

**CULTIVATING  
HAPPINESS  
AND SANITY IN  
TRYING TIMES**

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**Photo** Shayamuni Buddha painting (original in colour) by Jane Seidlitz.

# **1. EVERYTHING IS TRANSITORY**

**LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE**

## **SEE ALL PHENOMENA AS A STAR, A FLAME, DEW, A WATER BUBBLE, A DREAM, LIGHTNING, A CLOUD**

Look at all the causative phenomena: I, body, mind; friend, enemy, stranger; all the possessions, all the surrounding people; look at them like a shooting star the star is there, then the next minute when you look, it's not there. All these causative phenomena, including power, reputation and so forth, all these things, are in the nature of being transitory.

Like a flame. Just as a flame in the wind can go out at any time, so all causative phenomena can stop at any time.

Like dew. Just as those drops of water on the plant in the mornings can go at any time, these causative phenomena can go.

Like the bubble. The water bubble can pop at any time. We can't trust that it can last for this many hours or for this many minutes. So similar: these causative phenomena, like a water bubble, can end at any time because they are in the nature of changing within every second, due to causes and conditions.

Like a dream: it happened and then it's gone. The appearances happened but they're gone, finished. What we see in the dream, traveling or living with the family or having so much wealth, having a party, whatever – the appearance happened and then it's gone. The causative phenomena are like that. For a short time there are the appearances throughout life, but we cannot trust that they can last a long time. These things can be stopped at any time, like the dream.

Like lightning. All these causative phenomena – I, body, mind; friend, enemy, stranger; all the possessions, all the surrounding people – are like lightning. The lightning came and then went. It

happened in one second and during that time, while the lightning is happening, suddenly you see many objects. You can see your own human body and the surrounding people, the place, things. While there's lightning there's this appearance for a few seconds, and then again it becomes dark. Again this bright appearance stopped. So like that, these causative phenomena can be stopped at any time.

Like the clouds in the sky. While we are looking at the clouds, they are changing. Constantly they are changing. Not only changing their shapes, changing within every second as a result of causes and conditions. As we are looking at it, it's changing shape, it is disappearing. It is there, but while you're looking at it, it is disappearing. The next minute when you look at the sky the cloud is not there. So like that, all these causative phenomena, the nature of the people and things and events of our life are like that, like the clouds in space, in the sky. All these are in the nature of transitory.

### **PRACTISING LIKE THIS, THERE'S NO SPACE FOR SUFFERING**

We need to keep our mind in the awareness of these causative phenomena being just like these examples – that they do not last, that they're all changing within every second as a result of the process of causes and conditions: the existence of this thing depends on another cause, and that in turn depends on previous causes. Therefore the decay of the experiences of life also happens due to causes and conditions. Something happening depends upon causes and conditions and the stopping of it also depends on causes and conditions. And this can happen any time.

When we practice mindfulness of this process, suddenly there's no place for confusion; suddenly no space in our mind for confusion. Suddenly the confusion that we have in the life, suddenly it's stopped.

When we practice mindfulness of this, when we remember this, when we keep our mind aware of the nature of impermanence, it immediately cuts off our depression, which is when what attachment expected didn't happen.

Remembering that everything is transitory immediately cuts off the mountains of problems. We believe, "I have serious problems". They suffocate us, almost as if we can't breathe. We feel we are not free. We feel that our life is sunk in problems, drowned in a quagmire of problems.

By remembering the nature of the phenomena, that this I, body, mind, life, belongings, friend, enemy, stranger are in the nature of impermanence, immediately, immediately cuts off these problems, all these confusions.

All of a sudden you are free from problems, those mountains of problems. Before remembering impermanence, it looks like there are serious problems, but by remembering impermanence, the next minute, you're free. You discover it was nonsense. The way we were thinking, what we were believing, it now becomes nonsense.

By remembering impermanence, which is the nature of these causative phenomena, there is great tranquility in our own heart, immediately there is peace in our heart, a calmness.

When we do not remember the nature of these causative phenomena, their impermanence, that these things can be stopped at any time, then there's no protection, no protection for our mind. Then, delusion: anger, dissatisfied mind, attachment, ignorance, so forth, they take over. They defeat us. They take over our mind. Like the Communist Chinese took over Tibet, the delusions took over the mind, invade the mind.

If we do not practice mindfulness of the nature of the phenomena, such as impermanence, and the ultimate nature, emptiness, the delusions take over our mind, we become a slave. Delusions use our body, speech and mind as a slave to work for

them. So just for a short time, remember that I, action, object, enemy, friend, stranger, all these things, the possessions, so forth are changing every second as a result of causes and conditions; because of that, these things can be stopped at any time by causes and conditions.

*From teachings given in Sydney in 1993.*

## **2. WE CREATE OUR OWN REALITY: THE NATURAL LAW OF KARMA**

**VEN ROBINA COURTIN**

### **KARMA: FUNDAMENTAL TO BUDDHISM**

If we're saying we're a Buddhist and we're attempting to practice Buddhism, if we're not applying the laws of karma, if we're not taking that as our hypothesis, if we're not applying that in our daily life, we're not really being a Buddhist. This is fundamental to Buddhist teachings – his view about the world, how it comes into being, what our mind is, what causes happiness, what causes suffering, etc..

So, this law applies – runs – in the mind. So the mind, for the Buddha, is where things happen. The mind is where the workshop is. The mind is where everything happens. The mind is where the source of suffering is. The mind is where the source of happiness is. The mind is the point.

### **WHERE DO I COME FROM?**

According to Buddha we're not created by anyone, either a superior being or our parents. Instead, we're the product of our own past. In a simple sense, you could say you come from previous moments of yourself. Think of your mind as a river of mental moments – your thoughts and feelings of *now*, in the simplest linear sense of cause and effect, your thoughts and feelings of *now* come from the previous moment of your thoughts and feelings. And your thoughts and feelings of the previous moment come from – guess what? – the previous moment of your thoughts and feelings. You track it back to ten years ago, twenty years ago, in your mothers' womb. "Well, maybe I began a month before conception". Well, no. If my

mind existed then, it must have come from a previous moment of my mind. Then clearly you get back to the first moment of conception, when we all assume we began. If you're Christian, God put a soul there, in the egg and sperm; and if you're a materialist, you are only the egg and sperm.

Well, the Buddha has this third option. The first second of conception in our mother's womb is the entry of our own consciousness into the egg and sperm. So you can track your consciousness right in this continuity of mental moments going right back to that first moment of conception. "Well, I must have begun then". Well, yes, relatively speaking, this package called "Robina" began then, but where did the body come from? Mummy and Daddy. Where did your mind come from? Previous moment of itself. So your mind is its own continuity of mental moments.

It's a very simple concept, actually. Not difficult for us to intellectualize, to theorize about. Your mind is its own continuity. And obviously, to assume this, you have to assume it's not physical. Because, clearly, if you think your mind is your brain, then you did come from your parents, which is the materialist view, that they "made" you, you know?

## **YOUR MIND IS YOURS**

And so the experiential implication of this is that your mind is *yours*. And that means the contents of it are yours. And so what are the contents of your mind? All the love and the kindness and compassion and wisdom and contentment and anger and jealousy and fear and paranoia and rage – all of this. This is the contents of your mind. So all of these, being contents of your mind, they too come from previous moments of that particular quality in your mind.

So this is a simple idea that implies reincarnation, isn't it? It's a simple concept. Not a difficult concept intellectually. But

we're so familiar with the view that I come from mother and father and my anger comes from mother and father and my jealousy and my depression and my all the rest come from the DNA and the egg and the sperm and all the rest, you know. They play a role, no argument. But they're not the main thing. For the Buddha, the main things are your mind, your thoughts, your feelings, your emotions, your unconscious. Your tendencies, your feelings. All of this. This is yours. This is *yours*.

We come into this life fully programmed with all of our tendencies, with all of our characteristics. It's a big surprise to us. I mean, we accept we come fully programmed, but we think the programming comes from mother and father. It doesn't, Buddha says. Tendencies in the mind are mental and mind is not physical and it comes from previous moments of itself, not from the external condition, which is called the brain.

One can see indicators in the brain of certain things, no argument with this. So this fundamental point of Buddhism is that your mind is yours. And whatever's in it is simply from you having put it there in the past. Hardly surprising concept – cause and effect.

## **KARMA MEANS INTENTION**

This is the essential idea of karma. Karma is a Sanskrit word, that is translated as “action”, really simply. Which implies reaction. Action-reaction, in this meaning: cause and effect. Seed-fruit, you know.

It's also, more fundamentally, translated as intention, will, volition. Every microsecond of everything we say, everything we think and feel, and indeed do and say, with our body and speech on the basis of what's in the mind, is a karma. An intentional action that necessarily will leave an imprint, or a

tendency or a seed in your consciousness and will ripen in the future in that consciousness as your experiences.

What goes on in our mind, in other words, is the main cause of our future experiences. This is what Buddha says.

This is a simple concept. Not a difficult idea. It's just a question of being able to say it and get our heads around it. It isn't complicated. We think it's complicated, but it's just because we haven't got the right words, you know. It's not a complicated concept at all.

Of course, it's not evident to us. So we take it as our working hypothesis. Buddha's saying basically: we are the creators of ourselves. It's a very simple point. Whatever's in your mind is there because you put it there, not because Mummy and Daddy did something to you. This flies in the face of the assumption that we all have that's the basis of our lives, and is, as Buddha would say, a misconception. That, you know, I am angry because my father was angry. I am jealous because my mother was jealous. I am depressed because I have certain hormones. We always put an external reason to it, you know. Which sort of, for us, is a way of saying, "It's not my fault".

We've got this dualistic view. We assume we're made by mother and father. We assume the anger and the jealousy and the depression are either there because of the genes or the DNA or they're there because I've got a mean boyfriend, or because I had a lousy mother or a horrible husband or a bad kid or a horrible boss. This is the typical way we talk. And this is, in fact, the view of the materialist world. This is the philosophy of the materialist world that is backed up by the view that your mother and father made you, that you're only physical.

## ACCOUNTABILITY

One has to know one's mind, because that's what we need to change. Yes, certain people's external conditions make it quite tough – if you're in a prison and you can't open that door; you can say "Well, I can't help being angry, I'm surrounded by mean people". You might say that. But the ones who are really practicing don't say that. They know that this is their physical condition, and this is indeed the result of their karma (and we'll talk more about that in a minute), and so they will adapt themselves to that condition and still work on their minds.

The person who's got the chemicals that aren't working, that seem to be the trigger for depression, yes, you recognize that you've got those particular chemicals, but the depression is your mind, it's your viewpoint.

You might be around people who are mean and ugly who hit you all the time, and if you've got an angry tendency it'll make it easy for you to get angry, it's true. But if you're really being accountable, you'll recognize the anger's yours.

This is what we have to do. This is the toughest part. This is the part that's massive for us. So difficult because we're so used to this dualistic way of talking. It's always like, "It's not my fault. It's not my fault".

And that's the view of the materialist world, you look. It's an assumption of ego. "I didn't ask to get born, did I? It's not my fault. My mother made me. My father made me". So, the whole way ego works, Buddha says, is in its nature dualistic. It's always, "Poor me, the victim". Lama Yeshe would call ego the "self-pity me". We're always trying to defend ourselves, "It's not fair", "It's not my fault", "It's his fault", "I didn't mean to". Everything to try to deny accountability. It's so painful for us to be accountable. This is how ego is, this is its nature. This is the way it is.

By listening to and thinking about the Buddha's views of karma – that your consciousness, your tendencies, your experiences, come from our own past actions, not your parents; my mind is mine, I came fully programmed into this life.

And, of course, this includes our good tendencies and experiences as well, but we forget about those. We agonize, “Why do bad things happen to me?” We never agonize, “Why do good things happen to me?” We don't care why, just give me more! But we have all the good things for the same reason: I created the cause to have them.

## **FOUR WAYS THAT KARMA RIPENS**

There are four ways in which our actions from the past lives – you know, before we even entered into this present womb of our mother – there are four ways those past actions ripen in the present. Or indeed, there are four ways in which our present actions leave seeds in the mind that will ripen in the future as one's experiences. It's a constant process, ongoing. Every microsecond of everything that goes on in our mind, and the things we do on the basis of those thoughts with our body and speech, this is the karmic process. This is constantly occurring. This is the natural process of cause and effect, constantly in play.

### **1. FULLY RIPENED RESULT: A REBIRTH**

The first, main one – they call it Fully Ripened Result – is the type of rebirth we get born into. So, you know, if we're materialists, or if we're Christians, for example, we both agree on one thing at least – that someone else made us. I was made by God. I was made by Mummy and Daddy. They're the same principle, aren't they? That you're made by someone else. Which means it's got nothing to do with you.

Whereas the Buddha says, “Everything to do with me”. Our past actions are the main cause of why my mind found its way to my present mother’s human womb. Why blame your parents? They’re just lying there having fun and you come along. So Buddha puts us right in the centre of responsibility of even why we’re human in the first place. Which is kind of an interesting concept – who would have thought that you were the main cause of who you are? Big surprise!

Not more than a few weeks before conception in your mother’s womb, your consciousness was in another form, another life. And at the time of that death, before you stopped breathed, very simply speaking, a very strong seed from having practiced morality – in the context of keeping vows of morality according to Lama Zopa Rinpoche – was activated that basically programmed your mind after it left that body to find its way to your present mother’s human womb.

Your father and mother having sex is just a co-operative cause. They did not make you, they did not create you. Your consciousness had very strong karmic connection with them from past history with those particular parents.

One lama said that at the time of a male and female human having sex, billions of consciousnesses that are recently passed away (and that’s obviously not just from the human realm; Buddha would assert a whole spectrum of possibilities of types of consciousnesses existing in different realms) are all hovering around trying to get in. Well, we got in! From Buddha’s point of view, we should be weeping in delight every day at how fortunate we are, getting such an extraordinarily fortunate life.

Clearly it’s easier to get a mosquito birth, dog birth, a fish birth: we can see there are billions and trillions of other sentient beings, we can see this. But we got the human one. Amazing.

That's the first way our karma ripened – the type of rebirth we born into.

But, you know, Mother Teresa and Hitler both got one of those, so what causes the differences?

## **2. ACTIONS SIMILAR TO THE CAUSE: OUR TENDENCIES**

That gets us to the second way in which our past actions ripened in the present. And this is our tendencies, our characteristics, our personality; our depression, our kindness, our wish to kill, our wish to lie, our being good at piano, our being good at math; whatever it might be.

And that's an interesting point, psychologically speaking. In Buddhist terms, we give equal status to whether you're good at love, good at anger or good at music. It's just a tendency.

But we see our artistic tendencies and our emotional ones in a very different light in our contemporary world, don't we?

For example, we're honoured to own responsibility for our being good at music.

“Why are you good at piano, Robina?”

“Well, I have musical tendencies and I practiced really hard: *that's* why I'm good at it”.

“Why are you good at anger, Robina?”

“Oh, that's my father's fault! Nothing to do with me!” No accountability whatsoever! We love being accountable for our being good at music, or maths, or being a gymnast, you know, but not emotional stuff. We have this different set of laws when it comes to emotional stuff, which I find most fascinating – no logic at all.

The Buddha says, those tendencies – whether you're angry, jealous or just being good at music – are just tendencies. Why do we have a tendency? From having done it

before. Quite simple. Mozart clearly had musical tendencies. Hitler clearly had other tendencies, and he expressed them, didn't he, in his actions.

Our mothers and fathers – this is a big shock to us – they're not the main cause of this. The absolute default explanation in the materialist world is it's all in the DNA and the genes, etc. That's why we always look into the past, to our parents, for the causes of why I am what I am.

Yes, Buddha agrees: look into the past, but not to your parents; look into your past lives.

Alternatively, we see it all as conditioning. My mother was a musician, and everyone would say, "Yeah, Robina's good at music because her mother was good at music". Buddha would say, "No – Robina's good at music because she practiced it before. My mother had also practiced it before, and then she encouraged my music by teaching me. A simple point, but shocking to us.

So, your tendencies – they call this Actions Similar to the Cause. They're yours. You're fully programmed with every one of these from the first second of conception. Millions of these different imprints. Millions of these different tendencies. They're your own past habits.

### **3. EXPERIENCES SIMILAR TO THE CAUSE: HOW PEOPLE TREAT US, ETC.**

The third way that your karma ripens is called Experiences Similar to the Cause, and that's all the stuff that happens to you. The people and creatures you meet, the parents you get, the teachers, the abusers, the ones who are loving to you, the ones who rape you, the ones who give you a million dollars, the ones who are kind to you, the ones who steal from you, whatever it might be. The way you're treated and seen in the world. The main cause? Your past actions.

So Buddha puts every sentient in the very centre of our experiences. He says our actions are the main cause of why we are who we are and why what happens to us. All the good and all the bad. This applies to giraffes, dogs, ants, fish, humans – all “*sem-chens*”, the term in Tibetan for “sentient being”: “mind-possessor”. We’re all mind-possessors.

Buddha says that there’s not an atom of space where you won’t find mind-possessors. Trillions of them.

#### **4. ENVIRONMENTAL KARMA**

And fourth, they call it Environmental Karma. Environmental karma, which is the very way the physical world impacts upon us. For example, here we are sitting in this room. It’s quite pleasant, isn’t it? It’s quite peaceful, pleasant view out there, it’s quiet, you know – the walls aren’t dripping with mould. It’s pleasantly painted. It smells nice. No-one’s threatening us.

We take this for granted – we never ask, “Why are we having a pleasant experience?” For the Buddha there are very real causes created by us: this pleasant environmental experience is the result of our collective virtue.

If suddenly the building explodes, or a gunman comes in, *then* we’d ask, “Why is this happening?” This would be due to our collective non-virtuous karma.

