RIGPA SHEDRA

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From teachings by

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Essential Buddhist Studies 1

Chidön - an introduction to Madhyamika

CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

HOW TO STUDY

"Study is like a lamp which illuminates and clears away the darkness."
Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche

Examining Your Motivation to Study

The purpose of anything we do in life is to be truly in touch with ourselves, and to move closer to the truth. If we are not quite in touch with ourselves our motivation could distort our actions.

I want to encourage you to be honest with yourself, and to be clear about your motivation. If you are not clear, then you could be receiving teachings and be practicing in an incredible place such as Lerab Ling, but all in all it would be just like a sort of 'summer camp.' Of course, a summer camp might have some benefit. It might be relaxing and fun, but we are here to work on our individual paths of liberation from the suffering of samsara.

Being honest and in touch with ourselves is very difficult to do, because we have many fears to overcome. At the least, we need to find the courage to face our fears. Upholding and projecting a particular image of ourselves out onto the world may serve to fool others, but ultimately it will not fool ourselves. Eventually, we have to see through our own veil of ignorance and denial.

Busting the Ego

The purpose of all the mind training of the Buddhist tradition is to bust the ego! If you can take delight in busting the ego, then it can work. But if you dread facing on your ego, then no matter how diligent, devoted, and dedicated you are, and no matter how persistently you follow the daily routine of study and practice, you will never face reality. I have seen students go through this, but this is something that only you can work with.

A certain danger and a lot of spiritual materialism arise from that. You can be caught up in all sorts of dream-like hopes and fears, and it is not easy to recognize them when

you are caught up in them. The bubble is hard to burst when you are still inside it, but the bubble is not permanent: when it pops, perhaps as a result of intense suffering, you will realize that you have been trapped inside it for many years.

So try not to identify too much with your ignorance. Take delight in seeing the long-term habitual patterns of ego, and the ignorance that ego is based on. If you identify with what you have to cast off, it will be extremely difficult to rid yourself of your ego.

Rather, we could realize that we have a lot of potential—the potential to develop both an incredible wisdom that sees through illusion, and the potential to know. These abilities are not revealed through intellectual contemplation alone, but also through experience. The reason we are here is to develop our potential, and it is this that makes us practitioners of the Buddhist path.

Taking Delight in Overcoming Ignorance

We have to accept that we have many faults. Nobody, not even the Buddha, is perfect from the very beginning. Ego is with us, and nobody is exempt from having problems with their ego. But to the degree we identify our ego as being who we really are, or recognize it as the ignorant aspect of our mind, is entirely up to us.

Therefore, take delight in working with ignorance. Whenever ignorance comes to light, instead of having a negative reaction, try having a positive one. You could, for instance, sigh with relief, and say, "Ah! Now I see my own ego quite clearly!" Then you will have a real sense of working with your ego and of overcoming ignorance, and you will find the path to enlightenment to be a joyful one.

Working with Resistance

I think we all have a certain resistance in the area of study. We, as human beings, all have a strong ego. When we find that we don't understand everything at first, it is natural for our ego to feel threatened in some way or other, and we are in danger of ego closing off our mind. We may feel discouraged and hopeless, thinking that we will not be able to understand the teachings, or our pride may be hurt.

But we should know that it is the ego which feels threatened, and that this very same feeling has already brought many obstacles and difficulties into our lives. It is very helpful to watch that process, and to work with it.

Of course, as we study it will be difficult to understand everything. The scope of the Dharma is vast, and its meaning is very profound, so we should simply acknowledge as we begin that it is not always going to be easy. Nevertheless, by returning to a topic a second or third time, we will understand it much more deeply. If we catch a single raindrop in a huge pot, the pot will not be filled; but many drops will eventually fill the whole pot. So if we gather meaning after meaning, our minds will slowly fill with the knowledge and understanding of the Dharma.

Keeping a fresh and open mind will give you room to broaden your understanding of any particular topic the next time you come across it. As your knowledge increases, so does your understanding, and this will serve as a foundation that allows you to make sense of what you have not yet realized. In this light, understanding the Dharma becomes just a question of time, so you don't have to feel completely doomed. Be patient: the first step is to create the foundation.

Training in Joy

Every one of us needs to work with our areas of resistance, which are often caused by laziness. We don't always recognize excuses for what they are; we might see them as valid points of resistance. If we accept such attitudes without discernment, then we will never get over our laziness, and it will become more and more difficult to expose our laziness to our own wisdom mind. On the other hand, when study becomes a source of great joy and genuine fun, then the excuses we make for our laziness will be much more exposed and will carry less weight. As our joy grows, we will be much more willing to let go of our excuses and our laziness.

To train yourself in the joy of study, you need to understand what study does and how important it is. Working with whatever you do not enjoy, and with what triggers your resistance, can itself increase joy. For instance, when you are practicing shamatha, you might sometimes feel discontented and unhappy whilst sitting on your cushion, and want to get up and leave. But if you just think about what you might do if you get up, you will realize that all your alternatives are relatively frivolous and not that significant. Naturally, you will then become more restful, peaceful and joyful about staying where you are.

If you fight your resistance directly, you will only give it more power. Then, not only will you have no joy, neither will you overcome your resistance! When you contemplate the importance of practice, what the practice means to you, and what benefit it has brought you, then you will naturally rejoice, and the same is true for study . So these are the ways of training in joy.

The Eight Worldly Concerns

Sometimes people come to study with the sole idea of wanting to benefit others. This may seem fine, but actually it is very important to first think about how to relate to the teachings in a way that benefits yourself. People who are in a position to help or teach others can sometimes get caught in the so-called 'mara' of the eight worldly concerns. The eight worldly concerns are:

- hope for gain and fear of loss,
- hope for praise and fear of blame,
- hope for pleasure and fear of pain,
- hope for fame and fear of insignificance.

We must try not to be influenced by the eight worldly concerns, whether grossly or subtly, and genuinely try to renounce them. If we are motivated by the hope of gaining worldly benefits, then our study fails to become the great medicine for our mind that it can and should be.

The teachings of the Buddha are like a great medicine, the Buddha himself is like a skilful doctor, and we are the patients who need to be cured of the sickness of ignorance and samsara. If our motivation for taking the medicine is to eliminate the root of all the illnesses found in samsara, which is ignorance, then we have a good motivation for studying the Dharma. But if we are caught in the mara1 [1] of the eight worldly concerns, we will never be able to benefit anyone, so it is very important to be aware of them.

Applying the Teachings to Yourself

I have come across people who, as soon as they learn something, think about how to communicate it to others. Such people think about how to impress others even before they have taken what they have learnt into their own being. Even if we manage to impress others, there is not going to be much blessing if we have not practiced seriously ourselves. It is very important to apply the teachings to ourselves, especially the teachings on emptiness. These teachings are intended to help us free ourselves from the two kinds of ego, not to cultivate the ego and make it grow even bigger.

We don't always know what our motivation and attitudes actually are. We tend to get caught up in all sorts of excitement and temptations, and blindly follow wherever they may lead us. It takes a subtle mind to examine where we are. If we find that our mind is not in a good place, it is important to correct or change it, and thereby avoid harming both ourselves and others through having the wrong attitudes. As Dakpo Rinpoche (Gampopa) said, if we do not practice the Dharma properly, Dharma itself can become problematic.

The Three Wisdom Tools

We clear away ignorance by cultivating wisdom with the three wisdom tools, or the three *prajñas:* the wisdom of hearing, the wisdom of contemplation, and the wisdom of meditation. Over time we will come to see the phenomenal world, our own perceptions and mind accurately, as they are, and our confidence in our true nature will grow stronger. If we study, contemplate, and meditate, we will see the change in ourselves day by day, week by week, and month by month.

What is the prajña of hearing? As you hear me, there is an imprint being made in

1 Skt. *mara*; Tib. *dü*: demon; the tempter in general, that which makes obstacles to spiritual practice and enlightenment. *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, HarperCollins 1994, Glossary p.421.

your mind. The way in which this imprint is made differs according to your degree of openness, and the imprint is much stronger if you have an open mind.

We cultivate a general sense of the meaning of what is being taught through hearing, but when we return to what we have heard and contemplate it, our understanding will become more refined. We gradually arrive at a more complete picture of the subject we are studying. This kind of understanding is called *gowa.*

When we practice *shamatha* and *vipashyana* meditation, and follow the instructions on *shunyata* meditation, such as the contemplation of the *Heart Sutra*, realization will dawn. As this happens, what had previously only been experienced as an image or a sense of something becomes a clear and direct view. Gowa turns into the true living experience of realization, and this is the wisdom of meditation.

Once we have understood the importance of study, we can also recognize it as part of a logical flow, or progression. By hearing the teachings, we learn how to contemplate; by knowing how to contemplate, we learn how to meditate. Through meditation we learn how to fully embody the meaning of the teachings, so that it becomes a true experience; and ultimately, this is the purpose of studying and practicing the Dharma.

Examining the Words of the Buddha

We don't have to trust the three jewels or the Buddha's words with blind faith. As Buddha himself said, "Examine my words as a goldsmith examines gold; do not accept my words on faith." If we examine and clear up our own ignorance and delusion, our perceptions can slowly begin to match the perceptions of the buddhas.

At first, however, we need faith in order to pursue our study. Self-doubt defeats the whole purpose of study and prevents us from progressing along the path.

The Importance of Study

According to the sutras, study is the most valuable treasure; and no one can ever take it away from you. Sakya Pandita said that if you study during this lifetime, the fruits of your study will be 'stored away.' In your next life, as soon as the right conditions are present, you will become the true owner of this treasure without any difficulty.

Sakya Pandita also said, "To meditate without having studied is like trying to climb a rock without having arms." He said that of those who try to meditate on the true nature without having studied, only the most fortunate will be able to realize the true nature. But those who are less fortunate might only be meditating on *alaya*, the ignorant mind.

Sakya Pandita went on to say, "To study without meditating is like trying to travel a long distance without having eyes." Therefore, we need to both study and meditate.

It is true to say that there have been great Dzogchen masters who gained vast knowledge without much study. The absolute truth is the nature of all phenomena; therefore the realization of absolute truth is the natural result of the elimination of all ignorance. The wisdom of seeing the multiplicity of phenomena,which enlightened beings possess, does not only come from study and the cultivation of knowledge; it also comes from the realization of absolute nature, without any further need for study, practice, or contemplation. It is possible for someone who is very fortunate and whose faith is extremely strong and stable to realize absolute nature and to gain the vast understanding of the multiplicity of phenomena without much study.

But just who are these people? It is common knowledge that Jigmé Lingpa obtained this vast understanding of the Dharma without studying, but Jigmé Lingpa was no ordinary sentient being. We can be certain that he had studied in many previous lifetimes before becoming renowned as Jigmé Lingpa. Jigmé Lingpa had already stored away his treasure, and received it fully during the course of his life.

The Responsibility of Our Generation

Our generation in particular has a tremendous responsibility, because now is the time that Dharma is coming to the West and taking root. If this generation does not learn, preserve, and then pass on the Dharma in its entirety, future generations will not receive a proper basis and example to follow. So this generation holds a greater responsibility than any of the generations to come.

If the study, knowledge, meditation and realization of the Dharma can be kept alive, we will be able to preserve the complete Dharma. If both shedra and drubdra are established, they will serve the lineage of the Buddhadharma. This will benefit both ourselves and others, and be of service to the Dharma and to all beings. Through this, the Dharma can be well rooted and preserved in the West within our lifetime, and continue into the future. By keeping this in mind, we might be inspired to study more and more!

Understanding Mind

Having recognized the relevance of study and analysis, it is very important to

be given proper direction in the study of the Buddha's teachings, and proper guidance for the examination of our minds. This is the essence of the emptiness teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni. It is the 'Middle Way' of Madhyamika: understanding the different states of mind, and discerning within those different states between delusion and truth.

There is no enlightenment that we can go and 'get', as if we were picking a piece of fruit from a tree. As the great sages of all times have said, enlightenment is simply a matter of waking up from all our errors and faults.

The study of phenomena and mind can seem like a huge and abstract subject, but it is not. It is simply a matter of learning, moment by moment, how our mind works, and of having the right tools to examine it with, so that we can see the true nature of relative and absolute reality. The more prajña we have, the deeper our understanding will be.

With this, we will not only more accurately discern the truth with our intellect, but, through our meditation practice, we will also experience it. In the long run, we will have a sense of waking up from all the ignorance and confusion that has been coloring our perceptions, thoughts, and emotions; and this will have a tremendous impact on our way of being and our well-being.

Working with Our Tendencies

While studying, it is important to be aware of our own tendencies. People tend to go in one of two directions. One direction easily taken by those who are very intellectual and get caught up in pondering all sorts of mysterious subjects and questions, is the tendency to distance themselves from the experience of everyday life and the relevance of working with and relating to mind as it is.

The second direction is often taken by those who tend to be caught up in wanting everything to be based on their own experience. This tendency leads people to believe that anything they experience is somehow valid and authentic, as they lack any other basis from which to question or discern whether their experience is deluded or non-deluded. Therefore, they lack the clarity to pursue a valid combination of study, practice, and experience.

Whatever your tendency is, I hope that you will be able to go beyond it and attain some understanding. I need you to be open, rather than resistant to being more 'intellectual', or to exercising your intellectual capacity. Try to develop your intellectual capacity so that you can understand the teachings as best you can. If you tend to be intellectually-inclined, you can work with this by turning your mind inwards and contemplating what you study. As an integral part of your contemplation, always connect what you are studying to your life situation and experience. In particular, use any experience gained through practice as a reference for your understanding: use practice as your guide for understanding the teachings and for discerning how the teachings can be applied to your life. In this way, your study will not be too intellectual.

On the other hand, if you are someone who immediately relates everything you study to your own experience or practice, your method of study is rather biased. If you find a direct relationship between your study and your experience, then you are interested in your study; but if you can see no possibility of doing this right away, you are not. There is a certain closed-mindedness in such thinking.

It would be much more helpful to be aware of this tendency, and not to hold this

kind of bias towards study. Instead, study with an open mind. Study irrespective of whether the subject seems to be something you can apply to yourself or not: appreciate that it will enrich your intelligence, wisdom, and knowledge. This in itself is a very wonderful outcome!

With an open attitude, you can create a solid foundation in study that you can readily apply to your experience and practice. Even if you cannot immediately see that your study is directly relevant to your practice, you will eventually. Your study becomes part of your experience, and you will naturally develop an appreciation for it.

Ordinarily, we all relate to things from an ignorant perspective. Studying philosophy and logic will have an impact on our perception, and on our emotional relationship to the world, so it is very helpful. Even if you are not so intellectually oriented, try not to resist the exercise and development of your intellectual capacity for understanding the teachings. Whether you find you have this kind of resistance or another kind, study will show you how to differentiate between being deluded and waking up to the truth.

The 'Speedy Tourist'

There is not much point in going to the Louvre, taking a quick walk through it, leaving the museum and saying, "Louvre? I've done it!" People who hang out in the general sense of things are often like this. If you ask them what they saw in the Louvre, they say "the Mona Lisa," and when you ask what it looked like, they say something like "Well, it was beautiful, I think."

This is just not good enough. If something is really beautiful, it is good to take your time and appreciate everything about it. When you enter a temple, it is important to enjoy its overall beauty as well as the details of its design, paintings, and sculptures. You don't want to go in, have a quick look around and leave, like a speedy tourist.

A lot of meditators take the 'speedy Louvre tour'. They have some general sense of their mind being empty, but they don't quite see how all phenomena are empty. They meditate without refining their mind with logic and reason. So when you ask them about the nature of their mind, they might say, "It's empty," but this level of understanding does not serve them to go deeper in Dzogchen meditation. We need to understand how things manifest in our mind, how we conceptualize, and how our emotional behavior is caused by ignorance.

With this kind of understanding, you as students will gain a genuine understanding of the practices. Whether you practice *ngöndro,* the three roots, or inner yoga, you will do it with the complete understanding of that practice. And if you practice Dzogchen, you will understand the entire teaching of Dzogchen. Otherwise, there is a danger of 'hit and miss', and there would be much more chance of your missing than hitting.

Letting Go of Old Views

In the process of creating a firm foundation of study, even though we may realize the necessity for knowledge and understanding, we still need to ensure that we have fully comprehended any meaning that we have struggled to understand. Perhaps we got the basic idea, but it still may not make so much sense to us, or we may not yet feel a personal connection to it. One possible reason for this is that we may be holding on to an old view, and trying to assess everything from that old perspective. This may be why we get caught up in a struggle.

When we realize that we are in such a situation, we should try to let go of it during practice, and start afresh. Occasionally, we can understand something very absolute during our practice, and experience all this buzzing, floating information in a very clear way. The words of many different teachers that have been echoing around our heads will suddenly fit together and illuminate our experience of meditation practice. Then the information no longer floats around; it remains rather like a shining light which illuminates our experience more and more: the teachings become part of our experience.

All of a sudden we are able to open up and understand how the subject we are studying has a personal relevance and connection to us, and this changes our life. What was once the most difficult point, the one that caused us the most trouble, may be the very thing that changes our life the most. Keeping this in mind can help us remain open.

Paying Attention to the Words

The teachings advise us to remember not only the meaning of the teachings, but also the details and the exact order of the words. Sometimes you will find that you have not paid attention to some elements of a teaching. Consequently, you may know and be able to describe the meaning of the teaching, but you are still not very precise, and you don't really know the traditional wording. This situation can be improved by studying the specific words once you have understood their meaning. Further study of the words illuminates their meaning and brings complete understanding. So you should definitely focus on the words, and memorize them.

For example, we all understand something about enlightenment, but we might not necessarily know how to describe or define the word 'enlightenment' very well. So after understanding the general meaning, focus on the word; learn the meaning more deeply through learning the meaning of the word, and also learn how to comment on the word.

For example, *sangye* means enlightenment. *Sang* is 'pacification'. Pacification of what? Of the two obscurations. And *gye* means 'enriched' or 'complete'. All the qualities of enlightenment—wisdom, love, and compassion—are fully enriched or complete. In this way the meaning you already know becomes more complete, and this helps you become a little more enlightened!

The Woodpecker

On the other hand, if you spend too much effort on examining the details of a ext, you become like a woodpecker. If you become so picky with each and every word and concept, you can miss out on the whole meaning of what is there for you to understand.

So we want neither to turn into a woodpecker nor a speedy tourist who has only a general sense of how things are. It is important to balance these tendencies, and to focus on getting to the essence.

Questions and Doubts

During the course of our studies, it is quite natural for many questions to arise. There must be room for questions, curiosity, and doubts. It is not disrespectful to ask questions, nor is it disrespectful to have doubts. But it is very important to examine the way in which we doubt, and how we express our doubts and questions.

If we initially feel that we are right, and that to some extent we understand the truth, and then we find that because our view is threatened, doubts surge up aggressively in our mind, we must take notice. Aggression doesn't help anyone, so we should first work with the aggression before expressing our doubt.

People can become very charged when their own views are not confirmed, and get shaken up when their views are threatened. When exchanging viewpoints, or when learning from a teacher, even if we are passionate about wanting to deepen our study, it is vital to proceed non-violently and with tremendous clarity. If we remain aware of this, our exchanges will be much more pleasant and enjoyable.

Confidence and Self-Esteem

Whenever we talk about ego in the West, we also need to address the question of self-esteem. There are two kinds of self-esteem. One kind is basically egotistical and carries the connotation of pride and arrogance. In this case, no matter how well we project an image that suggests we are very confident, have a lot of self-esteem, and are very efficient, underneath we remain insecure. Especially if we have been practitioners for a while, we know that this kind of self-esteem doesn't serve us at all. On top of that, it hinders us from entering more deeply into the Dharma.

But we do need to possess a self-esteem that inspires us not only temporarily but also in the long-term. When you look at His Holiness the Dalai Lama, or any other great master, they don't seem to lack self-esteem or confidence, nor do they seem insecure. So there must be another kind of self-esteem that is based on physical, mental, and emotional well-being. This kind of well-being grows over time.

The idea of self-esteem might appear to contradict the Buddhist teachings, because of the language that is used. But there is no contradiction, because this kind of self-esteem does not confirm any neurotic ego as being truly existent. We must realize that this kind of well-being is not based on grasping onto an idea of self. It is possible to acknowledge the relative existence of a self without grasping at that sense of self as being absolute or permanent. The word 'self-esteem' is used here to mean that over time we gain a growing confidence in our study and practice.

Even though it may be a slow process or take longer than expected, a sense of growing confidence in ourselves is very important, and when it happens, we should acknowledge it. We are trained in Western study methods, and Western study methods train us not to trust ourselves. So when we begin our study of the Dharma, we might not have much trust in ourselves; but our self-trust will slowly develop.

According to the Buddhist view, ego needs to be abandoned. But people often turn ego into something worse than it is presented in the teachings. The teachings are never extreme, but people often are. So when the teachings say we have to realize egolessness, because ego is what brings suffering into our lives, people beat themselves up for having an ego. But if we study the teachings closely, they never suggest that we should get rid of our ego immediately, or that we have no time to allow our realization of egolessness to grow before letting go of ego.

A Lifetime's Passion

Generally speaking, we should take a long-term perspective rather than be impatient and look only for quick results. Study and practice are activities for our whole lifetime. There is no quick path to realization. If there were, then all of us would be fully realized by now.

So we should not become too goal-oriented in our study and practice or look upon them as if they were just another project. We would never say, "I want to be well for a certain amount of time" or "I want to be happy for this long and no longer." Study and practice definitely have to be our life's passion, not a pursuit for just a few months or years, or until we receive a piece of paper that says, "You are a master."

His Holiness the Dalai Lama very clearly states that study and practice is his whole life's passion; he studies continuously. We may think that study is only important at the beginning of our path, and that when the meaning becomes clearer and we become more aware of the essence of phenomena, we should concentrate on meditation. But if you look at the example of the great realized teachers, you will find that they are always reading, whether it is for their own benefit or for that of others.

There is a very profound saying, "The more learned you are, the less arrogant you become." Learning is infinite; there is always more to learn. Conversely, arrogance is a big obstacle to learning. The chests of arrogant people swell with pride, and they fail

to appreciate anything at all. Study begins to seem like a secondary pursuit, like a tale that someone is telling, or the mere repetition of information.

We become more learned not by becoming arrogant, but by being more openminded; which is to say, by becoming truly humble. Great scholars, such as the Kadampa teachers, possess great humility. They are completely open to any knowledge that is offered. There is never a 'know it all' quality about them. Great realized masters have tremendous reserves of honesty, freedom, and peace, and are not stuck in any kind of negativity or *kleshas* of the afflicting emotions: they are always poised and serene.

Many of these masters are still with us. One great example of both learned and meditative qualities is His Holiness the Dalai Lama. We should follow such examples instead of becoming full of ourselves and stuck in our own limited views and arrogance or swelling our chests to the point of no longer being capable of breathing in or out with any appreciation whatsoever.

Appreciation is the key to life. If you don't have appreciation, then you don't have much of a life. Appreciation is very tangible, so you can discern whether you have it or not. We should appreciate all the good things in our lives, regardless of whether they are material things other people our own qualities, opportunities, knowledge, studies, or growth. If we fail to do so, we just fixate on thinking, "If I could just get some more...," or, "If I had done something a little bit differently, I would have the satisfaction that I long for…." If this is what we think, we will end up lacking any sense of gratitude for what is already part of our lives, and undermining our appreciation for what we have.

In essence, we should appreciate everything—not just the good things but the difficult things as well. In this respect the teachings on emptiness are of great help, because in essence everything is empty, isn't it? It is logical. It is one taste.

The Benefits of Study

Through our study we develop gowa (understanding) and rigpa (precise intelligence). If we study text after text, or even if we read one text again and again, our gowa and rigpa will naturally develop. When studying the teachings and philosophy of the Buddha, we can use rigpa to analyze the teachings in greater depth and to bring in our own perception and experience.

In fact, the most important thing to learn in terms of study is how to think. Naturally the subject of study is also very important, but the main point is to learn to think about a subject like the *mahapanditas*—to use our mind in the same way as the scholars who taught on that subject used theirs. When that is established, we can use that capacity not only in our study and practice of the Dharma, but in every aspect of our lives. By this point the whole way in which our brains function will have improved, and that is true education.

When I was teaching in the Buddhist Studies department of Naropa Institute, students on the Master of Arts degree program sometimes became concerned about their future livelihoods. They would come to me and ask, "How am I going to get a job with this master's degree?" I used to tell them that this study would not only establish a more precise understanding of the Buddha's teachings and make them much more sane when they apply them to their lives, but that they could also use rigpa in any field they might want to engage with in the future: if they decide to become a lawyer they can bring rigpa to the law; and if they become a doctor they can bring it to medicine.

Dharma itself frees you from attachment to any career, but I feel very strongly that someone who has studied in depth will benefit from applying the Buddha's teachings to any career that he or she might choose. Whenever I am confronted by something, I recognize that my studies and the rigpa that I have developed are of tremendous help to me, because they enable me to think things through deeply.

Also, if I have a dialogue or discussion with someone, irrespective of whether I am familiar with the subject or not, I have some basic mental tools that help me understand the other person's point of view. I can discern whether something is merely hypothetical, or genuinely based on the experience of individuals or of mankind, and whether it is applicable and of true benefit. I give the credit for this ability to the studies that I was able to do when I was young, and to the great teachers who taught me.

Study gives us intelligence and teaches us how to use our minds, which is clearly a necessity for anyone who wants to be actively involved in life and maintain or develop a sense of well-being in the world.

Dharma in the West

The Rigpa Shedra program, through which these teachings are presented, is oriented mainly towards the traditional style of study practiced in Tibetan shedras. I hope that as we develop the study program among Western students, we will also be able to create an understanding of the relevance of these studies to everyday life, and of how they can be applied to working with our own mind on an everyday level. I hope that through the blessings of the lineage and all sources of higher power, the study program may benefit all beings.

Even though the Dharma has already been in the West for over twenty years, here is still a lot of room for greater clarity about how to approach the study and practice of Dharma; or rather, about how the Western mind can assimilate the whole of the Buddhadharma. I hope this will be clarified over the course of this century. Dharma took many centuries to become established in India and Tibet, and we should certainly be patient enough to wait at least a century for the Dharma to take root in the West.

Although people in the West go to school at an early age and study hard, the style of study is different from the one that we are developing in the shedra. The difference is

that there is a lineage; and this is very significant. The style of teaching in Tibet comes directly from the noble land of India. It is unique, and has the magnificent power to shape our minds.

There are different approaches to study within the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. This shedra follows the Nyingma and Kagyü tradition, which is rimé, or non-sectarian. In the rimé style, there is a lot of room for contemplation based on a profound openness to all the teachings of the Buddha. The rimé tradition actively attempts to establish that, in essence, the different points of view of all the yanas do not contradict each other, even though they may sometimes appear to do so. In this way, study can have a very deep impact on our minds.

It is wonderful for us to pursue our studies as part of this great tradition. But if we do not continue to cultivate a sense of lineage and to use the support of what has already been established in Tibet and India -- if instead people get attracted to some 'innovative' kind of Dharma that supports their own needs, and become caught up in worldly concerns -- then the study program will not work. Even though it may seem very exciting and appealing, it will not work. Therefore we should always appreciate that a sense of lineage, not only in practice but also in terms of study, is vitally important.

I hope we will be able to build a bridge that inspires people to study the traditional texts, rather than somebody else's version of the teachings of the Buddha. When we study various peoples' versions of the Dharma, we get further and further away from what the Buddha taught. But when we study the original texts, we build a solid foundation; and there is also tremendous blessing to be received from studying the original text—the blessing of all the great teachers and masters who have taught the text in the past.

Even though you may from time to time feel bored or distracted, if you have the discipline to continue your studies, and go through them with both an oral transmission and an oral explanation—because the teachings need an oral explanation—then we have established a shedra! But if there is no continuity, there will be no shedra. Always remind yourself why you are doing this. What is the purpose of shépa, the study done in the shedra? It is to develop our mind and our practice. The purpose of the shedra is to establish an authentic lineage of the truly realized, awakened state of mind.

CHAPTER TWO

PRACTICE

The Importance of Practice

The purpose of studying the Dharma is to help our mind to be at peace and in n awakened state. But study alone is not going to accomplish this; we must practice as well. It was said by the great sages of the past that we might know everything about a particular medicine, but unless we take it, we will never get better. If we are truly interested in being cured of whatever illnesses we suffer from, it is important for us not just to know about the treatment, but also to take the medicine. So we must practice.

1. SHAMATHA: Calming the mind

In order to contemplate, we must first learn how to calm our mind. Therefore it is important for us to know how to practice shamatha meditation (Skt.; Tib. shyiné). Shamatha means 'peaceful mind', or 'mind abiding in a peaceful state'[1]. How do we practice shamatha? We sit up straight, lower our eyes slightly, let go of our physical tensions, and remain as upright and as comfortable as possible. Once a great sage was meditating in the forest. He sat very well, in accordance with the seven aspects of posture of Vairocana[2]. There were a lot of monkeys in the forest. As monkeys like to mimic

1 Sogyal Rinpoche usually translates shamatha as 'peacefully remaining'. It is sometimes translated as 'tranquility meditation'.

2 The seven points of posture of Vairocana are

1) a straight spine,

2) the hands in a meditative posture,

3) the elbows slightly sticking out,

4) the chin slightly lowered,

5) the eyes unwavering,

6) the mouth slightly open with the tongue touching the palate and

7) the legs in the lotus posture.

See Thrangu Rinpoche: *Tranquility and Insight*, p. 22. However, observing the seven points of posture strictly is more important in yoga practice. Sogyal Rinpoche emphasizes the comfort and ease posture which he describes in *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, p.65.

people they imitated the sage's posture, and they all attained realization. Now, if monkeys can attain realization through this posture, then we can certainly benefit from it too.

This story illustrates just how helpful and important posture is, but you don't necessarily have to use the seven aspects of posture of Vairocana; sitting up straight is the most important point.

Then let your attention flow out with your breath. At first, you will realize that your breathing is inconsistent: you may, for example, sometimes breathe out for a long time or breathe through your mouth, and then through your nose. As long as you stay aware of your breathing all of these inconsistencies are fine. The point is to cultivate awareness.

To begin with, becoming aware of your breathing means simply to feel the sensation of breathing. If it helps you can count your breaths from one to twentyone, and when you get to the end of a cycle, start again at one.

You will notice that you are not able to stay aware of your breath for very long. Before you realize it your mind is off onto something else, caught up in thinking about this or that, and no longer focused on the practice. But when you 'find' your mind again, that is a cause for delight; simply bring your mind back to the practice. Do not be discouraged, self-critical, frustrated or judgmental. Such attitudes are not going to help you at all; in fact, they will ruin your discipline. You will never succeed in developing shamatha while holding on to such attitudes. Simply bring your mind back to the practice.

