elements of the physical universe as we experience it. On the spiritual side of one’s experience there is a connection with the Ten Perfections associated with the Ten Bhumis, the ten levels of Bodhisattva realization. There is a symbolic connection on both these levels.

It is a very complex subject. The differences between this cycle and other cycles alone are a subject of a great deal of debate, discussion and commentary. The commentaries written on this practice are truly oceanic. A vast amount of material has been written on both the Root Tantra, two by the kings of Shambala and other commentaries by such noted teachers as the First Dalai Lama and Taranatha. These are long and complex books, which deal with very intricate subjects. Even if one were very scholastic and erudite

it would be difficult to understand the finer points. Even if one were endowed with a great deal of wisdom it would be difficult to go into it during a teaching such as this. We simply do not have the time to sit down and nit pick through the commentaries to get all the fine differences. What we are concerned mostly with is a general teaching that is applicable to everyone's situation. While these differences do exist in the commentaries it would be very difficult to go into them in this kind of context with any degree of success.

What is most necessary in the present situation is to give some practical means of applying these teachings in their own situation and some idea of what is the resultant state; what the goal is that is being worked towards. These are the two most important elements.

On the worldly level of the physical universe suffice it to say that it is talking about the five elemental qualities of earth or solidity, fire, water, wind, space and the different combinations of these. An example would be the physical universe. Beyond this again we would need to go into detailed commentary and the whole thing would become rather unworkable in the present situation. Basically what is being referred to on the worldly level are the elements, the elemental qualities and the ways in which they interact. On the spiritual side this is what is held to be the quintessence of the physical universe. Whereas on the spiritual side the quintessence of the Dharma is what is expressed in the terms of the Ten Perfections and so forth. In whichever aspect one is examining there is the idea of quintessential principals being embodied in these syllables.

The term uncertain time refers to the element of uncertainty or relativity in any given cycle. For instance we have this concept of the four seasons which follow one after the other in succession. We have the concept of past seasons, spring comes before summer and we also have a concept of future seasons in terms of summer comes after spring. We also have a concept of the present season be it spring or summer Now at any given point one could say that there is an element of uncertainty in this cycle because winter either comes before spring or after fall. It is either the past or the future in that sense. There is an element of uncertainty or relativity in that relationship which is part of the cycle. This is what is called the fourth aspect of time.

Perhaps we will stop here for the evening. Particularly in relation to the kind of subjects we will be discussing over the weekend, it would be very beneficial if people would pursue in their own time a kind of meditation which aims at analyzing what this thing we take for granted called mind, that which remembers, that which is conscious, experiences, sense; exactly what is this? Meditate on consciousness itself. Working with consciousness itself to determine if this mind or state of consciousness is it real and solid or not. If it is real and solid what kind of characteristics does it have? Someone has to be relentless in this search. Does it have color? Shape? Does it have spatiality? Dimensions? Form? Maybe it doesn't have those qualities but does it have a location? Inside the body? Outside the body? Is it localized in any particular part of the body? Simply work with the mind in this way to determine exactly what the nature of consciousness is. People should pursue this kind of meditation on their own time and this will be an excellent

preparation for the teachings. I will simply do my best this weekend to present to people teachings which will be beneficial in light of this kind of meditation.

Let us conclude with the prayer to dedicate the merit of this session of teaching.

The principle topics that we are concerned with during this weekend of teachings are twofold. These correspond to the two phases of tantric meditation the first what is termed the phase of creation or development, which is the form meditation, meditation on the form of a divinity, in this case Kalachakra. The second phase of fulfillment or completion, which is a formless phase concerned with the Mahamudra experience and the teachings concerned with Mahamudra.

Now in order to begin in presenting these kinds of concepts it is necessary first for us to understand something about the nature of and the functioning of mind, which is actually experiencing these two phases of meditation. Through understanding the nature of mind we can perhaps begin to understand how it is that for any given individual there is the present experience of an unenlightened being, a sentient being in the cycle of rebirth, an unenlightened state of existence, and how there also exists the potential for each and every individual to experience a state of enlightenment, which we term Buddhahood. This is to say that currently there is a distortion or confusion in the mind, a negative element in the mind, in which it is possible to transform into something positive, a completely positive experience, the enlightened experience. How is this actually possible, this transformation from unenlightenment to enlightenment, from our current situation to what is possible? This is tied in with this idea of understanding something about the nature of the mind.

Perhaps in order to be completely precise about it we would say that mind as we normally think of the word when we say mind, the word sems in Tibetan or chitta in Sanskrit, is the sum total of the confusion and ignorance of mind and that which arises from it. We took the example yesterday of clear water which was polluted by or sullied by dirt or mud which was stirred into the water. The polluting element is all that we would term mind. What we mean by the clear water itself, the actual pure nature of the mind is the term rigpa in Tibetan or vidya in Sanskrit, which we might term as awareness or intrinsic intelligence.

From the ideal point of view the way this should be approached, coming to understand the nature of one's own mind would be as follows. The student would approach a particular teacher for instruction and would simply be told at the beginning, "Well this mind that you have which is conscious which sense, evaluates, perceives and remembers, take this sum total as representing your mind, is this mind anything real or not? Is it anything in and of itself?" One would start with this and simply examine the nature of mind and whether mind is something in and of itself or not, regardless of its particular manifestations. The student would go and meditate working with this teaching which he received and then based upon the decisions and

experiences that student had, the student would then again go to the teacher and relate their particular experience…

Thus this kind of approach would require a number of days. It is very unlikely that even with this very intimate situation that a person could come to any really solid or clear understanding concerning the nature of their own mind in anything less than one hundred days, three months of this steady work. So this is not something which happens easily or quickly.

Now this can be compared to a situation such as climbing the stairs in a tall building with many floors. Previously it used to be the case that one had to walk up flights of stairs in order to get to the top, which took quite awhile. Now we have high-speed elevators, which can take you to the top in a few moments. So perhaps we should approach the teaching from that point of view.

It is quite definitely the case that all of us have thought about this to some extent. We have examined our minds and tried to determine something of the nature of mind already. So perhaps I can get straight down to business and actually begin to talk about the point of all of this. The point we make in this particular tradition of teaching is that mind is essentially empty. Now what is meant by this word empty? It is that mind is simply devoid of all characteristics. Mind itself has no color, no shape, no form, neither size nor location. It has no limiting characteristics in and of itself. This is what we mean by the essential emptiness of mind. The say way we would talk about space being empty in that has no limiting or defining characteristics whatsoever. We can simply speak of empty space the same way we speak of the essential emptiness of mind.

This is not the whole picture. This is a little too simple; it does not account for everything concerning mind. So while we can say that mind is essentially empty essentially devoid of these characteristics it never the less exhibits an illuminating or clear nature. Not illumination in the sense of light radiating from a source like the sun, moon or electric light but in the sense of mind having the potential to perceive. The mind can perceive, can experience. This potential to experience and to perceive is what we term the illuminating nature or clarity of mind.

This again is not the entire picture as mind also exhibits a dynamic quality, an unimpeded quality or manifestation. What we mean by this is quite graphically illustrated by the idea of trying to leave a room when the door is closed, one is impeded or obstructed. If the door opens one passes freely from the room. In a similar way mind does not encounter any obstacles, any obstructions in its manifestation. Mind manifests without any impediment. This is what we term the non-obstructive manifestation of mind. This is also what we might term rigpa, the awareness or intelligence of mind, the dynamic intelligence. In order to accurately describe the nature of mind we have to speak in terms of its essential emptiness, its illuminating or clear potential or nature and its unobstructive manifestation to have the whole picture.

This is what the Third Karmapa; Rangjung Dorje was speaking of in the Mahamudra prayer he wrote in which he said, “Mind does not exist because even the Lord Buddha could not see it”. This means that mind is no thing in

and of itself. It does not have these characteristics and even a completely enlightened Buddha could not see mind in that sense. One can not demonstrate mind as some thing. On the other hand he said it is not the case that mind does not exist, as it is the basis for samsara and nirvana. It is the origin of all experience. In the first line of the verse he refers to essential emptiness of mind, mind is not a thing in and of itself. In the second line he was drawing attention to the illuminating potential of mind and the unobstructive manifestation of the dynamic intelligence aspect of mind.

[It does not exist – even the Buddhas have not seen it.
It is not non-existent, being the universal basis for samsara and nirvana.]

This empty, clear and unimpeded nature of mind is what is termed the alaya in Sanskrit or kun gzhi in Tibetan, the basis in terms of the origin of all experience both enlightened and unenlightened. It is also referred to as tathagatagarbha in Sanskrit or de bzhin gshegs pa'i nying po in Tibetan meaning the seed or potential for enlightenment. It is present in the mind of each and every being. The only difference being whether a particular being is directly experiencing this fundamental nature of mind, if this is so we speak of a Buddha or an enlightened being. If a particular being is not experiencing this, is out of touch with this experience, we speak of an unenlightened or sentient being in the cycle of rebirth. But whether one is speaking of the level of Buddha realization or the level of a sentient being there is this aspect of mind present in the situation. There is this fundamental nature of mind, which is empty, clear and unimpeded, which is the tathagatagarbha, the seed or potential for enlightenment.

If there were not this potential, if this tathagatagarbha was not present in the minds in each and every being, there would be no potential for enlightenment, no possibility of becoming enlightened. This would simply be no point in trying to become enlightened, as the potential would not exist in the first place. But the fact is that the potential is already there, intrinsically. This means there is room for improvement, there is the possibility of actually becoming enlightened.

Now it is quite true for beings in the lower states of existence in the cycle of samsara, the cycle of rebirth are in such benighted circumstances that they do not have the opportunity for developing themselves spiritually through purifying the obscurations and negative karmic tendencies in their being. Developing their awareness and positive karmic tendencies does not exist in their situation. So while the potential for enlightenment is continually present the actual circumstances which allow one to appreciate this are not present for the beings in the lower states of existence. There is not even the sound of the teachings or the possibility of encountering a spiritual teacher who could point out the truth of the teachings. So on a temporary basis we can speak of no hope for enlightenment but only within the context of the lower states of existence.

In our present circumstances due to the previous accumulation of merit and developing awareness, previous karmic tendencies and connections that were developed in past lifetimes, we now have a precious human birth. We

now have all of the opportunities and leisure necessary to practice the spiritual teachings. We also have come into contact with spiritual teachers who hold authentic transmissions of teachings from Lord Buddha Shakyamuni. There exist the teachings in the world and the transmitters of these teachings from whom we can receive these teachings. In our particular situation we do have all of the necessary circumstances to allow us to actually become enlightened, the potential on a temporary level exists for us.

But in order to actually realize this state of enlightenment one needs the teachings of Dharma, one needs this path to follow. Now in order to accommodate the different capabilities and inclinations of the people, whom he was teaching, the Lord Buddha presented a number of different teachings. We have roughly divided these into what are called the Three Yanas. The concept of the Hinayana or Lesser Vehicle is one of being a slow, sure path to enlightenment, the concept of the Mahayana as being a far more rapid path to enlightenment and of the Vajrayana being an extremely rapid path; all to the same state of enlightenment. The difference in the length of time that a particular path will take one in order to reach the same goal of enlightenment depends upon one's own personal inclinations and motivations. It was in order to speak to these different situations that the Lord Buddha presented such a spectrum of teachings.

One might wonder well if this enlightened potential exists and always has existed why are we unenlightened at this point? Why do we find ourselves in the current situation of confusion and in the unenlightened state? The point is that there is as well as this intrinsic enlightened potential, a certain fundamental level of ignorance in the mind. There is the simple fact that we have lost contact with this tathagatagarbha, this potential for enlightenment, this pure nature of mind. In a certain sense made can not see itself, its own nature. This fundamental lack of perception, lack of experience, in which the mind does not experience or understand its own nature, we term ignorance, fundamental ignorance. This is concomitant with, coincident with this enlightened state or enlightened potential.

It is very much the same situation as having two eyes in one's face but being unable to see one's own face. We all have a face, we all have two eyes but no one can see their own face with those two eyes. It simply does not work that way. In the present context mind simply does not work that way, it can not see its own nature. There is a fundamental lack of contact; somehow mind has lost contact with its own nature. This is just the case.

Because there is a lack of direct experience of the fundamental emptiness, the essential emptiness of mind, what has been substituted is the idea of a self, of an I, which is real in an ultimate sense. It is this I, which is clung to and is a poor substitute for the direct experience of the empty essence of mind. What represents or is substituted for the direct experience of this illuminating potential, this clarity aspect of mind is the concept of other, the objective pole in one's experience. So through not directly perceiving the essential emptiness and the illuminating clarity of mind, we instead experience self and other, subject and object. These are clung to as things

real in and of themselves rather than seen to be simply substitutes for this direct experience.

This level of dualistic clinging, this element of self and other, subject and object which is part of the picture, is what is termed the obscuration of fundamental tendencies, of habitual tendencies in the mind, the Tibetan term is bakchak durje drapa. This is something that is extremely powerful and extremely deeply rooted. In fact it is not completely eliminated until the eighth or ninth level of Bodhisattva realization, in all its subtle degrees. This very deeply rooted; dualistic clinging is the second level of obscuration we can talk about in terms of our present state and the fundamental nature of mind. This is the level of obscuration based upon the habitual tendency, this neurotic tendency to cling to subject and object, self and other.

At this point we have a situation in which there is already this ignorance and already this dualistic clinging to self and others, subject and object. Given that this is already the case it is also the case that there are emotional relationships between subject and object, between the self and anything other. There is attachment and desire for that which is pleasing and attractive. There is aversion and aggression towards that which is threatening or displeasing. There is also an element of stupidity, an element of mental dullness in that this emotional tension, this love-hate relationship with the world is not seen to be essentially empty, essentially a product of mind, which is essentially empty. Rather it is taken as something real in and of itself; the emotions are taken to be something real in and of themselves. This is the element of stupidity, not seeing the actual nature of emotional experience. So at this point we also can talk about the three basic emotional patterns or complexes in the mind of attachment, aversion and stupidity.

So the current situation is that there is somehow a distortion of these three aspects of the pure nature of consciousness, of mind. The essential emptiness of mind is experienced in the present circumstance as an I or self. The illuminating potential, the clarity of mind is experienced as the other, as the objective element of our experience. The unimpeded manifestation of mind, pure and simple, is experienced instead as the emotional relationships between subject and object, between self and other.

Based upon this fundamental pattern of desire and attachment, a further development of avarice, craving or grasping develops. Based upon aversion, jealousy and envy develop and based upon stupidity, pride develops. So we can speak of these three basic emotional patterns and their secondary developments as the six basic emotions or the six fundamental emotional patterns of mind which correspond to and provide the reason for the Six Realms of being and samsara. There is a direct link between these six basic emotional patterns and the six possible realms of existence in the cycle of rebirth.

When clouds obscure the sun on a very overcast day never the less from time to time the clouds may part. Even if one is not able to actually see the sun directly never the less there is a certain brightening of the whole environment because of the break in the clouds. In the same way because this fundamental tathagatagarbha, this potential for enlightenment, this pure

nature of mind is omnipresent, it is continually present, at some point or another it is possible that the obscurations thin somewhat and certain positive qualities can express themselves. That is, it is possible on certain occasions; faith or love and compassion or wisdom can arise in the mind. So there is a mixture at this point in our experience of the fundamentally pure consciousness and the fundamentally confused or distorted consciousness. This means that the karma that we accumulate, the karmic tendencies we reinforce through our actions, thoughts and speech tend to be of a mixed nature. Because there is this goodness and badness or positivity and negativity with the karma we accumulate, there is a whole spectrum of experience in the cycle of rebirth. There are higher states of rebirth and lower states of rebirth.

In that we are not enlightened beings at the present time we are basically subject to the influence of these four levels of obscuration, four levels of clouding or obscuring of the direct experience of the fundamental nature of mind which are omnipresent, part of the experience of each and every sentient being. These are the four that we have just been talking about; the idea of fundamental ignorance, dualistic clinging, the emotional patterns that develop based upon the dualistic clinging and the karmic tendencies that one reinforces because of the emotional patterns. So these are more or less based one upon the other, these four levels. Most fundamental of course is the level of basic ignorance, fundamental ignorance in the mind and the others follow from this.

The elimination of these four levels of obscuration and everything that develops from them is termed sang in the Tibetan language. The word sang means to eliminate or wipe out and this means that if we talk of a state of enlightenment, we are talking of a state where all these levels of obscuration and everything dependent on them have been eliminated. We also consider that once the obscuration of the pure nature of consciousness has been removed that pure nature can simply express itself, unfold itself without any hindrance. This is termed gya in Tibetan, which means to express, develop or unfold. So this is why the two syllables sang gya were chosen by the Tibetan translators to translate the term Buddha, the concept of Buddha. Buddhahood or enlightenment represents a state where there is an elimination (sang) and an unfolding (gya).

Because we can also speak of a gradual process of these levels of obscuration being diminished, gradually being eliminated and of the enlightened awareness which is termed yeshe in Tibetan or this intelligence termed rigpa as being one and the same things, synonyms, with the gradual expression of this fundamentally pure nature of mind, because there is this gradual experience, we can talk of the Five Paths or the Five Stages on the path to enlightenment. We can speak of the Path of Accumulation, Application, Vision and so forth. This is to indicate that there is a gradual process going on of the elimination and unfolding taking place.

The Path of Vision, the third of the Five Paths of the Mahayana, corresponds to the first level of Bodhisattva realization. The subsequent progress through the different levels of Bodhisattva realization from the second through the

tenth level (the Cloud of Dharma) this is termed the Path of Meditation. The Fifth Path in this schemata being presented is termed the Path of No More Learning, the Path Beyond Learning which actually is a synonym for the state of enlightenment, the resultant or goal state of Complete Enlightenment or Buddhahood.

We might at this point examine the process by which a sentient being comes into a particular existence regardless of whatever realm of experience in the cycle of samsara we are talking about. If we take ourselves as an example it would seem that at some previous point to this physical incarnation we were in another state of existence at which point death occurred. With death there was a separation between the physical body, which was discarded at that point, and the mind. Now because we were operating on a level of unenlightened awareness of discursive consciousness and not the pure level of awareness, the experience of death was followed by a period of unconsciousness, which was more or less a blackout. Our consciousness became unconscious for a certain length of time. The conscious activity ceased and there was simply a state of unconsciousness.

Following this period of unconsciousness in the afterdeath experience, the bardo experience, there is a certain point at which the mind begins to awaken again. There is a certain sense of consciousness returning. This is what is technically termed yowa or the mind moving, mind beginning to stir. This is preconscious but is never the less a kind of mental activity, it is a kind of stirring of the mind from the fundamental unconsciousness or ignorance in which it is immersed. Following this there is the development of actual consciousness, of actually being able to perceive phenomena and situations. One can make decisions and recognize this as such-and-such, what we would normally term consciousness. So there is a graduated experience of unconsciousness followed by the first stirrings of awareness leading to an actual fully blown discursive consciousness able to perceive things in a phenomenal way.

There is first this level of ignorance, ma rigpa in Tibetan, which is the first of the Twelve Nidanas, first of the Twelve Links of Interdependent Causality. The second nidana which is termed du che in Tibetan is and is often translated in English book by karmic formations refers to the first stirring of consciousness of mind from the state of unawareness towards a fully blown discursive consciousness during the bardo or afterdeath experience. The actual expression of mind on this discursive level of consciousness or what is termed nam she in Tibetan corresponds to the third nidana, the third of these links which is termed ming zuk or name and form. The point here is that there is a fully blown consciousness experiencing a phenomenal world but there is a distinction made between that kind of experience and our present state of experience with reference to what we term the five skandhas, the five aggregates of our personality. What is present in our current situation, what we term the five skandhas, includes a concept of physical form. Now during the bardo experience this fifth skandha of form is not present, is not part of the situation. The other four of sensation, perception, volition and consciousness are all present but the skandha or aggregate of form is not present, as there is no physical basis for the experience. There is simply a

mental state of being. At this point we speak of the experience of the four skandhas and this corresponds to the third nidana, the third link in these twelve links of causality.

As we said there is during the experience of the four skandhas there is no fifth skandha, there is no physical form or physical body, which is the basis for that particular state of being. Never the less there are strong tendencies in the mind, these bag chags these habitual tendencies and dualistic clinging to which we referred which are very much still present. There are also the particular conditions, which have been set out by one's previous karma and the karma, which is taking one towards a future rebirth. These conditions coming together create the impression of a physical body although there is no physical body to speak of it is simply a state of consciousness, a mental state. Never the less there is the experience of all of this s though there were a physical body. There is a mental body in a certain sense. Because of this we can speak of the different senses that although there is no actual physical organ of sight in terms of an eyeball, optic nerve and so forth, there is never the less the experience of sight. There is the experience of hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and thinking. There are the six sense-fields or six sense realms which a bardo being, the consciousness in the bardo state experiences. These completely mental sense-fields correspond to the next nidana; the next link, which is, termed the six sense-fields.

Because of this there is contact between a given sense faculty, a sense consciousness and its perceived object. There may not be a physical object present but there is the perception of the situation as though there were so there is a sense of contact between the sense consciousness, the visual consciousness or whatever and its corresponding sensory object. Based upon this contact which is the next nidana, the next link, we're working here through the twelve links, there is what is technically termed an acceptance. This is not in terms of being happy or content with something but accepting it as given. It is valid as given. The object is perceived whether it is good, bad or whatever. It is simply taken as it is.

Based upon this there is a certain sense of traction or clinging. This relates most particularly in the case of the bardo being we have been discussing to the process of conception, physical conception. As there is a certain tendency, which pulls one towards physical conception during the sexual union of one's father and mother. Another element in the conception of a child, of an embryo is the tendency of mind to incarnate, to express itself in this way, to accept and cling to existence. This brings us to the next nidana, the next link in the twelve links of a full chain which is actual physical conception, actually becoming a sentient being.

Following physical birth there is the completion of the cycle in terms of the aging and death of the sentient being, passing through the stages of life with eventual aging and the death process bringing the cycle to completion. Once the six sense-fields have been established in the bardo state then this is termed the Bardo of Becoming, the Si Pa Bardo, the second phase of the bardo experience which continues for an indeterminate period of time. Its

length depends very much on the individual's karmic tendencies, which are working themselves out.

But once one comes to the end of this Si Pa Bardo, the Bardo of Becoming and begins to approach the actual experience of conception, there is an experience, which reflects what gender one will be born. For example if the being is to incarnate as a male there will be a basic attraction towards the mother and a fundamental aversion to the father, whereas if the being is to incarnate as a female the reverse is the case. This is something that is a factor at the moment of conception.

From the physical conception there is the term of pregnancy in the womb of nine or ten months on a general level. This experience can be either pleasant or painful for the child and the mother depending on the individual karma, which is part of the situation. The experience of being in the womb for this period of time for the developing child may be a relatively easy one or maybe extremely difficult and painful. Following this there is the actual physical birthing experience, the actual coming into the world of that individual.

Following conception and birth we are speaking of course in terms of the five skandhas because the physical skandha of form is once again present, a physical form has been assumed. Because there is a physical basis for consciousness we have the five skandhas of form, sensation, perception, volition and consciousness complete in the picture. These form the basis for all the experience and in particular all the suffering a particular being undergoes. It is also based on the coming together of these five skandhas that there is the experience of disease and illness as well as old age and eventually death. As there is a certain coming together there is a falling away or falling apart again at a certain point as things are impermanent in this world. What ever comes together must eventually come apart. So there is this coming together of these different elements creating a basis for the experience of pain and pleasure during this life followed by a degenerating and aging process leading eventually to death of the particular individual in that particular existence.

When we speak of the aging process we don't necessarily mean that it is somehow written that everyone lives to be in old age, that one lives to be a certain number of years. The aging process takes place on an individual level regardless of long or short one's own life is due to one's karma. If a child is only to live one hour after its birth, it ages that one hour. It does spend those sixty minutes in an aging process, passing from birth to death. If the child lives to be only one year old or three hundred and sixty-five days of this aging process. So the aging process begins at birth, we are not necessarily speaking of old age following birth in terms of living a full, long life to an old age and then dying. Simply the aging process begins at birth and works to its own particular conclusion for that particular individual.

Following the aging process therefore is the experience of death. Now if a particular individual is a gifted meditator and is a spiritually sensitive individual then the potential exists at least for achieving complete enlightenment at the moment of death. The trauma of death can be the doorway to liberation instead of just a traumatic experience. However if one

does not understand the nature of the experience, does not understand or perceive what is going on there is simply the traumatic experience of death leading once again to the state of unconsciousness and the bardo experience with future rebirth and so and so on. One continues to take physical birth and the mind continues to take rebirth and reincarnate in an unending cycle.

So these Twelve Nidanas or links in this cycle represent a complete unit. There is the state of ignorance followed by the stirring of mind, this mental formation going on leading to an actual state of discursive consciousness. This is followed by the development of the different sense-fields, the six sense-fields, followed by contact of the sense consciousnesses with their respective objects. This is followed by a sensation of some kind followed by an acceptance of that experience. This is clung to leading to becoming, the actual physical birth which leads to the aging process followed by the death experience. This is then followed again by the state of unconscious ignorance and forms a complete cycle, which is of the life of any given individual. The cycle continues unendingly until one achieves enlightenment. This is why we speak of samsara, the wheel, the cycle of rebirth as it goes on and on and on until one achieves enlightenment in an unending cycle.

While these mental levels of obscuration, the four veils or levels of obscuration we discussed, are of course the basic problem, the way in which we are effective in perpetrating this cycle is physically, verbally and mentally. We basically have three levels in which we are effective agents in this world through physical action, speech and thought. In the same way in order to achieve enlightenment we approach it from these three same levels of involvement. There are physical, mental and verbal practices to engage one's being in the quest for enlightenment.

It is for this reason that one finds these three aspects as part and parcel of all practice beginning with the most fundamental idea, the idea of taking refuge. There is the physical aspect of prostration involved in the process of going for refuge and there is a recitation of the refuge prayer. There is also the mental feeling of faith and devotion for the Three Jewels in which one is expressing this devotion through the physical prostration and the verbal recitation. So body, speech and mind are integrated even on this fundamental level of taking refuge, the actual formal beginning of the spiritual path.

So when one performs the practice of taking refuge there is this physical, verbal and mental involvement. Furthermore following something like the practice of prostrations and taking refuge there is the concept of the Bodhisattva Vow or the developing of bodhicitta, the altruistic concern for all sentient beings in one's spiritual practice. This is again something one engages in on these three levels of body, speech and mind or physically, verbally and mentally. So that even once one has finished taking refuge, one is still meditating on and in the presence of the Three Jewels, the sources of refuge, and there is faith and devotion in one's mind. Furthermore there is the actual physical kneeling, of folding one's hands and of reciting the words of the Bodhisattva Vow or the bodhicitta formula.

There is the mental consideration of what we term the bodhicitta aspiration and the bodhicitta of actual involvement or application. The first is the thought that just as the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the past gave rise to the thought of enlightenment and practiced in order to realize it, I will do so as well. Just as they did it for the benefit of all beings, I will do so as well. This is the simple aspiration. There is the further consideration of the different means, techniques and practices one can actually perform in order to fulfill the aspiration. This is what is termed the aspect of application, actual practice, of engaging in practices such as the Six Perfections or the Four Ways of Influencing Disciples. All these formal techniques come under this second aspect of bodhicitta. So again there is this commitment in terms of one's respectful physical posture, in terms of one's recitation and in terms of one's attention to what one is reciting and actually developing the aspiration and the urge to apply oneself based upon these. So again in the taking of the Bodhisattva Vow and developing bodhicitta, the enlightening attitude, this altruistic concern is again something that takes place on a physical, verbal and mental level. All three of these faculties are integrated.

If we continue with this concept of the foundation practices, the ngondro as taking place on these three levels, the second of these is the purification meditation known as the Vajrasattva meditation or Dorje Sempa meditation. Again there is the physical aspect in terms of the posture that one assumes, the correct meditation posture holding the body straight and so forth. There is the act of counting the beads on the rosary to keep track of how many mantras one has recited and so forth. All of this is the physical level of involvement. There is the mental level of involvement in terms of one's actual meditation on the form of Vajrasattva and the flow of nectar from the form through one as symbolic of this purification, which is taking place. There is also the verbal act, the verbal involvement of reciting the one hundred syllable or the six syllable mantra of Vajrasattva. So once again in order for this purification to be effective, for this practice to really work, this total involvement of physical, mental and verbal is necessary.

This is something that is reflected in the third of the foundational practices as well, the mandala offering. Again there is the physical act of offering the mandala, placing the rice on the tray in a particular pattern again and again. There is the verbal involvement of reciting the description of the mandala and the actual offering prayer. There is the mental involvement of visualizing oneself in the presence of the Three Roots and the Three Jewels, the sources of refuge and actually making these visualized offerings with a spirit of faith, devotion and respect towards the sources of refuge. Once again when all of the three levels of one's being are involved in the practice, there is an effective situation in which in this case the accumulation of merit and the deepening of one's awareness can take place.

This again is reflected in the fourth and final of the foundational practices the guru yoga meditation in which once again one's physical posture is an important element in the practice. There is the verbal involvement in terms of the prayer of supplication, which one is offering to one's root guru. There is the mental involvement in terms in the formal visualization of one's root guru and the lineage lamas on the crown of one's head surrounded by the sources

of refuge. Also there is mental involvement in the attitude of faith and devotion of which one is offering this prayer to one's guru. So during this practice again there is a coming together and a total involvement of one's physical, verbal and mental levels of being in this practice. This is how the practice is effective in opening one to the blessings of the guru.

The particular benefits of the fourth practice, the guru yoga come about because of a certain connection, which is made. There is on the part of the disciple or student the respect, faith and devotion for the guru, the spiritual teacher. There is an attitude of taking refuge in and supplicating the guru and there is a certain sense of the respect one has based upon one's appreciation of the qualities of the spiritual teacher. From the side of the spiritual teacher there is the blessing and compassion for the student, the blessing which is able to be imparted and the compassionate concern on the part of the spiritual teacher for the welfare of that student. Traditionally these are referred to as the hook of the guru's compassion and the ring of the disciple's faith. The ring providing an opening where the hook can make contact and connection can be made. One can be drawn along the path towards enlightenment. It is the coming together of these different elements, one's own faith, respect and devotion along with the guru's blessing and compassion which coming together make the connection possible. This particular practice is the developing of this connection.

This therefore is the benefit of something like taking refuge in one's guru and the Three Jewels. There is also to be considered of absolutely crucial nature of bodhicitta or this altruistic concern as a basic, fundamental element in one's practice. There is not a Buddha who has achieved enlightenment, there is not a Buddha achieving enlightenment and there never will be a Buddha who will achieve enlightenment without first giving rise to this altruistic concern. True and complete enlightenment is only possible when it is in the context of enlightenment for the benefit of all beings. There is this completely selfless and universal concern for all beings. Just as Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in the past have given rise to this attitude, continue and will continue to give rise to this attitude, in the same way any individual bent upon complete enlightenment, complete Buddhahood must accept the crucial nature, the essential nature of bodhicitta. It is only possible to achieve complete enlightenment when one has this altruistic framework, one has this element of bodhicitta or the enlightening attitude.

Bodhicitta is an extremely powerful element in one's practice. Its importance can not be overemphasized. In the teachings of Lord Buddha we find reference to the fact that if the merit and virtue from a single instance of bodhicitta could be made visible, the whole of space could not contain such merit. So this element of one's bodhicitta, one's altruistic concern is an extremely important, powerful and effective element in aiding one's whole spiritual path.

This element of bodhicitta is effective in a number of ways. It is an extremely powerful force to counteract the negative tendencies and obscurations that have been reinforced since time without beginning, that are intrinsically part of one. It is also an incredibly effective means of developing one's awareness

and merit. It is also a means to bring all of one's activities regardless of whether they are formally spiritual or worldly activities to the spiritual path because if one engages in any activity through bodhicitta that activity becomes in and on itself a spiritual activity in some sense.

The second foundational practice, the Vajrasattva or Dorje Sempa meditation is essential because there is a certain sense that we need to purify. This is that since beginningless time there has been a continual process of reinforcing negative tendencies and obscuring tendencies in our being, in our minds. This process has been going on from time without beginning; it simply has always been the case. There is a need to purify oneself of those obscurations and of the negative tendencies in order to experience enlightenment. This is part of the process of experiencing enlightenment. So at this point the second foundation practice of Vajrasattva or Dorje Sempa meditation is very important for the actual process of purification.

This practice of Vajrasattva of meditating on the form of this divinity, reciting his mantra and performing the specific visualizations is extolled throughout the teaching of Buddhadharma as being the method for purification. Of all of the different techniques and methods one can use to purify oneself of obscurations and negativities this is the most excellent and most effective. This is particularly true in terms of the personal context of our own commitment to practice. Regardless of the fact that we have made connection with the teachings and we have taken certain steps committing ourselves to the teachings, regardless of formal ordination or not, perhaps one has taken lay ordination, one has taken refuge or maybe the bodhisattva vow or the samaya of tantric practice, there is a continual failure to live up to these commitments. There is a continual tendency to fall short of these commitments one has undertaken and this practice is very beneficial as well for purifying one of these shortcomings.

There are many people who feel that for example a novice's vows or monk's or nun's vows are very difficult to keep, bodhisattva vows are difficult to keep and tantric vows require no effort whatsoever, they simply come of themselves. Actually quite the opposite is true. If one is looking for easy vows to keep, the easiest are the monk's and nun's vows, by far.

To take an example, there was a very famous teacher from India named Atisha who brought the teachings of the Three Yanas to Tibet. He was quoted as saying at one point when he first undertook the practice of Buddhism he took the novice and fully ordained monk's ordination and through very scrupulously aware of his commitments of the different rules of conduct he was able to preserve his ordination without a single infraction. He then went on to take the Bodhisattva Vows, this level of commitment in his practice and he found he was breaking it quite regularly. Once a day or several times a day he would catch himself in a particular action, thought or word that was contrary to the spirit of his level of commitment. But he would not let an hour pass before he recognized, openly confessed it, acknowledged it and reconfirmed his dedication to the Bodhisattva Vows. He further said that when he undertook the tantra samaya, the tantric commitment the actual number of times he was falling short of that

commitment he compared to placing a polished metal plate out in a dust storm. Immediately the dust collected on the surface or drops of rain during a rainstorm, it was continual and ongoing. It was simply an unending process. He was continually falling short of his commitment to the practice.

So for those people who think that in terms of formal commitment the monk's vows are difficult to keep let us consider it. The fully ordained monk has two hundred and fifty-three rules in total, major and minor rules of conduct. When we speak of tantric samaya speak in terms of ten million one hundred thousand vows which are part and parcel of this concept of this level of one's practice, this level of involvement and commitment. So it would seem that the monk's vows simply by numbers alone are easier to keep.

People were coming to Atisha saying what you seem to be saying master is that having once begun the practice of the Vajrayana there is no hope for achieving enlightenment. He said no that is not the case at all as in fact there are very skillful means that we have through the blessing of Buddha in order to purify all of this and a great deal more of our negativity and unwholesome qualities and obscurations. At this point he taught them the meditation of Vajrasattva, the purification meditation, the mantra and the associated visualizations. He stated that this was one extremely effective way to counteract the shortcomings on one's part, in fact the entire accumulation of negativity and obscuration in one's whole stream of being not only the formal level of failure to live up to one's level of commitment.

If you look at it one way perhaps the tantric samaya is very easy to live up to, on a theoretical level at least. This is because it is stated quite clearly that if one is aware of one's body, speech and mind as identical with the body, speech and mind of the deity, the yidam, if one is experiencing vajra body, speech and mind then the ten million one hundred thousand are all included in that, in that single experience. What this is saying basically is that as long as one is in a state of experience where form is the divine form, where sound is intrinsically the sound of mantra and the mind is absorbed in the samadhi of meditation associated with the deity then one is keeping all of the ten million one hundred thousand vows perfectly. If we are already there then when we practice the ngondro we might leave out the second purification practice, as there wouldn't be any need!

The third of the foundational practices, the mandala offering, is connected with the idea of accumulation of one's merit and deepening of one's awareness. There are analogous situations such as the offerings one makes on a shrine, one places flowers, incense or candles on the shrine as an offering to the Three Jewels. Or perhaps a layperson would give an offering to a monk or a nun to support their spiritual practice or a disciple would give an offering to his or her spiritual teacher as an offering. There is a sense here of offering and this is meritorious for the individual who is making the offering and also has an element of deepening their understanding and their awareness. But what this practice of the mandala offering is concerned with is nothing less than the entire universe, an offering of the entire universe. The format of the meditation is to conceive of the entire universe and everything worthy of offering within the universe, be it an actual material offering, be it

an imagined offering or be it something like the physical environment. This includes the natural beauty which is intrinsically there and is part of the situation without one having to make it or actually go out and get it to offer it, it simply is there to be offered. Integrating all of these concepts into a single meditation and if it is performed with an attitude of faith and devotion, if it is out of this faith and devotion that one makes such an offering, then the mind becomes extremely powerful in this situation. Basically the merit one develops and the awareness one develops are no different than if one actually was offering the universe, physically to the Three Jewels.

The word mandala is a Sanskrit word the Tibetans translated as chin kor, which means center and circumference or center and surroundings. The idea of a central point around which there is a surrounding environment, which forms a kind of unit or a closed system. Now in the context of the mandala offering there is this idealized conception of the universe, there is this cosmology based upon the central mountain, the central axis of the universe and the continents, mountain ranges and so forth arranged in a symmetrical pattern around the center. This is part of the process of offering the universe. There is this cosmology which forms a part of this practice, which is based on the mandala principle, the ideal of a center point or axis surrounded by a closed system and all of this is being offered in the mandala practice.

This kind of cosmology disturbs many people in the modern world because they take it to be directly contradictory to what we experience with our own senses and with the technology we have developed. We have a concept now of the universe, at least of our solar system and our realm as being a planet, a spherical planet revolving around the sun and so forth. People have concrete evidence of this and so they see this as a very basic contradiction between the present worldview and the cosmology presented in the context of the mandala practice.

Now Buddhahood represents the state of omniscience and from this omniscience the Lord Buddha did speak of this particular cosmology but not of this being the only one. Different beings due to their different karmic tendencies and different levels of awareness experience the universe in different ways. So in different teachings of Lord Buddha particularly in a very vast sutra known as the Avatamsaka Sutra, one finds different cosmologies being presented. There are some which involve only a single continent, a single environment while others have a multiplicity of worlds such as the mandala pattern. Others involve planetary systems, round or spherical worlds and so forth. One finds any number of different cosmologies being presented. Each and every one being valid for the beings whose karmic projections causes them to experience the universe in that way. So there is a certain relativity regarding the way in which one experiences the world or the universe. The Buddha described these different approaches particularly in this one sutra known in Sanskrit by the name of the Avatamsaka.

This means that all the possibilities of experience of each and every being in the Six Realms of existence, the way each and every being perceives the universe is based upon that particular individual being's karma and inclinations. The degree to which that being is spiritually developed or not

which means on a relative level any cosmology is valid on a personal level. On an ultimate level one can not really speak of there being a particular cosmology which is true, period. It simply is not valid given the conventional situation of different beings in different situations. How is one to ascribe any ultimate reality to any one of these particular conventional perceptions? So the point of this kind of teaching that the Buddha gave is that an ultimate level one can't speak of the ultimate validity or truth of any worldview and on a conventional level one can't speak of their being any false worldviews. Basically for an individual being that is what is true, that is what is valid.

