

AMITABHA SUTRA by Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche



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(Singapore 21 & 22 Mar 2010)

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It is more fitting that we will be just vaguely go through the Amitabha Sutra, if you call it. After all even an attempt to read and try to understand has to have so much virtuous power. In the sutras we read that the words of the Buddha, forget about

contemplating and meditating upon it, but even to have the sutra written and kept in the house brings so much blessings.

In my limited understanding, Chinese Buddhism seems to have amazing eh, tradition of reading and contemplating the sutras, which is something that we Tibetans have lost or losing at least. We are more, should I say distracted by the shastras. And sadly even among the shastras, we Tibetans seem to more distracted by the commentaries written by the Tibetans themselves. So in many ways even though it is very painful to admit, in many ways when people call Tibetan Buddhism 'Lamaism', it is painfully correct. It is really at times not even Buddhism; it is Lamaism.

So to begin, I'm going to tune my motivation; I'll try to have the right motivation which is very difficult in this modern age. Because I have been in kind of solitary situation and this is kind eh, first time I'm facing a lot of people so my vanity is hitting me. And I'm always correcting myself – Am I sitting properly? Am I presentable, so on and so forth?

Ideally a listener's motivation has to be triggered by wishing to listen to this teaching so that you have a path to enlightenment. And because of that, a teacher's motivation is also not become famous, gain respect, gain offerings or gain some kind of attention but to REALLY benefit the seeker of enlightenment - being, the being.

So as I said right motivation is difficult to have and even before having it, to understand right motivation is already difficult, okay. Anyway what I usually do which is basically emulating all my teachers is to pray to the Buddhas and bodhisattvas so that I will have a right motivation some way, one way or another. And if you feel like having the right motivation, please do so. (Tibetan prayer recitation)

Okay, so let's begin with vaguely summarizing the Sutra. Eh, I think in China and also present-day Japan, they seem to have quite a strong tradition of doing the, you know practising the Amitabha Sutra or recollecting the Amitabra, Amitabha, his name, his seed syllable, and for that matter, old Sukhavati. And I am sure some of you know this – the practice of Amitabha also encourages a lot, believing and has an unwavering devotion to the existence of the Sukhavati and the power of the Buddha Amitabha.

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And of course like many things in the human world, this has then become some kind of a cultural or a custom, something that is practised in the, in countries where there is Buddhist majority. So much so that if a businessman wants to have his or her business successful, you almost can't think of Amitabha Buddha; you have to think of Dzambhala (laughter) as if Amitabha is not so good with you know eh, economy stuff.

So we tend to give the most 'grim' job to Amitabha, sort of something to do with the death and near-death and all that (laughter). And this is all we human beings; this is how we end up making things and it becomes so STRONG in our system. Eh, then probably this is boring but kind of important, I have to say this. Then I think there was a change, a big change in the world.

Eh, the West became very strong economically; well in other words the things that are produced by the West – boat that does not sink, aeroplane does fly whereas Sukhavati might happen, might not happen – it's not tangible. So I think there was a lot of a quest of Western education and with it came Christianity, Judaism, or Islam; all the religions that are coming from the other side. Well then Amitabha realm is the heaven, Amitabha is the God, and Avalokitesvara is God's secretary, you know so on and so forth – Oh, son of the God we should say, son, son of the God, or actually in Chinese case, daughter of the Buddha, right?

So what I'm trying to say is present day, the understanding of Amitabha and Amitabha Sutra is very convoluted with the religious idea, the heaven, the God, pray to this, you know all of that. So much so that among, even among the Buddhists, more intellectual Buddhists – they tend to look down to – you know those who read the Amitabha Sutra, those who tend to just believe in you know reciting the name and believe that they will go to the Amitabha realm. They tend to look down and saying that they are from Amitabha practitioner, kind of look down at them.

So I think Chinese Buddhism has REALLY contributed a lot to the world of Buddhism for keeping the tradition of this Amitabha Sutra, I believe. Because the sutras that talk, sutras like Amitabha Sutra that talks about the Pure Land, that talks buddha-nature such as Lankavatara Sutra are SO IMPORTANT.

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You know, okay maybe this is becoming too technical and academics, but in the part of the package so you have to hear this. Sutras such as Prajnaparamita Sutra is REALLY like form is emptiness, emptiness is form, all that. And then sutras such as Amitabha Sutra talk about the seven different swimming pools, (laughter) the swans, the flowers, all of this and also you know the buddha-nature, everything. Who is more important? I cannot decide that one.

You know even in Tibet many different schools of thought make different comments; schools of thought – they make different comments about which one is more important. I don't know this is again very my limited understanding, okay. The teachings that really explain the emptiness seem to have gone to Tibet more and emphasized by the Tibetans. You know the Nagarjuna and the Gang. Teachings that talk about the buddha-nature and you know the Sukhavati and all of this – seem to have really take, taken its root in places like China and Japan.

And for me, if you ask me which one is more important – VERY DIFFICULT to make a comment on this. Okay if you ask somebody to extract oil from sesame seed, you have to convince this person that the sesame seed HAS oil. You can't give this person a stone and say 'extract oil'. So in this way, teachings like buddha-nature, Amitabha Sutra are SO IMPORTANT, REALLY IMPORTANT because in order to give a student a job, the job has to be un-deceptive, undeceiving. There is a very good analogy spoken by the Buddha himself in the Mahaparinirvana Sutra.

Let's say a woman has just given a birth to a baby and this baby really needs for nutrition, this baby needs to drink milk; and yeah we all know that. But let's say a physician realizes that this baby can't have milk for some time. So in order for the baby to divert longing for the milk, the physician suggests to apply something bitter on mother's nipple. So every time baby goes to drink the milk, baby encounters this bitterness and then develops this detachment from the mother's milk.

Okay as time goes by, the baby is okay. Now the physician says now you have to make the baby drink milk, otherwise the baby has to have nutrition. Mother then has to lure back the baby to drinking the milk, yeah. This is a very great analogy, I think.

Like, like the baby, WE NEED to know the buddha-nature. We need to know the Amitabha realm. But our physicians, our teachers, our masters also know that you may end up going to a certain extreme like what we talk earlier – the heavenly experience and so on and so forth. THEN the teachers apply the antidote, the emptiness, the Prajnaparamita - form is emptiness, emptiness is form; everything is emptiness, heaven is emptiness, Sukhavati is emptiness, non-existence of even the Buddha.

So this is why I was telling you earlier to really make a comment – Which one is more important? We cannot make, we cannot make any comment as such. Obviously we now know that both are necessary, okay.

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So going back to the Amitabha Sutra; in the Amitabha Sutra – again and again it is mentioned and advised that one must have unwavering devotion, trust and faith in the existence of the Amitabha realm and the power, power, omniscience and the

compassion of the Buddha. Okay so what does this mean? This means BELIEF plays a very important role, so-called 'belief'. Eh, I was looking at a dictionary the definition of 'belief'. I don't know what your Chinese word 'belief' but anyway the word 'belief' seems to have this connotation that without, you know, you know like kind of vague, vague, vague reason; with a vague reason you just believe on a notion. It, it's just a notion, no valid, tangible kind of reasoning. Basically belief seems to have a connotation of being blind.

So if you talk to a scientist about Amitabha realm, swimming pools and the swans, and you know, the talking trees, and all of that – of course, they will laugh. But you should REALLY think deeply what belief is. I, after a lot of thinking, I have come to a conclusion that's ONLY ONE THING ON THE WHOLE WORLD that we can do; and that is BELIEF...in the whole world.

You can call yourself critical, sceptical, eh, investigative, logical, scientist, objective, objectivist, all of this. No matter what, at the END OF THE DAY all you can do is believe in something. Even your stubborn and systematic reason to NOT to believe is actually a belief to THAT particular reason.