Gradually, you will naturally become more and more able to rest your attention

on the breath as it flows out, and the breath will become less and less inconsistent. If you practice over and over again you will realize that your awareness is increasing, and you will 'go off' much less frequently.

Even when you do go off you will catch yourself more quickly, because you are not being judgmental or discouraged. The way in which you work with your emotions begins to shift, and your practice becomes much lighter.

Mind slowly synchronizes with the practice. When our mind is trained to return to a focal point again and again, as the instruction on shamatha advises, it relaxes, and is naturally appeased. This is the magic of the mind. When mind is disciplined it relaxes. There are no other causes or conditions through which mind can relax .

Our physical tension is also related to the inconsistency of the breath. If we are ble to breathe consistently and smoothly we can let go of our physical tension too, so our body will also synchronize with the practice. This is the magic of physical relaxation. Mind and body become much more synchronized, and this cultivates a sense of peace. We achieve peace simply through concentration.

Discipline is the Key to Progress

We should know and trust in this process, rather than expect something 'great' or 'grand' to happen. Nor should we try to feel peaceful immediately, because that is not going to happen.

The pace at which we develop depends entirely upon our level of discipline: on how disciplined we are with our minds, and on how disciplined we are with the practice. As our shin jang[3] (Tib.) develops, we become much more still and peaceful. *Shin jang* grows over time, but it does not develop at all if we don't know how to work with whatever obstacles to discipline we might have: there is no quick way into it.

Also, we must be careful not to 'overkill' our discipline, as a result of temporary inspiration. We can sometimes be very inspired and feel like practicing for days on end and we end up burning out. The next time we sit down to practice we might feel rather resistant to the whole idea. We should be consistent in the amount of time we devote to shamatha. As our shin jang develops, we can gradually increase the length of our practice in a much more natural way.

Working with Distraction

We do need to become less distracted. Our sense-consciousnesses are so gullible, and the phenomenal world is so seductive that we can be totally seduced, and taken on a roller-coaster ride. This is the so-called 'fatal attraction'! So we must work with our habit of distraction.

At first, it is hard to work with our habits. It is said that any conventional activity is easy to perform at the outset, but becomes more and more difficult with time, to the point where we no longer derive any real satisfaction from it. The opposite is true for the Dharma: it is a little bit hard to do at first, but as you continue it becomes easier and easier.

Mankind has been faced with the problem of distraction since the beginning of time, but we should also understand that the twenty-first century is even more dangerous for us than preceding centuries. So much happens all the time, and we live in the thick of it.

Even in the middle of the night, you can hear all kinds of sounds: the sirens of ambulances, police-cars, and fire-trucks, or the noise of subway trains. Nowadays sense-consciousnesses are constantly stimulated and mind has no choice but to accompany them, because that is our habit. But when mind is overstimulated, it turns numb, and fails to register what is really going on. We spend much of our lives being distracted in exactly this way.

3 Literally 'thoroughly trained'. The term has a wide range of meanings within shamatha practice.

Hope for Gain

As we invest so much hope in the possibility of experiencing pleasure, comfort, fame and praise, we strive very hard to attain them. But it is a tiresome and endless pursuit and, as phenomena are impermanent, it is also pointless. Life is constantly changing; and even life itself comes to an end at some point. Consequently, life continually presents us with fresh causes for disappointment. We become totally worn out and exhausted, and lack all sense of achievement.

Those who realize emptiness see that all our frustration is caused by being caught up in the nightmare of samsara, and by trying to make things work out well within the dream. Such people will be much more in accord with nature, and sit in that natural state, and attain peace and nirvana. Nirvana is the cessation of all suffering and pain, and of the illusions and ignorance that reside within us.

Fear of Loss

The other aspect of the eight worldly concerns is the tremendous fear that we are often caught in: fear of blame, pain, poverty and harsh words. The reason why we are so tight and closed-up, and push the world away from ourselves, even to the point of clenching our teeth in our dreams, is that we are extremely fearful. We feel groundless and bewildered. People are forced to confront all kinds of problems, and do all kinds of things during the course of their lives, but what is it all for?

The Importance of Shamatha

I am not suggesting that we should shy away from living in the city; I am suggesting that we should work with our minds. Let the senses be stimulated, but try to cultivate a quiet mind, through the practice of shamatha. Shamatha does not work with the senses; it works with the sixth consciousness.

When mind calms down, it rejuvenates and regains its power, so if we apply shamatha to our everyday life, whatever we do, we will be effective. Especially if we are to reflect inwardly on mind itself, on grasping, on our fixation with the ego, and on our egocentric attitudes and emotions, then we definitely need to practice shamatha as part of our daily life. Without having first practiced shamatha, it is extremely difficult to reflect on the self at all.

Positive Qualities

In the *Bodhicharyavatara*[4] Shantideva says that it is only through precise shamatha that we can develop vipashyana. Even during the time of the Buddha it was difficult

4 *A Guide to the Bodhisattvas' Way of Life* by the great Indian master Shantideva; the most famous exposition of Mahayana practice and action.

to develop vipashyana without having first developed shamatha,and if it was difficult then it is certainly difficult now.

Once you have established the practice of shamatha your mind will feel more settled. You become calm and still, and can work with your mind in accord with the teachings. People sometimes panic, and believe that they are eternally weak and incapable; but this is simply not true. If we practice, we will glimpse how to break through our habitual patterns. There is nothing eternal about ignorance, habitual tendencies, perceptions and projections; you begin to see that they are not such a big deal, so there is no need to panic.

Once you are focused, subtle, calm and still, your intelligence is able to flow as it should. You gain a real sense of hope as well, because shamatha practice makes you stronger. Even though you might occasionally panic, or even verge on the schizophrenic, you will sense that your positive qualities — qualities such as courage, strength, a brave heart, intelligence, wisdom, compassion, skilful means and shin jang—are growing stronger. All these qualities increase as a result of shamatha practice.

Buddha Nature

Everyone has buddha nature. Maitreya said, "What is the sign of all beings having buddha nature? It is that all sentient beings intuitively move towards happiness, and walk away from suffering."

We possess an intuitive intelligence which understands that there is a way out of suffering, and that lasting happiness is achievable. All sentient beings share in this aspiration. Even before the seed of our buddha nature is ripe, our intuition steers us away from suffering and towards happiness. But our intentions and actions often contradict each other, and that is why we get caught up in the suffering of samsara.

As the seed of our enlightenment gradually ripens, our intentions become clearer to us, and eventually accord with our actions. We understand much more clearly the way in which we are bound to suffering, and how we can wake up and find help. But some people lack this intelligence, which shows that they don't have enough merit. An example of this is the people who are in an environment of Dharma and yet do not study or practice it. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche used to say, "If you put green grass in front of a cow, it thinks that the grass is delicious, and eats it; but if you put grass in front of a dog, it will not be interested."

If people are not interested, they lack the merit for their buddha nature to come to maturation. As our buddha nature matures, we will become more intelligent, and realize what we can and need to do in order to wake up from the suffering of samsara.

Control and Discipline

Question: Both control and discipline sound like dualistic concepts. Are they not activities of the ego?

Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche: That is a good question. Nagarjuna said that through observing discipline we can attain rebirth in the higher realms, but we can only fully liberate ourselves through wisdom. We are not going to liberate ourselves fully from the suffering of samsara solely through the observance of discipline, we will only accumulate good merit and move up into the higher realms.

But *tsultrim*[5] (Tib.; Skt. *shila*) and *vinaya*[6] (Skt.; Tib. *dulwa*) are still very important on the path. To make full use of the wisdom mind and ultimately become completely liberated, we need some stability in our lives, and some consistency in our behavior. You could call it 'the consistent behavior of our good nature'. If we continue to engage in negative actions, rather than consistently maintain the good behavior that supports wisdom, it will be very hard for us to manifest wisdom. So although tsultrim supports us, unless it is allied to the wisdom that guides it, it remains dualistic.

If discipline is guided by wisdom, it becomes non-dual. This means that we observe the discipline without fixating on it. Here fixation means having an emotional reaction or relationship to what you do. The wisdom mind allows us to see the nature of things as emptiness, and this realization frees us from fixation. So discipline becomes less of an egocentric action, and more of a support through which wisdom and liberation can fully manifest.

Without the realization of emptiness, we can experience *tsultrim chokdzin*, which means 'grasping onto one's discipline as superior or great', and this is actually an obstacle to liberation. *Tawa chokdzin*, which means 'holding one's view as superior' is also a problem. So the teachings on emptiness should diminish our grasping onto discipline and our grasping onto the view itself.

'Control' might imply that we are trying to regulate our nature, but negative emotions are not part of our true nature. If we have gone a long way in the wrong direction, we need to reverse our actions in order to make progress. When we see that this supports our well-being and our journey on the path to liberation, then it is not so much a case of controlling our negativity as transforming it.

5 Discipline; literally 'appropriate action'. See also 'The Six Paramitas' section in this chapter.

6 The body of Buddha's advice on appropriate ethical conduct as part of the path. One of the three baskets, or tripitaka, into which the teachings are traditionally divided.

2. VIPASHYANA: Extraordinary Seeing

Vipashyana (Skt.; Tib. *lhak tong*) means 'extraordinary seeing': seeing the nature of reality, which is something we do not normally see or experience. Seeing phenomena in an ordinary way is not vipashyana. The Buddha said, "That which sees nothing, sees nature."

Seeing nothing does not mean that we perceive a void. It means that we have transcended the four extremes of seeing things as neither existent nor nonexistent, not both, and not neither.[7]

2.1 CHÉ GOM: Analytical meditation

After we have first calmed our discursive mind through shamatha, we slowly develop the discipline of contemplation in order to explore the deeper meaning of the teachings and to use our intelligence with accuracy. We can then bring the subject of our study under analytical investigation and explore its nature and meaning in detail. This is the objective goal of our study.

When you arrive at this point of stillness and clarity, you can use your mind in any way you want, and can contemplate and think seriously and deeply. When your mind is peaceful and still, its capacity to analyze and penetrate the true meaning of life increases dramatically.

THE CONTEMPLATION OF EGOLESSNESS

The Two Obscurations

All obscurations are contained within the two categories of emotional obscuration and cognitive obscuration[8]. Emotional obscurations are far than cognitive obscurations, and are therefore the first thing we need to overcome.

Emotional Obscuration

Clinging to the self creates emotional obscuration and gives birth to the cherishing and the protection of the self. All gross negative emotions arise out of self-cherishing. Negative emotions are defined as the three poisons: passion, aggression and ignorance; the addition of arrogance and jealousy gives us the five poisons. They are called emotional obscurations because their emotional charge is painful and causes suffering. For instance, if we feel aggressive, we experience tremendous pain and suffering; and the same can be said for ignorance, attachment, arrogance and jealousy.

7 Rinpoche is referring here to the four philosophical extremes, which will be explained in detail in later chapters.

8 The obscurations can be further expanded into four: cognitive, karmic, habitual and emotional.

As Chandrakirti said, "First you cling to yourself as 'I', then to others as 'mine'. Thus, the roots of suffering in samsara spread."

Because we lack the realization of shunyata, our emotional obscurations create karma that drags us down into the lower realms. Therefore sentient beings suffer tremendously.

Cognitive Obscuration

Cognitive obscurations are all thoughts that fail to see their own nature, which is emptiness. They are not necessarily generated by grasping onto self: the experience of consciousness itself becomes an obscuration to consciousness seeing its true nature. Take a vase as an example. When we see a vase, we might not experience a particular sense of grasping onto self. But this perception still has an ignorant aspect to it; it is ignorant of its true nature, which is emptiness. The obscuration in this instance is that we take the vase to be real and true, and in so doing we blind ourselves. All dualistic perceptions have the 'built-in ignorance' of not seeing their own nature.

The Two Aspects of Egolessness

In Madhyamika, the ground is emptiness and the path is the realization of the two kinds of egolessness: the egolessness of dharma[9] and the egolessness of the self. These, respectively, are the antidotes to cognitive and emotional obscurations. The ego of the self is based on the ignorance which fails to realize shunyata, or the egolessness of the self. The ego of the dharma is the failure to see that the nature of all phenomena is shunyata. So the ego of the self is a specific term and the ego of the dharma is a broader term. Both are based on the failure to realize the nature of things as they are, which is shunyata, and specifically on clinging to the skandhas[10], and seeing them as intrinsically existent.

The Egolessness of Self (Tib. *kang zak gyi dak mé*)

If we realize that the true nature of self is shunyata, then we no longer cling to, cherish, or protect the self. When there are no roots, there can be no branches or poisonous fruits. In the same manner when we no longer cling to the self, negative emotions will cease to appear. To free ourselves from karma and the suffering of samsara, we need to realize the egolessness of self.

The egolessness of self is the most profound concept that Buddha Shakyamuni expounded. As the great Kadampa[11] teachers said in the *lojong* (Tib.; mindtraining) teachings, there

9 Here the term 'dharma' signifies 'phenomena'.

10 Usually translated as 'aggregates': the five constituents of form, sensation, perception, mental formation and consciousness which we mistakenly impute as 'I'.

11 The Kadampa order was the first school of Buddhism in Tibet, founded through the instructions and

is not one volume, verse, or word of the Buddha's teachings that does not reflect the egolessness of self. Shunyata is the essence of the entire teaching of the Buddha.

If we have not realized shunyata, any special powers we might develop or any miracles we might perform are of no significance whatsoever. What should really be cherished or valued is the peace that is created through the realization of the egolessness of the self. The mind, which has been trapped in the beliefs of the ego for so long, is finally free. The quality of the first moment of liberation is intelligence seeing through its own ignorance.

Using Your Own Experience

Try to contemplate the teachings, to see for yourself whether they are true or not. Ask yourself whether the afflicting negative emotions—attachment, aggression, ignorance, jealousy, arrogance—originate with our tendency to protect and cherish the self. Use the events of your life to clarify whether this is the case or not, and to analyze yourself more clearly. I am sure that you have often become angry, and that you clearly remember how you became angry!

I am sure you have often become very attached, jealous, proud and arrogant, and that you can remember what these emotions were like too. Use these memories, one by one, as the basis of your contemplation. Recall past events and contemplate whether the teachings are really true or not: how much suffering and pain is there in these negative emotions? To what extent is the tendency to cherish and protect the self present as you feel a negative emotion? Is there a sense of clinging to the self?

Do we cling to physical and mental experiences as 'I' or as 'mine'? In order to cling to them as 'mine', there must first be an 'I' to which to cling. We cling to 'my heart', 'my eyes', 'my this', 'my that': we don't cling to them as an 'I', so this 'I' is very mysterious! [12]

Will negative emotions persist if we no longer cling to the self? Are we going to experience psychological and emotional pain if we no longer cherish or protect the self? Will negativity remain if we let go of our habit of clinging to the self? If we can dissolve this habit, to what extent will we free ourselves from our habitual behavior?

This clinging is the origin of all the causes and conditions of negative emotion. If we can analyze this clearly, using our past experience as a basis, the truth of the teachings is bound to become clear to us.

Also bring whatever negative emotions you have experienced during the day clearly to mind. Try to see how strongly we cherish and protect the self, and how much we

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influence of Atisha (982-1054) and his disciple Dromdönpa (1008-1064). In 1057 Dromdönpa founded Reting Monastery, which became the main seat of the order.

12 Here Rinpoche is briefly touching on one of the classic Buddhist arguments disproving the validity of ego-grasping, which is that our egocentric attitudes towards ourselves are inherently inconsistent. Sometimes we relate to aspects of our being as if they belonged to an 'I', yet at other times we relate to them as part of 'I'. If they are parts, at what point do they form a whole entity that can validly be called 'I'? If they are belongings, what is this 'I' that they belong to and are different from, and where does it reside?

cling to the self. See for yourself whether the teachings are true or not. Do not take the teachings on faith; examine them through your own experience.

Egolessness of Dharma (Tib. *chö kyi dak mé*)

Egolessness of dharma means that the nature of all phenomena is *shunyata.* As the Heart Sutra says, "Form is emptiness, emptiness is form". Every one of the five skandhas {form, feeling, perception, mental formation and consciousness} is shunya ta. Without realizing this, we cling to the skandhas as if they were real and intrinsically existent. This clinging is ignorance, because it prevents us from accurately perceiving the nature of the skandhas.

Our ignorant mind clings to the phenomenal world and does not accurately see what phenomena really are. Our distorted perceptions have a function and some validity in the relative world, but they cannot examine the true nature of things with any accuracy.

So how can we discover our true nature? It is possible for perception itself to see the true nature of phenomena by understanding its own ignorance and the way in which the ignorant mind functions, and then by removing that ignorance. This is achieved through the study of Buddhist science, the teachings the buddhas gave that explain how things truly are, as opposed to how they appear to us, and how we cling to the way they appear to be. Studying these teachings removes ignorance from our perceptions and mental functions. This is the way in which we can come to see the true nature of things.

The Benefits of Realizing Egolessness

The realization of the egolessness of self is the antidote to emotional obscurations. But even to overcome emotional obscurations, we must attain some realization of the egolessness of dharma. Without the realization of the egolessness of dharma, it is going to be very difficult to realize the egolessness of the self. So the egolessness of dharma and the egolessness of the self are connected.

If we examine the nature of phenomena closely, we will see the nature of our mind clearly, as well as the relationship between our mind and the nature of phenomena. Our ignorance will be exposed, and we will be able to dissolve it slowly. Our emotional connection to the phenomenal world will also change. We will gradually be freed from delusion, and therefore from suffering.

If you look closely you will find that phenomena and experience are impermanent and illusory, and made of many particles which themselves are emptiness, so there is nothing to cling to in the absolute. Speech, mind and feelings are all emptiness, as is very clearly shown in the teachings on the four foundations of mindfulness. [13]

13 The four foundations of mindfulness were elucidated by the Buddha in the Satipatthana Sutra. They are the mindfulness of the body, sensations, mind and dharma.

To realize that the nature of things is emptiness and to abide by that realization is an incredible breakthrough. There is no longer any need to put dualistic effort into obtaining nirvana. The nature of emptiness, and the nature of all appearance, is itself nirvana .

So, even while living in samsara, we can attain and abide by the realization of emptiness. The appearance of phenomena reveals itself as illusory, and this illusory phenomenal world is no longer a burden that brings suffering to us. But for someone who clings to the phenomenal world as solid and intrinsic, and who remains ignorant of its empty nature, this life can be a tremendously painful experience, a nightmare even.

It is very important for us to develop *prajña,* wisdom, so that our perceptions encounter phenomena accurately, as they truly are. Awaking from our ignorance, distorted perceptions, and the suffering that we bring to ourselves is the purpose of the entire path, the sole purpose behind studying and practicing the Buddhadharma, as well as the cultivation of prajña.

The benefit of realizing the egolessness of self and of dharma is that our suffering will cease, both in this life and the next. The reason why we normally suffer so much is that we are under the influence of the eight worldly concerns.

Clarity in Contemplation

If we receive these teachings and simply contemplate one word a day, and contemplate on the egolessness of self for just half an hour every day, we will make tremendous progress along the Buddhist path. Since this contemplation relates so directly to our pain and suffering, the relief we will feel will be much more substantial than if we had only a vague understanding of the nature of emptiness.

But first we need to be in touch with the pain and suffering that results from clinging to the self. This has to come to light in our mind. If we are distracted, like those in the god realm, then it is very difficult to progress along a spiritual path. When we see the extent to which we are trapped, we will have a far greater interest in the teachings, and a much greater aspiration to realize them.

If we do not come into contact with our pain and suffering, we might be exposed to the danger of spiritual materialism, which originates with the ego. Spiritual materialism means using the spiritual practices to cherish and protect ourselves .

We should contemplate egolessness again and again, because we will not realize it immediately. Mipham Rinpoche said that the contemplation of egolessness has an automatic effect on our habit of grasping onto the self, and that the power of our grasping will slowly decrease. It will not be obvious immediately, but we will experience it over time.

When this happens, we can further deepen our shamatha practice. Once shamatha is stabilized and the vipashyana of the egolessness of self dawns, we work to overcome the power of our habitual tendencies. Then, at some point we will become like

Shantideva, Chandrakirti, Nagarjuna and all the other great masters who have realized the egolessness of the self: they do not cling to themselves as solid entities and therefore do not suffer as a result of that, as we ordinary human beings do.

Renouncing Suffering

If we contemplate in this way, and are clear about how to use our experience of the past, present and future, then our faith in the noble Dharma is bound to grow. The power of our basic intelligence, which is common to all sentient and human beings, will increase, and we will no longer want to indulge in the things we used to indulge in. For example, if we put our hand in some flames and it gets burnt, we are clearly aware that it is the fire that burns our hand. If we later have the chance to avoid the fire, we will not put our hand in it again! Not wanting to hurt yourself is simply a question of common sense.

We will develop a sense of renunciation towards suffering and the mechanism of suffering that resides in us, the tendency to cling to the self. After six months or a year of such observation: real renunciation and genuine interest in pursuing the Dharma will take root in us, and this is the result that we are seeking.

The Buddha himself felt this kind of renunciation towards his own suffering and its causes. It was renunciation that inspired him on his search for a path that led not just himself but the whole of mankind away from suffering. This is the point at which Buddha left the palace and went in search of the path to enlightenment, which he eventually discovered under the Bodhi tree in Bodhgaya.

Simplifying Our Lives

Following his example, it is helpful for us to simplify our lives. Our lives are more or less like a spider's web: the spider stays in the middle of the web, attached to all its different strands. The spider is always busy, constantly repairing and maintaining the web. And this is what our lives are like. There are so many strands to keep in place if the web is going to be maintained. Consequently, we are not free.

Maybe we could reduce the size of our web gradually, rather than getting rid of it all at once. Reduce the spider web—make it a little bit smaller, a bit lower maintenance. Find more time to be at the centre of the web and to do what really matters.

True Renunciation Lies within Our Mind

True renunciation is not just a question of the external renunciation of phenomena, it is a realization that must be born within our mind. True renunciation only comes through vipashyana meditation, which allows us to see the real nature of *dukkha* and the way in which suffering is part of our lives. We realize for ourselves that the only

way out is to take refuge in the Buddha as the guide; the Dharma as the path, and the sangha as our companions; and this is what I would recommend you do.

This realization is not going to become clear to you instantaneously. Therefore, you need to meditate. Whatt I suggest is that you include the practice of contemplation in your daily meditation over a period of six months or a year.

Working with Obstacles

As we practice in this way, it is vital not to disrupt the discipline of hearing, contemplation and meditation. What breaks our discipline is the adoption of wrong attitudes towards the Dharma, or towards our discipline or capacity, or any other false attitude on which we might fixate and be unwilling to let go of. What causes us to grasp or reject something is our own investment in our ego; a preference for a particular view, understanding, or emotion that we cherish.

We should be aware that we are going to encounter a lot of obstacles. We have to examine each obstacle critically, understand what it is, and try to work with it. Our objective goal here is continual progress. Don't keep moving forwards and backwards, without ever really covering any ground!

For instance, you might contemplate or hear a teaching on the Dharma and find that your mind is not completely open to the view of emptiness. You see emptiness as a void, and this frightens you. If, whilst hearing the teachings on emptiness, you are fearful, that fear will be part of your mind-stream and could cause you to react in a way that prevents you from hearing the teaching, which will just go in one ear, and out the other. But if you realize that your fear is based on your own preconception of emptiness, you will recognize that your fear is irrelevant and so the fear will naturally dissolve.

Contemplation means appreciating the meaning of the teachings at a greater depth. It is rather like reading a book, and then going back over the contents and gaining a greater sense of its meaning. Reading itself can be shamatha practice. Whenever your mind goes off, just come back to the text and gradually gain a greater sense of the meaning of the teachings. This will clear up your ignorance. This is the wisdom of contemplation. Sometimes, you will stop reading and think about the meaning of the text, and this is contemplative meditation.

2.2 JOK GOM: Placement Meditation

Once you have reached some conclusion with your intellect, you can let go of analytical thinking and practice 'placement meditation'—*jok gom*. You focus on your conclusion, and see whether it agrees with your experience. Our understanding must be based on our experience. Since shunyata (the nature of all things) is what we are trying to realize, the nature of our experience and the nature of our mind must be shunyata. Until realization dawns, we need to conceptualize; after that there is no

need for conceptualization, as we can see directly 'what is'.

The validity of your conclusion must be experienced through the discipline of placement meditation. If you have reached a conclusion, but cannot trust its validity, you will become caught up in self-doubt.

2.3 THE INSIGHT OF VIPASHYANA

Exposing Our Ignorance

Vipashyana exposes ignorance and brings you to another level of operating with the mind and its activities. Vipashyana is known as 'extraordinary seeing', because it gives us the capacity to put an end to our old habitual patterns, to see phenomena as illusory and then to function more in accord with illusory nature. You cannot wake up until your ignorance has been exposed.

When you bring torchlight into a room, you suddenly recognize a rope as a rope, rather than mistaking it for a snake. In the same way, before our mind can cease grasping, we need to realize that the nature of all phenomena is emptiness. This requires a lot of merit and blessings and the development of concentration through shamatha practice. But when these factors are all present, vipashyana will dawn.

During vipashyana practice, we explore and examine the teachings. We need to know and clearly understand the teachings we are exploring, otherwise our mind will have no way of engaging with them, or will do so only with a certain amount of confusion. If our contemplation is thorough, it will establish the meditation of vipashyana.

Our exploration of the teachings brings us a clarity that is different in quality from the illuminating thoughts or ideas that formed the clarity of our contemplation. Here, we have an illuminating experience that embodies the teachings. Ultimately, this leads to the exact awakened state of mind that the teachings describe, which is what we have previously heard and contemplated, and which has become our experience. The teachings and our experience meet and become one.

Whenever we contemplate, no matter what illuminating thoughts or ideas we might have, the experience that the teachings describe remains in the book. We are separated from it, but in the process of vipashyana meditation, we become one with the meaning.

This is not a conceptual event. You might conceptualize it later, but the experience itself is not necessarily conceptual. It is a clarity that is fully awakened and which totally embodies the teachings. This is the nature of vipashyana.

There are many stages to vipashyana, but the essence is just as I have explained. There is a way in which to embody the essence of the teachings and arrive at an awakened state of mind through analytical meditation, and this way is described mainly in the Sutrayana tradition.

Vipashyana in Mantrayana

There is also a tradition of vipashyana within Mantrayana, which does not employ so much analytical thinking. Instead, the student practices in accordance with the teacher's instructions. The student's devotion meets with the teacher's blessings and the blessings of the lineage, and the student attains a full experience of vipashyana. So we don't necessarily need to think that it is only learned people with a vast knowledge of the sutras and tantras, and who have heard, contemplated and meditated on the teachings, who can realize vipashyana. Even though they might not have done so much study, or know how to practice analytical meditation, there are people who followed the instructions of their guru, developed strong devotion, realized the nature of mind, the absolute truth of phenomena, and attained a complete experience of vipashyana. Mantrayana contains both traditions; those of the intellect and those of devotion.

Faith

The basis for intelligence in western philosophy is that we cannot trust anything. We are always self-critical and self-doubting. If we continue with this neurosis, then we will not be able to meditate on the conclusion we have reached during our contemplation. We will not be still enough to let our understanding reach full realization. Because we cherish self-doubt, self-doubt has become a habit. If we failed to doubt ourselves, we would probably worry about falling into blind faith.

Vipashyana has nothing to do with blind faith. If somebody thinks they are resorting to blind faith, then they are heavily reliant on conceptualization, rather than on experience, and that is not the path at this point.

It may be the path of western philosophy, but it is not the path of training in Buddhism. Although we make use of conceptualization as a method of furthering our understanding, the training in Buddhism is to rely on the deepening of experience—on the increasing accuracy of our experience of the nature of phenomena and of the nature of mind.

Trust in this experience, not in the activities of labeling and conceptualization. Trust that there is a path with 2,500 years of history behind it, which was established by the Buddha himself and by great panditas and realized beings in both India and Tibet. It is not as if somebody only recently figured out how to do this. When we cannot progress, we must trust, look for the obstacle, and clear it away. As we clear away the obstacles, the path itself will become clearer.

3. DEVELOPING BODHICHITTA

'Seeing Emptiness, Have Compassion'

Seeing the nature of phenomena as empty, and as devoid of any intrinsic existence, causes us to engage with bodhisattva activities for the benefit of others and to turn our attention towards relieving the suffering of sentient beings. No phenomena, including suffering—*kleshas* (Skt.; Tib. *nyön mong*; conflicting emotions)—and even the path itself, exist as solid or permanent entities within the awakened state of mind.

A bodhisattva sees how important it is to awaken others from the nightmare of samsara. Samsara is not reality, it is just a dream created by ignorance, confusion and distorted perceptions. As a result of realizing the view of emptiness, bodhisattvas possess incredible courage, and it is this that allows them to confront the suffering of samsara and work for the benefit of others.

For example, if pain really existed in the absolute, a buddha would not be able to take on a headache, let alone the suffering of all beings. But because reality is empty, pain is nothing more than an experience, or an appearance. Therefore, by awakening to and abiding by the nature of emptiness, a buddha is able remain free of suffering.

The teachings on emptiness wake us up from our delusion and suffering. We wake up to reality. If that reality were something other than emptiness, it would be difficult to free ourselves fully, because there would still be yet another thing to obtain or grasp after: we would be trapped in the same old story.

Since reality is emptiness and emptiness is not an object, there is nothing to grasp at. Instead, we can look at our situation and condition and see how we have become trapped in the ignorance that causes everything to appear more solid than it actually is, and which has the power to make us suffer.

If we see reality itself, we can simply let go of all our grasping and sit in the cessation and peace of the true nature of things. Everything will still appear and function, but in a magical way. There is nothing that can be held onto as real or solid, and yet we can use whatever resources we need for the purpose of performing positive actions. We are no longer ensnared by ignorance, nor do werelate to the phenomenal world or our own mind in a dualistic manner.

This way of seeing is like being in a dream whilst realizing that we are dreaming. The events of the dream no longer have such a strong impact on us, and we will not become lost in them. The status of the dream has not changed; whether it is lucid or not, a dream is still a dream, but our relationship to the dream is entirely different.

This world and our experiences within it are also like a dream, and it is possible for us to wake ourselves up and to experience the phenomenal world as dreamlike. The world has not changed in any way; it has always been dreamlike. But the extent to

which we remain ignorant or to which we have woken from our ignorance, defines our entire relationship with the world.

The purpose of study, contemplation and meditation of the Dharma is to awaken to the dream-like nature of phenomena, and this realization can only come about through the study and practice of Madhyamika, the Middle Way.

As our intellectual understanding grows and our realization of emptiness stabilizes, our bravery increases, and we are inspired from the depth of our hearts to leave the cocoon of ego, as it does not serve our interests. It becomes almost impossible to continue within the increasingly sticky and smelly confines of the cocoon.