We have quite a number of people here today. If everyone were to lay down now, take a nap, have a dream and when we all woke up someone were to claim that they had the only true dream and that the rest had false dreams, what basis would there be for such a judgement? It is not possible to make that sort of value judgement as we each have our own perceptions based upon our own individual karmic tendencies. It would seem that out of all of these possibilities of different cosmologies that could have been presented for this particular teaching, the most beautiful and aesthetic, the most pleasing as an object of meditation is this mandala pattern of the central mountain and four continents, the symmetrical pattern which was presented as the ideal conception of the universe for the purpose of this mandala offering.

So in terms of accumulating one's merit and developing one's awareness it would seem to be most effective to offer that which is most beautiful, effective and aesthetic. To a certain extent based upon our dualism, our dualistic clinging, because we do have attraction to that which pleases us, which we consider good, wholesome or beautiful and aversion to that we consider unpleasant, ugly or disgusting, so this is why a choice is made of what one offers. One accepts that one has this kind of clinging and should only offer that pleases oneself, so one only offers the good. This is why the ideal conception, this thoroughly aesthetic model of the universe is used in this offering.

During the time of Lord Buddha in India there was old couple who were quite poor and did not have a great deal of wealth, just a small piece of land and barely enough to get by. At a certain point they realized that they were getting old and were coming closer and closer to death which was inevitable. They felt they should make use of the opportunity of being human, of having a human rebirth to make at least one gesture, at least one act which would accumulate a great deal of merit and develop their awareness to a certain extent before they died. They discussed between themselves to decide what particular formal act would be most appropriate. At that point living quite close by to them was Sariputra who was one of the wisest of Buddha's Hinayana disciples. They decided to invite the Venerable Sariputra to their home to serve him a mid-day meal, make the offering to him and then make prayers of aspiration in his presence to receive his blessing. This was the plan they developed to invite Sariputra and offer him this meal and offer their prayers of aspiration in his presence.

So this old couple made the necessary preparations and invited Sariputra, offered him the meal, formulated their prayers and received his blessing. Things kept carried on much as before and when the growing season was finished and it was time to harvest, they went out with everyone else to harvest their crops. In the case of this particular couple they had a small rice paddy. When they went out to harvest the rice they found that all the grains were made of pure gold. This came to the attention quite quickly of the king of the region because they became quite famous throughout the region that this couple had a field of gold rice. The king whose name was Ajatashasta, a very famous king of Buddhist India said to himself that this is entirely improper, I should have control after all I am the king. So he ordered his courtiers to confiscate the land from the old couple and give them an equal size plot of land somewhere else, another rice paddy somewhere else.

His messengers went out and disowned the old couple of the land and moved them to another piece of land. They found that when this was done grains of rice that they had confiscated turned into rice once again and the grains of rice on the piece of land they given turned to gold. This came back to the king and he told them to do it again, take the land with the golden rice. This went on seven times, each time taking the land from the old couple and when given another piece of land the same change would take place. The king was left with rice and the old couple was left with gold. At a certain point the people began to wonder what the reason for this was so they went to see the Buddha. They described the situation to him and at that point the Buddha was able to tell them of the particular karmic connection between the old couple's act of merit and the virtuous reward which the old couple had experience even within their very lifetime. This became quite an example for the people in that region of cause and effect, of the law of karma, the karmic process. This did a great deal to establish people's conviction in karma as a factor in their experience. It actually became quite a well-known story in the area to indicate to people the connection between what we do and what we experience.

In this particular situation the reason why the act was so meritorious was for two reasons. The object of their respect and devotion was an extremely pure and holy being. This is what is technically termed the field, something, which acts as a more or less sounding board for one's accumulation of merit. The object of one's devotion and offering, the field upon which one is working is a fertile and very pure one. This is one aspect. There is also one's own pure motivation in making the offering out of respect and faith. So with the complete purity of the situation there was an incredibly intense occurrence and a very meritorious deed was performed.

In the case of the mandala practice there are these elements at work as well. What is chosen as the field, the object of one's offering is the Three Jewels which represent the spiritual principles that are extremely pure and embody incredible potential. There is also one's own pure motivation in making this offering, which is a factor in developing one's merit and deepening one's awareness. So it is the coming together of these circumstances which make the practice so effective. Simply in terms of the merit involved the Lord Buddha said that, to say nothing of actually offering the mandala, simply to

wish to, to have the intention of offering the mandala or to go out and to make or have made the plate one uses during the practice, anything connected with this practice if it is done properly the merit one accumulates will give one dominion over the world.

This is also reflected in the statement that if one performs a single prostration with deep faith and pure devotion then one will be reborn as a universal monarch the same number of times that there are atoms between one's body and the golden basis of the universe. The merit resulting from a single prostration correctly performed is that strong.

Now all of you are very intelligent people, you are quite sharp. Perhaps it has occurred to you there may be a difference between these two processes because this old couple basically who had almost nothing were offering almost everything they had to Sariputra where all we are doing is piling rice on a plate when we offer the mandala. There doesn't seem to be as much commitment involved at all, one is not offering so much, only piling little mounds of rice on a plate. You may feel there is a difference that there is somehow a fundamental difference between these two processes. Actually there isn't, there is a great similarity between these two situations.

Again during the lifetime of Lord Buddha there was a particular Buddhist king in India whose name was Sagyal. At a particular point he hit upon a plan to sponsor a project whereby the Buddha and five hundred of his disciples who were all realized Arhats, extremely advanced meditators would stay for all three months of the summer retreat within his domain. He would provide them with a park in which to stay and would offer them all the food and clothing they would need during the three month period.

When the Buddha came to stay with his disciples in the grove supported and sponsored by the king, it was traditionally the custom to say a dedication prayer, dedicating the merit of the activity for the benefit of all beings. Following the mid-day meal on a daily basis the Buddha would recite a prayer to the effect of may all of the virtue and merit accumulated by King Sagyal as the sponsor of this summer retreat be shared for the benefit of all sentient beings.

At a certain point there was an old woman, an old beggar woman who lived in the town, the capital of the king. She was very poverty stricken but never the less had a very wholesome or positive frame of mind as when she saw the king undertaking this project she thought to herself this is really wonderful. Here we have a king who because of his previous merit, accumulation of merit has such a fortunate rebirth as a powerful king. However he is utilizing this opportunity to render service to a spiritual teacher like Lord Buddha and his attendants. In this way he is insuring that he continues to accumulate merit and deepen his awareness progressing on the path to liberation. This is extremely wonderful. This old beggar woman was truly thankful and truly gratified to see the king undertaking this virtuous work. She had a sense of joy when she saw someone else accumulating such merit in this way.

At a particular point one day after a meal the Buddha turned to the king and said, "Your majesty should I share the merit as usual using your name or

should I insert the name of someone who has more merit than you?" The king thought to himself what is he talking about, there can't be anyone one with more merit than I? He replied for the Buddha to do so if in fact there was one person with more merit than he, then by all means he should dedicate the merit on their behalf. So the Buddha proceeded to dedicate the merit accumulated by the old beggar woman for the benefit of all sentient beings and this went on for a number of days. Every day the Buddha would use the name of the particular beggar woman as a substitute for the king's and would share the merit she accumulated for the benefit of all beings. The king became quite depressed.

The ministers of the king began discussing among themselves how to cheer their king up, cheer the monarch out of his depression. One of the ministers who was a very bright person, rather crafty hit upon a plan and said to the rest that he would take care of everything. At a certain point he arranged an offering of food to the Buddhas and his five hundred attendants, a fine offering of fruit brought out on platters. He spoke to the people who were carrying the food in to the shrine room and asked they to spill the food on the ground before they reached the shrine. When they were bringing the food before they reached the temple they spilled the food on the ground. Just as there are many beggars in India today there were at that point to and the beggars came to try and grab the food that fell from the plates. At this point the minister started exhorting the people to beat the beggars back and he particularly pointed to the old beggar woman. He told them to be particularly rough on her and get her out of here. So the servants started to beat and kick the old beggar woman to keep her away from the food. She became so incensed at this that she completely lost her sense of rejoicing at the king's merit and developed a great deal of anger. She flew into a rage at the situation and completely destroyed her positive attitude in her mind through the anger. That day when the Buddha dedicated the merit for the meal the king's name was back in the prayer, he dedicated the merit the king had accumulated for the benefit of all beings.

There were many disciples present who were very disturbed at this and entertained a great deal of doubt. They couldn't figure out why the Buddha had in the first place replaced the king's name with the old woman's and then later on turned around and replaced the old woman's name with the king's again. They asked the Buddha to explain clearly and it was at this point that he had an opportunity to explain the situation. He indicated to people not only the karmic process, the relationship between one's actions and the results but also the extreme importance of one's attitudes. In fact it is one's mental attitude in any situation which is the most important factor. This again became an example for people, it became quite celebrated as an example of the karmic process and in particular the mental element in one'' experience and how important and crucial this is.

During the mandala offering one is using this metal plate upon which heaps of grain mixed with perhaps precious stones or other things of value are placed in a symmetrical pattern on the plate. This is simply a support for one's meditation, a physical representation or symbolic support for one's meditation of this universe, the symmetrical cosmology of the central

mountain with the continents and so forth around it. It is simply to focus one's mind on the meditation, to involve one physically in the meditation and to provide one with a support for this very complex visualization of the entire universe being offered. Through this kind of involvement on these various levels the merit one can accumulate and the awareness one can develop are basically no different than if one were actually offering the universe.

So through these first three of the foundational practices, the taking of refuge connected with physical prostrations, through the Vajrasattva meditation to purify one and through the mandala offering there has already been a great deal of preparation in terms of purifying oneself of negative tendencies and obscurations. One also is developing one's positive potentials through developing one's merit and awareness. If on top of this we can add the element of receiving one's spiritual teacher's blessings then one's spiritual practice becomes even more incredibly effective indeed.

In the Sutra tradition of Buddhadharma we do not speak of gurus, one speaks of abbots, preceptors, spiritual teachers or spiritual friends. There is not the concept of commitment of one's entire being, one's body, speech and mind to the spiritual teacher. There is more the sense of a companion on the path. However in the Vajrayana, the practice of tantra the guru becomes supreme. The concept of one's Vajra guru, one's Vajrayana teacher is someone who embodies the sources of refuge, represents the union of the Three Jewels and the Three Roots. As there is this intense nature of the guru, there is a correspondingly intense level of commitment to the guru in terms of one's Vajrayana practice.

In the context of the Vajrayana, the guru is someone from whom one has received Vajrayana empowerment, teaching and scriptural authority and whose teachings have benefited one's efforts to realize the nature of mind. This is what is implicit in the term guru. It is doubtful that simply through liking or being in love with one's guru, to pray to him one is going to receive blessings in the sense we are talking of blessings. What is necessary however is an element of faith. Again if one does not quite understand what the guru is or how the guru functions in one's life, it is doubtful that one will be able to relate to the guru in an effective way. As far as understanding the function of the guru it is necessary to understand what particular grace and kindness one has received from one's guru and what particular qualities one's guru embodies.

In accordance with the concepts we have been discussing today there is the idea that a guru is committed on all three levels, the levels of the Three Yanas to the practice of Dharma. The guru has taken a certain level of Hinayana commitment in terms of some kind of ordination on this level, be it lay or ordained. There is a commitment in terms of the Bodhisattva vow on the Mahayana level and the guru has undertaken tantric commitment or samaya vows on the Vajrayana level. The guru has undertaken and is fulfilling these levels of commitment and that from that guru's insight and experience and the compassion the guru has for students, this activity can take place, a beneficial connection can be made and one can receive the blessing of that individual.

This is an idea of the qualities, which are embodied in the guru. One's faith in the guru is based upon a realization also of the kindness and grace one has received from the guru. What is specifically meant here is the kindness the guru has shown one in demonstrating the path to liberation. In showing one the means by which one can free oneself from ignorance and suffering and achieve the ultimate happiness or true happiness of the enlightened state of mind. So it is through a realization of this kindness that one has received from the guru that one's faith and devotion, true faith and devotion develop.

Something else, which is a necessary part of one's faith and devotion of developing this, is the understanding that one's guru is in a certain sense even kinder and more gracious than the Buddha. There have been innumerable Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in the past and will be in the future. There are in different realms at the present. During this particular cycle in which we live there will be one thousand Buddhas, however we will not in this incarnation physically meet any of these. We never the less can come into contact with the guru who demonstrates the path to that state of enlightenment. So in terms of our own personal situation because the relationship we have with the guru is a personal one, an intimate one the guru is even kinder and more gracious than all of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

From this attitude of faith and devotion, both from recognizing the qualities of the guru and through recognizing the kindness and grace one has received, one approaches the actual act of supplication in the guru yoga practice from this point of view. Now when one is performing the prostrations during the taking of refuge or the mandala offering the attitude towards the guru is somewhat different. There is a sense of the guru being the foremost among the sources of refuge, surrounded by the other sources of refuge but representing the first and foremost from among these. The emphasis in the guru yoga is somewhat different. In the context of the guru yoga practice one is meditating on one's guru in the pure form of the Buddha Vajradhara, the Dharmakaya Buddha on the crown of one's head. For the purpose of the meditation the attitude is that although the guru is surrounded by the different sources of refuge these simply represent emanations or different aspects of the guru. Rather than being first and foremost among the sources of refuge the guru is the source of the sources of refuge. The other sources of refuge are simply different aspects of the guru's body, speech and mind emanating or manifesting in different ways. So the approach is somewhat different on this level of the guru yoga practice.

Among the masters of the Kagyu lineage there is in fact a tradition of meditating one's root guru in that guru's ordinary form and not bothering with meditating on the pure form of Vajradhara but simply meditating upon one's guru in the form one personally experiences in the presence of the guru. Now there is valid tradition to support this but the point is that as sentient beings we are quite confused. We are subject to our emotional responses and in any personal relationship attraction and aversion are bond to occur. If one is meditating on the physical form of one's guru, the actual physical form, one may be either attracted or repelled by it. One may find that the guru is beautiful and there is a feeling of falling in love or being extremely attached to

one's guru. Or one may actually find one's guru quite ugly to actually look at and feel that there is something wrong with meditating in this way. In any case there is bound to be some sort of emotional response manifesting. In order to offset this, in order to deal with this the traditional presentation of the teachings has been to meditate on one's guru as essentially one's guru but in this pure form, manifesting as this pure form of the Dharmakaya Buddha, Vajradhara or Dorje Chang in Tibetan.

From this attitude of faith and devotion in the guru therefore the blessings one receives from the guru correspond to the intensity of one's devotion and the sincerity of one's prayers and supplication. This is something we can see corroborated in the Torch of Certainty. At one point there is a quote given that if one's faith and supplication are excellent the blessings and accomplishments one receives and experiences are excellent. The less sincerity and less commitment there is, the fewer benefits one receives. If one prays with absolutely no faith and devotion at all, one receives no benefit.

The guru is not the only source of blessing that one can receive in one's spiritual practice. All of the sources of refuge, the Three Jewels and the Three Roots are sources of blessings through one's sincere devotion and supplication. But the example is used of the sun rising in the sky. The sun spreads warmth everywhere, if one places a piece of paper in the sunlight it becomes warm. In the same way the Three Jewels and the Three Roots on a general level can bestow blessing but the guru particularly is compared to a magnifying glass which focuses the rays of the sun and actually sets the paper on fire quickly. In the same way the guru is a focus for the spiritual blessing one can receive and through faith in the guru and sincere supplication and prayer to one's guru, one can receive the blessings in a far more intense way, a concentrated way.

Following the main portion of the guru yoga practice where one is reciting the prayer of supplication there is a recitation and visualization concerned with taking the four levels of empowerment, the four levels of abhisheka from one's guru. Now if one is concerned with this level of practice ideally one would be performing this process of taking empowerment through meditation three times in the daytime and three times in the nighttime, continual ongoing regular practice six times during every twenty-four hour period. Although this is the ideal never the less during this practice there should be daily performance of this process of taking empowerment through meditation. In fact every session of guru yoga meditation that one does should end with this taking of empowerment.

In the context of tantric practice when one actually takes part in an abhisheka ceremony, a formal empowerment ceremony, and receives the four levels of empowerment, the vase initiation, the secret initiation, the wisdom-awareness initiation and the fourth level of initiation representing a complete transmission, this is what is termed the empowerment of the foundation or basis of the path. This is the basis or beginning point. Meditating in this way, receiving empowerment again and again through meditation from one's guru

is what is termed the empowerment of the path, which is part of the actual path.

This idea of the empowerment on the path, of ongoing and continual taking of empowerment from one's teacher through meditation would seem to be very important. It would seem to be a way in which one is purifying one's commitment to the tantric path in general and particularly to one's guru as one's tantric samaya is closely bound and principally concerned with one's relationship with one's guru. Through this kind of process of taking empowerment through faith and devotion in one's guru, one is purifying a number of the shortcomings in failing to live up to one's physical, verbal and mental commitments to one's guru and practice of Vajrayana. One is receiving the blessings of body, speech and mind from the guru and one is developing all of the qualities, which are associated with one's spiritual progress. So this would seem to be an extremely effective way to engage in the practice of Vajrayana, this concept of empowerment on the path.

When through one's spiritual practice one experiences the state of enlightenment, this has a number of different aspects which we refer to as the different kayas or bodies of Buddhahood. There is the Dharmakaya, the Ultimate or Absolute level of the enlightenment experience, the non-conceptual or formless. There is the Sambhogakaya, the Pure Form aspect of the enlightenment experience and the Nirmanakaya or the physical manifestation level. There is also what is termed in Sanskrit, Svabhavakaya that is the totality of these different aspects as a complete experience. So sometimes we speak of the Four Aspects or the Four Kayas of enlightenment. When these are realized, when these different aspects of the total experience manifest in one's experience, this is what is termed the empowerment of the fruit or the result, the resultant empowerment or abhisheka.

Ideally during this weekend we will be attempting to combine meditation with theoretical discussions. Now we have run on for quite some time this morning because strictly speaking when one is beginning practice how to practice is more important than actually practicing. In order to practice one has to understand how to practice and why one is practicing. So this is why we have spent rather longer than we had planned to this morning going over these points. If through this weekend of teaching that we take, we come to some understanding of the nature of Dharma practice and how to actually practice the Dharma then perhaps it will be sufficient for us to meditate in the future while watching movies and television. We will conclude this session with prayers to dedicate the merit and virtue of the teaching for the benefit of all beings.

As we said previously the importance of understanding the nature of mind is fundamental to practicing the Dharma, as it is the mind, which is the origin of all experience. We were talking of the confused and ignorant state of an unenlightened being or the awareness of an enlightened Buddha. Never the less we are speaking about the mind. It is from mind that all these different aspects of experience arise. This is why it is so fundamentally important to understand something of the nature of the mind.

For unenlightened beings in the Six Realms of samsaric existence there is an incredible variety of experiences, different kinds of pain and pleasure which all these different beings, these infinite numbers of beings experience. On a certain level we could say that this is true experience, that this is real in some sense as at least on a conventional level the experience of say a human being is very real, we know no other state of existence. For us, the human experience is the sum total. So on a conventional level temporarily speaking this has some kind of validity, some kind of truth to it, a particular way in which an individual being experiences the universe.

But perhaps we could also consider all of these different kinds of experiences to be in a certain sense false because all of this experience is simply based on the projections of manifestations of mind according to dictates of karmic tendencies and emotional responses within the mind. Because there is this relativity to all of our experience then we can talk about something like the ultimate non-reality or ultimate non-validity of all experience. This is because in each and every given context it may be quite real but ultimately speaking all experience, all the different states of being are just the workings of mind.

It was in consideration of this relative truth or reality of different states of existence that the Buddha taught in the sutras and the Abhidharma about such things as the hell realms at a particular location thousands of miles below the earth's surface. He described places such as the Eight Hot Hells and the Eight Cold Hells as well as the neighboring occasional hells and so forth making up this particular environment. There are descriptions of these different realms and actual physical locations are ascribed to them because of the point of view of this relative truth of the way beings experience the universe this is quite valid on this level.

This kind of teaching corresponds to the Hinayana level of understanding. On the ultimate level of the Mahayana when we are speaking in terms of the Mahayana discipline and the teachings that are presented in the Mahayana, the idea is that there is no validity ultimately speaking to any of the states of existence. There is a certain switch at this point and this is probably best summed up in the verse which explains that the flaming environments of hell and the foundation made of molten iron, all of this, who is the agent who made this? Basically the Lord Buddha taught that it was an evil mind that created this environment. All appearances seem to be simply based on the projections of mind; all positive and negative tendencies in mind manifesting in superior or inferior environments. On the Mahayana level of understanding, ultimately speaking one rejects the notion of any ultimate validity or ultimate truth to any state of experience because it is all based upon the illusory projections of mind.

There is no real contradiction between these two levels of teaching. There is simply speaking about this rather paradoxical situation that things are real in a certain way but not real in another way. One can look at it from either side. This is most easily illustrated by taking the example of a dream. As one is dreaming, when one is in the dream state, one can accept the experience totally and experience quite literally anything in a dream, all kinds of pleasure or pain, different nuances of experience are possible during a dream state.

But when one awakes from the dream state then one realizes that there was nothing there. It is very easy to accept at that point that there was nothing there, it was just a dream. On the other hand when you are actually absorbed in the dream experience it seems very real. So there is this reality and unreality somehow, a paradox where something can be at one and the same time real and not real. This is what marks all of our experience.

In terms of our waking experience or basically any state we may experience, what produces the suffering and all the different states of experience we go through is the fundamental clinging to the reality of what we are undergoing. There is the self, the I that is clung to as something ultimately real. There is the concept of other, objectivity that is taken to be something very real. There era the emotional relationships between subject and object, self and others which is also taken to be very real. Based upon this clinging to the reality of what is going on, this naive acceptance of what is going on as ultimately real, this is where all the pleasure and pain and particularly the element of suffering come from in our experience.

The Noble Ones who followed the path to liberation as set forth by the Buddha, particularly the Eightfold Path, are engaged in a process of realizing what is termed the Wisdom Which Realizes the Non-self of an individual. There is no ultimate nature to either one's own individual ego or any given phenomena. Anything within our experience whether it be our own selves or anything other than that, is not ultimately speaking anything in the sense that has any self-existing nature. The realization of this brings with it the ability to move far more freely; miraculously we might say, in the phenomenal world. This is why beings like the Venerable Milarepa could demonstrate such miraculous powers because there was no longer the naive clinging to the phenomenal world as being ultimately real as given.

So this understanding of the essential emptiness of all experience falls into two categories or two aspects. The first is what is termed the realization of the non-self of an individual, the individual ego of oneself. The second aspect is realizing the non-self; the ultimate non-reality of all phenomena, which are projections of that mind which, is taken to be the self. With this dual realization of the non-self of the individual ego and the non-self of all phenomena that the ego experiences, then this is synonymous with saying that one is travelling the Bodhisattva Path towards complete enlightenment, towards Buddhahood. This is an absolutely necessary experience. The fact that one is having the experience means that one is traveling this path, the Bodhisattva Path.

While it may be difficult to directly experience these two aspects at this point, to actually realize the non-self of our egos and the non-self of all phenomena, never the less even understanding intellectually the concept, even having the conviction it is so on an intellectual level, will make one's practice of Dharma and particularly one's practice of meditation far more fruitful. Whereas if one carries on in a naive way clinging to the relative reality of everything as being the ultimate then whatever practice one undertakes, particularly the practice of meditation, one will experience far more difficulty.

Referring to this, the Indian teacher Atisha who we mentioned previously, at one point he gave teachings on deity meditation to someone who unfortunately hadn't any appreciation of the ultimate unreality of his own self and all personal experience. He was very caught up in naïve clinging to the reality of the ego and all of the ego's experiences. He was meditating on a particular wrathful form of Achala and he became very much like a wrathful deity himself. He would glare at everyone and had a very wrathful expression. He scared everyone, as he looked so horrible. He kept meditating with this clinging to reality, which became so strong that the intensity of his meditation, he was able to kill people with a glance. He developed a kind of evil eye and was able to harm people, to cause them to faint or wither away and die by merely looking at them. It was necessary for the spiritual teacher to step in and stop him in his practice. He began by explaining something of the non-self of phenomena and of the individual ego.

There is the case of another practitioner who went into retreat in a cave. Now this particular cave was quite large but had a small door, so much so that a person could just pass in comfortably. The particular meditation he was doing was concerned with another wrathful deity named Vajrabhairava and he was meditating on this form as being enormous. The central head on this figure is a buffalo's head with two long horns and this person spent a number of years in retreat meditating with a very solid approach. He fixed the visualization as something real of itself and he would meditate on himself in this enormous form to the point where he found it impossible to leave the cave. His form was too big especially with the large horns to get through the door and so he ended up dying in the cave, as he simply could not get out.

If one does not understand emptiness this is the kind of way that one's meditation can go wrong. One can fall into these kinds of pitfalls but another thing one may encounter in one's meditation due to this lack of understanding of emptiness is that it is impossible to maintain any sort of stable visualization. For example if one is meditating on the form of Chenrezig, the white four-armed form, one may find that the color changes. One is simply unable to control spontaneous impulses in the mind and colors change. Instead of four arms the deity ends up with two or six. There is a constant shifting in the visualization and one is simply unable to let the mind rest on a clear visualization, as one has not understood the emptiness of it all. One is still very fixed to the reality of it.

It was with this in mind that the teacher Nagarjuna stated that when one is not effective vis-a-vis emptiness one is not effective vis-a-vis anything. Whereas if one is effective vis-a-vis emptiness then one becomes effective in anything. The point was that in meditation at least, in meditation practice, it is this understanding of emptiness or the lack thereof that makes the practice effective or ineffective.

This is why when one begins a particular deity meditation, meditating on the form of any given deity; one always begins with a conception of emptiness, at least on an intellectual level. One meditates that the entire phenomenal world dissolves into emptiness and from this the divine form arises. Instead of simply trying to shift from our present waking reality to something just as solid

in meditating on a deity, there is an attempt at least on an intellectual level to dissolve everything back to this emptiness from which the form of the deity emerges. This is what is technically termed intellectual emptiness in the sense that it is on a certain level an intellectual concept. Never the less an attempt is being made here to loosen the naïve clinging to the reality of one's experience.

In any practice like the Kalachakra or any practice of Dharma at all generally speaking, one begins every session with the taking of refuge and the arousal of bodhicitta. These are very important as fundamental concepts both at the beginning of one's path and at the beginning of each session of practice as the re-taking of refuge, the taking again of refuge in the Three Jewels is a way which is a technique which brings one's mind to the Dharma. It involves one in the Dharma as one's path and which allows one to carry out the path through to its completion. Whereas the arousal of bodhicitta insures that if one is suitably developing this attitude of working for the benefit of all beings, even if one's practice is not particularly pure in the sense of say one's visualization is not completely clear or one's samadhi is not very deep never the less with this sincere, altruistic motivation all of one's efforts are being brought into the path of virtue. All of one's activities take on a spiritual tinge because of this basic attitude. This is why these two aspects of taking refuge and arousing bodhicitta at the beginning of a meditation session are so important.

Regarding the impure manifestation of mind, what we term samsara, much could be said about this particular aspect of experience. In fact one could think of it as an ocean from which we can only present a single drop at this time, as we simply don't have the necessary time available to go into this particular aspect of experience in great length. Never the less we can go over it in a very general, brief way. The same thing could be said for the whole subject of emptiness and the ultimate nature of mind and so forth. These are very complex topics and we could spend a very long time indeed going over this ocean of material to cover these concepts thoroughly. Again we are forced by circumstances to simply present a very abridged, brief introductions to these concepts. Also today it would seem most useful to cover the material on the Kalachakra as tomorrow the schedule may become more crowded and it may be difficult to speak on this as people may find it necessary to leave early. Since this was one of the main topics that was indicated that I would speak about, I feel I should cover that material today.

As with any teaching of Dharma these teachings concerned with the Kalachakra practice with the development and fulfillment stages and so forth, it is possible for this practice to either be very effective, a very pure practice or to go in a very impure direction. That is to say that given any particular practice of Dharma one can take it in one direction or the other. For example we have this particular transmission of the Kalachakra, this particular divinity. Now if people approach this with the idea that this is something very wonderful to be practiced and there is a certain sense of faith and respect for the teaching in a person's mind and the conviction that through receiving teachings on such a meditation and putting it into practice one can benefit not only oneself in terms of achieving enlightenment but all other beings as well,

if one approaches the situation in this way, this is pure practice. This is heading the practice in a positive direction.

There is another possibility, which is not such a favorable one. This concerns the fact that the Kalachakra cycle is a very unique cycle of teachings. It is the pinnacle of the Vajrayana and there are a number of characteristics and qualities to this particular teaching which distinguish it from others. But to become too fascinated with these and to simply become concerned with accumulating knowledge, particularly with the idea that having become erudite and very slick in understanding this cycle and to be able to impress people with one's knowledge of it and the incredibly profound teachings with which one is connected, if one is doing it from a sense of pride in order to receive respect and adoration from others then we are talking of spiritual materialism at this point. We are talking about something spiritual which has become anti-spiritual in a certain sense.

It was Gampopa himself who said some people through their practice of the Dharma achieve enlightenment while other people through the practice of Dharma go to lower realms of existence. This is what he was basically talking about that they were fundamentally perverting the purpose of Dharma practice.

Now quite definitely there is a scholarly or scholastic tradition involved with the Kalachakra Tantra. We have the Root Tantra itself and we have very extensive commentary on it composed by several Kings of Shambala. We also have many commentaries composed by Indian and Tibetan saints and a number of abridged commentaries and teaching texts on the actual practice of the meditation and so forth. To study all of these with a sincere and pure motivation is very wonderful. For example at the present time in Seattle, Washington Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey from Dharamsala is giving a thirteen week course on the Kalachakra cycle and each week during the weekly teachings he will be examining much of this tradition from this point of view of explaining the different levels of meaning of the teaching and so forth. People who are taking part in that course of teaching will gain a great deal of understanding from it about the nature of the Kalachakra teachings.

Because the teachings of the Kalachakra are very profound they are presented in away which often seems very cryptic or obscure to people who are not familiar with the interpretation of tantric texts. There are a number of different ways in which tantric texts are interpreted by people who are familiar with this system of teaching. This gives new dimensions and new levels of meaning to the teachings, which one simply can not come to simply by reading the texts. One can't simply sit down and read the book and expect to have that level or depth of understanding without having some basis in practice and also without having received some kind of guidance in how to interpret these texts.

What we are concerned with here at the present time is a short precise presentation of the practice that people can use in their own regular spiritual practices as part of their development towards enlightenment. Any extensive teaching might fail for two reasons. We do not simply have the time to apply it in our lives; the work and the responsibilities we have don't allow this. Would

we be able to understand and absorb an extensive teaching? It seems unlikely in the present situation and so a concise presentation of the basic practice seems the most effective.

When the Buddha presented the teachings of the Vajrayana, the Kalachakra Tantra held a position, which was central or foremost among the other cycles of tantric teaching. It was the basis from which the other tantric cycles spread and developed. We can think of it like the government of the United States of America vis-à-vis the individual government states. The Kalachakra represents the overall governing principal from which these other levels of government or these other levels of tantric teaching develop. It might be easier to think of it in terms of the physical body. The Kalachakra represents the torso and the other tantric cycles represent the different limbs and appendages of the torso, which develop from it.

The color of the main divinity is dark blue now this has a certain symbolic value in the tantric system as blue represents a certain sense of eternality or immutability. The idea being that when one has realized the ultimate nature of mind, one arrives at a state of being that is beyond any degeneration, impairment or exhaustion, there is a certain sense of an eternal state of being, of a stability and immutability. The comparison is made to space or the sky which we perceive as blue which has a certain eternal quality in our experience as regardless of what comes and goes in the sky, the sky is eternally present. So the color dark blue represents from the point of view of the tantras this immutability or changeless nature of mind, of experience.

The name which is given to the feminine aspect, the masculine aspect being named Kalachakra or the Cycle of Time, the Wheel of Time, is known in Tibetan as shogs yum. Yum refers to a feminine consort or principal and shogs means various or a variety. The color of this particular form, shogs yum, is yellow. Out of all the possible colors that could have been chosen, the one in which this feminine aspect appears is the color yellow which represents the second of the Four Kinds of Enlightened Activity, enlarging or enriching. The idea here is of positive qualities being enriched in one's experience, of one’s length of life, one’s merit, one’s awareness deepening, one’s meditational experiences developing, one’s wisdom becoming more profound and so on. There is a sense of all of the positive qualities of one’s temporal life and one’s spiritual development increasing and this is symbolized by the yellow color of the feminine consort.

This is from the point of view of the color symbolism pure and simple. If we take into consideration the principal of the Five Buddha Families the yellow color represents the Ratna Family which is again connected with a sense of enrichment, a sense of one’s wishes or needs being fulfilled, being realized. Again the yellow color of the feminine consort represents the fulfillment of one's potential through spiritual practice.

The essential nature or essential quality of the form of the feminine consort represents the state of emptiness. A state of emptiness which is not however emptiness pure and simple but rather the emptiness which is the potential for everything positive, a state of emptiness from which everything excellent can develop. So there is this dynamic state of emptiness, a dynamic potential of

the state of emptiness which is the essence of this feminine consort, this particular form.

In view of the fact that based upon this experience of this dynamically positive state of emptiness, this potential of the state of emptiness, one can realize a state of stable and ultimate bliss. This can actually become manifest. The bliss experience is represented by the masculine consort and this is why the masculine and feminine aspects are represented in union to indicate this connection or simultaneity of bliss and emptiness in the totally enlightened experience. So while the actual form is of masculine and feminine deities in union the meaning of this symbol, the meaning behind the symbol, the significance of the symbol is enlightened awareness which is the experience simultaneously of the state of emptiness and the experience of supreme bliss.

This particular form of Kalachakra, of the masculine deity is unique in the sense that it is multi-colored rather than being of one particular color. For example the shoulder joints, at the shoulder joints there is a band of black, at the elbows a band of red and at the wrists a band of white. These bands of different colors on the form of the deity represent the Three Kayas; Dharmakaya, Sambhogakaya and Nirmanakaya, which are represented by the different bands of color.

There are also a variety of colors on the hands of the masculine deity. The thumbs of the two hands are yellow, the forefingers white, the middle fingers red, the ring fingers black and the little fingers are green. These colors refer to the Five Buddha Family principle and to the Five Aspects of Transcending Awareness, which are connected with this particular principal. The knuckle joints of the fingers again have bands of color around them; the first closet to the palms have bands of black, the mid-knuckles have bands of red and the last knuckles have bands of white. This is another symbolic expression of the Three Kayas; Dharmakaya, Sambhogakaya and Nirmanakaya. These three principles are being represented by this color scheme.

This is a symbol or indication that the entire phenomenal world, the experience of the phenomenal world down to the atomic level or the mental world down to the momentary level, is essentially the nature of these Three Kayas of the total enlightened experience. The significance in terms of the particular form of the deity is that one can realize that totality through this kind of practice.

Each deity has a particular seed syllable or bija associated with the form. In the case of Chenrezig for example this is the syllable SHI. In the case of the Kalachakra divinity the order called the Ten Syllables of Power and which when one actually recites them are HAM CHA MA LA VA RAYAM, the central part of the mantra. This is what is known as the bija of the deity, it is not one single letter but the entire string of letters. This has a certain connection with the physical creation of the universe. For example the first element that appears in the process of creation is the element of wind or air which is represented by the syllable YAM. Moving backwards in the mantra the next syllable is RA or if we put the nasal with it we have RAM which is seed syllable for fire, the fire element. This is the next element, which

manifests during the physical creation of the universe. Based upon the mandala of wind there is the mandala of fire. The third syllable which is VAM, VA with the nasal applied to it, is symbolic of the element of water and this represents the water mandala which forms based upon the wind and fire during the physical creation of the universe. The next is LAM, again LA with the nasal the anasvarg attached to it, and this represents the element of earth in the mandala. The next syllable MA or MAM with the nasal attached to it represents the actual physical construction of the universe, the idea of the central mountain and the surrounding continents actually forming, a geography or cosmology. This level of differentiation is represented by this symbolic syllable MAM. The syllable MAM is mostly specifically connected with the continents and surrounding mountain ranges while the next syllable CHAM [KSAHM] is connected with the central mountain, the axis of the universe.

During the actual visualizations connected with the form of the Kalachakra deity however there is a slight shift in emphasis of the syllable MAM. MAM is the syllable that incorporates the idea of the central mountain as well and CHAM is associated with the lotus throne of the deity, which is on the top of the central mountain in the center of the universe. So there is a slight shift of emphasis at this point. In terms of the actual physical creation of the universe the syllable MAM is connected with the continents and the surrounding world-system and the CHAM is associated with the central mountain, whereas during the visualization of the Kalachakra deity, MAM covers the totality of the physical universe and CHAM the lotus throne of the deity in the center of that universe.

The first syllable HAM in terms of the cosmology of the formation of the universe is connected with the realm of the gods, the formation of the gods' realms. In particular the small sun and moon signs which are part of this logos above the letter HA which are actually derived from the Sanskrit vowel sign for the nasal, the anasvarg, these represent the sun and moon in the universe. Regardless of how these syllables are actually pronounced if one breaks them down and splits the consonant clusters, the vowel signs and so forth, one can count a total of ten syllables. This is why this particular mantra is referred to as the Ten Syllables of Power or the Ten Syllables Possessing Power.

In the context of spiritual practice there is a connection between these ten syllables and the Ten Perfections. Normally we speak of the Six Perfections of the Mahayana; generosity, morality, patience, diligence or energy, meditative concentration and wisdom. To these are added the four perfections of skillful means, spiritual power, aspiration and transcending awareness. With these four added to the original six we arrive at the figure of Ten Perfections which are connected with the Ten Syllables.

In terms of the qualities that develop during spiritual practice these are connected with the Ten Bhumis or the Ten Levels of Bodhisattva Realization and also with the Ten Powers of full and complete enlightenment. One of the aspects of a fully enlightened mind or Buddha Mind is the Ten Powers, which are symbolized by the Ten Syllables. In terms of the actual goal of

enlightenment there are certain classifications. For example there are the Ten Spiritual Powers that a fully enlightened Buddha can manifest or the Ten Kinds of Suchness or Thatness referring to the particular realizations that a Buddha has or the totality of Buddha awareness referred to as the Ten Aspects of Enlightened Awareness and so forth. All of these have symbolic connection with the Ten Syllables, the ten syllables of this mantra.

Regardless of the complexity of the symbolism involved the basic function, which is being indicated here is that these syllables represent the power or the ability to transform the confusion and emotionality in one's present state of consciousness. It is to transform and purify this and to develop all of the intrinsic potential in the mind and all of the positive potential of the enlightened state of mind. So this transformation from negative to positive is what is implied by the symbolism of the Ten Syllables.

In the particular visualization of the masculine and feminine deities in union, the central figures alone, there are two figures being trampled upon by their feet. One of these is termed Rudra or drakpo in Tibetan and the other is called the Red Desire Realm God and the feet of the central figure are trampling these. These are white and red in color respectively, White Rudra and red Desire Realm God. Now what these symbolize are both the transcendence of duality of clinging to the self and others and on an emotional level the overcoming of, or the elimination of attachment and aversion, or desire and anger in one's experience.

The silk and jewel ornaments which adorn the central figure are traditionally counted as eight in number and again there is a traditional classification or category of eight different aspects of the completely liberated experience which are represented by these ornaments. So the idea is here of the richness of the experience which is symbolized by the adornment and ornamentation of the central figure. The hair of the masculine deity is bound up in a topknot and this is ornamented with several items. The first is on the left side and is a crescent moon which is symbolic of the realization of supreme bliss that is completely stable beyond all impairment, it does not change. There is a visvavajra or crossed vajra which is multi-colored on the front aspect of the topknot, a kind of badge or emblem which indicates mastery over the four different kinds of Buddha activity or enlightened activity; pacifying, enriching, influencing and exorcising or wrathful activities. The crown of the topknot has a wish-fulfilling gem, a brilliant precious stone that indicates the accomplishment of all mundane and transcendent siddhis according to one's wish. Basically all of one's wishes both on the transcendent and mundane levels are granted by this kind of practice.