The fact that the Chinese, looking at two sticks and have generation of thousands of year's belief that it can pick up a 'noodle-ly' looking object and call it a chopstick – it WORKED up till today. When a Chinese looks at the chopstick, Chinese have no doubt that it is, it is not going to function as food picker, right. When an Amazonian Indian looks at the two chopsticks, it may be just good to make some fire indeed.

BELIEF is so strong; now of course we have jade-made chopstick. There is a way to hold it, there's the instruction on the chopstick, eh, what do you call it, the container. And then there is the chopstick eh, what do you call it, some kind of thing you know lifts up the chopsticks in certain restaurants. There are instant chopsticks, there's ALL KINDS of chopsticks. We have the culture of the chopsticks. The culture comes from belief.

One of the greatest tools that we use in our modern society is mathematics. Two plus two is four – that is a belief. And it is a TOTALLY BLIND belief actually. But it works just like the chopstick. It works for people who know two plus two is four, but it doesn't work for cats and dogs. Actually it doesn't work for many Tibetan lamas (laughter). They, they, you know there, their curriculum doesn't have mathematics.

So for a scientist, for a mathematician, two plus two – when they see this, just like the Chinese looking at chopstick – there is not even a scent of doubt that it is false.

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And then there is more into this because some of these beliefs are useful. Like two and two, two plus two is four – that's very useful and chopsticks. So when things become USEABLE then the belief has become stronger. And when the belief; okay also when the belief is SHARED by lots of people; we're talking about consensus, democracy, then of course, that system has become even more strong. And when that system also works for certain period, for long time like two plus two is four – like seven hundred year ago and it's still, and after seven hundred years it's still you know, four. And you know, it actually solidifies the belief system, solidifies.

First I want you to REALLY think about this so-called 'belief'. Okay, we're in the Amitabha Sutra; we have to believe the Western Land, the Amitabha Buddha, all the decorations, all of that, right. But first you think about the value of belief. I've given you some of the ideas just now. Be precise. No matter who you are, religious, non-religious, gullible, sceptical – you only have ONE thing that you do. That's all you do and that's called 'belief'.

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Now if we ask; we're going soon to have a break; we are soon going to have a break, okay; but before the break I want to put this in your head. If we ask – SO WHERE DOES THE BELIEF FITS IN with Shakyamuni Buddha and buddhadharma? What are we supposed to do with this belief? - This, this thing that; the only thing that we do – the belief. What do we do with this?

Ultimately, (Tibetan phrase) ultimately ALL BELIEF SYSTEMS HAVE TO BE CRASHED, deleted permanently from the root. ALL BELIEFS, huh, even the

swimming pools, or Buddha Amitabha is red you know - all that is just; yeah all that has to be gone, that has to go.

Relatively, depending on who you are, all or anything that takes you to the truth, bring across to the truth – you can believe relatively. There's a very famous quotation by Shantideva. This is really important quotation. (Tibetan phrase) Okay I will kind of loosely translate this.

You know, as a practitioner of the buddhadharma, we are supposed to get rid of all the ignorance, right? That's what we have to do. That's our homework. But he said – there's one ignorance that you should keep for the time being and that is thinking that there is enlightenment. THAT IS ALSO IGNORANCE but you need that for now.

So when it helps to see the truth in Buddhism - all, many, many different kinds of believing is not rejected such as talking bird. Okay we will have a break, about fifteen minutes.

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I can't go to Bugis Street for gin and tonic anymore. Okay, do you want to ask a question before we go more? Related to what we discussed. Okay, yes; then maybe can you go to ... yeah, you want to give the...

Student A: Good afternoon Rinpoche; I have a seemingly very silly question but it has been bugging me forever. Since Pure Land is empty, Buddhas are empty, does a Pure Land exist?

Rinpoche: That's a very, that's a philosophical question. I have but probably not from you but it ended up becoming a philosophical; because we have to define what word 'existence' means.

When the elephant while you are dreaming, the dream elephant is stomping over you. While you are dreaming, if I ask you - Does the elephant exist? You will say 'yes'. When you wake from the nightmare, then you will say - No, the elephant does not exist. But you were RELIEVED from being stomped over by an elephant. So you are, you were actually relieved from a problem that does not even exist.

So the question is - Does the relief exist? YES - but the reason of the relief, it actually does not exist. So Amitabha realm exists, Amitabha realm; with your question I'm going to continue. It's very good that you lead to this; because (Amitabha) 'OD DPAG MED'; 'DPAG TU MED' in the Tibetan language, 'dpag med', 'dpag tu med' is something beyond, okay, loosely translating - limitless, right, limitless.

I'm sure when we hear the word 'Boundless, Limitless Light', most of us, we think of somebody who has LOTS AND LOTS AND LOTS of light. By the way in some sutras, Amitabha is also known as Amitayus. In this case, it is referred to as 'Limitless Life'. So in the ordinary ear, Limitless Life means someone who is VERY, VERY, VERY, VERY OLD (laughter) and especially the Chinese society who loves to live old. It's like the longevity bun, the longevity symbols, the longevity this, the longevity that.

So in your image, Boundless Life means someone whose eyebrow is SO LONG that it's dragging for twelve kilometres or something (laughter). Basically for us, in our ear 'boundless' is always referred to something very big, which is STUPID! Boundless is boundless. It's not big, it's not small. SMALL AND BIG IS BOUND. Bound means you know 'territory'; it is LIMITED, so how can we contradict ourselves? Oh, boundless light, boundless life – we always think - oh, big ...

So does the Amitabha realm exist or not? Again when we talk about existence and non-existence, we are talking about boundary, okay. This is quite important that you know – 'all bound and boundlessness' All the suffering of our life comes from bound, limited, the, the fact that we make things limited. So actually earlier, I was talking about how we, in the cultural, Buddhist world, coming from a country you know that

has a Buddhist tradition – we are now thinking Amitabha and Amitabha realm as a heaven, god.

And yet what we are completely missing is the TITLE of the name or the title of this Buddha - Boundless Light, Boundless Life - is actually telling us the ultimate Amitabha. And we are COMPLETELY missing that and we are always looking for an existing, smiling, compassionate god with a halo, the swimming pools, the talking birds and all of that.

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What, how do you say 'west' in Chinese? West, what does that mean, literal meaning? What is it? Does it have a meaning? Like the Tibetan word 'nub', 'nub' has a, has a connotation of setting or exhaustion or the end. Does it have any specific meaning? Okay maybe this is something. Maybe it has, Chinese language is very rich so you should think about this, right - westerner, okay.

Okay I don't know probably this is not important but what the heck? Where SUN SETS, right; where sun sets – that's supposedly the west. Now there's something quite amazing about this because in many ways you can understand. Now this is, now we are REALLY talking from a very, very high level, okay from which I shall soon get out. But I have to again, this is coming from in the same package, I have to talk a little bit.

Okay we have so many thoughts, don't we? One moment we think about the towel, the towel, one moment we think about the towel. Next minute we think about the paper, then the next what I ate yesterday. Next I'm thinking about what I'm going to do tomorrow; or the person in front of you or the person behind you, SO MANY THOUGHTS!

Now the question is – each of these thoughts – they rise and they SET. This is quite an important aspect of the Amitabha Sutra. I hope one day you, you will get this with a really great master who can actually coach you to get this point. Because the point here is this – every time thought appears, thought rises, the same thought SETS - it disappears, right? And whenever a thought sets, that's where Amitabha is. This is VERY MUCH complementary to what Milarepa saying a song. Milarepa said – 'Between each thought there is the Buddha'.

So the West or where the thing sets is actually, can be understood as, in this very most profound format – which is when the thought sets which it does from towel to paper, maybe from towel to the book, the towel sets and the book appears. In that moment there is Amitabha Buddha, BELIEVE IT OR NOT! And you might as well believe since that's the only thing that you, you know how to do anyway (laughter).