I believe that we should develop a healthy, brave heart that is devoted to nonaggression. Put yourself out in as many ways as possible. If you have realized that suffering is an illusion, you can take on the suffering of others and give them loving kindness, compassion, good heart, bodhichitta and merit in return.

As realization dawns, this process of giving and receiving happens naturally and automatically. It is not a case of your trying to push yourself, of having an egocentric investment in becoming a better person or attempting to become more morally refined. Our motivation is not based on a subtle investment in the ego. When we see the illusory nature of things and how we have become caught up in that illusion, we have made a huge breakthrough. We glimpse how we and all other sentient beings can become free.

As the power of past habitual tendencies is so strong and persistent, we suffer. Other sentient beings suffer to a far greater extent, because they do not understand their suffering. To most sentient beings, everything seems intrinsically real. They do not recognize phenomena as their own projections, defilements or ignorance; to them the world is completely 'real'.

Nonetheless, the nature of mind and perceptions of all things, is shunyata. Consequently, the realization of the absolute brings about a sense of compassion. Sometimes this compassion can take the form of your feeling the pain of others, and at other times, it is an understanding of how suffering occurs and of how much it weighs down on us all, and wears us out.

At this point, we see that clinging to the self is just a habit and we experience a tremendous desire to overcome our habits. Although we might have intellectually realized that there is no self, our tendency to grasp can still be very strong. We experience so much pain as a result of holding onto the self, yet the habit persists and it is hard to let go.

At a point of realization, a time at which we see things really clearly, we feel quite sane. But all of a sudden, we revert to another, almost schizophrenic mode of being in which our habits take us over and we are no longer quite sure who we are, because we are following the pattern of habit. And yet hope remains, because we can see, over the time in which we have practiced and contemplated impermanence, just how much

progress we have made. When our mind is firmly focused on the teachings, we see that it is no longer impossible for us to overcome our habits.

The Purpose of Life

The Dharma is about putting ourselves in the position to carry out a serious task. Which is to engage in activity that is in accord with a bodhisattva's way of life through being physically, verbally or mentally active, or just by being alone and meditating on a mountainside, or in a cave or cabin.

Irrespective of whether or not people give you good feedback on your work on the bodhisattva path, the whole purpose of life becomes much clearer. The true meaning of life is to serve beings. There is no meaning to life other than this.

We can actively serve beings through generosity; this is something Christians are very good at. They develop hospitals and schools, educate disadvantaged children, give medical resources to those who have none, and alleviate poverty. These are good and compassionate acts; they are the actions of a bodhisattva.

I think Buddhists should also become involved in these activities. But not all Buddhists should undertake such work, because if they did, people would come to question the worth of staying in a cave or cabin up in the mountains in order to meditate. The idea of solitary practice is not to isolate ourselves or to run away from the hassles of life, but to awaken ourselves to our true nature, so that we can serve others better, with greater wisdom, skilful means and understanding, just as Buddha Shakyamuni and other enlightened beings have done in the past. In retreat, we stabilize or improve our realization of emptiness. Buddhas are constantly engaged in this activity.

Of course, some people abuse the opportunity of such a retreat, by trying to run away from life. This is not the purpose of going on retreat. Individuals who, before an election, promise to help the poor and to build hospitals and schools, only to provide nothing after the election is won, are also being totally selfish. There is room for being engaged both in activity and with the mind for the purpose of serving beings in a much greater way. One way is not better than the other.

The point here is that life becomes more meaningful. It is not just a question of, "Okay, I come into this world like a chicken from an egg, and then I die and get barbecued". If we look at life in this way, then it's purpose is nothing more than to follow a routine of going to school, getting married and having children, and then retirement, just like in a movie or a sit-com. There is not going to be much deep meaning in such a life.

We ourselves can make everything we do meaningful, but in order for us to reach out to the world and serve beings, our bodhichitta must grow and increase in strength to the point where a clearer sense of the meaning of life becomes naturally present in our mind.

For instance, if you see that an insect has fallen into a puddle, it is no big deal for you to rescue it and bring it to dry land, but it is a very big deal for the insect. The continuation of this insect's life depends on one or two moments of your time and effort. Every action we undertake is the same in this regard: the amount of benefit a particular action brings is not intrinsic to the action; it depends on the perception of the one who receives the benefit. In the example we are using here, the insect received tremendous benefit, and will probably be indebted to you for the rest of its life, whether that's another couple of hours, another day, or another week. We have so many opportunities to perform this kind of action.

Usually people prefer to benefit others in a big and glamorous way, but Hollywood-style activity does not really reflect the true nature of bodhichitta. What hits the mark are small acts, such as lifting an insect out of a puddle. There is no need for recognition, or for the confirmation of who we are; there is no need to measure our worth by the hour or the month. The main point is that something really changes for the being who receives help.

Understanding, intelligence and wisdom may grow within us, but it is also important to communicate these things to others. We could also undermine our activity by thinking that our actions are small and insignificant. In reality, for the being who receives assistance, one small act is of incredible significance.

We might think that as we are not famous teachers, or even that popular, we don't often find ourselves presented with the opportunity to help another being. Who are we going to help? There is some truth in this. Someone who is popular, famous and gets a lot of public attention will have a greater number of possibilities for benefiting others; but on the other hand, until their mind is pure, it is difficult for them to help anyone. We have to purify our mind first.

Cleaning Up Attitudes

Think about just how many people there are in your life. Begin with family members, but also consider people from every part of your life -- anyone with whom you have some kind of relationship or who occasionally pops up in your mind. There are so many, and we have developed a particular attitude and view towards each and every one.

Sometimes our attitudes are not so strong, but if we look closely, for the most part, there is a lot for us to clean up for the sake of our own peace and well-being. We might have a particular attitude towards somebody with a big nose, or a small nose; which is such a trivial thing. It is none of our business at all, but nevertheless we take on a particular attitude towards someone, and consider that he or she is like this or that. Our impression stays in our mind, and we develop all sorts of likes, dislikes, aversions and attractions.

We can clean these attitudes up by generating loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity towards all beings, regardless of the nature of our personal relationship with them. It is true that there has to be some room for the type of relationship we have with each individual to vary. However, we can also develop a fundamentally positive view towards everyone, and a positive feeling for the people who appear in our mind every day. And we could also adopt a more positive attitude towards ourselves—there is a lot for us to clean up in this respect too.

When you become clean, peaceful, and at ease, it is possible to make genuine contact with other people, and to be present with whomever you meet. This connection gives us a chance to be of benefit; there is actually something that we can do for other people.

If we fail to clean up our attitudes, then we can become quite ambitious about what we might do to help others, but the neuroses that remain in our mind will prevent our success. We are so full of opinions about all kinds of things and none of them are of any importance.

If we perceive some kind of threat, or there appears to be some reason for us to be concerned, then we might well assume a defensive attitude. But most of the time, there is no threat at all. How can the fact that somebody looks different threaten us? No physical feature, verbal expression or mental disposition can ever threaten us, but we take such things personally and make them our business, when they are not. There are a lot of things for us to do before we finally succeed in cleaning up our mind.

When our mind is clean, if we are in the presence of a great being or sage, we can feel the purity of their heart and mind. Perhaps their quality is not something that we can verbalize, or observe with our eyes, but their presence shines through, and we can feel it. Beginning to practice can sometimes accentuate our neuroses, and all the other things that go on inside ourselves. But over time, as we settle, we will reach a point where this no longer happens.

3.1 THE BODHICHITTA OF ASPIRATION

What is the bodhichitta of aspiration? It is the wish that all sentient beings might be enlightened, and the wish that all the benefits of our practice might contribute to the enlightenment of all sentient beings. Our motivation is to free all sentient beings from their obscurations, karma, suffering, illusion, and the causes of their condition. The bodhichitta of aspiration is the wish to attain enlightenment for the sake of the enlightenment of all sentient beings.

The bodhichitta of aspiration has two aspects: the wisdom aspect, which is the wish to attain enlightenment, and the aspect of compassion, which is the aspiration to benefit all sentient beings. The focus of wisdom is on enlightenment and all its magnificent qualities. The focus of compassion is on sentient beings and their suffering.

The bodhichitta of aspiration must possess both of these components—wisdom supported by loving kindness, and the aspiration to attain enlightenment and compassion supported by the wisdom that focuses on sentient beings. Wisdom allows us to see how we can limit the illusion and suffering of all beings. If we have no wisdom, then it would be impractical to wish to benefit sentient beings. The bodhichitta of aspiration needs both wisdom and compassion; without both, it is incomplete.

Three Types of Courage

There are three degrees of courage in the bodhichitta of aspiration: the aspiration f a king; the aspiration of a boatman; and the aspiration of a shepherd. To foster the well-being of his subjects, a king creates a well-supported and secure position for himself, and then brings benefit to all other sentient beings. The boatman aspires to cross the river along with the other people in his boat, whilst a shepherd first ensures that all his animals are in a safe and secure place, and only then looks after himself. Each of these three types of courage possesses the two aspects of wisdom and compassion.

The Three Stages of Practice

The practice advice for the bodhichitta of aspiration is described in three stages. The first stage is to see ourselves as no different from others. Secondly, as we contemplate and practice the bodhichitta of aspiration, we gradually come to see ourselves and others as equal. The third and final stage is to see others as much more important than ourselves, and that they should be cherished and protected by our love, kindness and compassion. This is how we travel along the bodhisattva path. These three stages of practice are a very skilful means of destroying strong habitual patterns and our stubborn tendency to cling to our egos.

The basis for arousing the bodhichitta of aspiration is the contemplation and practice of the four immeasurables: loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity.

3.1.1 THE FOUR IMMEASURABLES[14]

Loving Kindness

Loving kindness focuses on the wish that all sentient beings might obtain happiness and the causes of happiness.

14 See Patrul Rinpoche, The Words of My Perfect Teacher, Extraordinary Preliminaries, Chapter 2, Arousing Bodhichitta: Training the Mind in the Four Boundless Qualities.

Compassion

Compassion means, instead of focusing the wish to be free from suffering and the causes of suffering on ourselves, wishing that all sentient beings might enjoy this freedom. To take all sentient beings as the object of our aspiration and practice is a true expression of buddha nature, which manifests to free us from obscuration and the effects of our delusion.

Although it is intelligent to wish that we ourselves could be free from suffering, by making ourselves the focus of our practice, we perpetuate our belief in the existence of the ego, which is the cause of suffering and samsara. By focusing on all sentient beings, we can completely free our intelligence from the distortions ofmarigpa, or ignorance.

Sympathetic Joy

Sympathetic joy is the wish for all beings to remain happy and to possess the causes of happiness, and thereby stay free from suffering and its causes. Joy arises from loving kindness and compassion, and supports their continuation. We do not wish that sentient beings might enjoy happiness for one or two days, or for several months or years: we wish them everlasting happiness.

Equanimity

Equanimity ensures that our other wishes for the benefit of all sentient beings are applied without any bias or limitation, without anybody being left out, and that our aspirations remain untainted by any reference to the ego. We include everybody who has buddha nature and whoever aspires to the two wishes. [15]

What would be the greatest cause of happiness for sentient beings? Enlightenment. What would be the kindest and most compassionate thought or emotion we could have towards sentient beings? What causes them to become free from suffering and the causes of suffering? What would allow sentient beings to attain permanent happiness, and the causes of happiness, as well as freedom from suffering and the causes of suffering? What is the most immeasurable joy? Again, the answer to all these questions is enlightenment.

Equanimity Is the First Step[16]

What is the most enlightened attitude of mind? The first step is no longer being motivated by the ego, to the extent that we can find absolutely no reference to the ego

15 The wish to be happy, and the wish to not suffer.

16 Note that there are two traditions. In Patrul Rinpoche's Words of My Perfect Teacher it is emphasized to start with equanimity. In the tradition of the four Brahma-Viharas that is also taught within Rigpa, one starts with the practice of loving kindness because the practice of equanimity is already included within the progression of loving kindness.

in our thoughts of kindness, compassion and joy. Equanimity is the first step towards attaining enlightenment.

Every component of the path is a step towards enlightened mind. But if our attitude becomes partial, or if the first three thoughts become tainted by ego and self-reference, they will no longer be a step towards enlightened mind. For this reason, we begin with the practice of equanimity.

The Result

The result of contemplating and practicing the four immeasurables is giving irth to the bodhichitta of aspiration. The four immeasurables are like the earth from which the bodhichitta of aspiration arises, like an udumbara lotus, the rarest of all flowers. It is said that the udumbara lotus only appears in the presence of a Buddha.

3.1.2. TONGLEN

Genuine tonglen practice penetrates and transforms our self-clinging. As protecting and cherishing the self is the cause of our suffering, by taking on the suffering of others with compassion, we are able to let go of self-clinging; by generating bodhichitta, we are freed from the whole cycle of habitual patterns.

The Buddha's teaching on tonglen is quite magnificent, and exceptionally skilful. As we begin the practice, yet more suffering is added to the suffering that we are already experiencing. Our grasping is then reduced through renunciation and compassion. We may still have our habitual patterns, but their power is somewhat mollified by the radical change in the way we relate, psychologically and emotionally, to our pain. Tonglen really is the most sacred of the Mahayana teachings.

In the *Bodhicharyavatara* Shantideva says that when we are caught up in fflicting emotions or tremendous pain, we must practice tonglen. The point is to become free, to dissolve our struggle and pain.

Working conceptually with our mental activities is a seemingly endless process, so we must get to the root of it. As we penetrate to the root of our suffering, whatever has arisen from that root cause will also be remedied simultaneously. Of all the practices that are available to us, tonglen is the one which most effectively penetrates to the root of our suffering, and which works with it in the most precise way. If people practice tonglen, they will benefit immensely.

Whoever teaches people tonglen will also be benefited. I may not have any great realization, but I myself have benefited tremendously from the practice of tonglen. I have been deeply touched by the blessing of tonglen practice, particularly when I was suffering as a result of clinging to myself.

I assume everybody here has taken the refuge and bodhisattva vows, so it is not inappropriate to explain the teachings on tonglen. We should also understand that any

bodhichitta practice that we undertake is related to the practice of refuge. Refuge is connected to a true sense of renunciation, which in turn comes from the realization of dukkha and its causes. We are led to this realization through the practice of meditation.

Tonglen is a secret method because it is so outrageous. If we suffer greatly as a result of clinging to the self, we can feel overwhelmed. The natural reaction would be to try to free ourselves from the suffering we are already experiencing, not to take on more suffering, so tonglen is an outrageous idea. It might seem almost masochistic, but in reality it is not that way at all.

We tend to expect that practicing tonglen will cause us to experience even more suffering than we do normally, because we are deliberately taking on more suffering. But, through the power and blessing of compassion and bodhichitta, tonglen practice actually results in our being relieved of our suffering.

Meeting Suffering with Compassion

Usually our tendency to grasp at the self is not obvious; it is rather subtle. Tonglen practice brings that which we are not conscious of to the light, so that we feel our grasping much more strongly. All our paranoia and ways of protecting ourselves from paranoia also surface, and can be seen clearly.

When we feel genuine compassion, we do not experience suffering. When we completely let go of our self-clinging, in the manner of the bodhisattvas, we feel no pain. We actually feel quite relieved and free from suffering. Tonglen is like a medicine that eradicates our suffering.

Which is ultimately more important, reality or our expectations and projections? Through the blessings of compassion, the practice of tonglen not only penetrates the subconscious to bring self-clinging to the surface, it also dissolves that clinging. It is like a sudden breath of fresh air which enables us to relax and enjoy the blessings of compassion. We also feel a tremendous courage when we practice tonglen properly. We feel wholesome, good, and empowered by wisdom.

Offering Bodhi Mind

When people focus on their own pain, they think that they have nothing good to offer, but this is not the case. No matter how deluded we are, no matter how much pain and suffering we experience, when we practice tonglen in the way that the great bodhisattvas of the past practiced it, we have 'bodhi mind'.

Perhaps we are not yet enlightened and free from suffering, but the bodhi mind that we offer others is genuine. It is an incredible gift for beings to receive, one which possesses tremendous blessing to touch others and ourselves. Bodhi mind is the greatest gift there is.

There is nothing more precious to offer in the entire universe than bodhi mind: we

offer all sentient beings the compassion and wisdom of the bodhi mind, the 'good heart' that is cultivated through tonglen practice.

If somebody offers us a large gift, but does so with a bad attitude, motivation and heart, then it is not going to do us much good to accept it, even if the gift is of great value. But if somebody gives with a pure heart, with pure motivation, with the sincerity of a great, kind and compassionate mind, then the gift touches us deeply, more than any conventional gift could ever touch us.

The sentient beings for whom we are practicing tonglen will also benefit from our practice, but at this stage we are the ones who will benefit most. We never knew that we had such courage: it must have been inside us already, otherwise we would not experience it, but we finally realize exactly how much courage we have. A compassion that we had not previously experienced lies within us too, but now it is possible for us to experience it.

We also have a wisdom inside us that we have never known before, but now we can experience it. These qualities of our buddha nature are the gifts that we discover through tonglen practice. Tonglen is the most incredible practice of all.

Tonglen also purifies us of negative emotions. We all suffer from anger, attachment, jealousy or arrogance; but if we practice tonglen genuinely, our suffering will be reduced, day by day, and we will find peace.

We see the effect of tonglen when we practice it. This is what is called the 'path', and the results that the path produces is known as the 'fruit'. Maybe we will not immediately attain enlightenment, but we will definitely begin to glimpse the possibility of becoming free, and over time, enlightened. We see how we could become a true realized being, free from all suffering and all causes of suffering.

The Practice of Tonglen

How then do we practice tonglen? First, rather than immediately thinking of he suffering of all beings, think about the suffering of one particular being, to whom you have a close connection. If you do not have a close connection to someone who is suffering, think of someone with whom you do have a close connection: your mother, father, spouse, or child, or a good friend.

Really put yourself in the shoes of that person and feel their suffering. You cannot merely imagine what it would be like to be in their shoes; you have to think that you are in their shoes. If you only imagine what it would be like to be in their shoes, this creates a separation in the heart which 'protects' you, and does not allow you to go deeper into the experience of compassion.

But when you truly enter someone else's suffering, and experience all that is happening and all that has been experienced, you are bound to feel that person's suffering to a far greater degree than you do normally. Therefore, you experience much more compassion.

The Process of Taking and Receiving

Generating compassion makes us want to eliminate suffering, regardless of whether it is our own or other people's suffering. We are ready to do anything in order to get rid of suffering. When this feeling becomes very strong, we take the other person's suffering into ourselves, in the form of a black cloud. Once we have taken it in, the suffering does not remain as a solid mass.

We then offer our bodhichitta—our love, kindness, compassion, good heart and the merit that comes with these qualities— in the form of a white cloud to the person who is suffering so much. As the cloud touches him or her, he or she is freed. This has a very powerful effect on anyone who needs it.

Take in suffering and send out bodhichitta with your breath as often as possible. When you have established this practice, deepen your compassion. If you cannot do this practice, recognize which obstacles prevent you, and try to remove them.

We can develop compassion for those with whom we do not feel any close connection by reflecting on the fact that all sentient beings are equal in their desire to be happy and free from suffering. There is no difference at all in this respect between ourselves and others. From this ground of equality, we can see how important it is for everybody to be free from suffering.

For example, imagine a lobster or a crab being boiled in hot water just in front of you. Put yourself in their place and try to experience the suffering that they go through; try to let the experience penetrate your heart and feel compassion, and then try to practice tonglen with that suffering.

Another example would be to experience the pain and fate of animals being taken in chains to the slaughter-house, by putting yourself in their place. Let the pain and suffering penetrate you, and then practice tonglen. Do not think that you are only imagining them: because of the karma that we have created through supporting their slaughter by eating meat, we might well be born in their place in our next life.

Take the practice of tonglen really seriously. If it becomes overwhelming and difficult to do, don't make excuses for yourself or operate a 'cover up'; do not give in to the desire to protect the self, or justify your difficulty in some way. If this happens to animals, it could happen to us too. This is the only way in which we can really come to understand the suffering of these animals.

Overcoming Self-Cherishing

Instead of remaining blind to the suffering of others, be more courageous and include them in your practice. Giving in to our own petty logic and rationalizations will only perpetuate our desire to protect ourselves. Even if we justify our actions to the whole of mankind, the karma that we create will remain unaltered; nothing is going to change. And what is the point of our petty logic and rationalizations, anyway?

Engaging with tonglen practice is all about deciding to change. Nobody is forcing you to change: you want to change as a result of your own insight. So what is the point of arguing, or of trying to perpetuate the patterns that have brought you so much suffering and pain over the course of countless lifetimes?

Potential Misunderstandings

We should be aware that it is possible to misuse tonglen practice. Although we might experience some relief, benefit, freedom or peace, or feel soothed, if we practice tonglen in order to experience these things, we do so as a result of clinging to the self. This kind of motivation will not work with tonglen. Only genuine tonglen practice can penetrate our self-clinging.

Some people think that they will become sick or suffer more as a result of practicing tonglen. But this will not happen if we practice tonglen correctly, and genuinely wish to let go of our self-grasping. In fact, it will have completely the opposite effect. But if we continue to cling to the self and 'force' the tonglen practice, then our mind can become twisted to the point of developing paranoia.

It is going to take a rather long time to reach the point at which we can really take on the suffering of others. Once, a great master was teaching. A dog was sitting close by, and somebody threw a stone at it. The master immediately fell off his throne. Some people thought that he was being really pretentious: since it was the dog who had been hit and not the master, why should the master fall off his throne? So he showed them the bruise that had formed on him in exactly the same spot that the stone had injured the dog.

We must practice tonglen for a long time, and with the realization of emptiness, before we can genuinely take on the karma of others. Although we are not yet there, I do not think that we should be too concerned; and when we get there, we will not be so concerned either.

3.2 ENGAGEMENT BODHICHITTA: THE SIX PARAMITAS

The practices of engagement bodhichitta are the six paramitas (Skt.; Tib. *paroltu chinpa*): transcendental generosity; discipline; patience; diligence; meditation; and wisdom. Each of the six paramitas has three aspects.

1 GENEROSITY (Skt. *dana*, Tib. *jinpa*)

The three aspects of generosity are ordinary generosity, giving Dharma, and giving life.

Ordinary Generosity

Ordinary generosity is divided into three categories. The first is helping beings who are in need or in poverty.

The second is giving extraordinary things, such as something that is very valuable or dear to you. Examples of extraordinary giving can be found in the lives of the bodhisattvas and of the Buddha, who gave up his own wife, son, daughters and wealth.

The third category is extreme extraordinary generosity, that of giving up a part of our own body. Nagarjuna once gave his head to a prince who asked for it, and in one of his previous lifetimes Buddha gave his body to a tiger and her cubs.

There is a progression to the practice of the three aspects of generosity. It has never been said that we are expected to practice all three from the first moment of entering into engagement bodhichitta. Our practice has to develop slowly and progressively, as our inner strength and realization of the nature of all phenomena as illusory develops.

A bodhisattva can only practice extreme extraordinary generosity if he or she has attained the first bhumi, which means he or she has already attained the realization of emptiness, sees all phenomena as illusory, and has completed the path of seeing. When this is the case, it is not so difficult for someone to give parts of their body away.

The Generosity of Giving Dharma

'Giving Dharma' means teaching people. This helps others to become more aware of their mind, their obscurations, and their potential, as well as the path through which they can discover that potential and slowly be led towards enlightenment. Generosity of Dharma is giving teachings in order to eliminate the ignorance of beings, which is the source of all suffering experienced in samsara.

The Generosity of Giving Life

The third kind of generosity is giving life to those whose lives are endangered. Giving life means removing the threat to somebody's life by liberating him or her from a

dangerous situation. This generosity can be applied to both humans and animals, but it is usually much more possible for us to practice this with animals, as there are so many whose lives are in danger. We can give them life through loving kindness and by using our resources. Freeing an animal or human from the fear of losing their life is considered one of the most precious and meritorious acts of generosity that we could ever engage in.

2 DISCIPLINE (Skt. *shila*, Tib. *tsultrim*)

Shila is the practice of discipline. The word 'discipline' has many different onnotations, so it is important to understand what is meant. A more literal translation would be 'appropriate action'. Again, shila has three aspects: abandoning the ten negative actions, engaging in positive actions and benefiting beings in all possible ways.

Abandoning the Ten Negative Actions

Body

There are three negative actions performed by the body: killing, sexual misconduct, which includes adultery, and stealing. It might seem that we don't engage much in the three negative actions of the body, especially the first and last. But if we look closely, we will find that we do. For instance, anyone who profits through deceit is stealing.

Speech

The four negative actions of the speech are lying, creating misunderstanding between people, using harsh words, and engaging in pointless gossip. It is very helpful to remember the ways in which this applies to us all.

Mind

The three negative activities of mind are covetousness, the wish to harm others, and wrong views. Wrong views are something that we must all be especially careful to avoid.

Anybody who seriously wishes to purify their karma needs to pay meticulous attention to avoiding the ten negative activities of body, speech and mind. If we disengage from these actions, we cease the accumulation of karma that they create. Withdrawing from negative activity is the first aspect of shila.

Engaging in Positive Actions of Body, Speech and Mind

The second kind of appropriate action is engaging in the opposite of the ten egative activities, which increases the possibility of accumulating positive karma through the actions of our body, speech and mind. We should consider no act of body, speech or mind

as being too small or inconsequential to accumulate merit. Never even talk or think like this: engage joyfully in the smallest act of merit that is within your power to perform.

Benefiting Beings in All Possible Ways

The third aspect is benefiting beings in any way you can, through ceasing to indulge in negative activity, and by engaging in meritorious works. Our every action should spring from the meritorious intention of benefiting and helping beings, or of honoring, prostrating and making offerings to the three jewels and objects of reverence. If an action does not fit into either of these two categories, it cannot be an act of merit.

On the bodhisattva path, sentient beings, the three jewels, and any object of reverence in whom we take refuge, are recognized as being equally precious and of equal value. In particular, benefiting beings by creating the possibility for them to discover the Dharma and study and practice a path of enlightenment is tremendously meritorious work. So all the work that you do in your centers to create an environment in which others can study the Dharma falls within this category.

3 PATIENCE (Skt. *kshanti*, Tib. *söpa*)

The three kinds of patience are patience when wronged, patience while enduring difficulties, and patience while receiving Dharma teachings.

Patience When Wronged

As clearly explained in the sutras and shastras, we should be patient with all the harm and wrongdoing we receive from others, and not get angry or hold a grudge.

Patience While Enduring Difficulties

The second kind of patience is enduring the difficulties, challenges and obstacles encountered on the journey to enlightenment. Never give up, or feel discouraged or depressed because of the challenges and difficulties you are faced with on the path; be extremely courageous. Endure difficulties; work them through, and overcome them. There is a saying: "Your courage and patience should enable you to cross a field of fire for a single word of the wisdom of Dharma."

Patience While Receiving Dharma Teachings

The third kind of patience is maintaining a brave heart and an open-minded attitude towards Mahayana and Mantrayana teachings, and especially towards teachings on emptiness. Even when we are not able to understand such teachings, 'patience' means not having negative judgments or closing our mind down. Instead we maintain an

open mind and a brave heart. Be ready to examine the teachings further and try to understand and realize their meaning. This is what not being afraid of the profound meaning of the Dharma means.

There were once two Shravaka[17] monks who came to see Atisha when he was in Tibet. When Atisha gave teachings on the egolessness of self, they were very appreciative and listened to the teachings attentively. But when Atisha gave teachings on the egolessness of phenomena, they got very edgy and irritated. They became fearful and begged, "Please don't say such things!", and even covered their ears. Atisha commented that no matter how perfect your discipline may be, lacking courage and openness to the wisdom aspect of the Dharma is a tremendous obstacle on the path to enlightenment.

4 DILIGENCE (Skt. virya, Tib. tsöndru)

Diligent Action

The first kind of diligence is similar to the second and third kinds of patience, which are concerned with meeting and overcoming difficulties and challenges on the path to enlightenment. Here the emphasis is more on action, while patience emphasizes the emotional and mental aspects.

Diligent Study and Practice

The second kind of diligence is to engage with the path and practice of a bodhisattva night and day. It is said that we should study and practice the Dharma 'as if our hair were on fire', or as if we had no time to waste, because we don't.

Diligent Striving for Complete Understanding

The last kind of diligence is not to feel prematurely content, just because you have done some practice and study, performed some meritorious work, and have gained some understanding, realization and stability. The feeling that you have done enough is premature until you attain enlightenment. You should always strive to travel further along the path of the bodhisattva, to perfect the paramitas and attain a complete understanding and realization of the bodhisattva path and the bhumis.

5 MEDITATION (Skt. *dhyana*, Tib. *samten*)

Samadhi

Samadhi is usually translated as 'meditation' or 'concentration'. But this is not a perfect translation, as 'meditation' is also used to translate the Tibetan term shyiné (Skt. *shamatha*).

17 Skt; Tib. *nyentö*; lit. 'hearer'. A follower of one of the philosophical streams within the Hinayana teachings.

Meditation That is Free From Meditative Experience

The second aspect of samten is the critical intelligence with which we can differentiate experience. What this means is that our meditative state of mind is free from grasping onto any of the three kinds of meditative experience: joy[18], clarity and absence of thought. These three experiences are all part of mind, and all empty.

Meditation Free of Grasping onto Emptiness

Even though the nature of mind is empty, we can still cling subtly to a concept of emptiness. So the final aspect of meditation is the 'samadhi of the tathagatas', the enlightened ones, and is free from all grasping onto the three experiences, and onto emptiness itself. This samten is Dzogchen, and we should try to progress towards this realization.

6 WISDOM (Skt. *prajña*, Tib. *sherab*)

Prajña has three aspects: hearing, contemplation, and meditative experience.

The Wisdom of Listening and Hearing

When you first hear something, and it makes sense in your mind, that is prajña.

The Wisdom of Reflection and Contemplation

The wisdom of contemplation is reflecting on what you have heard or read and gaining a deeper understanding.

The Wisdom of Meditation and Application

Meditative prajña is the wisdom that arises from meditation. We arrive at a genuine realization that is free of concepts and fabrications. This is not a glimpse of the truth produced through the projection of meaning by the conceptual mind, but a direct experience of the actual truth. Here, instead of the teachings and the meaning of the teachings remaining separate from our mind, our experience and the teaching have become one. It could be called 'yogic direct perception', the absolute, direct perception that is the result of meditation.

Only through wisdom do the other paramita practices become truly 'paramita' practices. Paramita means 'that which has transcended the ordinary act'. The realization of emptiness transcends emotions, and the dualistic act of 'being generous'. This transcendental act creates far more merit for the attainment of enlightenment than an ordinary positive act, because it is based on the awakened state of mind, rather than

18 Tib. *dewa*; also sometimes translated as 'bliss' or 'well-being'.

on ignorance. For an act of generosity, discipline, patience, diligence or meditation to become truly a paramita, it must be imbued with the paramita of wisdom.