The form is radiating lights of five colors and is en-haloed in flames of five colors; white, blue, yellow, red and green. These are symbolic of the different aspects of being; body, speech, mind, quality and activities as well as the five aspects of transcending awareness or the five aspects of enlightened awareness which are omnipresent in all of one's experience whether it relates to body, speech, mind, qualities or activities. There is an interpenetrating of these concepts that all of these states of awareness are

omnipresent in all of these levels of one's being. The five colors of the flames and radiance of the central figure represent this.

The actual throne on which the central figure stands is made up of a number of discs which represent different heavenly bodies such as the moon, the sun and a particular planet which is termed Rahu in Indian astrology. There is also a disc, which represents the apocalyptic fire at the end of the kalpa, the end of time. If we take this simply on the level of the physical universe we have the concept of the sun and the moon, sources of light in our world. This particular planet Rahu was conceived of as being the planet, which in a certain sense devoured or obscured the sun and the moon during eclipses and so this was represented by this dark blue, blue-black disc. The apocalyptic fire represents the conflagration, the fire that will consume the physical universe at the end of this kalpa, when the particular collective karma of the beings of this universe exhausts itself. When the universe begins to deteriorate, the process of destruction, which involves at a certain point at least a consuming by fire and this is what this fourth disc represents.

If we are thinking about the pure symbolism or the spiritual level of one's experience, the moon disc is symbolic of skillful means and particularly with the realization through skillful means of supreme bliss, the experience of supreme bliss. The sun disc is symbolic of wisdom and particularly the experience of emptiness through this wisdom. The disc, which is blue-black, the planet Rahu is connected with the concept of prana and nadi, the channels of energy in the body and the energy, which flows through these channels in particular ways. The concept here is that one's dualistic clinging; one's dualistic subject-object reference is connected with the movement of energy in the parallel channels down the left and right side of the body. When the energy from these side-channels is focused into the central channel, down the middle of the body this is connected with the experience of nonduality, of transcending duality. This is what is symbolized at this point with the dark blue disc or the blue-black disc of the planet Rahu. The fourth disc, the apocalyptic fire represents the consumption of or annihilation of ignorance through the manifestation of enlightened awareness with all of the confusion and distortion based upon fundamental ignorance in mind has been burnt away or completely eliminated through the manifestation of this enlightened awareness. This is represented or symbolized by the disc of apocalyptic fire.

The reason for going into this at all is because when one is meditating on a deity, when one is using this kind of yidam meditation there are certain elements which are necessary in order to make the meditation really effective. The form of the deity must be clearly visualized if possible or as clearly as possible. One must be aware of the pure symbolism involved and there must be a certain sense of pride, of identification with the divine form, a certain divine pride. The first of these is quite simply the details, the visualization. Ideally at least the visualization should be as clear as possible in all details. The form that one is meditating upon should be very clearly pictured, it should be very clear within one's mind, the visualization.

The second aspect is the awareness of the pure symbolism involved and the relationship between the pure state of being which is symbolized and the different aspects of one's impure state of being at present. This is what I have been going into detail at this point. There are two sides to the coin here, that each one of these elements or symbols in the situation represents a transformation from the impure to the pure. So the whole form becomes a symbol for this transformation and it is important to be aware of this during one's meditation. When one is using this technique one needs to be aware of the fact that this symbolic transformation is the point behind the form of the deity.

If one doesn't have some kind of awareness of this pure symbolism of the form then one gets into a lot of distracting doubts thinking maybe why is it a particular color or why do we have these masculine and feminine forms in union. There can simply be a lot of doubt entertained and it may seem arbitrary unless one understands the symbolism working behind the form. Now people in the West and in the East have a different way of approaching this concept of pure symbolism. For example an Eastern person simply takes it as given, that the symbolism is explained as such and such and they think that this is fine. Now Western people are very intelligent and have a great deal of intellectual sophistication but this can be a trap as they tend to think that it is just a symbol, there is nothing really there. There is no such thing other than being a symbol representing something else, a mere symbol. So we deprive the deity of much of its power by simply considering it to be just another symbol.

This isn't quite the case. There is a certain sense of the deity being something other than merely one's own projection. We may talk about the deity existing in some sense. For example in the case of the Kalachakra the Buddha manifested this particular form of Kalachakra in a particular place at a particular time in order to present this cycle of teaching. There was a multi-level experience for the people who were present at this particular occasion when the Buddha manifested the different mandalas and so forth. So there is a certain sense of externality, it is simply not one's own fabrication but there is something to relate to which we may term the deity, the actual deity.

On the occasion of the Buddha presenting the Kalachakra cycle the audience was made up of a number of different beings. There were high level Bodhisattvas such as Vajrapani, the Bodhisattva Spiritual Power, present. There were realized human individuals such as the King Suchandra of Shambala and so forth. There were also non-human beings such as nagas, spirits and celestial beings present. So the audience present on this particular occasion of the presentation by the Buddha of this Kalachakra teaching was varied in its composition. From the time when the Buddha first manifested this form and taught this particular tantra to the present day, according to the cycle some two thousand eight hundred and sixty-one years has passed.

One year after the presentation of this teaching of the Root Tantra, the King of Shambala, Suchandra is said to have composed his lengthy commentary on the Kalachakra teachings which is called The Stainless Light. Due to the

spiritual realization and compassion of the Buddha this cycle was presented in a way which integrated the outer aspect of one's experience being the physical universe, the inner level of one's universe being one's physical body and the secret or mystical aspect of one's experience being connected with meditation on the mandala of deities. All three of these aspects are integrated in the practice.

In the actual retinue, in a more extensive form of the mandala, there are eight feminine divinities [shaktis] and again there is a connection between these different levels of one's experience. For example in terms of the external universe, there are what are termed the Eight Charnel Grounds or the Eight Tantric Gathering Places in the physical world which are connected with the eight goddesses or feminine divinities [shaktis]. On the level of the physical body or as we might term it the vajra body, the physical body as used in tantric meditation, the heart chakra which is called the Dharmakaya chakra in tantric symbolism is conceived of as having eight channels or spokes radiating out from the center. On the level of mind, the inner level of one's consciousness, there are the eight aspects of discursive consciousness, which we referred to yesterday. So again there is this symbolism of any one aspect of the deity or the mandala corresponding to these three levels.

The different wrathful deities, masculine and feminine which up part of the extensive mandala are connected with the ideal cosmology of the physical universe involving four main continents and eight sub-continents. In the vajra body they are related to the limbs and appendages of the body. So there is a connection on all of these levels between the outer, inner and secret levels of one's experience in terms of the composition of the mandala.

There is a relationship again between the different deities of the mandala and one's psychophysical individual and the physical universe from the point of view of the tantric teachings. We have for example what we refer to as the twenty-four tantric gathering places, the eight charnel grounds and so forth. All of these are considered physical holy sites in the tantric tradition and correspond to the idea of the macrocosm, the external universe. On the individual level, the inner level of one's physical body and mind, there is the idea of the five skandhas, of the twelve ayatonas or sense-fields, the eighteen dhatus or sensory realms and so forth which are components or aggregates making up one's being and personality. These are reflected in terms of the symbolism of the deities in the mandala as well on the secret level, the mystical level of one's meditation on this mandala. The five masculine Buddhas of the Five Buddha Families correspond to the five skandhas. The five feminine consorts correspond to the five elemental qualities and so forth. There is a direct correspondence between the outer, inner and secret levels of one's experience within the context of this tantric cycle.

This symbolism can also be seen in terms of the three hundred and sixty odd days of the year and this same number corresponding to the number of joints present in the physical body or the vajra body at least and the number of deities in the retinue of the mandala. Again there are these parallels or connections between these different levels of experience. Another level of

connection is that according to the cosmology as presented by the tantras there are in this universe, the visible stars can be numbered as thirty-five million, the number of stars in the universe, in this particular world-system is thirty-five million. There are thirty-five million pores in the skin of the vajra body and the physical body as well as thirty-five million deities making up the total retinue of the mandala. Again we find continual reference to the connection between outer, inner and secret levels of experience.

The very detailed examination of the relationships would have to be found in the extensive commentaries and treatises, which have been written on this practice. The point is that there is this connection between the outer world, one's inner level of experience of the physical body and one's secret or mystical experience of mind. The point is that there is something here, there is some kind of connection being talked about between these levels of one's experience. As the teachings are presented we are talking about something we can relate to in a real way. There is this deity and there is this practice which is valid on this level which we can relate to and it is not simply somebody's fantasy. There is something to relate to "out there" in a certain sense.

This is the reason why an individual's practice of a teaching such as the Kalachakra can actually influence developments in the outer world. Through the practice of teachings such as the Kalachakra cycle the degeneration in the outer world in terms of famine, plague, war, strife and so forth these things can be averted. One is contributing to the positive development of the world through one's spiritual practice of something like the Kalachakra. There is a relevance on and effectiveness on the level of the outer world, the outer universe that we live in. Because there is this connection with the physical body and the vajra body then the benefits on this level are felt in terms of length of life and freedom from sickness. Because there is a connection with the secret or mystical level of one's experience, the inner consciousness, this means that those mundane and transcendent accomplishments in meditation and spiritual practice become possible through this kind of meditation.

All yidams or meditational deities as being expressions of the same enlightenment embody the same potential for blessing and accomplishment in one's own spiritual practice. So on this ideal level, essentially speaking; there is no difference. However different forms of divinities become associated with or have association with different fortes, different areas of strength, different ways in which a particular practice on a particular deity is held to be most effective.

For example we have the United States of America which is a very prosperous and a highly developed society. Within this general context of society we have people who have different fortes, they have different strengths. Some people are very capable as scientists, lawyers or doctors. Everyone has his or her own particular training and inclinations, which they develop. The Kalachakra cycle would seem to be most effective on the three levels in terms of overcoming strife and discord, on the outer level the war, social disorder and so forth in the outer world, on the inner level the battle of the emotions in one's mind and on the secret level all the arguments within

one family [?]. So perhaps whenever one is caught up in the battle of the emotions, if as an antidote to this we recite the mantra of Kalachakra one might find this very effective. Or if one found oneself involved in some domestic quarrel or fight with someone within one's own family, if one were to meditate and to recite the mantra at that point perhaps that might be one effective way of dealing with it.

Through this kind of practice there is an effect on all the levels of one's experience of outer, inner and secret in terms of an increase in happiness and peace or tranquility. When one is practicing meditations associated with other tantric deities, particularly concerned with the Anuttarayoga level of tantra, the highest of the four levels of tantra deities such as Vajrabhairava, Chakrasamvara, Vajrayogini, Hevajra, Guhyasamaja or so forth, within these different cycles of teaching is the implicit assumption that one is practicing a secret teaching. One is not meant to go around talking about it or reciting the mantras to other people, as there is the danger of losing the blessing from one's practice. One is in a certain sense dissipating or draining, allowing the blessing to drain away through making it a topic of popular discussion. One lets the actual personal benefits be dissipated in this way. There is also the danger that one is shouting about secret teachings in the marketplace thus exposing ideas to people in a public way in a way in which they were never intended to be treated.

The Kalachakra mantra seems to be somewhat different in view of the relationship it has with all the levels of experience including the outer one of the physical universe. Certainly the custom among Tibetans was to display the logos of the mantra quite publicly. In fact one could see it very often on the sides of buildings even by the side of the road it would be carved in the rock at the side of the road. It was quite a public symbol the logos which is made up of the different syllables of the mantra. There would seem to be benefit however one encounters this particular mantra whether one sees it, remembers it, recites it oneself, touches it physically, all of these would be beneficial contacts. If people in their meditation encounter difficulties or they become upon something not clear to them or something for which they have a doubt then please remember that Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche is always available for people in order to seek further instruction.

Question: Would it be appropriate for people to gather together from different parts to study together?

Answer: Once one has received the initiation then group practice of something like this is fine. The point is that without having received initiation then one's practice will not be fruitful because as it is said in the tantras for someone who has not received initiation, accomplishment is impossible the same way that it is impossible to squeeze oil out of sand.

Question: A lama has suggested that I practice another yidam for which I have not yet received the initiation. Does my initiation into the Kalachakra allow me to practice this other yidam?

Answer: Once one has received the initiation or empowerment for a particular deity of course one has been empowered to do that practice. There would be no contradiction to practicing that yidam and Kalachakra as essentially the

same. In view of the fact that at the present time you have not received the initiation for this other divinity, this other yidam but have received the Kalachakra, it would seem to be most effective to follow the Kalachakra for your practice as you have received the empowerment for it. However if at any future time you receive the empowerment for the other yidam and choose to practice that with the idea that yidam and Kalachakra are essentially the same, simply different manifestations of the same essence then there would be no contradiction. One does not need to feel that one is rejecting one yidam and taking up another yidam, choosing between the two as there is an essential identity or unity present.

Question: What are the colors of the chakras?

Answer: The different seed syllables associated with the different centers of both deities are the white syllable OM at the forehead, the red syllable AH at the throat, the rich blue HUM at the center of the chest, a yellow HO at the navel, a green HAM at the crown of the head and a dark blue KSAH at the genitals.

Question: Could Rinpoche describe the visualization one performs with the daily prayer?

Answer: If people have looked inside the program handed out at the ceremony there is an English translation of the daily sadhana. This is the format that is basically followed and it correspond to the explanation I just gave now of the symbolism behind the deities' forms. The actual way one meditates; the form of the meditation is given in that sadhana.

Question: With samatha, ngondro and Kalachakra practices in a working world would Rinpoche give us some guidance on how to devote our time?

Answer: Of course one is going to have to emphasize one element or the other in one's practice. Perhaps it is most practical to emphasize the ngondro as this is first and foremost and it entails a commitment to carry through with the foundational practices. As far as the Kalachakra it would be very good if one could maintain a daily, ongoing practice even if it is very abbreviated or very short practice session of meditation. This would maintain the connection, which will no doubt ripen in the future into circumstances more favorable for a deeper involvement in this level of tantric practice. It is an important element which should be considered, one should strive for some kind of regularity and ongoing incorporation of the Kalachakra practice into one's daily routine. But never the less one should emphasize practices, which are far more relevant to one's situation such as samatha practice, something for calming and stabilizing the mind. If one is engaged in the ngondro or foundational practices because there is a certain commitment to finish the ngondro, to complete the cycle of practices, one should carry that through as the principal element. Of course each individual is going to have to make a choice of which aspect is most relevant to their particular situation now but never forgetting the connections one is making for the future.

Question: *Could Rinpoche go over the All-Powerful Ten and what their colors are?*

Answer: The different syllables, the Ten Syllables of Power are HA, the second syllable KSAH is separated into a KA and a SHAH forming the second and third syllables, MA, LA, VA, RA, YA for a total of eight and the anasvarg, the nasal symbol is composed of two elements, a crescent moon shape curve and the dot which form the ninth and tenth. For the purpose of this meditation these are all the same color, a dark blue color. They are connected to the Ten Perfections in the same way, HA represents generosity, KA morality, SHAH to patience and so forth. If one simply lists the ten perfections as they are traditionally presented and the ten syllables as they are presented in the mantra, one has the correspondence between them.

Question: Inaudible

Answer: Even if one has received the empowerment, a lung or scriptural authorization for a different text is required in order to really permit one to read these texts. Ideally because of the nature of these teachings one should receive detailed instruction on them. One should not only receive the lung but also a detailed, structured commentary by somebody who understands the text because of the obscure nature of the language. At the very least one should receive the lung or scriptural authorization before examining these kinds of texts.

Question: Could Rinpoche go into more detail on what tantric samaya is?

Answer: The word, which Tibetans use to translate samaya or commitment in the tantric sense is dam tshig, which means the word of one's bond. One is in a certain sense committing oneself in undertaking tantric practice to seek to avoid any activity or any action that is contrary to the spirit of one's tantric practice and lean towards that activity which involves one more in one's spiritual practice and helps one to live up to that tantric commitment. Now that is the basic intention by which samaya is undertaken. In terms of the actual practical discipline there is the concept of what are called the Fourteen Root Vows or the Fourteen Root Downfalls of the Vajrayana. These are the nucleus for the concept of samaya in the practical sense and the most important of these is the first root downfall which is concerned with contradicting or going against one's Vajra guru. In a certain sense rejecting or contradicting one's Vajra guru and this is the most important one to guard against.

What this means is that once one has samaya, has this connection with a particular vajra teacher, vajra guru, to develop wrong views about one's teacher, to develop animosity towards one's teacher or to reject a direct instruction from one's guru or to deliberately contradict or thwart one's guru in any way constitutes a breaking of this first samaya vow. This constitutes an infraction or the first downfall. If such a thing occurs then it can be purified by quickly acknowledging this fault and confessing it openly, simply acknowledging that one has committed such a fault, confessing it and

committing oneself not to not doing so again in the future. If one does this within a short period of time this is all that is necessary to purify one and restore the samaya bond. If one month is allowed to elapse following such an occurrence and one has done nothing to remedy the situation this is what is termed galwa or contradiction in tantric legal terminology. There is the concept that one has contradicted one's guru, gone against one's lama. If one year is allowed to elapse the severity or degree of contradiction becomes termed yampa, which means actual damage has been done to the bond. If two years are allowed to elapse and one has still not made any effort to repair one's samaya commitment then the term which is used is daypa which is to go beyond, one is out of bounds, one is outside of the samaya commitment. If three years are allowed to elapse there is what is termed complete rupture, complete breaking or literally tearing asunder the bond. Beyond the three-year period it is considered that even if at some future date one decides to do something about it at that point it is more or less impossible. An irreparable gap has occurred between oneself and one's vajra guru if one allows the three-year period to elapse without making any efforts at all to repair the damage one has done.

If one has allowed this month to pass and there is a contradiction of going against one's guru then the process which is necessary in order to completely restore the samaya bond is traditionally held to be a ganacakra feast, one offers a vajra feast to one's guru. This constitutes part of one's confession and purification, the process of offering a ganacakra to the guru. If one has allowed one year to elapse and so there is damaged that has been done to the bond then what is considered necessary to purify the vow and to show one's commitment is to offer all of one's wealth to one's guru. So perhaps someone like me being in the position of a guru would do very well if people accumulated many of these faults and offered all their wealth! (Laughter) If one has allowed two years to elapse and there is the complete transgression going beyond the terms of the samaya commitment then traditionally it is said that one should offer one's children and spouse to the guru as a sign of one's sincere repentance. Now again perhaps in this situation this wouldn't be too beneficial for someone like me who doesn't know if I could make good use of someone else's children or spouse. If one has allowed three years to elapse and there is a rupture of the samaya bond then the only means by which one can repair the samaya vow is to simply dedicate oneself totally, surrender totally to the guru. Basically one is willing to give up one's life and will do anything the guru says. If he tells you to go jump in the lake, you go jump in the lake. That kind of commitment is necessary, this kind of total surrender is necessary to repair the bond at that point.

The second of the root downfalls of the Vajrayana is to contradict the teachings, not one's teacher but the teachings of Lord Buddha or the guru. The idea here is to reject out of hand the truth or validity of a particular spiritual teaching, simply to say that something is not true, nonsense or completely reject any teaching of Dharma particularly that of the Vajrayana. While it may be impossible to actual live up to and have complete faith in all of the aspects of Dharma, never the less one should be striving in this

direction at least. There is the idea that one is trying to live up to this ideal and in particular in terms of one's lifestyle to avoid negative actions, thoughts and speech as much as possible and to encourage virtuous and positive actions, thoughts and speech. This is the basic approach of Dharma to eliminate the negative and to encourage the positive in us.

The third of the root downfalls of the Vajrayana is to be at odds with one's vajra brothers and sisters or one's Dharma brothers and sisters, one's friends in the Dharma. This has different levels of interpretation; the concept is rather complex because in a certain sense all sentient beings are one's Dharma brothers and sisters in a certain sense. There is a universality, which is part and parcel of this concept of Dharma siblings that in a certain sense we all share the experience of the Dharma with all beings. On a more intimate level there is the idea that all Buddhists, everyone who has entered the Buddhist path to liberation is part of this community, we are all Dharma friends in a sense. We have a Dharma connection. In a more intimate sense there is idea of all tantrikas, all persons who are practicing the Vajrayana being more intimately related. Furthermore within this context there is concept that someone or two individuals who share the same vajra teacher, Vajrayana master have the same father. Those who have received an initiation in the same mandala though from different teachers have the same mother. Those who have received the same empowerment from the same teacher in the same mandala have the same mother and father in the spiritual sense. This is the most intimate bond in terms of the vajra brother and sister concept or the Dharma brother and sister concept.

Now of course particularly on the general level it may be very difficult to live up to all that is implied in this commitment. One should definitely be aspiring to greater and greater ability to live up to this commitment to all beings and to one's Dharma brothers and sisters on all these levels. But in particular if one has received the same initiation from the same guru in the same mandala with someone else, this means one has a very intimate bond with that person. This needs to be respected in terms of trying to eliminate any aggression, anger or discord with the other person. This is something that people within a certain Dharma center experience as people within a given center of Dharma obviously tend to share this intimate connection. For there to be as harmonious relations as possible, as free from animosity, anger and ill-will as possible, is very important.

The fourth root downfall of tantra recognizes the importance of loving-kindness and compassion towards all beings. So the downfall or the infraction occurs when one develops real ill-will or malevolence towards another being. If one has very serious negative intent towards another being, the wish to harm or the wish to hinder and so forth then this constitutes the fourth downfall of the tantra.

The fifth through fourteenth vows are complex and people may be discouraged to hear about them. They may feel they are being presented something they can not keep. It is running late any way so we won't discuss them. If people feel it is necessary we can cover them tomorrow, if people feel that this is useful. The basic point is that if one is sincerely trying to

practice through one's meditation, recitation and all the different elements of one's practice then one is doing the best one can. There is a certain amount to be said for this; one is attempting at least sincerely to live up to one's commitments.

Let us dedicate the merit and virtue from this teaching to the benefit of all sentient beings.

As we said yesterday in order for one's practice of Dharma to be really effective, one needs to understand something about the nature of mind. Because with this understanding not only does one's confidence in what one is doing in practicing Dharma increase but one will actually find the practice far easier to undertake with this basic understanding. As we were also discussing yesterday using the example of the crystal clear water, the transparent water, pure water to represent the pure nature of mind, the ultimate or fundamental nature of mind. To this we added the element of mud which was stirred into the water polluting or obscuring element which is the fundamental ignorance and the basic level of discursive consciousness. So basically the situation at present is an admixture of these two aspects of mind. There is the pure ultimate nature of mind which is termed kun shi ye she in Tibetan, the fundamental primordial or intrinsic awareness and the sullying element the kun shi nam she, meaning the fundamental original discursive awareness. These two are present in our current situation like the clear water and the mud, which is stirred into the water, obscuring it. The discussion also touched upon the eight aspects of consciousness, which refer entirely to the confused and discursive element, the kun shi nam she which is in fact one of these eight aspects of consciousness, the origin of the other seven.

If we think of the kun shi nam she, this fundamental, original discursive level of awareness or consciousness as the main body or torso then the limbs or appendages, the secondary developments from this are what are termed the six sense-consciousnesses. This basically means that consciousness expresses itself in a number of different ways. There is visual consciousness, auditory consciousness, olfactory, gustatory and tactile, all of these associated with seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching. There is a sixth sense or sensory consciousness, which is mind itself, thinking and producing thoughts, the inner workings of mind not necessarily related with an exterior sensory object. These are what are referred to as the six sensory consciousnesses, which develop from the fundamental discursive consciousness.

In positing that there is any one of these sensory consciousnesses, for example visual consciousness, it would seem to follow that there are both a visual object, there is a sensory object to which that consciousness relates and there is a faculty or an organ of vision in this case. There is a faculty or sensory channel based upon a particular organ of in this case sight. So we

have in any sensory situation three elements. To take the example of sight we have visual consciousness, the faculty of vision and the object, the forms and shapes which the mind perceives through the avenue of the eye. This follows for each of the six sensory consciousnesses. We arrive at a total of eighteen; the six consciousnesses with the six faculties and the six objects to which these consciousnesses relate giving us what are termed the eighteen dhatus or eighteen spheres or realms which is one particular way of analyzing one's experience.

In fact these faculties such as vision or hearing which in Tibetan are called wang po or literally power are actually conceived of as a subtle organ, not a physical organ like the ear but the faculty itself has some subtle characteristics. Traditional imagery was used to describe these. For example the faculty of vision was compared to a flower in full bloom and the faculty of hearing to a curl of bark or paper. The faculty of smell was compared to a needle, long and thin while the faculty of taste was compared to a crescent moon. The faculty of touch was compared to the feathers on a bird's skin indicating that this faculty of tactile consciousness pervaded the whole body. The faculty of mind, the sixth sense being mind itself producing thoughts was compared to a clean or polished mirror.

Again we mentioned that there is the third element of a sensory object, one has this visual consciousness for example and the visual faculty but there is also a necessity for something perceived visually. These are the different sensory objects we would refer to by general category such as forms which are seen, sound which is heard, smell, taste, touch or texture and as far as the inner consciousness is concerned we can have phenomena or ideas, thoughts in the mind as being the sensory objects themselves.

Each one of these elements, these three elements are necessary in any sensory perception in order for it to be effective. If one has the faculty of vision and the visual consciousness but there is no form to be perceived obviously the whole act will not be complete. There will not be an act of seeing or even if there is visual consciousness, the potential for visual consciousness in terms of a mind and the forms to be seen if the faculty of vision is impaired, if one is blind or the eyes are covered. In this example again one of the elements is missing and there is not an effective situation present. So all three of these, the consciousness, the faculty and the object need to come together in order to make an effective sensory situation.

Then to carry this through to its logical conclusion if there were the faculty of vision or the organ of vision and the form but no consciousness then again we would have a situation where the perception would not take place, one would have a corpse. The organ of vision is present but no consciousness is behind it to perceive.

Now in our particular situation in experiencing physical existence in a physical body, we are undergoing a process, which is the result of the maturation of, or ripening of karmic tendencies, which were reinforced in past lifetimes. The technical term for this physical body is the body of complete ripening or complete maturation that is to say of karma. In this particular situation all three of these elements are necessary for the perception to be

effective. We have these different kinds of sensory consciousnesses. We need these different faculties of sensation and we need the third object in this situation to be perceived. When all of these come together then there is an effective perceptual situation as far as we are concerned in our physical waking state. But while this is true on a conventional level, ultimately speaking the faculties of the senses and in fact the objects themselves are based upon the activity of mind, the projection of mind. Ultimately our experience is completely subjective in nature, completely mental in nature. All we experience is a projection of mind. From this point of view it is possible to have the faculties of vision and so forth even when a physical body is not part of the situation. Even when one is not in a physical body with the different sense organs never the less the faculties may be present, as this is simply an expression of the workings of mind.

This is easy to understand when one considers the situation of someone dreaming. When one goes to sleep the different sense organs are no longer functioning but never the less because of the habitual tendencies of mind to experiences in certain ways, the impressions carry over to the dream state where one is in a different kind of body. One is not experiencing with the physical body but with a dream body but never the less one in a dream can see forms though the eyes are closed, hear sounds and so forth, all within the context of the dream. There is this complete sensory development within the context of the dream.

Furthermore at the moment of death there is a separation between the mind and the physical body of the particular individual who dies. The physical body is buried or cremated and simply discarded. It is no longer connected with the consciousness and so the consciousness is no longer experiencing the world through the avenue of the physical body. But never the less even in the bardo or after death state there is a kind of mental body, a kind of body through which the consciousness experiences in terms of seeing form, hearing sounds and so forth. There is no physical basis for these sensory perceptions.

So all of these six sensory consciousnesses, visual and so forth are part of … So the fact that all of these are complete in the situation means that strictly speaking there is no need for a physical organ in order for the consciousness to express itself in a particular way. There is no need for the eye in order to see, ultimately speaking. The point is that in our present situation we are extremely attached to the reality of the situation as it is in the moment and feel that simply this is the only way that the mind can express itself, visually through the eyes, to hear sounds through the ears and so forth. Now with the realization of the entirely subjective nature of experience, that everything we experience is a projection of mind, a certain freedom begins to be felt. The way this is traditionally illustrated is to point out that for bodhisattvas, beings who have realized the first Bodhisattva bhumi or higher states of realization, there is a freedom even in terms of the actual way the sense organs and sensory faculties work. So that whereas we as unenlightened individuals can only see with our eyes, a bodhisattva can see, hear, smell, taste and touch with the faculty of vision alone. The faculty of hearing can see, hear, smell, taste and touch. Any one of the sensory faculties can be used in any way

because at this point the fact that it is all a projection of mind, all based upon consciousness gives one a freedom. Whereas in the present situation we are extremely caught up in the reality of only being able to experience the world in certain ways.

So we have the idea of these six kinds of consciousness, visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile and mental and of the fundamental discursive consciousness on the level of fundamental ignorance in the mind. These are along with the subject/object split forming a kind of a seventh category or seventh aspect. Now where the concept of the eight aspects of consciousness comes in, the eighth represents a kind of bridge or link between this original state and the six sensory consciousnesses. If we compare the fundamental discursive consciousness to an ocean and the six sensory faculties to the waves on the surface of that ocean, the actual agitation of the water, the actual moving of the water, which causes the waves, is the eighth aspect we are looking for. This kind of moving of mind, this restlessness of mind is termed in Tibetan dematachige (?), which means literally the mind of immediacy. The idea is that in any given moment there is this restlessness or stirring of mind which expresses itself in different ways, i.e. forming waves on the surface of the ocean. This is the eighth aspect of consciousness that we are speaking about when we use the term the eight aspects or the eight kinds of discursive consciousness.

Another consideration or another system of looking at this is to consider the emotionality of mind. Now whether we talk about simple or basic emotional patterns such as the three fundamental mental poisons or the five or six basic emotions or whether we speak in terms of twenty-one thousand or eighty-four thousand emotions, this is a very complex picture. Never the less there is this element of emotionality in the mind, coloring the way in which consciousness expresses itself. This particular aspect is sometimes termed the mind of emotionality or the aspect of emotionality, which functions as an eighth. Some system which do not speak in terms of this restless, momentary stirring of mind but instead of the emotional tingeing or coloring of mind which is referred to as the eighth consciousness. So in examining a concept like the eight aspects of consciousness one will come across these two systems one which speaks in terms of the eighth aspect being a momentary restlessness or simple stirring of mind whereas the other speaks in terms of the emotional content of mind. All of this is based upon the concept of an I or self, the fact that there is this fundamental discursive consciousness of self and other, and particularly the I or self which is clung to as ultimately real. Based upon this all of the emotionality develops and in some systems this is considered the eighth aspect of consciousness.

Regardless of how we split it up and split hairs about it, the fact remains that we have all of them in our present situation. As unenlightened beings the whole package is present, all of these eight aspects of consciousness are part of our experience. Now what we experience on the impure level as these eight aspects of consciousness are transformed through spiritual practice into a pure experience and the iconography that is used to express or symbolize this pure experience is that the eight aspects of consciousness are symbolized by the eight masculine Bodhisattvas. The eight sensory objects

or the eight objects of these kinds of discursive consciousness are symbolized by the eight feminine Bodhisattvas.

One sees this kind of transformation being symbolized in the layout of the mandala, of any given mandala. In this particular case when we speak of the transformation that occurs in one's experience of the impure experience or confused experience becomes pure awareness then what had been experienced as the eight aspects of consciousness is represented by the eight cemeteries or charnel grounds which are positioned around the exterior circumference of the mandala. What is experienced rather than the eight aspects of unenlightened consciousness is represented by the eight masculine and eight feminine Bodhisattvas in the mandala of deities.

In the extensive mandala of Kalachakra or any other major tantric deity the symbolism is used of a celestial palace or mansion which is the residence or environment of the deity. The terms that are actually used to describe this environment or residence are very much like reading an architect's plan for a building. One speaks of four walls, four sides with four doors, different floors, staircases, doorways, lintels over the door, parapets, balconies, friezes around the outside building and so forth. The description is very much like a plan for a real building, a solid physical structure. But the point is here that this is a diagram or symbol of what are termed the Thirty-seven Elements Conducive to Enlightenment, this is a rather complicated list or classification of different elements of one's spiritual practice which are conducive towards one's progress to the goal of enlightenment. Examples are the Four Kinds of Mindfulness, the Four Types of Proper Renunciation or Proper Choosing of One's Actions, the Four Bases For Psychic Power, the Five Spiritual Faculties Which Develop into Five Stable Powers, the Seven Elements Conducive to Developing One's Enlightening Attitude or Proper Motivation, the Noble Eightfold Path and so forth. All of these added together constitute a total of thirty-seven elements in a successful spiritual practice. All of these find expression in the symbolic diagram of the celestial mansion.

As unenlightened beings, sentient beings in the cycle of rebirth, we experience a basically impure or confused level of experience. But the stages of Bodhisattva realization represent a pure counterpart to this and the ultimate goal of Buddhahood, of complete enlightenment represents the ultimate purity, the stage of ultimate purity. At our present point we are more or less poised on the boundary between impurity and purity. If we take a rather mundane example of two countries, suppose England was the place of purity and America was the level of impurity. The idea would be of a journey from America to England by plane or boat however the idea is of a journey, not in a physical sense. This is simply a very graphic example however the idea is of moving or progressing from one stage of being towards another. The path, which one follows in a spiritual sense, is one's practice of Dharma.

In approaching meditation there are two kinds of methods one can use. There is the concept we were discussing yesterday of receiving some kind of instruction from the spiritual teacher and going home thinking about it and actually analyzing one's consciousness, looking at one's mind and going over it again and again. This is some kind of intellectual search going on, some

kind of intellectual analysis. This is what is known as the intellectual meditation, the intellectual approach to meditation. The particular term given to it in Tibetan is shay pay ka bap, which means the intellectual or analytical meditation of a pundit or scholar. Another kind of meditation or another way to approach this direct experience of the nature of mind is what is termed drup pay ka bap which means the intuitive meditation of a yogi or of someone's concentration whose not intellectual or scholastic but simply experiential.

So there are these two approaches. One can approach it in terms of an analytical process in terms of intellectually analyzing consciousness and examining whether the mind has such and such a characteristic or not and so forth, examining consciousness from different angles in order to arrive at a clear understanding and direct experience. There is also the possibility of simply resting the mind in that state and becoming aware of it without any intellectual search being part of the process. So at this point we can consider this kind of technique, this type of intuitive meditation. In fact it would probably be very beneficial for us to experience something of this, to try simply putting the mind in a state of meditation without trying in an intellectual way to arrive at a particular experience, simply putting the mind there and try to become aware of it. Try to touch that experience without an intellectual search being part of the process.

Currently there is quite an incredible level of intellectual and technological sophistication in the world and this takes people to the actual frontiers of knowledge, continually expanding the frontiers of our knowledge. Inevitably of course something like the nature of mind, the actual nature of consciousness is going to become more of an object of speculation and inquiry. But how effective will this really be? For example if I'm looking for someone perhaps I'm looking for Kalu Rinpoche. Now I can look all over the planet for Kalu Rinpoche and I'm not going to find him, as I'm Kalu Rinpoche. As long as go all over the place looking for myself, I'm not going to find him. In the same sense when one is trying to look at mind, what is looking for mind is mind itself. Mind trying to find mind would seem to be the wrong way to approach it.

On the other hand if I'm looking for Kalu Rinpoche and some kind person comes and puts a mirror in front of me, I might have found him right away. There he was! In the same way the guru's instructions in meditation and in actually experiencing the nature of one's mind functions as kind of a mirror. If one is able to receive instructions in meditation and simply apply them directly then who knows, this might be very effective. One may find oneself. Mind may see mind.

There is a quote from the first Karmapa, Dusum Khyenpa who said if you want to see the hill over there; you have to look from the hill here. The idea being that to get best view one has to choose the proper conditions. Furthermore he said if you want to understand the nature of mind, physical posture is quite important. Indicating that there is a certain relationship between the physical posture that one assumes in meditation and the effectiveness of one's meditation.

There is a Jataka tale of one of the Buddha's former incarnations during which time he was a saint or rishi practicing ascetics and meditation in a forest. He would maintain a very erect posture, correct meditation posture throughout the day. In the forest there lived a band of five hundred monkeys. The strongest was the leader of the troop and the leader started to imitate the sage. He would sit in the correct meditation posture all the time and the other monkeys started to imitate as well as they have this tendency to imitate what others do. So they all started sitting around in the correct meditation posture and some of them actually had meditative experiences. So who knows, maybe this sort of thing is possible?

Of course this is no guarantee that one's meditation will be excellent simply through physical posture. Many people do experience difficulty in learning how to meditate properly and in having some sort of experience of the fundamental nature of mind. This does not indicate that the potential is not there, that one does not have the tathagatagarbha that one has somehow failed to be gifted with the potential for enlightenment. It simply means that the obscurations tend to be quite strong, the karmic obscurations, the emotional clouding and so forth of the mind are quite dense. They don't permit one to touch that experience directly and this is why the other supportive practices of Dharma practice are supportive to meditation. These include purification practices, practices for accumulating merit and deepening one's awareness, this is why all of these are helpful as they help to eliminate or at least thin out the veils of obscuration to permit a direct experience more easily.

During the lifetime of Lord Buddha there was one of his disciples who was a particularly thick individual, he was incredibly stupid. He could not learn a thing. In fact he was so bad that he could not learn the alphabet. People had told him it was very beneficial to learn the alphabet as the basics for learning, writing and reading. But the poor fellow would learn B and forget A, he was that stupid. He could not learn a thing.

The other monks came to the Buddha and asked if he should leave, as he was not doing any good. He certainly could not study or learn to become a teacher. He could not even learn his own practice. The Buddha said it was okay and that there were other ways to learn. We can help him anyway though he is unable to study at the present moment. He took the poor fellow and led him up to the temple where the monks assembled for meditation and services. He said to the very stupid monk that he wanted him to keep the shrine room clean and be the caretaker of the shrine as this is where the holy scriptures are kept and where the noble Sangha meets for their meditation and devotions. He should clean it every day, sweep it out, and place fresh offerings on the shrine and so forth. So the fellow went to work with a will and acted as the custodian of the shrine and temple. He kept it clean, made the offerings and just generally taking care of it. The merit he accumulated began to effect his awareness and he began to actually develop a deeper awareness and more intelligence to the point where he began studying. He also began to understand what he was studying and eventually he was able to take meditation teachings directly from the Buddha. Based upon this effort he practiced and realized the state of an Arhat or Realized One of the

Hinayana level of practice. In fact in the traditional presentation of the Hinayana we find reference to the Sixteen Arhats, the sixteen major teachers of this level of the Buddhist doctrine. He in fact is one of the Sixteen Arhats.

To illustrate what is necessary in coming to this understanding of the nature of mind there is a quote, which is held to come from the Dharmakaya Buddha Vajradhara, is held to be a direct inspiration from Vajradhara to the lineage. The quote says in order to realize Mahamudra, in order to have the direct experience of the nature of mind, other than one's own efforts in purifying oneself and developing one's merit and deepening one's own awareness in addition to blessings one receives from one's guru, other than these one should understand that any other attempt is useless. In fact it would be deluded to try and approach the realization, expecting the realization from anything other than those two things. So this indicates that as far as the realization of Mahamudra goes, only two things are absolutely essential. These two things are first one's own personal practice and effort at purifying oneself of obscurations and negative karmic tendencies, developing one's merit and deepening one's awareness. Faith and devotion towards one's guru which in turn opens one to the blessings of the guru and having received his blessing is the second element. So other than these two things, the direct experience of Mahamudra will not arise from any other causes and conditions.