Now THAT Amitabha Buddha, if you ask me – Is it golden coloured, red, blue, you know black; God only knows, we don't know these things. All of these are BOUND, right. I was just told by Steven that in Chinese tradition its gold. Be it, be it gold; for Tibetans it's red. You know Amitabha Buddha is red – why not? In Africa, if it is black, fantas, fantastic; why not? (Laughter) No problem.

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Can somebody remind me, probably later or tomorrow I need to also tell you though why Amitabha Buddha has a relative importance for us because we human beings have lots of greed? Greed and Amitabha Buddha are packed, packed together; yeah, that's why that is important. But let's talk about this later, not now. Passion, I think its passion, not greed; passion I think.

So in order; okay do you; okay where is this Amitabha Buddha? Okay where is this Amitabha Buddha we were talking about? You know right after the setting of the thought, there is Amitabha Buddha, remember I was telling you. Where is this Amitabha Buddha?

Always with you; no increasing by you doing lots, lots, and lots of good things, it's not going to become better. Gallons and gallons of whisky is not going to make it worse. In the Heart Sutra, remember no increasing, no decreasing, all of that. It's always there.

So immediately we want to worship this Amitabha Buddha, right? Worshipping Buddha, we have to worship, right; we have to prostrate, okay. So how do we worship this Buddha? Okay just briefly we will do this and then we will talk about the actual relative Sutra, you know the, the swimming pools and all of that.

Okay how do we worship this Buddha? How do we get acquainted with this Buddha? How do we get to know this Buddha? How do weeee, I don't know, how do we recognize this Buddha? Because at the end of the day, worshipping in buddha-dharma, Buddhism is to REALLY recognize the Buddha, you know. Because you can't, you can't be thinking like few oranges up there is going to satisfy the Buddha, right? You can't be thinking the Buddha prefers orange than durian, durian? (Laughter) This is ALL WE KNOW; this is all we know; that's why we're doing this.

For instance, 'argham, padyam', you know the offering, two water; one is drinking water, the other is washing-feet water – it's a very Indian thing. The Chinese don't wash their feet (laughter). This is all cultural thing. But of course, don't tell it to Tibetans but really there is ABSOLUTELY no problem if you just make this wonderful complicated Chinese tea mixing, all of that as an offering – absolutely fine. There is no problem if you do that. The offerings are not made to bribe the Buddhas – so important to know this.

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Okay now but let's go back to the ultimate Amitabha Buddha. How do we get acquainted with this? Okay just briefly, very briefly I will guide you, okay. This is raising your hope of course (laughter). Okay you sit straight and I'm going to time it. Yes, five minutes; very short but it's okay. For next five minutes; okay actually cough, yawn, you know scratch, whatever, you need to do that NOW, NOW! (Laughter)

Okay when we start, after we start until this thing tells us, no matter what happens you don't move, you don't scratch, you don't score, eh, cough, you don't, NOTHING. If the mobile phone rings, do not switch off, do not switch it on - none of that. Just sit straight. And WHATEVER the thought comes; mundane thoughts like the pizza you ate today, or if you have a good thought like compassion, love – PLEASE for goodness sake, try not to get excited.

If you have bad thoughts like killing the person next to you because he smells a lot – same thing, try not to judge yourself thinking – Oh, how can I think of this in front of this, you know like Shakyamuni Buddha and all of that. Do not judge.

Do you know why you should do that? All the thoughts will SET. All the thoughts, no matter how bad or good, they will all set. And every time it sets, beyond that is the Amitabha Buddha, yeah. So just watch your thoughts without any judgment. Okay we are going to do it soon. Please scratch, cough, whatever, yeah. If you fall asleep, that's better than scratching and coughing and all that (laughter). Okay we will begin very soon. Okay now we will start.

(After meditation) So THIS is the ultimate way to get acquainted with the ultimate Amitabha Buddha. I am not making this up, huh. I have the sutras' and the shastras' and the teachers' backing so I'm not making this up please. But this, EVEN THOUGH, it is probably as you can see it is the most simple way; yes, simple as it sounds, as it appears, it is not easy to really BELIEVE and yes, believe basically.

Like many great Mahasandhi teachers, they say – eye lashes too close, you don't see; ultimate Buddha too simple, you don't, you don't believe. This is a problem with everyone. Almost half a century being a Buddhist myself, myself almost half a century after becoming Buddhist, I STILL can't believe in this simplicity. Even though

intellectually I know this is, this alone will do the job but I find myself always looking for rituals, mantras to chant, statues to worship, you know some kind of you know WORK is necessary, some kind of symbol is necessary.

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I think it's also very same case with the Chinese also. Again this is my limited understanding. You know recently I was reading some of the Chinese philosophy, very little, not so much. Someone gave me these two books by Zhuangzi, Zhuangzi? So because I was in retreat, I didn't have much time so I thought, okay this is going to be my toilet reading - everyday one page in the toilet (laughter).

By around the third month, really a sense of 'I dare not read it in the toilet' happened. But you know the whole point of, you know why I didn't read Dhammapada in the toilet because you know I have respect to the Dhammapada whereas Zhuangzi, Chinese philosopher, I can read in the toilet, right (laughter). But this guy is so PROFOUND and there is also a comment, some comments of Tao, Tao Te Ching? - And the concepts such as you know like 'just leave things alone'.

But partially a joke with you - Chinese has forgotten these two people. You rather choose Guan, Confucius because Confucius says 'do this, don't do this, bow down at this, do this'. You like the ritual - human beings LOVE rituals and symbols.

India - my god, every non-(human) being is god - monkey, the pig, (laughter) every non-being. And the Japanese Zen - they pride themselves for having a simple, simple shrine, simple this but I have a story to tell you on this one. Even if a Japanese give me a Japanese Zen garden free of charge, I will not accept it. Basically I have to hire somebody to look at it and when one leaf fall, you have to take it out - SO MUCH COMPLICATION! (Laughter).

So rituals, symbols - inevitable, indispensable; I'm not condemning them, you CAN'T. You can't condemn them, they're useful. Okay with this, NOW let's go to the relative Amitabha. Where is he from? What is his citizenship card number, you know all of that? Well you know many sutras say different things, right.

But there're so many lessons to learn from this actually. Some say that he used to be a monk called Dharmakara (Tibetan phrase). Or some others say, other sutras say that Dharmakara was a king who renounced but doesn't matter; that's his previous life okay.

But we're talking about relative Amitabha, huh, so all the symbols, everything will come now; so much so like in certain sutras, you are supposed to look at the sunset. Mm, okay Tibetans, they call it (Tibetan phrase) – purifying the mandala or the land, the dwelling; purifying the dwelling.

Okay, just to so that you understand the whole business – it is mainly aspiration, this so-called (Tibetan phrase) is mainly aspiration. For instance, Shakyamuni Buddha, when he was a bodhisattva long time ago, eh, when he was a bodhisattva, someone who wished to be a buddha to enlighten all sentient beings, okay. Young bodhisattvas, beginning bodhisattvas – their main practice is aspiration prayers.

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So for instance Shakyamuni Buddha along with nine hundred and ninety-nine other buddhas did LOTS of prayers. Each, each of them, of course their main prayer is to enlighten all sentient beings, right; but they also have a specific aspiration. For instance, Shakyamuni's aspiration is never to be enlightened when sentient beings

are eh, going through what we call fortunate, kind of more virtuous age or a more happier time.

He also prayed never to be enlightened during the REALLY, REALLY degenerated time. So in Tibetan, we call it (Tibetan phrase) – which actually means when human beings' life span is about a hundred years – which actually symbolically means when sentient beings have somewhere in the middle of not too happy, not too much suffering. During that time, he, he, he, his aspiration was to be enlightened during that time, for instance - that's one.