Basically, Buddha’s point about karma is that suffering, which is when everything goes wrong – it could be externally, could be the people, could be the environment, could be in your own mind; when everything’s out of whack, out of balance, disharmonious, when the elements are all crazy, when people are all fighting, when people are mean to you, when your own mind’s berserk – all this is necessarily the result of negativity.

And happiness: same: the result of positive karma, virtuous actions.

## **I'M THE BOSS**

The four ways our past karma ripens in the present – the very fact that you're this human being, with this very particular family and friends and people who harm us and people who help us; all our tendencies; and even the way the physical world impacts upon us – are all the result of our own actions. Necessarily. It's just the way it is. It's a natural law. It's not blame, it's not punishment. There's no concept of punishment or reward in Buddhism – that implies someone punishing and rewarding, doesn't it? And for the Buddha there's no one pulling the strings, no one running things.

Buddha says each one of us in charge. "We are the boss"! Big surprise! So if I am the boss of my own present experiences, if I am the cause of it, then indeed I can be the cause of my future experiences – which is why we should then check up: Do I like this life, do I like people punching me in the nose? Do I like having people being angry at me? Do I like being depressed and angry and jealous and poor and living in an ugly environment? No, I don't. Then, okay, there must be causes of this; what were they? Buddha lays it all out, all from his own observation, his own experience.

This is Buddhist practice.

## **FOUR WAYS THAT KILLING, FOR EXAMPLE, WOULD RIPEN**

Let me give one example of one action and the four different ways it ripens; let's say "killing". If we look at the world, one of the most harmful things we do with our bodies is to kill other beings, wouldn't you agree? It's quite an intense way to harm any sentient being.

So, if as a result of the habit of killing in the past a strong seed of it is activated at the time of your death, it programs your consciousness to be reborn in a very suffering type of life such an animal or a spirit, for example.

Okay. So we can deduce in our case, it was morality that ripened because we got a human life, which as we discussed is the fruit of non-harming, in particular non-killing.

But look at the human realm: most humans kill something, don't they? Can you see that? Due to past killing, therefore, they're born with the tendency to keep killing. This is the worst one.

The third way killing ripens is as an experience: you get killed or you die young, or you get sick.

The fourth way, environmental karma, would be the very environment itself, the food, the water, etc., harms us. For some people just eating peanuts can kill them – that's a particular environmental karmic result for a person from past killing.

And we have the collective karma now to have poisoned water, polluted air, haven't we? The very elements themselves are harmful to us. That's the result of killing.

## **THE PRECIOUSNESS OF THIS HUMAN REBIRTH**

Q: I can't see how being born as a dog is necessarily lower.

A: I understand. I understand. Okay. Where that fits is this. As nice as dogs are, would you agree they're not very bright? I mean, you talk to them about developing compassion, they don't really get it. You try to explain emptiness to them, they're a bit thick.

Let me put it this way. If you want a really long neck, best to be a giraffe. Guaranteed. If you want to fly, be a bird. But, honey, if you want to work with your mind, make changes to

yourself, quit the causes of suffering, etc., etc., probably best to be a human.

So, it's a contextual thing. It's not high or low or some kind of hierarchy – it's a question of what you want to achieve. Lama Zopa Rinpoche said one time, if just for a couple of minutes you could have a direct experience of the mind of your little cute dog, the suffering, the mental suffering of the most profound ignorance of that mind would be so intense, you'd never want to waste another second of your precious human life. That's the ordinary ignorance of an animal's mind.

Now, we don't think this way in our culture, I agree. But just think about it – it's a different way to look at what ignorance is. We all have ignorance. Ignorance is the term for this ego-grasping that's this panic state that rises as soon as we're attacked or insulted or hurt or don't get what we want. Well, animals live in that one. Your dog has been living in your house for years, and it barks every time it hears the gate squeak. By now you'd think he would have learned that it's the gate squeaking. But he doesn't, the poor thing, because he's paranoid. His big eyes are round, he's barking like crazy; his unhappy mind, honey, is called deep, deep ignorance, and fear: fear is a function of ego-grasping, of ignorance.

Buddhist psychology, remember, refers to all living beings, not just humans.

## **KARMA IS RIPENING AND WE'RE CREATING IT EVERY MICRO-SECOND**

Q: Does the consciousness that moves from lifetime to lifetime – is that a ...collection of seeds or is it –

A: It's a collection of seeds or a bunch of programming.

Q: So, what happens, say for example in this life, like if a karmic seed has ripened, or a number of karmic seeds have

ripened over a lifetime, that consciousness that moves on, it is based on those seeds that are left in the consciousness....

A: Every microsecond that you're existing – so, what's your name?

Q: Helen.

A: Okay. So here we have Helen. So your consciousness, every microsecond right now it's working. Every second, you're doing something, thinking something, feeling something, assuming something. Each second, you're programming your mind, aren't you? Every second, you're sowing a karmic seed. This is a way of saying it, for whatever we do, say and think that leaves imprints in the mind. So this is your consciousness. If you tracked it back, just logically going back, each second, each second, you get back to the first moment of conception, wouldn't you? Then you have to go back to a moment before that. And it's the same continuity of mind. And then a previous life, and a previous life and you go back a million lives.

So we can deduce that there's this particular tracking of consciousness that at this moment in time is labeled "Helen" on the basis of this particular human form. So that consciousness will continue to program it, program it, program it, and it leaves this body, and program, program, and takes another body, program, program – so it just keeps going.

The Buddha says we're usually not in charge of this process, because we think everybody else does it to us, it's not my fault, and how dare? and all this business. But if you're really in charge of this business, you're cleaning up your act. You're stopping programming your mind – as best you can – with more negativity. You're trying to program your mind with positivity, and you're purifying the seeds you've already grown – hopefully this is your spiritual procedure – until

eventually you've cleaned up your mind completely and now you're an enlightened being. Do you see what I'm saying? This is a way of saying it.

Q: And every microsecond, we're experiencing the ripening of karma, and creating more.

A: Precisely. That's exactly right. That's exactly right. That's exactly the point. Every microsecond is the fruit of a past one, and on the basis of this we do more. So that's why we've got to get ahead of the game. Stop creating the negative ones, clean up our act, control body and speech, clean up the mind, rip out the negative ones from the mind so we quit that, and then grow the positive ones, and that finally eventually will be a mind that's now completely what they call "enlightened" – fully developed in goodness and completely rid of badness. That's what it is and that's where we're heading. So it's not a random thing... if one is in charge of the process, it's not a random thing at all. You're really on track with it and you know what you're doing. You know what to do, what to say, what to think, what not to do, what not to say, what not to think, what seeds to sow, and you just keep on bopping.

*Teachings given at Osel Shen Phen Ling in Missoula, Montana, in 2011.*

### **3. THERE'S NO KARMA THAT CAN'T BE PURIFIED**

**VEN ROBINA COURTIN**

As Lama Yeshe says, “We create negativity with our mind, so we can purify it by creating positivity with our mind”. This is the process of purification.

If we are the creators of our own reality, our experiences, then we change things. Of course, easy to say, but very hard to see this, mainly because we're addicted to the samsaric way of interpreting life: that we didn't ask to get born, that it's not my fault: so deeply ingrained in us!

#### **THERE IS SUFFERING: FIRST NOBLE TRUTH**

So, if we're sick of suffering, we'd better know how to accurately identify it. This is the First Noble Truth. There are three levels of suffering.

##### **1. The Suffering of Suffering**

This is in-your-face suffering; all the bad things that happen.

##### **2. The Suffering of Change**

Now this is a bit depressing, because it's what we actually call happiness. Buddha calls it suffering. It's a sneaky, honey-covered razor blade; it's basically when attachment gets what it wants. It looks to us like happiness, but it's just the junkie getting the fix. It's actually fraught with suffering.

##### **3. All Pervasive Suffering**

The third kind of suffering, even more subtle – we don't even give it a name in our culture, or even in our religions – is being born in the first place with this body, which is the body of a junkie in a world constructed of junk, and to survive you need to ingest it.

There's no choice: it's all in the very nature of suffering. That's the third level of suffering.

## **THERE ARE CAUSES OF SUFFERING: THE SECOND NOBLE TRUTH**

So, we're locked in suffering – the world is in the nature of suffering, the Buddha says. And why all this? Well, it's got causes – that's the Second Noble Truth. And guess what? There are two main causes, and we created both of them. It's scary – we think it all comes from everybody else.

One is the **1. past karma**, the past action, that left the seed in your mind when you did the negative action that is now ripening as your suffering. And the second cause, and actually they both subsume down to this one, is the **2. delusions** in the mind that cause you to do the negative action in the first place, which then again manifests when you punch me in the nose and I say, "How dare you", and I punch you right back, and the ball keeps rolling.

## **TWO LEVELS OF PRACTICE**

### **1. WATCH OUR BODY, SPEECH AND MIND LIKE A HAWK AND REFRAIN FROM DOING HARM NOW**

So, in relation to these two causes of suffering, there are two main kinds of practice. And as Lama Zopa Rinpoche says, the first one, the most immediate, the most urgent, is in relation to the second cause of suffering, the delusions: do not respond in a deluded way to the good and bad things that happen every day, which are the fruit of our past action.

You own these karmic appearances as yours, so you do everything in your power to not respond with negative mind, body, or speech. You do everything in your power to avoid harming the person back or grasping at the good things; you watch your mind like a hawk and try not to sow more negative

seeds. That's your first immediate practice. Every minute, watch your mind like a hawk, watch your body and speech like a hawk. You avoid at least creating more negative karma in relation to the situations of daily life.

The second one is where you now have to take care of the karma you've already created in all the countless past lives, the seeds that are lying in your mind, latent, waiting for the conditions to ripen as your suffering. They haven't ripened yet; so you've got to get ahead of the game, you've got to pull them out, or at the very least weaken them. And that's what purification is.

## **THE FORCE OF OUR PAST HABITS**

But before we get into purification, first let's look at why it's so hard to do the most immediate level of practice, the most urgent: to watch our body, speech and mind and not create negative karma now.

So it's a tough one, because the tragedy of karma is, we're brainwashed, we're completely conditioned, we're completely habituated, we're completely brainwashed – not by others but by our own past actions, habits. We are propelled by the force of our past habits.

Now, when it comes to good things, aren't we fortunate? For example, a friend of mine taking the lice out of her three-year-old son's head, and the little boy cries, "Mummy, Mummy, leave them alone, don't hurt them. It's their home". The little boy is full of compassion. He's three. She hasn't taught him this. So *he* is propelled by the force of *his* past karma, which is his compassion. We can deduce logically that he has practiced compassion in the past so that now it arises just naturally. How fortunate that spontaneous compassion arises in his three-year-old mind and he cries with compassion for the lice in his own head! How marvelous! Programming is good when it's virtuous karma.

Look at Mozart: his mother gives him a piano at the age of six, off he goes writing, his sonatas. We can deduce that he's programmed with music. When I popped out of my mother's womb, shouting and kicking, we can deduce that I was programmed with anger. So, it's a tough one when the programming is negative, because whatever's happening to you appears bad, not fair; it feels so spontaneous that you believe that anger is totally right.

Another example I use, a friend of mine, another mother of a child – she said when her little boy first saw the fishing, he ran like a magnet. She hated fishing. She never taught him this. He saw fishing and he ran like a magnet. Why? Because he had the karma to kill. We can deduce he's been in the lower realms in the past, he's finished that karma, but the tragedy is, he didn't purify all aspects of it. He's still got the residual result, which in this life is the habit to keep killing. The habit is very strong. The three-year-old boy with compassion, he didn't have to think about it; it just spontaneously came because he'd practiced compassion in the past. So this little boy, he must have practiced killing in the past. He saw the river, the fishing, attachment is instantly activated. He was magnetized by the fishing, it looked so delicious to him. And the thing you run like a magnet to is a thing you've done before, then you put your attachment glasses on instantaneously so it will look good to you, it will therefore trigger a good feeling, therefore logically you assume, "Oh, this must be good because it gives me a good feeling". So then he pursued it. He followed the fishing. He became a professional fisherman.

She said she went fishing with him one time, to please her boy. And she found it unbearable. All she could see was suffering fish. All she could see was the fish, who by their body language were clearly showing that – poor things – they would rather be in the water, please! The poor things can't shout; they haven't got a voice. Their poor little eyes can't show much; the best they can do

is wriggle their body, isn't it? I mean, if he had the addiction, the attachment to killing pigs, you'd *know* the pigs were unhappy – they'd squeal and kick and try to run away on their little legs. Who'd want to go pig killing? Nobody. We go fishing because they die seemingly peacefully, poor things – they don't make a noise.

So he can't see suffering. All his life he's killed fish; he's attached to it. He's addicted to it. Every single day going out – and the feeling of feeling good. This wonderful feeling comes from attachment to something. So, because the world accepts fishing, no-one's going to argue with him. If he was attached to killing poodles, he would've been in trouble – keep it secret, snuck out at night. No. Fishing, everyone does it so no-one tells him it's not good. So he never questioned it.

But his mother, having no attachment to fishing, all she can see, nakedly, is the suffering of the fish. He literally couldn't see it, and this is the proof that we make up our own stories based upon what's in our minds.

So, because he had a habit to kill and attachment to it, then his rose-colored spectacles caused it to look good. He couldn't see the suffering. Literally. He was a lovely human being, she said, a kind, lovely, generous man. But he was blinded; and that's what attachment causes – so sneaky. It blinds us from seeing the truth. She saw suffering; he couldn't see it. He'd been doing it for years, killed hundreds of thousands of little fishies. He felt blissful. This is the tragedy of habit.

## **JUNKIES FOR PLEASURE**

So we are propelled by the force of our past habit. And that, conjoined with the attachment – you're lost. Completely lost. That's why it is so hard to change – because we are junkies for pleasure. We are junkies for pleasure. That's this human realm. Buddha calls it a desire realm. So that means we are junkies for pleasure; we are born with these senses that crave their objects.

The moment we get the object, that's what we mean by happiness. If we feel happy, then we logically deduce the action we did must be good.

The same with the torturer – I remember reading about one of those guys years ago, a multi-murderer and a torturer. He said, from the time he could remember, he was compelled to kill, to torture and kill creatures, little ants and animals, because it gave him pleasure. And then of course as he got older, he graduated to humans.

He intellectually knew it was wrong; because he could see the world didn't approve, but you know, he had to keep it secret, of course. But he was totally addicted to the pleasure that it gave him. Why? Habit from the past, programming from karma.

We think in the West, Oh, he's just this devil, he's an evil person. But the logical reason he did it is because of his past killing, no doubt as an animal, torturing – look at animals, they torture each other all the time. Constant. They're just addicted to torture. Being tortured and torturing – that's what animals do. Worst, most intense suffering. This guy – karmic imprint, you know, of torture. And what happened? He got pleasure from it: habit meets attachment equals pleasure. And the logic is, "It must be good, because it gives me a good feeling". Of course, the world doesn't agree, so he's going to keep it quiet. There's always this conflict in his mind. But he is addicted to the pleasure.

Look at our pathetic little habits, you know. Overeating, smoking, junkies for sex, maybe... look how hard it is to get past our old habits, and we've got pathetic little habits, you know. Imagine if you got born with the habit to torture! What a terrible suffering – can you imagine? Or just to even kill fish and not realize it's suffering, not realize it's negative, all because it feels good. This is why attachment is so tricky.

This is why we have to have really logical, intelligent minds to have a sound basis for what is good and what is not, and then

judge our experiences according to it. And then struggle to change our old habits. It's a tough job, because we are propelled by our habits. We're on autopilot, you know. We think we make choices. We think we're intelligent. We're not. We're just junkies for habits, you know, craving to get good feelings. Stuff the food in, whatever we do. So we have to look into our minds carefully, and then struggle to change the habits. And it is a struggle, we all know that.

So that's the immediate level of practice, the most urgent, as Rinpoche says, the here and now, dealing with what arises every second.

## **2. PURIFY THE KARMIC SEEDS THAT HAVE NOT YET RIPENED**

This other one – the purification – is to deal with the seeds that haven't even manifested yet, that one can see no evidence of. This is called purification. And as Lama Zopa says, we are insane not to do this practice every day.

### **PURIFICATION IS A PSYCHOLOGICAL PROCESS**

So, like all this work in Buddhism, this process of purification is practical, it's psychological. A really easy way to remember is – and I like this one – is to call the steps the Four Rs. There are different orders of these, according to the practice, but I like this particular order.

The first one is Regret, the second one is Reliance, the third, the Remedy, the fourth one, Resolve, the determination to make changes.

#### **1. FIRST OPPONENT POWER: REGRET**

So the first one is you've got to acknowledge what you've done wrong. If you've taken poison, let's say, the very first step is to recognize that you've done it. You've got to first acknowledge there's a problem. It's pretty reasonable. You've first got to

acknowledge you've eaten poison. "Oh, what a fool! Quick, what can I do about it?" Then you find yourself a decent doctor; then you do something to purify it, you apply the antidotes. Then you determine never to do it again. This is reasonable; it's practical, it's common sense.

Trouble is, when it comes to morality, we seem to have this other set of rules and we get all guilty and ashamed and neurotic, or we blame; we're ridiculous. We do everything to avoid responsibility.

### **BLAME, GUILT, DENIAL**

When it comes to doing things like killing and lying and stealing, instead of simply acknowledging it, we want to find someone else who's fault it is. That's as ridiculous as trying to find someone to blame for the poison in my dinner. You're dying, but all your thoughts are for blaming. Blame is pretty useless, which is our typical mode.

Another typical mode is guilt – "Oh, I ate poison. Oh, I'm such a bad person. I ate poison". Every day, you're getting sicker and sicker..."Oh, I'm such a bad person, I ate poison". We love to live in this one. Completely useless. Complete waste of time. Totally impotent. It's the same as blame, but you're the person you're blaming. One is anger, one is self-blame. They're the same problem.

The third one, even more ridiculous – and we love this one – "Robina! There's poison in your dinner!" "There is not!" We call it living in denial.