At this point perhaps we could actually meditate together, actually experience something of the actual practice of meditation rather than the theory. Now, as with all practice of Dharma or study of Dharma one begins the session of meditation with the fundamental foundation or basis of taking refuge and developing or arousing bodhicitta. To begin with there is a visualization or meditation connected with this in order to stabilize the foundation one is beginning with. So at this point meditate that the sky in front of you are the sources of refuge, the Three Jewels, being the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha and the Three Roots, the gurus of the lineage, the meditational deities, and the Dharma Protectors and dakinis. All of these Three Jewels and Three Roots, all of these sources of refuge are in a resplendent assembly in front oneself, extremely clear and distinct but completely insubstantial like rainbows appearing in the sky, brilliantly clear in front of one. One visualizes oneself in the presence of these sources of refuge.

Furthermore one meditates that oneself and all beings in the universe, all sentient beings, unenlightened beings are present as well, in the presence of the sources of refuge. The approach is through considering that because of the four levels of obscuration that we have been discussing yesterday and today, oneself and all beings continue to wander in the cycle of rebirth and experience different kinds of suffering, the suffering of actual painful situations, the suffering of change and impermanence and the suffering of simply being alive, the pervasive, fundamental suffering, subtle suffering. All of these beings experiencing the ocean of endless suffering on and on have no hope in this particular situation without looking beyond the situation of actually seeking or finding some true happiness. Furthermore through taking refuge in the Three Jewels and Three Roots, the sources of refuge one can temporarily, in the short term, receive blessing and guidance which will

actually protect one, provide refuge from pain, suffering, and fear. It will also give one the necessary blessing to progress oneself towards that state of being beyond suffering itself to actually experience directly the level of complete enlightenment. It is with this attitude of seeking this refuge both within the temporary and ultimate sense that oneself and all beings are going for refuge in the Three Jewels and Three Roots. At this point as we recite the refuge formula a number of times together, one should be conscious of this attitude with which one is taking refuge. (Recite refuge formula)

Following the taking of refuge one visualizes from the sources of refuge, the Three Jewels and the Three Roots a effulgence of light radiates forth and bathes oneself and all beings in its brilliance, purifying the confusion and obscurations in the minds of all beings and bestowing blessings. In this state of mind one simply lets the mind relax for a few moments.

Following the completion of the taking of refuge it is also necessary to arouse one's bodhicitta, one's altruistic concern for others in spiritual practice. This is based upon one's compassion and empathy for all other living beings. Now to say that one must arouse compassion in order to develop bodhicitta is not as easy as it sounds. It is not simply sitting down and looking at a particular being and thinking "Oh I feel so compassionate towards you" It does come that way. It is not something one forces in that way. There are however means by which to approach the situation in order to arouse or allow the compassion simply to express itself. For example one can develop compassion through a consideration of one's own situation, being compassionate towards and through oneself so to speak. One can arouse compassion through examining the situation of other beings. One can arouse compassion through examining causality, the relationship between our actions and our experiences. There are different approaches to develop compassion rather than simply saying I should have compassion so I have it. It doesn't happen that easily. One has to work at developing it, allowing it to express itself.

There are actually quite detailed instructions on a seven-fold progression in one's attitude, one leading to the other, which results in a feeling of compassion towards other beings. To explain this would require far more time than we have to go into but never the less it is necessary to mention this concept at this point, the importance of compassion and the skillful means which one uses in order to develop it.

I had one Western gentleman come to me who said that when he was thinking about the concept of compassion he found it was very easy to have pity for beings who were worse states than him, people who were more poor, sicker, hungry and so forth who were in worse circumstances. It was very easy to have a spontaneous pity without working on it at all. But vis-a-vis people who were in a better situation than he were more wealthy, more fortunate, in a better state of health and so forth, he found it very difficult. This is quite accurate what he was saying and fairly obvious actually. To look at someone who is rich, powerful and healthy and think what a pity or what a shame is not examining it from the right way. This is not the way compassion is developed. There is a difference between sentimental pity which is very

easy to have without working on it at all, it is simply a part of us more or less naturally, and true compassion.

One way to approach this is by developing compassion towards oneself because one is after all a sentient being like all other sentient beings in samsara. In one's own particular situation there are, as there are for all beings, different levels of obscuration, ignorance, dualistic clinging, emotionality, karmic tendencies and so forth. Because of these one is experiencing certain sufferings and frustrations in one's particular situation. There are even elements of frustration and suffering that one is not aware of due to the extreme state of ignorance one is in. Because one is, for example a human being, there is part of the human condition in terms of the suffering of diseases, old age and death, which are going to overtake one inevitably. There is the fear of death; there is the knowledge that one has no idea where one is going after death, where one's karma will take one in terms of future experience, existences. If one looks at one's own situation, one can see oneself as quite helpless and simply tossed around with very little control in the situation, very similar to the consciousness of a being in the bardo state. There is very little control and very little freedom in the situation. Now having realized that, one extends that understanding to all beings who are in the same situation. We are all in the same boat. We all have the same limitations and are subject to the same kinds of sufferings and shortcomings. So based upon one's own situation, a thorough examination and honest appraisal of one's own situation as an unenlightened being, one gains a handle on the situation and extends that to all sentient beings. This gives one a way of empathizing with all other beings through understanding one's own situation.

Another approach is to consider causality, consider the relationship between actions and experience in terms of cause and effect, to develop some kind of true compassion. One can see again a parallel between oneself and all beings as the basic search of each and every being is for happiness. Anything that is alive wants to be happy, is looking for some kind of happiness on some level no matter how primitive and is seeking to avoid unhappiness, harmful or painful situations. But the point is that very few beings even understand the way to go about finding that happiness, what actually constitutes a cause of true happiness in terms of virtuous and positive actions, speech and thoughts. How many beings actually understand that and how many of those who do understand are actually able to put it into practice, are actually able to do it and develop the causes of true happiness? On the other hand, how many beings understand the causes of unhappiness in terms of negative and harmful actions, thoughts and speech, harmful to oneself and others? Again how many beings are aware of the fact that these are the causes of the unhappiness which all of us are trying to avoid? How many beings who actually understand that are actually able to carry it through to actual practice and avoid the causes of unhappiness? So this is another way to approach developing compassion, looking at the situation and seeing the contradiction between what we do and what we want, what we would like to have and how we actually go about trying in this very confused, inverted way to get it. One realizes that oneself and all beings are the same in this search for happiness, this fruitless and pointless search for happiness

in terms of going about it entirely the wrong way. This is another way to develop an appreciation of our limitations in the situation and a way to develop compassion and empathy for each and every living thing.

Another way to approach the whole problem of developing true compassion is through examining the situations of beings in the different realms of existence in the cycle of rebirth. This is a subject to which a great deal of teaching and commentary has been devoted and again we don't have a great deal of time to go through all this. To consider it briefly one would work with meditations on the Six Realms of existence. For example one could begin with the hell realms and consider first the hot hells, the experience of beings there. Now even the least severe experience of pain and suffering in the first hot hell involves experiencing the pain of death thousands of times every day and night, thousands of times on a regular basis. A continual experience of the suffering and trauma of death, not just an ordinary death simply passing away but being sliced, beaten and torn to pieces by beings with weapons, spears and so forth. So one undergoes this agony of a traumatic, violent and painful death thousands and thousands times every day and night in this kind of hellish realm.

In terms of our human experience we have time divided into cycles of roughly thirty days to a month and twelve months to a year and so forth. If we take one of our years in human terms this is one day for one of the Desire Realm gods termed the Heaven of the Thirty-three. If we take this as a basis for thirty days roughly in each month and twelve months in a year, these gods in this particular realm live for one thousand of those years, a fairly fixed span of life [129,600,000 human years]. One of their years [129,600 human years] is one day in the first of the hot hells and during this day, this infinitely long day there is the continual experience of thousands and thousands of deaths from which one is continually revived only to experience death again and again.

For the beings in this particular hell using this day as a basis for computing months and years, these being live one thousand of those years. So there is this infinitely long [46,656,000,000 human years] time of this infinitely great suffering which is being experienced by a being in this particular hell realm. The different hell realms are multiples of each other, the next hell realm is so many times worse and longer than the first one in terms of the intensity of suffering and the duration of life.

Traditionally we refer to the Eighteen Hells or hell regions, realms of existence. The numbers of beings who are in these states of hell at the present moment experiencing these states of hell are infinite. The numbers of beings who are contributing to the causes of such a hellish rebirth in terms of their negative actions are again infinite. Now if one considers this, thinks clearly about it, it would seem there is no way one could not develop compassion and empathy, sympathy for all these beings in these states of existence who are actually experiencing this suffering or those who are doomed to experience that kind of suffering by the way they act in the present moment.

The next lowest realm of existence is the preta realm or hungry ghost realm. Many different kinds of experiences, some thirty-two different kinds of experiences in this realm have been clearly set forth in the traditional teachings. Again this is a realm of intense suffering and long duration. The frame of reference for computing the time is that one human month equals one day in the experience of a preta. Using this as a basis for computation the pretas live for some five hundred years [5,400,000 human years].

The particular suffering in the hungry ghost realm is of deprivation and a poverty-stricken experience of the world especially in terms of hunger and thirst. Hunger and thirst beyond anything we can imagine, the kind of thirst that one would develop from going without water for ten or twelve years, not seeing water or even hearing the name of water in that length of time. This kind of suffering is very common among the hungry ghosts. This intense kind of desperation is also seen in the way that hungry ghosts are born. It is said that a female preta will give birth to five hundred preta children at one time and because there is no food for the mother or the children they end up eating each other. Sometimes the children turn upon the mother and devour her alive or the mother will devour her own children alive in order to survive. This kind of intense suffering is part of the experience in the hungry ghost or preta realm.

The next lowest realm is the animal realm and by far the majority of beings in the animal realm are not directly perceptible to human beings. A term used to describe the vast majority of these animals is the naga class of beings. The Lord Buddha at one point stated that nagas are so numerous that in the impression of a horse's hoofprint there are ten thousand colonies of nagas. So they are extremely microscopic and extremely numerous. There is never the less suffering even on this microscopic scale of being oppressed by the elements, of being flayed and beaten, crushed and so forth. There is also the predation of one species upon another and so forth. So even though this particular part of the animal world is not directly perceptible to our senses never the less it does exist and the beings in this state of existence experience pain and suffering which is very real.

To get some idea of the suffering in the animal realm we need only look at the life in the ocean and the continual predation of one species upon another which is probably most obvious in this particular environment. Now of all the possibilities of rebirth in the animal realm perhaps the most favorable would be a pet such as the cats and dogs that people, particularly in the West take very good care of. But even an animal in this fortunate state of rebirth is still limited by its ignorance and stupidity. If you have a favorite pet and say to that pet OM MANI PADME HUM, it could not understand let alone start reciting. If you explain something about meditation to the animal, the animal can not start to meditate. If you explain something about the concepts of Dharma, the possibility of enlightenment the animal simply doesn't understand. An animal simply lacks the intelligence to understand something as complicated and profound as the teachings of Dharma. This is something, which is beyond the capacity of an animal in that particular incarnation at least to perceive. So temporarily speaking the animal has no hope of becoming enlightened even in that particularly favorable situation.

In terms of our own human experience, the human realm, there are sufferings that are part and parcel of the human condition. There are the sufferings of birth, the aging process, of sickness and of death to which each and every human is subject. Also part of the human condition is a certain sense of frustration in never being able to achieve what one wants and being separated constantly from the fulfillment of one's desires or the objects of one's desires. This can take very serious forms. People have been known to commit suicide over unrequited love, a man who is rejected by the woman he loves may kill themselves, as they are so unhappy. This is part of the human condition as well this kind of frustration and pain from being separated from the object of one's desires, never being able to fulfill or achieve the object of one's desires.

There is also the suffering of continually encountering unpleasant and disastrous circumstances, circumstances that one would never wish for in a million years but is never the less forced up against because of the particular situation. For example when the Chinese communist forces invaded Tibet many hundreds of thousands of people killed themselves when they saw what was happening. They were so upset they actually took their own lives, jumping into rivers or stabbing themselves to death. This is an extreme example of this kind of meeting with negative circumstances or coming up against something one does not want but is forced to come into contact with. In the particular case of the Tibetan people, the current situation is far easier due to the reforms, which have occurred in the country. The sufferings and hardships that the people experienced before have been lessened to a very great extent.

Other kinds of suffering are the inability to be able to hang on to what one has. For example if one is a wealthy person one simply can not maintain their wealth. It is continually leaking away and people in America must be very familiar with this feeling. There is also the suffering of not being able to get what you do want, not only the inability to hold on to what one has but there is always something else that one can not get a hold of. Someone is poor and wants to be rich, someone is sick and wants to be healthy and so forth. Again this is something we are all familiar with, this inability to live up to what we would like or experience what we would like.

Examining the higher states of rebirth in samsara, one can consider the suffering in the god realms due to the instability of that situation and falling back into the lower realms of existence. There are the demi-gods realm with quarrel and strife, which is the major suffering there. The point is that when one examines each and every possibility within the cycle of rebirth one sees that there is no escape from this fundamental experience of pain and suffering. The whole cycle of rebirth is a giant ocean of suffering in which beings are continually immersed.

So when we consider the situation of beings who are lost in these different realms of suffering, this gives us a means of developing the motivation to enlighten and free those beings from those states of suffering. How would one go about this in one's present situation where one is not particularly effective in liberation beings from samsara and leading beings towards

enlightenment? The point is that through one's own practice and through one's own achievement of enlightenment one becomes far more effective. In fact the goal of Buddhahood represents a state of power and fearlessness from which this true effectiveness in guiding beings is possible. So the motivation is one of achieving enlightenment but not simply for one's own sake but in order to become increasingly effective in leading all beings. This eventually leads to the complete enlightenment of each and every being, the liberation of each and every being from the cycle of rebirth.

So at this point returning to the context of this session of meditation, beginning with the taking of refuge followed by at this point the recitation of the bodhicitta prayers, the prayers for arousing bodhicitta. These are the particular thoughts that are behind such an arousal of bodhicitta, these different ways we have been talking about to approach the generation of compassion, the development of compassion. (Recitation of bodhicitta prayers)

So much for the preparation for beginning any session of meditation. As far as the actual practice goes in the present circumstances, one should keep in mind that physical posture is important. The body should be held erect and straight, not tense and rigid. Never the less a certain sense of stability and erectness to the posture is important, as there is an intimate relationship between mind and body. Mind depends upon the physical body to a certain extent and there is a relationship between the awareness of the physical body and the actual state of mind. The mind is extremely sensitive to the posture and sensations on the physical level. Now in terms of the physical aspect then, the posture should be correct. In terms of the mental aspect, the point of this meditation is simply to relax the mind without any contrivance, without any effort in the mind to meditate or to produce a particular result at all. Simply let the mind relax in its natural state effortlessly with artifice or contrivance.

The example is like having a large cauldron or pot filled with water into which mud has been stirred. Now if one wants to see the clarity of the water one simply leaves the pot alone. You don't stir it at all; you don't mix it up at all. You simply let everything settle to the bottom and the water becomes clear. So the point in this meditation is that any contrivance, artificiality or effort in the mind is contrary to the spirit of it. One simply lets the mind settle, lets the mind relax to experience that clarity.

What this means in terms of the practical feeling tone of the meditation is that the mind is not concerned with looking outside or looking within, it is not directed in any way, the consciousness or attention. This is no effort to make anything any better or any worse for that matter but simply to let the mind relax. There should be a state of bare awareness so that the mind is not distracted, does not waver but there is simply a state of bare awareness, the bare spark of aware intelligence. This is all that is necessary; this is sufficient for the purpose of the meditation.

When resting the mind in this way, uncontrived meditation, if the mind becomes dull, if that spark of awareness is extinguished then this is not meditation but actually a kind of stupidity, a kind of lethargy. This is quite

what we are working towards. The point is that there should be just a bare spark of awareness, unimpeded, it should not be obstructed or suppressed in any way but never the less just that bare spark. Just the first flicker of awareness or gleam of awareness in the mind without any distraction beyond that is the goal.

When meditating in this way people encounter many thoughts coming up in the mind, there is a lot of activity in the mind. Now the approach at this point in this particular context is not the suppression of or cutting off of thoughts that one might pursue during the practice of samatha meditation for developing tranquility. In samatha meditation pure and simple the idea is to cut off the thought and return to the meditation. This is not the point here. It would seem unlikely that it is possible for us to have authentic Mahamudra experience of just the spontaneous liberation of thoughts as enlightened awareness. However the particular approach we might take is to regard the thoughts as neither good nor bad but simply be aware of them as they arise. So part of this momentary glimmer of awareness, this spark of awareness takes into consideration the awareness of the thoughts as they arise, with nothing beyond that. No following after the thought, no attempt to cut off or suppress the thought. Now if one follows this technique towards one's thoughts, one regards them as neither acceptable nor unacceptable, neither good nor bad. They are not something to be indulged in or repressed and cut off. One is simply aware of them as they arise. They may very well dissolve back into the emptiness of mind and simply cease to be a problem. Regardless of whether they are present or not the point is to be aware of the fact that they are present and beyond that bare spark of awareness there is a thought in the mind that nothing is necessary.

Gampopa stated that when the mind is uncontrived it is blissful the same way, as when water is not agitated or obscured, it is clear. Yesterday we were discussing the nature of mind, the way mind is. As we discussed yesterday one can consider it from the point of view of the essential emptiness of mind in being no thing in and of itself, the clarity or illuminating nature or potential of mind and the unimpeded manifestation. In the context of this meditation because this is intrinsically the way mind is, this is the intrinsic or ultimate nature of mind, one way to allow that to express itself is simply to relax the mind. Simply let the mind rest in a state of total relaxation, complete relaxation and allow the nature of mind to express itself, to manifest itself, that which is intrinsically there. This experience is again connected with the essential emptiness of mind; it is an experience of this essential emptiness, this clear or illuminating nature of mind. The unimpeded manifestation in this particular context is this spark of awareness, this bare awareness of the experience is the unimpeded manifestation, is this third aspect of the nature of mind.

Many tantric masters of India, the Mahasiddhas were noted for saying that meditation per se has nothing to do with efforts to meditate, as long as one is using a particular technique to meditate, as long as there is effort or contrivance involved this is not true meditation. In the state of true meditation there is no meditating going on at all, no one is meditating on anything when

there is true meditation. There is simply the direct experience of the natural state of mind; mind simply rests in its own nature.

Through this kind of meditation, this kind of experience first and foremost develops a kind of stability of mind, this samatha aspect of the experience. The mind, while not losing any clarity or awareness, never the less becomes more peaceful, simply rests, and is not so agitated as before. It is not a state of dullness or lethargy but never the less the mind develops a certain sense of peace and calm. This is the samatha or shi nay tranquility aspect of meditation.

If because of this tranquility and calmness of mind there is a growing appreciation of the empty essence and clear or illuminating nature of mind and this spark of awareness which is the unimpeded manifestation of mind, if all of these are present then this direct experience ripens into what is termed the vipasyana experience. This is insight into the actual nature of mind. At this point if one can approach a skilled spiritual teacher for pointing out instructions, for an actual practical demonstration of the nature of one's own mind, this preparation through one's practice of this kind of meditation is very effective in making the situation come together. At this point a great deal of benefit can be received by the student from the teacher who can indicate at that point the nature of the student's mind and more or less point out the Mahamudra experience for that student.

Having had a such an experience, this Mahamudra experience, this flash of insight, if one can maintain this and it becomes a stable element in one's experience then total and complete enlightenment, the level of Buddhahood is not a distant goal indeed. This can be realized within a matter of months or even within several years, definitely within this lifetime. With this authentic Mahamudra experience there is no need to search for any other means to purify oneself of negativity and obscuration. All of those obscuring and distorting confusing elements in one's experience are counteracted by or eliminated by this experience and there is simply no other technique or method which is more beneficial than simply this direct experience.

Because all of this negativity and the obscurations develop from the naïve clinging to the ego or self as something ultimately real, other as something ultimately real and clinging to everything one experiences as somehow being ultimately real in and of itself, it is this naïve realism, this naïve clinging to the reality of what we experience that causes the problem in the first place. The Mahamudra experience if it is deeply rooted, if one has a deep, direct and profound experience, demonstrates to one the non-reality, the relativity of everything one experiences. At this point the ground is simply cut away, there is no ground for such an occurrence as a negative or confused thought to arise as there is no clinging to a self, other or the relationship between the two and the phenomena one encounters as ultimately real. So the ground has been removed which is the basis for that kind of negativity to develop, that kind of confusion and obscuration of the true nature of mind to develop.

These two aspects of mind, the fundamental awareness and fundamental discursive consciousness, form the basis, the melange of the two that we experience at this particular point is termed the alaya, the foundation, kun shi

in Tibetan. It applies to both enlightened and unenlightened experience. In terms of how the karmic process unfolds, that which accumulates or reinforces karma is principally mind that is based in this alaya, this foundation or rather the alaya is the foundation of mind. The emotions, which condition one's karmic tendencies, arise from this foundation. The tendencies, which are reinforced through action, the causes, are maintained in the alaya until such time as the result in terms of experience becomes manifest. So the alaya functions as a foundation for the whole process.

In terms of our present experience therefore we reinforce these karmic tendencies on the level of the six sensory consciousnesses, the five senses and the thinking mind or the intellect. But the tendencies, which are reinforced through these six avenues, are maintained on a preconscious or subconscious level, which is this alaya. So take the example of some kind of training or study that we are doing, it is through our senses and our intelligence or intellect that we study but the knowledge we accumulate becomes preconscious. It is absorbed through a conscious level to a preconscious level to be called back to a conscious level when the circumstances require it. So one for example who learns to drive a car, who has perfected that skill, has the latent potential to drive a car. In any situation where it is necessary to drive a car that latent potential makes itself felt and the person can drive the car. So what was absorbed through a conscious level through the operation of the six aspects of consciousness is maintained on a preconscious level which is the alaya, this fundamental discursive state of mind. This can be brought forward at any time to a conscious level to be utilized again through the six kinds of sensory consciousnesses.

Because mind is essentially empty, nothing in and of itself, it follows that all these projections and operations of mind are essentially empty. All the karma which is accumulated and reinforced, all of these tendencies are essentially empty in being no thing in and of themselves. To give some idea of what we mean by the essential emptiness let's consider the fifteen to twenty years most of us have spent in school learning. Now where did we put all that learning? Is it outside the front door? Is it inside one of the rooms of our house? Is it somewhere inside our body? Where is that vast body of knowledge? It is there to be called upon but you can't actually find it or see it. It is nothing tangible in that sense of the word. If it were we could speak of it as something real ultimately speaking, something in and of itself. But the more you look for it the harder it is to find, you simply can't put your finger on that particular aspect of your experience. This is what we mean by its essential emptiness.

Suppose there is an interval between the time one has finished one's training or learning a skill such as flying a plane or driving a car. If there is a span of time between finishing that training and actually applying it in terms of one's work or one's career where does that learning go? Does one see? Is one aware of it? Even though it is something you can not see or might not be aware of, you can not say it does not exist or that it isn't valid. There is some kind of continuation in the sense that when one takes up the particular skill or work that one has trained for, one is prepared to do it because of the previous preparation one has undergone even though there is a space of

time present. One can do the work or one can fly the plane. So there is this continuation in one's experience even though one might not be aware of something and it is not directly demonstrable, does not mean it is not effective, not valid.

In fact this is just the kind of argument that people use when they are trying to demonstrate the falseness of something like karma. They say well no one can see the connection between a given act and a given result so therefore it does not exist, therefore the concept of karma is nonsense. We are talking about exactly the same thing in this situation. There is no directly demonstrable connection between the act of training for something and the act of doing it but never the less there is some validity. There is something effective that is happening in the situation. If one understands it from this point of view, one can see what is being talked about in terms of cause and effect when we refer to karma, the karmic process. Even though there is nothing that can be actually demonstrated, tangibly to connect a given action with a given result, this does not mean that the connection does not exist that it is not effective.

So in these kinds of situations we have cause and condition and we have the connection between all of these different circumstances which are valid on the conventional level. This was what the Buddha was speaking of in presenting the doctrine of karma, the idea of cause, causality, of conditioned situations, and of the connection between all of the elements in a situation which produce particular results.

If one places a drop of water on the back of one's hand, one can watch it very quickly evaporate and before too long the water is gone. If one places it in the ocean of course this evaporation takes place but there is more sense of it entering into something which has more stability to it. Instead of an ephemeral nature of the drop of water it is mixed with the ocean and remains part of the ocean. This analogy is to show us the benefits of dedicating and sharing the merit of all study and practice of Dharma. As long as it remains simply the merit and virtue one has accumulated per se it in a situation it is subject to change, it is subject to degeneration. It can be destroyed by various causes, various circumstances. But if it has been sincerely dedicated for the benefit of all beings there is a level of stability, which is introduced, and basically that virtue and merit will be with one until one achieves enlightenment. It becomes a stable and continually present part of one's experience, one's total being. So this is why it is considered so important to dedicate and share the merit and virtue of one's study and practice for the benefit of all beings. This is the frame of reference to dedicate it towards the enlightenment of each and every living thing in the universe.

First and foremost among these negative circumstances, the destructive circumstances is anger. Anger is like the atomic bomb of karma, it is capable of incredible destruction. A quote attributed to the Lord Buddha goes to the effect that even thousands of kalpas of merit and virtue which have been accumulated can be destroyed in a single moment of intense anger. This is the benefit again of sharing the merit and virtue of one's practice to introduce this note of stability. So at this point we can conclude with the prayers to

dedicate the merit of this session of teaching. Those people who have no anger in their makeup need not recite these prayers of dedication! *(End of session)*

Perhaps the most fundamental teaching, which the Lord Buddha presented, was that of karma, that of the cause and effect process that is part of our experience. The fundamental nature of this teaching also indicates the crucial nature of karma as a part of one's practice, a realization of this karmic process and a scrupulous application of this in one's daily life in terms of choosing the way in which one acts, speaks and thinks based upon one's appreciation of the relative merits or demerits of certain kinds of actions.

Positive activity which reinforces positive karmic tendencies arises from the pure aspect of the alaya that we have been talking about, the kun shi ye she, the fundamental original awareness or pure nature of mind. Negative, harmful actions, which reinforce negative karmic tendencies, arise from the fundamental confusion or dualistic, discursive consciousness, the kun shi nam she, this impure aspect of the alaya. If there is a predominance of positive in terms of spiritual progress then these virtuous karmic tendencies and the awareness which is developed upon them will result at a certain point at what is termed a first level Bodhisattva realization. Now at this point there is at least a partial experience of the transformation of ignorance into awareness. There is a partial elimination of the veils of obscuration, which cloud the mind, cloud the pure nature of consciousness and prevent one from directly experiencing that. Because of this partial elimination of those veils a new situation develops where there is no longer clinging to the object which results in a karmic tendency being reinforced. There is no longer the naïve clinging to the reality of subject and object in this situation based upon which karmic tendencies is reinforced. To say the same thing in a different way at this point a first level bodhisattva is no longer subject to the fourth veil of obscuration that of karma, at least not in the sense of experiencing negative karma. This is because the realization is sufficient to insure that there will be no more negative karmic tendencies established or reinforced beyond the point of that realization. Furthermore because of the actual realization of the emptiness of subject and object any previously accumulated or reinforced negative karmic tendencies are eliminated, are no longer effective and can no longer cause the first level bodhisattva any pain or suffering. So aside from the continuing reinforcement of virtuous and positive karmic tendencies there is no obscuration of the pure nature of mind due to negative karmic tendencies. Of the four levels of obscuration; ignorance, dualistic clinging, emotionality and karma, the fourth of these, karma has been eliminated at this point.

We might think of our present state of ignorance as like a dark room. With the experience of first level Bodhisattvahhood, the stage which is called rap tu ga wa in Tibetan or the Supremely Joyful State, one experiences an illumination or enlightenment in the sense that the fundamental ignorance starts to be

transformed into fundamental awareness. Rather than the kun shi nam she, the fundamental discursive consciousness or confused consciousness being predominant, the kun shi ye she, the fundamental awareness begins to shine through, begins to be the predominant factor. So there is elimination at least on the grosser levels of the operation of the ignorance. There still remain subtler veils of obscuration and ignorance to be overcome but at this point the experience is simply like taking a light into the dark room, immediately the room is illuminated. In that single flash of experience, from that point on, from the point of that stable experience on, one is no longer subject to the veil of karma, the operation of karma as the agent and the object, the subject and object are perceived to be ultimately unreal.

There is no longer any naïve clinging to the ultimate reality of subject and object. Therefore the karmic relationship does not develop.

In a particular sutra on the teachings of karma it is stated that karma is an incredibly complex subject and the different situations that can arise from it are infinite. This is why there are infinite numbers of beings in infinite different situations within the general context of the six realms of samsara, the cycle of rebirth. There is this complexity and infinity to different karmic situations but on a very general level speaking very roughly we have the concept of the ten kinds of virtuous and non-virtuous actions, positive and negative actions. These form a rough basis for evaluating the whole question of karma.

Within the context of the ten non-virtuous or negative actions, three are physical. These are the acts of taking life, stealing or taking that which is not given and sexual misconduct. The corresponding positive virtuous actions on the physical level are preservation and encouragement of life or protecting life, generosity and sharing of one's possessions and guarding moral and ethical discipline in one's way of life.

On the verbal level there are four kinds of negative or unwholesome speech which are lying or the telling of things that are not true, divisive speech which is met to cause discord and to divide people, harsh language or abusive language and gossip or idle chatter. The counterparts to these on the positive side are being as truthful in one's speech as possible, avoiding divisive language but instead trying to encourage harmony through one's speech, to speak gently and kindly to people without resorting to harsh or abusive language and to make what one says count, to only speak of things which have meaning and not to waste time in idle chatter.

The three mental non-virtues are avarice or covetousness, harmful intentions or malevolent attitudes towards others, and wrong or perverse views about the nature of reality. The counterparts to these on the positive side are an attitude of contentment and satisfaction with what one has, a beneficial and helpful attitude towards other beings, and faith and conviction in spiritual truths such as the law of karma, emptiness and so on. These are the counterparts on the positive side for the non-virtuous activities of mind.

Of these last three harmful actions of mind seem fairly easy to understand but what about the first of avariciousness or covetousness? This term can be applied with reference to oneself or with reference to others. The first is over-attachment to what one has oneself, one's own wealth, property,

possessions and so forth, simply to have an exaggerated sense of ownership and an over-attachment to what one has. The stronger this attachment towards one's own possessions the more harmful the potential for the results. With regard to others this is the actual craving or desiring the possessions of others, thinking to oneself that person has such a thing and if only I had that instead. If only I could take it from them or only if I had that rather than them. So this idea of covetousness can apply to entirely within one's own individual frame of reference or with reference to others as well.

The counterpart to avarice is satisfaction, contentment that is again with reference to oneself and with others. The idea being that one is content with what one has, one has enough to eat, enough to wear, a place to stay and so forth. When one has enough then one is satisfied and beyond that one does not spend a lot of time and energy in craving and running after things beyond this. Furthermore when one encounters others who would seem to be more fortunate than oneself in terms of what they posses, own or enjoy never the less there is a basic contentment of mind. One reflects that it is all very well as one has enough basically and doesn't need to go around trying to get more, one has enough. Again within the context of one's own situation or with reference to others, one's relationship with others, there is a sense of contentment which is the virtuous or positive counterpart of avarice or covetousness.

The point is that without this contentment it doesn't matter what one has, one won't be satisfied. One will never be able to fulfill one's wishes simply by indulging in them and chasing after them. There is a story to illustrate this, which concerns a particular king whom we have met already in one story whose name was Salgel and lived during the time of Lord Buddha. He was a very powerful and rich king. During his reign and the lifetime of the Buddha a particular monk who was the disciple of Lord Buddha came into the possession of a wish-fulfilling gem, a magic jewel which would answer wishes. It was endowed with the miraculous power of answering someone's wishes and provide them with all that they wished for in terms of the necessities of life, even the luxuries of life.

This monk was not a covetous person and had no particular desire for personal wealth. He thought to himself I can't let this go to waste as it is a very rare and precious thing this magic gem perhaps I should give it to someone who is very poor and unfortunate. I will help them out in this way, I certainly don't need anything myself but someone else could benefit from it. He thought to himself rather than make the judgement himself he would go to his spiritual teacher the Lord Buddha and seek direction.

He went to the Buddha and explained to the Buddha his wish to give the gem to someone who felt deprived and could benefit from the gem. The Buddha replied then give it to King Salgel. The monk thought this was unusual as the king was the richest and most powerful person in the region but never the less he went along with his teacher's instructions. He went and gave the gem to the king. The king was surprised and asked why he was to receive it. The monk explained his wish to give it to someone really in need and that the Buddha told him to give it to the king. The king thought this was unusual and

went to see the Buddha. He asked the Buddha why he recommended the monk give him the gem. The Buddha said that he was so rich and powerful that he spent all his time worrying about how to hold on to what he had and how to get more. He told the king he was never satisfied and that as far as the Buddha was concerned no one was less happy than the king. No one had a less satisfied mind than the king so he was the person in greatest need. Given the way the monk phrased his question the king was the most in need of such a gem.

Of all the three different types of negative mental attitudes the last two, maliciousness and perverted views, are the most serious, these aggressive attitudes of seeking to harm others or reject spiritual truth. Something like coveting or desiring something is less severe in its consequences in terms of the harm to oneself and others. But never the less it is something to be considered quite serious as it arises from desire, attachment and clinging. There are stories to illustrate the shortcomings of such clinging and attachment in one's experience.

One of these stories concerns an old man during the lifetime of the Buddha who had been a very successful businessman during his life, a man of the world. When he reached a very old age, perhaps in his nineties, it was extremely difficult for him to carry on any kind of business or look after his family. He had become more or less useless as far as his family and business were concerned. He became very discouraged and depressed because he was approaching the end of his life and he realized he was becoming more and more ineffective at what he was used to doing. He thought to himself that perhaps the best thing would be to take ordination as a disciple of the Buddha, a monk under the Buddha's guidance and try to become effective on a spiritual level at least. He began asking people who would be the best person to serve as his preceptor and give him his ordination. The disciple of Buddha, Sariputra, who was renowned for his knowledge and understanding of the Dharma, his realization and the purity of his moral discipline so he was recommended as the old man's preceptor.

He approached Sariputra and explained the situation and Sariputra said that he would refuse him ordination as he was simply too old to effectively study and meditate. He felt that they would both be wasting their time. Discouraged the old man went to other monks seeking ordination but wherever he went everyone knew that he had been turned down by Sariputra. They would say to him if Sariputra who understands the situation clearly won't give him ordination how could they presume to take precedence over him so they would not ordinate him. He was refused by all and finally he became so depressed he started having thoughts of suicide. He began to feel there was nothing left for him to do than lay down and die. In fact he lay down and was lost in self-pity when the Buddha came by. The Buddha asked him why he was suffering so and when the old man explained the situation the Buddha said not to worry. Buddha said you are old but you have all of your intelligence, faculties and there is still hope for you. I will accommodate you. So Buddha took him to a particular monk and set me up as his preceptor instructing the monk to give the old man ordination.

He took ordination and began to practice under the instructions of his preceptor but his meditation was not very fruitful. One big obstacle that he had was developing any deep sense of sincere renunciation, as despite his advanced stage he was still very much involved in samsara. He was still very much attached to the world. At a particular point the Buddha decided that he was ripe for some instruction. The Buddha came to him and said shall we go see something that will be instructive. Take hold of my robe, which he did and found himself flying through the air to some environment he had never seen before to the top of a tall mountain.

During this miraculous spiritual journey that he took with the Buddha, the old monk was exposed to many amazing and incredible experiences. For example at one point he saw the corpse of what had been a very beautiful young woman decaying and there was a snake which was crawling all over the corpse and attempting to enter into the various orifices. It was continually crawling around this corpse and the old monk asked what the reason was for the snake's behavior. The Buddha replied that he would explain later. They came to another place where there was a woman cooking over a large pot on a roaring fire and when the water came to a boil she stripped and jumped into the water. She died in the boiling water by drowning and scalding. The water was so hot that it separated the flesh from the bones and the bones were thrown from the pot and became the woman again. She proceeded to eat her own flesh and repeated the process again. Again when he saw this the old monk asked what could be the reason for this strange behavior and the Buddha said he would explain again later.

These kinds of experiences happened over and over and these are just a few examples of the things he saw. Once the experience was over the old monk asked the Buddha to explain what they saw. Buddha said you remember the corpse of the beautiful girl and the snake trying to enter into the corpse. The woman was very attracted to her own beauty when alive and spent hours looking at herself in the mirror admiring her own beauty. She had a great deal of attachment and a greedy attitude towards herself; she was infatuated with her own beauty. When she died her consciousness took rebirth as the snake and her attachment was so great that the snake returned to the corpse and was trying to inhabit the corpse.

With reference to the woman who was diving into the boiling pot and eating her own flesh, the Buddha said that at one point the woman was a servant. She worked for a householder woman who had a spiritual teacher who lived close to her house to whom she sent offerings of food every day. The woman servant took the food to him but on the way would eat the best parts of the meals herself, leaving the leftovers and scraps for the spiritual teacher. This went on for awhile and the teacher became thin and lean and the servant woman was becoming fat and rosy. The woman householder who had doubts asked the servant woman one day if she was stealing the food she was sending to her spiritual teacher. The servant woman replied that how could she think such a thing and that she would rather eat her own flesh than steal the offerings given to the spiritual teacher. This resulted in a hellish state of rebirth where indeed she did eat her own flesh.

Finally their journey took them to a small hill on the shore of the ocean and as they were sitting on the hill the old monk began to wonder where such a strangely shaped piece of land came from. He asked the Buddha if he knew the reason for this. The Buddha said yes, that it used to be your body. The old monk asked what do you mean by that? Buddha stated that in a previous existence you were an enormous, carnivorous sea creature who consumed living beings constantly simply by opening its mouth drawing in the seawater. At a certain point this creature came across a small boat with shipwrecked people on it among who was a fully ordained monk. As the creature began to devour the boat the people began to cry out and the monk began to pray to the Buddha. Through simply hearing this the sea creature became pacified, closed its mouth and let the people go. Very soon after that the sea creature died and his body washed up on the shore where the bones formed a framework for the hill. The Buddha could point out the limbs and so forth to demonstrate the truth of his story.

Seeing something this direct and this graphic as a demonstration of the cause and effect in the cycle of rebirth, the old monk became very industrious in his practice of meditation. His renunciation became very strong and his progress was rapid. It was through the spiritual blessing and compassion of the Buddha that this connection was made. Through simply hearing the sound of the Buddha's name the sea creature came to take rebirth eventually as the old man. There was a connection or seed, which had been planted; this connection which had been made which ripened into a commitment to spiritual practice. This is one of the benefits of reciting mantras, prayers and the name of Buddha into the ears of animals so that even insects, simply planting seeds, simply establishing connections that will only be beneficial to those beings in the future.

This whole idea of the infallibility of karma, of cause and effect, and the relationship between one's actions and one's experience is a very crucial one in one's spiritual practice. This is something that needs to be regarded with the utmost respect.