He also has the aspiration to when he becomes the Buddha finally that he wants to be, he wants to belong to a family that is neither so high caste nor so low caste. This all has its own reason. This all has a profound reason, for instance when sentient beings have, are going through the happiest time, they don't have renunciation mind. So there is no point of teaching.

Similarly if he is born in a very, very poor beggar's family, his renunciation won't make much point, you know it's not too dramatic. Aspirations are powerful, huh. Aspirations are VERY POWERFUL. When Shakyamuni Buddha took bodhisattva vow from Dipankara (Buddha), Dipankara said – If you want to take bodhisattva vow, you have to offer me something as a symbolic link. He was a very poor person, this - you know previous life of Shakyamuni Buddha. And you know he couldn't find anything to offer.

And this, this girl who sells flowers; so he begged her and asked her – I will offer you a day's service like cleaning the house and all of that if you could give me one flower. The girl was very puzzled – What's so important about this? So she asked for the reason. When he explained because he wanted to take the bodhisattva vow, then the girl said – Well, in that case I will sell it to you only if you pray that I will be your wife for until you attain enlightenment. And that's Yasodhara, all the way until enlightenment.

Aspirations are SO IMPORTANT. Just to share my thoughts – I have my own personal aspiration too. And one is supposed to do in the very holy places like Bodhgaya. I want to be reborn, not as a Tibetan lama, it's just, you know. This is actually one of my aspirations – NEVER EVER REBORN AS A TULKU (laughter).

There is a great master called (Tibetan name) from the Nyingmapa School. He actually has one 'verses' about, about how to pray so that you will not reborn as a tulku, yes (laughter). But my aspiration is to become the President of the United States, Premier of Republic of China, People's Republic of China, and if it is America, I want to become a black woman Republican (laughter).

I am serious. I really pray this. I'm sharing to you in case some of you might want to have aspiration to become my, I don't know, Minister of this, Minister of that. (Laughter and applause)

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But anyway, what I'm trying to tell you is what we call a SPECIFIC bodhisattva's aspiration. Okay coming back to Amitabha; when he was a bodhisattva, he had about twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two, I don't remember specific prayers, is it? - Forty- eight, right, right (laughter). Didn't I tell you, the mathematics is? (Laughter). And there is a two very, very interesting one.

He said in the future may the land of the dwelling place where I will be Buddha, may it be so attractive, may the people wish to go there by having the connection and get acquainted with the truth, the enlightenment and so one and so forth. THAT IS SUCH A BEAUTIFUL, BEAUTIFUL ASPIRATION. I mean who could think of that. Smartest real estate agent – I think.

And then the second one that is really interesting. He said you know the death is something that everybody detests, everybody so afraid of. One day this breath that is coming out and in at a moment, one day this is not going to happen. Yes it's for sure; that's like confirmation – it's going to happen, guaranteed. But that is not the worst news. The fact that we are guaranteed to die is not the worst news.

The worst news is NOT KNOWING WHEN IT'S GOING TO HAPPEN! That is the worst news, isn't it? You can be stopping this breathing in and out after a good visit to one of these hawkers centers tonight, okay. So something that is so feared is the death. And his other aspiration is – Whoever thinks of me during the death, dying, that may I be able to appear myself in front of this person. Now that is just another great amazing aspiration. Not like you know Republic, you know President and all of that.

But you know some of you may think ah, very sceptically, you know sceptical. Some of you may think – Well you know this is all stories. You know aspiration is just wishful thinking. Merit does not exist. No, but you should REALLY analyze. Lack of merit or abundance of merit does exist, so many examples. Karmic death exists. Karmic link exists. The fact that Dan Brown, the fact that Dan Brown 'Da Vinci Code' is the best seller internationally – is so the most stupid book actually (laughter).

I was just talking to some of my friends yesterday. FORGET about the dharma, forget about the dharma. EVEN as a; you know, even to live in this earth as a sound, successful human being, we don't have enough merit. Forget about the dharma; dharma practice is way too much, but even as a human being.

Just go to any of these department stores, you will know. Benetton, what United Colour of Benetton, right, something like that? MacDonald's, Starbucks, ALL of these, making all of these like Yves Saint Laurent, Cartier, Cartier is it? – Cartier, all of these things are basically making the world ultimately boring. You know, really you can sleep in a what, Takashimaya, right? You can sleep in a Takashimaya and wake up in Hong Kong, and you can't tell the difference. Or elsewhere, London, New York, Paris doesn't matter. World looks SAME, there is no more point of going sightseeing.

AMITABHA SUTRA by Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche

(Singapore 21 & 22 Mar 2010) ... 13/29

Last year I went to Morocco and this, this small night, not small, quite big actually, bazaar I went. Just amazing, BEAUTIFUL you know. Like this small old woman selling only like a, a, you know like eye makeup that's like handmade; or stone, lipsticks, or just so many interesting things to watch and interesting. Everything you know like monkey dancing, fortune teller, snake dancer, tarot card reader – all of these are what we human beings have, you know the WEALTH. You go elsewhere, anywhere it's becoming, you are losing; we are losing it.

Twenty-five years ago when I was in Singapore, there were so many hawker centres. About fifteen years later, half of them have become air-conditioned (laughter). This time the first upon arrival, I requested my friends – Take me to hawker centre. They had to search like for about fifteen minutes and we had to go like long way.

I mean forget Singapore but EVEN INDIA – it is one of the last places where things are actually a little different. It's really nice to see you know big cows sleeping right in front of, in the middle of the highway. It's nice to see. It's REALLY INTERESTING. But even India is losing it. India has similar department stores. Everything, Calvin Klein, everything is there. The only difference between Indian department stores and here is the Indian department stores seem to have a lot of more fart smell (laughter).

So talking about merit, THIS IS DEGENERATION – losing uniqueness. By the way I read that 'Da Vinci Code' myself, from page one to last page. But you know this tells us that we must have owed him Dan, Mister Dan Brown a lot. We could have done so many amazing other things all these hours but we have done, we have paid him debt.

So you CANNOT really say merit does not exist. Merit does exist. Karmic link exists. Karmic debt exists. Yeah all of these exist. Of course, of course it's very individual definition, of course. For somebody a boutique coffee shop is more important than going to same old Starbucks again and again - special home-run, family-run, interesting to have that. For some people maybe consider more because of better merit. But for others, and unfortunately a lot of others, to have a Starbucks erected next door is like a sound of Sukhavati.

So going back to the Amitabha again, relatively when Amitabha was a bodhisattva, he had lots of aspirations; among them two things that's quite interesting. I was, I just pick up randomly. I'm sure all forty-eight, right? Forty-eight of them are amazing, I am sure. Now we will talk about this more tomorrow. I think a continuous flow is important.

AMITABHA SUTRA by Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche

(Singapore 21 & 22 Mar 2010) ... 14/29

Actually, yes the word 'belief'; the word 'belief' is quite interesting – a vague idea in which some confidence is placed. When we talk about belief, we are talking about perception, aren't we? So you know this is a request of combining Amitabha, the concept of Amitabha realm and Amitabha Buddha with the great, you know teachings of "Path and Fruit - Snang Gsum", Triple Perception. This is something that we will talk, discuss right at the beginning tomorrow. And I think we will talk more about the relative Amitabha because that's, that's really important.

You know it's like this. If you have never tasted the salt, right, if you have never tasted the salt, then it's important that I make you taste sweet. Because that's give me the opportunity to say – That's not it. So relatively, it's very important, okay. We discuss this tomorrow. Maybe three questions tonight, and please try to eh, you know ask the questions based on the Amitabha, Amitabha sutra and all that. Any questions; if there is no question, that's also fine.