### **ACCOUNTABILITY**

So we've got to be accountable. This entire process of purification is based upon the understanding of karma and on the recognition that you don't want suffering. Regret, the first step, is all about yourself.

So, we have guilt, now, which beats ourselves up. “I’m just a bad person”. Blame or guilt, we run to these spontaneously because they are a natural response to having ego-grasping, of having this ignorance that clings to the self-existent me. It’s this dualistic state of mind that naturally blames others, or naturally blames yourself. And we have to conquer that. We have to argue with that wrong view.

One time His Holiness was asked the difference between guilt and regret. It was such a sweet answer, but quite profound. He said: “With guilt, you look into the past and you go, “I did this and I did that and I did this”, and then you go, “and I’m a bad person”. We just assume naturally that if I’ve done bad things, I must be a bad person. That’s how we think. That second thought is the view of ego, the view of ego-grasping, that over-exaggerates the badness, and paints the entirety of myself with that brush.

The same with blame. “You are a bad person. You did this and you did this and you did this and you’re a bad person”. This is what all delusions do; they exaggerate. And it’s just not accurate. Forget being not morally right – it’s just not accurate. It’s an exaggeration. It isn’t accurate to conclude because you’ve killed and lied and stolen, that you’re a bad person. You’re not. That’s mistaken. Your *actions* are bad, no problem with that. That’s clear. That’s more precise.

But the point here is, then His Holiness said, “With regret, you also look into the past and think, “I did this in the past, and I did this, and I did this...” but then you think, “What can I do about it?” Now, we have to cultivate this consciously, it doesn’t come naturally. Instead of saying, “...and I’m a bad person”, you then say, “What can I do about it?” You change the thought. We have to cultivate that view. That’s what regret is. It’s wholesome, courageous, and optimistic.

You could say that regret is like compassion for yourself. Like the poison, the reason you say, “Oh my God, what an idiot! Quick,

where's the doctor?" – it's obvious why you say this. You don't have to state it: you know that poison will cause you suffering, and you know you don't want suffering. Well, same here. You're sick of suffering, and you understand that having harmed others will cause you suffering.

## **WE HAVE TO SAY THE WORDS**

So, when we do this practice at the end of the day, you speak out to yourself what you have done to harm others. You bad-mouthed your husband, you talked about your girlfriend behind her back, you took the pencil at work and you never returned it. I mean, maybe you're not going around torturing and killing too many people, but whatever it is, you've got to acknowledge it. "I did do this and this..." And then you check the main things throughout this life – maybe you had an abortion, maybe you went fishing, maybe you're a hunter: you acknowledge it, and you regret it.

And, of course, this step is most important if you have taken vows: lay or monastic vows, bodhisattva vows, tantric vows. It's vital to regret having broken them, and not just this life but in the past as well.

And this is regret. You acknowledge what you have done to harm others and, because you don't want suffering yourself – this is the motivation behind regret (compassion for others comes in the second step), you regret having done it. "I regret this. Why? Because I'm sick of suffering. I don't want the suffering that will come from this if I leave that seed in my mind. Because if I do leave that seed in my mind – that poison – it will ripen as my suffering and – hey! – I do not want suffering".

This attitude does not come naturally to us. Guilt comes naturally! Even if we say the word regret, it still feels like guilt. So, we have to spell it out to make it a new thought. It's a really crucial point, I tell you. It's not enough just to say, "Oh, I regret killing

and lying and stealing”. It feels like guilt, so you’ve got to change the words.

The simple, most fundamental thing about karma is that everything you do and say and think leaves a seed in your mind that can ripen as that experience for yourself in the future. You just have to think: do I like being stolen from? Nope. What causes people to steal from me? I must have stolen from them. So if I’ve just stolen a pencil, then I’ll get stolen from in the future. I don’t want that. It’s just logic; you’ve got to think it through, if you apply the law of karma, you know.

So you’ve got to be logical. Think it through. Make it real for you, not just some religious feeling. Not some weird, guilty feeling. That’s useless. It’s practical – I regret having done this because I don’t want to be stolen from, I don’t want suffering, I’m sick of it. Yet again I’ve shot my mouth off – shouted at people. I’m sick of this habit. First of all, too, you can even right now see the suffering and the hurt it causes you, the pain of that anger, you’re feeling all caught up in it and fed up with it and you’re so sick of it. You’ve got to feel that pain and be fed up with it. “I’m sick of this suffering, I’m sick of this boring habit”.

And, of course, the main suffering we do not want is to be born in the lower realms, which is the main result of negative actions. We really have to think these things through.

And we’re just talking here of the habits that we do that harm others; we’re not looking at just our own emotional problems yet. We’re looking at the actions of our body and speech first – what we do to harm others first – killing, lying, stealing, bad-mouthing; there’s only so many names for them. You regret them. Remember the things, your old habits in this life – you know, maybe you’re addicted to sex and you harm people with your sexual attachment; but you look at the suffering you’re causing yourself.

## **THE BUDDHA'S VIEW OF MORALITY**

You see, this is a very interesting point, let's look at this a bit more – Buddha's view of what morality is. It's a really important point to think about. The usual view we have about morality, which is why we're like children and resisting it mightily, is because we think it comes from somebody on high forcing it upon us: either God or our mother or the judge or the police, you know. We think it's done to us.

It isn't like that, not for Buddha. I asked a Catholic priest, a friend of mine, "What defines something as a sin?" He said, "It's going against the will of God". That is what defines a sin: something you do that is against the will of God. Now, that's reasonable if God is the creator, and that's reasonable if you are a Christian. That's appropriate. That's correct.

But that's not the Buddhist definition of a negative action. Going against Buddha's views is not what defines something as negative. It's got nothing to do with Buddha! That's like saying, "Why is smoking bad? Oh, because my doctor told me not to". Your doctor's merely a messenger. The reason smoking's bad is because it'll hurt you, dear.

For Buddha, what defines killing as bad is really simple; it's because it harms another. Buddha says this is a conventional truth that you can prove quite quickly. You just do your market research in this world, in this room and you ask around, "Do you like getting killed, stolen from, lied to, kicked in the teeth?" Everybody will say no.

So we can deduce logically that a negative action is one that harms another, because you've just proven it by agreeing we don't like it. That's what makes it negative. It does not come from somebody on high, it's not set in stone; it is not, in other words, self-existent. It is a dependent arising. That's Buddha's view; it's a natural law. So, what a negative action is is one that harms another.

But in this very first stage of practice where you regret doing actions that harm others, the reason first – you have to hear this point – the reason you regret having done it is not for the sake of others yet; it’s for *your* sake, remember? So, a negative action is defined as an action that harms another; but at this first step, you regret it because your doing it programs your mind to keep doing it and to have it done to you, not to mention being born in the lower realms.

So, you regret it because *you* don’t want the suffering. This is a crucial point. We’ve got to understand this, not just be vague about it. “Oh I do my Vajrasattva practice, oh I regret lying, killing...” We don’t even give it thought, you know, we just wishy-washy gloss over it.

So a negative action is defined as one that harms another, but at this first stage – and this is the very meaning of the first level of practice in Buddhism – in the first scope of practice, junior school, I like to call it – His Holiness uses this analogy as well: the way the teachings in the lam-rim are structured, it’s like the education system. In Tibetan medieval language they call it the Lower Scope of practice. So junior school level of practice is to control your body and your speech.

The reason you will regret killing and lying and stealing and bad-mouthing – and there’s not that many actions you do with your body and speech that harm others, sexual misconduct, lying, killing, stealing, you know, shouting at people, harsh speech, talking behind backs; there’s only so many. “You know what, I’m sick of this suffering, I’m sick of the pain it causes me right now and I do not want the karmic fruits of this in the future. No way! So I regret having killed, lied, stolen, etc. etc”.

Then it makes it very real for you, because it’s about yourself. Don’t feel bad about this. Don’t feel guilty, like I should just be having compassion for others. Compassion’s the Great Scope – that’s university, people! You’ve got to recognize your own

suffering before you recognize the suffering of others. You've got to be sick of your own suffering – this is what renunciation is – you're sick of your own suffering. That's why you've got to contemplate what these ridiculous things that we do, do to *ourselves*. Don't gloss over this step, it's extremely important.

So, you regret the things you did today, yesterday, this life, in beginningless past lives – the things you've done with your body and speech to harm others. "I regret anything I have ever done, since beginningless time to any sentient being".

And of course, for those of us with vows, deeply regret our broken vows: pratimoksha vows – vows of individual liberation, the vows you take for junior school and high school – if you've broken those, then you deeply regret having broken those. If you've taken bodhisattva vows, then you deeply regret having broken your bodhisattva vows. If you've taken tantric vows, you deeply regret having broken your tantric vows, because these are lifelong vows. So you regret these, hugely, because you don't want the suffering that this can cause in the future: being separate from our lamas, the Dharma, the Buddha's teachings, not to mention other suffering.

And if Buddha is right in asserting, as he does, that we've had beginningless lives, that we've had countless lives as animals, and that mightn't be the most suffering life, but that's where we do the most harm; animals just in their nature harm and get harmed. Look at one whale: it opens its mouth for one mouthful of one breakfast on one day and forty million creatures go in. And you get guilty because you killed one person. Get some perspective, please! That's a lot of sentient beings. So they live in a killing environment; they live on killing, animals do. So, the harm we've done to sentient beings as animals is inconceivable in comparison to what we've done as humans.

So if our minds are beginningless and we've had these lives, we've done countless things and that means those karmic seeds

are on our minds now. So, you better regret them, because you know you don't want that suffering again! "I regret anything I've ever done to any sentient being since beginningless time". Regret the lot! Because I do not want suffering – we've got to add that thought. "Because I am sick of suffering. Because I do not want suffering". You've got to say that. That's what makes it real, and not just some nice religious feeling. Not just guilt.

That's regret, the first of the four opponent powers.

## **1. SECOND OPPONENT POWER: RELIANCE.**

### **a. REFUGE**

Now you think, "Well, good! Whom can I turn to? Where's the doctor, please?" So you turn to Mr. Buddha. He's our doctor. Second step: Reliance.

There are two parts in Reliance: the first is reliance upon the Buddha; that's called Refuge. So what does that mean? Let's look at this again, carefully. If I'm a Christian, I would rely upon God, because he's my creator. So how I get purified is by requesting him to forgive me. Well, Buddha will forgive you; he's a nice guy, I promise. But it's got nothing to do with purification. Nothing. It's nice to be forgiven, but it's not the point. It is not the discussion. Quite different.

So we rely on Buddha because he's our doctor – he's got the methods; he's got the medicine. So, "Thank goodness I've got a decent doctor", you think. And you do a little prayer, you visualize Vajrasattva, the particular manifestation of Buddha that all the lamas praise as the best one for this practice.

In the bodhisattva path, the Buddha manifests as like, gorgeous, you know, jewelry on his arms and ears and throat, and silken clothing; they call it the royal aspect. This is coming from tantra, where that's a whole different discussion and it has to do with enhancing the senses and energizing them. It's quite

different, another level. So, Buddha in that aspect is called Vajradhara, or in Tibetan, Dorje Chang.

When I first became a Buddhist, I really like this name “Dorje Chang” and I asked Lama Yeshe, “Who’s Dorje Chang, Lama?” and he said, very simply, “He’s the biggest Buddha, dear”. I was very proud to know I liked the biggest Buddha! So basically, that’s the tantric aspect of Shakyamuni Buddha.

For this purification practice, we use another aspect of Vajradhara, who looks the same, but he’s white: Vajrasattva. He’s particularly to do with emptiness, because realizing emptiness is when you’ve finally cut the root of the delusions, and that’s when we actually purify our minds. Until then, by doing this purification practice we are simply stalling the ripening, we’re weakening the seeds, we’re like burning them, we’re not pulling them out completely. Until you’ve realized emptiness, you will never cut the delusions, you’ll always have more suffering. We need to stop their ripening, though, and that’s what the purification process does. So, one relies upon Vajrasattva.

So, we visualize him above our head, and then we take refuge, say a prayer remembering the Buddha, grateful to have a Buddha, and we imagine him as our own lama, who manifests as the Buddha for our benefit, to show us the way. That’s what refuge means. You rely upon the doctor.

Now, you’ve got to look at what it means, “rely upon the doctor”. Why would you rely upon a doctor? Two reasons: one, because you do not want more sickness and you need their medicine; and two, because you are confident they’re a good doctor. It seems kind of obvious; you don’t go to a doctor because they’ve got a cute nose. So you rely upon their advice. It’s perfectly reasonable.

Here, of course, this implies having thought about the Buddha, seeing that he’s valid, and wanting to rely upon the Buddha because you want his medicine so that you can heal yourself.

In other words, if you've never thought about suffering, and you haven't regretted anything you've done wrong because you haven't thought about suffering and its consequences, then the Buddha will be pretty meaningless to you. If you haven't taken poison, or you don't realize you've taken poison, you might have heard about some amazing doctor who's got every antidote to every poison on earth, and you go, "Oh, how interesting. But how boring. Who needs him?" You don't care. But check how you feel when you've discovered you know you've taken poison; you're going to hang on every word that doctor says and take his advice perfectly.

## **b. COMPASSION**

The second part of Reliance is where you have compassion for those you have harmed. It's a bit curious that it's called reliance. The lamas put it like this: here we are, now wanting to cultivate compassion for the suffering of others. Whom do we rely up, or need, in order to accomplish compassion? Suffering sentient beings, of course. If we never meet a suffering sentient being, how could we ever cultivate compassion. It's in this sense that they say we "rely upon" sentient beings.

In the first step, Regret, it's like having compassion for yourself. You're regretting the harm you've done for your sake. Now here, what you need to cultivate is compassion for those you've harmed, and you regret for their sake and want to purify yourself for *their* sake. But you can't have that until you've got the first one. Compassion is based upon this first one, on Regret. You can't have compassion for the suffering of others until you've got this real sense of renunciation for your own suffering. It's impossible, you can't. You've got to have this one first.

Why? Very simple. Renunciation has two parts: The first part is: you are sick of suffering. Now, we all know that – we're all sick of suffering. But the second part's crucial: you now know *why*

you're suffering – your past negative actions and your delusions. When you've got these two, that's renunciation.

Compassion is these two as well, but instead of yourself, it's applied to others. One: you see people suffering, and you find it unbearable. But, two: you now know why they are suffering, and that's the big shift here. You now know why they are suffering: because of their karma and their delusions: They, like you, are the source of their own suffering. You don't have compassion because they're poor innocent victims, which is the only people we usually have compassion for now; we love to have compassion for innocent victims, usually animals and children.

Now you see others suffering and you know why they're suffering. It's a crucial difference and one has to cultivate it carefully. Again, it's completely based on the teachings of karma, so one has to think of this so carefully, analyze it so carefully. Because the feeling we have now is guilt and shame and hate and blame, you know.

Our compassion now on based upon there being no karma. We only have compassion for innocent victims, because we assume the cause of suffering is the horrible oppressor. Buddha says, "Wrong view". Actually, when you've got this view of compassion, you'll have even more compassion for the oppressor. That's a fact. Why? Very logical. It's like a mother for her junkie kid. Everybody else hates him – he lies, he steals, he's a pain to be around; but the mother, her heart breaks for him. Why? Because he is causing himself suffering. That's the basis of compassion.

You see people who are the victims of harm, you realize it's the result of their own past actions and your heart breaks for them, but you have even more compassion for the people who caused it, because the people who are the victims are just finishing their suffering and the ones who caused it are just beginning theirs.

Once you've got this first for yourself, which is renunciation: I'm sick of suffering, I know why I'm suffering: karma; then it's

easy then to have compassion for others. You can't get it properly until you've got it for yourself. This is a reasonable psychological kind of progression, and all of it's based on karma.

Now, in this second part of the second step, Reliance, you think about compassion now. You think of those you've harmed, and you know what it's like to suffer so you know what it's like for their suffering. You regret for their sake, now. Compassion for others.

And if you're brave enough, you can have compassion for those who have harmed you, because they're going to suffer in the future. And of course, the dynamic of all this is you know you caused them suffering in the past, that's how come they're causing you suffering now. When you've got karma down, you can own it so strongly.

## **WITH THE VIEW OF KARMA, NO BLAME, THEREFORE NO ANGER**

In 2003 I remember, in New York, I was there for a conference that Richard Gere had organized: a bunch of ex-prisoners, when His Holiness was there. Twenty ex-prisoners who had been meditating in prison: black and white, male and female, Puerto Rican, Mexican: a cross-section of American society. So people like me who had worked with people in prison were invited as well. We had this very nice talk all day, just a lovely conference, you know? And they all met His Holiness.

Richard also invited two young Tibetan nuns who'd been tortured and sexually abused in prison for a couple of years, basically for just being nuns. So they were telling their experience.

First of all, if you could quantify suffering, then it was obvious to all the Americans that the suffering of the nuns was more than all of theirs put together. But second, it was really clear they weren't angry, which is a big surprise to us. Because we have a victim mentality, and because we think we're innocent victims, and we think suffering is caused by others, we assume anger is

normal; because anger is blame, isn't it? Anger is the response of the innocent victim.

But if you have the view of karma, you don't have blame. The nuns were sad, there were tears, but they weren't angry. And that's a big shock to us: we assume anger is normal; in fact, we'd think you're not normal if you don't have anger.

But these nuns, at the end of their talk, they said very quietly, "And of course, we had compassion for our torturers, because we knew we had harmed them in the past".

This is a huge point. This is why we can't just gloss over karma, we've got to really give it thought. And this is the basis of all of Buddha's teachings. It is a way of spelling out the law of cause and effect. Really think it through – it's the basis of all practice. And it's the basis of compassion.