There is another story to illustrate this infallibility of karma, which concerns again something that happened during the lifetime of the Buddha. It concerned the case of a woman who at the age of about twenty or so conceived her first child. Having become pregnant she naturally became quite large but before she gave birth to the first child, she conceived another. After finishing the gestation of the second child she gave birth to it however the first pregnancy remained inside. She conceived a third child and gave birth to it still without delivering the first. This went on until she had a total of ten children. All the children were delivered normally after normal pregnancies without giving birth to the first child. She carried this child in her womb for her entire life until she was about eighty. At that time she developed a fatal illness and knew she was dying.

She told her family there is this child to whom I have conceived but have never given birth, it is still inside my body. I'm dying but I want you to save the life of this child. Perform a cesarean delivery as soon as I am dead and bring the child into the world without harming it. Her plight became well

known and when it got near the time of the delivery many people gathered. Buddha and his retinue were passing the area and through his psychic powers the Buddha was aware of the situation and came at the exact moment of the delivery. Inside the body of the eighty-year-old woman they found a wizened little form of a sixty-year-old baby. This so-called child had gone through all the different stages of a human life and was in an advanced state of age. He was a sixty-year-old person although very underdeveloped, his hair was white, his teeth had fallen out and so forth. The Buddha blessed this child and the child began to speak. The Buddha said you are quite old. Can you tell of your past lifetime, what resulted in this?

The child said he could not remember anything. Buddha again blessed the child and this triggered a memory of a previous existence during the time of the previous Buddha, Kasyapa. During this time one of the Buddha Kasyapa's students had been a very fine monk and a very advanced meditator who had a servant. The young servant served his master as best he could but he was somewhat rebellious. At a certain point a carnival came to town and the servant wanted to go see it. He asked his master if they could go and the monk said no. The servant asked if he could go and the master said no. The boy asked again and again however his master said he wanted him to stay studying with the master. The boy continued to ask getting more agitated and the boy said I don't care if you sit in this dark little hut for sixty years, I'm going to the carnival. This established both through gross disrespect for his spiritual teacher and the anger he developed coupled with the image formed in his mind of someone in a dark, confined space for sixty years the infallible connection to experience a sixty year pregnancy.

So this is an indication of the scrupulousness which is needed and the respect which needs to be given to the infallibility of the connection between our actions and our experience. It is quite truly said traditionally that once a karmic tendency has been established it doesn't matter if a hundred kalpas elapse between the establishment of that cause and the effect in one's experience. Sooner or later when the correct conditions come together that particular karmic tendency will ripen and make itself felt in one's experience. It doesn't matter if hundreds of thousands of years pass; there is no expiration date on karmic tendencies. Until the time in which the conditions create an environment, a situation where that tendency can exhaust itself, the actual latent tendency will not disappear in and of itself.

It is only through sincere confession and acknowledgement of one's faults and failings and the practice of virtue as an antidote that one can overcome negative karmic tendencies and unwholesome actions, which have been committed. Other than that there is no way they will disappear in and of themselves. In fact this is perhaps the only virtue to non-virtue. In fact this is the subject of a witty epigram, which is the only virtue of non-virtue is that it can be erased, it can be confessed and eliminated. Other than that one can not speak of negative karma or unwholesome actions as having any particular virtue. The one virtue we might say it has is that if one does sincerely confess and practices some virtuous activity as an antidote, it can be eliminated, it can be wiped out.

Another story at this point to illustrate the kind of topics we are discussing. This concerns a particular young man whose name was Dayche. At a certain point when he was a young man he fell in love with a young girl who lived close by to his house but the girl's mother was not pleased with him at all. She didn't want her daughter matching up with Dayche and didn't want her to fall in love with and marry him. She went to Dayche's mother and said your son is attracted to my daughter but I am not happy with this arrangement at all so I want you to help me keep them apart. I'll make sure they don't meet in the daytime but it is up to you to watch your boy at night. The mother agreed to do this and so by day the girl's mother would do her best to keep them apart and by night Dayche's mother would have him sleep in the inner room of the house where there were no windows. She would lock the doors and sleep right outside the door to keep him from leaving.

At one point he couldn't wait to see his beloved any longer so one night he got up and rattled the door. It was locked and his mother woke up and opened the door. She said your not going anywhere go back in the room and locked the door. He kept tapping on the door wanting out and she asked want he wanted. He said I need to pee and she said you need to stay in there. He became enraged, broke down the door and grabbing a knife he cut his mother's throat and killed her. He ran to his beloved's house trembling with fear. When he got into his beloved's house she noticed him trembling and asked him what was wrong. He decided to tell her the truth to show her how much he loved her and told her how he killed his mother. She was horrified and thought if he can kill his own mother what will he do to me? She left the room on a pretext and she ran away. He waited for her until daylight. He realized his mistakes, was filled with disgust for the world and decided to take ordination. He was not aware of the fact that in the Buddhist tradition one could not receive ordination if one killed their father or mother. He was scheduled to receive ordination, as he did not inform anyone of his crime. Before the ordination he was being interviewed and when asked if he had killed either of his parents he said yes. He related the story of how he came to kill his mother. An objection was raised to his ordination as he had killed his mother.

Due to his commitment to his spiritual practice and his purification practices and so forth he became a very advanced meditator, a very sincere practitioner of Dharma. However no one would really accept him as he had committed this crime, had an evil mark on his history. Finally he was forced to leave the area and go someplace where no one knew him or his past. He went to another area of India where he established himself as a spiritual teacher because of his understanding and realization of the teachings. He was able to help a great number of people in their practice of the Buddhadharma. He organized monastic institutions, provided support for them and so forth. His activities became very widespread and he was able to successfully teach and guide quite a number of people to advanced states of realization.

At one time he organized a monastic institution where there was quite a cool climate which made it difficult to practice in the wintertime, particularly due to the cold. He came up with the idea of building a large building where the

practitioners could live and would have some sort of heating system to provide protection from the elements. This was the last project he undertook before he died and was deeply involved in this project of constructing this building. Suddenly he died. It would seem that at his death there was still a trace of his negative karma of having killed his mother because he took immediate rebirth in a hot hell. But the connection in his mind, this virtuous tendency in his mind of building this project so that he was aware that he had been involved in a project involving heat. He thought this was too hot at which point the denizens of hell became enraged at him. They told him he was in hell and they chopped and beat him with their weapons. At that point he was liberated from that hellish rebirth and achieved a godly rebirth.

These stories are to illustrate the strength of our mental attitudes and of the karmic tendencies, which we reinforce through our actions, speech and thought patterns. They also indicate to us the necessity to respect the infallibility of karma, the infallible connection between our actions and what we will experience. So an appreciation of this is very necessary because we need to accept that we are not first level bodhisattvas, we don't have this kind of realization. We do not have the insight or experience of emptiness and so forth, which exempt one from the necessity of working through the karmic process. We must experience the effects of our actions and for this reason we need to respect that certain types of actions led in bad directions while other actions led in good directions.

What makes this karmic process effective, perhaps the cause of the whole thing is fundamentally the clinging to ego, the clinging to a self, the assumption of an ultimately real self or ego. Fueled by the different emotions, through which that self relates to others and the objective part of one's experience, the six basic emotions are definitely linked with the six possible realms of existence in the cycle of rebirth. For example the three basic emotional patterns which we spoke of previously, attachment, aversion and stupidity have secondary developments. For example from attachment develops avarice, grasping or craving. This is particularly a cause or characterizes the hungry ghost or preta realm. The basic emotions of anger or aversion and stupidity characterize the realms of the hells and the animal realm. So the three lower realms of existence are connected with these emotional patterns of avarice (preta), anger and aversion (hell) and stupidity (animal).

The superior states of rebirth in the cycle of rebirth of samsara are connected with mixtures of positive karma, virtuous karma and certain afflictive emotions. Human rebirth is most particularly due to a mixture of virtuous karma and desire, desire and attachment. The god's rebirth is a mixture of virtuous karma and pride. The demigod's realm is an admixture of virtuous karma and paranoia or jealousy, which is a product of anger, a secondary development of anger.

The point of all Buddhist practice therefore is in overcoming or eliminating the harmful effect of the afflictive emotions in one's mind. This is the basic function of Dharma practice. Now this can be approached in different ways. On the Hinayana level of practice one is attempting to deal with the emotions

by rejecting them, by eliminating them, by abandoning them. On the Mahayana level and into the Vajrayana level in terms of the first three of the four classes of tantra, Kriya, Carya and Yoga are all concerned with the transformation of emotions, the skillful manipulation of emotions. The Anuttarayoga tantra level of practice, the highest level of tantric practice is concerned with liberation through directly seeing the nature of emotional experience.

Eliminating or abandoning the emotions would appear to be quite difficult, particularly in the context of a householder living in the world. So it would seem that one is forced to fall back upon the idea of learning how to skillfully manipulate the emotions, how to see the actual nature of emotional experience as one's main approach in terms of study and practice to begin to come to terms with one's emotionality.

Whether one is dealing with this idea of skillful manipulation and transformation of the emotions or simply seeing into the very nature of the emotions never the less there needs to be some kind of appreciation of the nature of emotional experience, the origins of emotional experience. Where do these emotions come from? Basically they come from mind. If there were no consciousness, if there was no mind then there would be no emotions. They are products of mind. Now this is something people may appreciate on a general level, people ascribe mental origins to the emotions. They also ascribe physical ones. There is this way of viewing emotions that there are physical origins for the emotions, that they actually arise from physical states of being as well as mental states of being.

But basically we are speaking about the mental origin of emotions, fundamentally emotions arise from the mind. This shows therefore the importance of realizing and experiencing the emptiness of mind as realizing the emptiness of mind it follows that the projections of and developments of mind are empty as well. They are essentially empty in that they are not anything in and of themselves ultimately speaking. This very understanding alone, simply the intellectual understanding takes a great deal of power away from the emotions. That which was formerly felt to be so strong and so real in and of itself is perceived to be simply the projection of an essentially empty mind. This deprives or robs the emotions of a great deal of their power and ability to influence one in negative ways.

The way in which this works is best illustrated by again reference to the dream state. If one is dreaming, having a nightmare and being chases by a tiger or some other desperate situation at some point one realizes that it is a dream. Although not awake one's fear diminishes, as there is a realization that what is taking place is not ultimately real; it is simply the projection of one's mind. It is just a dream. With this realization there is instantaneously a lessening of the fear, the fear and suffering in the situation become less intense. We can also take the example of desire or attachment in the mind and there is the arising, particular in the case of sexual desire, of feeling that it is so fundamental in and of itself, so much a part of one's mind and body that it is considered something in and of itself. It is something real, beyond one's own mental projections to the point where people will even risk their

lives to satisfy the desire. People are known to indulge in it to the point where it is actually dangerous to their health or risk their lives in situations because of something they desire, want to get. This is because it is treated as something which is real in and of itself rather than being seen simply as essentially empty simply a projection of mind, which is in turn essentially empty.

Another way in which one can approach this analysis of mind, of one's own consciousness is to examine oneself during different emotional sates. This is referring to the six basic emotions; does this mean there are six different minds, a mind for each emotion? Does one mind experience the totality of emotional experience? What exactly is taking place when one is experiencing a given emotion? Furthermore when one experiences a different emotion what kind of change is taking place?

If there were separate minds, separate consciousnesses experiencing these different emotions we would seem to be talking about something that could be tangibly demonstrated if there is this difference between the mind that experiences lust or desire and the mind which experiences anger. One should be able to demonstrate in terms of their characteristics or in terms of their shape, color, form, location or some kind of characteristic to distinguish between these different kinds of mind, if in fact there are separate minds for separate emotions.

But this is in fact not the case. The totality of emotional experience is experienced by this single mind, this mind that we have. So to treat any one emotion as anything real in and of itself is missing the point. At any given point when an emotion arises in the mind, one treats it, as the only real thing going this is absolutely real. This desire or anger, whatever I'm feeling absolutely must be answered, it must be acknowledged, as it is real, it is reality. When in fact there is not a case of there being eternal self-existing emotions but just a continual turbulence in the mind, a continual arising of different changing, shifting patterns of emotions, none of which are permanent or lasting in any sense. There is a continual shift in flow and change in the emotional situation of the mind. For example in a man and a woman are very attracted to each other, very much in love with each other there is this intense relationship but this can change at any point. If one of the partners becomes interested in someone else then for the other partner that love which was felt can turn to hate very quickly. Where there once was a strong feeling of attachment for the other, there is now an intense sense of rejection or hatred.

The point is that all of these emotions which arise in the mind are essentially empty, are nothing in and of themselves. But as long as one ascribes reality, ultimate reality to any given emotion it will be necessary to follow that emotion through, to indulge in that emotion and give into that emotion. One loses one's control to that emotion because as the more reality one ascribes to it the more power it has over one.

The image is like the wind-tossed surface of the ocean when there is the agitation of a great wind stirring up the surface of the ocean. As the wind gradually diminishes the surface of the ocean becomes calm and tranquil.

There is a certain sense of peace. In the same way through understanding the ultimate emptiness of the emotions they gradually begin to diminish and one begins to approach at least a state of calm and peace of mind.

Now we might not be able to hope for complete elimination of any negative, disturbing elements in the mind at all. But never the less this kind of understanding of both the emptiness of mind and the mental origin of emotions gives one a handle on at least very intense emotional states so that they need not be so destructive in terms of one's own experience and one's relationships with others. One is able to gain a certain amount of freedom at least through simply seeing through, simply understanding the essentially empty nature of mind and the mental origin of the emotions, the fact that they arise from this essential empty mind. They are nothing in and of themselves. This gives one a certain degree of control in the situation, a certain amount of freedom which can be very helpful in avoiding very unskillful situations and losing one's control in states of very intense emotions.

As mentioned previously on the level of the Mahayana and the lower levels of tantra there is the conception of skillful transformation of or manipulation of the emotions. For example in the context of general Mahayana practice if anger is very strong in one's mind one uses that energy which was normally expressed as anger to develop one's love and compassion for other beings as a kind of antidote. If desire is particularly strong in one's mind one meditates on the illusory nature, the magical nature of all phenomena as being simply illusions, conventionally real but not anything ultimately real on which one could base any deep rooted desire. If one is meditating using Vajrayana techniques there is a certain symbolism, a connection between the divine symbolism and one's emotional state. For example if one's state of mind is one of lust or desire, one is encouraged to meditate upon the form of Amitabha, the red form of the Buddha of the Lotus Family. Or if one's mind was dominated by anger, one can meditate on Akshobhya, the Buddha of the Vajra Family. These are different techniques on different levels for the general idea of manipulating or transforming the emotions.

This isn't a magic formula in the sense that simply through hearing the words that the mind is empty and that the emotions arise from mind, one's problems go away. The point is that there needs to be some kind of personal effort involved. One is meditating again and again on the concepts of emptiness and developing the experience coming to some actual direct perception or experience oneself. This is the only way that true, lasting benefit is felt.

If you're starving and you see a large plate of food you understand that you need to eat the food in order to alleviate the hunger pangs, you know this but until you eat it, you are not going to be full. You will continue starving. As long as you only know about Dharma and don't practice it and experience it, it is not going to satisfy you, not going to actually give any benefit. So the point is not to leave one's understanding on an intellectual level, a simple superficial appreciation but to actually experience the truth of the teachings. This is the only way in which one feels lasting benefit.

The particular word in Tibetan, which is used most frequently to describe the Vajrayana, is song ngak. Song means secret or private and ngak in this

particular case may be interpreted as to eulogize or praise. The idea here is that the practice, particularly of the tantras is meant to be a very private or personal thing. It is meant to be a casual subject of discussion. It is not meant to be something extremely public in the sense that the teachings one has received on the Vajrayana level, one practices oneself. Based upon one's own experience there may be situations that develop where one can encourage people to enter into the practice of Vajrayana by speaking about it or help guide their own practice once they have begun this through speaking about it. But basically it is not something one talks about in an idle way because this indicates that one has not actually experienced what one is talking about. One simply has a store of facts of knowledge and can entertain people by speaking about it but there is no lasting benefit for oneself or others. All one is doing is babbling in the marketplace with these great personal, private things and simply spreading them around all over the place and all the benefit is lost for oneself and others. But if there is sincere commitment to one's own practice and has a sincere sensitivity to the benefits in a particular situation of introducing other people to the ideas of the Vajrayana then this is fine.

This introduces the idea of secrecy, the secrecy or privacy of the teachings. The second syllable introduces the idea of something being very praiseworthy. The idea is introduced of the Vajrayana representing a system of teachings, which are incredibly special. Through the practice of these teachings, the qualities and realization that one can develop and the speed or efficiency by which one can produce these results is quite remarkable. So the entomology of this particular term song ngak in Tibetan examines these two aspects, the privacy or private nature of the Vajrayana teachings and the praiseworthy nature of such practice.

We don't have a great deal of time in the present situation to go into many more things so perhaps we should simply emphasize the main points of what was presented today. The idea is to approach in one's meditation the idea of emptiness of mind, to examine one's mind and experience one's mind with a view of working towards the experience of the emptiness of mind. One should try to have a definitive experience of the essential emptiness of mind. Furthermore one should examine very precisely one's emotional experience to determine the exact nature of the emotions. Where do they come from? Are they actually something separate from mind or not? Are they truly mental in nature or do they have an existence of their own? Can we speak of something beyond the mere act of thinking to account for an emotion? We examine all these different aspects of one's consciousness, one's experience in order to come to some definitive experience. Something that will help one in one's meditation is a consideration of our present state of relative helplessness in that we don't have a great deal of freedom or control in our present situation. The control lies instead with the emotions and thoughts, which disturb the mind, the karmic tendencies, which determine our experience on a level we are not conscious of. So at least on a conscious level we have very little control and freedom in the situation. What we are working towards is the development of some kind of control, some kind of

freedom in this situation which comes about through the meditation that I have been discussing today.

Perhaps a word at this point on Vajrayana meditations using meditation on the form of divinities such as Chenrezig, the Bodhisattva of Compassion whom is very familiar to everyone by now. There are two reasons or two crucial points to consider in looking at this kind of practice. First is that in some sense the deity does exist as something to be related to, there is something beyond one's own mental conception of the deity. So when we say Chenrezig is the union of the compassion of all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas we are talking about something that is real in a certain sense. There is something to relate to, there is something that can be experienced and there is something there which is a source of blessing, a source of benefit to one beyond simply one's own individual thoughts and ideas.

The second is that in our present situation there is a great deal of attachment to our own individual well being, the physical body for example. We think very much in terms of my body, this body that is mine. Because of this attachment a great deal of the suffering we experience arises, this attachment is the fundamental cause of all experiences of pain, frustration and suffering. What one is doing in meditating on a deity is identifying with this transpersonal ideal form or pure form to loosen the clinging to one's ordinary physical body and one's ordinary waking state of being. So through this kind of identification of not thinking I am me, I am this physical body, but instead identifying completely with Chenrezig. I am Chenrezig; I become Chenrezig in the meditation. There is also the benefit of loosening the clinging to the ultimate reality and solidity of this particular, temporary physical existence.

Even if this is not effective during this lifetime if one's practice is not strong enough or deep enough to actually uproot this clinging to the physical body and produce some significant enlightenment experience in this physical lifetime, this will however carry over to the bardo experience. In the after death state there is a mental body experience and the benefits of such meditation in this life can be felt within the after death state as well. The reason for this is because during the mental body experience of the bardo there is not the buffer of the physical body of the waking state and therefore whatever arises in the mind is immediately experienced, immediately manifest as one's experience. This means that if one has the habits and tendencies from this life, meditating on oneself in the pure form of a divinity in a pure environment, this can actually manifest in the bardo state. If the tendency carries over and is strong enough in the bardo state in any given moment there, maybe the arousal of this memory, this tendency will lead to the direct experience of that state of being in the realm of bliss for that individual consciousness in the bardo. The effects are that direct in the bardo state.

When we are dealing with something like the Dharma, we are dealing with something that is as vast as the sky and as deep as the ocean. It is truly enormous in its implications. To try and cover it in a short period of time is relatively speaking impossible. We can cover the main points however and it is necessary for one to continue to pursue these main points which are most

relevant to one's own particular practice, to receive teachings on these from qualified teachers and to begin to actually apply them to one's own life. Perhaps we will stop at this point and I will take one or two very important questions.

Question: What are the Four Immeasurables?

Answer: The Four Immeasurables are immeasurable love, compassion, joy and equanimity. These are formulated in the prayer "May all beings enjoy happiness and the causes of happiness", this being virtuous actions and positive karmic tendencies. Secondly compassion, "May all beings be free from suffering and the causes of suffering", this being unwholesome, negative actions and negative karmic tendencies. Thirdly immeasurable joy, "May all beings never be separate from happiness.." a sense of rejoicing in the happiness of others, "…and be freed from suffering." The fourth is equanimity; "May all beings rest in equanimity free from attachment and aversion." These four attitudes are what are termed the Four Immeasurables.

If there were only one hundred or one thousand sentient beings we could speak of unlimited compassion. But because the number of living beings is infinite, truly immeasurable, this is why we speak of immeasurable attitudes necessary to encompass them all.

Question: The sadhana goes from Om pushpe ah hum to Om shabda ah hum. What is between these?

Answer: This is actually an offering ceremony. Those are offerings being made and there is a traditional set of offerings, which are made. The pushpe refers to flowers being offered. The next one in the order is dhupe, which is incense. This is followed by aloke (lamps), gandhe (scented water, Rinpoche says you can spray cologne or perfume if you like), naividya (food) and shabda is music. There are different mudras or gestures associated with each offering.

Question: Is there a way to practice Kalachakra without going through this entire sadhana? Can one just visualize Kalachakra and recite the mantra?

Answer: That would be fine, as it constitutes a basic, most fundamental part of the practice as it includes visualization on the form of the divinity and recitation of the mantra.

Question: Is it appropriate practice to recite the mantra in off moments during the day?

Answer: That is fine.

Question: So much emphasis has been placed on taking ordination as the best way to practice. However here in the West that does not seem practical. How should we approach this dichotomy?

Answer: In terms of one's own personal practice the point is not so much whether or not one should be ordained or not, that one has to be ordained to

practice. The point is adopting a lifestyle in which one avoids as much as one can actions, speech and thoughts that are harmful to oneself and others. Regardless of the formal level of that ordination never the less the attitude one is approaching one's life with is this idea of avoiding those kinds of activities and encouraging actions, speech and thoughts which are helpful to oneself and others. This is the basic Hinayana level of one's practice regardless of the formal context in which it takes place, whether one is ordained or not, whether one is a layperson or not.

In the context of one's Mahayana practice, the Mahayana level of one's practice this level of commitment is fulfilled by one's resolve to have as helpful and as considerate and compassionate an attitude as possible towards all beings. One continually seeks to extend that compassion and good will towards all beings. The tantric level of one's own personal commitment to Dharma practice is in terms of one's commitment to the actual teachings one has received. There is no need to go beyond that. The actual teachings one has received, simply to take these and to work with them as given to resolve one's doubts so that one can approach this practice with confidence and use it as best as one is capable. With this kind of commitment on these three levels not only will one's personal appreciation and experience of the Dharma deepen but the general cultural situation, the climate in which the Dharma is spreading will improve. These seeming contradictions and cultural gaps will be bridged but this is something that is going to take a certain amount of time and commitment on all our parts to bridge the gap, to create an environment in which everyone practice is something we all share in. One's practice will become more effective.

Question: Something about the levels of tantra

Answer: To begin with the Hinayana level of practice is characterized by these three aspects or three elements of view, meditation and practice, the actual expression of behavior. The view is concerned particularly of the non-self of the individual, the fiction of the ego as something ultimately real. The actual meditation, which one practices to carry this out, focuses on a partial, at least, realization of emptiness or shunyata, the emptiness of ego or self. The terms samatha and vipasyana apply here, the terms of tranquility meditation to calm the mind, stabilize the mind and insight into the nature of mind, particularly into the emptiness of ego. This forms the basis of Hinayana meditation practice. The behavior or deportment on the Hinayana level is related with the levels of formal ordination, a sense of disciplining one's physical and verbal outer actions with a view towards eliminating certain negative tendencies in oneself and encouraging positive ones.

In the context of the Mahayana level of practice the view is a more complete appreciation of not only the emptiness of an individual ego but also of all phenomena, the ultimate emptiness, empty nature, empty essence of all phenomena and all experience. This is tied intimately with the meditation on shunyata, developing the experience of shunyata and the fact that phenomena and experience is only conventionally valid and not ultimately real. The meditations which one develops are basically a deeper and more

profound appreciation or experience of this shunyata, this essential emptiness of all phenomena. The third aspect of one's deportment or one's behavior is linked with this idea of emptiness as the basic approach is to regard all phenomena and all experience as illusory or magical in nature. It is something, which appears to be when there is actually nothing there, ultimately speaking. The approach here is not so much of choosing between good and bad, of actually accepting or rejecting so much as approaching everything from the point of view of its illusory nature. In terms of practical experience, in terms of practical techniques one is using, we have the concepts of the Six Perfections, generosity, morality, patience and so forth which one is developing and encouraging through one's practice. But the basic approach to all experience that one has is its fundamentally illusory or unreal nature.

…this is very true. I think we have all felt a great deal of benefit has taken place in this situation. I would encourage you all to take these teachings to heart, not simply to pay lip service to what I have been saying and you have been listening to these days but to actually put these teachings to use so that qualities like faith and compassion grow in your experience. This is beneficial not only for you but on a general level as well. There is benefit for others as well. So please take these teachings to heart and use them. Perhaps now we can simply close the session with the dedication of the merit from this kind of effective teaching.

Colophon

This text was transcribed by Phil Lecso, using tapes made available by Karma Triyana Dharmachakra.

Dharma Teachings

Given by

Kyabje Kalu Rinpoche



San Francisco

KDK - 1982



His Eminence Kalu Rinpoche
wearing the ceremonial Gampopa Hat
Photograph taken at Kagyu Ling Retreat Center, Plaige, France

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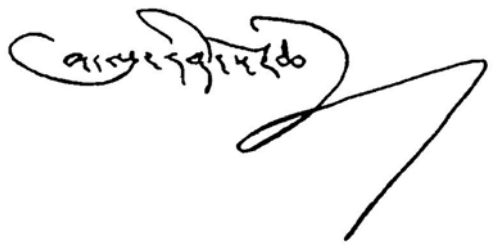
Dedication

I go for refuge to the divine assemblies of the Three Jewels and Three Roots. Please grant us your blessings.
All sentient beings of the six kinds who have been our parents,
Who are bound in the state of cyclic existence due to self-clinging,
Who, by their not having comprehended taking rebirth endlessly,
Are distracted by concerns of this life only,
I pity the distress of their pain and separation at the time of death.
From virtuous and non-virtuous actions, one experiences the results as bliss and suffering.
By this nectar of oral instructions which point out this situation
To all sentient beings who are confused as in a dream,
Having sown in their mind streams the seed of liberation,
And having in the end freed them from samsaric suffering,
I have written this for the purpose of attaining the state of Buddhahood, Permanent bliss.



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The Three Yanas

This is a very auspicious occasion; it is very fortunate that we could come together for this program of teachings and empowerments. This is due to the kindness of Lama LodS. All of you who are students and patrons of the dharma, due to your previous karmic connections with this lineage, have come together in this isolated, beautiful place. It is due to this activity on the part of all of you, the support and effort that all of you have shown, that the KDK Center in San Francisco has come together, and likewise, the retreat center here in Oregon. We all have a wonderful opportunity in being here.

First, let us examine the three yanas. They can be viewed in two ways, following two classifications of Buddhist teachings. The more general or common way to view the three yanas is as the Shravaka, the Pratyekabuddha and the Bodhisattva. The first two beings pertain to the Hinayana level, the third to the Maha-yana. Another way of looking at the three yanas is from the point of view of our individual practice. The outer element, our particular lifestyle, pertains to Hinayana individual liberation vows. The inner motivation of our practice is the Bodhisattva attitude of the Mahayana. The secret or hidden aspect of our practice is the experience that we develop through tantric practice, through Vajrayana techniques and our samaya or commitment to that practice.

All three of these yanas, regardless of the particular classification we are using, are the authentic teachings of Lord Buddha Shakyamuni; all of these are part and parcel of the Buddhadhar-ma, the only difference being that while each of these yanas or levels of practice can bring the practitioner to the attainment of complete enlightenment, there is a difference in regard to the time scale in which this happens. Some paths require far longer periods of time for the individual to develop and purify to the attainment of complete enlightenment and other paths are very rapid, comparatively speaking.

There is also a difference with regard to the ability of the practitioner of any one of these yanas or levels of practice to be effective in helping others as well. In some cases, the particular approach that is being used will have greater ability to benefit others as well as oneself through spiritual practice. In the lowest level of the Hinayana path, that of the Shravaka, one who hears the teaching will practice accordingly on that level of the Hinayana. The approach in meditation is to reduce the mind to a momentary state of consciousness which is perceived to be empty, being no thing in itself. So there is partial realization of shun-yata at this point. An individual on this level can come to the realization of one aspect of egolessness, that of the individual self, the mind—which is normally taken to be something solid and existent and real, in and of itself. The mind is perceived to be intangible, empty, without any limiting or defining characteristics. However, this realization does not carry through to a point where the practitioner of the Shravaka path can experience the egolessness of all phenomena. Instead, there is the egolessness of the individual, the individual mind or

consciousness which is perceived. So there is a fifty percent realization of shunyata. This is the arrival at the half-way point in the possibility for the experience of emptiness or shunyata and it is the highest point that this particular path can take.

Due to our present lack of the experience of this emptiness of mind, we are subject to a great deal of emotional conflict as well as thoughts and ideas which are continually agitating the mind. These, from the point of view of the Hinayana path, are recognized to be something negative, or at least not productive of anything but suffering and confusion. At this point, the approach to the thoughts and emotions of the mind is quite ruthless. One cuts off or arrests this emotional and mental turbulence of the mind, in an attempt to cut off or arrest the origin of suffering and confusion.

This approach also extends to our physical bodies and environments, the world in which we exist. The Hinayanist lives in a mechanistic universe composed of elements which have the potential to be harmful to the physical organism. Earth, air, fire, and water—all of these can be the source of suffering. Also, the relationship to the human body, the physical body, is to regard it as one very basic cause of ego clinging and fixation on the self, which is the primary cause of continued existence in the cycle of rebirth. So the approach is to cut through any fascination with or attachment to the human body, by viewing it as composed of any number of different impure substances. This is accomplished through an analytical process in meditation which dissects the body, as it were, viewing it as flesh and blood, bones and marrow, feces and urine, lymph and internal organs and so forth. The thirty-two impure substances of the body, taken out of context, are unappealing, so by analyzing the body in this way, one is attempting to cut off or arrest any fascination with or clinging to the physical body, regarding it rather as one of the principal bonds or chains keeping the mind caught in the cycle of rebirth. This approach also applies to all the sensory experiences we have through sight, sound, taste, smell, touch, and so forth; all of these are regarded as sources of attachment. We attempt to pull ourselves as far away from any kind of sensory stimulation and attachment as possible, and instead focus the mind inward to develop an awareness of a momentary state of consciousness, which is the key to a partial realization of the emptiness of mind and all experience. In the case of the Shravaka, one realizes the emptiness of the mind without carrying that through to understanding the emptiness or egolessness of all phenomena. Even with this partial realization, however, there comes a release from personal suffering. This is the state of being an Arhat.

The term Arhat, drachompa (dgra.bcom.pa) in Tibetan, literally means "one who has conquered the enemy." From the point of view of this yana, this particular vehicle of practice, the thoughts and emotions which contribute to and reinforce our ego clinging are the enemies; they are the foes we are battling since they are blocking our attainment of enlightenment. The practitioner has risen above the limitations that are imposed by conceptual thought and emotions, by placing the mind in this empty state of momentary awareness.

This produces the absence of suffering. The personal experience of an Arhat is total freedom from or transcendence of personal suffering, but the state is a relatively static one. The mind simply remains poised in this state of empty awareness for what may amount to thousands of kalpas, an infinitely long time. One is free of the need to take rebirth again and suffer according to the dictates of karmic tendencies, but totally ineffectual in dealing with the welfare of others. It is a completely neutral or static state of awareness.

At some point, the Arhat will be roused from this state of stagnant partial awareness by a visionary experience of a light being empowered by Buddhas or Bodhisattvas, and will be encouraged to rise above the limitations of the partial realization of emptiness to embark on the Mahayana path. The Arhat will come into contact with a Buddha or Bodhisattva who can transmit the teachings of the Mahayana path and the Arhat will embark on that path, being capable of developing the ability to benefit others and of attaining further realization. The Arhat's path is now identical with the ordinary Mahayana path because the Arhat will have to go through that stage to attain to complete enlightenment.

The intermediate path or yana is that of the Pratyekabuddha, the so-called Self Buddha or Self-made Buddha. For someone who is following this particular approach, the partial experience of emptiness is somewhat extended. The resultant state of awareness is very similar to that of an Arhat, but the particular path which is followed to attain to that state of realization differs. On this level there is emphasis on the twelve nidanas, the twelve links of interdependent causality, which form a cycle beginning with fundamental ignorance and following through to birth, old age and death. The process in meditation is one of examining these twelve nidanas from beginning to end and then examining them in reverse order to discover the key to unlocking the whole cycle, which results in the experience of not only the egolessness of the self or individual mind, but also a partial realization of the egolessness of phenomena. Phenomena are no longer taken to be existent in and of themselves but are perceived to be composed of monads or atomic particles to which they are reduced in meditation. However, the final step of realizing the egolessness of the particles is not made. There is a reduction of all phenomena to their sub-atomic structure but this is still taken to be something ultimately real in and of itself, so there is a partial realization of the egolessness of all phenomena. Thus the Pratyekabuddha can attain to a state which is similar to that of an Arhat in that it is the experience of egolessness of the individual, and also can partially attain a realization of the egolessness of phenomena.

However, while again this entails a personal experience of liberation from suffering, it does not constitute complete enlightenment and it does not constitute a particularly effective state to work for the benefit of others. It is possible for someone who is practicing on this level of dharma to inspire faith in others through the demonstration of miracles such as flying in the sky or manifesting as various elements such as a ball of fire or pool of water. These miraculous powers arise spontaneously from their realizations; they inspire faith in people and plant seeds in them that will result in future rebirths among gods or humans in contact with the teachings. It is therefore

beneficial, but there is no ability to actually teach. In fact, this is something noteworthy about the Pratyekabuddha path. The experience of enlightenment is kept to oneself and is not something that is possible to communicate to others; one lacks the effectiveness somehow. Eventually of course, to attain complete enlightenment, the Pratyekabuddha would, as an Arhat does, have to make contact with the Mahayana and follow this particular path through to complete enlightenment; the ability to benefit others would begin to grow in the context of Mahayana practice.

When we consider figures in the lineage of the early spread of the Buddhadharma, such as the seven generations of teachers who followed after the Buddha's passing (the Buddha's Pari-nirvana), the sixteen Arhats or sixteen Elders of the early Buddhist church, or Shariputra and Maudgalyayana who were the two main students of Buddha, these are individuals who are generally considered to be models of Hinayana practice and individuals who attained the state of an Arhat's realization. However, ultimately speaking, these were very advanced Bodhisattvas manifesting in a particular form as Hinayana individuals, exemplifying this particular model of spiritual practice for the benefit of those people who find it easier to relate to this kind of model. The awareness behind that expression was really much more advanced, much more profound than one might assume, looking at the surface and taking these simply to be Arhats (very advanced, very adept spiritual practitioners but limited in their realization). In fact, it would seem that there was far greater realization and experience behind that which was expressing itself in the choice to manifest in a form which beings at that time and in those circumstances found beneficial.

One model of this Hinayana approach was an individual named Kashyapa who received a particularly significant transmission from the Buddha and functioned as one of the first lineage holders after the Buddha. He is one of the seven generations of teachers who fulfilled the same function as the Buddha, being the central lineage holders after his Parinirvana. This individual Kashyapa was a married householder at one time and he and his wife both practiced the Vedic system of religion under a sage of that tradition. At a certain point both husband and wife became filled with disgust at further involvement in samsara, seeing nothing but suffering and confusion and pain arising from their continued involvement in the cycle of rebirth. Both of them developed a very strong renunciation and a desire to liberate themselves, so they adopted a very strict lifestyle. Although they were married, they adopted a celibate lifestyle and made a vow between themselves that they would have no physical contact nor any sexual activity. They would live as though they were ordained individuals and would refrain from any physical contact, even touching hands.

Once they were on a journey and they lay down to go to sleep under a tree. While Kashyapa was asleep, his wife woke up and saw a poisonous snake coming out of the bushes toward them, and her first thought was to wake him up. But so strong was her commitment to their vow that she felt she shouldn't touch him, even under these circumstances; she took a fly wisk and flapped it at him to wake him up. When he awoke, he thought she had touched him, and he said, "Why have you broken our vow? We can't break our vows; we

must stick to them." And she said, "There was a poisonous snake coming and I thought I should wake you up." Kashyapa replied, "It doesn't matter if it bites me. The important thing is to keep the precepts."

That austere approach to life led them to decide that living in the same house was too distracting, so they decided to part ways. Kashyapa went in one direction and his wife went off in the other, to seek their own paths as best they could.

Kashyapa wandered until he came to the particular region in central India where the Buddha was teaching at that time. He met the Buddha and accepted the Buddha as his spiritual teacher. And after taking refuge in the Buddha, he received teachings and began to practice, and eventually attained the realization of an Arhat. It was his strict dedication to that particular approach that allowed him to attain this state of realization, and gave him the sensitivity and development to be able to carry on the Buddha's teachings as one of the main lineage holders.

Kashyapa is a model of Hinayana practice, abandoning worldly concerns to dedicate energy to an austere spiritual practice. This brings us to the Mahayana, which is considered the superior vehicle for a number of reasons. To begin with, the motivation which is necessary to embark on the practice of the Mahayana is an altruistic one: We are taking part in this spiritual activity not simply for our own benefit, but to benefit others. This attitude is something which we need to bring to the Mahayana first and foremost, and is one distinction between the Hinayana and Mahayana. From the very beginning, the keynote is an altruistic one, and that requires commitment. This is not just flashes of altruism, but requires a stable altruistic base upon which to work in order for the practice to be worthy of the title Mahayana. So it is the superior vehicle because of its superior level of motivation.

The results of meditation are also different. We not only realize the emptiness of mind, self and mind having no tangibility whatsoever, but we also carry this through to all experience, all phenomena, as merely manifestations of this empty mind and equally intangible. This is why in the Prajnaparamita literature such as the Heart Sutra we find references such as, "There are no eyes, there is no nose, there are no ears, there is no tongue, there is no body, there is no form, there is no sound, there is no smell, there is no taste, there is no touch. . . ." The Prajnaparamita teachings speak of eighteen different aspects of shun-yata, covering all phenomena as well as the mind. Through this kind of practice, one arrives not only at the experience of the egolessness of the self or the individual but also the egolessness of all phenomena, the complete experience of shunyata, and therefore there is a difference as to the level of possible accomplishment which merits this term Mahayana—superior vehicle —being used.

There is also a difference on the level of behavior, the way that our meditation manifests in our activities. Because there is an altruistic basis in the Mahayana, the emphasis is on being able to benefit others through what we personally experience in our spiritual practice. Rather than it being a strictly personal experience, the practice and its benefits are something to be shared and spread to others. So the approach to one's practical work in the

world is different. For example, in the Mahayana, morality and ethics, moral discipline, is considered to have three different aspects. The first is the narrow sense of the word morality, that is, avoiding negative actions, cutting off or abandoning actions which send one in harmful directions. The second aspect is a kind of morality which consolidates and brings together positive qualities. And the third kind of morality is working for the benefit of other beings which constitues in itself a form of moral discipline and ethics.