Student A: Thank you, Rinpoche. You spoke about merit and I'm not quite sure I understand what merit is. I know how it's often used. The way you spoke about it, it sounds like gratitude or appreciation or something like that. Could you say more about what merit is?

Rinpoche: Merit is actually a POETIC NAME, poetic name to cause, condition and effect. That's it basically. We use poetic because you know, okay; if you, if you eat

lots of fat and if your cholesterol goes up and if you have really suffered with your health – there is a gathering of cause and condition because you ate lot of fat, and you're, you are not doing the right thing, you're not doing the exercise, all of that.

But we will not call it - you have a bad habit because of your merit. Rather we use some derogatory term like bad karma, you understand? But of course we will not use that also; it's because of your, you know life, what do you call it, lifestyle, but actually that's it. Merit is more; I guess it's a more religious connotation – poetic, positive name given to cause, condition and effect. Two questions, okay you want to ask.

AMITABHA SUTRA by Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche

(Singapore 21 & 22 Mar 2010) ... 15/29

Student A: Thank you Rinpoche for the teaching. I wonder why we need to look for uniqueness. What's wrong with the, you know universal boring Starbucks? Eh, we need to look for the homemade coffee. Eh, can we say we don't care; we just need coffee and we take wherever we want and...

Rinpoche: Why, why should we because of the air-con..; can you repeat that again?

Student A: Why do we need for, why do we need to look, look for uniqueness? Can we just say...

Rinpoche: Look for?

Student A: Uniqueness

Rinpoche: Uniqueness? (Student: Uniqueness, yeah) I see – Oh, I see.

Student A: So what's wrong with the universal Starbucks and the franchise; can we say we don't care, you know? We, we want that.

Rinpoche: Spiritually speaking, absolutely nothing; nothing special about uniqueness, about the world – spiritual point of view. From the worldly point of view, nothing to do with the dharma, huh – everyone wants to be special. (Student A: Really?) I think so. It's something to do with the ego, you know.

Student A: Ah, this is something I want to say, you know...

Rinpoche: No, no, I really respect when you say “Really?” because human beings have a very strange conflict. We all want to be special. We all want to be unique. But when you are too unique, then you are alienated. So you also want to wear the uniform and be with somebody and into a group like the Buddhist, Mahayanist, you know all of that. But within that group, also you want to be a little bit unique with the, maybe a pink colour hair or something like that (laughter).

Student A: Yes, so being unique is kind of eh, manifest of one's ego.

Rinpoche: Yes, wanting for attention, I guess; yes.

Student A: So why, why do we need to look for uniqueness?

Rinpoche: Only worldly, on the worldly level. From the dharma point of view, of course we don't want to look for. But within the secular world, as a human being; that's what I'm saying, forget the dharma but within the world, don't you think it's nice?

Okay when I go to Chinese restaurant, I would like to have a Chinese food instead of a sandwich. If everything becomes like a, you know jambalaya, then; well from the

spiritual point of view, no problem, but from the worldly point of view, almost no entertainment anymore.

Student A: So, so why are we talking about eh, this kind of cases during this time of dharma talks, what's the meaning here?

Rinpoche: Because lack of the dharma to EVEN TO BECOME a; you know forget practising the dharma, even to be, even to experience the uniqueness of individual human being; because we are all trying to fit in so we make ourselves more and more boring. And we also know that; you got that, the little logic?

Student A: I got that but like, maybe I'm wrong. It's like we're, we're teaching dharma; dharma is becoming a tool or a method for us to becoming unique so in this case ...

Rinpoche: Yes, from the dharma's point of view, you are absolutely right. I am agreeing, but I am keeping the dharma aside. Let's forget the dharma but even; okay when we have no more dharma, what do we have? Worldly life – so let's have a GOOD WORLDLY LIFE, that's what I am saying, right. Let's say we have, let's REALLY have a good worldly life so which means we have all, we have each one have something to show.

Student A: Thank you.

AMITABHA SUTRA by Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche

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Rinpoche: It's probably just me, okay this way of thinking because you know I have this thing. You know like I like to when I go to China, I like to really see the Chinese men with the shaved here, shared here and the long hair, with the long, what do you call it? "xuan sang" or something with the yeah; I like to see that. It would be really nice but they all look, you know they all wearing Yohji Yamamoto (laughing). You, you understand?

EVEN the Mao suit to me is more interesting. It's unique. To me it's something to photograph but now I have nothing to photograph because everybody's; I must just as well grab a newspaper and say just keep that. Okay one last question.

Student B: Yeah, this is a question about the relative Amitabha? The relative in general eh, because sometimes I get the sense that the relative means the arbitrary and it's kind of confusing for practitioner to know what's essential about the relative and what is cultural about the relative?

When we were talking about relative Amitabha, you're referring eh, to the Chinese relative Amitabha, which is golden and the Tibetan relative Amitabha, which is red. And for us who have to visualize in our practices as a way of understanding the absolute, it becomes confusing to know you know the major and minor marks are essential, or just cultural or arbitrary and, and so ...

Rinpoche: That part, I didn't get it. Can you repeat that part, just that part?

Student B: Yep, there are certain aspects about the relative that seem essential and important in a heuristic sense ...

Rinpoche: Yes, very good, very good, yes.

Student B: As a way of getting to the absolute but there are other things that seem to be arbitrary and cultural. And how do you tell them apart so that you can have some confidence in your practice, which seems to be very important?

Rinpoche: This is very good; very, very valid question, yes.

Student B: How do we get to that to that point where we have that confidence? We're not just making up a Picasso painting and pretending it to be Amitabha, for example. And if you're totally lost you're going down the wrong path...

Rinpoche: Mm, this is a very important point actually and I'm quite, actually quite eh, fanatical about this. One of the biggest; okay I don't know other thing, other traditions, one of the biggest, weakest of the Tibetan lamas – we always end up teaching more of the Tibetan culture than the Buddhadharma.

You are talking about like, you know like washing feet with water which is ESSENTIAL for the Indian to enter into the house. But which is; I mean when that's practised in Tibet, FORGET ABOUT WASHING FEET. They don't even wash their body for years! (Laughter)

You are very right on that one. For instance, Buddhadharma is growing everywhere. It's growing everywhere and that's wonderful – that's the compassionate activity of the Buddha it should. Ah, there are so many things like that. Okay, that's; I mean okay a different cultural background; you're, you are absolutely right. It's like how would, how would WE TIBETANS, if we are told a spiritual path that, that involves our Buddha wearing a bowtie, for instance or a dinner jacket, which is non-existent in Tibet? (Translator having slight problem in translating bowtie...) Oh, doesn't matter, whatever, okay.

AMITABHA SUTRA by Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche

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And if I may, there's even more interesting angle. For instance like the definition of 'non-virtuous' action; okay, lets; I'm sorry if some people gets offended, but let's talk about sexual misconduct.

Buddhism, coming from places like India, Tibet, China, eh, same gender you know sexual activities considered sexual misconduct. But that's CHANGING now, that's changing. If you tell the public, you tell San Francisco – 'Hey, you know, you having sex with the same gender, similar gender, that's a sexual misconduct'. You'll be lucky to be alive.

And there're many other things like in the tantric union that involves, when it comes to that, it becomes even more interesting but let's not talk about that now. So what do we do for those who have different sexual orientation? Are they not qualified to be a Buddhist? ABSOLUTELY NOT - Buddha's compassion is to everyone, equal. Okay where culture, when the culture takes preceding, when the culture takes precedence, it's always very dangerous.

So to answer your question, ANY RELATIVE ARBITRARY method, as long as it is bringing you closer to the truth, the truth like all compounded things is impermanent and all emotions are pain. If any of these methods brings closer to the truth – good. That's arbitrary, that's relative method but useful. Any kind of method, arbitrary relative method that takes you away from the truth – not good even though it looks very valuable, old custom, blah, blah – not good.