### **3. THIRD OPPONENT POWER: THE REMEDY**

So now, the third step. Now you take the medicine. You apply the antidote. You can say in Buddhism there's a whole medicine cabinet of remedies, but all the lamas in the Tibetan traditions praise this particular meditation, this particular visualization, this particular mantra as a really potent medicine. Often this step is simply called "applying the antidote".

So, you know, anything here would apply. If you've got a habit to kill, you make a point of saving lives. You go get a bunch of worms and instead of having them killed as bait, you release the worms. It's a powerful thing to do. Or one of your practices could be, one of your antidotes could be to help sick people: anything you do that's opposite to the thing you're regretting. If you're regretting lying, you make a special point of telling the truth. You must do this anyway in your life. They are necessary.

But here, in this step, the very powerful practice, very powerful antidote, remedy – and one has to think about why it's powerful, not just because it's religion, you know – this very potent medicine

of visualizing Vajrasattva and saying his mantra. This is said to be a very powerful medicine that works at a very deep level of your mind. So, one does this visualization of Vajrasattva purifying the various actions of your body, speech and mind and reciting the mantra.

All the lamas say that any practice that involves saying the Buddha's name, visualizing, reciting their mantras, is hugely powerful, far more powerful than practices that don't involve the Buddha. They talk about the "power of the object", the object of one's thoughts, actions, etc. So doing this practice of visualizing nectar coming from the Buddha and purifying your negative actions of body, speech and mind while you recite the mantra, is like an atomic bomb on the negative karmic imprints.

That's the third step.

#### **4. FOURTH OPPONENT POWER: RESOLVE**

And the fourth one, as Pabongka Rinpoche says, is the most important: Resolve, or the determination to change. If you can't own responsibility for what you've done wrong, you can never make the decision to change, can you, because you don't want to own it. First with regret and then the determination to change, you're really becoming accountable. You're really growing up. You're becoming mature. And you're becoming your own friend. That's why this practice is so crucial to do. Not just to gloss it over, say, "Oh I've done my Vajrasattva mantras..." That's not enough, I tell you. That's just not enough. You've got to think through these four steps. It's psychologically really profound. It's being your own therapist, as Lama Yeshe puts it, I'm not kidding.

Things really shift if we can do this properly, because this is where we get the courage to know we are in charge of our life and we *can* change. Because it's the power of our own will, our own determination to change.

So this fourth step, again, is so practical: you make determination not to do again. So, if you have taken vows – I will never kill, I will never lie, I will never steal – you’ve taken those five lay vows, and they’re lifetime vows, so obviously you need to reiterate that vow.

Every time you say “I will never kill”, it’s like digging that groove deeper in your mind. It’s not enough to say, “Oh, yeah, I took vows twenty years ago. Twenty years ago I vowed I wouldn’t kill”, but you’ve never thought of it since. It’s like saying, “Oh, I’m a pianist, I played piano twenty years ago”. You’re not, unless you do it every day. We see these things as so self-existent. It’s not enough. It’s an ongoing, dynamic daily thing.

If every day you say, “I will never kill”, I mean, excuse me, guess what the result will be? It’s hardly rocket science. If every day you say it, that protects you every day from ever killing. It’s obvious. It’s so embarrassingly obvious. But we forget these things. So you need to reiterate your vows. I will never kill. I will never steal. I will never lie. I will never whatever they are. I will never break my bodhisattva vows. I will never break my tantric vows. You need to say this every day. Reiterate your commitments.

And it’s not just because you’re hoping God will make you good or Buddha will bless you; it’s you training your mind. Like if you do pushups every day, guess what? You keep getting better at it. We understand it when it comes to creativity and art and learning things, but we think this is “religion” so we don’t understand why I should say every day I’ll never kill. Because you’re training your mind in that direction. Because everything comes down to the thought. All you’re doing by becoming a Buddha is programming your mind with positive thoughts. It’s nothing more secret than that.

Then, of course, you don’t lie to yourself, as Rinpoche says. If you’re not ready to say I’ll never do it again, if you haven’t taken the vow, and you’re still going fishing every day or going hunting,

then don't lie to yourself and say "I'll never kill again"; you're not ready. Be realistic.

Look at our old habits, like getting angry. So maybe you'll say, "Okay. I see the reasonableness of not getting angry. I'm going to give it a go. I won't get angry for five hours". Or you might say, "I won't lie for ten hours", – and because you've got to go to bed soon, when you're asleep, you won't lie, believe me; you'll keep your vow!

Be realistic; it's an incremental thing, and you've got to take this seriously on board. That's why you can't just do your mantras and think, "I've done my practice". It's not enough. It's a serious psychological procedure that you're involved in. Practice is real; it's you dealing with your own mind.

So, give yourself a timeline. And when it comes of course to your delusions, your neurotic thoughts, the things that harm you only – and I didn't mention this in Regret – but of course you can think of your own rubbish: your own angry thoughts, your depression, your jealousy, which are destroying you. You can deeply regret these because it's obvious the suffering it causes you; because you're sick of the suffering.

Now here in this fourth step, you maybe can't say, "I'll never be depressed again"; it's not possible, if you're caught up in the middle of it. But you make some decisions for yourself; realistic, humble decisions. "Okay. I'm going to watch my mind like a hawk. I'm going to do my best tomorrow".

Any vows you've taken, you must reiterate them at this step: I will never break my lay vows, I will never break my bodhisattva vows, I will never break my tantric vows, etc. If you haven't taken vows, and if you can start to say I will never kill, lie steal, etc., then great. Take it at your own pace. Make decisions every night with this practice, and you will change. "We can mold our minds into any shape we like", as Lama Zopa Rinpoche says. We're the boss, remember.

## **4. THERE'S NOTHING BETTER THAN PURIFICATION!**

**LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE**

There is nothing better to do than doing purification practices. Even if the Third World War that people talk about were happening, other than Vajrasattva practice, what else could you do? Even if the Third World War had broken out, there'd be no other way to spend your life than practicing Vajrasattva to purify yourself and benefit others. Even in the face of nuclear danger, there's nothing better to do than practicing purification. The immediate thing to do is to purify negative karma.

Even if you discover you have cancer – you go to a hospital for a check up and the doctor diagnoses cancer – there's nothing else to do but practice purification, to purify your mind of the causes of suffering rebirths, the negative karma that causes your consciousness to migrate into the lower realms. Even if you find out that you are terminally ill with cancer, AIDS or any other life-threatening disease, the immediate solution is to purify as much negative karma as you can, to ensure that your next rebirth will be a good one, so that in your next life you can continue to practice Dharma, to actualize the path to enlightenment.

When some people find out that they have cancer or AIDS, they go on vacation to some pure land like Goa, Tahiti or Rio de Janeiro – which I used to call Rio Degenerated, but I haven't been there for a while! – anyway, to some place that Westerners consider to be pure lands. But that doesn't help. That doesn't solve your problem; that doesn't heal your sickness or purify your negative karma. It just distracts your mind from the problem. Similarly, drinking alcohol or taking other substances to suppress your fear, to not feel afraid, works for only a short time and is

simply cheating yourself. Not only does getting intoxicated not solve your problem but it also leads to additional life problems. Therefore, even if you are going to die tomorrow, tonight, this hour, there's nothing else to do but purify your mind.

Besides benefiting yourself, to be successful in benefiting others, to have no obstacles for that, you also need to purify your mind. To free numberless sentient beings, the source of all your past, present and future happiness, including not only temporary happiness but also ultimate happiness – liberation from samsara and the great liberation of full enlightenment – to bring these numberless sentient beings to full enlightenment by yourself alone, you need to actualize the steps of the path to enlightenment. What interferes with your doing that is your negative karma, your defilements. Therefore, purification is very important; a key point in your practice. Even to liberate yourself forever from the oceans of samsaric suffering, the continuity of which has no beginning, you need to actualize the path that ceases the defilements, the cause of all suffering – karma and delusion, including the seed of delusion. Even for your own liberation from samsara, purification is the essential practice.

Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo advised that, out of meditation on that lam-rim and collecting merit and practicing purification, it is more important to spend time collecting merit and practicing purification. Here, meditating means meditating on the lam-rim, the various points of the path to enlightenment (see page 9). Of course, practicing purification and collecting merit all involves meditation, but the specific meditation Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo was referring to was meditation on the path.

As we know from our own experience, we've tried a lot to meditate on the lam-rim, starting from guru devotion, the perfect human rebirth and so forth, spending time on that, but not much has happened in our minds. Even though we've spent much time meditating on the lam-rim, there's been no real change in our

hearts. The words on which we've been meditating remain just words and haven't connected with our hearts.

There's a gap between our hearts and the words we've been repeating or reciting during meditation. Sometimes, instead of getting transformed, our minds have even gotten worse.

You might have heard this example used by Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo. A rock might have been immersed under water for a long time, but it still remains very hard and solid. Similarly, our minds have been around Dharma for a long time, we've been reading and listening to teachings for ages, but nothing has happened; there's been no change in our minds. We have no realizations and our egos are just as big as they were before we met the Dharma, if not bigger! Perhaps our egos have become even more professional, more sophisticated, better qualified than they ever were. Anyway, I'm joking. However, if you've been meditating on the lam-rim for a long time and feel no benefit, your mistake is that you have not practiced enough purification or collected enough merit.

Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo also said in his lam-rim teachings that even if you have been doing many preliminary practices [of purification and collecting merit] along with your lam-rim meditation, if there's been no change in your mind, you need to examine your guru devotion.

There might be something wrong in your practice of that. You have to analyze what might have gone wrong in your guru devotion and fix any mistakes that you find by confessing past errors and correcting your future practice. If you fail to do this, you'll continue to collect the heaviest of negative karmas, the greatest obstacles to realization and the development of your mind in the spiritual path, the path to enlightenment. If you are unaware of this and continue to do mainly preliminary practices and lam-rim meditation, not much will happen in your mind. What you are doing is good, but it won't transform your mind, won't bring you realizations.

Even in this case, therefore, purification is required. You have to recognize your mistakes and confess them, refrain from making them in future, and do whatever else should be done. In *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo said that of all the things you do in your life, the practice of purifying negativities and collecting merit is more important than meditation. This is what we are doing here at this retreat.

Also, for old students who knew Lama Yeshe, who was kinder than the buddhas of the three times, doing Vajrasattva practice is the best offering we can make to Lama. He wrote these teachings on the Vajrasattva practice and tsog offering, put together the sadhanas and so forth, so our doing one of Lama's favorite practices would please him a lot and is repaying his kindness. Whether you're a direct or indirect disciple, it's the same.

*Teachings by Lama Zopa Rinpoche given at Land of Medicine Buddha, California, 1999.*

## **5. UNRAVELLING OUR EMOTIONS**

**VEN ROBINA COURTIN**

The Buddhist view is that we've all got extraordinary potential to cultivate our minds, our consciousness. It's not some special gift that only some people have; it's innate within all of us.

But potential for what? Not something holy, like heaven in the sky, or next life, but potential to eliminate entirely fear, depression, anxiety, neediness, low self-esteem and to fully develop love, contentment, compassion, clarity, courage and the other qualities we want so badly. That's the meaning of nirvana.

It is something very earthy, so tasty, not something vague and mystical.

This potential exists, simply, in our minds, our consciousness. Therefore we need to learn how to access our own mind. Sounds simple enough, but it's not a job we're educated to do. It is not our habit to look inside, much less know deeply and well what's going on there.

### **WHAT IS THE MIND?**

From the Buddhist point of view, the word "mind" covers the entire spectrum of our inner experiences: thoughts, feelings and emotions, unconscious, sub-conscious, intuition, instinct, even what some might call soul – all of this is our consciousness. And this, as Lama Zopa Rinpoche puts it, is where the workshop is. This is what we have to become deeply familiar with in order to cultivate our marvelous potential.

Mainly what we're familiar with, what we run to in order to understand our lives, is the outside world, the past – the people and events and objects – which we're convinced are the main cause of our happiness and suffering.

This is okay, and necessary, but not enough. Our parents, our genes, the boyfriend, the boss, the external environment – they are merely catalysts for our experiences, not the main event. The main thing is our own mind, our own emotions, characteristics, personality traits, tendencies: our own very being itself.

Investigating, unravelling, and transforming this is the Buddhist approach to psychological work.

## **BEING OUR OWN THERAPIST**

According to this model of the mind, psychological states fall into three categories: positive, negative, and neutral. Leaving aside the neutral, the positive states, which are at the core of our being, are necessarily the cause of own wellbeing and happiness, and the basis of our capacity to benefit others. The negative, which are not at the core of our being and thus can be removed, are necessarily the cause of our unhappiness and the basis of our harming others.

The key job, then, is to develop the skill to look inside, to be introspective, in a clear and disciplined way, so that we're then qualified to do the actual job of changing our emotions, of distinguishing between the positive and negative. To become our own therapist, in other words, as Lama Yeshe puts it.

Not an easy job. First of all, we're not educated to look into our minds. Second, we only notice we're angry, for example, when the words vomit out of the mouth; or that we're depressed when we can't get out of bed one morning. Third, even if we do look at our feelings, often we can't tell the difference between the positive and the negative: they're mixed together in a big soup of emotions – and a puréed soup at.

And one of the biggest obstacles is that we don't think we can change them: they're so concrete, so real: "I'm born this way, what can I do about it?" We so fiercely identify with the neuroses, believing that they're the real me. We even think they're physical. And anyway, who *wants* to look into their mind? "It's not my fault,

is it? I didn't ask to get born! This is how we all are! What am *I* supposed to do about it?"

Everything conspires against our doing this job.

## **NEGATIVITY IS NOT INNATE**

To give ourselves the confidence to even start, we need to think about how the negative states of mind are not at the core of our being, they do not define us, they are not innate, and thus can be removed. This flies in the face of our deeply held assumption – one that's reinforced by all contemporary models of the mind – that the positive and negative have equal status; that they're natural; they just are who we are. If you ask your therapist for methods to get rid of all anger, jealousy, attachment and the rest, they'll think you're insane!

We can be forgiven for thinking the negative, neurotic, unhappy emotions are at the core of our being: they certainly feel like it! We identify totally with them, follow them perfectly, truly believing this is who I really am. This is the irony of ego.

## **NEGATIVE STATES OF MIND ARE DISTURBING AND DELUSIONAL**

So, if the negative, neurotic emotions are the source of our pain and the positive ones the cause of our happiness, then we'd better learn to distinguish them. This is the very essence of the job our being our own therapist.

What are negative states of mind? They have two main characteristics (which the positive ones necessarily lack) and these are indicated by two commonly used synonyms: "disturbing emotions" and "delusions".

**Disturbing** Even though we can see that anger is disturbing to oneself – just look at an angry person: they're out of their mind! – we fiercely live in denial of it; or we deflect it, so determined are we to believe that the external catalyst is the main problem. My

friends on death row in Kentucky told me that they receive visits from an old Catholic man who, after thirty years of grief and rage after his daughter was murdered, finally realized that the *main* reason for his suffering was his rage, his anger.

**Delusional** The other characteristic that these unhappy states of mind possess is that they're delusional. We'd be offended if someone accused of that, but that's exactly what Buddha is saying. The extent to which our minds are caught up in attachment, anger and the rest is the extent to which we are not in touch with reality. He's saying that we're all delusional, it's just a question of degree.

In other words, anger, attachment and the rest are concepts, *wrong* concepts. It seems like a joke to say that these powerful emotions are based in thoughts, but that's because we only notice them when they roar up to the surface as emotion.

Perhaps we can see the disturbing aspect of them, but rarely the delusional.

They are distorted assessments of the person or the event that we are attached to or angry with; they're elaborations, exaggerated stories, lies, misconceptions, fantasies, conceptual constructions, superstitions. As Rinpoche puts it, they decorate on top of what is already there layers upon layers of characteristics that are simply not there. Bad enough that we see things this way; the worst part is that we *believe* that these stories are true. This is what keeps us locked inside our own personal insane asylum.

Understanding this is the key to understanding our negative states of mind and, therefore, how to get rid of them.

## **ATTACHMENT AND ANGER COME TOGETHER**

The delusion that runs our lives is attachment. It's a profound dissatisfaction, neediness; a primordial sense that something is missing, of being bereft, lonely, cut off. It's just there, *all the time*, in the bones of our being.

And this is where aversion, anger, the exact opposite of attachment, comes into play. The split second that attachment is thwarted, doesn't get what it wants – and that's a thousand times a day – aversion arises. Then this is expressed externally as anger or internally as despair and depression. Attachment and aversion are utterly linked. Being a fantasy, attachment is not sustainable; the bubble has to burst, and it has nowhere to go but aversion (or ignorance, which manifests as boredom, indifference, uncaring).

In our never-ending efforts to keep the panic at bay, we hungrily seek the right sounds, smells, tastes, feelings, thoughts, words, but the split second we don't get them, aversion arises, exploding outwards as anger or imploding inwards as depression, guilt, hopelessness, self-hate.

## **DELUSIONS ARE LIARS**

At the root of this, as Buddha calls it, is ignorance: *marigpa* in Tibetan: unawareness: a fundamental unawareness of how we actually exist. The function of this “ego-grasping”, as it's called, is to isolate and concretize this universe-big sense of self, a deluded sense of “I”, a totally fabricated sense of I, whose nature is fear: paranoid, dark, cut off, separate, alienated, and overwhelming.

This instinctive, pervasive sense of an independent, self-existent, real, solid, definite me-ness, totally pervades everything – there is not an instant when it is not there. It's at the deepest level of assumption, beneath everything. It is always there, informing everything we think and feel and say and do and experience.

And the main voice of this I is “I want”. Why? The vivid sense of a separate, lonely I manifests as a deep sense of missing something, not being enough, not having enough. And that is the irony of ego – we actually feel empty, bereft. And so that neediness, that bottomless pit of yearning, that hunger: that's attachment. And it's the main voice of ego, it is constantly there,

moment by moment; not just occasionally there, but constantly there.