Now, the first category, the prohibitive side of morality, of actually cutting off or abandoning activities which one feels are harmful to us in terms of our spiritual practice, harmful to ourselves or others—this is something which is common to all three yanas, to the Shravaka, Pratyekabuddha and Bodhisattva paths. The common emphasis in all three is a morality which judges certain activites to be harmful from the point of view of our spiritual development and from the point of view of our ability to help others. Therefore these activities are cut off.

The second aspect of morality and ethics, the encouragement of positive qualities, the use of our faculties in positive ways, is something which is present on the Hinayana level of a Shravaka or Pratyekabuddha in a limited or partial way. What is present in the Hinayana is a sense that controlling our physical actions, developing a correct meditational posture and simplifying our lifestyle so that our physical activities are restricted, encourages positive and moral use of our physical being. Keeping silent and controlling our speech to use it only for positive purposes channels the energy of our speech into a positive direction. A positive moral step is made through the mind being clear of emotional confusion and discursive thought, and letting the mind rest one-pointedly in a state of bare awareness.

However it is only in the Mahayana that we find a really fullblown approach to this second aspect of morality and ethics. There is an emphasis in the Mahayana and particularly in the Vajrayana on many skillful means of using the body, speech and mind in positive ways. Practices such as prostrations, circumam-bulation of stupas and temples, and the offering of a mandala involving the use of a plate and rice, are physical processes. The recitation of prayers, mantras, texts and sutras are a means of developing verbal merit and verbal virtue. The various methods in meditation to develop faith, to develop compassion, to develop the experience of emptiness in the mind, are associated with a person's individual progress toward enlightenment. These form the second aspect of morality to its fullest extent, and while they are present to some degree in the Hinayana level, it is only hi the Mahayana level that we find full expression of this aspect of morality and ethics.

The third aspect of morality, that of working for the benefit of others, is not significantly present on the level of a Shravaka, which remains a purely personal experience and approach in spiritual development. For a Pratyekabuddha, there is some limited ability to manifest miracles or exert some kind of spiritual influence over others, but it is really only on the Mahayana path of the Bodhisattva that one finds specific and explicit references to such practices as the Six Paramitas, which are the means by which a practitioner of the Mahayana expresses commitment to spiritual

practice in a way which is beneficial to others. This is not only something which is implied, but is explicitly stated and encouraged in the Mahayana and therefore, of course, in the practice of the Vajrayana as an extension of the superior vehicle. For example, a simple act like eating a meal in a Mahayana context becomes imbued with spiritual significance. As practitioners of the Mahayana, we offer the food to our spiritual teachers and Three Jewels, following which we partake of it; the meal ends with our dedication of the virtue and merit of the offerings and of all practice for the benefit of all beings. This is particularly the case with a meal being offered for the benefit of a patron or sponsor of a meal, but there is always this idea of the sharing of the merit at any meal we eat.

The Vajrayana or tantric approach places even more significance on a simple situation like eating a meal. There is a process known as the inner ganachakra, or inner vajra feast, in which we meditate the transformation of the food we are eating into a nectar of awareness which we imbibe, identifying ourselves with our yidam. We meditate ourselves in the form of the divinity and hold to what is termed the divine pride, the complete identification of ourselves with the divinity. We visualize our guru in the throat chakra, our other meditational divinities in the heart chakra, and the dakinis and dharma protectors of the lineage in the navel chakra. All of the mandalas of the Three Roots are fed or receive offerings by this taking in of the nectar of awareness that the food represents. Through this process of meditation, the whole context of eating a meal becomes charged with a far more profound and beneficial significance, and the means of developing our merit and deepening our awareness by this kind of approach are quite incredible. The dedication of merit and virtue occurs at the end of the meal.

The Vajrayana makes use of any aspect of experience. There is even a technique in the Vajrayana carried out in the act of urinating. We meditate ourselves in the form of Chenrezig (Spyan.ras.gzigs) known as Kasarpani. We meditate that the flow of urine from our body is a flow of nectar. The nectar is that of awareness being shared with the pretas and other beings that are not fortunate enough to have direct contact with the teachings. We are attempting through this process to establish some connection through a simple biological act. From the point of view of the Vajrayana this can be imbued with a very profound significance.

In the West, people are not familiar with such an approach, but in Tibet, it was not uncommon for people to make use of these kinds of techniques for even the most ordinary act. For instance, in lighting a fire in the morning to brew a cup of tea, the tantric practitioner would visualize the fire as Vajrasattva, and the fuel as the obscurations and negativities of ourselves and all beings being purified. The practitioner would recite the Vajrasattva mantra while the fire was fed.

For someone who is a practitioner of the Mahayana and Vajrayana and understands the blending of general Mahayana motivation and the specific techniques of the Vajrayana, there is no act that remains meaningless. Each and every act in our daily activity can become a virtuous and spiritually charged situation. As a matter of fact, we are involved with all three yanas.

Our personal effort is to develop a lifestyle that is harmless to others, to avoid killing, stealing and so forth. This is an expression of the Hinayana element of our practice. The development of our faith and devotion to the Three Jewels of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha; and the Three Roots of guru, meditational divinities and dharma protectors; our prayers and supplications to these sources of refuge; our prayers and supplications to our guru; the prayers or hymns of praise to our yidam; mandala offerings and prostrations that exist for purifying ourselves and developing our merit and awareness are in the context of the Mahayana or Vajrayana, depending upon the particular technique that is being used.

In this level of practice our loving kindness and compassion toward other beings becomes paramount. Recognizing other beings as our parents due to karmic connections from previous existences supports this. Our awareness of the essentially positive nature of that past connection and our awareness of the ignorance that now creates disharmony, confusion and separation between beings is the basis from which to develop compassion in the Mahayana context. The Mahayana approach also emphasizes our efforts to be as beneficial as possible to others in any situation; even when we are not physically able to be helpful, our compassion and loving kindness and positive aspirations on behalf of other beings are a very significant factor. Any attempt to develop altruism in ourselves and any attempt to manifest this in physical activity or aspirations to benefit others is extremely important for our involvement in the Mahayana in general and the Vajrayana in particular.

Throughout an infinite process of rebirth after rebirth, the single common denominator has been the concept of the "I," the self, the mind, as something real and solid and individual in and of itself. It is this concept which gives rise to the cycle of rebirth in the first place and continues to fuel it. Any attempt to attain complete enlightenment is an attempt to transcend the limitations of that fixation on the self or ego. That is why the meditation of Chenrezig is so important. In that meditation, which is Mahayana in spirit but Vajrayana in technique, there is the attempt not only to foster positive qualities such as loving kindness and compassion for others; but there is also the attempt to eliminate this fixation on the ego. We shift the focus from the self to the form of the divinity as a step toward the final transcendence of all fixation; the practitioner will transcend the limitation of ego and break through into the experience of true ego-lessness, the ultimate nature of mind itself. The recitation of the mantra Om Mani Padme Hung, which is one of the single most beneficial mantras of the tantric path, and our use of the visualization in states of meditative absorption, are very important from the point of view of liberating the mind from the necessity to experience according to the dictates of ego, to experience things as REAL.

There are three aspects to the Mahayana and Vajrayana, the view with which we go about the practice; the specific technique of meditation through which we maintain and develop that view; and the particular deportment or activity that is encouraged in the way we express our realization or experience in daily activity. On the Mahayana and Vajrayana level, the correct view is nothing less than the direct experience of the ultimate nature of mind itself; only at that level can we say that someone has completely realized the view

of the superior vehicle. As long as there is only a partial realization, we are speaking of only a partial understanding of the view.

People often say that there seems to be a significant difference between Eastern world view and Western world view. Actually, there seems to be a greater difference between a secular world view and a spiritual world view. Whether we came from an Eastern culture or a Western culture, if we do not understand the concept of karma, we have a secular world view. Whether we are Eastern or Western is not going to make any difference that is going to benefit us on any ultimate level. Western people for the most part, for example, have a great deal of doubt about the nature of mind—whether mind exists or not in any ultimate sense. Westerners also seem to have doubt about the concept of future existences or previous existences of continuity of mind. From one existence to another there is a tendency to focus merely on this plane, on this life, as the given, the ultimate reality, and to work from there. Now people in the East are no different if they have not received spiritual training and have not developed themselves through the practice of dharma. They see things very much the same way. So what we are speaking about rather than the differences between East and West are the differences between the worldly and the transcendent or spiritual. Whether we come from the East or the West, we can receive very great benefit from developing a spiritual world view which sees beyond the limitations of dimensions.

I will describe the nature of mind briefly by saying that the mind is essentially empty but luminous in nature, in terms of its potential or ability to know, and unimpeded and dynamic in its manifestations as cognition or awareness. Now, this is something we have to validate for ourselves once we have grasped these ideas. We have to validate it through our own direct experience. We have to sit down and look for the mind. Is there something there? Ultimately, of course, the search is going to be fruitless. We are not going to find the mind, because there is no thing that is the mind. Nevertheless we have to go through this process of sitting down and examining the mind and examining our experience to see what is really going on. What, if anything, is happening? It is only through this kind of approach that we come to some significant understanding; perhaps it is not complete enlightenment, but at least we have a glimpse.

Our actual approach is not so much looking for the mind as allowing the mind to relax, allowing the mind to experience its true nature. It is not as though we were not looking at all, because there is this alertness or awareness to the mind, there is this spark of intelligent awareness which should not be lost if the meditation is to be effective. Slowly we come to understand more about the nature of mind, the immortality of mind, the deathlessness of mind in and of itself, rather than the particular projections of the mind such as the physical body. With this understanding of continuity from one life to another, we can still be caught in a relative framework, the apparent solidity of the physical body, for example, and can make very good use of it. Given that the mind will go on beyond the death of the physical body and experience some other state, then it seems only sensible that if we are concerned about happiness and fulfillment in this life, we are going to be concerned about the same things in future existences. We are going to want to assure that the continued

experience of the mind is as happy and as fulfilled and as beneficial as possible. This gives us a basis for moral choices in our present life, a basis upon which to make a choice between whether an action is virtuous or non-virtuous, whether it is helpful or harmful.

By appreciating the emptiness of mind, we begin to appreciate the emptiness of all phenomena, of all experiences as merely arising from the mind. What we tend to do right now with an ordinary worldly outlook is to take this body, this life, this state of existence as ultimate reality. We think of everything as real and solid in and of itself and we go about life in that way. However, as we meditate, we begin to understand the relative reality and non-reality of everything that we experience. The physical body came into being as a result of certain karmic tendencies maturing hi the individual consciousness, giving rise to this temporary experience of something as solid as the physical body. But it ages, it dies, it decomposes; it is not something eternal.

Similarly, everything that we experience now lacks any kind of ultimate reality, ultimate stability, because the quality of the projections that arise from mind is continual impermanence, change and flux, where nothing remains the same because there is nothing to remain the same. Once we begin to experience that, we see the illusory or dreamlike nature of all experience, all phenomena. The physical body of the universe is merely temporary appearances coming together as a result of various causes and conditions acting together in certain ways, but certainly nothing to which we could ever ascribe any ultimate independent reality.

There is a collective aspect to this karmic process because we share certain elements of our experience. We are all human beings in the same realm of experience. We see the same physical environment and experience that same physical environment of rocks and trees and rivers and so forth. All of this is due to the fact that we share a certain common karma and thus share a relatively coherent view of the universe. However, we all have individual experiences which are not shared with others. Some people are happy while other people are unhappy. Some people are rich while other people are poor. Some people are healthy while others are unhealthy. These individual aspects of karma remain purely personal experiences because they are the result of tendencies that were developed on an individual level.

What we experience now is, ultimately speaking, an illusion very much like a dream. When we go to sleep and have a dream, we experience the dream as something real. There are forms we see. There are sounds we hear. There are things we interact with in a dream which give it a real internal logic. We wake up and the dream is gone and nobody would ascribe any reality to that dream. What we experience now in both its collective and its individual aspects has that same quality of a dream because eventually when we die, we leave it all behind and the entire experience that was this life disappears just as a dream disappears when we awaken.

This impermanence is something which also expresses itself on the level of our individual consciousness, in the emotions of passion, aggression, stupidity, pride, jealousy and greed which continually arise in the mind. None of those can be considered ultimately real. There is continual change and

instability in the mind, continual arising and breaking down of emotional patterns, thoughts and concepts. However, let us take heart, because if these things were real in and of themselves, we would have no room to move in the situation. Because none of these thoughts or emotions or circumstances are real in and of themselves, we can work with them. Through the practice of dharma we can come to change the way in which we experience things because, given that they have no ultimate reality in and of themselves, there is no reason for these aspects of experience to dominate us. We are perfectly able, with the practice of dharma, to know the benefit that comes from being able to take control over our own experience.

We can see, in the way the world is structured around us, that things are always moving in cycles and nothing is stable. Take water as an example. We see a continual flow of rivers and streams into the oceans of the world and the oceans never seem to overflow because the water is redirected by means of water coming up from under the earth; there is a seemingly unlimited supply of water coming from under the earth which doesn't exhaust itself, no matter how much water flows up in springs and geysers and so forth. There is no fixed or solid nature to any of the elements in this situation, but continual impermanence, a continual flux and flow.

This inexhaustible change and impermanence is something that we see on an individual level as well. There seems to be no end to the thoughts and emotions that we can come up with in our minds; there seems to be no end to the words that we can come up with to speak. These are not things which are fixed or limited in any way, but exhibit the kind of inexhaustibility which derives from their fundamental impermanence and fundamental lack of ultimate reality.

Why do we pursue such an investigation? It gives us a greater perspective so that we are not so attached to this life, this particular reality, this particular physical body, this particular self. The benefit that we experience through loosening the bonds of clinging to things as solid and real is that the practice of any kind of meditation and any kind of mental discipline becomes far easier and far more effective. Also, the personal experience of suffering and conflict diminishes as this naive clinging to things as ultimately real begins to dissipate. This is not to say that we are entirely free from or should not respect the relativistic patterns that we are caught up in, because the karmic process is something that remains perfectly valid and infallible. In fact, until our realization allows us to transcend the limitations of karmic process, our physical, verbal and mental efforts to develop and purify ourselves are very important. Thus we can, while still working within a relative framework, control it to a certain extent, so that our own experience of that process is as positive as possible. Then the mind continues from happiness to greater happiness and from fulfillment to greater fulfillment because of our skillful use of and respect of the limitations of karma.

Questions

There seems to be an implication that the Theravadin (Hinayana) path is limited whereas the Vajrayana path is the complete one. Have there been controversies or conflicts about this?

We have no reliable sources about the present situation, but we can refer to the historical development of Buddhism to give us an example of the problems that are sometimes encountered when different levels of teaching are presented. The early spread of Buddhism was largely Hinayana in flavor; the model for spiritual practice tended to be that of the monk and the Arhat. When the Buddha began to teach about shunyata and the emptiness of all phenomena, it is reported that people at his teachings would plug their ears rather than hear that teaching because it threatened their world view too much. It was too profound and they simply could not accept it, so they would refuse to hear it.

It doesn't seem to me that there needs to be a lot of conflict about this in America. You might be a farmer and you do your farming well. This is the way you make your livelihood and this is the way you like to work; you think farming is a perfectly good vocation. You know that there are airplane pilots and cab drivers and physicians and lawyers and so forth, but you're a farmer. They can do what they want and you do what you want. So, it would seem that in the area of spiritual practice that this would be a fairly healthy attitude. Everybody can know what everybody else is doing but it is what you do that is important. If you are doing it well and you are doing what you feel is the best for you, then that is probably the single most constructive approach you can have. You have made your own decision; there need not be any conflict.

The Tibetan tradition does encompass all three yanas. There is a monastic tradition in Tibetan Buddhism. People wear robes and there is emphasis on moral discipline and the individual liberation vows; this is perfectly in accord with the Hinayana path. There is also a very strong emphasis on bodhicitta and the bodhisattva vow and bodhisattva activity, which is perfectly in accord with the Mayahana. There is also a very rich tradition of tantra, the empowerments and teachings for Vajrayana and the different techniques of meditation that we can use in Vajrayana for people who are drawn to that. So the point of the Tibetan approach to Buddhism is an attempt to integrate all of these. It is not so much that there is something for everybody and you pick and choose among them, but that the whole integrates all of the parts.

Will you talk about memory, not simply short-term but also that of previous lifetimes? What is the relationship between mind and body? Is anything stored in the body? Is the Buddha's consciousness more than a blank state? Does it involve thought and memory and mental processes rather than just being blank?

The reason why memory is possible at all, even in a very limited way, is because the nature of mind is empty, clear and unimpeded. Because the mind is empty and no thing in and of itself, it can and does pervade every aspect of experience, regardless of whether we realize that consciously or

not. Because it has the potential to experience anything whether we realize it or not, and because it has the dynamic manifestation of awareness which can experience anything, the mind has the ability to recall events which occurred in previous times. The mind is not actually limited to the present moment, though we feel that it is.

As we develop an experience of the pervasive empty nature of mind, which is not any different from the mind that we experience at this moment, the scope of it begins to expand. Our memory begins to increase; our ability to see into the future as well as the past begins to increase. This is something that is noted in the process of meditation; we become aware of more in all directions, not just linearly into the past. The experience of a fully enlightened Buddha, far from being a blank state, is an enhancing of what we now experience. At the level of Buddha-consciousness, there is even greater awareness than we presently have and that is why we can speak of omniscience, literally being aware of everything.

On a very pragmatic level, there are signs that this begins to happen, that the mind begins to increase its scope, and that is why it is said that a first level Bodhisattva not only sees with the eyes but hears with the eyes, tastes with the eyes, touches and feels with the eyes, smells with the eyes, and thinks with the eyes. A particular avenue of consciousness can operate in other ways because the mind begins to expand and increase its ability to express itself.

This does not preclude that on a relativistic level, when we are still caught up in a vast illusionary scheme of things, certain circumstances can contribute to situations happening in certain ways. The idea, for example, of certain organs being the seat of certain emotions, is perfectly acceptable within a relative framework, but there is no need to ascribe any ultimate reality to it. Within a particular situation there may be a configuration of the psycho-physical structure of the organism that indicates a link between organ and emotion, for example, the liver and anger or the heart and desire, but that does not mean that on any ultimate level we would say that it is because of the organ that any particular emotion arises.

We can take the case of a lower form of life like an invertebrate, such as a leech or a bloodsucker. These are very common in the East and some of them get quite large. They slide alo'ng the floor of the forest and as soon as they get near a warm-blooded creature, they attach themselves to it and start drinking the blood. If you dissect one of those things you do not find any organ systems at all. There is really little there except a sheaf of tissue that can absorb blood, but it has got a consciousness. It does not have a skeletal structure. It does not have any well-developed circulatory system or respiratory system or digestive system, but it still has emotions. It can still feel pleasure and pain. It can still feel desire and frustration. There is consciousness on that level even though the particular physical envelope is very primitive when compared with something like the human organism.

Why do the Buddhas wait thousands of years to send light to the Arhats?

The Buddhas are sending light to the Arhats at all times. However the Arhats are not clear enough to sense it until they have been in a state of awareness for much time.

2
Ordinary Preliminary Practices

The preliminary practices are the approach to the practice of dharma. The Tibetan term Ngondro (sNgon.'dro), which is used to describe this phase of practice, literally means "something that goes before, something which precedes." This is rather like the example of wanting to drive a car. First you must have a road on which to drive; if you haven't prepared that surface, then there is no way to drive the car. The idea of Ngondro as a preliminary or foundation practice is to prepare that road for one's practice of dharma to continue in a certain direction. These preliminary practices can be considered to be of two kinds. The first is the common or ordinary kind of preliminary and the second is the special or particular kind of preliminary practice.

The ordinary preliminaries are the contemplation that we term "the four thoughts which turn the mind." They turn it away from involvement in samsara and toward the practice of dharma. It is a solid understanding and appreciation of these four thoughts, these four contemplations, that arouse in the mind a sincere commitment to the practice of dharma. Without having understood these preliminary considerations one cannot generate sufficient motivation and sufficient sincerity to carry through with one's practice of the dharma. Because this is the case, these four thoughts are not particular to any one school of Buddhism, but common to all of them, so they are called the common or ordinary preliminaries. We can even find elements of them in other religions too. If we examine the iconography of Christian painting, we find the symbolism of skulls and skeletons as the symbols of mortality and impermanence. These concepts pervade the religious and spiritual systems of the world, because there is this common or fundamental quality to them. The first thought that turns the mind toward the dharma is an appreciation of the precious human existence. The term used in Tibetan to describe this state of existence is dal-jor (dal. 'byor) which literally means "a freedom or opportunity difficult to come by." This phrase denotes that the precious human existence provides us with certain opportunities and freedoms that allow spiritual practice to take place. The term dal indicates a sense of leisure or a sense of freedom from restriction. The term jor has the sense of an opportunity or something very positive that one has in abundance so that one is able to profit from it. In the precious human existence, the freedom in this state is the freedom of not having taken existence in the eight states of fettered existence where one lacks the opportunity to practice dharma. These eight fettered states of existence are, first, the three lower realms of existence; the hell realms, the preta realms, and the animal realms; and the higher realms of the gods and the demi-gods. Though these last two are superior states of rebirth in samsara, they do not provide one with spiritual opportunity but merely the experience of pleasure. Altogether, then, these are four fettered states, the three lower realms, and the two higher realms counted as one.

The other four of the eight fettered states concern the human realm. These are being born in a land where there is no dharma; being born as a person whose nature does not appreciate or respect spiritual teachings, even though one may be surrounded by them; being born in an era, or kalpa, when Buddhas do not appear; and being born with some impairment of one's faculties which prevents one from being able to understand or receive teachings.

In not having been born into these eight states of hindered or fettered existence, one is enjoying a considerable state of freedom as a human being. For example, in the hell realms, the minds of the beings suffer so intensely from the continual anguish of extreme heat or extreme cold that the mind is totally absorbed in this experience of agony; there is no chance that the mind can direct itself toward anything like spiritual practice. The same absorption occurs in the preta realms. Because these beings suffer from hunger, thirst and a sense of deprivation, and because there is continual preoccupation of the mind in experiencing this intense suffering, the mind cannot come into contact with or appreciate spiritual teachings.

The same can be said of the animal realm, though the particular limiting factor there is the incredible stupidity in the minds of animals, in that they are not sufficiently developed intellectually to come into contact with a teacher and receive spiritual teachings and implement them in their lives. In fact there is no opportunity for an animal to encounter a Buddha or Bodhisatrva spiritual teacher, not because these teachers do not try to manifest in these realms, but the beings in those realms lack sensitivity due to their karmic obscurations. So these first three fettered or hindered states are the three lower realms of existence in the cycle of rebirth and for the various reasons just mentioned, these states of existence do not provide beings in these realms with the opportunity to develop themselves through the practice of dharma.

The next realm of fettered existence that the texts speak of is that of the gods. Here we are speaking of beings that inhabit the three realms of samsara: the desire realm, the form realm, and the formless realm of existence. The particular catch of the desire realm gods' existence is dissipation and distraction due to the sensual pleasure that those beings experience as a result of their conventional merit. It may be possible for such a being to come into contact initially with the teachings of dharma. They may encounter something as fundamental as the four marks of Buddhadharma which state that everything compounded is subject to impermanence; that everything that is subject to exhaustion creates suffering and frustration; that each and every phenomena is essentially empty, lacking any real self or ultimate reality; and that nirvana, the transcendence of suffering, is ultimate peace. It may be possible for a being in these desire realms of the gods to understand and appreciate that teaching and think, "You know, I really should do something about this; I really should practice dharma." However, in the next instant, the mind is wandering into some pleasant experience, and it cannot be focused for very long.

In the form realm of existence, the gods are experiencing a kind of samadhi, a trance-like state. This is not an eternal state of enlightenment, since it is subject to exhaustion and degeneration at some point, but a blank state. Therefore, there is not the intellectual comprehension necessary to meet the dharma. In the formless realms the gods are in such a state of nearly non-conceptual consciousness that nothing as structured as spiritual teaching can take place. So, whether we are talking about a god in the desire, form, or formless realms, there is no occasion for that being to come into contact with the teachings of dharma in any significant way.

The next state which is mentioned in the traditional text is that of barbarians, of spiritual barbarism, and there would seem to be many areas in the human realm nowadays where this spiritual barbarism is the case. There may be injunctions against religious practice in a certain area, or it may be that a certain area has not been exposed to the teachings of something like Buddha-dharma, so that these spiritual concepts are not part of the common view.

Sixthly, the texts speak of those who have views naturally antagonistic to those of the dharma. Even if they live in a place where the teachings are present and accessible, they reject them. They reject any idea of the continuity of mind from previous existences to future existences; and any idea of causality, the relationship between actions and experience.

The seventh of these eight hindered states is a time in which Buddhas do not appear. During our particular kalpa, from the time this world system we inhabit was formed until its destruction, there will appear a total of one thousand Buddhas, which means that this is an extremely fortunate kalpa. Following this, there will be a period of sixty such kalpas where no Buddha will appear at all. Then there will be one kalpa in which Buddhas will appear, following which there will be seven hundred kalpas in which Buddhas will not appear, following which there will be one in which Buddhas will appear. From one age to another, there is no guarantee that Buddhas will appear. It is an extremely rare occurrence, when seen on a cosmic scale, that Buddhas actually appear in any given age and present the teachings of dharma; or that the word dharma is even present in the language; or that the concept even exists at all.

The eighth kind of hindrance that could be a part of one's existence is some kind of impairment or retardation. This could be a sensory impairment, such as being born blind or deaf, or it could be a mental impairment, such as being born without the intelligence necessary to understand and implement spiritual teachings. Any of these impairments would make one's pursuit of the dharma difficult, if not impossible.

When one has attained a state of human existence free from any of these eight possibilities which would hinder or limit one's ability to receive and implement the teachings, one is enjoying what are termed the eight freedoms associated with the precious human rebirth. Therefore, one has the ability to understand and practice the teachings of dharma. However, even if one were enjoying these eight freedoms, that would not guarantee that one would meet with and practice the teachings; this is what the texts refer to by maintaining

that there are also ten opportunities. Five of them come about through others and five of them come about through one's own situation or actions. It is necessary for all of these to be present for one to meet the teachings and actually practice them.

The five opportunities that come about through others are the appearance of a Buddha, the teaching that the Buddha presents, the maintenance and duration of that Buddha's teachings, the following of those teachings by others, and the kindness and support that one is shown by others in one's practice. Now, as we have already mentioned, there are many kalpas in which Bud-dhas do not appear. In those ages, the first two opportunities would be missing; the teaching would not take place and one could never come into contact with it. In our particular case, the Buddha Shakyamuni appeared in India hundreds of years ago and taught a very extensive and profound cycle of teachings of three yanas, Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana. (This is not something which every Buddha does. Some appear, but do not teach.)

Once this Buddha appeared and taught, there is a span of time in which those teachings remain present before they gradually disappear, and then there is quite a long period of time before the next Buddha will appear, during which there are no teachings at all, though one is still within the context of this age where one thousand Buddhas will appear. We live in a time when the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha are a living transmission. There are also many people who continue to follow these teachings, providing one with an example, and it is because of their involvement in the teachings that there has been this living transmission.

Finally, there is the kindness and support that others show for one's practice. This is something that is quite important because without support, be it financial or moral, one might have all the intention in the world but be unable to practice. However, in fact, that support is forthcoming from individuals who are impressed by the teachings, impressed by one's interest in and practice of the teachings, and they therefore provide support out of kindness and affection for one as a practitioner.

An example of this last point can be appreciated by looking at the general situation since I first came to America in 1971. There were many people who were interested in practice but they had no support from the culture around them whatsoever. Now, in a very short span of time, we see that increased interest has given a greater sense of support. For example, people are now going into the Three-Year, Three-Month retreat program. Some of them are entering without adequate funds to complete that retreat, but we are finding that many people are inspired to support them. This is not something that really could have happened even a short time ago and is an example of affectionate and compassionate support for one's practice by other people. So all of these opportunities that are provided by the actions of others are necessary for anyone to enjoy the precious human existence.

Of course, even though there might be much support and opportunity forthcoming from others, it remains for individuals to provide themselves with opportunities. The five opportunities we are concerned with are having taken

a human rebirth, having been born in what is technically termed a central country, having been born with all one's faculties intact, living one's life in such a way that one does not fall into some karmic extreme or cul-de-sac which leads one away from the teachings, and having a basic faith and confidence in the teachings of dharma. These are the five opportunities that are provided from one's own situation.

In the first of these, one has avoided the eight fettered or hindered existences and taken rebirth as a human in this precious state of existence. Next, being born in a central country is interpreted to mean a historical or geographical place such as the areas of India where the Buddha appeared, or it can be any place where the teachings of dharma are present. We find ourselves in that situation, in a country where the teachings of dharma have spread and are spreading; this area has become a central country from the point of Buddhadharma.

The third concern is that one is born with all of one's senses intact. The fourth point is having lived one's life hi a way which has directed one toward rather than away from the dharma. This means that one has not, due to the influence of one's parents or family or friends or one's own inclinations, concerned oneself solely with something extremely mundane; but has continued to maintain some sensitivity for the teachings of dharma. All of this is very important, but there must be this fifth point, which is the basic confidence in and attraction for the teachings of dharma. This is something which we as individuals enjoy in this precious state of rebirth.

When the eight states of freedom and the ten opportunities are complete, then one is speaking about a precious human existence. All of you reading this are now in that kind of human existence. We may feel that there are billions of people in the world so we may be confident that if we die we will probably take a human rebirth, but we do not have any kind of guarantee because of the extreme rarity of the precious human state of existence.

We can consider the rarity of the precious human existence in a number of ways. The Buddha gave certain examples to illustrate and impress the rarity of this occasion upon his listeners. First of all, by considering the karmic cause which results in one taking rebirth in such a fortunate state of existence, one can appreciate its rarity; it is only through a process of moral choice between unskillful, un-virtuous actions and skillful, virtuous actions, that a being establishes a sufficiently positive karma to attain to this kind of precious human rebirth. When one looks at the various forms of life, one can see that the actual number of beings involved in that kind of moral choice, avoiding negative and harmful actions and encouraging in themselves virtuous and positive ones, are very few. Because those who are developing the cause are very few, therefore those who are going to experience the result will be correspondingly few.

Secondly, one can consider the number of beings in various realms. Buddha tried to illustrate this when he compared the number of beings in the hell realm to the number of atoms in the earth, the number of pretas to the grains of sand in all the lakes and oceans and rivers in the world, and the number of animals to the number of drops of rain or flakes of snow that fall. This

indicates the enormity, the immensity of the number of beings in those realms, by comparison to which the number of beings in the human realm is very small.

In particular, the number of beings in the human realm enjoying this precious human state of rebirth are extremely rare and the Buddha compared them to the appearance of stars in the daytime. It is possible to see such a thing but very, very rare; in the same way, it is possible for such a being to have that state of rebirth but it is very, very rare. The Buddha used a metaphor at one point to try to illustrate this rarity of the precious human rebirth. He said that if the whole earth were covered with water, and at the bottom of this vast ocean lived a tortoise which was blind and only rose to a random point on the surface of the ocean once in every hundred years, and if on the surface of that ocean there was a yoke made of wood, which was being buffeted about by the wind and waves in a random fashion, how often would the tortoise rise and put its head through the hole in that piece of wood? We cannot rule out the possibility, but obviously it is not going to happen very often. That is the kind of rarity that the precious human rebirth represents.

The first preliminary practice, then, is to recognize and appreciate the precious human state of rebirth and to appreciate its potential. This precious human rebirth offers us incredible opportunity for the practice of dharma and for spiritual development; we cannot expect this opportunity to come again and again. Moreover, life is brief. If we appreciate these things, we will see the need to make use of this precious human state of rebirth and to truly realize the potential of being human while we have the opportunity.

Not to make use of our opportunity would be an incredible waste. It would be like a pauper being presented with a hundred kilos of gold and then sitting there the rest of his life, not knowing what to do with the gold, and dying as poor as ever. It is a wasted opportunity. We have been given that wealth; we have found that wealth in our situation and if we do not do something meaningful with it, then we are wasting something quite incredible. We can do something significant with our spiritual development, we can make moral choices in life, choosing between virtue and nonvirtue, and develop realization and insight. We have the potential to attain complete enlightenment, the ultimate achievement for our own welfare and for helping others as well. Once we have an appreciation of what the human potential provides, we can develop the motivation to actually realize that potential through the practice of dharma.

As humans, we make the naive assumption that things around us are stable, solid, and eternal. The second preliminary practice is to become aware of death, impermanence and change in every aspect of our experience.

This can be considered on a number of levels. We can take a cosmic viewpoint and consider the world system in which we live. It seems so solid now, but ultimately it is going to be destroyed; eventually, there will be a process of dissolution through fire and water and elements breaking up. On a cosmic scale, we can see that nothing is eternal.

One can also examine our annual experience of the changing of the seasons. Spring passes into summer, then autumn into winter in a continual cycle. This is a continual process of change.

Even on a daily basis, nothing is ever stable; nothing is ever constant; nothing remains the same. Everyday one gets up. It is dawn, it is early morning, midmorning, midday, afternoon, evening, nightfall, night. One has a watch; one can sit and look at the watch and see life ticking by second by second. There is relentless change and relentless instability to everything we experience.

And most significantly from one's own point of view, one can consider one's span of life, which is shortening, second by second, minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day. This is a process that cannot be stopped. It is a relentless process of change and impermanence that we experience in everything, including, significantly, our own life.

Everyone who has ever been born in this realm has died; everyone who has been born and is still alive is going to die; everyone in the future who will be born, will die. This is the nature of things. Everything that is born is subject to death—and we are no different. In particular, we live in a realm where the span of life is not fixed. People die at all ages. Some children are stillborn; some die in infancy. Some people die in youth or middle age or old age. There is no certainty.

No one of us can say, "I am going to live this long," and guarantee it. We understand the precious potential we have in being human, but we do not know how long that opportunity is going to last. It is something we need to understand so that we can appreciate the necessity of using our precious potential as quickly as possible. Once we have that appreciation, we will find that we have no trouble at all practicing dharma,

The benefits of appreciating the implications of impermanence are something that Milarepa addressed when he said, "It was fear of death that drove me to the mountains, and I meditated so long on death and impermanence that I realized the deathless state of my mind. Now death holds no fears for me." Sooner or later we are all going to die and the experience of death is a very traumatic one. If we do not utilize this life for the practice of dharma, part of our suffering and pain at the point of death will spring from recognizing our wasted opportunity. We will think to ourselves, "If only I had practiced sooner, if only I had not waited. Now there is no time." When death comes, death comes. There is no way to forestall it and try to make up for the lost time that resulted from one's procrastination. It is now while we do have the opportunity that we need to see the opportunity and make use of it, so that we will have no regrets. If it were the case that the more we heard about or thought about death and impermanence, the shorter life got, then there would be an argument against mentioning it. But whether or not we think about death, we are going to die; and whether or not we think of the impermanence of things, things are impermanent. At least by being mindful of this, we can develop an awareness that instills the commitment to practice, so that when we do inevitably have to die, we can at least go to death cheerfully. We can feel, "Well, I haven't wasted my life. I've made a good thing of my life and a

significant amount of virtue has taken place." We do not have to go to death with regrets.

The third of the common preliminaries is the concept of karma: the causality between actions and experience. This is something so crucial to the understanding of Buddhadharma that the Buddha regarded it as the essence of all of his teachings. At one point the Buddha said, "Once a karmic tendency has been established, it won't exhaust itself in a million kalpas; it won't go away. At a certain point when the conditions come together which require it to emerge, it will ripen; it will mature into experience." Given that there is this infallibility of the karmic process, we must not expect our karma to get lost so that we will not have to account for it.

It is important to understand how the karmic process works, because it is such a crucial and infallible aspect of our own experience. We can examine a few general aspects of the karmic process here. Those who are interested in a more exhaustive description would do well to consult the Jewel Ornament of Liberation by Gampopa. Also, in my own small book, The Writings of Kalu Rinpoche, there is a reasonably complete though concise treatment of this theme of karma.

To begin with, there is both a collective and an individual aspect to karma. For example, we have all taken rebirth as human beings in this particular realm, so we have a certain element of shared karma. A certain percentage of our experience as human beings in this realm is due to a collective or common kind of karma. However, within that general context, some of us live longer than others; some are happier than others; some are healthier than others. This range, this spectrum of individual human experience is due to the individual aspect of karma. While each individual shares a certain element with every other individual in this realm, there are individual karmic patterns and tendencies which result in individual variations of experience for each person.

There is a story of a certain individual who was born during the lifetime of Shakyamuni Buddha. This young boy was born with a beautiful jewel in his ear. When it was appraised by experts it was found to be worth one million units of the currency of the day—a fabulous jewel. The boy quickly became known as The Million Dollar Ear. At a certain point during his life he came into contact with the Buddha and received teaching from the Buddha and set himself to meditation. He very quickly attained the level of an Arhat, the realized saint of the Hinayana level of practice. Understandably, people were curious about him, due to the remarkable circumstances of his birth and also his very rapid spiritual progress, so they asked the Buddha to explain what the karmic causes of such a rebirth were.

The Buddha explained that an infinitely long time ago there had been a wealthy merchant who had a beautiful earring with a very costly gem in it. In his travels, he had come across some people erecting a stupa or monument to a particular Buddha and he was so inspired by faith that he decided to sponsor the project; he took the beautiful jewel from his ear and gave it to the people who were working on the stupa. The merit that he developed from that sincere act of generosity and faith set up a karmic tendency whereby his

mind took rebirth in human and godly states for a long period of time until he was born during the time of Shakyamuni Buddha under these very remarkable circumstances of the jeweled ear. Because of the spiritual connection he had established through faith and appreciation of the stupa, he came into contact with the Buddha. That event created the positive karmic tendency which allowed him to make rapid spiritual progress. We are constantly experiencing the maturation of karmic tendencies which were established in previous lifetimes through our actions.

Also during the lifetime of Lord Buddha, another remarkable occurrence was the experience of a particular woman who, when she was very young, married and conceived her first child. However, she did not give birth to this child after the normal term of pregnancy. Instead she conceived a second child and following a normal term of nine months, gave birth to the second child. During her life she gave birth to ten children and the first fetus that had been conceived but never born remained in her womb all of this time.

When she was in her seventies and had been carrying this first child for sixty years, she was dying. She exacted a promise from her doctor and her family that when she died, the fetus would be delivered by Caesarean section because, she said, "I know the child is still in my womb; I have been pregnant eleven times and given birth to ten children and I know I am still carrying this first fetus in my womb. I want to make sure the child is going to be looked after. I am sure it is still alive; I am sure it has been developing all this time and I want its life to be preserved after I die."

Understandably, this became quite well known and many people gathered when she was dying. The Buddha also became aware of this situation and, with a large number of his followers, he came to the place where the woman was dying. When the doctor pronounced her dead, he performed a Caesarean section and lifted from her womb a living being who was not a baby, but a kind of small dwarfish figure that resembled an old man with white hair. He also lacked teeth. In fact, it looked as though the teeth had formed and then fallen out, for the face was sunken. This wizened little figure was lifted from the womb of the dead woman and the Buddha blessed the child, or rather, old being, and gave it the power of speech. The Buddha said to it, "You seem to be quite old; you are, aren't you?"

The little dwarfish figure replied, "Yes, I am quite old." The name Old One was given to it for want of a better name. The amazing thing was that this human being, this old child, was able to develop intelligence and learn to walk and talk and become a functioning individual; more remarkable than that, it was able to attain Arhatship through the spiritual teaching of the Buddha.