What is the difference betweeen ordinary generosity and the paramita of generosity? The word 'paramita' describes the realization that neither the nature of the recipient of generosity, the one practicing generosity, nor the object being given are solid or real, but all are shunyata. Three elements[19] appear in the act of generosity, but in reality there is only shunyata. There is no dualistic notion, and no clinging or grasping onto dualistic thought. Without this view, the action would be one of ordinary generosity.

So, just as someone who is able to see can lead many blind people to their destination, prajña paramita leads the other paramitas to enlightenment. Through praj ña paramita, the other five paramitas become part of the path to enlightenment. Without prajña paramita, generosity, discipline, patience, diligence and meditation all remain relative and ordinary meritorious acts, neither prajña nor paramita.

How do the paramitas contribute towards our enlightenment? The more merit we accumulate, the lighter our obscurations to complete awakening become. Since in essence a paramita is a non-dual act that is viewed and understood non-dualistically, it is much closer to the enlightened action of a buddha than to an ordinary action.

Therefore, bodhisattva activity should be carried out with the wisdom that transcends the view of duality; and that is what makes these actions 'transcendent' and part of the path to enlightenment. So wisdom accumulates merit, and merit counters obscuration. As our obscurations become lighter, wisdom shines through with increasing strength.

Each of the paramitas contain all six paramitas, so there are thirty-six aspects to the paramitas in all. The paramitas are an antidote to emotional and cognitive obscuration and are practices on the first four Mahayana paths of accumulation, engagement, seeing and meditation.[20] When a bodhisattva arrives at the path of 'no more learning', then he or she has attained enlightenment.

4. ABSOLUTE PRACTICE

The relative way of working with self-grasping is to apply an antidote. For example, if we are impatient or angry, then we apply patience as the antidote to our neurosis.

Tonglen is the essence of all the paramitas, and can really penetrate our selfishness and help us to let go of it, but it is still a relative practice. Relative practice can sometimes be very helpful, because it is much more 'concrete'.

19 Subject, object and action; sometimes called 'the three wheels'

20 The chapter on the three turnings of the wheel of Dharma contains a more detailed explanation of the five paths.

In terms of absolute practice, it is said in the *Seven Points of Mind Training* that shunyata is the supreme way of protecting ourselves from harm. We apply shunyata to our ego and its habits, since they are what bring us so much harm and suffering.

As a great Kadampa teacher said, "When the ego is active and vigilant, I myself become active and vigilant. When ego is peaceful and somewhat calm, then I myself stay calm and peaceful". 'I myself' here refers to the wisdom mind, the person who is deciding to practice.

So how can we apply absolute practice to self-grasping? The Madhyamika teachings on the egolessness of self are analytical. They try to find out the location of the ego, which we hold onto as singular, permanent and intrinsic. The physical aspects of our existence are gone through, one by one, as are those of speech and mental activity. Then, when we have failed to find anything that we can call the ego, we simply rest in that 'not finding'. It requires a lot of prajña to analyze the skandhas in this way.

But there is another, pithier way of doing this. When your grasping tendency arises, look directly at the grasping itself, rather than trying to identify an object of grasping. Try to see whether the grasping truly, intrinsically exists or not. Do not use analytical meditation, just try to see the grasping very clearly; penetrate it with your awareness.

When we are driving on a hot summer's day, we can see what appears to be a puddle of water on the road. In the first few moments, we are uncertain as to whether there is water on the road or not. But then, when we get closer and look, it becomes clear that the puddle was only a mirage. In reality, there is no water.

Seeing our grasping clearly is just like this. When we realize the still, calm mind of shamatha, we penetrate grasping itself with our awareness, and begin to see the nature of grasping, which is, of course, shunyata.

This is a very distinct experience, but not in the sense that it can be grasped at, in the way that we grasp onto the ego, clinging to it as solid, intrinsic, singular and permanent. It is not possible to grasp shunyata.

When shunyata becomes clear to you, just rest in it for as long you are able. This is the absolute practice of working with ego-grasping, or 'placement meditation'. It is brief, pithy, to the point and not so analytical. Of course, each person will have their own experiences. This is a practice I suggest you do over and over again. Once again, the whole starting point for placement meditation is shamatha practice.

If shunyata becomes clear to you, then at that moment there is no need to explain anything. If it does not become clear, then just keep following the instructions. Don't conceptualize shunyata, because that is not going to get you anywhere.

CHAPTER THREE

BUDDHA, DHARMA AND SANGHA

1. BUDDHA

Buddha as the True Guide

In the sutras, Buddha said that we should consider ourselves to be ill, that the Buddha is our physician, and that the teachings are our medicine. We should relate to the Buddha as a sick person does to a physician. Just as we follow the diet and take the medicine that our physician recommends, we should follow the Buddha's instructions and apply the teachings to ourselves. By taking the medicine, we will derive both immediate and long-term benefit.

The illness we are confronted with is our own ignorance, negative afflicting emotions, distorted perceptions, and suffering. Since the Buddha is free of all these sicknesses, he is a truly reliable guide.

As it says in the sutras, how can someone who is in the same difficulty as ourselves save us from drowning in quicksand? Similarly, those who are not themselves free from the cycle of existence cannot free us from the cycle of existence. Therefore Buddha is the true guide, and the teachings are the true medicine.

Buddha's Enlightenment

The Hinayana View

According to the Hinayana perspective, Buddha Shakyamuni became enlightened at Bodhgaya by conquering his emotional and cognitive obscurations. The Tibetan word for the enlightened one is *sangyé* (Tib.). *Sang* means the purification of negative emotions (Tib. *nyöndrip*) and cognitive obscurations (Tib. *shédrip*). *Gyé* means the awakening of a state replete with all the excellent qualities of enlightenment. The awakened state of Buddha is free from obscuration and possesses the excellent qualities of knowledge (Skt. *prajña;* Tib. *sherab*), loving kindness, compassion and wisdom (Skt. *jñana;* Tib. *yeshé*).

The Hinayana view sees Buddha Shakyamuni as an ordinary being. Of course it is acknowledged that this ordinary being was extraordinary, but from this perspective, he possessed ordinary skandhas.

The Mahayana View

According to the Mahayana, Buddha Shakyamuni was enlightened in *Akanishtha* (Skt.; Tib. *Omin*), the highest celestial realm—a Buddha-field which is not usually visible to ordinary human perception.

Out of compassion, for the benefit of others, he took rebirth in the human realm and 'pretended' to go through the entire process of the 'twelve acts',[1] including the act of enlightenment under the Bodhi tree. Since Buddha was already completely enlightened he was free of all the experiences of the cycle of existence because he was not tied to ordinary skandhas. He just manifested ordinary skandhas so as to be perceptible to ordinary beings, and to provide an example of the path to enlightenment.

Buddha was enlightened through the bodhisattva path, which he followed from beginning to end. He said that for him the beginning of the path of bodhichitta was in the hell realms. He was pulling a heavy cart with another person and both of them were being horribly tortured. Buddha thought, "Why don't I take all this karma on myself, why not let myself be the object of torture and free this other person?" He asked the yamas[2] who were torturing him to be allowed to do this. But they said, "Everyone has individual karma! You can't free anyone from their individual karma", and hit him on the head with a metal hammer. Buddha died, but because of the positive karma his wish had caused, he was immediately freed from that hell realm.

He attained enlightenment in Akanishtha; later on he was in Tushita, the Buddha-field where the future Buddha Maitreya dwells now. When the time was ripe, and the people were mature enough for Buddha to take birth in this world, he was conceived in his mother's womb.

Buddhas' Appearance in the World

If the buddhas have exhausted all the causes and conditions of samsara and samsaric appearances and completely realized the absolute truth of shunyata (Skt.; Tib. *tongpa nyi*), how and why do they appear in this world?

This comes about through two aspirations; the aspiration of sentient beings to make a connection to the buddhas and to wake up from their dreamlike ignorant state of mind, and the buddhas' aspirations to benefit beings and wake them up from their dreamlike illusion. When the aspirations of sentient beings and of buddhas meet, buddhas appear in the world.

Their appearance is traditionally likened to the moon in the sky, which is reflected clearly and simultaneously in the many different ponds and lakes below. But this

1 The twelve deeds are: Dwelling in Tushita, descent and entry into the womb, taking birth, proficiency in the arts, enjoyment of consorts, renouncing the world, practicing asceticism, reaching the point of enlightenment, vanquishing Mara's host, attaining perfect enlightenment, turning the doctrinal wheel and passing into the final nirvana. See Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism,* Vol. II, p. 169 .
2 Demonic forces in the hell realm.

does not imply that the buddha himself 'descended' from space, that there is one buddha 'down here' and another buddha 'up there', nor that there are many buddhas everywhere.

A Thousand Buddhas

In this particular cycle of kalpas (aeons), a thousand buddhas will appear. According to the traditional description, all that we see was once a vacuum, or space. Then wind and a huge rainstorm arose, which created the earth element. The rain continued, and one thousand lotuses blossomed. The gods and goddesses of the celestial realms saw this event and wondered what it signified. The older, wiser gods could see into the future through the power of their meditation, and said that this was a sign that in this kalpa there would be one thousand buddhas. Therefore it came to be known as *kalpa zangpo*, the 'excellent kalpa'.

So far in this kalpa, we have had four buddhas. In each of the eras of these four buddhas, many other buddhas have appeared and benefited beings. But there is only one supreme buddha in any one era, which ensures that all the teachings of a particular era are in accord with the word of that one Buddha. The supreme buddha of this era is Buddha Shakyamuni, yet there are many other buddhas who have come into this world and benefited beings. For example, Manjushri, Avalokiteshvara and Vajrapani are all buddhas, but they appear in this age in the form of bodhisattvas. Guru Rinpoche is also an emanation of Buddha.

These supreme buddhas all go through the twelve acts of a buddha, attain enlightenment and teach the Dharma. In the case of Buddha Shakyamuni, he was born as a prince, but Buddha will not necessarily be born as a prince in every era.

Two Wisdoms

It is important to know that Buddha has the two kinds of *jñana*:[3] the jñana which sees the nature of things as they are, and the jñana which sees the multiplicity of all phenomena.

That which Buddha sees from his enlightened point of view or experience is called rang nang in Tibetan. The perception of other beings is called *shyen nang*. Since time itself is shunyata, rang nang and shyen nang can both appear at the same time. The jñana of seeing all things includes both the enlightened perception of all things, rang nang, and sentient beings' perception of things, shyen nang. If this was not the case, the buddhas would not be able to teach.

3 Skt.; Tib. *sherab*; wisdom. Sometimes translated as 'experiential understanding' to distinguish it from yeshe.

How Buddhas Teach

One image that may help us to understand how the buddhas teach is to imagine two people in a room: one person is awake and the other is asleep, and having a nightmare. The one who is awake—the Buddha—can see that the other person is having a nightmare. This is not only understood by inference, but also through the direct perception of the other person's nightmare.

Even though the person who is awake sees the other person's nightmare directly, the dreamer's experience does not become the reality of the person who is awake. So the one who is awake can slowly wake the dreamer from the dream. Over time, he can bring the dreamer out of their dream and into reality, which is the non-existence of all nightmares. This is how buddhas teach sentient beings.

When you wake up during a dream, the dream may continue, but your whole relationship to the dream has changed. That is how it is on the path of the bodhisattvas, especially during post-meditation. When you completely wake up from the dream, that is buddhahood. You wake up to a whole other experience of reality and appearance; it is not the case that all appearances simply vanish at this point.

The Three Kaya Nature of the Buddhas

The nature of reality is called dharmakaya (Skt.; Tib. chö ku), and appearances are rupakaya (Skt.; Tib. zuk ku).[4] A buddha is totally in tune with the dharmakaya, whilst appearing as the rupakaya.

Dharmakaya

In the ultimate state of nirvana, in the dharmakaya, there is no perception, and no appearance. But this does not mean that the dharmakaya is solid and isolated, or a space intrinsically separate from the buddhas' activities or the appearances of buddhahood, which are the two rupakaya appearances of sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya.

Sambhogakaya

Sambhogakaya appearances arise out of the dharmakaya, which is like all-pervasive pace, appearing mainly to bodhisattvas who are on the path to enlightenment. They arise through interdependent origination as a result of the bodhisattvas' karma and openness, and the power of the buddhas manifesting from the dharmakaya. Sambhogakaya appearances are not accessible to ordinary beings.

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4 Samboghakaya (Skt.; Tib. long ku) and nirmanakaya (Skt.; Tib. trul ku) are sometimes considered together as rupakaya, 'the body of form'. The forms of nirmanakaya buddhas can be perceived by all beings. The forms of samboghakaya buddhas can usually only be perceived by highly realized Bodhisattvas.

Sambhogakaya buddhas benefit bodhisattvas who have attained at least the first bhumi (Skt.; Tib. *sa*). These bodhisattvas are able to see and receive teachings from the sambhogakaya buddhas. The way they receive teachings is not the same as the way in which we receive teachings, which is orally. Bodhisattvas can, for example, simply look at a sambhogakaya buddha's body and see their own obscurations and the way in which they can purify them very clearly.

Nirmanakaya

From the Hinayana point of view, Buddha is seen as an ordinary being, and ordinary beings experience the Buddha as a nirmanakaya buddha. From the Mahayana point of view, Buddha Shakyamuni is a nirmanakaya buddha who, as the reflection of the sambhogakaya buddhas, descended as a fully enlightened being from the heaven of Tushita. Nirmanakaya buddhas are like the reflections of the sambhogakaya buddhas, just as the moon in the sky can be reflected in a pond.

Although buddhas appear, their appearance is not that of ordinary, deluded relative truth, which is the product of conceptual mind and defilements. They originate interdependently, but their appearance is pure rather than defiled. Therefore, the innumerable qualities of the buddhas are known in Tibetan as *zakmé kyi chö*, 'undefiled qualities'.

The dharmakaya has the power to give rise to innumerable undefiled qualities. Although the nirmanakaya Buddha Shakyamuni went through all the twelve acts of a buddha, from the descent from Tushita heaven to passing into nirvana, from the Buddha's dharmakaya view, there was never any movement or change.

The purpose behind the buddhas coming to this world is to show the path of enlightenment. Buddha went through, in the most excellent way, all the stages of the path that we need to follow. To show detachment, Buddha left the palace and all its pleasures as if they were spit in the dust. He then went into the forest, which demonstrates the importance of renouncing seemingly pleasurable pursuits that in reality cause only suffering and bondage.

Buddha's Qualifications as a Teacher[5]

Buddha's qualifications as a teacher are self-evident. He possesses both types of jñana, the jñana of seeing nature as-it-is and the jñana of seeing the multiplicity of phenomena, the ten powers,[6] the four states of fearlessness,[6] the eighteen distinguished

5 See Treasury of Precious Qualities, Appendix 5, pp. 297-300.

6 The four fearlessnesses are

1. Fearlessness in the knowledge of all things
2. Fearlessness in the knowledge of the cessation of all corruption
3. Fearlessness to declare definitely that phenomena which obstruct the path do not become anything else
4. Fearlessness that the path of renunciation through which all excellent attributes are to be obtained, has been just so realized.

characteristics of the Buddha's state of mind, the thirty-two major marks (physical signs), and the eighty minor marks of a buddha.[7]

The Eight Qualities of Enloghtenment

As it says in the Uttaratantra Shastra, of all knowable things, the Buddha is supreme. The state of buddhahood, or enlightenment, is completely unsurpassable, free of all stains, and totally reliable.

Enlightened mind has three qualities which benefit the enlightened one himself. It is uncompounded, spontaneously present, and self-aware , which means that the Buddha's mind did not become realized as a result of external conditions.

The three qualities of the buddhas that benefit others are great wisdom or knowledge, great loving kindness, care and compassion, and the great power to benefit.

The quality to benefit oneself and the quality to benefit others, when added to the three qualities that are listed in these two categories, make up what is sometimes called the eight aspects of enlightenment.

See Dudjom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, Vol II., p. 130-
7 See for example Robert Thurman, The Holy Taching of Vimalakirti, pp. 156-7.

2. DHARMA

The Meanings of the Word 'Dharma'

The term 'Dharma' (Skt.; Tib. *chö*) has many different meanings. For example, it can refer to knowledge, path, nirvana, phenomena, the object of one's mental thinking, merit, life, and the future. Here Dharma refers to the noble Dharma (Tib. *dampé chö*), the teachings of the buddhas.

What is the noble Dharma? It is that which the enlightened ones have perceived directly, which is the true nature of reality, and it is that which the buddhas have taught to others as the path. So Dharma is the true path that leads us away from the suffering of samsara and the cycle of existence.

Dharma as the Path

Some teachings function only in one particular area or time, and when that specific time is over, they are no longer useful. But the teachings of the buddhas have served mankind consistently throughout history and will continue to do so. The reason why these teachings remain relevant is that they address our inner mind.

At Lerab Gar in September 2000, His Holiness the Dalai Lama was saying that all the scientific and technological developments that are intended to create a better world contribute to the sense consciousnesses, whilst the only thing that contributes to the inner consciousness is wisdom. If it provides no way of working with the confusions that mask our innate wisdom, then no matter how much science and technology develops, it will not make the world a better place to live in. Of course, science and technology will have some positive effects, but beings will still suffer.

Particularly in the 20th and 21st centuries, people see this more clearly than at any other time in the history of mankind. When you watch TV, all the celebrities and 'soap opera' stars seem to have every material comfort, but they are still depressed; they are in quite bad shape.

So it is really such a great gift to have the Buddhist teachings in our life, such a great opportunity to have the means to work with our minds, and particularly with our ego and the problems associated with the ego. It is wonderful that this wisdom and skilful means have been transmitted without break since the time of the Buddha, some 2,500 years. So many human beings have attained realization through this wisdom and skilful means. Enlightenment is not just a hypothetical possibility; this wisdom and skilful means have been used with great success.

This lineage of skilful means and wisdom is still very much alive, and we have the opportunity to be part of that lineage. We ourselves can actually practice in this lineage and experience the benefit it offers. If it were ever broken, it would be very difficult to recreate such a lineage.

There is a Tibetan proverb which says,
"Dharma is nobody's property; it becomes the wealth of whoever practices it."

It is not the personal property of any particular teacher or of any particular group of people. If the teacher does not practice, it does not belong to the teacher, because Dharma is not an empty ritual. In the same way, it is not any particular group's property, since it is not like Communist doctrine. It belongs to whoever practices it. Any individual who practices the Dharma will be enriched by it. You yourself could be someone who could make best use of the Dharma.

The Dharma as Refuge

All Buddhist teachings have two characteristics. The first is that they must be a remedy, or an antidote to the afflicting emotions from which sentient beings suffer.They should reduce the amount of afflicting emotions that sentient beings experience, and ultimately eliminate their causes. Buddhist teachings must also provide the steps by which sentient beings can progress to higher realms, and ultimately become liberated from the sufferings of samsara and the cycle of existence.

The teachings must provide refuge in both these ways. Anything that is in accord with these two characteristics is counted as a Buddhist teaching. It is also said that outside of the Buddha's teachings, such teachings are not commonly found.

The Dharma of Scripture and Realization

As Vasubandhu said in the *Abhidharmakosha*, the teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni fall into two categories: the Dharma of scriptures (Tib. *lung gi chö*) and the Dharma of realization (Tib. *tokpé chö*).

The scriptural aspect of the Buddhadharma is directly sustained by study which consists of teaching, hearing, composing and debating. This involves both *ché* (Tib.), which means to explain the Dharma, and *nyen* (Tib.), which is to hear the Dharma.

The realization aspect of Dharma includes contemplative meditation and actual realization. This second aspect derives from the first.

By engaging in these activities we preserve the Dharma not only in books, but in the experience of beings. We keep the tradition of scriptural Dharma alive and preserve the Dharma of realization. If we were to lose one of these two aspects of Dharma, it would have a tremendous detrimental effect on the other; the Dharma would be incomplete. Just as it is important for us, it will also be important for future generations to have the possibility of engaging with and becoming wellversed in both the Dharma of scripture and the Dharma of realization.

Teachings and Commentaries

Generally there are two categories of Buddhist scriptures. *Ka* (Tib.) are Buddha's own words, and *tenchö* (Tib.) are the commentaries given by the great panditas (scholars) of India and Tibet.

Ka

The teachings of the Buddha are *ka*. But ka does not necessarily consist of only words that the Buddha spoke. For example, the Heart Sutra is ka, but it was Avalokiteshvara who expounded on the *Heart Sutra,* when answering Shariputra's question. The reason why it is considered to be ka is that Buddha's blessings were conferred on Avalokiteshvara, who became the Buddha's spokesperson. Therefore the *Heart Sutra* is known as *chin gyi labpé ka*, a 'ka arising through blessings'.

There are other occasions on which the Buddha would not speak, but sound ould come from different parts of his body. These teachings are known as *chotrul gyi ka,* 'miraculous ka'.

Buddha himself suggested that when his teachings were compiled, they should always begin, "Thus have I heard..." at the beginning. All teachings that begin "Thus have I heard..." are ka.

The Buddha's words are pure, stainless, and peaceful. They accord with relative and absolute truth, are honest, truthful, and a remedy for all illnesses. They are beyond comparison.

Tenchö

The literal meaning of the Tibetan word *tenchö* (Skt. *shastra*) is "showing and transforming". When you are shown clearly how things actually are, your mind is transformed. Ignorance is transformed into awareness, negativity into sanity. Therefore, the purpose of tenchö is the subtle transformation of the student's mind, and the fruition of tenchö is that you will then be protected from the lower realms.

Tenchö are written by pandits. In relation to the Abhidharma, it is said that seven great realized masters from the Hinayana tradition came together and composed the first shastra, *Chédrak Shédzö Chenmo*. To be authorized to compose a shastra a scholar must, as a minimum qualification, have an understanding of the five major and the five minor sciences.[8]

The five major sciences are craftsmanship or arts (Tib. *zo rigpa*), medicine (Tib. *so ché kyi rigpa*), language or grammar (Tib. *dra*), logic (Tib. *ten tsik*), and the inner science of philosophy (Tib. *nang rigpa*).

8 See also Mipham Rinpoche, *The Gateway to Knowledge*, Vol. I, Rangjung Yeshe Publication, p.62/63.

The five minor sciences are synonyms, mathematics, performance, poetry and composition.

Only someone who has understood these sciences may write a commentary on the Buddha's teachings. In addition to this, in order for someone to compose a shastra, he or she should have realized at least the first bhumi, or be able to communicate directly with a deity, such as Manjushri. Ideally, the author should have directly perceived *dharmata* (Skt.; Tib. *chö nyi*), reality itself.

There are about one hundred volumes of ka (Kangyur) in Tibetan and around two hundred volumes of tenchö (Tengyur). All of the tenchö were written by great scholars who were pandits in all the major and minor sciences.

The three jewels are the essence of the subject of both *ka* and *tenchö*.

What is nature? What is nature's purpose, and what are its qualities? What are its functions? These questions are answered in the Buddha's teachings, and are the subject of our studies.

3. SANGHA

Those with Virtuous Intention

Those who study, contemplate and meditate on the teachings of the Buddha, and whose intention is set on following the path of the Dharma and attaining enlightenment, are called the sangha (Skt.; Tib. *gendün*). Sangha literally means

'those whose intention is virtuous'.

There are two kinds of virtue: virtue oriented towards action in the world, and the ultimate virtue of the attainment of enlightenment.

Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels

Conventional people are lost in cherishing and protecting the self and in the afflicting negative emotions. No matter how much pain and suffering is caused by cherishing and protecting the self, this is the way in which they live their lives. Even though they try over and over again, these attitudes fail to make them happier, and do not free them from suffering.

It is almost impossible for conventional people to grasp that the possibility of letting go of clinging to the self, and of thereby easing the pain, stress, and anguish that we feel inside, could ever exist. It is almost as if you would have to be crazy to even suggest such a thing. Yet on the other hand, it is very clear that cherishing and protecting the self is the cause of all suffering.

So your path and the path of conventional beings become increasingly divergent. Even though you live as a member of a family and care for each member of your family lovingly, still you see that you are becoming different from the rest of your family. Although you may be married and have taken the vow to travel the path of life together with your spouse, and even though love and care remains, because you work with your mind, you will realize that the distance separating you from your spouse is becoming wider.

This separation is not based on some sort of prejudice towards your spouse. It is the result of the increasing clarity that you possess as a result of working with your mind. The wisdom you are cultivating sees through not only the problems of others, but through your own problems. This is all related to seeing the *dukkha*[9] in one's life, and penetrating its cause, which is clinging to the self.

We are inspired to work with our psychological and emotional problems by applying the noble Dharma. Therefore, we follow the Buddha as the guide and the Dharma as the path, and we become part of the noble sangha.

Though our love, care and compassion for others increases, and we would still like to be of much more help others, our own path is becoming clearer. For this reason, we take refuge in the three jewels much more genuinely. This is the purpose of our study and practice; to take refuge genuinely and authentically, and not just ceremonially. We do not take refuge just to follow others, but in order to develop a personal relationship with the objects of refuge. Temporarily, we take refuge in the Buddha as the guide, the Dharma as the path, and the sangha as companions. Ultimately, there is only one refuge, and that is enlightenment.

9 Pali. Skt. duhkha; Tib. dukngal; Usually translated as 'suffering', but more accurately as 'frustration' or 'dissatisfaction'.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE THREE TURNINGS AND THE THREE BASKETS

1. THE THREE TURNINGS OF THE WHEEL OF DHARMA

The three turnings of the wheel of Dharma are progressive teachings on relative phenomena and absolute nature. They enable our understanding to deepen further and further.

The First Turning

Buddha himself gave three cycles of teaching. After attaining enlightenment, he first taught in the Deer Park at Sarnath, near Benares. His first five close disciples later became arhats.[1] He taught the four noble truths: the truth of suffering, the truth of the origin of suffering, the truth of the cessation of suffering, and the path that leads to cessation.

Experiencing Suffering to Eliminate Its Causes

The Buddha first taught on dukkha, not just in the relation to unfavorable circumstances, but as the suffering that is part of our everyday life, and that is in our mind, no matter how happy we present ourselves as being to others. When we examine our mind closely, we discover that suffering comes from our habit of clinging to the self.

There are of all sorts of suffering: suffering related to the mental activities, and to the emotional aspects of ignorance, attachment, aggression, pride, arrogance and jealousy. The emotions are the actual experience of suffering. We have to see our suffering and experience it much more clearly. Only then will we genuinely renounce self-clinging, and not want to indulge in our habitual patterns in the way that we have done before. This renunciation marks the beginning of the awakening and maturing of our buddha nature. It is the point at which our study and practice become a genuine part of the true path of Buddhism.

1 Skt.; Tib. dra chom pa; literally 'one who has conquered the enemies' or 'foe-destroyer'. The highest level of realization in Hinayana practice.

The Four Noble Truths

Though they are the basic teachings of Buddhism, the principles of the four noble truths apply to all Buddhist teachings: Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana. They show exactly how grasping and fixation onto relative phenomena, and terms and concepts, are the root causes and conditions of suffering. Since suffering is produced by causes and conditions, suffering can also be ended by creating the appropriate causes and conditions.

The teachings of the first turning of the wheel of Dharma are essential, and are for people beginning with the path of Dharma, who grasp and fixate onto relative phenomena very strongly. Their minds are open, but not completely open, and their primary interest is to be free from suffering as quickly as possible. Because of their urgency, they have a slight tendency towards wanting only themselves to become free from suffering. They are not familiar with any view other than that of the relative. It is not that they do not have compassion, but their compassion is not very strong.

The Hinayana tradition evolved from these teachings. The principal Hinayana philosophical approaches are Vaibhashika and Sautrantika.[2] These teachings flourished during the Buddha's lifetime and continued without interruption after his parinirvana.

The Second Turning

The second cycle of teaching that Buddha taught was on Vulture Peak Mountain, near Rajgir, to a large audience of people with more open minds; students who were more willing to explore the depth of reality, rather than just concerning themselves with the urgency of their own freedom from suffering. Bodhisattvas from this and other worlds were present, including many humans, such as Shariputra and Maudgalyayana. They were already familiar with relative phenomena, concepts and views, and were open to understanding and accepting the absolute nature of phenomena.

The teachings of the second turning of the wheel of Dharma began to be widely taught around the 2nd century CE, some 500 years after the Buddha's passing away. These are the Mahayana teachings, revealed primarily by Nagarjuna. It is important to understand that Mahayana masters consider these teachings to be authentic teachings of the Buddha, given secretly to human and non-human students up until the time of Nagarjuna, as the time was not yet ripe for them to be given more openly.

The main teachings in the second turning are the *Prajñaparamita* Sutras, which are placed in three categories. The broad version consists of twelve volumes, the medium version consists of two, and the essential version is the *Heart Sutra*.

The Mahayana and the bodhisattva path evolved from the *Prajñaparamita* teachings of the second turning of the wheel of Dharma. The principal philosophical viewpoint

2 See the following chapter on the four schools for details.

of the Mahayana schools, which propound the teachings of the second turning, is Madhyamika.

The second turning does contain teachings on relative phenomena, but it emphasizes that their nature is magical, illusory, insubstantial and empty by nature. The Buddha clearly explained how the absolute nature of relative phenomena is emptiness, completely devoid of any solidity and intrinsic existence. 'Intrinsic' means existing without any interdependency or cause and effects; it describes something that has a solidity of its own and holds its own characteristics permanently.

This does not imply that these teachings say that things do not appear or do not function on the relative level. Something that is empty by nature can have both appearance and function, but there is a difference between how we perceive things and the actual nature of reality. Not only do we perceive that things appear, we consider them to be solid and intrinsic, thereby creating delusion and suffering for ourselves.

THE FIVE PATHS AND THE TEN BHUMIS

On the bodhisattva path, one traverses five paths and ten levels of realization and liberation.

The Five Paths (Skt. *marga*, Tib. *lam*)

The Path of Accumulation (Skt. *sambhara marga*; Tib. *tsok lam*)

The path of accumulation begins with our first offering to the three jewels and the first time we generate bodhichitta. We accumulate merit, which works in our favor by bringing about the conditions in which we are able to study and practice further, to learn more and to develop the faculty for understanding the teachings.

The Path of Engagement (Skt. *prayoga marga*; Tib. jor *lam*)

The path of engagement is being actively mentally engaged in the bodhisattva path, with the three kinds of prajña,[3] particularly contemplative prajña, becoming much more sharp and clear. The path itself and the nature of the view, meditation and conduct of the bodhisattva are clarified.