This attachment, this desire, being a misconception, makes the mistake of believing, a million percent, that that delicious person, that gorgeous taste, that lovely smell, that nice feeling, that idea – that when I get *that*, when I have it inside me, then I'll feel full, then I'll be content. That is what desire thinks.

This is so hard to see how desire is deluded. And it is not meant to be a moralistic issue. As soon as we hear these words we feel a bit resentful, “What do you mean – I'm not allowed to have pleasure?” That's how we feel. But as Lama Yeshe has pointed out: we're either completely hedonistic, and grasping and shoving everything in, or we're completely puritanical. And the irony is that they are both coming from a misunderstanding of desire; they both come from ego.

Buddha is not being moralistic. He is not saying we should not have pleasure – the reality is he is saying we *should* have masses of pleasure, joy, happiness, but naturally and appropriately, and, incredibly, without relying upon anything external. This is our natural state when we've depolluted our minds of the neuroses, in fact.

Right now, because of the misconception that desire has, we have got the wrong end of the stick. Desire thinks that the delicious chocolate cake, that gorgeous thing is *out there*, vibrating deliciousness, demanding that I eat it – nothing coming from my side at all. We don't think our mind plays any role at all. We think that it's all happening from the cake's side, all the energy is coming from the cake.

## **OUR MIND MAKES IT UP**

And the thing is that we don't see this process! The fact is we are making up the cake – attachment has written a huge story about cake and what it will do for us. It is a complex conceptual

construction, an invention, an elaborate view, an interpretation, an opinion.

We're like a child, as one lama said, who draws a lion, and then becomes afraid of it. We invent everything in our reality, and then we have all the fears and the paranoia and the depression and the grasping. We're too much!

But we make up that cake, we make up the enemy – we made them up ourselves. This sounds pretty cosmic, but it is literally true. This doesn't mean there is no cake there – there is. And it doesn't mean that Fred didn't punch you – he did. We need to distinguish between the facts and the fiction: that's the tricky part.

It is hard to see this, but this is the way delusions function. And basically they are liars. What attachment is seeing is simply not true. What attachment is seeing simply does not exist.

There is a cake there, but what we think is cake and what cake actually is are hugely different. This is interesting. And because this is hard to see indicates how ancient it is within us.

What we're seeing or experiencing, what we are grasping at – delicious cake from its own side that will make me happy – is a total lie. It doesn't exist like that at all. There is a cake there, it is brown, it is square: that's valid. And this is what's hard to distinguish – the correctness, and the incorrectness. What is actually there and what is not there. That is the job we need to do in knowing the way delusions work and therefore how to get rid of them.

## **ATTACHMENT IS THE VOICE OF THE VICTIM**

Another characteristic of attachment is that it is the voice of the victim. We truly feel we have no control – cake is this incredible powerful thing, and I just have to have it. What choice do I have? That is attachment talking. Attachment gives all the power to the outside object. Which is why we feel like a baby. That's the victim mentality. And victim mentality, the one of hopelessness, the one

of no control, that's the voice of attachment. Literally. That's exactly how attachment functions. Attachment is giving all the power to that object. It sees this truly delicious divine thing, which in reality our mind has made up, and then we believe it and then blame it.

### **ATTACHMENT IS NOT A FUNCTION OF THE SENSES**

“We make the body the boss”, as Lama Yeshe would tell us. We totally follow what the senses feel. We assume the delicious cake is an object of the senses – of course, it is; but what we think we see isn't what's there. What appears to the sense of sight, for example, is not a delicious cake but simply the shape and colour of the thing. “Delicious cake” is a story made up by the mental consciousness, specifically attachment. This is a crucial point.

Let's analyze. What is being experienced in relation to that cake? What are the states of mind? One of them is the senses indeed – we smell it in the kitchen, so there's our nose sense. Then there's the touch, the sight, we see the shape and color when it comes to the table; then we touch it, the hand feels it, then there's the taste consciousness, the one we're wanting the most. So four of the five senses are involved in the experience of that cake.

The senses are like dumb animals. Our tongue doesn't experience the hunger for the cake, it doesn't leap out of our face and grab the cake desperately; even our hand doesn't, although it looks like it. The hand goes out to the cake, but not from its own side. So what does? It's propelled by the neurotic need to get the cake in the mouth. The mental consciousness, in other words. The thought. It is the story about what is chocolate cake, and I need chocolate cake, all the stuff about chocolate cake that is chattering away in the mind. That is where the delusions exist. Attachment is not a function of the taste. It is simply not possible. How can it be? Our tongue doesn't feel neurotic. Our tongue doesn't feel grasping, our tongue doesn't feel, “I want to have more cake”, it is just a

doorway through which this bunch of thoughts, these concepts, this sense of “I” grasps at the experience, isn’t it? That is all. So the senses do not experience attachment. It is a logical fact.

## **WE ARE ALL JUNKIES**

So, of course, for ages we have had the mistaken assumption that satisfying the senses is the way to get happiness. So right now, we are totally dependent on sensory objects. We are all junkies, it’s just a question of degree. We can’t imagine having pleasure unless we get that fix. That fix is any one of the objects of the five senses. Which makes it sound quite brutal.

But unless we can start to look into this and cut through this whole way of working, we will never break free of suffering, we’ll never become content, satisfied, fulfilled. Ever. Which is why, the basis of practice, the foundation of all realizations, is morality. Discipline. It means literally practicing control over the senses. And it is not a moralistic issue; It’s a practical one. The aim is to get as happy as possible. This is the aim.

## **NOTHING WRONG WITH PLEASURE!**

This happiness, this pleasure, is not deluded. If pleasure were deluded, we might as well give up now. Pleasure, happiness, joy are totally appropriate.

So where’s the problem? Why do we suffer? Why are we frantic and anxious and desperate, fantasizing about the cake before it’s even there, then shoving two pieces in when it comes, and then being depressed when we eat too much? Why all this rubbish? Because we have these delusions. Suffering doesn’t come from pleasure, it doesn’t come from the senses. It comes from neuroses in the mental consciousness. But right now it’s virtually impossible for us to have pleasure without attachment.

## **ATTACHMENT TO A PERSON**

It's the same with people. Let's look at the person we are attached to, the person we are in love with – even more dramatic. Again, this soup of emotions, which we never analyze, never deconstruct.

I can say, "I love you". That means I wish them to be happy. Totally appropriate. Unbelievable, virtuous. The more of this the better. We will only get happiness if we keep thinking that. "I want you not to suffer", that's called compassion. Generosity, maybe you'd like to give the person something. Generosity, in its nature is a virtue, necessarily the cause of happiness.

So, love doesn't cause suffering, compassion doesn't cause suffering, the senses don't directly cause suffering, happiness can't possibly cause suffering – so what does? The cause of suffering is the attachment, first of all, the neurotic sense of an "I", a hungry "I" that sees this person, grossly exaggerates their value to me, gives too much power, puts the power "out there" in that person, just like the cake, which implies that we are devaluing the power of ourself. We're giving all the power to this person, like it's all out there, this person, vibrating, so delicious, so gorgeous, this is exactly how it feels. So attachment is hungry and empty and bereft and lonely. And is completely convinced that having that person is going to make me happy.

What attachment does is exaggerate the beautiful qualities of the person, it is exaggerating our sense of an "I" that needs that person, because attachment thinks that if I don't get that person then I am not happy; because we don't believe we can be happy inside, we have to have an object. Attachment then starts to manipulate this person, expects massively that this person will give me happiness.

It's the same with the person we loathe. We really believe that that person, from out there, from their own side, independently, definitely, is an awful person, as if ugliness is coursing in their veins along with their blood. We hear their name, it appears awful,

we see their face, it appears awful. The discomfort in our mind is huge. We think the discomfort, the unhappiness, the hurt, the anger, the pain, we actually think and believe they are doing it to us.

But it's a lie. It's our own anger that causes the person to look awful, the anger that makes us so miserable.

## **GOING BEYOND ENEMY, FRIEND, STRANGER**

Usually the only person we wish to be happy – that's the meaning of love – is the person we are attached to. And the only person we are attached to is the person we love. So we assume because they come together, they're the same thing. It is just not accurate. We need to start going beyond those limits, which is so scary. When we start practicing equanimity, we analyze: enemy, friend, and stranger – we try to cut through this narrow self-centred view of attachment, ignorance and aversion.

Right now we assume it is normal that when a person is mean to me, I don't like them. So we call them enemies. And we assume it is normal that when a person is nice to me, we call them friend. And when a person is doing neither, they are called stranger. That's the reality of the entire universe, isn't it? We need to go beyond this one.

## **WHAT IS ANGER AND WHAT IS ANGER NOT?**

A perfect question. And the perfect answer, which I heard from a lama, is: "Anger is the response when attachment doesn't get what it wants". But what is it not?

**Anger is not physical.** Anger is part of our mind, and our mind is not physical. It exists in dependence upon the brain, the genes, the chemical reactions, but is not these things.

When anger's strong, it triggers huge physical symptoms: the blood boils, the heart beats fast, the spit comes out the mouth, the eyes open wide in panic, the voice shouts. Or if we experience

aversion as depression, the body feels like a lead weight; there's no energy, a terrible inertia. And then, when we boost our serotonin, the body feels good again.

But these are just gross expressions of what, finally, is purely thought: a story made up by our conceptual mind that exaggerates the ugly aspects of the person or event or oneself.

Recent findings prove what is explained in Tibetan Medicine: that what goes on in the mind affects the body.

**Anger is not someone else's fault.** This doesn't mean that the person didn't punch me; sure they did. And it doesn't mean that punching me is not bad; sure it is. But the person didn't make me angry. The punch is merely the catalyst for my anger, a tendency in my mind. If there were no anger, all I'd get is a broken nose.

**Anger does not come from our parents.** We love to blame our parents! Actually, if Buddha is wrong in his assertion that our mind comes from previous lives and is propelled by the force of our own past actions into our mother's womb; and if the materialists are right in asserting that our parents created us, then we *should* blame them. How dare they create me, like Frankenstein and his monster, giving me anger and jealousy and the rest! But they didn't, Buddha says. (Nor did a superior being – but we dare not blame him!). They gave us a body; the rest is ours (including our good qualities).

**Anger isn't only the shouting.** Just because a person doesn't shout and yell doesn't mean they're not angry. When we understand that anger is based on the thought called aversion, then we can see we are all angry. Of course, if we never look inside, we won't notice the aversion; that's why people who don't express anger experience it as depression or guilt.

**Anger is not necessary for compassionate action.** His Holiness the Dalai Lama responded to an interviewer who suggested that anger seems to act as a motivator for action, "I

know what you mean. But with anger, your wish to help doesn't last. With compassion, you never give up".

We need to discriminate between good and bad, but Buddha says that we should criticize the action, not the person. As Martin Luther King said, it's okay to find fault – but then we should think, "What can I do about it?"

It's exactly the same with seeing our own faults, but instead of feeling guilty we should think, "What can I do about it?" Then we can change. Anger and guilt are paralyzed, impotent, useless.

**Anger is not natural.** Often we think we need anger in order to be a reasonable human being; that it's unnatural not to have it; that it gives perspective to life. It's a bit like thinking that in order to appreciate pleasure we need to know pain. But that's obviously ridiculous: for me to appreciate your kindness, you first need to punch me in the nose?

**Anger is not at the core of our being.** Being a delusional state of mind, a lie, a misconception, it's logical that anger can be eliminated. If I think there are two cups on my table, whereas there is only one, that's a misconception. What to do with the thought "there are two cups on my table"? Remove it from my mind! Recognize that there is one cup and stop believing the lie. Simple.

Of course, the lies that believe that I'm self-existent, that delicious objects make me happy, that ugly ones make me suffer, that my mind is my brain, that someone else created me – *these* lies have been in my mind since beginningless time. But the method for getting rid of them is the same.

What's left when we've removed the lies, the delusions, is the truth of our own innate goodness, fully perfected. That is what's natural.

## **PRACTICE IS PAINFUL**

Real practice is painful – real practice. Until it is painful, it is not practice, we’re just playing safe. We’re just keeping our nice comfort zone. Practice has to threaten something – it has to feel painful. Just like when we are overweight, we decide we are going to get thin and beautiful, and we start doing push-ups. It has to be painful at first. We know that if the second we start feeling pain from doing pushups we stop, we will never benefit from doing them. We can always pretend “Oh I did my pushups this morning”, but if the second they started being painful, we stopped, we know that if our muscles don’t hurt, they will never get strong – it is logic. Giving up attachment is like that – it has to be painful.

Until then, we are just being in our comfort zone – we’re playing safe, thinking that being spiritual means smiling and being holy and having a pleasant manner. It is just not so. Until we stretch, until we go beyond our limits, we won’t get better at doing anything. We really get our body strong when we go beyond our limits every day. How do we become an accomplished pianist or anything? We have to go beyond our limits. That’s what spiritual practice is – we have to stretch our limits.

This means we have to be facing our attachment every day, feeling the pain of it, seeing it. And then, the second we start to do that, somehow we become fulfilled, satisfied. That is what is interesting. When we start to give up being a junkie, we start to become happy. We begin to taste our own potential. As long as we continue to follow attachment, which is so deep, we will never be happy.

## **PRACTICE STARTS WITH MOTIVATION**

So how to begin? It all comes from motivation. We can start the day by deciding we will begin, be very courageous. It starts from the thought. We tend in the West to dismiss thoughts. We say,

“It’s only in the mind”, we give no value to the mind, even though we are caught in it. We give no value to just thought.

The point is, that if we really understand this fundamental, and easily provable, truth that every thought programs us into what we will become, we would be so happy to have positive thoughts, and be content with them. Because of two things; first, everything that we do comes from the thought that we think. If I am going to get up and walk out the door, what is the first thing that has to happen? My legs don’t just jump up and walk out, my mind has to say “I want to walk out that door”. So what does that mean? How do we walk out a door? The first thing is to think “I want to walk out that door”.

So every day, you’re saying “I want to be compassionate, I want to be beneficial”. You’re aspiring, and then you’ll act. It is no mystery. That’s how we become pianists, footballers, a cook – or a happy, beneficial person. It starts with the thought, the motivation, the aspiration.

So we just start our practice with powerful sincere motivations. We are sincere, after all; we do want to be these things, loving, compassionate, etc. Genuinely wanting, seeing the reasonableness of having a compassionate thought, seeing the reasonableness of turning around a negative thought. Not thinking that thought doesn’t matter. What we are is the product of our thoughts. It is simply a fact. This is what karma is saying. No one else made us into anything, we made yourself. As Lama Zopa says, remember, we can mold our mind into any shape we like.

Practice is, in the beginning, every day, is motivation, motivation, motivation. I want to do this, I am aspiring to that. When we start every day, we wish “May I be useful, may I not shoot my mouth off to too many people”, etc. Even this is so profound. We have to value the thought, value the mind, it is so powerful. Like the Dalai Lama says, we are then on the right track for the rest of the day. Don’t underestimate that. If we really got

that, we would be so content, knowing we were sowing the seeds for future crops of happiness. It is like we had a big open field, and we are sowing seeds for the future. That's practice. That's how we start.

We shouldn't fret, "I'm hopeless, I'm useless". We are too concrete in our thinking. So we start with the motivation, start with the thoughts, and we go into the day, and bring that awareness with us. Watch our mind, be careful of the rubbish, try not to shoot our mouth off too much, try to be a bit useful, rejoice in the good stuff. At the end of the day, we look back, we regret our mistakes and rejoice in our efforts, and then go to bed with a happy mind. That's one day of practice. One day at a time. It is organic, and it's humble. We start one day at a time, and slowly, something develops.

## **6. THERE IS NOTHING TO BE ATTACHED TO LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE**

### **ATTACHMENT IS A DEEP HABIT**

You mentioned in your letter the habit of attachment to sex, how difficult it is for you. There is a saying in the teachings – I don't remember word for word – that if where a chili plant is growing you put sweet honey only a few times, it won't make it sweet.

Of all the delusions, you have to understand how unbelievably strong the habit of attachment is. The habit of attachment to sex, desiring sex, didn't begin in this life. It is from past lives. In fact, it didn't have a beginning; it is beginningless. From beginningless rebirths, you have had this mind habituated to attachment to the opposite sex and to sexual pleasure.

It arises in the mind due to causes and conditions. An imprint was left on the mental continuum by attachment before, thus planting the seed. Then there is the condition, the object of attachment, the body of the opposite sex, and so forth. Of course, it is not necessarily always the *opposite* sex; this is just a general explanation.

### **EVERY TIME WE FOLLOW ATTACHMENT, WE DEEPEN THE HABIT**

Attachment is a causative phenomenon, arising from the seed, the imprint, of the delusion. Every time attachment arises – attachment to anything – it leaves an imprint on the mental continuum, like planting a seed, and that causes attachment to rise again. That leads to the action. Then again, the same problem: that action leaves imprints on the mental continuum.

We become more and more familiar with that habit and then only engage in non-virtue.

This habituation makes the future lives so difficult. “Future lives” means not just one life, but *all* the coming future lives. Then, your suffering of samsara has no end. It becomes endless; not only the endless lower-realm sufferings, but the endless sufferings in human rebirths as well.

Again and again you will engage in all those negative actions with attachment. There will be no end to going to prison. There will be no end to the other sentient beings complaining about you and no end to the police and the judge and others having to put you in prison. There will be no end. Why? Because of the habituated mind of attachment, and so forth.

It is mentioned by Buddha in *The Sutra of One Hundred Actions*: “That with which we are habituated is always made familiar by non-virtue. Because of that, again, one relies on non-virtue and engages in non-virtue and follows non-virtue. Because of that, again, in the future, one relies on non-virtue and engages in non-virtue and follows non-virtue”. Think about this quotation, remember it every day, again and again.

### **ANALYZE THE BODY: THERE IS NOTHING TO BE ATTACHED TO!**

When we’re attached to somebody, we’re attached to their body. Of course, it is not necessarily always the body. Sometimes we’re attached to the voice, a singsong voice, let’s say; or to their knowledge or intelligence. Sometimes we are attached to their wealth, personality, smell, sense of humor, etc.