The Buddha explained that this particular karmic situation had begun during the time of the previous Buddha, Sangye Korwajik (Sangs rgyas hKhor wa hjig). An old and venerable monk who was very developed in his meditation had a young novice as his attendant and their relationship was very harmonious. One day, however, a large festival came to the area and the young monk was eager to go. He went to his teacher and said, "Why don't we both go to this fair?"

The teacher said, "Well, both of us have taken monk's vows. We don't need to go to spectacles. The most important thing for us to do is to sit and meditate and develop ourselves spiritually." He would not give his permission and he himself did not want to go, so the young monk asked permission to go alone. The old monk reiterated that they should be doing their meditation. The novice continued to press for permission to go and the teacher continued to refuse.

Finally, the young monk became furious and started to scold and abuse his guru. He said, "I don't care if you sit and rot in a hole for sixty years; I'm going to the carnival," and he left. He developed such an aversion to his teacher that it established a karmic tendency that eventually ripened as he spent a lifetime in his mother's womb before being born. However, because of the previous positive connections he had had, and the basic virtue he had established in that earlier lifetime, he was able to make contact with the Buddha and make very rapid spiritual progress. Again during the Buddha's lifetime a monstrous creature appeared in a large open sewer close to the city of Varanasi. This strange creature had eighteen heads and each one resembled the head of a different animal, such as a horse, a monkey and a sheep. A report of this came to the Buddha's ears and he went to see this creature with a large number of people following. As he came to the bank of the foul pool, the creature came to the surface and came toward him and he bestowed his blessing on the creature and said, "Do you remember what it was you did that brought this about?"

The memory of this strange creature stirred and it began to understand what the karmic causes had been which led to its present existence. It began to cry, for in a previous existence it had been a monk who had a particularly foul mouth. He gave his fellow monks very derogatory nicknames, mocking how their faces were formed, such as "pig face" and "monkey face." This karmic tendency eventually became the stream of consciousness and resulted in this very graphic manifestation of negativity. The Buddha blessed the creature and liberated its consciousness from its lower state of existence and the being attained to a higher state of rebirth in the god realms.

Another occurrence during the life of the Buddha concerned an old couple who had lived their lives in a very simple way and had never really concerned themselves with spiritual practice. They were just a peasant couple and toward the end of their lives, they wanted to do something virtuous before they passed away. They wanted to earn merit, recognizing that, if they were not going to attain enlightenment, at least they could assure themselves of having some kind of positive rebirth. They decided to invite Shariputra to their home. Shariputra was one of the Buddha's main disciples, renowned for his samadhi and psychic powers and for having attained to the state of an Arhat. Shariputra was quite a holy individual and they felt that by serving him a meal and offering service to him, they would create the conditions of offering positive aspirations and thus they could realize those aspirations in the future. So with great respect and devotion they offered a meal and some very auspicious prayers and aspirations in his presence.

As it happened, this old couple had a field of rice which was their only possession. When the rice ripened the year after Shariputra's visit, everyone was astounded to note that the actual grains of rice were made of solid gold. The report of this spread far and wide and the king heard of this and became quite jealous. He thought, "How is it that I am the king of the country and have only rice in my fields while these old people have gold? That will never do." He ordered his men to confiscate the field and to give a similar plot of land to the old people as compensation.

The couple were relocated but once they had moved, it was found that their original field now had nothing but rice in it, and the new field to which they had moved had grains of gold in the sheaths of rice. The king moved them again and again. In fact, the cycle was repeated seven times but the gold would only "grow" where the old couple farmed. People started asking the Buddha, "What is happening here?"

The Buddha said, "This is simply a case of karma ripening very quickly. These old people offered their service to a holy individual with such faith and sincerity that they are experiencing part of the karmic effects in this lifetime. No matter how much you try and take it away from them, you can't, because it is theirs to experience." This was a way for the Buddha to expose people to this idea of causality, the relationship between our actions and their natural results. These examples gave people much confidence in the karmic process as a valid element of experience.

With an appreciation of causality, we can choose virtuous actions which reinforce positive patterns, producing happiness and fulfillment, and avoid harmful actions which reinforce the opposite kind of karmic tendency, bringing about suffering and pain. Appreciation of causality also affects our spiritual practice, since it, too, is an action leading to a result. The conviction that cause and effect are real, results in our turning away from negative and harmful actions and toward positive actions and spiritual practice.

There are three sutras which fully describe the concepts of karma, the Sutra of the Wise and Foolish (mdo.sde 'jangs.b'un), the Sutra on the Foundations of Mindfulness (mdo.sde dren.pa nyer.bzhag), , and the Sutra on One Hundred Instances of Karma (mdo.sde.las.brgya). These are presently only available in Tibetan, but for those who can read them hi the original language, these sutras describe the karmic process hi great detail.

The fourth of the common preliminaries is an awareness of the sufferings and limitations of samsara, the cycle of conditioned rebirth. We will examine the concept briefly; fuller discourses may be found in the Jewel Ornament of Liberation and The Writings of Kalu Rinpoche. Whatever realm of being we are talking about in the cycle of rebirth, it is fraught with some kind of suffering. There is the suffering due to heat and cold in the hell realms; intense hunger, thirst and deprivation in the preta realms; incredible stupidity and predation of one species upon the other—the struggle for existence—in the animal realms; the suffering of birth, aging, sickness and death in the human realm; quarreling and jealousy in the realm of the demi-gods; and suffering of the gods due to falling eventually from that state of relative happiness and ease to a lower and more tormented state of existence. In

general when one examines the limitations of the cycle of conditioned rebirth, the cycle of samsara, one can truly see that it is an ocean (or one might better say a swamp) of suffering into which we have sunk.

As human beings we all experience the sufferings of birth, of the aging process, of illness and death. We have no choice; it is part of the human condition. There are many other kinds of suffering which are entailed by being human: the continual search or striving after something which cannot be realized; the continual loss of that which we have attained; the continual contact with people and situations that harm and thwart us; and the continual separation from those we love and hold dear. All of these are part of the human condition.

In general we human beings can be thought of as a mass of emotions. Because there is enormous emotional confusion, there is a tremendous amount of suffering as well. As long as there is emotional conflict, through our remaining unenlightened, there is going to be suffering. Once we have seen that, we begin to realize the hopelessness of trying to escape suffering when we are still caught up in emotional confusion. The only possible escape from suffering is a transcendence of emotional confusion, and a transcendence of suffering is only possible through the attainment of enlightenment.

Let us take the life of Milarepa as a model for spiritual practice, commitment and unflagging devotion. He was able to put up with all circumstances. If he froze, he froze. If he starved, he starved. If things were difficult, they were difficult. He put up with it all and he was able to see through it all and attain enlightenment. That kind of commitment and exertion came from having understood the four basic preliminaries. Because he made them a part of himself, he so thoroughly realized them that he was able to dedicate himself in a complete way. We may not intend to be like Milarepa but nevertheless, in our practice of dharma, we will find that the more we think about and really understand these four preliminary contemplations and make them part of our experience, the easier and more fruitful our practice of dharma will be.

While the teachings of dharma have many blessings and benefits, if we do not have an understanding based upon the contemplation of these four thoughts, then it is like having a finely tuned car with no road on which to drive it. We might be able to get a short distance, but we are not going to be able to drive it effectively, and we certainly cannot get to our destination. Whatever practice we try will be in fits and starts; a really effective practice of dharma is not going to occur without the solid foundation which these four preliminaries give us.

3
Ngondro: Refuge and Prostrations

* Editor's note: This chapter is a complete explanation of the refuge visualization. The reader is encouraged to seek the instruction of a qualified lama for prostrations and refuge recitation (the physical and verbal aspects of taking refuge).

We have explored the ordinary or common preliminaries, the four thoughts which turn the mind away from involvement in samsara and toward the practice of dharma. The special or particular preliminaries of the Ngondro practice begin with refuge. Taking refuge is linked with the practice of prostrations, * which is the physical element of the physical, verbal and mental aspects involved in taking refuge. The reason we need to take refuge or practice prostrations is because our particular situation is one of helplessness.

Tathagatagarbha, the potential for enlightenment which is the nature of mind itself, is something which is inherent in our being. However, we lack direct experience of it, and therefore a number of levels of confusion and obscuration have set in; we are more or less in the situation of infants, dependent upon our mothers and unable to do anything for ourselves. We have no real control or power over ourselves. Given that we are in this helpless or powerless state, we lack the ability to provide our own refuge, to lead ourselves along the path of enlightenment. The mind itself has lost power to its own projections, to the kar-mic tendencies that are part of mind, to the thoughts and emotions which continually arise in and disturb the mind. Therefore, we are not able to provide ourselves with an adequate source of refuge, or an adequate source of guidance for spiritual development.

In order for us to traverse the path to enlightenment, we need some help; we need to look somewhere outside of our own limited situation for something that can provide that source of refuge. This is the reason, first and foremost, for taking refuge in the Buddha. The attainment of Buddhahood implies the removal of all levels of obscuration and confusion in the mind, and the unfolding of all the incredible potential which is the nature of mind itself. At that point, there is complete control, complete freedom, complete power and capability. Therefore, the Buddha, as one who attained to omniscience, provides us with a source of refuge and with the guidance for our own spiritual practice.

Taking refuge in the Dharma, the teachings which were presented by the Buddha to enlighten other beings, provides us with a source of guidance and refuge. Taking refuge in the Sangha, those beings who attain to high states of realization such as the ten bodhisattva levels and who realize and transmit

the dharma, provides us with an additional source of guidance and refuge. We call these sources of refuge the Three Jewels. Through our own efforts in seeking refuge, and through the blessings which are inherent in the sources of refuge, the connection is made whereby we can make effective progress along the path to enlightenment.



Refuge Tree

Part of the very compassionate and skillful activity of the Buddha was the tantric teachings called the Vajrayana. These teachings were presented to

provide beings with the means to traverse the path to enlightenment effectively and attain that goal very swiftly. A practitioner to whom these teachings are accessible, and who is a fit vessel for these teachings, meditates upon yidams, which are manifestations of enlightenment, manifestations of Buddha in both peaceful and wrathful forms. The yidams, or divinities, are associated with certain mantras and visualizations which are used to effect transformation very rapidly. Theoretically, it is entirely possible to attain complete enlightenment in a single lifetime, through the practice of the Vajrayana. Because this accomplishment stems from meditation upon and identification with the yidams, we speak of the yidarns as the source or root of accomplishment, and this is the first source of refuge in Vajrayana practice.

The second crucial element of Vajrayana practice is the blessing and inspiration that we receive from our spiritual teacher. The particular function of the guru is to provide us with a link to the living transmission of blessing and experience which has come down in an unbroken lineage. This lineage derives from the Dharmakaya level, the absolute or formless enlightened experience, which is iconographically repreented as Vajradhara Buddha. In the case of our Kagyu tradition, one lineage begins with the Dharmakaya level and passes through a human succession of teachers such as Tilopa and Naropa in India. Another lineage begins with the Dharmakaya level and passes through the wisdom dakini Niguma, or through the wisdom dakini Suk-hasiddhi. Each of these lineages is a living transmission of teaching and experience from one generation to the next; each lineage is unbroken, composed of gurus down to the present day, and includes our own root guru who is the principal source of blessing for our tantric practice. Therefore, in the Vajrayana, the second source of refuge is the guru.

It is quite truly said in the Vajrayana tradition that the deeper the dharma, the deeper the negativity that we encounter in our practice. In a powerful and intensive practice, there can be very strong obstacles from within and without. In the Vajrayana tradition, there are particular forms which we can supplicate, known as dakinis, dharma protectors, and guardians of the teachings. These are emanations of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, usually in wrathful form. Their principal function is to allow the practitioner to overcome obstacles and hindrances which are encountered in the practice. These forms are described as the root of enlightened activity. In the Vajrayana, we speak of both the Three Jewels and the Three Roots of refuge, the guru (or gurus) as the root of blessing; the yidams or meditational divinities as the root of accomplishment; and the dakinis and dharma protectors as the root of enlightened activity.

Because we are concerned with practice of the Buddhadhar-ma on the sutra and tantra levels, all of these sources of refuge constitute valid objects of our faith and devotion. The benefits of taking refuge are that the practitioner opens himself or herself to the blessings of the sources of refuge. Our minds turn toward the dharma more and more; we become involved with the practice of dharma so that it becomes our path and our way of life. These blessings clear away obstacles to the supreme accomplishment of complete

enlightenment. Taking refuge is fundamental to our practice of dharma, both in starting on the path and in following it through to completion.

The four main schools of Buddhism in the Tibetan tradition, Sakyapa, Gelugpa, Kagyupa, and Nyingmapa, all emphasize taking refuge in the Three Jewels and the Three Roots, the six sources of refuge. However, the particular visualizations and liturgies which are used for recitation differ, and it is on this basis that the name "particular" or "special" preliminaries is given to this level of practice.

One fundamental text of the Buddhist tradition states that all phenomena are subject to our intentions and motivations. The way we experience things depends very largely upon the way we intend to experience them, upon how the mind is actually predisposed toward a given situation. In the case of refuge, this truth has given rise to a traditional way of presenting the teachings and of following the practice by which we share the experience of the masters of the Kagyu lineage.

When we take refuge during Ngondro, we meditate that the particular environment that we are in is not in its ordinary form but is a vast, beautiful meadow. In the center of the meadow there is an enormous lake filled with water of a very special quality; this is no ordinary lake but a magical, miraculous one. The lake is surrounded by a green shore with flowers growing on the banks and beautiful water birds resting on its surface.

In the center of this lake grows an enormous tree with one trunk, which separates into five main branches. The central branch extends vertically and the other four branches extend in each of the cardinal directions. Each of these large branches divide into smaller branches and twigs which are covered with a profusion of leaves, blossoms, and fruit. When we imagine this enormous five-branched tree growing from the center of the lake which is in the center of this vast meadow in front of us, it gives us ease and happiness, and a certain spatial feeling to the mind.

Beyond that, this visualization has been confirmed by the experience of the masters of the Kagyu lineage and we share that experience and receive the blessing of the lineage when we practice in the traditional way.

Above the central branch of this tree we visualize a very finely wrought and beautiful throne composed of beautiful jewels and precious metals, which is supported by eight lions and upon which there is a seat in the form of a fully blooming lotus flower. Above this flower there is the flat disc of the moon, and above that is the flat disc of the sun. In tantric practice these four elements—throne, lotus, sun and moon discs—form the seat upon which we visualize our root guru manifesting in the form of Vajradhara Buddha, the dark blue form of the Buddha. His form is brilliantly clear, radiant and adorned with jeweled ornaments and silken garments. In this manner we meditate on our guru as the Dharmakaya aspect of the Buddha.

Above the crown of the guru's head we visualize the actual form of our guru's guru, and above that guru's form, that guru's guru and so forth, so that there is a progression of the lineage from our own root guru back through the lineage, each figure being above the last. It is as though the figures are

stacked like coins, one above the other, so that there is a pillar formed by the figures of the gurus of the lineage. The pillar is crowned at the top with, again, the figure of Vajradhara Buddha, clearly visualized as the source of the lineage. This particular lineage, which is the direct transmission of the Mahamudra teachings in the Kagyupa school, is known as the golden string or the golden rosary of the Kagyu lineage. We also visualize that all the other gurus of the lineage who were not main lineage holders, all of the sid-dhas, realized yogis, and meditators of the Kagyu school, are grouped around the central axis of the main lineage.

We can then incorporate all the lineages of Buddhadharma, for example, the gurus of the lineage known earlier as the Kadampa school, which was later re-codified into the Gelugpa school; the Lam-dray (Lam.'bras) transmission of the Sakyapa school; lineages such as the Shi-jay Chod (Shi.byed.gCod) teachings, which were introduced to Tibet by the Indian teacher Padampa Sangye (Pha.dam.pa.Sangs.rgays) and were developed by the Tibetan woman Machig Labdron (Ma.gcig.Lab.sgron); the lineage of the Six Doctrines of Naropa, Niguma, and Sukhasid-dhi; the lineages of the Kalachakra teachings, particularly the Jorwa Droog (hByor.wa.Drug) or Six Applications, which are similar to the Six Doctrines of Naropa but in the Kalachakra cycles; the Maha-Ati lineage of the Nyingmapa school and so forth.

In short, we meditate on the gurus of all these lineages surrounding the central axis of the Kagyu golden rosary, so that there is a vast assemblage of gurus of all transmissions surrounding the central lineage. The point is to adopt a nonsectarian approach, a totally ecumenical visualization, for while we identify most strongly with the particular lineage that is our personal inclination, in this case the Kagyu lineage, as the central lineage or central axis of the visualization, nevertheless, we are encouraging and developing our faith and respect for all valid transmissions of Buddhadharma without making sectarian judgments.

Of the four main traditions of Buddhism as it developed in Tibet, the Maha-Ati lineages are referred to under the name "Nying-ma" which means literally the earlier or older transmission. The other three schools, Sakyapa, Gelugpa, and Kagyupa, are sometimes collectively referred to as the Sarma, or Sarmapa, which means newer or later transmissions. This means that the particular tantric cycles that are emphasized adhere to a later wave of translation of texts from India to Tibet, rather than to the earlier Nyingma translation cycles. The divinities which are associated with the later cycles are particular to these new lineages. In the Kagyu school, particular emphasis is placed upon two cycles, that of Chakrasamvara or Korlo Dompa Dechog ('Khor.lo.sDom.pa.bDe.mchog), and Vajravarahi or Dor-je Pagmo (Rdo.rje.Phag.mo).

In the visualization, we are encouraged to meditate on one of the forms of the yidams on the branch of the tree closest to us in front of this lineage of gurus. Either Chakrasamvara or Vajravarahi is the central figure surrounded by the forms of other tantric divinities such as Kalachakra, Mahamaya, Guyasamaja, or Hevajra. Any and all of these tantric divinities are visualized in a vast

assembly or mandala of divinities on this eastern branch, taking the direction toward us (forward) as east for the purposes of the visualization.

On this eastern or forward branch in front of the lineage of gurus, the divinities which correspond to the Nyingmapa tantra, the earlier or older transmission of the Vajrayana in Tibet, are quite appropriate for subjects of visualization as well. In general we find the classification of the Nyingma yidams divided into five groups which correspond to the five Buddha families. Those associated with the wrathful form of Manjusri correspond to the family associated with body; the divinities of the lotus family correspond to that of speech; the divinities particularly known as Yang-dak-tuk are the principal divinities in the family of mind; the teachings of amrita or nectar are associated with the development of positive qualities; and Vajrakalaya or Dorje Pur-ba (Rdo.rje.Phur.pa) is connected with enlightened activity. Any and all of these divinities of the Nyingma school can be included as visualized divinities on this eastern branch closest to us in front of the lineage of gurus.

On the southern branch, which is to the right of the gurus in the lineage (on our left as we face the visualization), we envision the figure of the Buddha Shakyamuni, the particular Buddha who presented the dharma in our period of this kalpa. He is seated on a throne supported by lions and a seat formed of a lotus flower and a moon disc. We visualize the golden form of the Buddha Shakyamuni, and around him are the figures of the thousand Buddhas that will appear in this kalpa. We can envision as vast an assembly of the Buddhas of the three times and ten directions as our imagination can encompass.

On the western branch to the rear, behind the lineage of gurus, we visualize the jewel of the Dharma in the form of books or scriptures. In the Tibetan tradition, these would consist principally of the Kangyur (bKa.gyur), the collection of the words of Lord Buddha translated from the Indian language into Tibetan; and the Tangyur (bStan.hgyur), the commentaries on these root teachings by masters of the Indian Buddhist lineages and the early Tibetan lineages. All of these are seen in the form of an enormous stack of thousands of texts. The Tibetan way of binding a book is to wrap it in cloth and mark it with a small face cloth which identifies the particular scripture. When these books are stacked on the shrine, the face cloth of the book is what we see. We envision this enormous stack of texts, all of them vibrating with the sounds of the consonants of the alphabet in which they are written, so that the texts and scriptures literally hum with the sound of the language which is used to transmit those teachings.

On the northern branch to the left of the lineage, which is to say to our own right as we face the visualization, we visualize the noble Sangha composed of the Bodhisattvas such as the eight great Bodhisattvas, Chenrezig, Manjusri, Vajrapani, and so forth; and the many forms of Arhats.

In the space underneath the branches of the tree, forming a kind of canopy, we envision the figures of the dakinis and dharmapalas or dharma protectors. These protective figures fall into two categories, the masculine and the feminine tantras. The masculine tantras include the forms of the two-armed,

four-armed, and six-armed Mahakala and the feminine tantras include the form of Palden Lhamo (dPal.ldan.Lha.mo), a feminine aspect of the wrathful divinities. All of these forms of the divinities that guard and protect the teachings, the dharmapalas and dakinis, are meditated in a vast host or assemblage underneath the tree, supporting, as it were, all of the branches of the tree. This is a very complex visualization. To be able to visualize clearly all these forms of the divinities with the appropriate colors and the appropriate garments and the appropriate attributes and symbolic implements requires a great deal of stability and " skill with this phase of tantric meditation, which is known in Tibetan as kye rim (skyed.rim), the development phase. Even more basically, it implies a certain kind of "Tibetan" experience, a sense of calmness which has been instilled in the mind, so that the mind can hold such a complex visualization for any length of time at all.

Though we might not be able to approach this visualization with any clarity in the beginning, that need not be a cause of discouragement, because Vajrayana is the path which exploits the aspirations that we feel. The most crucial element becomes this aspiration, this motivation that we have. The Buddha himself says that whoever sincerely conceives of being in the Buddha's presence is in the Buddha's presence. We do not need to doubt that. If it is our conviction that we are in the presence of the sources of refuge, then we actually come into contact with their blessing. Even if our visualization is not clear, nevertheless, our basic faith and confidence in the practice and in our ability to place ourselves in the presence of the Three Jewels and the Three Roots should remain unshaken, because this is the crucial element that determines the success of the practice.

Do not think of these forms as solid like stone statues or flat like a scroll painting. They should be envisioned to be perfectly transparent like a rainbow or a hologram, but having no solidity at all. Nevertheless all of the attributes of the divinities, the radiance and brilliance of the peaceful divinities and the flaming magnificence of the wrathful divinities, should be brilliantly clear to the mind, or at least as clear as possible. We then have the immediate presence of the divinities and the gurus and so forth, the sources of refuge, without the concept of them being something real or corporeal.

4
Ngondro:
Dorje Sempa Meditation

The second foundational practice is the Dorje Sempa or Vajra-sattva meditation. The particular purpose of this meditation is to purify us of the different levels of obscuration and confusion in the mind and the negativity and negative karmic patterns that develop as a result of that confusion and obscuration.

To purify ourselves of these kinds of obscurations, confusion, and negativity, there are a number of different forces or powers that have to come into effect. Traditionally these are four in number. The first force is that of support, the basis from which we are working in our purification. The element of commitment on any level, the individual commitment of the Hinayana, the bodhisattva vows of the Mahayana, or the tantric samaya of the Vajrayana, provide this support. This commitment lends a great deal of power to any part of our spiritual development, including purification.

The second force is technique that we are using as a remedy for a given situation. In this case it is the purificatory technique of the Dorje Sempa meditation, meditating the form of Dorje Sempa above the crown of our heads, reciting the mantra, and using the visualization of the flow of nectar from the form of the divinity to our own form, as a process of visualized purification.

The third force is that of repentance or remorse. This is our sense of regret and appreciation of the negative effects of any given action, tendency, or level of confusion in ourselves, and our sincere desire to remove this.

Finally, there is a sense of promise or commitment to ourselves that, having divorced ourselves from any given tendency, action, or state of confusion, we will not reinforce that in the future. Instead we commit ourselves to a positive direction. This is the force of the antidote. If all four of these powers are present, then it does not matter how deeply ingrained the confusion is, or how negative the particular action is, we can purify ourselves of the hindering and harmful effects.

In the sutra tradition of teachings, we find reference to five kinds of actions which are termed inexpiable. The Tibetan term team-may (tsham.med) means no interval, because the karmic effects of these acts are so grievous that the consciousness of the being, assuming that there is no effort in purification, will go straight to a hell realm immediately upon death. The mind will experience the negative results of that karma immediately. These inexpiable actions are: the killing of one's father; the killing of one's mother; the killing of one's spiritual teacher or a highly evolved spiritual being; physically harming a Buddha, out of negative intent; and causing a schism or

faction in the Sangha, which is the assembly of practitioners. Any one of these five actions is considered, from the point of view of the sutra tradition, the single worst kind of action that a human being could possibly commit in terms of karmic consequences. However, with the skillful use of these four powers of purification, even this kind of very serious karma, which would normally be considered something irrevocable, could be purified.



Dorje Sempa

There are stories in the Buddhist tradition of certain individuals who committed these kinds of crimes and were able to purify themselves of the karmic consequences. A prince in India at the time of the Buddha was guilty of killing his father in order to ascend the throne. He later repented and was

able to purify all of the negative karmic consequences. Another individual was guilty of killing his mother and was also able to purify himself through sincere repentance of that act and sincere efforts to purify. Another man whose name was Ungulamala was guilty of killing some 999 people. Despite this very heavy karma, he was able through sincere repentance and efforts in purification to purify himself and make quite significant spiritual progress.

In the Vajrayana path, the fundamental samaya or commitment that we are observing is considered to be extremely important.* To deliberately violate our root samaya is considered, from the point of view of the tantric teachings, even more serious than to commit one of these five inexpiable acts. However, even an infraction of this root samaya in tantric practice can be purified through the use of these four forces. According to this understanding of nonvirtuous and unskillful action, the only virtue of nonvirtue is that it is purifiable.

The Dorje Sempa or Vajrasattva meditation is the single most effective and most excellent practice for purification that can be found either in the sutra or the tantra teachings. A session of meditation begins with us visualizing ourselves in our ordinary form and envisioning that above the crown of our head there is a white lotus flower above which there is the flat disc of the full moon forming a throne or a seat upon which rests the form of Dorje Sempa. This figure is conceived to be our root guru manifesting in this aspect of purity.

The white form has one face and two hands, the right hand holding a golden dorje (rdo.rje) to the heart, and the left hand a silver bell which is held with the hollow part of the bell facing upwards at the left hip. The divine form is seated in a cross-legged posture and adorned with the jeweled ornaments and silken garments of the Sambhogakaya. We envision this manifestation of our guru as completely insubstantial or noncor-poreal, like a rainbow, the union of form in its pure appearance. In the heart of the figure of Dorje Sempa we visualize the moon disc forming a kind of seat or basis upon which the seed syllable of Dorje Sempa, a white syllable HUNG, is standing upright. Then we envision the white syllables of the hundred-syllable mantra arranged counterclockwise facing outward in either of two ways. If we find it more convenient, we can visualize the entire mantra around the outer rim of the moon disc, surrounding the central syllable; however, this is a very long mantra and, if we find it more convenient, we should envision that it is coiled rather like a spring or a coiled snake with the first syllable directly in front of the HUNG in the center of the moon disc coiling slowly outward in a counterclockwise fashion. Either way that we visualize is entirely appropriate.

For someone who has some expertise in the practice of visualization, and faith in the practice, envisioning the figure above the crown of the head is sufficient. For this person, Dorje Sempa is actually present above the crown of the head. However, in the case of beginners such as ourselves, the problem that is posed is that the mind is thinking in terms of this being a mental construct. We think, "This is something I invented, something my mind is just imagining." There is no sense that the meditation is imbued with the divinity.

So, for the beginner, the particular aspect of the divinity that we call forth, visualized above the crown of our heads, is what is termed Samayasattva or damtsig sempa (dam.tshig sems.dpa1). This is the bonded or consecrated aspect, and is our own mental creation, our own visualized concept of the divinity. At this point, we meditate that from the HUNG syllable in the heart of the Samayasattva, light shines throughout the universe and invokes the awareness aspect, Jnanasattva or yeshe sempa (ye.shes sems.dpa']. The awareness aspect of the divinity, that is, the actual divinity, is called to imbue the bonded aspect with the awareness aspect. We visualize this by meditating the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas from all directions manifesting in myriad forms of Dorje Sempa; they are absorbed into the aspect meditated above the crown of our heads. We can rest assured that the awareness aspect has blended with the consecrated aspect, and the divinity is actually present above the crown of our heads.

Once we have blended the awareness aspect with the consecrated aspect of the divinity, we pray to this aspect as our guru manifesting in the form of Dorje Sempa. We acknowledge on behalf of ourselves and sentient beings, all of the obscurations and confusion that has arisen, all of the negativity that has arisen, and all of the harmful acts which have been committed by ourselves and others in all lifetimes from beginningless time. All of this is clearly acknowledged and sincerely repented, and we offer a prayer to this aspect of the guru to purify us and all beings of this negativity.

As a response to this supplication, we meditate that from the seed syllable and the syllables of the mantra in the heart of the figure of Dorje Sempa, a nectar begins to flow like milk. This brilliant white nectar begins to flow from the central syllables of the mantra and fill the entire form of the divinity. As the divinity fills to overflowing with this liquid, the nectar begins to flow from the divinity's form into our own form through a hole visualized in the crown of our heads. As it fills our form we meditate that this elixir expels all the confusion and obscuration in our mind, in the form of dark and inky substances like soot or dirt. These are expelled from our body through the orifices of excretion, through the pores of the skin, through the palms of the hand and the soles of the feet.

Our physical involvement in this practice is the correct posture of meditation. The body is as erect and still as possible so that the mind can concentrate on visualizing the continual flow of nectar from the divine form through our own form.

The verbal aspect of this practice is the recitation of the hundred-syllable mantra:

> OM BEDZRA SA TO SA MA YA MA NU PA LA YA BED-ZRA SA TO TE NO PA TI TA DRI DO ME BA WA SU TO KOY YO ME BA WA SU PO KOY YO ME BA WA A NU RAK TO ME BA WA SAR WA SID DI ME PRA YA TSA SAR WA KAR MA SU TSA ME TSI TANG SHI RI YA KU RU HUNG HA HA HA HA HO BAN GA WEN SAR WA TA TA GA TA BEDZRA MA ME MUN TSA BED ZRA BA WA MA HA SA MA YA SA TO AH.

To complete this portion of the Ngondro practice, this mantra is recited 100,000 times, with additional recitations to make up for any errors. Traditionally, a total of 111,111 mantras is recommended as the complete recitation.

Following this, there is a short mantra, OM BEDZRA SATO HUNG, which is an additional mantra used as a recitation for this practice. This is done as many times as we conceivably can, ideally, 600,000 times, with additional repetitions to allow for errors, totaling 666,666 recitations of the short mantra. These would be done in addition to the 111,111 recitations of the long mantra to complete the practice. This, of course, is not done at one time; we divide the practice into regular sessions of meditation during which time we do as many hundreds or thousands of the mantra as we are able.

We will find that if we concern ourselves solely with the recitation of the mantra during a given period of meditation, without any other recitation or talking during the session of meditation, the effect of the mantra will be far more powerful. We can illustrate the importance of confining our verbal activity by thinking of a piece of white silk which has become soiled. If we want to clean it, we need a number of things. We need soap, water, and elbow grease. For the practice to be successful, we could think of the form of Dorje Sempa as the water, the recitation of the mantra as the soap, and the visualization of ourselves being purified by the flow of nectar as the actual work of scrubbing. When all of these elements come together, our purification will be effective and we will experience the benefits of the practice.

In the commentaries on the Dorje Sempa practice, one of the tantras says, "If we can recite the mantra 108 times without the mind wavering, we have become a son or a daughter of the Victorious Ones." This means that the power of the mantra depends upon the mind being focused upon the practice. If the mind is not distracted, then the power of the mantra brings about very high states of realization which will take us to a high level of Bodhisattvahood, and we will truly be a son or a daughter of the Victorious Ones. In the context of this meditation, the only relevant occupation for the mind is the meditation on the form of the divinity, the sound of the mantra being recited, and the visualization of flowing nectar purifying us again and again. Beyond that, the mind should not wander.

At the end of any given session of practice, we offer a supplication to the guru Dorje Sempa, openly acknowledging all the faults and shortcomings of ourselves and all beings, particularly any infraction of our tantric samaya. Finally, we meditate that there is an affirmation from the guru in this aspect of Dorje Sempa, that the form of the divinity actually speaks to us, and says, "Oh, son or daughter of noble family, from this day forth all of your purification has been successful and your obscurations and negativity have been purified." We should meditate and develop an attitude of celebration that this has taken place. This is quite important to insure the success of the practice. All of the various elements and attitudes must be part of the practice because there is an inter-causality between them.

Following this, we meditate that the form of the divinity dissolves into light and is absorbed into ourselves; there is an identity of our own form, speech,

and mind, with that of the divinity. We let the mind rest for a short period of time, as long as is comfortable, in the formless state of that awareness.

The texts speak of certain signs that our purification is effective. Dreams of watching the sun or the moon rise in the sky or dreams of finding ourselves in a beautiful garden or spacious meadow, meeting with the form of a Buddha or Bodhisattva, or dreams of climbing a high mountain to its peak, would be regarded as signs that our purification is effective. However, it would seem that the most important indications that we are purifying and developing ourselves and receiving blessings are our deepening compassion for others, our faith in our gurus and the Three Jewels, our understanding and belief in the karmic process, and our renunciation of samsaric involvement. If these qualities are developing, we can take them as signs that our purification is successful and that we are receiving blessing.

* Editor's note: The reader is referred to Chapter Fourteen, Vajrayana Commitment and the Fourteen Root Downfalls, for a full explanation of samaya.

5

Ngondro:
Mandala Practice

We can use the example of building a house to consider the attaining of enlightenment. To build a house, we need bricks, wood, cement, and labor. The attainment of enlightenment is no less complex. The Ngondro meditations were designed to ensure that all the necessary elements in our spiritual practice are present.

Just as we lay the foundation for our home, we establish our spiritual foundation through prostrations and taking refuge. Once the foundation is built, our mind begins to turn toward the dharma, which then becomes our path and our way of life.

The next element is that of purification, introduced by the Dorje Sempa meditation. Now we not only have a basic sense of support, but encourage our own spiritual progress through purifying ourselves of the negativity and obscurations which inhibit spiritual development.

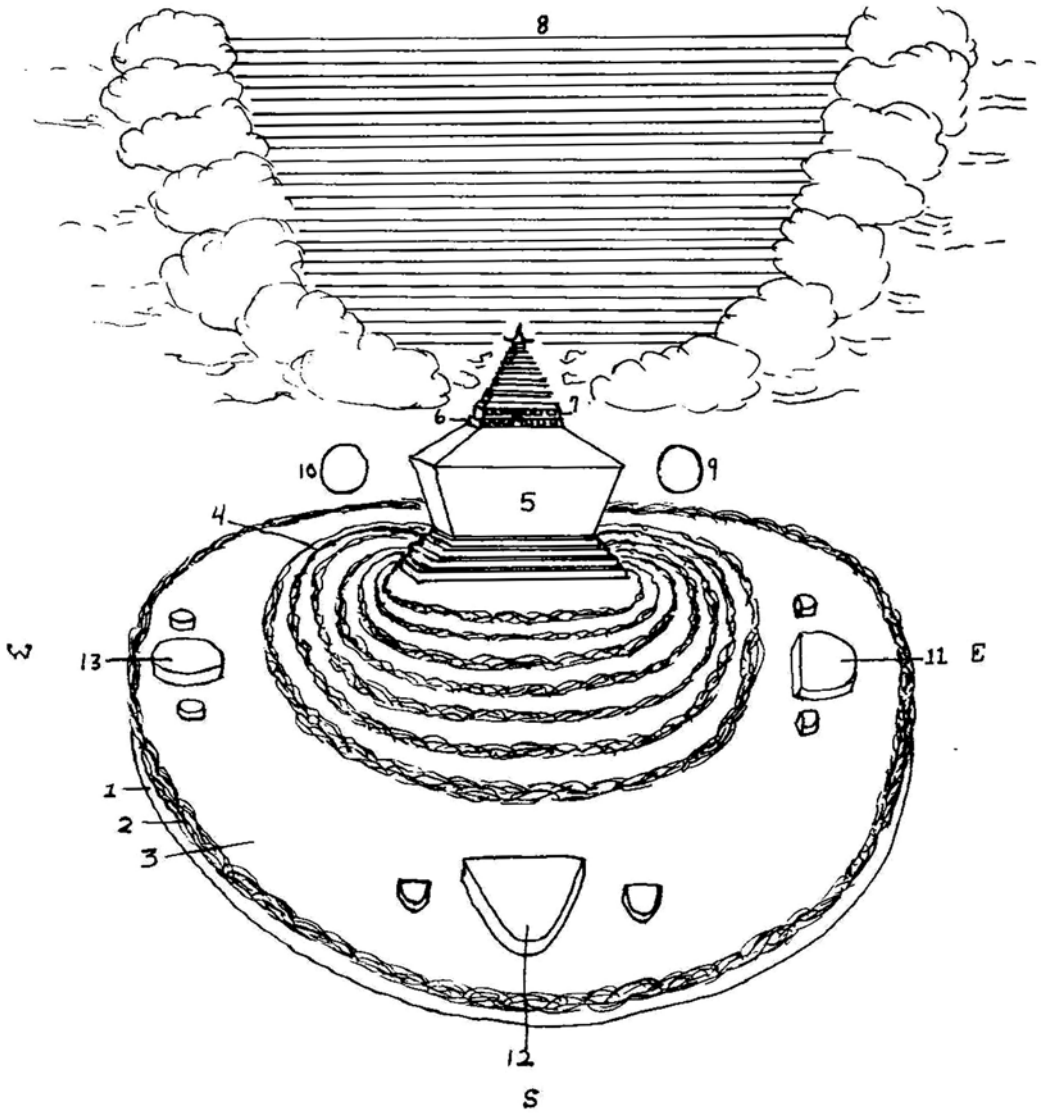
The third element, the mandala practice, is concerned with enhancing the positive, through the development of merit and the deepening of our awareness.

The Guru Yoga practice, which is the fourth element, opens us to the blessing of the guru. All these elements are essential for our spiritual practice to be effective and lead us directly to the attainment of enlightenment.

For the mandala practice as traditionally presented, certain materials are necessary. Two small metal plates which are called mandalas are used as a basis for meditation. The better of these is placed on the shrine, with five piles of rice in a pattern, one in the center and one in each of the four directions. This forms the basis for our visualization of the sources of refuge, the Three Jewels and the Three Roots, in the sky in front of us. This is what is termed drupay mandala (sgrub.pa'i.mandal), the mandala of attainment or achievement; the sadhana or actual practice is the basis for that visualization.

The other mandala, which is held in the hand, is termed chopay mandala (mchod.pa'i.mandal), which means the mandala for making offerings. It is on this plate that we place piles of rice in a prescribed fashion and this becomes the basis for our visualization of the mandala of an idealized conception of the universe which is being offered again and again in the presence of the sources of refuge. Ideally we should have these two plates, one of which occupies a position on the shrine and remains there during the entire practice as a basis for the visualization of the sources of refuge, and the other of which is held in the hand and repeatedly cleaned and piled with rice during

the practice. If we do not have two plates, we may use just one in the hand. If no plates are available, the practice may be performed entirely through visualization.



Traditional Depiction of the Main Features
of the Ideal Universe, for Visualization

1. Iron mountain
2. Ocean
3. Golden ground
4. Seven lakes
5. Mt. Meru
6. City of Vishnu
7. Indra's palace
8. Deva realms
9. Sun
10. Moon
11. Videha and satellites
12. Jambudvipa and satellites
13. Godaniya and satellites
(Not visible is Uttara-Kuru and satellites.)