The Path of Seeing (Skt. *darshana marga*; Tib. *tong lam*)

The point at which understanding turns into realization, the first glimpse or experience of the true nature of things, marks the beginning of the path of seeing. This is the breakthrough of seeing simultaneously the causes and conditions of the suffering of

3 The wisdom of hearing, contemplation and meditation.

samsara, the realization of the egolessness of dharma and the egolessness of the self. When reaching the path of seeing we attain the first bhumi.

The view in the path of seeing is not yet stabilized, so there is still a difference between the experience in meditation and post meditation. A bodhisattva meditates continuously, and during post meditation engages in the six paramitas.

There are two kinds of merit to accumulate. The merit of wisdom is meditating on shunyata itself, thereby purifying obscurations and habitual patterns. In post meditation, the bodhisattva accumulates merit by engaging in the paramita practices, such as generosity and patience. The bodhisattvas stabilize their realization through these two accumulations of merit.

The Path of Meditation (Skt. *bhavana marga*, Tib. *gom lam*)

Just after the moment of seeing, the path of seeing becomes the path of meditation.

The Path of No More Learning (Skt. *ashaiksha marga*, Tib. *milop lam*)

This stage of the path is identical with the eleventh bhumi, enlightenment.

The Ten Bhumis

The ten bhumis (Skt.; Tib. *sa chu*) are traversed through the practice of the six paramitas: generosity, discipline, patience, diligence, meditation and understanding. Sometimes four more paramitas are added: method, power, aspiration and wisdom (Skt. *jñana*; Tib. *yeshé*), which makes ten paramitas in all. By the time we have reached the eighth bhumi, all emotional obscurations and their residues, and much of our cognitive obscuration, are purified. A bodhisattva no longer has to put so much effort into meditation; it has become more natural and spontaneous.

In the eighth, ninth and tenth bhumi, only cognitive obscurations remain to be purified. In essence, cognitive obscurations are dualistic perceptions. It takes progress to the tenth bhumi to purify them completely. In the meditation practice of the last three bhumis, which is connected to the paramitas of power, wisdom and aspiration, there are no dualistic perceptions; but in the post meditation there are still residual dualistic perceptions to be purified.

At the end of the tenth bhumi a buddha, with vajra-like samadhi, purifies all he subtlest levels of cognitive obscuration or dualistic perception in a single moment. The eleventh bhumi is the enlightened state itself. At that time the buddha has the complete realization of shunyata, and suchness becomes dharmakaya.

Upon the realization of complete enlightenment, the buddha sees that he or she was enlightened from the very beginning. It was only dualistic perception that prevented

the realization of complete enlightenment before now. Because of how things were perceived (Tib. *nang tsul*), he or she did not accurately realize how things are.

All along the path to the enlightened state of mind there are various methods available to us that allow us to match our perception with the true nature of phenomena. But the true nature of phenomena has never changed, from the beginning of the path to its end. This is the nature of the awakened state of mind. A buddha sees that all sentient beings are enlightened.

It is only because sentient beings' perceptions are distorted that they suffer the illusions and torments of samsara. Seeing this, the compassion of the buddhas increases further, and they appear in sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya forms in order to benefit beings.

The Third Turning

The third turning of the wheel of Dharma occurred in many places simultaneously, nd was taught by many different emanations of the Buddha. The third turning in particular is not limited to human beings. The audiences consisted of bodhisattvas, both human and non-human, who were extremely open and appreciative of these teachings, and who were ready to learn more about absolute nature than had been presented in the second turning.

Here Buddha speaks of the luminous aspect of absolute nature, the complimentary aspect of emptiness, which is emphasized in the second turning. This luminous mind is uncompounded, free from dualistic perception, and possesses all the enlightened qualities as inherent potential, which are ready to arise.

The audience learnt that enlightenment is inherent within all beings; that all beings are by nature enlightened. All that is needed for them to attain enlightenment is a path that pacifies their obscurations; and when these obscurations are pacified, enlightenment emerges, endowed with all its qualities.

The teachings of the third turning mainly took place in the human world around the 4th century CE. They are also Mahayana teachings, given by Buddha and revealed by Asanga. Asanga undertook the practice of Buddha Maitreya for a long time. After many years, he had a vision of Maitreya. He was subsequently able to communicate with Maitreya and make the numerous teachings he received from him generally available.

Much of our understanding of buddha nature stems from these teachings. Thus, Asanga is a key figure in the Mahayana tradition, as he put forward and explained the teachings on buddha nature, the enlightened mind that we all possess, and on the luminosity aspect of phenomena.

The teachings of the third turning were then elaborated by Asanga's halfbrother Vasubandhu and others. They particularly focus on the philosophical understanding

of buddha nature (Skt. *tathagatagarbha*; Tib. *de shek nying po*), and the luminosity or clarity aspect of mind. The principal philosophical approach of the third turning is that of Chittamatra/Yogacara.

The teachings of the third turning became the bridge between the Sutrayana [4] and Mantrayana traditions; they are known as 'half Sutrayana, half Mantrayana'. They prepared the audience to receive Mantrayana teachings.

In the first turning, buddha nature is presented as a virtuous seed, a potential. In the second turning its nature is realized as emptiness. In the third turning, emptiness is presented as luminous, pregnant with all the excellent qualities of enlightenment, which are ready to arise.

So the teachings of the second turning are mainly on the nature of emptiness, and correspond to the dharmakaya aspect of buddha nature. The third turning places more emphasis on the qualities of buddha nature, which correspond to the sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya aspects.

Provisional and Definitive Teachings

Within the Sutrayana tradition, there are provisional (Skt. *nayartha*, Tib. *drang dön*) and definitive teachings (Skt. *nitartha*, Tib. *ngé dön*). The provisional teachings lead to the definitive teachings, but there are good reasons for the existence of the provisional teachings.

For example, Buddha taught impermanence to be absolute truth to beings who were not yet open enough to completely understand reality, as a stepping stone to understanding the empty nature of phenomena. In contrast, definitive teachings directly state the truth as it is. The teachings on emptiness, for example, are definitive teachings.

The lower yanas (Skt.; Tib. *tekpa*; vehicles) are the basis for the higher yanas. It is possible to quote from the lower yanas when studying the higher yanas, because they are based on the lower yanas. But when you study the lower yanas you cannot quote the higher yanas, because those teachings are not yet revealed in the lower yanas.

For example, in studying the Mahayana you can quote Hinayana teachings. But you cannot quote Mahayana teachings when studying the Hinayana. In the same way, within the Mahayana there is the causal vehicle (Sutrayana) and the fruitional vehicle (Tantrayana). One can quote the Sutrayana when one studies the Tantrayana, because Tantrayana is based on Sutrayana. But when one studies the Sutrayana, it is not appropriate to quote the Tantrayana.

There has been much debate about which of the last two turnings of the wheel of Dharma are definitive and which are provisional teachings. But within the Nyingma

4 Sometimes Hinayana and Sutra Mahayana are grouped together as Sutrayana, to distinguish them from Tantra Mahayana, which is also called Mantrayana, Tantrayana or Vajrayana.

and Kagyü schools, particularly from the time of Jamgön Kongtrul Rinpoche[5] and Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo[6] onwards, both are considered definitive teachings.

The Importance of Studying Sutrayana

The lineage of the teachings on emptiness began with Nagarjuna, and the lineage of the teachings on buddha nature began with Asanga. Both these lineages were brought to Tibet and became the main subject of study of all schools of Buddhism. The Nyingma tradition was the oldest tradition in Tibet, to be followed by the Sakya, Kagyü, and then later the Ganden.[7]

All of these schools studied the Sutrayana teachings of the Buddha and the commentaries of the great mahapanditas of India; but, above all, they studied the works of Nagarjuna and Asanga. These were immensely cherished and cultivated in depth to support the practitioners' view of Mahayana as well as to deepen their understanding of the Mantrayana practices.

Although emptiness is mentioned in the Mantrayana practices, there is no detailed explanation of it, nor is there much logic or reasoning devoted to it. This is because it is assumed that those who enter the Mantrayana tradition already have understood emptiness.

If you are a student of the Tibetan tradition, you may have been introduced to Mantrayana practices. You may even carry them out on a daily basis. However, if you have a rather tenuous understanding of the Mahayana teachings in general and the Mahayana view of emptiness in particular, your understanding of the view will be limited. This makes it difficult for you to develop the confidence in the view that is necessary to gain a solid basis of practice.

Therefore, teachings on the view of emptiness and on buddha nature, Mahayana teachings from the second and third turnings of the wheel of Dharma, will broaden your knowledge of the Dharma, and deepen your Mantrayana practice. These teachings will not only give you more confidence in your practice, but will also provide the background or general understanding that allows you to increase your knowledge further. You will also be able bring that knowledge into your own experience, so that it feeds into your life and nourishes the practice that sustains you.

I have been teaching in the West for some fifteen years, and it is clear to me that having some understanding of the Sutrayana teachings, particularly those relating

5 Jamgön Kongtrul Rinpoche (1813-1900) was one of the most influential masters in the Tibetan Buddhist world and the founder of the non-sectarian movement. For his life story, see *The Autobiography of Jamgön Kongtrul. A Gem of Many Colors.*

6 According to the Nyingma tradition Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo (1820-1892) is the body incarnation of Jigmé Lingpa. For his life story, see *Masters of Meditation and Miracles*, pp. 215.

7 In this context Ganden is a synonym for the Geluk tradition, Ganden being the name of its main monastery.

to the view of emptiness and to buddha nature, benefits students greatly. It is not that you all have to become scholars, logicians or intellectuals; it is just that a basic knowledge of these teachings really seems to help practitioners deepen and widen the scope of their understanding of the Buddhadharma, and of their practice.

This especially applies to students of the Nyingma and Kagyu traditions. In the Sakya and Gelug schools, there is much more emphasis on the study of the Sutrayana. In the Nyingma and Kagyu schools, newcomers are often introduced to the Mantrayana teachings and begin practicing Mantrayana immediately, without much grounding in, or familiarization with the Sutrayana teachings.

2. THE THREE BASKETS (Skt. tripitaka; Tib. dé nö sum)

Both Buddha's own teachings, *ka,* and the *tenchö*, or commentaries, are divided into the three categories of *Vinaya* (Skt.; Tib. *dulwa*), *Sutra* (Skt.; Tib. *dodé*), and *Abhidharma* (Skt.; Tib. *chö ngönpa*).

2.1. Vinaya

The Vinaya are teachings on discipline and conduct, and involves the taking and observation of vows. In order to progress along the path and attain enlightenment, we need tremendous discipline, and to observe discipline we need to take vows. The taking of vows or precepts has the power to cut the momentum of our constant engagement with negative actions. They cut the root of our selfish, egocentric actions, give us strength, and free us from negativity.

The Vinaya teachings explain how to take a vow, the meaning of the vow, the method of observing that vow, and the benefits of taking it.

Each of the three yanas has its own vows.

Hinayana Vows

Within the Hinayana tradition, there are six vows: the vows of laymen and laywomen, the vows of male and female novices, and the vows of full monks and nuns.

The essence of the Hinayana vows is to discipline oneself in proper conduct, to abstain from the negative actions that prevent our progress. The vows differ in detail, but what is common to all of them is that you should abstain from the three negative acts of the body, the four negative actions of the speech, and the three negative acts of the mind.

Mahayana Vows

The intention of the Mahayana vow is to generate bodhichitta, which has two aspects: the bodhichitta of aspiration and of engagement, or action.

Mantrayana Vows

We receive the Mantrayana vows when receiving an empowerment. But in order to become a Mantrayana practitioner, we need to take the bodhisattva vow, which is a Mahayana vow, and in order to receive the bodhisattva vow, we need to take the vow of refuge, and one of the sets of Hinayana vows.

2.2. Sutra

The Sutra teachings explain the nature of phenomena, the way in which that nature relates to the reality of our existence, how wisdom is used to observe that nature, and how understanding that nature can free us from our ignorance and allow us to manifest the qualities of our enlightened potential.

As the Sutra teachings explain, all beings are enlightened, but their enlightened nature is hidden by obscurations which cause them to live in delusion and suffering.

2.3. Abhidharma

Abhidharma teachings explain how phenomena exist on the level of manifestation, how they function on the relative level, and the categories of perceptions, such as the skandhas.

The Three Baskets and the Three Higher Trainings

The Vinaya teachings are related to discipline. For individuals to remain on the path and to awaken themselves from their ignorance, discipline is very important. From this point of view, the Vinaya teachings are the most important. They are like the ground: if you have good ground or soil and you plant good seeds, then you will have a good crop.

But discipline alone does not liberate us from ignorance or bring us to enlightenment. We also need to awaken ourselves through the wisdom of knowing the nature of reality. We cannot gain enlightenment through mere mental fabrication; the truth must be realized.

The Sutra teachings are related to wisdom.[8] They give us insight into the true nature of all phenomena, the way in which we can realize our true nature, what our obscurations are, and how to become free of these obscurations. From this point of view, the Sutra

8 There is also another tradition which connects Sutra to meditation and Abhidharma to wisdom.

teachings are the most important for an individual to attain enlightenment.

Abhidharma is related to meditation. Without the support of meditation it is difficult to penetrate the nature of things. Concepts cannot take us all the way to realization. At some point we have to stop conceptualizing, and meditate upon the conclusion that we have arrived at through our study and contemplation. At this point there is a real possibility of awakening.

Receiving the Vinaya, Sutra and Abhidharma teachings is extremely relevant for anyone who enters the path of awakening. The entire teaching of the Buddha falls into these three categories.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE SCHOOLS OF BUDDHISM

1. INTRODUCTION: THE TWO TRUTHS

The teachings of the buddhas of the three times, past, present and future, are all in accord with the two truths: Absolute truth is how things are (Tib. né tsul) and relative truth is how things appear (Tib. *nang tsul*).

The relative truth is that which is within the realm of perception. Anything penetrable by the intellect is relative. The relative consists of almost everything that has appearance: sight, form, sound, and so on. Relative truth is that which is experienced, that which works in the relative world and appears to function, produce and interact. Relative truth includes all relative activity of the five skandhas, the five elements and the sense sources (Skt. *ayatana*)[1].

Absolute truth is that which is beyond intellect, and beyond sensory perception. It is non-dual. It is what-it-is. It is the experience of an awakened state of mind, the nature of all things. The intellect can only understand that which absolute truth is not.

The whole purpose of Dharma is to realize the absolute truth as it is, and we do this by understanding more and more about relative truth. Without studying relative truth, we will not understand the absolute truth; and without understanding the absolute truth we will not attain nirvana. Ultimately, there is only one truth, and that is the absolute truth.

There is also no disagreement between the different schools over the nature of relative truth. Buddha himself said,

"All that common people agree to be relative, I too, agree to be relative."

As relative truth is based on the experience of beings, it is therefore the relative truth of the individuals.

The absolute truth can be understood on different levels. The understanding of conventional people differs from that of people who are more advanced in their meditative perception of the nature of phenomena. We continue to clarify our perception of absolute truth right up until buddhahood. Although we may come

1 Skt. *ayatana*, Tib. *gyé ché*; 'sources': the six sense organs or faculties of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind; and their six objects of form, sound, smell, taste, texture, and mental object.

to agree intellectually with the view of emptiness expounded in the teachings of the Buddha, we still have a lot of catching up to do in terms of our experience of emptiness: there is a lot of work to be done in order to remove our ignorance fully.

The higher the attainment of a bodhisattva, the clearer the experience of absolute truth becomes. Just as a waxing moon does not in reality change its size or shape, the absolute truth never changes: it is the accuracy of our perception of the absolute that increases, and which allows us to see it more clearly.

As the accuracy of their perception grows, the more the qualities of buddha nature blossom in the mindstream of the bodhisattvas. Consequently, the clearer our perception of the absolute becomes, the more we can benefit beings who have not arrived at an understanding of the absolute: this is the training of a bodhisattva.

2. HINAYANA: VAIBHASHIKA AND SAUTRANTIKA

The Two Truths in Hinayana

The Vaibhashika (Tib. *ché drak mawa*) and Sautrantika (Tib. *do dé pa*) schools are based mainly on the first turning of the wheel of Dharma. After Buddha's paranirvana, the Buddha's teachings were compiled by his cousin. It was from this compilation that all the various Hinayana traditions were established. Gradually, the various disagreements that emerged among Hinayana practitioners gave rise to the different Hinayana schools.

The Vaibhashika school comprises eighteen different schools. After the formation of the eighteen Vaibhashika schools, certain scholars and practitioners wanted to return to the original teachings of the Buddha, and so they developed the Sautrantika school.

The view of the relative truth in the Hinayana schools is that consciousness and all gross phenomena are relative, as they can be broken down into something much subtler: indivisible particles. Therefore, consciousness and phenomena are viewed as empty. Relative here means something that cannot be held as true in terms of the absolute.

Both Hinayana schools hold the indivisible moment to be the absolute truth of consciousness, and an indivisible particle to be the absolute truth of the phenomenal world. They hold the indivisible moment and the indivisible particle to be intrinsic, and therefore absolute truth.

The Hinayana schools do not view the indivisible moment and particle to be emptiness. They say that all things are made of various indivisible atoms, and that these atoms are not emptiness. In the same way, they state that consciousness is made of momentary continuums, of indivisible moments of mind that are intrinsic, and therefore not emptiness.

This implies that the indivisible moment and particle are permanent, and not interdependently originated. It implies that they are self-born, which is not the case.

This view leads to all kinds of logical problems. It does not match the experience of absolute truth of the enlightened ones.

The Five Skandhas

Generally speaking, all schools understand the two truths through the analysis of the skandhas and phenomena. The two Hinayana schools in particular focus on the five skandhas as a method for the precise examination of relative truth. The purpose of this examination is to arrive at an understanding of the nature of the skandhas: the egolessness of self.

The five skandhas are the skandha of form, feeling, perception, formation and consciousness. Skandha is the Sanskrit term, and the Tibetan term is *pung po*, which means 'a heap', or 'aggregate'.

The Skandha of Form (Tib. *zuk gyi pungpo*)

The skandha of form can be divided into the outer and inner skandhas of form. The outer skandha of form comprises the five elements: earth, water, wind, fire and space.

The inner skandha of form is the body and its organs: the eye, ear, nose, tongue and body organ. In this context we are not talking about the gross physical organs but the subtle organs. For example, in relation to the eye organ the Abhidharma teaches that there is a flower-like shape within the gross eye organ which evaporates when one dies. In the gross ear organ, the subtle organ has the shape of twisted wood. The subtle nose organ has the shape of two tiny pipes. In the tongue, the subtle organ has the shape of a crescent moon. And there is a subtle body organ which is like chicken skin.

These subtle organs are based on the gross organs that we see. As they are all made of particles, they, along with their objects, (sight, sound, taste, smell and touch) are all part of the skandha of form.

From the Hinayana point of view, there are even subtler forms. For instance, when we receive a vow, a subtle form begins to manifest. Also, when we engage in an extreme negative activity, a subtle form comes into being. These subtle forms cannot be perceived by ordinary perception, but are nevertheless considered to be forms. So the skandha of form is a compilation of many forms.

The Skandha of Perception (Tib. *dushé gyi pungpo*)

The skandha of perception contains the sensory perceptions of the eye perceiving form, the ear perceiving sound, the nose perceiving smell, the tongue perceiving taste, the body perceiving touch and the mind perceiving all phenomena and everything that can be imagined.

The Skandha of Feeling (Tib. *tsorwé pungpo*) [2]

With any perception, such as when the eye sees an object, or when the mind perceives phenomena, a feeling rises, which is like the meeting of two currents of electricity. When two wires (the eye or mind, and the object of perception) are joined, a current is generated, and a feeling, which is either pleasurable, unpleasurable, or neutral, rises.

The other type of feeling is emotion. Emotions come from thinking things to be good or bad, desirable or undesirable. Again, particular feelings arise from thoughts engaging with objects. There is no sensory contact with an object here, it is thoughts about the object of other thoughts, but such thoughts are still within the category of emotions. Happiness, joy, suffering, pain and neutral emotions rise as part of the skandha of feeling.

The Skandha of Formation (Tib. *duché gyi pungpo*)

The skandha of formation is mainly composed of thoughts. A gross thought is accompanied by many subtle thoughts which form the action of karma. In total, there are 51 types of mental formation. There is also physical formation, verbal formation, and the formation of positive, negative, and neutral karma. These are created by thoughts, which are all included in the 51 categories of mental formation. These categories can be a subject of study in themselves, and something that you can read about.

The Skandha of Consciousness (Tib. *namshé pungpo*)

The Hinayana schools believe that there are six consciousnesses. They are the consciousness of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, mind, and mental perceptions.

The Functions of the Skandhas

The skandhas of perception, form, feeling, mental formation and consciousness are not completely separate from one another. They are all part of mind, and they are named and identified according to their different functions. For instance, the function of perceiving phenomena is called perception. The function of illuminating is called consciousness. The function of experience is called feeling. They are not necessarily separate types of mind, but more separate functions of one mind.

It is the skandhas that make a person exist. It is very important for us to understand these relative phenomena. Through understanding relative phenomena, we come to know what we are made from.

2 You might notice that usually the five skandhas are mentioned in a slightly different order. Here Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche talks from an experiential point of view and therefore mentions the skandha of perception before the skandha of feelings.

The Relative and Absolute Truth in Hinayana

By looking closely at relative phenomena and what they are made from, we can see their nature. Through seeing the nature of relative phenomena, we understand the egolessness of self.

The Vaibhashika and Sautrantika schools believe that the skandhas which we experience in gross ways are relative phenomena. This means that we believe that the skandha of the body is just one body, or that the skandha of feeling is just one feeling. If we don't examine them properly, we believe that the skandhas are all one entity, such as "my body", "my mind", or simply "me".

Sometimes we fail even to get close to thinking that there are five skandhas. We think only in terms of the body and the mind, and that the body and mind are single entities. We think that in some sense the body and mind are permanent, and we experience feelings as single entities, and as permanent too. This is the experience of conventional people, beings who are not well versed in philosophy.

For instance, perceiving a mug as one solid mug is a gross experience. And this gross experience is considered from the Hinayana view to be relative truth. By examining this gross experience we come to understand that the mug consists of many parts, which are in turn made of other parts that also consist of other parts, and so on.

Phenomena can be broken down into particles and atoms. Ultimately speaking, the atoms, the most refined particles that are unbreakable and cannot be further divided and which form relative phenomena, are the absolute truth from the Hinayana perspective. And that absolute truth gives rise to relative phenomena, and the illusion of relative phenomena.

The Relative and Absolute Truth of Time

Consciousness, perception, feelings and mental formations can all be broken down into three parts: past, present and future. The present can also be broken down into past, present and future, and that present can be broken down into past, present and future. Finally, we reach a point where the most subtle consciousness cannot be broken down any further, and that is what the absolute truth is considered to be.

So there are two aspects to absolute truth; the partless particle (Tib. *dul tren cha mé*) and the indivisible moment (Tib. *ké chik cha mé*) which cannot be broken down any further. They form the relative physical and mental world and are the two absolute truths. This is something that ordinary beings fail to realize.

Consequently, conventional beings grasp onto a self that is seen as intrinsically existent.

The Egolessness of Self

If you examine the five skandhas truly and break them down further and further, you recognize the two truths. Then you realize that there is no ego and that the self is just a projection of your mind. It is from this understanding that arhats come to realize the egolessness of self.

If we fail to examine reality, we tend to grasp onto self as singular, permanent and solid. We might not consciously think that the self within our existence is a singular, permanent and solid entity, but these concepts and ideas are all built into our unconscious habit of clinging onto the self.

For example, we think of ourselves as a singular being: a singular and permanent self with a body, speech and a mind. We accept that body, speech and mind change all the time, but feel that the self does not change; we feel that the self we were born with and the one we are now is the same self, and that this self is permanent.

Even if we do not consciously think about the self, if someone says something pleasant to us, we feel happy, and if someone says something nasty to us, we feel hurt. So we continually refer to the self, experience it as being solid, and consider that it is affected constantly.

We feel that the self is to be cherished and protected. These concepts are the result of previous habits. For example, when a child is born, it has an instinctive feeling for the self, grasps on to it, then turns to the mother's breast and works on surviving by sucking the milk out of its mother. It is an unconscious process: these concepts and ideas are built into an unconscious and instinctive sense of self.

Through understanding the two truths, we get to know and experience that there is no self. If this self did exist, it would have to exist within the context of the five skandhas. It cannot exist outside of the five skandhas. In order to realize that there is no self, we first have to realize the conditions that create the skandhas. If you examine the skandhas closely you will find that nothing about them is permanent, singular, or intrinsic in any way. Everything is made up of parts and particles. Everything is changing. Everything is illusory and insubstantial, whether it is part of the physical world, the mental world, or the emotional world. Therefore, belief in self is rooted totally in ignorance. Neither through examination, nor by the careful analysis of our existence, can we ever find the self.

For instance, in relation to the skandha of form, let us examine the body. This body is made of arms, legs, a head, ribs, organs, and so on; it is not one, singular body. The coming together of all these different factors does not create a single entity. A hand consists of a palm and some fingers. If you take parts of it away, it will not be a complete hand anymore. In addition, the body is made of many atoms, which, when they make an appearance of a gross form, do not become one. Atoms do not merge into one another; they stay separate. So form is made from an innumerable number of particles. Grasping onto the body or the self as a singular entity contradicts reality.

The body is also impermanent and changes every fraction of a second. Gross changes come about through subtle changes. Our body is constantly changing, but because of the continuum of appearance and dissolution, it appears to be the same or very similar, so we cling to it as permanent, even though this is not the case. The physical body is clearly not permanent: since we were born, we have changed immeasurably, and we cannot say that our current body is the same body that we were born with. And when we get cremated, we will no longer have a body at all. So the body is obviously impermanent.

The Emptiness of Phenomena

We are investigating the emptiness of the existence of gross relative phenomena. Here the term 'empty' is used a little bit differently than it is usually in the Mahayana. The term 'emptiness' in Hinayana means the way in which gross phenomena are made up of parts and particles in moments, and the way in which they are impermanent. Realizing that our belief in singular, permanent and substantial existence is an illusion is called realizing emptiness. This is not emptiness in the sense that all phenomena are by nature empty and illusory.

The Hinayana schools still cling to the solid and intrinsic existence of the partless particle and the momentless moment. So there is still a grasping onto phenomena, but not a grasping towards the self. Therefore the Hinayana practitioner has the opportunity to understand the egolessness of the self. If we no longer cherish and protect the self, we will no longer engage in mental formations, which in turn means that we will no longer create karma.

So the Hinayana perspective makes it possible to overcome negative and emotional obscurations, and to arrive at the cessation of suffering.

Cognitive Obscuration

Although we can overcome emotional obscurations and put an end to our uffering, clinging and grasping onto phenomena, which is clinging to the skandhas in the very subtlest way, remains to be overcome. This clinging has not been understood in the Hinayana tradition as a wrong view, and its nature has not been understood as being empty.

From a Mahayana perspective, cognitive obscuration still remains to be purified as long as there is clinging and grasping. Cognitive obscurations, or the ignorance which produces cognitive obscurations, will not give rise to the twelve afflicting interdependent originations which bring beings into samsara and the world of suffering, but they will definitely create the twelve non-afflicting interdependent originations.

Afflicting origination means being drawn into the suffering world without any choice, and by the force of karma. The twelve non-afflicting interdependent originations are

free of the inevitability of being drawn into the suffering world through the force of karma, but the skandhas still need to be purified.

From the point of view of the Hinayana schools, after realizing the absolute truth of phenomena and the egolessness of self, and having ended the perpetuation of negative karma and negative emotions completely, only karma left over from previous lifetimes needs be burnt up. Once it is, complete cessation is experienced by the arhats and pratyekabuddhas, and this is the end of their suffering and of their existence. Ultimate arhathood is total tranquility, peace and voidness.

Two Stages of Arhathood

There are two stages of arhathood, with remainder (Tib. lhak ché) and without remainder (Tib. lhak mé). Arhats in the first category, though they no longer create new karma, still have to work with the remaining skandhas of past karma, until they pass into the gokpa ('complete cessation') in which those skandhas dissolve. From their point of view, they remain in that cessation forever.

From the Mahayana point of view, they will at some point emerge from this meditative absorption, and be reborn into the celestial realms of the buddhas. There they will continue the path of the bodhisattva. The reason why their path is not complete is that they still have to purify their ignorance of the true nature of things, of shunyata.

As a result of this ignorance, there will be another, non-afflicting form of the twelve links of interdependent origination, which will lead them to be reborn in the pure realms, such as Dewachen, in a lotus. When the lotus opens, because of their higher training, and their prajña and meditative power, arhats cover the entire bodhisattva path in a very short time, dissolve all their dualistic perceptions, and attain complete nirvana.

3. THE TWO TRUTHS IN MAHAYANA

The Difference between Hinayana and Mahayana

In the Hinayana, the egolessness of the self is emphasized in order to overcome the obscuration of negative emotions. On the path, we meditate on the egolessness of self. In post-meditation, egolessness means withdrawing the self from the objects of kleshas, maintaining discipline, controlling our senses and abandoning the cause of negative emotions and the habitual patterns resulting from negative emotions.

On the Mahayana path we meditate on the egolessness of dharmas and the emptiness of all phenomena without any conceptual grasping. In post-meditation, we transform our ego and ego-clinging, which is the root of all our suffering, into bodhichitta. The emphasis is placed on seeing the objects of the kleshas, and all grasping, as illusory, and

on transforming illusion into the awakened state of mind. This is a brief explanation of the difference between the Hinayana and the Mahayana paths.

3.1 CHITTAMATRA

The Origins of Chittamatra

In the third turning of the wheel of the Dharma, Buddha taught the teaching that is now contained in, among others, the Lankāvatara Sutra. In this sutra, Buddha expounds on the buddha nature (Skt. tathagatagarbha; Tib. *dé shek nyingpo*) and its luminous aspect. The Chittamatra view is based on this teaching.

There were many great scholars in the Chittamatra school. Asanga was the pioneer in revealing the teachings on buddha nature, and his coming was predicted by Buddha in the Lotus Sutra. After practicing the guru yoga of Maitreya for twelve years Asanga actually met Maitreya.[3] He then went to Tushita, where Lord Maitreya and all the future buddhas dwell. Asanga brought the five great treatises of Maitreya into this world, such as the Abhisamayalankara and the Uttaratantra Shastra.

Mind Only

The name of the Chittamatra view in Tibetan is sem tsam pa. Sem means 'mind', and tsampa means 'only', or 'merely'. The Chittamatra view does not accept that all phenomena are empty. It accepts the illusion of outer forms, atoms, molecules, and the physical world as being empty, and sees mind's projection onto the physical world as being empty. But it does not see the source of the mind which projects, luminous mind, as being empty.

Chittamatrins believe luminous mind to be intrinsically existent (Tib. *den drup*). There must be some ground that allows samsara to manifest as such a powerful force for sentient beings, and from their point of view that ground is the mind itself. Therefore, Chittamatra is known as the Mind Only school.