As for the body, if you look at the skin under a microscope you will see it differently than without a microscope; you will see many pores, and the skin cells look like mountains. There is no truly existent skin. It is just a collection of cells, atoms.

Right now, though, you see the skin as beautiful, having colors, etc. But there is nothing there from the side of the object, not even the slightest atom is there from its own side. How you see the skin is according to your view; it comes from your own mind, it is your own mind's projection.

Then, if you take off the skin, if the skin is separated from the body and put aside, suddenly, there is nothing to be attached to. Without skin, there is no way to be attached to the rest of the body. Without skin, it would be shocking, it would be incredibly shocking! Even when you see blood coming out of someone's body, you can get frightened. There is certainly no attachment to the blood coming from their body!

Or let's say the body you are attached to smells of kaka (poop) – the same young body, the same shape, same style of hair, the nose, the cheeks, lips – everything the same – but it smells. You wouldn't be attached to it then, would you?

These are the logical reasons that prove that there is nothing from the body's side to be attached to.

Attachment has a lot to do with the face. You believe there is a truly existent face, not merely labeled by your mind. You have this view from the negative imprints left by past ignorance. This projection exaggerates a beautiful hair style, beautiful nose, beautiful cheeks, nice this, nice that. It's just your interpretation. Your mind makes up "beautiful".

First you exaggerate, then attachment arises, then you believe "this is beautiful". Not only does your mind label it that, but you *believe* it. Attachment clings to that view, and it's hard to separate from it. That becomes a problem for your mind – a problem that didn't exist before the attachment arose.

This helps to give some idea that, from the object's side, there is nothing to be attached to. Thinking, "This is nice, and there is something that is worth being attached to" comes from one's own mind. It is a projection from one's own mind.

## **FROM LIFE TO LIFE OUR KARMIC VIEW CHANGES**

Then there is attachment to the organ of the opposite sex. That is due to imprints from past lives, the imprint left on the mind by attachment to the opposite sex. Again here, there is nothing from its own side at all to which attachment is drawn.

This time you are a male with a penis, but in the next life when you become a woman, let's say, your karmic view of what you are attached to now is the man's organ.

Of course, I am giving a general explanation. I am not including lesbians or gays. But once you understand the reasoning, the basics are the same, whether it is heterosexuals, gays, or lesbians.

We need to understand that there is nothing coming from *there*.

## **THE OBJECT OF ATTACHMENT CHANGES**

Also, the object that we're attached to now does not always remain the object of our attachment. This happens for everybody, whether they've received teachings on meditation and have consciously practiced seeing the object differently or not. One day the object no longer seems attractive to us.

Another case to consider is this. For a person who isn't a lesbian, or isn't gay, there wouldn't be any attraction to someone of the same sex, would there? But if, let's say, they become gay or lesbian, now they have a view that they didn't have before. The mind changes its projection.

Or let's say you are not attached to a particular person. Then, after a while they are very kind to you, nice to you. They give you lots of gifts; whatever you like, they give you. Now, even though there was no attachment before, all of a sudden, your view changes. Suddenly, they appear beautiful to you; they

become an object of attachment. Now your view is totally different.

Before that, you see, your karma had not ripened. The karma of seeing that person's body as beautiful, the imprint left by attachment projecting the person's body as beautiful, had not ripened. Now, suddenly, today, the karma ripens. Suddenly, this unbelievably strong desire arises for that person's body. There is a sudden huge change in your mind. Now, you have a different view of the same person, which you didn't have before. Attachment now exaggerates the beauty of their body, and it becomes difficult to separate from the person.

### **ALWAYS DISSATISFIED**

The other problem with attachment is the dissatisfied mind. You're not satisfied with the pleasure you had before, so you desire more pleasure or better pleasure. The mind is never satisfied with the previous sensation, so you want to repeat the act again. Again, you're not satisfied, the pleasure doesn't last. You look for another pleasure, for even better pleasure. There is always expectation, always looking for pleasure that will bring satisfaction, but it never comes. For years, months, weeks, days, hours, minutes, you never get satisfaction.

By following attachment, even in one billion years you will never get satisfaction. Even if you owned the whole world, including the sun and the moon and the planets, even if you possessed them all, still you wouldn't get satisfaction.

This dissatisfaction is the heaviest suffering, the biggest problem in people's lives in the West. In fact, the more you have, the unhappier you are. There is only suffering inside, no inner peace and happiness. All this comes from the non-virtuous thought of attachment.

## **IMPRINTS LEFT BY ATTACHMENT AND IMPRINTS LEFT BY IGNORANCE**

There are two things: imprints left by attachment and imprints left by ignorance. Because of attachment you cling to the body, and because of ignorance you hold on to it as real, then it is difficult to separate from the person. But all you're doing is holding on to your own hallucination, you're attached to your own projection, the exaggeration made up by your own mind.

The object your ignorance holds as real – the body you're attached to as beautiful – doesn't exist. Ignorance holds on to it as not merely labeled, then, seeing it as beautiful, it becomes the object to which you're attached; you sink into it like oil absorbing into paper.

I talk more about how we label things in chapter 10.

## **OUR MIND RECORDS OUR EXPERIENCES LIKE A CAMERA DOES**

There are so many imprints in our mind; our consciousness records experiences like a camera does. The mental continuum is like a film that from beginningless rebirths has had countless imprints put on it by attachment. It is beginningless, like the chicken and the egg. Due to past imprints, attachment arises, which leaves further imprints. You see the opposite sex, then you project, then you believe. The imprint of attachment is actualized, and again attachment arises.

## **OUR MIND MAKES THINGS UP, BUT WE BELIEVE THAT WHAT WE SEE HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH US!**

It is a total mind-creation; your own mind creates the object. There is no beautiful body from its own side. Nothing like that exists from its own side. It came from the negative imprint left by attachment from the past. It is just the view of your karma;

what you are attached to is only your own karmic view; only what you thought. You are attached to what your mind labels.

You are attached to your own view, but you believe, totally, that it has nothing to do with you, that nothing came from your mind, that it totally came from the object of your attachment. This is a total hallucination.

You need to see that there is nothing from the side of the object. There is nothing existing from its own side. It is your own projection, coming from your mind, labeled according to your own karmic view. It is a concept made up by your mind.

When attachment arises, be aware of it. Be able to recognize what is happening, while it is happening, knowing that it is your own mind labeling, then believing in it. “This is my karmic view. What I am attached to is my karmic view”. This is helpful. Then you are aware of the problems you are creating in your life that you didn’t have before.

It’s kind of a shock to discover there is no such thing there to be attached to! This helps to kick the habit. Meditating in this way is the method to make your mind free from desire, free from this habit that has continued from beginningless rebirths. We need to keep the mind immersed in this by meditating on it as much as possible every day. Remember it again and again – with respect to the objects of anger as well.

## **ATTACHMENT CAUSES SO MUCH SUFFERING**

Caught up in the habit of attachment, the mind is so uncontrolled. There is no freedom, no peace. It brings unbelievable suffering. It leads to sexual misconduct and other negative karmas – and the motivation being non-virtuous causes the action to become non-virtuous, which causes suffering in the lower realms.

Lama Yeshe used to say in his talks, when ordinary people are doing their love-making, there is no control, no wisdom, so

the mind becomes totally unconscious. The mind in that act is totally unconscious, totally confused. I think what Lama meant by “wisdom” is, of course, Dharma wisdom, and in particular the wisdom realizing emptiness.

And therefore there is no compassion. All this means, of course, that the motivation is only pleasure for oneself.

### **BUT ATTACHMENT CAN BE REMOVED**

You can decide to see the body of the person as a dependent-arising. It is not something that is permanent or about which you can’t do anything. It is not like that. Therefore, there is no question that with meditation on the teachings, you can stop attachment arising towards the object.

Then, when you reach the levels of the path to enlightenment such as the right-seeing path and the path of meditation (there are five paths: of accumulation, preparation, right-seeing, meditation, and no more learning), there is no question that you can cease the delusions altogether with the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness. Actualizing the right-seeing path removes the intellectually-acquired delusions, and then actualizing the path of meditation ceases the simultaneously-born delusions.

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## 7. MEDITATE ON THE CLEAR NATURE OF YOUR MIND

LAMA YESHE

Maybe you're not sure what it means "to meditate on your mind". The mahamudra way is to start by focusing on the thoughts themselves, our own concepts. Eventually we will experience the clarity of the mind, its conventional nature.

We refer to this approach as "nonconceptual", "non-superstitious". In Tibetan we say, *mitogpa kyongwa*: "maintaining a nonconceptual state of mind". The great yogi Lama Tsongkhapa says that when we contemplate the consciousness, we should not follow any object, such as form or color or sound, or even the image of a buddha, a mantra, a syllable. These we should abandon. I think this is very sensible, very logical. Of course, our habit to follow the five sense objects is strong, so we need to learn to use skill in meditation to stay on the consciousness itself.

In our gradual-path meditations we analyze. But mahamudra meditation emphasizes *not* analyzing. Because when the mind is analyzing, it's trembling, shaking. It's like an airplane when it's turning; it shakes, doesn't it?

Contemplating our own thoughts allows us to explore our fundamental pure consciousness, our original consciousness. By becoming quiet, we can purify the grosser levels of our consciousness—all the dualistic thoughts about good and bad, the worldly superstitions, the artificial concepts, the negative thoughts. This creates space. We observe the thoughts, and then we let go. *No*

intellect—we don't analyze our thoughts. Leaving the mind as it is like this is the special emphasis of this meditation.

For Lama Tsongkhapa, using our own consciousness as the object of concentration is a very sensitive, direct approach, which *easily* eliminates the superstitions and confusion and—this is the *point*—*easily* leads to mahamudra, the realization of the universal reality of nonduality, emptiness.

## THE TWO MAIN OBSTACLES IN MEDITATION

Countless obstacles prevent us from obtaining perfect concentration, but we can include them in two categories: one is distractedness and the other is sluggishness.

**Distractedness.** Our mind becomes distracted, or wanders, because we're overwhelmed by our usual delusions: desire, anger, and the rest. And, of course, it also wanders because of laziness. We don't make enough effort to concentrate because we don't yet have enough understanding of the incredible benefits of concentration, like those discussed above. We understand really well the benefits of going to the supermarket—all that supermarket goodness! We understand the results of our samsaric activities, but they are nothing compared to experiencing our own clarity.

**Gross sluggishness.** Sluggishness has both gross and subtle levels. Gross sluggishness, when our mind is cloudy or we feel like falling asleep, is more easily recognizable. There is a skillful way to stop it. As we are contemplating the clarity of our thoughts, we might have a slight impression of darkness: this is one sign of sluggishness. It's like when we're sitting outside on a sunny day and a light cloud moves across the sun. So in our meditation, the moment we get an impression of darkness, we need to adjust our object of meditation, making it a little clearer, a little stronger. We learn to develop the skill to know how to do this.

In your effort to make the object clear, clear, clear, however, you risk applying so much effort that you become totally distracted. It is possible to go too far. So be careful.

**Subtle sluggishness.** When we reach a certain stage of very deep concentration, the major obstacle is subtle sluggishness, but it is very difficult to recognize. We can easily mistake subtle sluggishness for correct concentration. We can stay there, effortlessly, forever. That's dangerous. Some meditators think they have perfect concentration; there is no wandering, no superstition, no sensory feelings, only a very blissful experience. They feel, "This is fantastic! Someone could cut me with a knife and I wouldn't feel pain. Now I no longer have any sensory attachment".

Yes, the mind has indeed become subtler, but it is not fully mindful; there is no intensive wisdom. It's like sleeping. This is subtle sluggishness. Maybe for most of us it will be a long time before we need to worry about this danger!

## **NO NEED TO CLEAN THE MIND**

Now let's practice. Just watch your thoughts. Maybe not *literally* watch—language is a problem. Be like the sunlight, which merely shines.

Normally we think our mind is bad, deluded, and that we have to make it clean. But mind's nature is clean-clear: clarity is a fundamental characteristic of mind. In Buddhism, this applies both in philosophy and in meditation. You don't need to make effort to make your mind this way or that; you just need to leave it alone. Its clear-light nature is pure from the beginning, and this nature exists forever.

If you can find the object to some extent, then just let go, let go. If you try too hard to make it bright, you will lose it, and distraction will come.

## **NO EXPECTATIONS**

Abandon expectations, any hope, say, for a high realization. Abandon expectations of any kind, in fact. Just let go. Keep the concentration strong and be satisfied with that.

Losang Chokyi Gyaltsen says you should not “allow your conceptual mind to entertain any fears or expectations and enter equipoise without the slightest distraction”.

In other words, when you’ve reached a reasonably clean-clear point, without emotional disturbance, don’t start worrying or get too excited. No! Just leave it there.

## **AVOID EVEN VIRTUOUS CONCEPTS**

Avoid all concepts, even virtuous ones such as, “How wonderful if all sentient beings can reach buddhahood!” That is not valid here. Even if you have a memory of your past life as some Himalayan yogi or you have some fantastic vision—even if the Buddha comes!—do not follow it. Let go of it immediately.

Don’t think that I’m trying to get you to forget about everything, your normal life. “Maybe I should just go to sleep and forget everything”. No! Panchen Lama mentions this: “It’s not the cessation of mental activity as when you faint or fall asleep”. In the development of concentration, all such thoughts are interferences. That is why you need to stop following them.

Because the habit to go to the form, the sound, the color, the smell, is so deep, you must use great skill to keep our awareness strongly on our consciousness. Keep mindfulness, or memory, continuously. Panchen Lama says:

Begin keeping watch with undistracted  
mindfulness, and with alertness, make your mind  
attentive to any movement.

We also have the habit to go to the past or the future; we get so distracted. We must break this habit, too. Remain focused on the clean-clear state of our own consciousness. The yogi Tilopa says to place the mind on the consciousness alone, without anything else. Eventually our muddy consciousness, our superstitions, will settle and become clear. Continuous nonstop mindfulness is the resource of awareness.

### **LIKE THE SUN**

Your consciousness is like the sun. Just as the rays shine out from the sun, your thoughts, your views, manifest from your consciousness. It doesn't matter whether they are right views or wrong views, just relax.

Whatever thought you experience, keep your mindfulness of it, continuously. That is the meditation.

### **LIKE THE FULL MOON**

Your consciousness is like the full moon. On this earth all the people and fishes and chickens and trees—all the organic things—are moving, functioning. But the full moon is just there.

Your intensive awareness remains intensive awareness of consciousness, even though the distractions themselves are coming and going. They no longer energize you. They no longer distract you. You remain on your thoughts with intensive mindfulness.

As Losang Chokyi Gyaltsen says, “Tighten by making taut and look nakedly at the nature of that which is clear and knowing”—your mind, in other words—and “recognize any conceptual thoughts that arise”.

## **LIKE SPACE**

Your mind is like space. When the rain comes, the space is not disturbed. Rain falls, but still it's part of space. When the rain is strong, it's disturbing, but when it stops, things become quiet and peaceful again.

The rainfall is similar to your superstitions: when they are manifesting, it's disturbing, but they still have nonduality nature, still the original nature.

## **LIKE THE OCEAN WAVES**

Your thoughts are like the ocean waves. Waves manifest from the ocean, but they are still part of the ocean. When a wave rises out of the ocean, there's some turbulence. When it drops back into the ocean again, it's not different from the ocean, is it?

## **LEARN TO LET GO**

When you reach the point where you can experience the clarity of your consciousness, then try to let go. Keep your concentration a little loose rather than exerting tremendous effort. Don't squeeze your mind. Too much effort, too strict discipline, is not good. You need to learn to let go.

Keep your mindfulness continuous and experience the clarity. When the mind is stable, let go. In this state, you experience quiet, joyfulness, even bliss.

"Let go" has many meanings. When you drive a car, for example, once you're aware of the right speed, the overall situation, then you need to just let go, relax. When you relax you can enjoy the drive. It's almost as if the car is flying, isn't it? But new drivers can't do that. They're always trying to adjust things; they're too nervous, too tense.

It's the same with new meditators. You have to learn to let go. If you don't know how to let go, you can never experience

bliss. When you try too hard, you get headaches and high blood pressure, and eventually you hate meditation. Just the sight of your meditation cushion makes you want to go nowhere near it! So learning to let go is extremely important.

When you know how to let go, the root text says, you will be liberated from superstition. “When mind bound in a tangle is relaxed, without doubt it frees itself”. When you know how to let go, you taste the blissful chocolate cake of meditation. Then each time you go to meditate, you will enjoy it!

### **DON'T REJECT DISTRACTIONS**

Don't feel bad when distractions come. Don't get upset and reject them. There's no need to think, “Oh, this is ego. It is bad”. Recognize that these deluded thoughts, the dualistic thoughts, the superstitions, are simply a manifestation of your consciousness. Look at the essential nature of the thoughts: they are also clear in their nature, as we discussed. When they come, instead of rejecting them, look, then penetrate into their essential nature.

Or think that the thoughts are like the birds, the airplanes, all the organic things that move in the space of your consciousness; they come and they go. Just let go. You can use your awareness to watch the essence of the superstitions; you don't need to lose the awareness. Panchen Lama says that you should

recognize as movement [of the mind] whatever conceptual thoughts are generated, and without blocking them, focus on their nature.

### **IF TOO DISTRACTED, RELAX AND WATCH THE BREATH**

If the distractions are too strong, it's better to stop the meditation on the consciousness and do the nine-round

breathing meditation. Or you can simply watch the breath. Breathing meditation is simple. Breathe, but don't think about the breathing. Using the breathing techniques, we can help our super-sensitive schizophrenic mind calm down so that we can again contemplate the clear mirror of our own consciousness.