Mandala drawing by Elizabeth Johnson

The arrangement of figures in the visualization of the sources of refuge is similar to that which has been described in the chapter on refuge and prostrations. However, in the mandala practice, we visualize the lake and the tree in an enormous palace or mansion in the sky in front of us. This mansion is four-sided with four main gates; it is a truly magnificent structure, though not something solid or corporeal, but something which is pure in appearance, the union of form and emptiness, like a mirage or a rainbow. This enormous palace contains a vast assemblage of the Three Jewels and the Three Roots, with the central focus being the lineage of gurus surrounded by the gurus of other lineages; the meditation divinities in front; the Buddhas to our left; the text and scriptures of the dharma behind; the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the Sangha to our right; and the protective divinities forming an assemblage of support beneath all the sources of refuge.

It is worth noting that at this particular point in our practice, if we have wealth it is meant to be shared and unhesitatingly dedicated in positive ways. Any feelings of being miserly during this practice are quite contrary to the spirit of the mandala, which is why the traditional texts speak of forming the mandala plate of gold, silver, copper, or some precious or semi-precious metal. This is not absolutely essential, and will depend on the wealth of the practitioner. A piece of wood or stone is quite appropriate, but we do procure the best we can for the practice because the more we unstintingly devote our wealth, the more benefit we receive.

To begin a session of mandala meditation, we place in our lap a pile of grain, such as rice, and hold our plate in the left hand. We take a handful of grain and rub the plate, cleansing and polishing it with the smooth part of the wrist, rubbing three times in a clockwise direction and three times in a counterclockwise direction. Some texts present an abridged form of three times clockwise and one time counterclockwise. During the polishing process, we are reciting the hundred-syllable mantra of Dorje Sempa. Our attitude during this recitation and polishing is that all negativity and confusion based upon dualism, in which the outer world is conceived as other and the inner mind conceived as self, is being purified, just as the plate is being polished by our hand.

During the building of the visualization of the mandala, we are placing piles of rice on the plate in a certain configuration which corresponds to the cosmology that is used as the basis for our idealized conception of the universe. We begin by visualizing that the plate is the vast golden base of this world system, this universe. We make the first placement of rice on the plate a$ a counterclockwise circle of grain around the rim of the plate. We envision a vast mountain range which encircles the golden base; this is like a retaining wall around our world system.

Then we begin to build the actual visualization stage by stage, planting a pile of rice in the center of the plate to represent Mount Sumeru, the central mountain of the world system, and four piles of rice in the four cardinal directions. We take east to be the direction we are facing, so we place the piles in this order: east, south, west, and north. Then in a particular pattern which is learned from someone who has done the practice, we place to the

right and left of the eastern continent two small piles of rice representing two sub-continents. We do the same to the near and far side of the southern continent, to the left and right of the western continent, and then to the far and near side of the northern continent. As we place these eight sub-continents, we are conceiving of these as part of the visualization. While we are, from a practical point of view, placing piles of rice on this plate, what we are doing from the point of view of the meditation is creating an idealized conception of the universe as an offering.

Again placing piles of rice in the four directions, we meditate on four further aspects of the visualization to which the texts refer. The first of these is an enormous mountain of jewels and precious substances which is meditated as being in the eastern direction. The next of these is a grove of wish-fulfilling or magical trees that bestow upon the person coming in contact with them all that is wished for; these are in the south. The third aspect is a herd of cows which are conceived of as wish-fulfilling in their ability to bestow upon the person coming in contact with them all that is wished for; these are conceived as being in the west. Finally, there is a field of miraculous crops which grow without any cultivation, giving the bounty of the earth without any effort being necessary; they are in the northern direction. We are calling each of these concepts to mind as we place the grains in the appropriate directions.

The next elements in the visualization are the seven attributes of the universal monarch, the first four of which are the precious wheel, the precious wish-fulfilling gem, the precious consort, and the precious minister. These are visualized as we place piles of grain in the four cardinal directions. The last three of the seven attributes are the precious elephant and precious horse of the monarch, and the precious general. An eighth attribute is a great vase filled with treasure and riches. These attributes are meditated in the inter-cardinal directions, so we pile grain in the southeast, southwest, northwest, and northeast.

Next we visualize eight offering goddesses who offer different sensory pleasures and aspects of sensory experience. The first four of these are meditated in the cardinal directions and the placement of the rice is done correspondingly. The first is the goddess of gaiety and laughter; the second is the goddess of flower garlands; the third is the goddess of song; and the fourth is the goddess of dance. The fifth through eighth of these offering goddesses are meditated in the inter-cardinal directions. The goddess of flowers is in the southeast; the goddess of incense is in the southwest; the goddess of lamps, light, and illumination is in the northwest; and the goddess of perfumed water is in the northeast.

The next elements are the sun and the moon, the sun in the northeast direction, and the moon in the southwest direction, though some texts speak of the sun in the east and the moon in the west. Either one of these traditions is appropriate as there are two valid transmissions of this particular configuration. If the placement that we use is the former one, the sun in the northeast and the moon in the southwest, then in the southeast and the northwest are correspondingly placed piles of rice representing the umbrella, which is a sign of majesty and power, and the victory banner, which is the

sign of the victory of the forces of good over those of evil. Finally, as we pile the final handful of rice in the center of the plate, so that the plate now brims over with rice, we are meditating that this fills the universe with all of the wealth of gods and men, and that anything splendid or worthy of offering that could possibly be imagined, is filling the universe, and being offered to the sources of refuge.

Our attitude should be not simply to benefit ourselves through this kind of practice, but that through this offering and through the merit that it is generating, all beings may come to benefit. In fact, the actual prayers we make when presenting the offering to the sources of refuge state, "Please accept this out of compassion for the benefit of all beings so that all beings may share in the benefits." There is a selfless concern as we are making our offering.

In the sutras, the Buddha described many different ways in which beings perceived and experienced their world systems; all of these are perfectly valid from a relative point of view, from the karmic perspective of the being in that particular realm. The Buddha spoke of world systems which are shaped differently, with spherical, oblong, and rectangular bodies, all of which are possible from the point of view of the karmic perspective of the beings in those realms. The reason why this particular design or cosmology is employed for the mandala is because it represents one of the most balanced, symmetrical, and aesthetically pleasing designs with which to convey the idealized concept of the universe which we are offering.

While the physical object is a plate with piles of rice in a certain pattern, our meditation is that the universe in this cosmology is actually present, and that we are creating an offering filled with all of the splendor and the wealth of a perfect universe. We are limited by our material needs in making offerings to the guru and to the Three Jewels. The most we could ever present would be hundreds or thousands or millions of dollars. However, through this meditative process, we can offer the whole universe. From the point of view of the meditation and the benefits that we receive, if we are sincere and dedicated in this practice, we do actually offer the universe and we do receive benefits as though we had. In terms of the spiritual development that takes place, the difference between actually offering the universe and conceiving of offering the universe is purely technical.

This particular cosmology, then, presents the world system as grouped around the central mountain, Mount Sumeru, which is in turn encircled by seven concentric rings of golden mountains, and in between each of these rings is an ocean filled with vast treasure. Outside the seventh golden ring there is an outer ocean which extends as far as the retaining wall of mountains which encloses the world system. It is in this outer ocean that we conceive of the major continents in the four directions, and the subcontinents, one on either side of the major continents, similar in shape but half the size of the major continents. This particular cosmology is presented as one unit, one world system.

The next greater unit of measure for the universe is a chilio-cosm, which is one thousand of these world systems taken as a greater unit. The next

greater unit of measure is one thousand chiliocosms. The next greater order of magnitude is the tri-chiliocosm, which is one billion of these world systems taken as a larger unit. In offering the mandala of the universe we are conceiving of this not as one world system, but a trichiliocosm; we are offering with this single act one billion world systems filled with all of this splendor and wealth and majesty to the Three Jewels and the Three Roots, and the merit is correspondingly great. The farther our imagination can take us in meditation, the greater the benefits that we can receive. Because this practice of mandala offering is primarily concerned with the development of our merit and deepening of our awareness, and because there is an emphasis on offering, then the actual corollaries to the offering of the mandala, such as offering flowers, fruit, incense, and candles on our shrine, are particularly emphasized during this practice.

To begin any session of the mandala offering, we meditate on this extended form of the mandala of the universe, which is termed the mandala of thirty-seven features. We may do it once or any number of times, but the actual recitation and practice that is used for the main body of the meditation is a short prayer of four lines combined with an abbreviated version of the mandala known as the seven-point mandala. This particular offering is repeated 100,000 times, or rather 111,111 times, to fully complete the formal Ngbndro or preliminary practice. The seven-point mandala uses the key features of the thirty-seven as a basis, so that the piles of rice are significantly fewer. One pile is placed in the center to represent Mount Sumeru. Then there is one in each of the four directions to represent the four major continents, and one each in the northeast and the southwest to represent the sun and the moon. However, we should not abbreviate the visualization; we should continue to meditate during these recitations and repetitions of the seven-point mandala, just as we did during the extended form, so that the visualization is as complete as possible.

The particular four-line prayer which is repeated more than 100,000 times to complete the formal practice of the mandala offering, is literally translated as follows. "The golden base is anointed with perfumed water and sprinkled with flowers; this mandala is adorned with the continents and the sun and the moon." The first two lines refer to the structure of the visualization, and the second two lines of the prayer say that by offering this, while conceiving of the realm of the Buddhas (the assemblage of the Three Jewels and Three Roots), may all beings come to enjoy the pure realm of experience.

There are also lines in the liturgy which call to mind the expanded view of the visualization, so that we not only offer this single world system to the assemblage of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas visualized in front of us, but to all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, all gurus, all manifestations of these energies, all the sources of refuge in all the directions. We are offering millions upon millions of these world systems with this single act of the mandala offering. There is a certain attitude which we should cultivate as a general approach to our experience in the world, particularly when we are practicing the mandala offering. Whenever we are not in a period of formal meditation but encounter something beautiful, a garden or a sunset, for example, we offer it to our

guru, to the Three Jewels, to the sources of refuge, so that our experience throughout the day is a constant act of offering.

When we have completed the offerings we intend to do for a particular session, the concluding prayers reaffirm our aspiration that through this offering of the mandala, we may develop pure merit and deepen our awareness to the utmost, that we may fully realize the intention of all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and that we may share in that enlightened state of experience. We affirm that we will not seek to continue wandering in samsara nor seek a selfish nirvana in which there is no benefit for other beings. Instead, through this practice, we will attain complete enlightenment so that we are able to liberate all beings from the ocean of existence, the cycle of rebirth. There are prayers of supplication in the liturgy which specifically call attention to our root guru and the gurus of the lineage as the embodiment of the form, speech, mind, blessings, and qualities of enlightenment. We mentally conceive of various offerings, outer, inner, and secret, which we are presenting to the gurus; and in addition, all of our wealth, body, speech, and mind, is dedicated to the gurus for the purpose of purifying ourselves and receiving the blessing which will allow us to attain to the Mahamudra state of perfect enlightenment. There is an abbreviated reference to the Seven Branches prayer of the Mahayana, and we should call each of the branches to mind: the homage we give to the Buddha; the offerings we make; the acknowledgement of our own failings and shortcomings; the rejoicing in the merit of others; the hope that the dharma will continue to be taught; the request to the Bud-dhas and Bodhisattvas not to pass into nirvana, but continue to work for the benefit of all beings; and finally the dedication of our merit for the benefit of all beings.

The concluding phase is a general aspiration that, through ourselves and all beings having presented this offering, we may all consummate the development of merit and deepening awareness, and attain enlightenment. At this point, there is an identification of ourselves and all beings with the sources of refuge as the state of enlightenment. We meditate that the field of refuge, this assemblage visualized in the sky before us, dissolves into light and is absorbed into ourselves. We identify our form, speech, and mind, with that of the sources of refuge and we let the mind rest in a state of formless, nonconceptual awareness for as long as is comfortable.

6

Ngondro:
Guru Yoga Practice

The practice of Guru Yoga and a special attitude which views teacher as guru is something which is particular to the Vajrayana path. In the sutra tradition of the Hinayana and the ordinary Mahayana teachings, when we take the vows of refuge; the vows of a lay person, novice, monk or nun; and the bodhisattva vows; we are not speaking of a guru or lama in the strict sense of the word. We receive these vows from our abbot or preceptor, our teacher or spiritual friend, but not from our guru. On the sutra level of practice there is no sense that the teacher is one to whom we pray as a source of blessing or that the teacher is one from whom we can receive blessing. Certainly the teacher or spiritual friend is considered worthy of our respect and honor, someone to whom we can make offerings and in whom we have faith, but only the Vajrayana views the teacher as a source of blessing.

In the practice of the Vajrayana we develop tantric samaya or commitment with a particular guru through receiving empowerment. This may be a ceremony which involves a form, speech, and mind empowerment of a particular divinity, or a tantric ceremony involving the four stages of the vase empowerment, the secret empowerment, the wisdom-awareness empowerment, and the precious word empowerment. In any case, once we have gone through the tantric process of empowerment with a teacher, then that teacher has become our guru. In a general sense, anyone from whom we have received Vajrayana empowerment and teaching is one of our root gurus. Once that relationship has been established with a particular teacher, then the benefit that the tantric practitioner receives is through the faith and devotion which they have in that teacher. This opens them to receiving the blessing of the teacher and the practice, so that they may attain to high states of realization, which would ideally include the Mahamudra level of experience. This is the function of the guru in the tantric process, to provide the source of blessing and the focus for our devotion.

The particular term for guru in the Tibetan language is lama jbla.ma}. The first syllable means superior or highest. For example, the canopy which is hung above the throne of the teacher in the Indian and Tibetan traditions is called la dray (bla.bres). The second syllable means mother. A guru or lama is as devoted to and concerned about the student as a mother is about her only child. This is the way a guru would view all beings, who are potential students and can benefit from the teachings. There is concern, compassion and loving kindness.



Vajradhara Buddha

Line drawing courtesy of Kagyu Dharma, San Francisco

In one of the tantras, the Buddha spoke a certain verse to the effect that the guru is Buddha, the guru is Dharma, and the guru is Sangha. The guru's form is the embodiment of the Sangha, the guru's speech is the embodiment of the Dharma, and the guru's mind is the embodiment of Buddha or enlightenment. So our respect, faith, and devotion are based on the recognition that the guru is the source of the Three Jewels for us.

The guru is the form which unites all the Buddhas and Bodhi-sattvas and is seen as the Vajra Holder. The term Vajra Holder is a synonym for Vajradhara or Dorje Chang (Rdo.rje.hChang), the Dharmakaya level of ultimate realization. The guru is considered identical with this absolute level of enlightened being.

In another tantra the role of the guru was emphasized when the Buddha said, "Of all the Buddhas who have ever attained enlightenment, not a single one accomplished this without relying upon a guru; and of all the thousand Buddhas that will appear during this kalpa, none of these Buddhas will attain enlightenment without relying on a guru." In order to attain enlightenment, this reliance upon a spiritual teacher, a guru, is an absolutely essential factor.

The Buddha spoke quite extensively about the need for both student and teacher to examine each other before any formal teaching or empowerment is given. The student should intelligently decide, "Is this teacher for me? Is this teacher a good teacher? Does this person have authentic teachings and the ability to benefit me?" The guru determines through examination whether a student will be able to undertake and keep commitments for practice and whether a student is a fit vessel for the transmission that the guru can offer.

Once the formal bond of empowerment and teaching has been established and we have accepted a particular teacher as a guru, then, the Buddha emphasized, it is extremely important for us to have nothing but pure views toward the teacher. Even in the case of discovering qualities in the teacher that we find repulsive, the bond has been established, and purely from the personal point of view of making spiritual progress, the only attitude that is beneficial is to view that teacher as an emanation of Buddha. To view the teacher as an ordinary person and become critical does not help us and in fact can be a serious obstacle.

In general, a guru is someone who is endowed with loving kindness and compassion, and a benevolent, altruistic motivation in teaching. This is someone who has knowledge and experience to transmit, who has understood the nature of the teachings, and has some experience from which they can speak.

From the point of view of tantric practice it is important that the guru also be the holder of the authentic lineage of blessings and teachings that derives from the historical Buddha Shakyamuni or from the lineage which originates with the Dharmakaya level which is termed Vajradhara Buddha. This presumes that the guru has a guru, or had a guru at some point, and that they have had the samaya commitment with that guru. It is very important that our own guru be someone who is respecting and observing their samaya with their own guru, so that this lineage which they are transmitting remains unbroken.

In the Kagyu tradition, we speak of the lineage as a transmission based upon devotion. This lineage originated with Vajradhara at the Dharmakaya level and passed through a human line of teachers, including the Indians Tilopa and Naropa and the Tibetans Marpa the Translator, Milarepa, Gampopa, and the first Karmapa. Throughout the history of this lineage, the crucial element in the transmission of the blessing and spiritual power of the Kagyu line has been the devotion that each lineage holder has had for their guru as the embodiment of enlightenment. The gurus who historically formed part of the lineage of transmission from the Dharmakaya level down to the present day are termed the lineage gurus; the personal teacher from whom we receive empowerment and teaching in Vajrayana practice is our root guru.

During the Guru Yoga practice which is performed as the last of the preliminaries, there are two methods that one may employ for visualization. We may visualize the form of the guru on the crown of our heads, in which case we envision the throne and lotus, and the sun and moon discs, forming the seat upon which our guru is visualized. The guru faces the same direction as ourselves, with the lineage of gurus, one above the other, above the crown of the head of our guru; surrounded by the gurus of the other lineages, the meditational divinities, and the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas arranged similarly to the visualization for taking refuge and the mandala offering. If we find this difficult, we may choose to envision the assemblage in the sky in front of us. They are facing us, so we are in the presence of the sources of refuge rather than meditating them above the crown of our head. Either of these visualizations is appropriate.

The central figure of the visualization is the form of our root guru, with the main transmission figures one above the other, above the crown of the head of our guru, surrounded by the gurus of the other lineages, with the meditational divinities hi front of the guru. The Buddhas are to the guru's right, the Dharma behind, the Sangha to the guru's left, and the protective divinities forming a support beneath the entire assemblage.

From a practical point of view, the visualization has not changed from that of taking refuge or the mandala offering; however, from an experiential point of view, there is a significant shift in attitude. When we were performing the practices of taking refuge or the mandala offering, our attitude toward these different sources of refuge was a compartmentalized one in which we conceived the gurus as embodying form, speech, mind, qualities, activities, blessings and characteristics. The meditational divinities performed another function with different qualities. Each source of refuge was considered, in turn, to have its own qualities. In the Guru Yoga practice, the shift of attitude is one of considering all of these secondary sources of refuge as emanations of the central principle of the guru.

Whether we adopt the approach of meditating this assemblage above the crown of our heads or in the sky in front of us, the liturgy begins by describing the assemblage and continues with the Seven Branches prayer of the Mahayana. While we are reciting this prayer, we are ideally linking the contemplation of each branch with its recitation, meditating that our own form is emanated millions of times. All of these emanations of ourselves join

together in performing the various branches of the prayer, offering homage and worship, making offerings, confessing shortcomings, rejoicing in the merit of others, and so forth. All these emanations are joined together in making these offerings to the assemblage of the guru and other sources of refuge.

In the liturgy that follows, the supplication to the gurus of the Kagyu lineage is written in quatrain verses, and mentions each of the gurus by name, beginning with the Vajradhara Buddha, the Dharmakaya aspect, and continuing through the line of human gurus down to our own root teacher. We are reminded at the end of each quatrain of the purpose of supplication with the regularly repeated line, "Bestow upon me co-emergent awareness," or, "Grant me the arising of co-emergent awareness." The term co-emergent awareness refers to the direct experience of the fundamental nature of mind itself, our own mind as inherently embodying this pure awareness, this Tathagatagarbha or Buddha nature, which we are attempting to discover through tantric practice. So the particular approach of the supplication is to request the gurus of the lineage to grant this blessing to us, that we may come to have this authentic, direct experience of the nature of mind itself.

Following this long supplication to the gurus of the Maha-mudra lineage, there is a short prayer which is known in Tibetan as Dorje Chang tungma (thung.ma), which means the short prayer to Vajradhara. It begins with the words, "Vajradhara, Mighty Vajradhara, Tilopa, Naropa," and it is a prayer which brings our attention to the gurus of all the sublineages of the Kagyu tradition. We are calling upon the gurus of the four major and eight minor transmissions of the Kagyu school and requesting their blessings for various qualities to develop hi us as part of our spiritual practice.

Following this general prayer to the gurus of all the lineages of the Kagyu tradition, there is a recitation of a four-line prayer which is termed the Four Ma-nam Prayer because each line begins with the Tibetan syllables "Ma namka dang nyampay semchen tamchay." This supplication is an appreciation of the guru as the embodiment of enlightenment for the practitioner. The first line states, "I and all beings, my parents whose numbers fill space, pray to the guru, the precious Buddha." The next line refers to the guru's mind as the Dharmakaya aspect which is the absolute or formless aspect of the enlightened state of being. The third line refers to the guru's speech as Sambho-gakaya, the pure form manifestation; and the fourth line to the guru's physical form as the unimpeded dynamic quality of Nir-manakaya, the physical form manifestation of enlightenment. So in reciting this four-line prayer a number of times, we are calling to mind these different aspects of the guru's being and relating them to the corresponding aspects of complete enlightenment.

At this point in the liturgy, there is the mantra Karmapa Chen-no (Karma.pa.mKhyen.no) which means, "Karmapa, know me," or "Karmapa knows." The term karmapa can be interpreted in two ways. On a less formal level, a karmapa is an activity emanation of all the Buddhas, someone whose spiritual presence is a manifestation of enlightened activity. From that point of view, any spiritiual teacher could be considered a karmapa. On a more

formal level, there is the lineage of the Gyalwa Karmapas who function as the main transmitters of the Kagyu lineage, from the first Karmapa Dusum Khyenpa (Dus.gsum.mKhyen.-pa) to the sixteenth Karmapa Rangjung Rigpe Dorje (Rang.-byung.Rig.pa'i.Rdo.rje). The Karmapa hierarchs have transmitted the heart of the Kagyu lineage, and this is a recognition of their supreme role. Traditionally this mantra is incorporated as part of the recitation process for the Guru Yoga practice, and we do as many thousands of these mantras as we can, though the formal 100,000 recitations are not necessary to formally complete the Guru Yoga.

Our approach to the guru should take into account the essential emptiness of the guru's mind as the Dharmakaya aspect, the absolute formless level of enlightened experience. The clarity and luminosity which arises as consciousness into the guru's mind is the Nirmanakaya aspect, the form expression of this energy. The Sambhogakaya is the inseparability of form and formless. There is also an emphasis in tantra on the experience of the unity of these three aspects as a total experience of enlightenment, which is inherently blissful. The term Svabhavikakaya is used to describe the Dharmakaya, Sambhogakaya, and Nirmanakaya as different aspects of a single experience. In the Vajrayana, it takes on the quality of supreme bliss as the experiential tone of the integrated experience. We view the guru as the embodiment of these Four Kayas, the three ordinary kayas of Dharmakaya, Sambhogakaya, and Nirmanakaya, and a fourth kaya which is this integration as supreme bliss.

In supplicating the guru, then, we are conscious of the guru as the embodiment of all the sources of refuge, the guru's form embodying the Sangha, the guru's speech embodying the Dhar-ma, and the guru's mind embodying the Buddha, the enlightened mind. Also in tantric practice we consider the guru to embody the Three Roots. Obviously, the physical form of the guru is the guru, the source of blessing in the Vajrayana. The guru's speech is the manifestation of the dakinis and dharmapalas, the protective divinities. The guru's mind is connected with the meditational divinities.

In developing faith in our guru, we are encouraged to consider not only these qualities, but also the kindness and grace of our guru. We consider our guru to be equal to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in terms of the qualities and realization that the guru embodies, but even more kind than they are from our point of view. We have not had the good fortune to meet with the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Many have appeared in various world systems but we have not had the good fortune to meet directly in this life with one of these and to hear the speech of a fully enlightened Nirmanakaya. We have, however, been able to meet with our personal teacher who, while not being perhaps one of the thousand Buddhas such as the Buddha Shakyamuni, nevertheless is the vehicle by which the teachings are accessible to us; it is through that relationship with the guru that we are personally able to receive teachings, practice them, and attain enlightenment. Because the guru's function is one of leading us along this path to enlightenment, the guru is even more kind and gracious to us than these Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

There is every possibility that our teacher is in fact an emanation of Buddha, because the Buddha once said that in more degenerate times, Buddhas will appear in the form of personal teachers, and those who come to have conviction and belief in the presence of Buddha in the form of these personal teachers will develop faith accordingly. In the particular times in which we live, it seems that the Buddha was indicating that enlightened beings would manifest as personal gurus upon whom we would rely. Now insofar as our guru may not be totally enlightened, but has an authentic transmission of blessing and teachings from the lineage, it only remains for us to consider that teacher to be totally enlightened, to receive the same benefits as though that teacher actually were. From the teacher's point of view there may be a lack of realization, but if from the student's point of view there is no lack of faith and devotion, then the student will receive the corresponding blessings from the authentic lineage. There is a Tibetan proverb which says, "If we have faith, we can receive blessing even from a dog's tooth."

The prayer that we recite as the main body of the Guru Yoga practice is a seven-line prayer which begins with the words, "I supplicate the precious guru." The second line, "Grant the blessing for the abandonment of ego clinging," is a recognition of our egocentricity as the major stumbling block in our attainment of enlightenment. The fixation on the self as something ultimately real limits the mind to a fictitious concept of the self and prevents our ability to transcend the ego and experience the state of enlightenment.

The third line of the prayer is, "Grant the blessing for the development in my experience of contentment." The text literally says, "No wants, no needs." There is an understanding that it is the basic concept of ego which creates the necessity to feed the ego with what it perceives as its needs, which fuel the samsaric process. With the experience of egolessness, we arrive at a state of contentment in which there is no need to satisfy. The prayer then requests the blessing for cutting off thoughts and attitudes which are contrary to our spiritual development, the mental dissipation and distraction which work against our spiritual development.

Next the prayer asks realization of the nature of mind as being unborn or unoriginated, something which is no thing in and of itself, and therefore not subject to birth and death. The final lines of the supplication say, "Grant the blessing that all illusion, all delusion in the mind may be pacified in their own ground," and, "Grant the blessing that the entire phenomenal world may be perceived as the Dharmakaya." Through the direct experience of the nature of mind itself, all levels of confusion and obscuration in the mind, which are based upon fundamental ignorance, are eliminated. The entire phenomenal world, rather than being perceived on a superficial level, is perceived as the manifestation of the essential emptiness of mind and all phenomena and experience are perceived as Dharmakaya.

If our practice is not merely recitation but also a meditation upon these various points and if this recitation is done with a conscious awareness of the context in which we are supplicating the guru, then in the formal practice of 111,111 recitations of this prayer, we need not have any doubt that we will

receive our guru's blessing and that the practice will be effective. The point is that the mind must be focused upon what is being said.

At the end of any session of the Guru Yoga practice, we meditate that the figures around the central guru in the visualization dissolve into light and are absorbed into the central figure of our root guru. The form of the guru becomes the union of all of these sources of refuge.

Then we begin a process of meditation which is known as taking empowerments from the guru. We meditate that from the guru's forehead white light shines forth and touches our own forehead. This is the first stage of tantric empowerment, the vase empowerment, which purifies us of physical obscurations and negativity, empowers us to meditate upon the form of divinities, and implants the potential to actualize the Nirmanakaya, the physical body manifestation of enlightenment.

The second stage of the visualization involves meditating red light shining from the throat of the guru and being absorbed into our own throat. This is known as the secret empowerment and is concerned with the purification of speech obscurations and negativity. This empowers us to practice a particular kind of meditation, such as the Six Doctrines of Naropa, which involves the chakras and channels of energy hi the body. This secret empowerment is concerned with the realization of Sambhogakaya, the body of enjoyment or pure form level of enlightenment.

The third stage of the visualization involves meditating blue light coming from the guru's heart and being absorbed into our own heart. This is the wisdom awareness empowerment, which purifies our mental obscurations and negativity, transmits the blessings of the mind of enlightenment, and empowers us to attain Dharmakaya, the union of bliss and emptiness.

Finally we meditate that from the three places on the guru's form, these various lights shine forth simultaneously; white light from the forehead, red light from the throat, and blue light from the heart; and these are absorbed into our own three places simultaneously, which effects the simultaneous purification of our physical, verbal, and mental negativity and obscurations. This is the fourth empowerment which is sometimes called the precious word empowerment. It is the introduction to the Maha-mudra state of experience, the direct experience of the nature of mind itself. This level is also concerned with the Svabhavi-kakaya, the integration of the different aspects of enlightenment as aspects of a unique experience rather than separate things in and of themselves.

Following this, we meditate that the guru, wearing a benign and radiant expression, dissolves into light and is absorbed into our own form. There is a complete identity of our own body, speech, and mind with the Vajra body, Vajra speech, and Vajra mind of the guru. We dissolve the meditation into a state of formless awareness and let the mind rest in this uncontrived state as long as is comfortable.

In the liturgy, the recitations that precede the dissolving of the meditation into this formless state make reference to three on going factors which we attempt to maintain in this meditation and throughout all of our activities.

They are held to be the source of spontaneous liberation according to the teachings. The first is an awareness of all form as the guru's form, which is to say, the direct experience of form and emptiness rather than solid form conceived of as something ultimately real in and of itself. One experiences the emptiness of the form as simultaneously present with the form itself. This is the experience of divine form, of all form as the form of the guru. Secondly, there is the experience of all speech as the union of sound and emptiness, like an echo, not something solid or ultimately real in and of itself. This is the experience of divine sound or all sound as the speech of the guru. Finally, there is the experience of all thought and mental activity, all that arises in our mind, as the union of intelligent awareness and emptiness, the Mahamudra experience which is the experience of all thought and memory as the mind of the guru. During the Guru Yoga practice, we are encouraged to develop this awareness of the essence of the guru in all our activities by adopting some very simple techniques of recitation or meditation which emphasize this.

When we first wake up in the morning, our first thought and recitation is the prayer from the beginning of the Ngondro text, "Palden Tsaway Lama Rinpoche." This prayer says, "To the glorious and precious root guru resting on a lotus-moon seat above the crown of my head, I supplicate you to look upon me with your supreme compassion and bestow upon me the form, speech, and mind accomplishments." We meditate our guru above the crown of our head and pray to the guru in this way. This forms a basis for our attitude during the whole day so that we continue to be aware of the presence of the guru in all that we do.

Likewise, before we go to sleep at night, we recite the same prayer, changing a few words in the second line to indicate that we meditate the form of the guru in our heart center, glowing and radiant. We go to sleep with the presence of the guru in our heart. These techniques are encouraged, particularly for someone performing Guru Yoga practice, as a way to generate this feeling of the ongoing presence of the guru.

At the end of every session of the Guru Yoga practice we dedicate the merits and virtue of the practice with any prayers of dedication and aspiration with which we are familiar. One prayer which is very significant from the point of view of the Guru Yoga practice is the one in which we aspire that in this and all future lifetimes, we will never be separate from this pure guru, and that we will partake the wealth of the teachings, traversing the paths to enlightenment and attain the state of Vajra-dhara, the Dharmakaya, the ultimate level of enlightened experience.

The connection between the guru and the student is on a very experiential level. The guru's mind is essentially empty, luminous, unimpeded and dynamic, and this is the ultimate nature of the student's mind as well. There is no difference between the guru and the student from the point of view of the ultimate nature of their minds.

Practically speaking, of course, there is quite a qualitative difference between them, because the student is an unenlightened being, still lost in confusion and suffering, still caught hi the cycle of conditioned rebirth and attempting to achieve liberation. The motivation of the guru is a compassionate concern

which is continually aware of the plight of the student and continually seeks means by which suffering and confusion can be eliminated. The compassionate response of the guru toward the student is traditionally likened to a hook which is literally termed the hook of the guru's compassion. On the part of the student there is faith and devotion toward the guru, and this faith is the opening in the mind which is termed the ring of faith. With the hook of compassion and the ring of faith, a connection can be made; once the connection is made, the bond cannot be broken until the student attains enlightenment.

When we are pursuing these preliminary practices, beginning with the ordinary foundations and continuing with the special preliminaries, it is very important that we have access to someone who is a qualified teacher. Any lamas authorized by their lineages can give this kind of instruction. People who are interested in doing these practices can receive detailed explanations. It is quite important not to go into this blindly, but to understand the process as we execute the various preliminary practices.

Questions

In some iconographical drawings of various divinities, one sometimes sees a kind of lasso with a hook at one end and a ring at the other. Is that a representation of the hook of the guru's compassion and the ring of the disciple's faith?

The objects which are held in the hands of the divinities are actually symbols for various qualities and one could think of this lasso with the hook and ring as symbolic of the activity of liberating beings, of drawing beings toward enlightenment, from the states of confusion and suffering.

In the Guru Yoga practice, there is a time when we meditate ourselves in the form of Vajrayogini. Rinpoche, will you discuss this portion of the practice? Also, should one have had the Vajrayogini empowerment to meditate oneself in the form of this feminine divinity?

The texts do recommend that we meditate ourselves in the form of this divinity Vajravarahi, or Vajrayogini, as well as meditating the form of the gurus, the Three Jewels, and Three Roots above the crown of our head. This is because it is maintained by the tradition that if we identify with this divine form as we meditate, we are far more receptive to the blessings that we receive from the Guru Yoga practice.

In terms of the benefits of identifying with a divine form, any meditational divinity would be fine, and in fact we could meditate ourselves in the form of any yidam that we wished. The reason why Vajrayogini is emphasized in the Kagyupa lineage of Guru Yoga is because of the central role of this particular divinity in all Kagyupa practice.

As a feminine aspect, Vajrayogini is sometimes referred to as the consort of all the Buddhas and sometimes as the mother of all Buddhas in the sense

that this divinity embodies the emptiness, the ultimate nature of reality, which generates all enlightened experience. Also, this particular divinity, Vajrayogini, has played a very significant role in Kagyu transmission, and so texts recommend that we visualize ourselves in the form of Vajrayogini, rather than any other divinity, hi this meditation. At this point of our practice, because the focus is on the guru and the Guru Yoga meditation, rather than solely identifying ourselves with the divinity (such as the Chenrezig meditation), we do not need to have received a formal Vajrayogini empowerment. It would not damage the practice at all to have received it, of course; it would be a support. To engage in the Guru Yoga practice, we should have received some form of Vajrayana empowerment.

Can we use Guru Yoga and our devotion to the guru to help us make choices more skillfully?

If our faith is very strong and unwavering in our guru, then there is no doubt that prayer to the guru from that state of devotion can be very beneficial for helping us through any kind of problems or difficulties, including facing a difficult decision. One of the functions of the blessing that we receive through our relationship with the guru is the ability to attain our ends more effectively and to overcome the obstacles that we encounter more effectively. There is no doubt that this can be a very beneficial factor in coming to a difficult decision in our lives. However, it depends entirely upon us having very sincere faith and generating that to the guru with this practice of supplication, which is the Guru Yoga meditation.

When we do the Seven Branches prayer, shouldn't we dissolve the visualization of our multiple selves before we go on?

When we are performing or reciting the Seven Branches prayer which is an introduction to the Guru Yoga liturgy, it is not only we who are giving the homage and respect, the various offerings, the acknowledgement of our own faults and shortcomings, the admiration and rejoicing in the merit and virtue of others, and so forth. We can meditate that we manifest many emanations and that there are millions of replicas of ourselves all joining together in offering collectively this praise, this homage, these offerings, and so forth. This is done simply to enhance the experience of the Seven Branches prayer; we do not need to feel that there is anything so solid in this visualization that at the end of the prayer we need to do anything about all of these emanations. We simply let it go. It is not even a case of returning to being one person; it is simply that it is no longer part of the visualization.

When beginning the Guru Yoga practice, or some other new practice, can we alternate reciting it in Tibetan and English, so we understand what we're doing?

It would seem that alternating recitation in Tibetan and English is quite necessary at this point if people are going to understand what they are doing. You cannot read two things at once, so you are either reading the Tibetan

phonetics or you are reading the English. If you try to do both together it is either impossible or very laborious. However, the more we can acquaint ourselves with what we are saying in Tibetan, the better it is.

For example, in the lineage prayer, the names of the gurus, such as Dorje Chang, Lodru Rinchen (bLo.gros.Rin.chen), Saraha, and so forth, which are underlined in the English translation, are also present in the Tibetan. We might not understand the particular descriptions of the gurus, but we can certainly pick their names out in the recitation. While we are saying the Tibetan prayers, we should try to be as aware as possible of key words that we do understand, so that it all begins to fit together more. However, to use a system as you suggest, of alternating Tibetan for one session or one day and then English the next time, would be quite appropriate because then you are getting both the meaning in English and the blessing of the original prayers in Tibetan. The Tibetan is also in meter for recitation.

How can we visualize the gurus in the lineage prayer if we've never seen them depicted?

Even though we are not familiar with each of the gurus in the lineage and the way they are iconographically depicted—the particular gestures, postures, symbolic implements, and garments— nevertheless, what is most important is that as we read through the prayers and the various figures in the lineage are mentioned, we have a sense of the presence of the lineage. We are actually in contact with that living transmission and while we might not have a perfectly clear visualization at this point, we are nevertheless filled with a sense of the presence of the lineage, so that they actually are present above the crown of our head.

At the end of the Seven Branches prayer, there is a request to turn our bodies into the Three Kayas. Please discuss this.

The request to, "Grant me the blessing to realize the illusory body as Nirmanakaya, the vital forces as Sambhogakaya, and mind itself as Dharmakaya," is basically talking about the transformation of our ordinary physical, verbal, and mental faculties into their enlightened equivalents. Illusory body means we experience the emptiness of the form, the ultimate non-reality of the physical body, as being based upon the projections of mind rather than as something real and solid. That is what is termed the union of form and emptiness and the particular synonym for that is illusory body. This is Nirmanakaya, the physical form manifestation of enlightenment, and a transformation of our present naive experience of the self.

The Sambhogakaya manifests on our present level of unenlightened being most conspicuously as speech, communication and sound. But there is also the notion of "vital forces." Now the term in Tibetan is tsok tsol (srog.rtsol). Tsok means life and tsol is a verbal form meaning effort or function; these are two tantric technical terms. The first refers to the prajna in the upper part of the body, which is concerned with respiration, vocalization and speech; the second refers to the lower prajna, which is concerned with digestion,

excretion, reproduction and so forth. This is the modal energy in the body. When we think of the concept of energy moving in the body in various subtle patterns, we are concerned with speech and communication as the raw material for the experience of Sambhogakaya. This is what we now experience as ordinary sound and speech, which we take to be something real in and of itself. This is something which can be transmuted into the union of sound and emptiness.

In the final line, there is a transformation of our ordinary experience of mind as something tangible and fixed to an experience of the essential intangibility of the mind which is the formless or absolute level of enlightenment, the Dharmakaya. In all, we are requesting a transformation of our physical, verbal, and mental planes of being from the ordinary aspect to the enlightened equivalent.

Certain wrathful divinities such as Vajrayogini or Palden Lhamo are depicted wearing a necklace of fifty-one fresh heads with blood dripping from the neck. They are variously said to represent negative tendencies or neuroses. Will you please address the significance of this iconographic detail?

This necklace of fresh heads which adorns the forms of some of the wrathful divinities relates to what the Abhidharma literature calls the fifty-one negative mind states. These mind states are directly antithetical to spiritual development. The heads are severed at the neck because the wrathful divinity represents a state of being where these negative mind states have been eliminated forever.



Vajrayogini (Dorje Palmo)
Line drawing by Cynthia Moku