The cultural, you know dictating buddhadharma through culture has really destroyed Buddhism a lot everywhere. Like for instance; I'm sure some of you be surprised if you say – Oh, you can be a butcher and a Buddhist. Wouldn't you be surprised? So what are we supposed to do with the butcher, if he wants to also practice? Buddha Shakyamuni had given a precept to a butcher – remember at night you don't kill, after the sunrise do, you do whatever you want. I can't really control you (laughter).

And one of the BIGGEST problems actually is in the culture, Buddhist cultured society such as yourself also. Your model because of your culture, your model is always a little bit off the target, off target, to whom you refer to. Like okay; so you all think to be a Buddhist, you have to become a monk, to be a good Buddhist, you have to become a monk or a nun.

Even here see in this Sakya Tenphel Ling temple, I don't see Genghis Khan Statue, yeah right; or the Karma Kagyu centre, they should have Ching dynasty, Ching Emperor – they should have that because they were equally important in preserving the buddhadharma, EQUALLY.

Forget those, even Asoka, you don't remember. WOW! If not for him, Buddhism does not exist. Does anybody remember him? - Maybe as a powerful king but not as an object of refuge. Spiritual path that is influenced by culture; limited culture does this kind of damage. Still please don't put Genghis Khan there because I will be blamed (laughter), okay.

AMITABHA SUTRA by Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche

(Singapore 21 & 22 Mar 2010) ... 18/29

So we begin with tuning the motivation. I have no need to tell you, I have no need to tell you that purpose of, purpose of practicing the dharma, following the; purpose of taking the dharma as the path is enlightenment. Purpose of the dharma practice is definitely nothing close to worldly gain. In fact practicing the dharma, aiming for worldly glory and gain is a mistake.

Spiritual path and the worldly path unfortunately is fundamentally a contradiction. But you know this may be all the things I have been telling you, maybe kind of sensible, it makes sense when you talk and you listen. But in, in our, in world of emotion, the samsaric world, we ALWAYS end up using the dharma as a means to gain for worldly - long-life initiation so that we can live long, worshipping wealth deities so that we can become prosperous, seeking the blessings of deities such as Manjushri so that we can become clever and outwit others.

And finally when death is inevitable and when we know that then we kind of seek for the Amitabha and its realm but that actually is not necessarily a pure motivation because there is sense, there is an element of migrating to kind of like transcendental New Zealand (laughter). I am sure you do this. I will have to confess to you even after half a century of being Buddhist myself, I do this.

I have a near-death experience REALLY this time quite serious, near-death experience just about a week ago in India. The car that I was travelling was right on the train track; in front of me there're about hundred cars, behind me there're about hundred cars. And then there was this train conductor shutting at us – move otherwise within like two minutes there is a train coming. I find myself instead of letting go, understanding the illusion, all of that. Even though this is what I teach to everyone, this is what I make almost living out of (laughter).

Mind you I was doing prayers, I was doing prayers; not so bad, at least the prayers came to my mind. But I find myself, I found myself having this just incredible, you know like grip or clutching towards wish to live long. And I was doing prayers so that I am not going to face the problem. Well, I'm sure Dezhung Rinpoche Jampa Gyaltzen somewhere up in the Sukhavati must have laughed at me because just about a few months ago I taught his famous statement, his famous teaching on – If you have attachment to life, you are not a dharma practitioner (laughter).

Okay, so longing practice of the dharma really should be, eventually, ultimately aim for the enlightenment of myself and others. Only to help sentient beings and to enlighten sentient beings and oneself, if it helps then as a bonus, one should pray for longevity, success, wit, all of that – only as a bonus, only if it, if it is going to help the main project. If it is distracting from the main project, then it's an obstacle.

AMITABHA SUTRA by Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche

(Singapore 21 & 22 Mar 2010) ... 19/29

And this could be anything; not only long life or you know prosperity but even your football, you own team winning the game. During last year's Champions League, football game by the way if you don't know what that is. Champion League's football game, football huh (laughter), I actually did prayers for Barcelona to win (laughter) because my excuse is if Barcelona doesn't win, I would be so depressed that I would not practice the dharma (laughter). No, no, this is actually bad that I did that; so don't, don't follow my example.

So dharma practice should only aim to be, dharma practice should be only aiming at enlightenment. What is ENLIGHTENMENT? Enlightenment is actually not, especially you know like now that you are reading hopefully reading the Amitabha Sutra – actually enlightenment is a state or the; yes the state of absolute understanding of the realization of the truth. It's not really a PLACE. And that is, you know this is quite an important statement because when you don't, when you don't have the whole picture, meaning when you don't have, when you have wrong view; wrong, when you have wrong view meaning you have completely opposite of the truth, meaning the fake or a partial truth, all of that – only brings you misery.

Seeing the truth, for example when you have a nightmare, when in the nightmare you are about to be crushed by an elephant but at THAT MOMENT you realize it is a dream. THAT recognition of the truth that it's actually just a dream, what does it do? It releases you from unnecessary pain and paranoia. Similarly if you dream winning a lottery and within that dream you realize it is a dream. And within the next moment, someone asks for this money that you just won; you generously GIVE it because you know you are losing nothing.

According to the master, Virupa, this was one of the great saints and a scholar; again a graduate from Nalanda University actually. You know I like to use the terms like Virupa tradition instead of Sakya, Tilopa tradition instead of Kagyu because the later word stinks (laughter). Virupa tradition, according to the Virupa tradition, many, many amazing teachings were taught, right. And of course, ALL OF THEM, just to actualize the truth, nothing else. None of these masters have spent any amount of time to analyse whether the deer have horns or not. Eh, and not only the teaching on finding the truth but even the method, method of different ways to find the truth.

And by the way, I'm sharing this because you know the, the venue that we are - you know discussing the Amitabha Sutra belongs to the Virupa tradition. According to Virupa everything is divided into three perceptions; and it is really, really clever and very practical approach to the truth. I'm sure you have heard this, billions of time but I'm sure you will hear it billions of time again.

AMITABHA SUTRA by Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche

(Singapore 21 & 22 Mar 2010) ... 20/29

Well to give an analogy of these three perceptions, let me use a classic example. So we are talking about a person looking at a conch. And this person has jaundice or some other, I don't know other problems, yes; so because of the jaundice he sees the conch yellow, okay. And this, according to Virupa it is impure perception. When, of course clearly Virupa is indicating it's impure not because of the conch, but because of the person, because his subject is defected, there is you know, a defect.

Okay, and then this person sees, meets a physician. This physician says – Look you know something's wrong with you. Of course, now, now we're talking something very vast. Actually we don't know what is; different physicians say different things, depending what kind of patient you are. But anyway, the physician says, let's say – Oh, you know it's actually not yellow but you, you have jaundice, you have a problem. You must take such and such medicine; you should avoid this and that food, all kinds of instructions.

Okay, from the time that person, the patient hears this news, the way he looks you know; from that moment it's not as if you know suddenly the person will see as white conch. He will still keep on seeing it as yellow but in his head there is a new information. I know I am looking at a conch and I know I'm seeing it yellow but actually it is not yellow. That new information; at, at least he has that information, okay. Then he takes medicine and all of that. ALL this is called experiential perception because by then the person is beginning to realize what you see is not what it is.

The third, the conch itself has never been stained by yellow; therefore it cannot become absent of yellow. That is what we call pure perception; seeing conch AS IT IS. And this categorization is quite important, as what I was telling you; ESPECIALLY for us practically speaking the second perception.