Sometimes people don't know how to breathe, and that creates tension. Notice that when you are sad or depressed, you sigh deeply, don't you? Breathing is very important for health. You should be sensitive to the movement of your breath. Breathing well can even energize bliss, while breathing wrongly can cause problems.

These techniques can quickly cut the gross levels of the superstitions, and soon you'll reach a point where your mind is more neutral and you can go back to the clarity of your mind.

## **PERSEVERE. AND BE SATISFIED**

It's important to put energy into the practice from the beginning. And to not give up. The Vinaya texts illustrate this with an example: If you want to make fire by rubbing two sticks together, you have to be persistent. You can't just give up and then start over; it will never work. It's the same with your concentration.

Lama Tsongkhapa emphasizes that when you get some experience of clarity, be satisfied. Don't think, "Oh, this not enough clarity; this is not what my lama means". You understand? You're over-intellectualizing. You need to discover what is right through experience; don't go by mere words.

Perhaps you have special experiences in meditation, and then they go away. Don't be disappointed. They are valuable. They are *your* experience. It has nothing to do with intellect, nothing to do with the books, nothing to do with my words. It's important to recollect these experiences. They show you what you can achieve. At other times you can have perfect

experiences, but you don't recognize them. You just throw them into the garbage.

When I do retreat, I have some experiences too—small experiences. When I recollect my retreat, I am satisfied. I am not saying I have great experiences, but they're good enough. I think all of us can have moments of bliss—or even of simply not being disturbed by the concepts. That's super! Remember these times. They're *your* experiences, not anyone else's.

### **RETAIN THE CLARITY OUTSIDE OF MEDITATION**

With mahamudra you don't need to do anything formal. The clarity of your mind is with you twenty-four hours a day, so it's possible to retain the experience during your breaks as well. You use your mindfulness and leave your mind on the clarity of your own thoughts.

This is very simple. You can apply it in any situation: while you're drinking tea, while you're eating, walking, talking—even while you're dreaming. Part of your mind is always aware of the clarity of the thoughts.

Normally, you're busy with your fantasies, transfixed by your thoughts and ideas. Or you're always thinking, "Oh, I'm so confused", and there's no sense of clarity. But the clarity of your mind is always accessible. It makes no difference whether you are feeling confused or miserable, blissful or fantastically clear. All these feelings are your mind, and they are clear in their nature.

Every situation can become a meditation. Just watch your own mind, the views moving through your mind. When your emotions are strong, instead of focusing on the object, the person, focus on the mind itself. Sit back and observe the clean-clear nature of the feelings themselves. Instead of making your mind busy with the dualistic judgments about the person or

other external things, simply keep your mindfulness on the subject, on mind itself.

At a certain point you will become clear. You keep your mindfulness on whatever's arising, and you let go, without intellectualizing or analyzing. Okay?

This is beautiful. Whatever situation you're in, you immediately remember the clarity. Once you've developed this habit, you can bring it into any situation. You're developing mindfulness. That's what concentration meditation is: continually remembering.

*Excerpted from Lama Yeshe's, Mahamudra, How to Develop Our True Nature, published by Wisdom Publications..*

## **8. EQUANIMITY, THE BASIS OF LOVE AND COMPASSION**

**VEN ROBINA COURTIN**

### **EQUANIMITY**

In this context, as a basis for developing stable love and compassion, equanimity is the heartfelt recognition that enemies, friends, and strangers – and let's face it, there's no fourth category – enemies, friends and strangers are equal, are equal.

Now, from what point of view? We're not all equal in terms of being fat or thin or long-necked; we're not all equal in terms of intelligence. All sentient beings all equal in their wish to be happy and their wish not to suffer. Check this out. Even thinking about this statement we can begin to see how it makes sense.

### **ENEMIES, FRIENDS, AND STRANGERS**

But right now of course, we don't see this emotionally, because our world is made up of enemies, friends and strangers. And who are they? They are the objects of our three main delusions, the three root delusions.

Ignorance, and the object of this ignorance – and the way it functions here is just this deep indifference – is what we call strangers.

The object of our aversion are called enemies.

The object of our attachment, they're called friends.

Friends, enemies and strangers, isn't it? And you won't find a fourth category. You think about it.

### **ATTACHMENT FOR FRIENDS**

There are those you like, whom you are attached to. And who are they? Simply, they're the ones that do what you want. Not being

mean or anything, that's just it. They do what you want, they suit you, they agree with you, they like what you like, they appear pleasing to you therefore, and so they're the ones you can afford to love. They're the ones you can say "Okay, I want you to be happy".

You do love them, it's true, we do have some love, but as Lama Zopa says our love right now is unstable or, as we would say, it's got strings attached. Very nice statement. Because why? Because it's only for those we're attached to.

Look at animals for us, look at how we relate to animals. It's very obvious. You can have incredible compassion for that little cute poodle. Remember a few years ago – was it San Jose somewhere? – some road rage bloke got out of his car and went over and stuck his hand in and grabbed his little poodle off the front seat and chucked it into the traffic, and it died. Now he was practically hanged.

Now, if that had been a rat, people would have called him a hero. You see my point? Look at the difference. The Buddha would say, "Excuse me, rat or poodle, they're both sentient beings, they both want to be happy, they both deserve being loved", but because we're attached to poodles, we call the man a naughty man. Because we hate rats we call him a nice man. I mean, how arbitrary can you get? Isn't this very bizarre? Isn't it?

We say we are attached to certain types of people, we're attached to what we call our husband – or maybe not, who knows! We're attached to our children, or we're attached to whoever the person is, generally speaking because they suit my needs. A thing called a poodle, if I like poodles, they suit my needs so I become so attached to it. Then what do I do? I impute all sorts of qualities onto that poodle, which, excuse me, it just doesn't have. Like with the chocolate cake. You make the poodle far more gorgeous than it really is. Look at it. Our pets, it's embarrassing what we do. We call it love, we call it compassion, we call it helping animals.

Even PETA, who love animals and don't want them to be harmed, I bet they don't care about the insects. I don't think they care about the insects. I don't think so. There are many people who are very pure vegetarians, who don't care about the insects: they will use them to kill each other so they can have nice healthy veggies. You see my point? Not to mention the millions of creatures who die when we plant and grow veggies, etc., etc.

We always limit whom we love and whom we don't. The Buddha's deal is, there's not a single sentient being on this earth whom we shouldn't have compassion for and love for, and not just humans, it's not just a few animals, it's every single sentient being. It's a very big basis: all the mind-possessors, because they're all in the same boat. They're all being born human one life, animal the next, spirit the next, hell being the next, they're enemy the next, they're friend the next, but fundamentally there's some things that we all share: the wish to be happy, the wish not to suffer. Have to establish this, think about it, see how it's logical, first.

## **HOW TO MEDITATE ON EQUANIMITY**

Then practice. You visualize in front of you, imagine in front of you, right in front, eyeball to eyeball, your enemy, the person at the moment you don't like – and usually, it can easily be our Mum or our Dad or ex-husband; it's often a person who's been our friend; now it's our worst enemy; the person whom just when we look at their face appears so uncomfortable to us, makes us feel miserable, makes us feel all distressed, or guilty, or angry, or hurt. So, fantastic: the more you dislike this person the better for this meditation!

These types, all of these meditations we're taking about, by the way. . . it's very surprising, because we think of meditation as some trippy thing where you close your eyes and you visualize something like a buddha, or you watch your mind or something. But – and we're going to talk about this in a minute – you do

concentration meditation, and then you go to the second mode of meditation and you do analysis. This is all you're doing. You're taking these things you've heard and you think them through in a very careful, clear way in order to trigger a feeling for them. That's meditation. We'll talk about this in a minute, it's coming.

Equanimity, essentially as I said, it's the attitude that, when you've really got it, heartfelt, a genuine, easy recognition that in fact enemy, friends and strangers are equal in wanting happiness and not wanting suffering. The method you use to come to this conclusion, you use all sorts of arguments just to argue with ego's view, ego's entrenched view: real enemy out there, real friend, real stranger.

## **USE LOGIC TO ARGUE WITH EGO'S MISCONCEPTIONS**

There's all sorts of things you can do. You can look at the enemy and you can think okay, you look at your catalog of reasons why now you call them enemy, why now you have anger towards them: because they did this, this, this and this; we use all this logic. Well, like we've been talking already, Buddha's really basically saying, "Excuse me, Robina, just because someone is mean to you is no logical reason to hate them. It's completely unnecessary". Which is so shocking to us, because we absolutely believe that's logical. The world lives this way.

In other words, in this equanimity meditation what we're trying to do is get a bit of space between ourself and these three people. See them separately from me. Right now we see them as extensions of myself: the friend is an extension of me, so my friend, whom I want to be happy, whom I totally adore, we can't even separate them from ourself. Aversion the same. We see people only in terms of what they do or don't do to me. A friend is a person who helps me, an enemy is a person who harms me, and a stranger is a person who does neither. You think, very simple.

How do we feel about each? We have attachment for the one who suits my needs. We have aversion for the one who harms me. And we have a profound uncaring and indifference towards 99.9999% of all the rest of them who are the strangers. Why? Because they don't affect my life. Who could care? Can't even look at them, they're so boring. Isn't it?

## **ENEMIES, FRIENDS, AND STRANGERS KEEP CHANGING**

This is how it is, this is how we are. And these groups keep changing. The delusions stay the same. The stranger of yesterday is now the friend of today. The stranger of yesterday is now the enemy of today. The friend of yesterday is now the enemy of today. The enemy of yesterday is now the friend of today. We can see, we constantly go back and forth, because things change.

And then we believe in that latest label. The one we were totally adoring six months ago, made us faint with pleasure, now he leaves us cold as ice; hate him. Look at him, "If only I'd known what he was like six months ago". Isn't it? Just because our eyes are now seeing something different. We're so silly aren't we, it's embarrassing.

Basically to get this equanimity, you put in front of you these three people, and they can be different people at different times, and you just go through, enemy first and you go through different things. "It's not permanent, Robina, six months ago he was my friend. How could he inherently be an enemy? It can't be like this". You try to argue with yourself to sort of shake your very entrenched view. "Yes, he did do this to me, he did do that to me, but what's that got to do with it? That doesn't mean he doesn't want to be happy". When you loved him, you knew he wanted to be happy and you tried to make him happy. He has not changed. You just use logic to argue with yourself to see how this

entrenched position is mistaken in its assessment. This is what you're trying to do, get away a bit, get some space.

## **FRIEND**

You look at the friend; the same type of logic applies. You look at this person, you think she's a lovely person because she does this, this, this and this for me. "Of course she's a lovely person. She is a lovely person, that's why I like her, because she's lovely". I mean, excuse me, you just have to find a few things about her that you know that she does, that is mean to other people. We don't care about this because she's not mean to me. We even would defend her and what she does.

You look at every group of people who support each other, who are friends. They all agree on the same group of enemies and they all support each other in that view. But it should be enough to blow your mind, to prove that there can't be an inherent friend. If some people dislike this person then there can't be an inherent friend there. Like there can't be the cake, delicious and ugly simultaneously. They're both projections of the mind. Enemy and friend are projections of the mind.

Use simple arguments to break down ego's entrenched view. You think for example this person whom you totally adore, whom you're in love with, and he smiles and he's so happy and you know he's happy because you make him happy. Wow, amazing isn't it? Incredible feeling. All you've got to do is practice, just think: he's happy tomorrow and you look at him being happy, and then you notice that he's happy now because she makes him happy, not me. He's still happy. You should be so happy for him. But instead you want to kill him, because suddenly someone else is making him happy. He's smiling now. . . the same smiling as yesterday or the week ago, or the month ago, or the six years ago when he smiled at you and was blissful. Now he's smiling, still blissfully, but it's no longer you who's causing it. But he's still happy. If you really want

to have love, may you be happy. Of course it's so painful: oh my God.

### **ENEMY**

Look at the enemy. You just have to argue to see how he's not inherently an enemy; you just have to remember that he's got a nice girl friend who thinks he's gorgeous. He's got some kids who love him. His boss thinks he's great. You know this, but you don't want to think this. It's not comfortable; because they're stupid too: they can't see the real person like you can. We don't like to think of that, but it's very profound logic.

### **STRANGER**

We can see our mind is so limited by attachment, aversion and, of course, indifference. You hear about a stranger, a person who you don't know, means who neither harms nor helps you: you just don't care. Totally can't even look at them, can't even spend long enough to read the story in *The New York Times* about this particular country whose name you can't even say, about the particular suffering; you go to the page and look at the football scores or something, because they are strangers to you. They've neither harmed nor helped. But many Americans will look avidly at all the Iraqi news because the Americans are in there, you see. It's attachment and aversion, friends and enemies.

### **WE ALL THINK WE'RE SPECIAL**

Look at the Israelis and Palestinians, it's amazing. Israel is so tiny you could jog across it without getting too puffed out. Look at the energy there of the people who occupy that piece of Earth, all believing it's their land, fighting over it, hating each other, and then putting all their philosophies onto it. Frankly – I'm not being rude about anybody – but I think if you think you're the chosen people, already you're in big trouble. I mean really, I think you've

got to be in big trouble if you start to think this. I don't care whether you call yourself Christian, Jewish, Hindu or Muslim, or Buddhist for that matter. That's really a very difficult statement: the chosen people. Oh my God. But everybody thinks this, they all think they're special. Mormons think they're unique and special, the Seventh Day Adventists completely convinced that they're right. The Catholics totally believe they're right. No doubt fundamentalist Buddhists are completely believing they're right. Everybody has this concrete, fixed view we're right and these poor people down there who aren't. I mean, it's crazy.

Equanimity is this attitude that moves yourself away from these three a little bit, using a logical arguments to break down ego's illogic. There's no inherent enemy, friend or stranger, there are just projections of your delusions. That objectively, these people are the same.

If I put up here in front of you my enemy, my friend, and my stranger, you won't notice any difference, you can't tell. There's no big "E" engraved on the forehead of the enemy. There's no wings on the friend. You'll put your own projections onto them. They have noses and arms and legs and toes and fingers, they all want to be happy, they all go to the toilet, they all get depressed, they all get constipation. There's equality there, it's very easy to see it, but we're so tunnel-vision in our views, believing in our own karmic appearances.

With equanimity we can begin to be more objective and therefore more stable and effective in our capacity to help others. It's a powerful starting point.

*Excerpted from A Very Simple Presentation of the Lamrim, from Junior School to Post-Graduate, Kopan Monastery, November 2019.*

## **9. OUR LIFE BELONGS TO SENTIENT BEINGS**

**LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE**

### **SO MANY SENTIENT BEINGS SUFFER FOR US**

When we realize that being caught up in samsara is the most frightening thing, we won't be able to stand it for even one second.

But not only that: so many sentient beings have to suffer for us, for our comfort, so that we can survive. So many beings had to die so that we can enjoy shelter. So many beings were killed so that we could have clothes. So many sentient beings had to die so that we could eat and drink. Think of just the chickens: billions of chickens are killed in the world every day just for food. And then so many sentient beings had to create negative karma by killing the chickens and all the other beings for our food and our clothes. So many beings get crushed and die when we drive a car. So many sentient beings suffer many hardships for us.

### **WANTING HAPPINESS FOR OTHERS BRINGS HAPPINESS FOR YOURSELF**

Devoting your life to achieving happiness for others is the best way to achieve your own happiness. You become like the rising sun, illuminating all. In this way, you achieve happiness now, every day, every hour, and every minute. By continuing to live your life like this, you go from happiness to happiness and at the end of your life, when you pass away, you have so much happiness and no regrets, not the slightest fear of or worry about dying, only incredible enjoyment.

You can even die for others: to give happiness to all living beings, temporarily and ultimately, and to free all living beings from suffering and its causes.

And you can help others around you. If you have the opportunity, talk to them. Think that you're there to liberate them. Talk to them about the good heart, teach them compassion, and how to look at everything as positive. It will give peace and happiness to them.

### **WITHOUT COMPASSION LIFE IS USELESS**

Even if a person can live for many eons, if there is no compassion, if life does not become useful for other sentient beings, it is empty and meaningless. Even if a person has a lot of power, if there is no compassion, power is dangerous. Without compassion, power is used by the ego, by self-cherishing, and it becomes dangerous for the world, for oneself and for others.

If there is no good heart, no compassion, no thought to benefit others, it doesn't matter how much education we have, life is empty and meaningless. All the education is used just to develop selfish ego and delusions. There is no meaning in having an education without a good heart, the thought of benefiting others.

It doesn't matter how much wealth a person has, life is empty if there is no compassion. Being rich is not the purpose of life. Being healthy is not the purpose of life. Having a long life is not the purpose of life. These things are not the meaning of life. The purpose of life is to be beneficial for others, useful for other sentient beings.

If you are able to make your life beneficial for other sentient beings, to bring them happiness, then your purpose in life is achieved.

## **EXPERIENCE PROBLEMS WITH COMPASSION**

When you have problems, you can experience them for others, use them to develop compassion for others. Thus you use your problems to achieve enlightenment, your problems become the path to enlightenment.

If you have cancer or AIDS, for example, you can experience your illness with compassion, for the sake of other sentient beings, to bring them all happiness up to and including enlightenment. Thus your sickness becomes the path to enlightenment.

Even if you have a bad reputation, you can experience it for sentient beings. Therefore, all problems – being in prison, failed relationships, illness, business failure, unemployment, bad reputation – become a special, heroic practice. Before, such experiences were something that you disliked and only wanted to get rid of. But now, with your practice of compassion, they become highly desirable, so powerful and special, even necessary, for the development of your mind in the path.

## **GREAT COMPASSION IS THE MAIN CAUSE OF BODHICITTA**

The determination that drives bodhisattvas to bear hardships and work continuously for sentient beings comes from bodhicitta, which itself comes from great compassion. This root, compassion, fuels the skies of benefit that derive from bodhicitta, like rocket fuel powers a spaceship or electricity generated by a power station lights up an entire city.