The Three Natures

The Chittamatrin schools' view is structured by the three natures: random labelling, dependent nature and intrinsic nature.

All phenomena to which we designate names, are called 'randomly labeled' (Tib. *kun tak*). 'Dependent nature' (Tib. *shyen wang*) means that everything we project and label is dependent upon karma and kleshas. Karma and kleshas are the source and seed of projection and labeling.

Dependent nature means that everything we label, the whole of samsara and nirvana,

3 See *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying,* p. 191.

is mind's projection. The source of the projection and the activity of the projection, kleshas and karma, are both relative and within the category of dependent nature. All relative phenomena are included in the two categories of random labeling and dependent nature.

'Intrinsic nature' (Tib. *yong drub*) is the self-illuminating mind. This is the bsolute truth, which is intrinsically existent. Chittamatrins feel that intrinsic nature must exist in order for random labeling and dependent nature to appear.

Relative phenomena are non-existent, but the nature of relative phenomena, which is the luminous mind, is intrinsically existent. This is the explanation of the three natures and the two truths according to the Chittamatra school.

The three natures are a magnificent view which describe how the phenomenal world works. Do not make the mistake of considering the Chittamatra school to be simplistic. It is a very sophisticated school, but they do have some insecurities about emptiness.

The purpose of this analysis is more to expose the Chittamatra and the two Hinayana schools' insecurities about emptiness, not to undermine their philosophy and sophistication. Without these three schools, the various traditions of the study and p ractice of Buddhadharma would not have survived. We should have tremendous appreciation for these schools and for what they contributed to succeeding generations.

3.2 MADHYAMIKA

The Origins of the Madhyamika School

The Hinayana and Mahayana teachings were both given by the Buddha. As Buddha predicted, a great scholar named Nagarjuna came to live in India after Buddha had passed away. He studied teachings of Buddha that existed in both this and other worlds extensively. For instance, the Prajñaparamita teachings were brought up by Nagarjuna from the naga realm. It is believed that the original texts are still in Nepal. After traveling and studying in this and other worlds by way of his magical power, Nagarjuna established the Madhyamika tradition, *uma* in Tibetan. Uma here means 'the Middle Path'.

The teachings of the Middle Path are mainly based on the second turning of the wheel of Dharma. Nagarjuna's emphasis was on the nature of emptiness. He was the first pioneer of the Madhyamika teachings.

There are two Madhyamika schools: the Prasangika and the Svatantrika.

The Middle Way

We study Madhyamika to help us understand that the nature of phenomena is emptiness, and that emptiness is the key which makes everything possible.

This is the essence of Buddha Shakyamuni's emptiness teachings:

- understanding the various states of mind
- differentiating between what is delusion and what brings us closer to the truth
- understanding truth to be the middle way, which means non-extreme
- not upholding the eternalist view of seeing all things as intrinsically existent, solid and possessing a true reality
- not adopting a nihilist view. Nihilists deny cause and effect and believe in nothing that goes beyond what they can presently observe, such as past and future lives. They don't confirm anything in the name of being open, but create a lot of self-doubts, and are too afraid to commit to a view that speaks of the absolute.

Because of communism, socialism, and many other views that affected our lives, such as twentieth-century science, a lot of people, even so-called Buddhists, fall into an atheist view. They have a hard time cultivating any faith in causes and conditions that go beyond this life or what is observable in the present moment.

Misunderstandings of Emptiness

We have established that both Hinayana schools, and the Chittamatra tradition believe in something inherently existent. The Hinayana schools maintain the existence of indivisible particles and indivisible consciousness, whilst the Chittamatra school maintains that luminous mind is intrinsically existent. These beliefs stem from the misconception and fear of emptiness.

The Vaibhashika, Sautrantika and Chittamatra schools all misunderstand emptiness. Therefore, they try to impose their projections on the absolute truth. In some ways, their positions on absolute nature are quite accurate and refined, but they are not ultimately true. The ultimate nature of things is shunyata.

The Hinayana and Chittamatra schools have difficulty in believing that everything is emptiness because of a certain fear. We too fear that if everything is emptiness, things would not have any appearance or could not function. We have a preconception of emptiness in our mind; a projection of emptiness as a void, so their fears and projections are similar to our fears.

But emptiness is not simply a void, or nothingness. If we were to examine the nature of a void, we would not be able to pinpoint anything. If you take the walls of a room away, there will be no defined space, and if you take away all matter, there will be nothing to point at as being a void, so a 'void' is more or less a visual concept.

In reality, in an absolute sense, there is no void. 'Void' is just a concept. Of course, in the relative world, void and space exist as interdependent phenomena, but they only exist on the relative level, not on the absolute. In the absolute, the void is void of itself. Emptiness is empty of itself. Appearance is emptiness, so everything is emptiness.

Emptiness is not something that we can penetrate by the use of concepts. But we can employ conceptual thinking, together with the logic of Madhyamika on absolute nature, to clear away all our misunderstandings and misconceptions of emptiness. We can clarify what emptiness is not, but no words can describe what emptiness is.

When we realize that everything is our projection, we get a little bit of a shock. Some people take that shock well, and some people do not. Some people insist that their projection is absolute nature, and resist opening to absolute truth as it is explained by the buddha.

The Prasangika View of the Two Truths

The Prasangika view of relative truth is that all dualistic perception is relative and illusory. Why is dualistic perception illusory? When we are caught in dualistic perception, when the subject, mind, is focused on an object, it is easy to understand that experience as dualistic. But the way in which dualistic experience is illusory is not clear for many people. There is a lot of confusion surrounding it. Coming to know and understand the illusory nature of dualistic experience forms a crucial part of our study.

What does the illusory nature of duality imply? It means that the whole of samsara and nirvana, all realization on the paths and bhumis, all ideas of enlightenment and of the enlightened mind, are relative. As long as there is dualistic mind then there is also illusion. Dualistic mind is neither absolute nature, nor the realization of absolute nature.

What is absolute truth? Absolute truth is free of all concepts. You can't grasp it in any way. Absolute nature is totally free of illusion and the experience of the subject of mind focusing on an object. You cannot say that absolute truth is existent or non-existent. You cannot grasp at absolute nature by saying that it is both existent and non existent, and you also cannot say that it is neither. Any way in which you might grasp is grasping. Grasping needs an object (something to grasp), and so it traps us in dualistic mind, dualistic perception and illusion.

You cannot use words, expressions, grasping or concepts to confirm emptiness as being anything. You can have no fabrications, because fabrications give birth to concepts, and concepts give birth to grasping, which give birth to suffering. So if you fabricate anything, concepts and grasping, and even absolute truth become suffering. Since the absolute is nirvana and totally free of all concepts, then absolute truth is unstained and untouched by relative phenomena.

The Prasangika view of absolute truth is encapsulated in Nagarjuna's statement from the *Refutation of Disputed Topics* (Tib. *Uma tsö dok*),

"Since I do not affirm anything, I am entirely without fault"

If anything is affirmed in the view, then that view is not free from faults. This is the Prasangika understanding of absolute truth.

If we contemplate this deeply, there is a deep meaning to be found, but if we fail to contemplate it, then we will fail discover the real meaning. Once Shariputra asked Buddha, "What is absolute truth?" Buddha said nothing, but remained silent. Shariputra did not understand. Then Manjushri spoke on Buddha's behalf, and said,

"When the Victorious One says nothing, he says all."

And this is what the absolute truth is. This is the absolute statement a bodhisattva makes. It is the essential view of Madhyamika, and any view beyond Madhyamika, such as Tantrayana, correlates with this view.

The Four Extremes

The Prasangikas hold the view that there is no explanation for the absolute: there is only negation of what the absolute truth is not. Therefore, the Prasangika view is believed to be the most superior view of all, because there is no affirmation of absolute truth as being any particular thing. Absolute truth must be free of all four extremes of fabrication: existence, non-existence, both existence and nonexistence and neither existence nor non-existence.

In order for non-existence to exist, there first has to be something to exist. Since there is nothing that exists, there cannot be a fabrication of non-existence. And since both are not there, absolute truth is free from both. So fabrication is just mind's desperate need to cling to something, or even to nothing.

Clinging to something soothes the mind, so the mind clings to something. If that becomes a problem, then the mind desperately clings to nothing; this may soothe the mind, but it has nothing to do with the realization of absolute truth. In order to realize the nature of mind and phenomena, we have to be very courageous and stop grasping altogether.

The point is to see clearly, openly and objectively, what the absolute truth is. And when we do not cling onto any of the four extremes of fabrication, we cease grasping. When we completely cease grasping, peace arises, because grasping itself is what disturbs the mind.

Grasping itself is what deludes us, and gets us caught in illusion. Grasping is the seed of the ego of self and the ego of phenomena. So when grasping ceases, obscuration ceases. At that point, realization dawns and everything becomes magical. Everything has appearance, and everything functions, but the nature of everything is free of all fabrication. This is what the absolute truth is.

This is the non-conceptual view of the bodhisattva, whereby they live in the suffering of samsara without being tempted by the appearance of suffering. Instead, they have incredible compassion for others and try to wake them up. Beings mistakenly take their dreams to be reality, and suffer tremendously from their dream experience.

If there is any grasping whatsoever, then we are not authentically experiencing the absolute truth. The great Sakyapa master Sachen Künga Nyingpo[4] said that if there is grasping then there is no view. The absolute truth must be free from the four types of attachment.

Hearing this does not necessarily give you the full taste of the absolute truth, but that in itself is a great lesson. It is very good for us to look at our mind and its grasping and clinging. The mind needs a picture, an object to hold onto, to satisfy even the most subtle relative mind. Relative mind gets confused or shocked, and goes blank when the absolute mind is presented in this way.

This is a very important experience. We should examine it very closely and realize that it is possible at such a point to cease all grasping, instead of becoming confused, shocked, or going into a blank state of mind, and later rising from that state with some judgments about it.

The absolute truth is non-dual, and free from all grasping and fabrication. Since absolute truth is suchness, any fabrication cannot be suchness; it is mind's creation. All that is penetrable by the intellect is relative. Absolute truth is beyond intellect, beyond grasping, beyond dualistic perception. Since there is no intellect, and since there is no grasping, it is free of all fabrication (Tib. *trödral*).

But the absolute is still something that is to be realized; it is the experience of buddhas, bodhisattvas, and of realized beings. We could talk about the buddha's 'perception' of the absolute truth, where perception is a subject of mind, and the absolute is an object; but as an experience, it is not dualistic at all. There is no separation, as in the case of forms perceived by the eye consciousness, where the entity of the eye consciousness as subjective mind sees the entity of form as an object, and the separate entities interact. But for the sake of communication, we have to speak about Buddha's 'perception' of the absolute truth.

A buddha's perception is far superior to ours. Our perception sees only what is in front of us; we cannot see the world behind us. Our intellect is only able to penetrate what the sensory perceptions have provided for the intellect to contemplate; beyond that, we cannot penetrate, we can only infer. Intellectual mind, which is inference, continues until the time of our buddhahood, when it ceases completely. The buddha's wisdom sees the nature of all things, as well as the appearance of things.

If we realize absolute truth, do perception, intellect, the functions of mind and

4 Sachen Künga Nyingpo (1092-1158) was the first of the "five superiors" of the Sakya school. When he was 13 years old, the Buddha of Wisdom, Manjushri appeared in a vision and gave the extraordinary teaching called Parting From the Four Attachments (Tib. Shyenpa Shyidral), which is:

If you are attached to this life, you are not truly a spiritual practitioner.
If you are attached to samsara, you do not have renunciation.
If you are attached to self, you do not have compassion
And finally, if you have grasping, you do not have the view.

appearances of the phenomenal world all cease? Not necessarily, but we do not grasp onto the absolute truth at the sight or sound of any sensory object.

The wisdom[5] of realized beings is non-dual. There is no separation, as when we see a lamp as an object and our perception as subject of mind. In the experience of buddhas, the perception is emptiness, and jñana is emptiness.

All phenomena and perceptions are relative, but their nature is shunyata (Tib. *tongpa nyi*). Shunyata is trödral and trödral is shunyata. In this sense, if you realize the absolute truth, it is the nature of all relative appearances, or phenomena. And as we wake up to the absolute truth, our whole interaction with the phenomenal world and ourselves—the way in which we perceive, cling and create karma— changes. Slowly, our interaction becomes consistent with the way things are in the relative world: illusory, merely dreamlike, or like a magician's magical display.

Shunyata is the absolute truth. Only through understanding the absolute truth can we be liberated, since absolute truth is nirvana, or enlightenment. There is no enlightenment outside of the realization of the absolute truth. Absolute truth is present all the time, in everything, everywhere. It is part of all of us; it is not something that we have to search for outside ourselves. Enlightenment means the mind has completely shed all obscuration and awakened completely to the truth.

With such an understanding of absolute and relative truth, it is easier for us to understand the meaning of the Middle Way.

Ground, Path and Fruition

In the ground, there are two inseparable truths: relative appearance and absolute nature.

On the path, the two accumulations of merit and wisdom are inseparable. In relation to fruition, the two kayas, dharmakaya and rupakaya, are inseparable.

The Mahayana views the ground as shunyata, and therefore as ultimate nirvana. All confusion, and samsara itself, is seen as arising through perceiving the ground as different. The path is the egolessness of self and the egolessness of dharma. These two kinds of egolessness work against the dualistic perceptions of clinging onto self, others and all things as separate phenomena. The dualistic perception of phenomena dissolves over time as we pass through the ten bhumis. When it has completely dissolved, at the end of the tenth bhumi, the fruition of buddhahood is attained. At that point the ground, which is shunyata, is completely realized, and becomes dharmakaya.

Dharmakaya means 'the source of all phenomena, of all powers, and of all the qualities of buddhahood'. The whole path is illusory, and even before the path, all appearances of the phenomenal world, which become obscuration, are illusory. In the end, when

5 Skt. *jñana*; Tib. *yeshé*; wisdom; lit. primordial consciousness. Ye means primordial, shé means consciousness.

we attain enlightenment, or the dharmakaya state of mind, nothing is intrinsically existent. Everything is illusory, and the nature of everything is shunyata.

In the Madhyamika teachings, we should understand the inseparability of
• appearance and emptiness in terms of the ground,
• the accumulation of merit and wisdom (*prajña*) in any aspect of the path and view,
• dharmakaya, sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya in terms of fruition.

In their nature, all of these are non-dual. In terms of appearance, there is
• the appearance of all things in relation to the ground,
• the appearance of the two accumulations on the path,
• the appearance of the sambhogakaya and nirmanakaya in terms of fruition.

Categories of Logic and Reasoning[6]

For the examination of causation, Madhyamika teachings employ the so-called 'vajra splinter' reasoning (Tib. dorjé zekma). Cause and effect do not meet, neither at different times nor in one moment. This refutes the whole process by which it is alleged that phenomena are born.

When we examine change, we can see how all phenomena arise from causes and conditions. If cause and effect were themselves intrinsically existent, cause could not actually produce an effect, and an effect could not be produced by a cause; they would be isolated from each other. In order for cause and effect to have an interconnection, both cause and effect must be empty by nature.

The connection between cause and effect is more magical than linear. For cause and effect to have a linear connection, they would both have to exist in the same moment in order to meet, but if they existed simultaneously, they could not be cause and effect. So cause and effect cannot both be present in any given moment, because the cause would have dissolved as the effect happened, and when the cause is there, the effect could not be there.

If the cause dissolves, then it becomes space. If the effect is not there, it too is space. There is a logical, non-linear connection between the two.

On the absolute level, everything is shunyata, and cause and effect do not have any kind of interaction. Nonetheless, in relation to appearance, cause has the appearance of cause, and effect has the appearance of effect. The interaction between cause and

6 Here Rinpoche is touching on the four or five great logical arguments of Madhyamika.
1. The reasoning of the vajra splinter; the reasoning inquiring into the nature of the cause.
2. The reasoning inquiring into the nature of the effect, which refutes production from existence and non-existence.
3. The reasoning inquiring into both cause and effect, which refutes birth from either of the four extremes.
4. The reasoning inquiring into the essence, which examines the absence of one and many.
5. The logical argument of the great interdependency.

effect—the way the interaction functions—is more magical than the absolute is: everything, all appearances, are interdependently originated.

'Intrinsic' means something that exists independently of cause and conditions, something that has substantial nature and that cannot be broken down into space, or that is not space, shunyata, itself. There is nothing like this in the entire universe. The whole universe is created as a result of shunyata; because of shunyata, the causes and conditions of interdependent origination are able to manifest. If causes were intrinsic, nothing would never change, move, or have any effect on anything else. Everything would stay just how it is, permanently. Interdependent origination means that there are no intrinsically existent phenomena whatsoever.

In Nagarjuna's *Mulamadhyamakakarika* (*Root Verses of the Wisdom of the Middle Way,* Tib. *Uma Tsawa Sherab*) there is a famous verse which means 'no phenomena arises from self, nor do they arise from others, from both, or from any other source. Therefore all phenomena are free from birth.'

In the *Madhyamakavatara* (*Entering the Middle Way,* Tib. *Uma la Jukpa*), Chandrakirti goes into a detailed refutation that explains how nothing arises from self, others, or from both, and that no arising is without a source. This Madhyamika reasoning examines the cause and establishes the birthlessness of all things.

There are different categories of logic. All these statements and reasonings belong to a specific category called investigation into the absolute (Tib. *dön dam chö ché kyi rigpa*). They are not relative reasoning (Tib. *ta nyé chö ché kyi rigpa*). But all categories of logic will, in the end, dissolve into the freedom from elaboration (*trödral*) itself, because they all establish the view of trödral.

Without the investigation into the absolute, it seems as if everything functions through causes and conditions coming together and producing an effect, and that causes and conditions are connected. If we look closely, it is not true to say that causes and conditions bring things into existence, because causes themselves do not contain the fruit within them, and neither is the fruit separate from the cause. Nor does the coming together of causes and conditions produce an effect that originates somewhere else, or from something new.

When you apply such reasoning, everything becomes dreamlike. We cannot penetrate a dream's causes and conditions in order to explain how they produced the dream. It is like the atoms a magician uses in his magic show. The magic is not in the atoms, nor is it separate from them; nor will putting those particles together produce the magic. It somehow still becomes magic; and that is why it is called 'magic'!

Something that is not existent could not, if truly non-existent, be brought into existence. And if something is truly existent, it cannot be brought into nonexistence. Something that truly does not exist, as far as the fruit is concerned, could not be brought into existence, like a rabbit's horn. No matter how many causes and conditions there are, a rabbit's horn cannot be brought into existence. The barren woman's daughter or son

also does not exist, and neither does a flower from space. Even with hundreds and thousands of causes, these non-existent things cannot be brought into existence.

The 'logic'we often use is that if something is non-existent, it can be brought into existence by causes and conditions. Without applying the absolute reasoning this logic is seemingly possible. But when you apply the absolute reasoning very closely, you realize it doesn't happen that way, because we ask the question, "Does it come to exist without leaving the state of non-existence or by leaving the state of non-existence?" And if we say that it does not leave the state of non-existence, but comes to exist, we are wrong, because this never happens.

Until it leaves the state of non-existence, nothing becomes existent. When it leaves the state of non-existence and exists, then it is no longer non-existent. If something truly exists, and we say that it ceases to exist, in terms of illusion, it works. But in reality, it cannot work, if this thing is intrinsically existent.

We can also ask whether something can become non-existent without leaving the state of existence. If something truly does exist, and then becomes nonexistent, it has to become non-existent without leaving the state of existence, and this never happens. Therefore, something that truly exists never becomes nonexistent. Something that truly does not exist never comes into existence, in terms of fruition.

Also, if something does exist, at which point can it be said that it does not exist? Or if something is non-existent, at which point can it be said that it does exist? These things function in terms of illusion, and in the mind and perception of beings. All things are illusory and nothing other than dreamlike states of mind, dreamlike experiences of things, or a magician's magic show.

In reality there is nothing, nothing whatsoever, onto which we can grasp. Can we grasp onto things as existent? No. Can we grasp onto things as non-existent? No. Can we grasp onto things as both existent and non-existent? No. And can we grasp onto things as neither existent nor non-existent? No. Ultimately, we cannot grasp in any way at all.

Everything is like a dream. As far as our perception is concerned, we can enjoy the dream, or be like a child in a beautiful temple. But in terms of emotion, when we realize the nature of emptiness, all grasping ceases; when all grasping ceases, the egolessness of dharma and of the self is present.

The Svatantrika View: Realizing Emptiness in Stages

The Prasangika and Svatantrika views are similar. In terms of the most absolute absolute (emptiness which is free of the four extremes and all grasping at once), they are the same. But in examining and leading us to the attainment of the absolute absolute, the Svatantrika Madhyamika school expresses another absolute truth, which is just emptiness. This is the temporal absolute, and the absolute is explained in this

way because many people find it difficult to understand the absolute absolute right away.

The Svatantrikas guide beings whose tendency to grasp onto things as solid and existent is very strong. First, they demonstrate that phemomena are not existent, and that they are empty by nature. This emptiness is not necessarily free of the four extremes. Once this has been understood, they then lead beings towards the realization of the absolute absolute truth, which is the emptiness that is free of all four extremes.

The first kind of emptiness or absolute truth is called the 'enumerated absolute' or 'the absolute truth that can be counted with numbers' (Tib. *nam drang pé döndam denpa*). For example, emptiness can be enumerated as the emptiness of form, the emptiness of feeling, the emptiness of formation, the emptiness of perception, and the emptiness of consciousness. As the Heart Sutra says, there is "no eye, no ear, no nose". There are in all sixteen different types of emptiness that are all called *nam drang pé döndam denpa.*

The absolute absolute truth, the emptiness which is free of the four extremes, is *trödral* or 'non-enumerated ultimate' (Tib. *namdrang mayinpé döndam*). In this absolute truth, there is nothing to count.

The enumerated ultimate is the empty nature of individual phenomena. The absolute absolute is the absolute nature of all phenomena. Both traditions recognize that experience is illusory but do not refute the experience of illusion.

The Madhyamika View on Relative Experience

The teachings of the Madhyamika and Mahayana views never conflict over the relative truth of conventional beings. You can point out that the perception of conventional beings is illusory, but you cannot refute the experience of illusion.

This is very important, because a lot of people think that Madhyamika and Mahayana teachings refute the experience of conventional beings when pointing out that everything is emptiness. Yet they do not refute the experience; they simply point out that our experience of relative phenomena is illusory and that we are caught in this illusion.

Nobody can refute what conventional beings experience. If it is experienced, who can refute it? But the way in which experience is illusory and in which we are caught in the illusion can be pointed out. This is very helpful, because you could wake up from your illusion. You might see the possibility of ending the illusion.

Both Madhyamika traditions agree with the consensus of the conventional world, but the Prasangika goes further towards the conventional. The Prasangika explanation of relative phenomena concurs with the consensus of conventional beings, and with whatever conventional beings say about the truth of relative phenomena. If you were to say that when you plant barley seed, water it and fertilize it, it will grow into barley plants and yield crops, they would agree with that, without debate.

The main focus of Prasangika philosophy is on the absolute truth, and on pointing out that grasping and fixation cause all our suffering, that we grasp and fixate because of ignorance and our belief in illusion, and that we are caught in this illusion.

The difference between the Svatantrika and Prasangika schools is that Svatantrika uses a philosophical system of logic and reason to establish relative phenomena, and Prasangika does not.

Svatantrikas employ a system of logic and reason that explains what exists and what does not exist. This logic is based on conventional consensus. If it were not, how could it ever be logical in the first place?

Using smoke as a sign to predict fire is an example of the use of logical inference. But there must be somebody to perceive that fire produces smoke and that smoke is a sign of fire. If there were no one to perceive this, there would be no reason or logic. Any systematized philosophy that is established as a school of logic, reason and study must ultimately be based on consensus. Consensus must be based on perception, which in turn must be based on the authentic experience of beings.

The difference between these two schools is analogous to the difference between the views of science and conventional people. Science uses logic and reason, whilst conventional people may not. However, they all agree that fire is hot. If you say to a conventional person "Is fire hot?" he or she would agree. If you say, "Why is fire hot?", he or she would say "Because it is." But if you ask a scientist, he or she would have an explanation.

So the Prasangika and the Svatantrika schools differ in their method of establishing relative truth. Within the relative, there are two categories: the relative truth and the false relative. Again, they are not categorized in relation to philosophy, but according to the perceptions and experience of conventional beings.

For instance, the perception of someone who sees a snow mountain as white is in accordance with the conventional consensus, which is established by the perception and experience of conventional beings. If we were to perceive a snow mountain as yellow in color, this would be unconventional, because that is not how conventional beings perceive it. So the statement "a snow mountain is white" becomes relative truth, whilst believing it to be yellow is false in the relative world.

Yogachara

Yogachara is another Madhyamika school. But Yogachara explains relative henomena according to the Chittamatra view of three natures. In terms of the absolute absolute the view of Yogachara is similar to the view of the Prasangika and Svatantrika schools. Yogachara does not uphold the belief that luminous mind is intrinsically existent. Yogachara differs from Chittamatra in this respect, as Yogachara understands emptiness to be free of the four extremes and of clinging to the four extremes.

Summary

Emptiness, from the point of view of any of the Mahayana schools, is not a refutation of the experience of conventional beings. It is simply a pointing-out instruction that shows experience to be an illusion, which is created by ignorance.

Secondly, absolute truth is free of all concepts and grasping. If we grasp onto the four extremes in any way, this is not absolute truth: we are caught in an illusion. The absolute truth is the egolessness of dharmas. The realization of the egolessness of dharmas makes it possible to see all phenomena as illusory, and that all illusions are equal. Samsara, nirvana and the path from samsara to nirvana are all illusory. If we hold onto samsara, the path or nirvana in any way at all, it will hinder our realization of the absolute.

Karma is produced by thoughts and emotions, which are produced by grasping. Grasping is produced by mental fabrication, which can be ended by the realization of emptiness. It cannot be ended by mental fabrication.

These are short and condensed statements on the two truths. In order to bring the meaning into our own wisdom and intelligence, each statement should be studied and contemplated for a long time.

3.3 RANGTONG AND SHENTONG

In the third turning of the wheel of Dharma, Buddha emphasized the tathagatagarbha . The tathagatagarbha teachings do not focus solely on the aspect of emptiness, they also focus on the luminosity aspect.

In the third turning of the wheel of Dharma, Buddha spoke of the qualities of enlightened beings as being present in the mind of all sentient beings, as the luminosity aspect. They are present as potential. If they were not present, then these qualities could not rise on the attainment of enlightenment.

The schools which emphasize the tathagatagarbha are the traditions of *Rangtong* and *Shentong*. They are very close to the view of the Mantrayana tradition.

Rangtong

The Tibetan term rangtong means 'empty of itself'. This school stresses that all phenomena, from form to enlightened mind, are empty of their nature. It states that their nature is trödral, or the dharmakaya, free from the four extremes and of clinging to the four extremes, and considers this to be the absolute teaching of the Buddha.

Rangtong is part of the Prasangika school. The Rangtong tradition places greater emphasis on the second turning of the wheel of the Dharma than Shentong does. Rangtong sees the teachings of the third turning as relative and open to interpretation, not as absolute teachings of the Buddha.

Shentong

Shentong means 'empty of other'. It means that any one phenomenon is empty of other phenomena. It states that all kleshas, karma, and samsaric appearances are empty, but that buddha nature and the qualities of buddha nature are not empty.

The Shentong tradition believes that the teachings of the third turning are the most absolute teachings of the Buddha, and are not open to interpretation. They see the teachings on emptiness as open to interpretation, and view the teachings on tathagatagarbha as the most essential and absolute teachings of the Buddha.

Shentong practitioners believe they are a Svatantrika Madhyamakan school, but others classify them as Chittamatra.

'Hard-line Views' of the Rangtong and Shentong Traditions

'Hard-line' Rangtong proponents don't accept that buddha nature or any aspect of the qualities of enlightened mind are present. They believe that there can be no affirmation of the absolute truth.

'Hard-line' Shentong scholars believe that the tathagatagarbha, the enlightened nature and the qualities of enlightened nature, are not empty. It and its qualities are intrinsic, uncompounded and truly existent.

The Middle View

Some scholars and practitioners, who are more in the middle, accept both views and try to combine them by seeing the good aspects of both.

They state that the teachings on the second turning of the wheel of Dharma emphasize emptiness as ultimate nature, which is the ultimate truth. The teachings on the tathagatagarbha in the third turning of the wheel of Dharma teach on the pure appearance of that absolute truth, and the luminous qualities of pure appearance. Together, they make a complete teaching on enlightened nature and the absolute truth.

Belief in emptiness, without luminosity and its qualities, is for these people gravitating towards the extreme view of nihilism. Those who do not accept emptiness as the tathagatagarbha and the qualities of the tathagatagarba are moving towards the eternalist extreme.

This view, from my point of view, is the complete view. It makes tremendous sense and contributes a great deal of understanding and insight to the teachings of the Buddha. It is also the view of the Vajrayana tradition. This tradition is emphasiszd by Longchenpa, Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thayé, Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo and Patrul Rinpoche, so this is also the Nyingma view of these two turnings of the wheel of the Dharma.

CHAPTER SIX

SHUNYATA

The Madhyamika View

A general introduction to the view of Madhyamika is known, in Tibetan, as *chi dön*. The study of Madhyamika, the Middle Way, enables us to understand that the nature of phenomena is emptiness, and furthermore, that emptiness is the key which makes everything possible.

How can shunyata be the key that makes everything possible?

The view of emptiness is the essential ground of bodhichitta and is what inspires bodhisattvas to live in samsara, to work for the benefit of beings and to progress along the path and bhumis until enlightenment.

Interdependent Origination

Everything is brought into existence because of interdependent origination. Interdependent origination and emptiness are inseparable. Because of emptiness, interdependent origination is possible, and because all things originate interdependently, their nature is emptiness. This is crucial to understand for anyone who aspires to be on the path of enlightenment.

There is a Tibetan saying, "For whatever is emptiness, all other possibilities exists. For whatever is not emptiness, there are no possibilities at all".

As everything is emptiness, it is possible for both samsara and nirvana to come into existence. If samsara were intrinsically existent, it would be impossible to overcome samsara. If nirvana were truly existent, beings would never be in samsara, and would never suffer.

Emptiness and Appearance

Space provides the ground from which everything can come into existence. Space allows causes and conditions to have an effect, and to produce the phenomenal world. Without space, it would be very difficult for cause and effect to function.

Take the example of this book. If it were intrinsically existent, it would never degenerate, disintegrate, or become old. It would never have been possible for it to have been formed in the first place. As the nature of this book is empty, the causes

and conditions that made it appear can occur. It is also possible for the causes and conditions of its disintegration to appear.