Okay, now this is, you know this is infinite. We can go on talk about this a lot. Okay one is this. Eh, you have a jaundice; you still have a jaundice. You have been told

you have a jaundice. You have been told that the conch is not yellow, right. But you're, you are also CONVINCED that it is actually your own, you know mistaken perception. So in your head, okay, in your head you aim for white conch but you still keep on seeing yellow. But you tell yourself even though blatantly you see it as yellow, you tell yourself – No, no, this is white. I'm wrong. It's not yellow again and again and again.

And this according to the Virupa tradition (Tibetan phrase) – it's one of the most essential teaching on, teaching from, teaching we call 'Path and Fruit Lamdre' teaching (Tibetan phrase), meaning...okay first you explain that (speaking to the Chinese translator).

AMITABHA SUTRA by Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche

(Singapore 21 & 22 Mar 2010) ... 21/29

I got a good example. Omelette; omelette is a good example. When you look at the egg, onion, cheese, tomatoes, NONE of them remotely looks like an omelette, REMOTELY. Yeah you understand? Onions, you know sort of greenish with the leaves and the tomatoes reddish – they don't look, they don't look remotely like omelette. But when the omelette maker, the cook, is making the omelette, he or she HAS that image of the outcome – the flat, I don't know whatever, the cheesy, you know juicy omelette, already in his head even though those things look nothing like omelette.

Now, there's something quite important here about the omelette business. Can you make an omelette with a stone, shoes, a pencil, a paper, a rubber, altogether? You do exactly the same as how you make the omelette. You have the oil, you have the heater, and all of that but you have these components. No, no omelette, right? Why? – Because the stone and the shoes have no potential of omelette, no omelette tathagata (laughter). But onion has a little bit, tomato has a little bit, so when all, when things that you know...

As I told you yesterday – sesame seed, when you look, there is no oil, when you look at the sesame seed. But it HAS oil; that's why you can squeeze it and then oil you can experience. Actually this is a very important message, important thing that you learn. When great masters, when they look at you, that's how they see you. (Rinpoche chuckled) You know like the omelette components, they, they, they see – Ha, this can be made into Buddha. You understand; they don't see you as a stone or a rubber or something. They know you can be made.

See again it complements very well with the Three Perceptions. Remember when you have impure perception, you actually really not, it's not remotely white; it's totally yellow. So where is the swimming pool? Where is the talking bird? Where are the offering goddesses? These things do not even REMOTELY look like Sukhavati, I am sorry to say this. Remotely, it doesn't even remotely look like the Land of Amitabha. But this is a perfect component if it is done, prepared properly with the proper situation, it will become Sukhavati. It has complete potential to become Sukhavati - today we're talking relative huh, relative.

You know for some people, Singapore is such a clean, safe heaven where you can send your kids to school even past midnight; where police doesn't take about nine days to answer your question. But for some people, Singapore is like – you can't really find a place that is more boring. It's like nothing goes on here; just a little bit better than very well conducted kindergarten school (laughter). So what does this take, said; what does this say? It's all your perception. Sukhavati is also a perception. Okay as I was telling you – this thing that we have, we are sitting, we are dwelling right now; not only this, including everything, the whole world - has the component what takes to make Amitabha realm.

AMITABHA SUTRA by Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche

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So now we are really going to talk the relative; now you know it's just you know; so you then ask me – Okay we can see this has the component but what do we do now? We really want to make it into a Sukhavati, how do we do it? How do you make an omelette? How do we begin?

Obviously first and the most important thing is you have to long for it. Even if somebody is saying the word 'OM..LET' (laughter), if you are famished, if there's some saliva collecting in your mouth – YES, you are getting there. You will REALLY GO UP AND DOWN Orchard Road looking for one. So THAT LONGING IS SO IMPORTANT; difficult though because we have so many obstacles. We long for other things, you know. We end up usually longing for shit-holes (laughter as translator queried), sewage.

Yeah, because we; you know the Buddha said (Tibetan phrase) – Buddha said you know you must understand the suffering, right. Usually we think sufferings are, suffering; usually we think the things that we think of as happiness – they're all suffering, right, we don't know.

So longing for the Amitabha realm is SO important. This is why in the sutras (Tibetan phrase) – you know the tathagata Amitabha, I take refuge to you, I make offerings to you. I take eh, you know I pay attention to you and then reciting such verses you think of the quality of the Buddha realm.

Okay just to remind you; the ultimate way to approach the ultimate eh, Amitabha – we talked yesterday. We are talking about the relative level, huh. Relative, the relative path is very workable. It's really compatible to how we think. So, you know there are so many different methods, for instance you know there's method like mm, like looking at, you know facing western direction, kneeling down, as the sun is setting, right; and gazing towards that.

And all these, this is all, remember when you make omelette you need all kinds of atmosphere. You need the; you need the, you need well at least a frying pan; so then like kneeling down towards, gazing towards the Western Land. Even the word, you know like 'gazing' is important; like gazing means (Tibetan phrase) – meaning like really you are longing SO MUCH you don't even want to BLINK, you know that kind of intense longing.

Then you think about the beauty and the exalted qualities of this Land. But when we say beauty, beautiful qualities, as a human being what reference do we have? That's why there's like you know like swimming pools and talking birds because we think they are beautiful. Of course the swimming pool doesn't look like asparagus soup. So think of the quality and the detail as much as you want, as much, however you want to elaborate; not only, yeah. And not only the Land and mansion of Amitabha but of course Amitabha himself, his entourage, mainly Avalokiteshvara, who also has his own entourage.

AMITABHA SUTRA by Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche

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And by the way, I am sure you're going to ask me later – Oh well, all this visualization details I don't know. Don't ask me that question (laughter). I will give you an example. Think about your mother, right now. When you think about your mother, do you have to think her nose is like this, her ear is like this – do you think like that? You don't have to.

If every time you have to think when you think about your mother; if every time you need to – Wait, wait, I'm just about to the nose of my mother (laughter), you will have a problem. It's a bit like that. Visualization is mainly to do with the confidence – that all these Buddhas and bodhisattvas THERE, RIGHT IN FRONT of you whether you see them or not. They are there. And this you again and again, you develop this.

And if you want to elaborate, you can, you can prostrate, you can make offerings of all sorts, you can – all on the visualization level. But if you want, you can also sprinkle some flowers or expose your misdeeds, you know rejoice to, rejoice with all the great qualities of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas and also the qualities of others, the great qualities of others. Ask them to teach. Ask them to remain on this samsara as much, as long as the samsara is not empty. Dedicate the merit. Again and again think about Amitabha and the Amitabha's realm - just to give you some suggestions.

You know spiritual path is difficult, not because the path itself is so hard to chew – because too much distractions and not enough longing, like a bunch, like a bunch of grass placed in front of a tiger; not like an omelette in front of an omelette seeker. So longing for practicing is difficult because actually it even starts right from the beginning because there is no longing for enlightenment. So it's because of this you know like; you know all of us, we love to receive abhisheka because it is related to power and blah, blah. But then when it comes to the practice, we are lagging behind.

I am sure many of you have received abhishekas of all sorts. Receiving the abhisheka is basically like you know, going back to the Triple Perception; receiving abhisheka is like you know you have the jaundice, right and you're looking at the conch. And you are seeing it as yellow. Receiving abhisheka is asking somebody to come and telling, tell you it's actually not yellow, it's white. But it is you who is seeing it is yellow, not the other. So you have to keep on remembering that it's not yellow, it's white. I have, you know a defect on my, you know organ.

This is why even in the Vajrayana, you know the sadhana practices are really important. They are very, you know designed by great masters and the saints of the past. For instance, like the Four Sadhanas according to the Virupa tradition that you are supposed to remind yourself with it. It's really important to keep it going this awareness.