It is great compassion that has already brought numberless sentient beings to enlightenment in the past, brings numberless sentient beings to enlightenment at present, and will bring numberless sentient beings to enlightenment in the future. It is great compassion that makes numberless buddhas do perfect, unmistakable work for numberless sentient beings until they

achieve enlightenment. And it is great compassion that causes all buddhas to have omniscient mind and the perfect power to benefit all sentient beings.

Your own great compassion will become the source of peace and temporary and ultimate happiness of numberless sentient beings, including all the beings in this world, in your country, your own parents, companion, children and, lastly, yourself.

Without compassion in your heart all you have is ego, which both directly and indirectly harms all sentient beings, including those in this world, in your country, your own parents, companion, children, and yourself. Your compassion is the source of happiness of even the people and animals you encounter in everyday life.

Without compassion there are only personality ego-clashes and many other problems – anger, jealousy and the like. Without compassion your life is overwhelmed by problems, like a mouse trapped in a cage and killed, an elephant stuck in the mud and suffocated, a fly caught in a spider’s web and eaten, or a moth attracted by a flame and drowned in hot candle wax. Without compassion, your life is enmeshed in problems that continue until you die.

You need to practice compassion. Compassion is the most important Dharma practice you can do, the most important meditation you can practice. The more you practice compassion, the greater the peace and happiness in your heart. Living and working with compassion is the best thing you can do.

## **COMPASSION CAN HEAL ILLNESS**

In recent times, in Seattle, one student had cancer that had spread all over her body. The doctors were afraid to do an operation; they felt that it was very risky and dangerous. So she did the bodhichitta practice called *tong-len* (see chapter xx),

exchanging oneself for others: taking upon oneself's sentient beings' sufferings and the causes of suffering, and giving one's own merits and happiness to others.

Eventually, when she went to the hospital for a check-up, they did not find any cancer. The doctors were completely amazed. She explained what she had practiced, but they could not understand how this meditation could cure her cancer totally. This is one subject that they cannot explain.

This is one of the benefits of bodhichitta, letting go of the "I", and cherishing others. Well, you can use the difficult situations in your life as a means to develop bodhichitta, exchanging oneself for others. Instead of cherishing the "I", cherish others; instead of giving to oneself, give to others.

This is said in the teachings of Buddha, but also this is the reality that you can see in your own life, from your own experiences. Global problems, problems in a country, family problems, individual problems – all these problems come from cherishing the self. By cherishing the self one opens the door to all sufferings. By cherishing others one opens the door to all happiness, inner peace, joy, satisfaction, and fulfillment right now in your heart. You are able to overcome all the problems in your life and your mind; you will have a very happy death, a self-supporting death, as well as happy future lives, and, especially, ultimate happiness, total liberation from all suffering and its causes, and enlightenment.

Cherishing others is the cause of temporal and ultimate happiness for all sentient beings up to enlightenment.

## **THE UNBELIEVABLE BENEFIT OF BODHISATTVAS**

All this compassion leads to bodhichitta. You need so much merit, unbelievable, unbelievable merit to actualize bodhichitta. When someone achieves bodhichitta, they become a bodhisattva. In that second they become the spiritual heir of

all the buddhas, they receive the name. They become the supreme object of offerings of all sentient beings. You collect inconceivable merits when you make offerings to them, or when you see them, hear their voice, or even if they give something to them, or they touch you. Even if you harm them, because of their realization of bodhichitta they only benefit you in return. They pray for good things to happen to you.

There is a saying in relation to bodhisattvas: “If you can’t make a connection with them by doing good things, then make a connection by doing harm”. This is not saying you must harm a bodhisattva, but in the case that it happens, it is worthwhile. In return you are guided by that bodhisattva from life to life; they only benefit you, only pray for you.

For example, when the Buddha was a bodhisattva, he sacrificed his blood for the five yakshas; they drank his blood. Then, due to that karmic connection, in the next life they became his disciples as human beings – at Deer Park in Sarnath when he gave his first teaching, on the Four Noble Truth, the first turning of the Dharma Wheel. They drank his blood, but in return the bodhisattva prayed that in a future life they would be his direct disciples and be able to receive teachings from him, and, of course, that they go forth to liberation and enlightenment.

There is unbelievable benefit for sentient beings when you are a bodhisattva. Only with bodhichitta can you complete the two types of merits – wisdom and compassion – and become a buddha. Without bodhichitta, even if you have wisdom directly perceiving emptiness, the highest you can achieve is arhatship, liberation from samsara, the cessation of all the delusions and karma.

By practicing bodhichitta, you can achieve the holy body of a buddha, the totally pure vajra holy body. Not only can you be free from suffering, but you can be totally free from the

disturbing thoughts, the delusions, the gross and subtle obscurations. You can attain an immortal body that pervades all of existence – a holy body that pervades the whole world and is itself pervaded by the whole world. This is what the buddha's holy body can do. There is no limit to your ability to benefit all sentient beings. Transformation such as this happens; it comes from bodhichitta.

## **WITH BODHICHITTA YOU CAN BENEFIT COUNTLESS BEINGS**

Whatever unceasing heavy negative karma you have created, with bodhichitta you can purify it. With bodhichitta, you achieve all the happiness of this life and, the happiness of all the future lives, and the happiness of liberation from samsara, and finally and most importantly, you attain full enlightenment.

You achieve everything from bodhichitta. From you, from this bodhichitta, the numberless hell beings, hungry ghosts, animals, humans, sura, and asura beings can receive all this happiness up to enlightenment. Isn't that incredible? Even just considering the human beings in one country, the many millions – you are able to cause all of this happiness up to enlightenment for them. Then you are able to cause all this happiness for all the human beings in this world, then all the human beings in other universes. For numberless human beings you are able to cause all this happiness.

You can achieve this for all sentient beings. Just ants, for example. In one spot, under one stone, one ants' nest, there are so many ants, thousands of ants. You are able to cause all this happiness up to enlightenment for them. Then in one field, or on one mountain, in one country, in all the countries of this world – there are so many, we can't imagine how many. Imagine all the numberless sentient beings you can see only

through a microscope. Your bodhichitta is able to cause all this happiness up to enlightenment for all these sentient beings. If you imagine all the various types of animals there are: they are numberless. Then there are numberless hell beings, hungry ghosts, human beings, sura and asura beings.

You can't imagine what your bodhichitta can do! What else is there in life to enjoy? Wherever you are, if you can practice bodhichitta, that is the best life, the happiest life, the most meaningful life. It doesn't matter where you are, your mind can practice this.

### **BODHICHITTA FULFILLS OUR OWN WISHES AND THE WISHES OF OTHERS**

What is the best practice? What all the numberless buddhas found when they checked for sentient beings was that bodhichitta is the best practice for sentient beings. The answer to your question is the same. I cannot answer differently from what all the buddhas have said in the past when they checked for what was most beneficial for others.

The practice and realization of bodhicitta is the most important thing in life because it fulfils not only your own wishes for happiness but also those of all other sentient beings – each and every one.

With bodhicitta you can completely dry up the ocean of samsaric suffering and its causes and achieve liberation and enlightenment because it helps you gain the wisdom directly realizing emptiness, which eradicates both gross and subtle defilements.

Bodhicitta is what allows *arya* bodhisattva to abandon the sufferings of samsara, including rebirth, old age, sickness and death, just by achieving the right-seeing path. Even though arhats of the lesser vehicle path have the wisdom directly

realizing emptiness and many other inconceivable qualities, they still have the remainder of the suffering aggregates.

Bodhicitta is the door to the Mahayana path to enlightenment and the root of the limitless qualities of the Buddha's holy body, speech and mind. The courageous bodhisattvas are able to bear all the hardships of working for sentient beings, no matter how great they are, even if it costs them their life. Since bodhisattvas see how beneficial it is to bear hardship in order to work for others, they are not only able to bear it but they experience limitless joy as well. For bodhisattvas, even dying as a result of working for others is like drinking nectar. They experience the delight of a swan plunging into a cool pond on a hot day.

Bodhisattvas abandon the thought of achieving their own liberation from the ocean of samsaric suffering and its causes – delusions and karma – as one discards used toilet paper, having not an atom of interest in it. They have only aversion to gaining the ultimate happiness of nirvana for themselves alone.

Bodhicitta allows bodhisattvas to complete the accumulation of the two types of merit – transcendent wisdom and virtue – and is the cause of their achieving the two holy bodies, the ultimate goal: the holy body of form, *rupakaya*, and the holy body of mind, *dharmakaya*. The sole purpose of achieving these two holy bodies is to be able to do perfect work for all sentient beings. Even though there are numberless sentient beings and it can take three countless great eons to complete the accumulations that enable them to bring every single one to enlightenment, what gives bodhisattvas the determination to do so is bodhicitta.

No matter how many eons it takes to have one sentient being generate a single virtuous thought, the bodhisattva will try to make it happen without being discouraged. In the *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras*, Maitreya said,

In order to ripen even one virtuous thought, the bodhisattva, the heir of the Victorious Ones, whose mind is stabilized in supreme perseverance for highly ripening sentient beings, does not get discouraged, even if it takes thousands of ten million eons.

### **OUR LIFE BELONGS TO SENTIENT BEINGS**

Our life belongs to other sentient beings. Therefore I advise you to live your life with bodhichitta motivation, so that everything you do, as much as possible, is to free sentient beings from the oceans of samsaric sufferings and to achieve enlightenment.

To accomplish this you need to achieve full enlightenment, therefore do everything – study, practice, meditate, eat, walk, sleep, sit, do a job – with this motivation.

Every day, practice having a good heart as much as possible. When one sincerely practices kindness to others and one wants to give every single cause of happiness to others, then even if you don't expect it, naturally the result is that everybody becomes kind to you and is happy with you, listens to you, etc. In this way, you can help others, you can talk to them about the path, how to achieve everlasting happiness and total liberation.

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## **10. HOW WE GRASP AT A SEPARATE SELF**

### **LAMA YESHE**

#### **THE MOUNTAIN OF SELF**

Our conception of ego instinctively feels that I'm somewhere around here; Thubten Yeshe is somewhere here. Where is Thubten Yeshe? My ego's instinctive interpretation is that I'm here, somewhere in my body. Check for yourself. See what comes up in your mind when you think of your name. The huge mountain of your self will arise. Then check exactly where that mountain of "me" can be found. Where are you? Somewhere around your body. Are you in your chest, in your head?

You feel this instinctively. You don't have to study philosophy to learn it; you don't have to go to school; you parents didn't teach you. You've known this since before you were born.

Buddhism describes two kinds of ego identity: *kun-tag* and *lhen-kye*.

#### **LEARNED GRASPING AT SELF**

*Kun-tag* means the sense of self that's philosophically acquired. It's something that you learn through outside influence from teachers, friends, books and so forth. This is the intellectually derived ego. Can you imagine? You can even acquire an ego through reading. This one is easier to remove, of course, because it's more superficial. It's a gross conception. The simultaneously born sense of self is much, much harder to get rid of.

#### **INNATE GRASPING AT SELF**

The one I'm talking about is *lhen-kye*, the simultaneously-born one; the one that exists simply because you exist. It was born with you; it needs no outside influence for its existence. Like the smell

that comes with a pine tree, they're one. The pine tree doesn't grow first and then the smell comes later. They come together. It's the same with the innate sense of ego;

This instinctive conception of ego is really convinced that around my body is where you'll find Thubten Yeshe. Someone looks at me and asks, "Are you Thubten Yeshe?" "Yes", I reply, "I'm Thubten Yeshe". Where is Thubten Yeshe? Around here. Instinctively, I feel I'm right here. But I'm not the only one who feels like this. Check up for yourself. It's very interesting.

### **MY NAME IS NOT ME**

Until I was six years old, I was not Thubten Yeshe. That name was given to me when I became a monk at Sera Monastery. Before that time, nobody knew me as Thubten Yeshe. They thought I was Döndrub Dorje. The names Thubten Yeshe and Döndrub Dorje are different; different superstitions give different kinds of name. I feel my name is me, but actually, it isn't. Neither the names Thubten Yeshe nor Döndrub Dorje are me. But the moment I was given the name Thubten Yeshe, Thubten Yeshe came into existence. Before I was given the name, he didn't exist; nobody looked at me and thought, "There's Thubten Yeshe". I didn't even think it myself. Thubten Yeshe did not exist.

But when one superstitious conception named this bubble, my body – "Your name is Thubten Yeshe" – my superstition took it: "Yes, Thubten Yeshe is me". It's an interdependent relationship. One superstition gives the name Thubten Yeshe to this bubble of relativity and my ego starts to feel that Thubten Yeshe really does exist somewhere in the area of my body.

### **THUBTEN YESHE IS MERELY A NAME**

The reality, however, is that Thubten Yeshe is merely the dry words applied to the bubble-like phenomenon of these five aggregates. These things come together and that's it: Thubten

Yeshe, the name on the bubble. It's a very superficial view. The ego's instinctive feeling that Thubten Yeshe exists somewhere around here is very superficial.

You can see that the relative reality of Thubten Yeshe is simply the name that's been given to this bubble of energy. That's all Thubten Yeshe is. That's why the great philosopher and yogi Nagarjuna and the great yogi Lama Tsongkhapa both said that all phenomena exist merely in name. As a result, some early Western Buddhist scholars decided that Nagarjuna was a nihilist. That's a conclusion that could be reached only by someone who doesn't practice and spends all his time dealing in concepts and words.

If I were to show up somewhere and suddenly announce, "You're all merely names", people would think I was crazy. But if you investigate in detail the manner in which we're all merely names, it becomes extremely clear. Nihilists reject the very existence of interdependent phenomena but that's not what Nagarjuna did. He simply explained that relative phenomena exist but that we should view them in a reasonable way. They come, they go; they grow; they die. They receive various names and in that way gain a degree of reality for the relative mind. But that mind does not see the deeper nature of phenomena; it does not perceive the totality of universal existence.

### **RELATIVE AND ABSOLUTE EXIST SIMULTANEOUSLY**

Phenomena have two natures: the conventional, or relative, and the absolute, or ultimate. Both qualities exist simultaneously in each and every phenomenon. What I've been talking about is the way that bubbles of relativity exist conventionally. A relative phenomenon comes into existence when, at any given time, the association of superstition and the conception of ego flavors an object in a particular way by giving it a name. That combination – the object, the superstition giving it a name and the name itself – is all that's needed for a relative phenomenon to exist. When those

things come together, there's your Thubten Yeshe. He's coming; he's going; he's talking. It's all a bubble of relativity.

### **THUBTEN YESHE IS A BUBBLE**

If right now you can see that Thubten Yeshe's a bubble, that's excellent. It helps a lot. And if you can relate your experience of seeing me as a bubble to other concrete objects you perceive, it will help even more. If you can see the heavy objects that shake your heart and make you crazy as relative bubbles, their vibration will not overwhelm you. Your heart will stop shaking and you'll cool down and relax.

If I were to show you a scarecrow and ask if it was Thubten Yeshe, you'd probably say it wasn't. Why not? "Because it's made of wood". You'd have a ready answer. You can apply exactly the same logic to the argument that this bubble of a body is not Thubten Yeshe either.

I believe very strongly that this is me because of the countless times from the time I was born up to now that my ego has imprinted the idea "this is me" on my consciousness. "Me. This is me. This bubble is me, me, me". But this bubble itself is not Thubten Yeshe.

### **THUBTEN YESHE IS NOWHERE TO BE FOUND**

We know it's composed of the four elements. However, the earth element is not Thubten Yeshe; the water is not Thubten Yeshe; the fire is not Thubten Yeshe; the air is not Thubten Yeshe. The parts of the body are not Thubten Yeshe either. The skin is not Thubten Yeshe; the blood is not Thubten Yeshe; the bone is not Thubten Yeshe; the brain is not Thubten Yeshe.

The ego is not Thubten Yeshe. Superstition is not Thubten Yeshe. The combination of all this is not Thubten Yeshe either – if it were, Thubten Yeshe would have existed before the name had been given. But before this combination was named Thubten

Yeshe, nobody recognized it as Thubten Yeshe and I didn't recognize it as Thubten Yeshe myself. Therefore, the combination of all these parts is not Thubten Yeshe.

If we call the scarecrow Thubten Yeshe and then analyze it to see exactly where Thubten Yeshe can be found, we can't find Thubten Yeshe in any of the parts or on all the parts together. This is easy to understand. It's exactly the same thing with the bubble of my aggregates. Neither any single constituent part nor the whole combination is Thubten Yeshe. We also know that the name alone is not Thubten Yeshe. So what and where is Thubten Yeshe? Thubten Yeshe is simply the combination of superstition flavoring an object with the words, "Thubten Yeshe". That's all that Thubten Yeshe is.

### **BEYOND THE NAME, THERE IS NO THUBTEN YESHE**

Beyond the name, there is no real Thubten Yeshe existing somewhere. But the simultaneously-born ego doesn't understand that Thubten Yeshe exists merely as an interdependent combination of parts. It believes that without question, around here, somewhere, there exists a real, independent, concrete Thubten Yeshe. This is the nature of the simultaneously-born ego. Therefore, if we do not remove conceptions like, "Somewhere in this bubble, I'm Thubten Yeshe", we cannot release the ego.

The conception of ego is an extreme mind. It holds very concretely the idea that somewhere within this bubble of the four-element combination body there exists a self-existent I. That is the misconception that we must release. If the ego mind assessed the situation reasonably and was comfortable and satisfied perceiving that superstition giving the name Thubten Yeshe to this interdependent, four-element bubble was enough for Thubten Yeshe to exist, that would be a different story. But it's not satisfied with that. It cannot leave that alone. It wants to be special. It wants Thubten Yeshe to be concrete. It's not satisfied with

Thubten Yeshe being a mere name on a collection of parts.  
Therefore, it conceives an imaginary, unrealistic, exaggerated,  
concrete self-entity.

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