So space is emptiness, and everything arises from space. All phenomena remain in space when they are originated; and when things dissolve, space is unchanged and therefore present. Space is always there; in the beginning, in the middle, and in the end. Space does not change. Anything that appears, however solid it may appear to be, is in reality made of space.

Space serves as the ground from which things appear, both from the scientific point of view and from the point of view of Madhyamika. This building that we are in, for example, came into existence because of the ground of space; space allowed the causes and conditions for the production of this building to unfold. Though it looks solid, concrete and incredibly dense, it is also made of space. It is made of matter, and if you examine the nature of matter, you will find that matter is also space. Matter is not in any way intrinsically existent. Eventually, this structure will dissolve into space. When it dissolves, what does it dissolve into? It dissolves into space.

Change and Impermanence

In fact, within every fraction of every second, all phenomena are dissolving. As the nature of the phenomenal world is compounded, the moment something comes into existence, it dissolves simultaneously, within a fraction of a second: it is impermanent. Within each fraction of a second, there are still smaller fractions in which change occurs, so there is no time in which phenomena can linger for a while.

What continues is the continuum of origination and dissolution, not the thing itself. The thing itself does not exist as something solid and concrete that continues without any change.

Any gross or apparent change is derived from the subtle changes that occur from moment to moment. Our perceptions are locked into seeing big changes, rather than subtle changes. Whether our perception is able to penetrate subtle changes or not, the changes still occur, despite our lack of understanding.

Again, we can illustrate this point by examining the building we are sitting in. This building is seemingly the same building that we saw last year and visited yesterday, but it is not the same at all. It has actually changed a great deal since yesterday, and even since an hour ago. It is constantly changing, in a very refined way, in every moment. That we see things as solid, and as the same as they were, is a trick of the continuum of appearance and dissolution. Our tendency to grasp on to things as solid or intrinsic makes us perceive things as permanent, and to consider them to be the same as they were yesterday, or a month ago.

Another example is of walking through a river. You could walk through the same river this year that you walked through last year, and say to yourself, "Oh, I walked through

this river last year." But the river that you walked through last year flowed into the ocean long ago.

Take the example of an apple seed. You could plant an apple seed and the next year think that the tree produced by the seed is what you planted last year. It is not the same; it was a seed then, and now it is an apple tree. Because of the continuum of appearance and dissolution, we have a tendency to grasp, and become attached to seeing a phenomenon as one solid thing, or as always the same thing. An apple seed does not even look like a tree. An apple tree, small as it is, is much bigger than a seed, and its shape and color are completely different, but we still might consider them to be one thing.

Our ignorant mind clings to the phenomenal world and fails to validate the reality of phenomena. Our distorted perceptions have some validity in the relative world, but they cannot validate or examine the true nature of things.

How can we discover the true nature of things? By understanding the ignorance inherent in our perception, and the functions of the ignorant mind, and by removing this ignorance. Our misperception can be cleared by studying the teachings of the Buddha on the true nature of phenomena. Through our studies, we can remove our ignorance and see the true nature of phenomena; both the objective, phenomenal world and subjective perceptions, such as our own mind and its perceptions.

How Things Really Are

Space, or shunyata, is the ground which gives birth to all interdependent originations. It is always present. While it seems like the intrinsic nature of things is solid and concrete, space, or shunyata is nevertheless the nature of all things. There is nothing in the whole universe that is not impermanent. There is nothing in the whole universe that does not come to exist without the influence of causes and conditions, so the ground must be shunyata. Shunyata is as large as the whole universe, and as small as a seed.

Take the example of a seed. If a seed were intrinsic and not made of space, it could not change. What would make the seed change, sprout, and turn into a plant? In order for anything to change, it must be interdependently originated, and that means that it has its own causes and conditions and therefore is not intrinsic. The nature of everything is always emptiness and space.

Hypothetically speaking, if space was not the nature of everything, then what would the nature of everything be? Appearance perhaps, but what would be the nature of appearance? It would have to be something intrinsic, and if the nature of appearance were something intrinsic, then yet again, it could not move or change or produce any effects.

The seed itself has to be either consciousness or matter. If it is matter, it is made of atoms and if we examine atoms, atoms can be broken down further and further into space, which is what science has also discovered.

If it is consciousness, it too can be broken down. Let us take thoughts as an example, because thoughts are more important to us than any other part of the mind. All thoughts are sentences, and sentences are made of words. Words are made of syllables, and syllables are made of sounds. Sounds are made in time, and time can be broken down into 'no-time'. So, ultimately, there are no thoughts arising, dwelling, or ceasing.

The perception that all things that arise from ignorance should also be realized as shunyata, is the awakened state of mind. The accurate seeing of 'how things re' (Tib. *né tsul*) is seeing a rope as a rope, rather than mistaking it for a snake. This is the absolute truth, or shunyata. From the ground, to the path and ultimately to fruition, shunyata has never changed.

How We Perceive

However, the perceptions of sentient beings are different from the true nature of phenomena. Sentient beings do not perceive phenomena, such as the five skandhas of form, feeling, perception, formation and consciousness to be illusory, even though they are. Although phenomena are illusory, and their nature is emptiness, or shunyata, sentient beings cling to phenomena as being intrinsically existent, solid and real. The results of this clinging are the ego of the self and the ego of dharmas.

Karma is created and the appearance of all phenomena rises out of karma, but in reality it arises from emptiness; the appearance of phenomena is empty and will always be empty. As we have seen, emptiness never changes, but the perceptions of beings differ from the true nature of things. The way in which we perceive (Tib. *nang tsul*) is different from how things really are.

The perception of the buddhas is the same as how things truly are. There is nothing religious about being enlightened or the path to enlightenment. It is a matter of fact that if your perception matches how things really are, then there will be less ignorance, and fewer causes and conditions of suffering. If our perception does not meet with how things really are, it is distorted and ignorant and there will be many more causes and conditions of suffering.

Egolessness of the Self and Phenomena

In Madhyamika the ground is emptiness and the path is the two kinds of egolessness: the egolessness of the self and the egolessness of dharmas.

Without the realization of the egolessness of dharma it is very difficult to realize the egolessness of the self. In the Prajñaparamita it is said that without a certain degree of understanding of shunyata, it is impossible to attain any of the three fruitions of buddhahood, pratyekabuddhahood, or arhathood.[1]

1 Buddhahood according to the bodhisattva path; pratyekabuddhahood according to the Pratyekabuddha path; arhathood according to the Shravakayana.

In order to be free from the suffering of samsara, we must realize the egolessness of the self, thus freeing ourselves from the emotional obscurations which bind us to the suffering of samsara. In order to free ourselves completely from the cycle of existence, we must realize the egolessness of dharmas, which then works against the cognitive obscurations.

Yet we have to strip away the ego of dharmas to a certain extent if we are to realize the egolessness of the self. A good example of this is that we need to realize that a rope lying on the ground is not a snake before we can be free from the fear of it being a snake. So the emptiness of the skandhas has to be realized, to some degree, if we are not to cling to them as the basis of the ego.

The fear of the snake will not go away just because someone tells you that there is no snake. As Chandrakirti said, if you are afraid that there is a snake inside your dwelling and someone says to you, "There is no bear here, do not be afraid", it will not help you overcome your fear that a snake is in your house. In the same way, if we continuously cling onto the phenomenal world with dualistic perception, and someone tells us that the 'I' does not exist, and that the 'I' is emptiness, it will only make an intellectual impression on us; it will not help us in a profound way.

When we cling to the self, we cling to the self that is perceived through the five skandhas. In order to see that the self does not exist, we must realize that the nature of the skandhas is emptiness. It is an illusion to cling to the self as solid, singular, intrinsic and permanent, when in reality it is not any of these things.

All phenomena, including our body, speech and mind, are illusory but we cling to them as real, solid and intrinsic as a result of our ignorance and habitual tendencies. Just as we do in a dream, we have an illusory body, but we cling to it as real and solid. We cling to phenomena in the same way, even though their nature is shunyata.

The difference between grasping at self and grasping at phenomena is the object that is being grasped. Grasping onto the self is grasping onto the ego of self, whilst grasping onto our body is grasping onto the phenomenal world, or the ego of dharmas. The realization of the egolessness of dharmas is necessary for the realization of the egolessness of the self. The egolessness of self is the ground for becoming free from clinging to the self.

Our habit of clinging to the self is so strong that we cannot simply hear about the egolessness of self and automatically realize it. We might see very clearly that all our psychological and emotional suffering and problems are related to clinging to the self, but we have to reach the point at which we appreciate the egolessness of the self. Otherwise, if someone says, "Self does not exist", we might be frightened, as a result of our habit of clinging to the self.

Fear arises with us attempting to protect the self, but the buddha points out that the self does not exist. It is quite ridiculous to harbor fears that are the result of protecting a self which does not exist in the absolute, or even in the relative.

In the relative, objects such as a glass or a table do exist, but even in the relative, the self does not exist. There is nothing in the skandhas or the whole world that is permanent, singular and intrinsic. The self is a projection of mind that arises out of ignorance.

If we see that our suffering arises from clinging to the self, and that we can free ourselves of our clinging and realize the egolessness of the self, which would in turn free us from our emotional and psychological sufferings, we would be genuinely inspired to follow the path of the Buddha, the path of egolessness.

We must be open to this possibility. If we are not we will have very little basis on which to follow the Buddhist path. We would be following the Buddhist path as a way of cherishing and protecting the self. If this were the case, as this cherishing and protection will always result in further suffering, it would make little difference whether we followed and practiced the Buddhist teachings or not.

So, as a result of our contemplation and observation of our mind and life, we must genuinely renounce all forms of clinging to the self. We must want to let go of self-clinging, to escape our habits, our ignorance, and our capacity for becoming emotionally disturbed.

When we are free of self-clinging, we are freed from cherishing or protecting the self. When we are free from these two tendencies, negative emotions, such as ignorance, passion, aggression, jealousy and pride, will no longer arise in us. If we create no further negative emotion, we will not create any negative karma, and if there is no more karma, the seed of rebirth in the suffering of samsara no longer exists.

Gross and Subtle Understanding of Emptiness

Even if our realization is not that vast or deep, we must realize the emptiness of the phenomenal world to some extent. It does not need to be a complete understanding of emptiness, or a total recognition of the emptiness of all compounded things, and of all consciousness. To begin with, we should examine gross phenomena, or the gross skandhas. Once we have realized that the gross skandhas are illusory, impermanent, and made of many particles, this will be enough to

remove the ignorance of clinging to the body, or to the skandhas as a self.

Is this recognition a realization of emptiness? Yes, it is the realization that gross phenomena are illusory, impermanent, and compounded. It is not the most refined realization of emptiness, but it is still a realization of emptiness. Whether you realize a chariot is made of parts, or that the parts consist of shunyata, it is still a realization of shunyata: the first is on a gross level of the understanding of shunyata and the second is more subtle.

The philosophical position of the Nyingma School, and in particular the view of Mipham Rinpoche, differentiates between the Hinayana and the Mahayana. The great

masters of this tradition state that the Mahayana teachings on emptiness are complete, and that the bodhisattvas have the skilful means to completely realize the teachings on emptiness. They also state that the Shravakayana is a genuine path, a genuine path to arhathood, as is the Pratyekabuddhayana path that leads to pratyekabuddhahood.

Even though these schools do not realize emptiness completely, the level to which they have realized emptiness enables them to understand the egolessness of the self. Since their objective goal is to be free from the suffering of samsara, they are able to obtain their objective goal. There is no difference between the yanas in relation to the realization of the egolessness of the self, but the bodhisattvas' realization of the egolessness of dharmas is much more refined and complete. The bodhisattvas are therefore able to understand the view of emptiness completely, and this is the difference between the Shravakayana and the bodhisattva path: one understands emptiness partially, and the other understands emptiness fully.

In the *Abhidharmakosha,*[2] there is a logic that explains how gross phenomena are not how they appear to be, and that they are made of many particles and moments, and are impermanent, and so on. In the Madhyamika teachings, logic takes the form of breaking down a chariot into emptiness. Mipham Rinpoche says there is no difference between the two in terms of the use of logic and reasoning to establish emptiness, but there are differences in relation to how far they go.

Though the hearers and solitary realizers hold on to the partless particle and the shortest moment of consciousness in their understanding of emptiness, they can still have a direct perception of emptiness, rather than just a conceptual understanding. An arhat's perception can penetrate all things made of matter and all things that are impermanent.

However, since the philosophical position is that the indivisible particle and ndivisible moment are intrinsic, they do not go into impermanence so deeply. Philosophical positions can be a tremendous obstacle, because they do not reflect reality.

There is a story about two Shravaka monks coming to see Atisha in Tibet. When Atisha gave teachings on the egolessness of self, they were very moved and praised Atisha, holding their hands to their heart. When Atisha gave teachings on the egolessness of dharmas they were quite frightened and covered their ears with their hands and said, "Please don't say such things." People can get quite attached to their philosophical positions.

Dealing with Fear

People can be very afraid of the view of emptiness. There are two reasons for this. First, they think that when they realize emptiness, they will no longer experience phenomena. Secondly, they fear that the experience of phenomena will be a state of

2 Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Abhidharma*, which is the main treatise on the Hinayana understanding of phenomena.

mind that is permanently stuck in the idea of voidness. They think that phenomena will no longer function or change and there will no longer be any life.

This is simply not true. To think of voidness when we say emptiness, is incorrect, because voidness means grasping onto an image of non-form, which is itself an image of form. Shunyata is free of grasping. There is nothing else to be pointed out other than the pacification and cessation of all grasping. If emptiness could be described as 'experience', that is what the experience of enlightened beings would be.

There is no negation or disturbance of the experience of appearance, or of the functions of appearance. The appearance of all phenomena is undisturbed yet unceasingly perceived by the sense consciousnesses and by mental consciousness.

Another question people ask is, how can something function, and how can there be any activity if there is no grasping? This is the magical aspect of emptiness and it is the way in which mind works in the absolute. Illusion can be such a benefit on the path of the bodhisattva, as enlightenment can be attained by using the illusory path to overcome the illusion of samsara. When a fire has burnt itself out, the wood has also been consumed, and both the fire and the wood are extinguished. The illusion and obscurations of samsara are like the flames of a fire, and the path is like the wood. Both are burnt up simultaneously, both are extinguished and both cease to exist. This is the magical aspect of emptiness.

Passion without Grasping

Furthermore, many Westerners like to be passionate and can sometimes feel threatened by teachings on emptiness, because they are attached to feeling or experiencing things in a passionate way.

Without the perspective of emptiness, passion seems to have great importance. But what is passion? Passion is about being passionate. Passion never results in a lasting and deep satisfaction or happiness. Instead, engaging in passion or lust is a kind of suffering or pain in itself, rather like drinking salty water. The more salt water we drink, the thirstier and more dissatisfied we become. There is no truth or benefit to be gained from passion and lust.

True passion is the realization of emptiness. If you genuinely realize emptiness, you become completely passionate. Who could be more passionate than a bodhisattva? Think about what they do; they need tremendous passion in order to do what they do. So the true source of passion is the realization of emptiness. It cuts through ordinary passion, and brings about its complete cessation and the emergence of a profound and pure state of mind, which is free of all poison. So the pure energy of passion arises out of emptiness.

We might wonder how phenomena and mind can function without grasping. This is possible because grasping is not the function of mind. Our grasping nature

is even a hindrance to the functioning of the mind. When we grasp, we focus on a particular object, thus obscuring the vast vision that is a natural quality of the mind. By focusing, we remain within the limits of our focus, and this eliminates all possibility of a panoramic view. Not only can the mind experience such a view, it can also function according to the view. Therefore, it is a hindrance to see grasping as a function of mind. We are so familiar with the habit of grasping that we tend to feel that mind cannot function without it.

If there is no grasping, then we possess the vast view of the nature of mind, and its functions, and such a mind can be used in many more ways. All its various potentials and methods become very effective, whatever activity mind is engaged in.

The realization of emptiness or of absolute truth will never be a hindrance to the functioning and effectiveness of mind. It will always add to mind's potential. Grasping, ignorance, and the habitual patterns of grasping are what hinders the mind. In some sense you could say that the process of exploring and improving the functioning, capability and scope of the mind, is the path of the bodhisattva. The removal of everything that hinders the mind from functioning properly is the path of the bodhisattva.

Enlightened Mind Is Uncompounded

We have seen that shunyata is the absolute truth. Only understanding the absolute truth can liberate us, since the absolute truth is nirvana, or enlightenment. There is no enlightenment outside of the absolute truth, or the realization of the absolute truth. Absolute truth is present all the time, in everything, everywhere. It is part of all of us; and not something that we have to search for outside ourselves.

Absolute truth is not something that you need to cultivate through causes and conditions. If something is cultivated through causes and con ditions, it is compounded. If enlightenment were a compounded phenomenon, produced by causes and conditions, it would be momentary and impermanent. Therefore, it would bring us suffering, rather than nirvana. Enlightenment means that the mind has completely shed all obscurations, and has awakened to the truth.

The relative, phenomenal world is definitely impermanent. The realization of impermanence is the realization of the relative truth, but it is not the realization of absolute truth. When we investigate impermanence, we will see that there is nothing hat makes shunyata impermanent. Since impermanence is a thing, it is a product of causes and conditions, of interdependent origination. It is therefore not the nature of phenomena.

Shunyata, or enlightenment, is nirvana, or completely awakened mind. When we describe shunyata, people who are not familiar with it might conclude that shunyata is an object. Shunyata is the nature of objective phenomena, as well as the nature of subjective mind.

So awakened mind is not an intrinsic phenomenon that has a view of shunyata. If it were, it would be dualistic: shunyata would be an object, and awakened mind would be the subject; or shunyata would be emptiness, and awakened mind would be intrinsically existent. People often maintain such dualistic views, but this is not how it really is.

Ground, Path and Fruition

As we become more realized and awakened, the nature of subjective and objective phenomena merge into their true nature, where there is no differentiation. When the nature of phenomena is fully obscured, it is known as the ground. When it is partially obscured, it is called view, and when it is completely unobscured, it is called dharmakaya, or enlightenment. There is no actual change in the nature of phenomena: it is just that our obscurations have been removed by the prajña of hearing, the prajña of contemplation, and the prajña of meditation.

The awakened mind is absolute; it does not change. For example, the moon does not wax or wane at all, but from the point of view of beings on this earth, the moon waxes each month until it comes into full view. In the same way, a practitioner's intellectual and experiential understanding of the nature of things, along with the shedding of obscurations, gradually increases.

The teachings on shunyata are the ultimate and definitive teachings of the buddha. Shunyata is the nature of phenomena, and the awakened state of mind is the realization of shunyata with which we see the nature of phenomena clearly: when this happens, then ignorance, and the causes and conditions of delusion and dualistic perception can no longer exist.

When the delusion of dualistic perception dissolves, there is no longer any suffering, and when suffering dissolves then samsara no longer exists. So in order to be free from the suffering of samsara, we must be free from delusion, and in order to be free from delusion, we must be free from dualistic perception, grasping and fixation. To accomplish this, we must understand the ignorance which produces grasping and fixation, and penetrate our grasping and fixation with our understanding of the nature of emptiness, or shunyata. All things that arise from ignorance should also be realized as shunyata.

Complete Realization of Suchness

We have seen that né tsul means how things truly are, the absolute truth. Nang tsul, which means how things appear, is the relative. Né tsul and nang tsul do not match in the experience of ignorant beings, and they therefore experience delusion, suffering, pain, and samsara.

As we develop an accurate perception of né tsul, and begin to shed our obscurations,

we experience less and less delusion, and therefore less suffering. The ultimate result of this is buddhahood.

At the time of buddhahood, all remaining obscurations, both emotional and cognitive, fall away, and we attain the complete realization of suchness. Suchness (Skt. *tathata*; Tib. *dé shyin nyi*) means 'that which is consistent from the ground to the path, and from the path to enlightenment'. Suchness never changes, and is allpervasive.

When all obscurations are purified, the resultant realization is called dharmakaya. Dharmakaya means 'shunyata', or 'mahashunyata', the source from which all the qualities of enlightenment arise. By this point, dualistic perceptions have completely dissolved, and the two egolessnesses, particularly the egolessness of dharmas, are completely mastered.

The Perception of Enlightened Mind

Once we recognize our ignorance, it cannot function anymore. When ignorance is exposed and deprived of its secret power, ignorance dissolves.

Emptiness is not something that we can define with the conceptual mind. Emptiness is suchness, and the realization of emptiness is prajñaparamita. When we realize emptiness completely, we no longer see in a dualistic way. Perception itself, as well as the emptiness that is being realized, is emptiness. It is like pouring water into water. There is nothing to be affirmed, in terms of existence, non-existence, nor of both, or of neither.

Normally, we cling to the idea that something exists or does not exist, or to both these ideas. 'Neither' means that we cling to the non-existence of existence and to non-existence, but reality is not like this. Since we no longer cling in any of these four ways, and no longer cling to rising, dwelling and ceasing, all clinging has ceased. Therefore mind is at perfect peace, in perfect nirvana, and free of all fabrications (trödral).

When we communicate, we have to speak of emptiness as if it were an object, and as if the perceptions of the buddha were perceptions of emptiness. In reality, there is no dualistic perception at all. The buddha's perception is known as so so rang rig. So so rang rig is very different from rang rig. Rang rig is 'self-awareness', whilst so so rang rig applies to the perception of suchness, the perception of higher beings, which is ma sam jö mé, free of mental fabrications or grasping, and free of speech or thoughts.

So so rang rig is absolute. When the absolute is realized, there is no particular affirmation, but there is realization. This realization not only has the power to liberate beings, but through it we also obtain the qualities that are a natural part of our tathagatagarbha.

For instance, on the first bhumi, the bodhisattva is able to perceive other world systems and the buddhas within those world systems, and receive teachings from them. Bodhisattvas on the first bhumi perfect the paramita of generosity. On the

second and third bhumi, through the realization of shunyata, the qualities of buddha nature are more accessible, and we are able to benefit beings.

On the sixth bhumi, when we completely realize prajñaparamita, or when we perfect the paramita of wisdom, we attain the power to enter and exit the state of shunyata within a fraction of a second. Time itself is transcended. We could be in shunyata for a kalpa or for a mere split second. The more we are in accord with the realization of prajñaparamita, and the more we realize emptiness, the greater our own potential and freedom for exercising our mind becomes. The qualities of mind come increasingly under our control.

Shunyata is not like a fire being extinguished or water evaporating. We do not dissolve into shunyata to find that nothing ever happens again. Such misunderstanding or fear of emptiness comes from ignorance itself. We can now see how mind is capable of functioning in an ignorant condition. Since the mind is itself shunyata, if we are realized and our ignorance is purified, mind has a hundred, a thousand, or even a million times greater potential. We should understand emptiness to be like this.

Appearance and its interdependent origination will always manifest. On the level of the ground, appearance manifests as the two truths. On the path it manifests as the two accumulations. On the level of fruition it manifests as the two kayas, with the aspirations, mental faculties and karma of bodhisattvas and sentient beings.

The Benefits of Realizing Emptiness

Through the influence of the eight worldly concerns, we gravitate towards pleasure, pleasant sounds, comfort, and praise. We cling to them extremely strongly, and try very hard to achieve them. We invest so much hope in them, and so much effort in attaining the objects of our hope, but it is an endless pursuit, a tiresome work that wears us out and exhausts us, and we gain no sense of achievement from our activity whatsoever. Even if we were to achieve something, it would be a pointless achievement, as it is impermanent and the cause of great disappointment. Life changes continually, and life itself will eventually come to an end.

Those who realize emptiness see that all suffering is caused by being caught in a dream and trying to make things work out within the dream. They have no desire to attain pleasure, comfort and praise in the first place, because the reasons for that desire no longer exist. Neither would they fool themselves through clinging, as if there was something to gain from the dream. Nor would they want to make things work well in the dream, as we do in life. Therefore, such people will be much more in accord with nature, and will sit in that nature and attain peace and nirvana, the cessation of suffering and ignorance.

The other aspect of the eight worldly concerns is the tremendous fear that we are often caught in: fear of blame, pain, poverty and unpleasant words. Our lives are full of all

kinds of fear which constantly strike at our hearts, and make us shiver and panic, and feel incredibly groundless and bewildered. Life itself becomes a pain and a burden, and the experience of pleasure or comfort becomes rarer and rarer. People grow up and are forced to confront all kinds of problems, but in the end, what is it all for? For nothing.

Life itself is impermanent. Whatever problems we have solved, in the end, life itself is in the hands of impermanence, and we will leave this world, so we have not solved our problem! We forget that eventually we all have to die. We fixate on small problems, instead of thinking that the four streams of life—birth, old age, sickness and death—are natural, inevitable, and occur to all beings. In one way or another we have to find peace. This can only happen by realizing that birth, old age, sickness and death are themselves illusory.

If we fail to realize the illusory nature of the four rivers of life, we fixate on small problems concerning this and that, problems with ourselves, with society, with our family, with Dharma centers, all kinds of problems. Our mind is continually busy with all sorts of fears about what is going to happen next. All in all, our minds are preoccupied by fear.

All our fears are of losing something, but loss is a part of life, and there is nothing that we can do about it. All things are impermanent. What goes up must come down. That which is born must die. That which is compounded is impermanent, and whatever comes together must separate. This is all part of nature.

Our mind is tight and cannot accept this, and so we try to hold onto things, and think that things should continue forever, that what goes up should stay up, and never come down. We think that whatever comes together should stay together, and never separate, that all that is compounded should remain intrinsic and solid and never become impermanent, and that all that we accumulate should never be exhausted. It is the thoughts in our mind that create our fear, because they are not at all in accord with the nature of phenomena. Our hopes and fears go round and round in our minds and our consciousness; we are helplessly and always caught up in them, and this is the pain we experience in our lives.

As our realization of emptiness grows, our whole approach to life, our actions and the way in which we get caught up in them comes to seem humorous and silly. All the things sentient beings intuitively try to get from life are already there. Emptiness itself is the remedy that soothes our frustration, pain and dissatisfaction. Since emptiness dissolves our negativity, our positive qualities are naturally revealed, and since these qualities are part of our nature, we are in touch with ourselves.

Everything is there, but as we do not cling to anything, we do not ruin it. As soon as we try to cling to our happiness, it will not be there; it would just be an image in our mind. Therefore, it is not good to grasp at our meditative experiences (Tib. *nyam*). However great the experience might be, as soon as we try to grasp it, we lose what

we have and fall into the mindset of clinging, which we then project. Even if the experience does not evaporate immediately, our problems have begun again.

Never grasp onto experience. Always look at the nature of the grasping itself, and examine it.

Someone who has realized shunyata sees grasping as the product of a child-like mind which grasps at things that are not truly existent. It is just like a dream in which we make everything solid, real and problematic. Then, we attempt to gain something from the dream, and to reject the parts that we do not like.

Our struggles are even worse than those of a child. At least a child enjoys the moment; but we, as adults, do not even know how to enjoy the moment. When the sun shines, or when it rains, we do not know how to enjoy it. When the sun shines, we want rain; when it rains, we want sunshine. When it is cloudy, we want blue sky, and when there is blue sky we want some cloud for shade. When it is winter we want summer, and when it is summer we want winter. Our mind is always dissatisfied. We are worse than children, because children know, to some extent, how to be in the moment.

In the eyes of the noble ones, our mind and our whole mode of behavior is even worse than that of a newborn child. Those who realize the nature of emptiness realize that everything is illusory, and that suffering comes from clinging to dreamlike phenomena, dreamlike life, and dreamlike experiences.

Therefore, to bring about the cessation of suffering is to realize the nature of emptiness, and so we meditate on the nature of emptiness and are sustained by the food of meditation. This is one of the benefits of the realization of emptiness.

Through the realization of shunyata we recognize that life and birth are themselves non-existent, just as dwelling and ceasing are non-existent. We transcend the whole cycle of birth, old age, sickness, death, and rebirth. We become more aware, and more capable of gaining even higher realization, of receiving teachings from the buddhas of the ten directions. We practice the paramita practices, without being afflicted by samsara as we were before. This is how the realization of shunyata benefits us in the next life.

Other sentient beings also benefit, as tremendous compassion for all beings arises when we realize the nature of emptiness. Although this is the nature of things, and the way in which freedom comes into being, not all beings are freed by our compassion. Sentient beings are in great pain and suffering, which they express in all sorts of outer, inner, and secret ways, thereby creating more pain for no reason at all. An unbearable compassion arises in the mind of bodhisattvas. They cultivate bodhichitta and dedicate their lives to the service of other beings, by bringing them the teachings of the buddha, and by trying to awaken them. As much as they can, bodhisattvas take on the suffering of other beings, by exchanging themselves for others. They take a vow to remain in the world, and to be of service to sentient beings, until space itself is completely empty of all sentient beings. This is the benefit that the study of the teachings on emptiness brings.

DEDICATION

Let us dedicate all merit to the enlightenment of all sentient beings, so that everybody might realize their nature and be free from ignorance, and gain a clear perception of their nature, so that their nature and their perceptions meet, and nirvana is attained.

May all the multiple world systems be at peace and in harmony, and in accord with the noble Dharma, which is the ultimate source of happiness, joy and freedom from suffering.

May all of us realize shunyata, and liberate ourselves from our own ignorance and the chains of dualistic mind. May genuine bodhichitta be born in all of us; may we stabilize it and bring it to fruition.

May all the great beings who benefit others remain in good health and may they carry out their work in favorable conditions, and fulfill their aspirations.

May Sogyal Rinpoche, the founder of Rigpa, be in good health and always meet with auspicious conditions for teaching the Dharma to many beings, in Europe, and all over the world; and may they practice and study the buddhadharma at Lerab Ling and Dzogchen Beara. May the Dharma flourish at Lerab Ling and all Rigpa centers and may many great teachers propagate the Dharma there.

I make this dedication with the sincere motivation of us all; and call on the blessings of the buddhas and bodhisattvas to confirm this dedication.

This is the ordinary dedication. The extraordinary dedication is to meditate on emptiness.

About Venerable Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche

Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche was born in 1964 in Northern India to Tibetan parents, and grew up in a monastic environment. He was recognized by Gyalwa Karmapa as an incarnation of Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thayé the Great, who was one of the most revered and influential masters of 19th-century Tibet. Rinpoche received extensive training in all aspects of Buddhist doctrine, and in the Nyingma lineage and Longchen Nyingtik in particular. Rinpoche´s root teacher was Kyabjé Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche; he also studied extensively with Kyabjé Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche, Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche and the great scholar-yogin Khenpo Rinchen.

Since 1989 he has lived in the United States with his family. In 1990 he began a five-year tenure as a professor of Buddhist philosophy at the Naropa Institute. Rinpoche also founded Mangala Shri Bhuti at this time, an organization established with the vision of furthering the wisdom and practice of the Longchen Nyingtik lineage. Later, Rinpoche moved to southern Colorado and established the mountain retreat center, Longchen Jigmé Samten Ling. Rinpoche currently spends much of his time there in retreat and guides students in long-term retreat practice. When not in retreat, he teaches throughout the world.

Further information about Kongtrul Rinpoche's Shedra teachings is available at:

www.rigpashedra.org

or www.mangalashribhuti.org.

GLOSSARY

Abhidharma (Skt.; Tib. *chö ngönpa, chos mngon pa*): one of the three baskets in which the Buddha's teachings are classified.

Absolute (Skt. *paramartha;* Tib. *döndampa, don dam pa*)

Absolute truth (Skt. *paramartha satya;* Tib. *döndam denpa, don dam bden pa*)

Akanishtha (Skt.; *Tib. omin, 'og min*); lit. 'nothing above': the highest celestial realm—a Buddha-field which is not usually visible to ordinary human perception.

All-ground consciousness (Skt. *alaya vijnana*, Tib. *kün shyi nam shé, kun gzhi rnam shes*); the eighth consciousness. It is usually defined as 1) the ground of samsara, but can also be defined as 2) the ground of samsara and nirvana. In the latter sense, it is used as an expression for the nature of mind.

Analytical meditation (Tib. *ché gom, dpyad bsgom*)

Arhat (Skt.; Tib. *dra chom pa, dgra bcom pa*); literally 'one who has conquered the enemies' or 'foe-destroyer'. The highest level of realization in Hinayana practice. There are two stages of arhathood, with remainder (Tib. lhak ché) and without remainder (Tib. lhak mé).

Asanga (Tib. *tokmé, thogs med*): The famous fourth century master who received direct teachings from Maitreya and revealed Maitreya's five great teachings (Tib. jam chö dé nga, byams chos sde lnga).

Atisha (982-1054): also known as Dipankara, one of the main teachers at the famous university of Vikramashila. His disciples founded the Kadampa school.

Awareness (Skt. *vidya*; Tib. *rig pa*): the natural state of mind.

Bodhichitta (Skt.; Tib. *chang chub kyi sem, byang chub kyi sems*); lit. 'the mind of enlightenment'.

Bodhichitta of action or engagement bodhichitta (Tib. *jugpé semgyé, 'jug pa'i sems bskyed*)

Bodhichitta of aspiration (Tib. *mönpa semgyé, smon pa'i sems bskyed*)

Bodhisattva (Skt.; Tib. *chang chub sempa, byang chub sems dpa'*); lit.: 'warrior of enlightened mind'.

Bodhisattva level (Skt. *bhumi*, Tib. *sa*): the ten levels through which a bodhisattva progresses on his way to enlightenment. The Mahayana counts ten levels, the Vajrayana thirteen levels, and Dzogchen sometimes counts sixteen levels.

Buddha (Skt.; Tib. *sangyé, sangs rgyas*); lit. 'purified and developed': one who has purified all obscurations and fully developed all the qualities of enlightenment.

Buddha nature (Skt. tathagatagarbha; Tib. *de shek nying po, de gshegs snying po*): the nature of buddhahood present in every being.

Buddha's own words (Skt. *vacana*; Tib. *ka, bka'*)

Calm abiding (Skt. *shamatha*; Tib. *shyiné, zhi gnas*)

Cessation (Skt. *nirodha*; Tib. *gokpa, 'gog pa*)

Chandrakirti: renowned seventh century Indian philosopher and siddha, the abbot of the great monastic university of Nalanda. He is revered for his interpretation of Nagarjuna's teachings on the Middle Way and is the author of the Madhyamakavatara (Introduction to the Middle Way).

Chittamatra (Skt.; Tib. *sem tsampa, sems tsam pa*); lit. 'Mind-Only': one of the two philosophical schools of the Mahayana.

Cognitive obscuration (Tib. *shédrip, shes bya'i sgrib pa*)

Commentary (Skt. *shastra*; Tib. *tenchö, bstan bcos*); lit. 'showing and transforming'.

Commitment (Skt. *samaya*; Tib. *damtsik, dam tshig*)

Compassion (Skt. *karuna*; Tib. *nyingjé, snying rje*)

Cyclic existence (Skt. *samsara*; Tib. *khorwa, 'khor ba*)

Definitive teachings (Skt. *nitartha*; Tib. *ngé dön, nges don*)

Demon (Skt. *mara*, Tib. *dü, bdud*): the tempter in general, that which makes obstacles to spiritual practice and enlightenment.

Dependent nature (Skt. *paratantra*; Tib. *shen wang, gzhan dbang*): one of the three categories with which Chittamatra proponents explain reality.

Dharma (Skt.; Tib. *chö, chos*): This term has a wide range of meanings. For example, it can refer to the Buddha's teachings, knowledge, path, nirvana, phenomena, mental objects, merit, life and the future.

Dharma of realization (Tib. *tokpé chö, rtogs pa'i chos*)

Dharma of scriptures (Tib. *lung gi chö, lung gi chos*)

Dharmadhatu (Skt.; Tib.*chö ying, chos dbyings*): absolute space.

Dharmakaya (Skt.; Tib. *chö ku, chos ku*); lit. 'truth body'.

Dharmata (Skt.; Tib. *chö nyi, chos nyid*): reality itself.

Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche: (1910-1991), one of the great lineage holders of the Nyingma, in particular of Longchen Nyingtik.

Diligence (Skt. *virya*, Tib. *tsöndru, brtson 'grus*)

Discipline (Skt. *shila*; Tib. *tsultrim, tshul khrims*)

Disturbing emotions (Skt. *klesha*; Tib. *nyön mong, nyon mongs*); lit. 'afflictions': ignorance (Tib. *ma rigpa*), passion (Tib. *döchak, 'dod chags*), agression (Tib. *kongtro, khong khroba*), pride (Tib. *ngagyal, nga rgyal*) and jealousy (Tib. *tradok, phra dog*).

Drubdra (Tib. *sgrub grwa*), lit. 'place of accomplishment': retreat centre.

Dzogchen (Tib. *rdzogs chen*); lit. 'Great Perfection': Atiyoga, the highest teachings of the Nyingma tradition.

Egolessness (Skt. *nairatmya*, Tib. *dakmé, bdag med*): absence of singular (Tib. *gcig*), permanent (Tib. *rtag pa*) and independent (Tib. *rang dbang*) existence.

Egolessness of dharmas (Tib. *chö kyi dak mé, chos kyi bdag med*): the antidote to cognitive obscurations.

Egolessness of self (Tib. *kang zak gyi dak mé, gang zag gi bdag med*): the antidote to emotional obscurations.

Eight worldly concerns (Tib. *jigten chö gyé, 'jig rten chos brgyad*): the hope for gain, pleasure, praise and fame; the fear of loss, pain, blame and insignificance.

Emotional obscuration (Tib. *nyöndrip, nyon sgrib*)

Enlightenment (Skt. *bodhi*; Tib. *chang chub, byang chub*): the purification (*chang*) of all obscurations and the realization (*chub*) of all qualities.

Enumerated ultimate (Tib. *nam trang pé döndam denpa*): a category of absolute truth which is used in the Svatantrika Madhyamika.

Eternalism (Tib. *takpar tawa, rtag par lta ba*): the belief in existence.

Extraordinary seeing (Skt. *vipashyana*; Tib. *lhak tong, lhag mthong*)

Five aggregates (Skt. *skandha*; Tib. *pungpo nga, phung po lnga*): form (Skt. *rupa*, Tib. *zuk, gzugs*), feeling (Skt. *vedana*, Tib. *tsorwa, tshor ba*), perception (Skt. *samjña*, Tib. *dushé, 'du shes*), formation (Skt. *samskara*, Tib. *du ché, 'du byed*) and consciousness (Skt. *vijñana*, Tib. *namshé, rnam shes*).

Five sciences (Tib. *rik ngé nga, rig gnas lnga*): craftsmanship or arts (Tib. *zo rigpa*), medicine (Tib. *so ché kyi rigpa*), language or grammar (Tib. *dra*), logic (Tib. *ten tsik*), and the inner science of philosophy (Tib. *nang rigpa*).

Five paths (Skt. *panca marga*, Tib. *lam nga, lam lnga*): the path of accumulation (Skt. *sambhara marga*; Tib. *tsok lam, tshogs lam*), the path of engagement (Skt. *prayoga marga*; Tib. *jor lam, sbyor lam*), the path of seeing (Skt. *darshana marga*; Tib. *tong lam, mthong lam*), the path of meditation (Skt. *bhavana marga*, Tib. *gom lam*, *sgom lam*), the path of no more learning (Skt. *ashaiksha marga*, Tib. *milop lam, mi slob lam*)

Four extreme views (Tib. *mu shi, mu bzhi*): the belief in existence, non-existence, both or neither.

Four foundations of mindfulness: The four foundations of mindfulness were elucidated by the Buddha in the Satipatthana Sutra. They are the mindfulness of the body, sensations, mind and dharma.

Four immeasurables (Tib. *tsé mé shyi, tshad med bzhi*): loving kindness (Tib. *jampa, byams pa*), compassion (Tib. *nyingjé, snying rje*), joy (Tib. *gawa, dga' ba*) and equanimity (Tib. *tang nyom, btang snyoms*).

Four noble truths (Tib. *pakpé denpa shi*): the truth of suffering (Tib. *dukngal denpa, sdug bsngal bden pa*), the truth of the origin of suffering (Tib. *kun jung denpa, kun 'byung bden pa*), the truth of cessation (Tib. *gokpé denpa, 'gog pa'i bden pa*) and the truth of the path (Tib. *lam denpa, lam bden pa*).

Freedom from conceptual fabrication or elaboration (Tib. *trödral, spros bral)*

Fruit (Tib. *dré, 'bras*)

Gampopa (1079-1153): also known as Dakpo Rinpoche, one of Milarepa's most famous disciples and the founder of the Kagyü tradition.

Ganden: In this context Ganden is a synonym for the Geluk tradition, Ganden being the name of its main monastery.

Gelugpa (Tib. dge lugs pa): Sarma tradition founded by Jé Tsongkhapa (1357-1419).

General introduction (Tib. *chi dön, spyi don*)

Generosity (Skt. *dana*, Tib. *jinpa, sbyin pa*)

Ground (Tib. *shyi, gzhi*)

Hinayana (Skt.; Tib. *tegpa menpa, theg pa dman pa*): the basic vehicle that is based on the first turning of the wheel of Dharma.

Ignorance (Skt. *avidya*; Tib. *ma rigpa*)

Indivisible moment (Tib. *ké chik cha mé*)

Indivisible particle (Tib. *dul tren cha mé*)

Interdependent origination (Skt. *pratitya samutpada*; Tib. *ten ching drel war jungwa, rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba*): The twelve links of interdependent originaiont are

1) ignorance (Tib. *ma rigpa*) 2) formations (Tib. *duché, 'du byed*) 3) Consciousness (Tib. *namshé, rnam shes*) 4) Name and form (Tib. *ming, ming gzugs*) 5) Six sense fields (Skt. *ayatana*; Tib. *kyéché druk, skye mched drug*) 6) Contact (Tib. *rekpa, reg pa*) 7) Feeling (*Tib. tsorwa, tshor ba*) 8) Craving (Tib. *sépa, sred pa*) 9) Grasping (Tib. *lenpa*) 10) Becoming (Tib. *sipa, srid* pa) 11) Birth (Tib. *kyéwa, skye ba)* 12) Old age and death (Tib. *ga shi, rga shi*).

Intrinsically existent (Skt. *parinispanna*; Tib. *yong drup, yongs grub*): absolute truth from a Chittamatra perspective

Investigation into the absolute (Tib. *dön dam chö ché kyi rigpa*)

Investigation into the relative (Tib. *ta nyé chö ché kyi rigpa*)

Jamgön Kongtrul Rinpoche (1813-1900): one of the most influential masters in the Tibetan Buddhist world and the founder of the non-sectarian movement.

Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo: According to the Nyingma tradition Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo (1820-1892) is the body incarnation of Jigmé Lingpa. For his life story, see Masters of Meditation and Miracles, pp. 215.

Jigmé Lingpa (Tib. *'jigs med gling pa*) (1729-1798) is considered to be an emanation of Vimalamitra and King Trisong Detsen. He received the Longchen Nyingtik teachings from Longchenpa.

Kadampa (Tib. *bka' gdams pa*): The Kadampa order was the first school of the Sarma tradition in Tibet, founded through the instructions and influence of Atisha (982-1054) and his disciple Dromdönpa (1008-1064). In 1057 Dromdönpa founded Reting Monastery, which became the main seat of the order.

Kagyüpa (Tib. *bka' brgyud pa*): Sarma school, which follows the teachings of Marpa (Tib. *lho brag mar pa*) (1012-1097) and Milarepa (Tib. *rje tsun mi la*) (1040-1123).

Lama (Skt. *guru*; Tib. *bla ma*); lit. 'nothing superior': spiritual teacher.

Longchenpa (Tib. *long chen rab 'byams pa*) (1308-1363): One of the most extraordinary masters of the Nyingmapa tradition, author of the Seven Treasures (Tib. *mdzod bdun*).

Mahamudra (Skt.; Tib. *chakgya chenpo, phyag rgya chen po*), lit: 'Great Seal': the Kagyü tradition that emphasizes direct realization of the luminous and empty nature of mind and phenomena.

Mahayana (Skt.; Tib. *tekpa chenpo, theg pa chen po*); lit.: 'Great Vehicle': the bodhisattva vehicle.

Maitreya (Tib. *jamgön, byams mgon*); lit. 'Lord of Love': the future Buddha. The five great treatises of Maitreya are The Ornament of Realization (Skt. *Abhisamayalankara*; Tib. *ngön tok gyen, mngon rtogs rgyen*), The Ornament of the Mahyana Sutra (Skt. *Mahayana Sutralankara*, Tib. *do dé gyen, mdo sde rgyen*), Distinguishing the Middle from the Extremes (Skt. *Madhyanta Vibhanga*; Tib. *ü ta nam jé, dbus mtha' rnam 'byed*), Distinguishing Phenomena from Suchness (Skt. *Dharmadharmata Vibhanga*; Tib. *chö chönyi nam jé, chos chos nyid rdam 'byed*), and The Sublime Continuum (Skt. *Uttaratantra Shastra*; Tib. *gyü lama, rgyud bla ma*).

Mantra vehicle (Skt. *Mantrayana*; Tib. *ngak lam, sngags lam*)

Meditation (Skt. *dhyana*, Tib. *samten, bsam gtan*), lit. 'stable concentration'.

Meditative experience (Tib. *nyam, nyams*): experiences of bliss, clarity and nonthought.

Merit (Skt. *punya*; Tib. *sönam, bsod nams*)

Middle Way (Skt. *Madhyamika*; Tib. *uma pa, dbu ma pa*)

Mindfulness (Skt. *smrti*, Tib. *drenpa, dran pa*)

Mipham Rinpoche: The nineteenth century master Jamgön Mipham Rinpoche (1846-1912) was one of the most influential scholars of the Nyingma tradition.

Monk (Skt. *bhikshu*, Tib. *gelong, dge slong*)

Motivation (Tib. *kün long, kun slong*); lit. 'that which gives rise to everything'.

Nagarjuna (Tib. *klu sgrub*): Indian master of the first and second century, revealer of the Prajnaparamita teachings and pioneer of Madhyamika, author of the Fundamental Treatise on the Middle Way (Skt. *Mulamadhyamikakarika*, Tib. *uma tsawé sherab, dbu ma rtsa ba'i shes rab*).

New schools (Tib. *sarma, gsar ma*): the Sakya, Kagyü and Gelug traditions.

Ngöndro (Skt. *purvagama*; Tib. *sngon 'gro*): the preliminary practices of Vajrayana.

Nihilism (Tib. *chépar tawa, chad par lta ba*): the belief in non-existence.

Nirmanakaya (Skt.; Tib. *trul ku, sprul pa'i ku*): the form body of the buddhas.

Nirvana (Skt.; Tib. *nya ngen lé dépa, mya ngan las 'das pa*), lit. 'beyond misery': the liberation from cyclic existence.

Novice (Skt. *shramanera*; Tib. *getsül, dge tshul*)

Non-enumerated ultimate (Tib. *namdrang mayinpé döndam*): a category of absolute truth which is used in the Svatantrika Madhyamika.

Non-sectarian movement (Tib. *rimé, ris med*); lit. 'without partiality': the nonsectarianmovement of Tibetan Buddhism, which was founded by Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thayé, Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo and Chogyur Lingpa.

Nyingmapa (Tib. *rnying ma pa*); lit. 'ancient tradition': the followers of the first teachings of Vajrayana in Tibet, propagated by Padmasambhava.

Obscuration (Skt. *avarana*; Tib. *dribpa, sgrib pa*)

Paramita (Skt.; Tib. *paroltu chinpa, pha rol tu phyin pa*): the six perfections of generosity, discipline, patience, diligence, meditation and wisdom.

Path (Skt. *marga*; Tib. *lam*)

Patience (Skt. *kshanti*, Tib. *söpa, bzod pa*)

Patrul Rinpoche, Jigme Chökyi Wangpo (Tib. '*jigs med chos kyi dbang po*) (1808-1887): author of the celebrated Words of My Perfect Teacher.

Phenomenon (Skt. *dharma*; Tib. *chö, chos*)

Placement Meditation (Tib. *jok gom, 'jog bsgom*)

Prasangika (Skt.; Tib. *uma tal gyur pa, dbu ma thal 'gyur ba)*; lit.the Middle Way Consequence School): one of the two Madhyamika schools

Pratyekabuddha (Skt.; Tib. *rang sangyé, sang sangs rgyas*); lit. solitary realizer: one of the two fruitions of the Hinayana path.

Primordial wisdom (Skt. *jñana*; Tib. *yeshé, ye shes*)

Provisional teachings (Skt. *neyartha*, Tib. *drang don*)

Randomly labeled (Skt. *parikalpita*; Tib. *kun tak, kun brtags*): one of the three categories with which Chittamatra proponents explain reality.

Rangtong (Tib.); lit.: 'empty of self': This Prasangika Madhymika school stresses that all phenomena, from form to enlightened mind, are empty of their nature.

Reading and study (Tib. *lokpa tö sam, klog pa thos bsam*)

Realm (Skt. *dhatu*; Tib. *kham, khams*)

Relative truth (Tib. *kündzop denpa, kun rdzob bden pa*): the apparent truth perceived by ordinary beings.

Renunciation (Tib. *ngéjung, nges 'byung*); lit.: 'emerging into certainty'. Rupakaya (Skt.; Tib. *zuk ku, gzugs sku*): Samboghakaya (Skt.; Tib. *long ku, longs sku*) and nirmanakaya (Skt.; Tib. *trul ku, sprul sku*) are sometimes considered together as rupakaya, 'the body of form'. The forms of nirmanakaya buddhas can be perceived by all beings. The forms of samboghakaya buddhas can only be perceived by highly realized bodhisattvas.

Sachen Künga Nyingpo (1092-1158) was the first of the "five superiors" of the akya school. When he was thirteen years old, the Buddha of Wisdom, Manjushri appeared to him in a vision and gave the extraordinary teaching called Parting From the Four Attachments (Tib. *Shyenpa Shyidral*).

Sakya Pandita: Sakya Pandita Künga Gyaltsen Pal Zangpo (1182-1251), one of the most eminent masters of the Sakya lineage.

Sakyapa (Tib. *sa skya pa*): Sarma tradition founded by Könchok Gyalpo (1034-1102).

Samadhi (Skt.; Tib. *ting gne 'dzin*)

Sambhogakaya (Skt.; Tib. *long ku, longs spyod pa'i sku*); lit. 'the body of complete enjoyment': one of the three bodies of the buddhas.

Samsara (Tib. *khorwa, 'khor ba*): the cycle of existence.

Sangha (Skt.; Tib. *gendün, dge 'dun*): lit. 'those whose intention is virtuous'.

Sautrantika (Tib. *do dé pa, mdo sde pa*); lit. 'the followers of the Sutra': one of the two philosophical schools of the Hinayana

Self (Skt. *atman*; Tib. *dak, bdag*)

Sense faculty (Skt. *indriya*, Tib. *wangpo, dbang po*)

Sense Sources (Skt. *ayatana*, Tib. *kyé ché*); lit. 'sources': the six sense organs or faculties of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind; and their six objects of form, sound, smell, taste, texture, and mental object.

Sentient being (Skt. *sattva*; Tib. *semchen, sems can*); lit.: 'possessing mind'

Shamatha (Skt.; Tib. *shyiné, zhi gnas*): the practice of calm abiding.

Shantideva (Tib. *zhi ba lha*): Great Indian mahasiddha of the eigth century who wrote the Bodhicharyavatara (Way of the Bodhisattva, Tib. *byang chub sems dpa'i spyod pa la 'jug pa*), one of the most famous descriptions of the bodhisattva path.

Shedra (Tib. *bshad grwa*), lit. 'place of discussion': college, study centre.

Shentong (Tib.); lit.: 'empty of other': The followers of this Madhyamika school see the teachings on emptiness as open to interpretation, and view the teachings on tathagatagarbha as the most essential and absolute teachings of the Buddha.

Shin jang (Tib.): lit. 'thoroughly trained': The term has a wide range of meanings within shamatha practice, but generally refers to a mind which is stable to remain on an object as long as the meditator wishes.

Shravaka (Skt.; Tib. *nyentö, snyan thos*); lit. 'hearer': A follower of one of the philosophical streams within the Hinayana.

Shunyata (Skt.; Tib. *tong pa nyi, stong pa nyid*): the true nature of reality, the absence of true existence.

Skandha of consciousness (Skt. *vijnana*; Tib. *namshé pungpo*): the six or eight consciousnesses

Skandha of feeling (Skt. *vedana*; Tib. *tsorwé pungpo, tshor ba'i phung po*)

Skandha of form (Skt. *rupa*; Tib. *zuk gyi pungpo, gzugs kyi phung po*)

Skandha of mental formation (Skt. *samskara*; Tib. *duché gyi pungpo, 'du byed gyi phung po*): comprises the 51, or sometimes 55, types of mental formation.

Skandha of perception (Skt. *samjna*; Tib. *dushé gyi pungpo, 'du shes kyi phung po*)

Suchness (Skt. *tathata*; Tib. *dé shyin nyi, de zhin nyid*): the absolute nature of phenomena.

Suffering (Pali *dukkha*; Skt. *duhkha*; Tib. *dukngal, sdug bsngal*): Usually translated as 'suffering', but more accurately as 'frustration' or 'dissatisfaction'.

Sugata (Skt.; Tib. *de shek, bde gshegs*), lit. 'Bliss Gone', a title of the buddhas.

Sutra (Skt.; Tib. *do, mdo*) : 1) the Buddha's teachings, 2) one of the three baskets.

Sutrayana (Skt.; Tib. *dö tekpa, mdo'i theg pa*), lit. 'the Sutra Vehicle', also called the causal vehicle. Sometimes Hinayana and Sutra Mahayana are grouped together as Sutrayana, to distinguish them from Tantra Mahayana, which is also called Mantrayana, Tantrayana or Vajrayana.

Svabhavikakaya (Skt.; Tib. *ngowo nyi ku, ngo bo nyid sku*); lit. 'nature truth body': the unity of the Dharmakaya, Sambhogakaya and Nirmanakaya.

Svatantrika (Skt.; Tib. *uma rang gyü pa, dbu ma rang rgyud pa)*; the Middle Way Autonomy School): one of the two Madhyamika schools.

Tantra (Skt.; Tib. *gyü, rgyud*), lit. 'continuum'.

Tathagata (Skt.; Tib. *de shyin shekpa, de bzhin gshegs pa*), lit. 'Thus Gone': the buddha.

Ten paramitas: generosity, discipline, patience, diligence, meditation, understanding, method, power, aspiration and wisdom.

The six paramitas (Skt.; Tib. *paroltu chinpa, pha rol tu phyin pa*) : perfect generosity (Skt. *dana*, Tib. *jinpa*), discipline (Skt. *shila*, Tib. *tsultrim*), patience (Skt. *kshanti*, Tib. *söpa*), diligence (Skt. *virya*, Tib. *tsöndru*), meditation (Skt. *dhyana*, Tib. *samten*), wisdom (Skt. *prajña*, Tib. *sherab*).

Three jewels (Skt. *triratna*, Tib. *könchok sum, dkon mchog gsum*): Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

Three baskets (Skt. *tripitaka*, Tib. *dé nö sum, sde snod gsum*)

Three roots (Tib. *tsa sum, rtsa gsum*): the lama, source of blessings; the yidam, souce of accomplishments; and the dakini, source of activity.

Tirthika (Skt.; Tib. *mutekpa, mu stegs pa*): a proponent of non-Buddhist tenets.

Transmission (Tib. *lung*)

Twelve great deeds (Tib. *dzépa chunyi, mdzad pa bcu gnyis*)

Two wisdoms: the jñana which sees the nature of things as it is (Tib. *ji tawa, ji lta ba*) and the jñana which sees the multiplicity of all phenomena (Tib. *ji nyépa, ji snyed pa*).

Understanding (Tib. *gowa*)

Vaibhashika (Skt.; Tib. *ché drak mawa, bye brag smra ba*): one of the two philosophical schools of Hinayana

Vajra splinter (Tib. *dorjé zekma*): the first of the four or five great logical arguments of Madhyamika

Vajrayana (Skt.; Tib. *dorjé tekpa, rdo rje theg pa*): the Tantra vehicle.

Vasubandhu: brother of Asanga, author of the Abhidharmakosha (Treasury of Abhidharma), the main treatise on the Hinayana understanding of Abhidharma.

Vehicle (Skt. *yana*; Tib. *tekpa, theg pa*)

Vinaya (Skt.; Tib. *dulwa, 'dul ba*): The body of Buddha's advice on appropriate ethical conduct as part of the path. One of the three baskets, or tripitaka, into which the teachings are traditionally divided.

Vipashyana (Tib. *lhak tong, lhag mthong*): the practice of extraordinary seeing Way of appearance (Tib. *nang tsul, snang tshul*): how things are perceived by ordinary perception.

Way of existence (Tib. *né tsul, gnas tshul*): how things truly are.

Wheel of Dharma (Skt. *dharmachakra*; Tib. *chö kyi khorlo, chos kyi 'khor lo*)

Wisdom (Skt. *prajña*, Tib. *shérab, shes rab*): often translated as discriminative awareness to distinguish it from primoridal wisdom, yeshé.

Yama (Skt.; Tib. *shinjé, gshin rje*): the Lord of Death; demonic forces in the hell realm.

RECOMMENDED READING

General Readings

His Holiness the Dalai Lama. *The World of Tibetan Buddhism*. Wisdom, 1995.
—*Kindness, Clarity and Insight.* Snow Lion, 1984.
—*A Flash of Lightning in the Dark of Night.* Shambhala, 1994.
—*The Meaning of Life from a Buddhist Perspective*. Wisdom, 1992.

Kyabjé Dudjom Rinpoche. *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*. Wisdom, 1991.

Gyatso, Khenpo Tsultrim Rinpoche. *Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness*. Longchen Foundation, 1986. *(This is the clearest and most accessible presentation of the different philosophical schools.)*

Kalu Rinpoche. *Luminous Mind: The Way of the Buddha*. Wisdom, 1997.

Lobsang Gyatso. *The Four Noble Truths*. Snow Lion, 1994.

Longchen Yeshe Dorje, and Kangyur Rinpoche. *Treasury of Precious Qualities.* A Commentary on the Root Text of Jigmé Lingpa entitled *The Quintessence of the Three Paths*. Translated by the Padmakara Translation Group. Shambhala, 2001.

Mipham Rinpoche. *Gateway to Knowledge.* Vol. I, II, and III. Rangjung Yeshe Publications 1997, 2000, and 2002.

Newland, Guy. *Appearance and Reality: The Two Truths in the Four Buddhist Tenet Systems.* Snow Lion, 1999.

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Patrul Rinpoche. *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*. Translated by the Padmakara Translation Group. Shambhala, 1998.

Powers, John. *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism.* Snow Lion, 1995.

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—*Four Foundations of Buddhist Practice*. Namo Buddha Publications, 2001.
—*Tranquility and Insight*. Shambhala, 1993. (This book is on shamatha and vipashyana and is a commentary on Chapter 8 of the *Treasury of Knowledge* by Jamgön Kongtrul Lodro Thayé.)

Trungpa, Chögyam Rinpoche. *Glimpses of Abhidharma*. Prajna, 1978.
—*Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism.* Shambhala, 1987.

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The Vimalakirti Sutra. Translated by Burton Watson. Columbia University Press, 2000. (Alternative translation: *The Holy Teachings of Vimalakirti*. Translated by Robert Thurman. Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976.)

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Dreyfus, Georges. *Recognizing Reality*. State University of New York Press, 1996.

Garfield, Jay L. *Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*. Oxford University Press, 1995.

Khenchen Kunzang Palden and Minyak Kunzang Sönam. *Wisdom: Two Buddhist Commentaries*. Padmakara, 1993. (Two commentaries on the ninth chapter of the *Bodhicharyavatara* written by two disciples of Patrul Rinpoche.)

Lamrimpa, Gen. *Realizing Emptiness, Madhyamika Insight Meditation.* Translated by Alan Wallace. Snow Lion, 1999.

Murti, T.R.V. *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism: A Study of the Madhyamika System*. HarperCollins India, 1998.

Shantideva. *The Way of the Bodhisattva*. Translated by the Padmakara Translation Group. Shambhala, 1997.

Thrangu Rinpoche. *Middle Way Meditation Instructions*. Namo Buddha Publications, 2000.

Buddha Nature

Hookham, Shenpen . *The Buddha Within.* Sri Satguru Publications, 1992. *(This book contains the translation of the very valuable introduction to Jamgön Kongtrul's commentary, which is not translated in* Buddha Nature*.)*

Maitreya, Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thayé, and Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche. *Buddha Nature.* Translated by Rosemarie Fuchs. Snow Lion, 2000. *(N.B. Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche has specifically asked that students NOT read this or any other commentary on the Uttaratantra Shastra before receiving the lung [textual transmission]. Please respect this request.)*

Thrangu Rinpoche. *Buddha Nature*. Rangjung Yeshe Publications 1993.

Further Books by Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thayé

—*Buddhist Ethics.* Translated by the Sonada Translation Committee. Snow Lion, 1998.
—*Creation and Completion.* Translated by Sarah Harding. Wisdom, 1996.
—*Enthronement.* Translated by Ngawang Zangpo. Snow Lion, 1997.
—*Myriad Worlds.* Translated by the Sonada Translation Committee. Snow Lion, 1995.
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These teachings were given at the Rigpa Shedra in Lerab Ling in June 2002, 2001 and 1997.

On account of the teachings it contains, this booklet should be treated with respect. If you should wish to dispose of it, please burn it rather than dispose of it.

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