AMITABHA SUTRA by Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche

(Singapore 21 & 22 Mar 2010) ... 24/29

Today we are not going to have a break. You can go to toilet anytime. I'm going to; you know wrapped this up, summarize this and let you ask some questions. So when you remind yourself with the mandala or the place of Amitabha and Amitabha himself again and again, you are also being mindful of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Oh yeah, right; I nearly forgot. I was going to say that I give you some suggestions.

So to practice right; so like Amitabha, the ultimate approach to Amitabha and his Land, we discussed yesterday; this is something if you, you can do, you should do it, you know consistently. I will suggest to you to really, those who are interested, to really seek and look for the teachings such as Mahamudra or Mahasandhi or the Non-difference of Samsara and Nirvana.

Consistency is important. Quantity is not that important. Doing it EVERY DAY whether it's badly done or perfectly done doesn't matter. But consistently doing it is REALLY IMPORTANT; and then remembering the Amitabha Buddha, his form, his retinue, his land or the Amitabha Land – that's important. If possible you should try to remember three times a day and three times at night. That's just about nine seconds, so really it's not long. Mind you, you can make it longer. You can each remember, you can make it one hour. What I'm saying is AT LEAST should remember the Buddha Amitabha and his Land DAILY, daily.

Longing that's need to be, you know you need to cultivate the longing, right; ESPECIALLY as you are about to sleep. Again all this sounds like so much homework. Make it; you know in this modern age it's really difficult for us to remember the dharma. So let's say you have watched your favourite soap opera and it's like 1.30 a.m. You have to get up like 5 and in your mind you may think – Oh well I have no time to think about Amitabha today. That's not right.

You know while you are making your bed, while you are taking off your clothes, you should think about Amitabha and his Land. How long does it take? Ten seconds, probably less; and THAT you should, you should; okay this is one of the biggest problems, huh. This is one of the great masters, Nyingma masters, Kunkhyen Jigme Lingpa, he said this and I want to share this with you because this is very important.

He said dharma practitioners have this problem - that all these small, seemingly very small and you know like minute dharma practices; we always think that's so small, what's the point of doing that? And the big dharma practices such as three years, three months, nine years, nine months retreat – we can never do. So we end up doing nothing. So EVEN few seconds of remembering the Buddha Amitabha and his Land, just about you are to sleep, with the, of course mixed with your soap opera images of course; if you continuously do that, then you will reach to a stage when the moment you open your eyes when you wake up, you think about Amitabha realm.

Or in the middle of the night, you wake up for no reason; the first thing you think about is Amitabha. And you still keep on doing it; THEN the moment an anger comes, you think about Amitabha. The moment DESIRE comes, Amitabha; so Amitabha will end up accompanying you all the time.

AMITABHA SUTRA by Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche

(Singapore 21 & 22 Mar 2010) ... 25/29

It's really nice, this the Chinese traditions of you know, they say "A MI TUO FO"; it's really nice. I know a Taiwanese monk; in his answering machine it's like this "A MI TUO FO". But later he becomes Vajrayana practitioner, and he has whole Vajrasattva mantra "OM VAJRASATTO..." whole of that. If you are in a telephone booth with a small change, you have a problem there (laughter).

Remembering the Amitabha again and again is remembering the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. You might ask this question – What's the point of just remembering? Don't we have to DO something? Just remember – what's the point? Ah, this is a big mistake.

Look at the whole Buddha's teaching. The SPINE of Buddhism is actually the practice of remembering. It's called mindfulness. There's even a Sutra (Tibetan phrase), you know there's even a Sutra to remember the Triple Gem. Ah, again as I said, right at the beginning, teaching sutra by someone like me is a joke. But at the same time, Buddha said in many sutras including this one, EVEN to possess the book Amitabha Sutra at home is a blessing. Obviously so much merit to talk about, to discuss about, to teach, to listen - so much merit.

This is a little bit Tantric, so I don't want to go too, too much detail but just to give you a little bit of glimpse. Amitabha plays important role in our realm. Quality of the Buddha is like a, is kind of categorized into five based on you know, in order to purify five different kinds of emotion. We, beings from this earth, especially belong to what

we call the Realm of Desire, Realm of Passion actually. When we, when I talk about the passion, I'm not only talking about some kind of you know like physical, sexual related passion. I'm talking about basically the beings from this Realm; among although of course we have so many kinds of emotion.

The base emotion is mainly by, mainly through longing, longing something - longing for friendship, longing for a good eh, view, longing for a good massage, longing for a nice smell of lavender, longing for fitting shoes, longing for kinky stuff - all kinds of longing. And Amitabha actually, from the Tantric point of view, is the pure aspect of this longing. It is because of that, even in the Amitabha Sutra, the path is based on LONGING – longing for reborn in the Amitabha.

So it makes sense, if you look at all these bodhisattvas and deities – most of them are manifestations of Amitabha, most of them. I mean just Avalokiteshvara who is none other than the manifestation of Amitabha. Just Avalokiteshvara, just; just Avalokiteshvara has already taken the whole of China, Tibet, and Arya Tara taken over India. And Sri Lanka also again by Avalokiteshvara; mm, Amitabha you know in Japan, this Amitabha is big. They call it 'Amida Butsu', right. And there is definitely a relationship, in-built relationship with us and Amitabha.

AMITABHA SUTRA by Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche

(Singapore 21 & 22 Mar 2010) ... 26/29

So fortunate that you are going to be participating, those who are, the puja, right? Puja, so fortunate that you're going to participate the puja. Amitabha puja basically means offerings. You know Shantideva said in the Bodhicharyavatara, you know he said – I want to do prayers. I want to do prayers for the benefit of all sentient beings. But I don't know what benefits sentient beings, what does not? I don't know these things. So who am I to say that I want to pray so that I benefit sentient beings?

So the only person who knows these things, how to pray, how to benefit sentient beings - the great Manjushri and Samantabhadra. So Shantideva so beautifully put here; Shantideva said – Well I will pray and wish as how he wishes, because I don't know how to wish, right.

And in this tradition, we don't know what to offer to Amitabha Buddha. Well, Khabje, His Holiness Sakya Trizin, he is the Manjushri himself. So if, if you are going to participate, as he is making offerings to Amitabha Buddha, all your offerings will, of course it's not going to be wasted, but it's going to manifest as how it should manifest. So it's really so fortunate that those of you who are attending this. Eh, what else? My brain is like jelly, so can't think of anything else right now. You can ask some questions, right.

Student A: Hello, hello; Rinpoche in your recent talks, you mentioned about not forgetting the three Triple Gem.

Rinpoche: What did I mention?

Student A: Not forgetting; remember the three Triple Gem (Rinpoche: Yes) and I wonder by our practice how, how we make sure we're not forgetting eh, in the future or in the bardo, because when I first learn Buddhism, become a Buddhist, I was sad and frustrated. How can I, eh, totally absent in my life for decades? So I want to make sure eh, we're not, I won't forget eh...

Rinpoche: As I told you earlier, if you keep on consistently doing it, even if you wish to forget, you will not forget. That's what I'm saying. You have to be just consistent. Consistency is the key.

Student B: Rinpoche, yesterday you talked about eh, believing. I want to ask eh, how do I stop believing and what are the consequences?

Rinpoche: How do you stop believing?

Student B: Yeah, usually we believed in, whether you want to believe or not, we believe.

Rinpoche: Actually most practical is what we did yesterday. You know sitting and just watching the thoughts. That is the most effective way to stop believing.

Student C: Rinpoche, thank you for the teaching. Eh, a couple of questions; one is eh, I'm constantly stuck with this ultimate and relative, right; for example in the Amitabha Sutra, it's talked about the confidence and believing in a place like Sukhavati. And my problem is that if you know ultimately all these are your own projections, your mind's projections; and at the same time how do you convince yourself that you need to believe that there is this place and you're longing for this place?

Rinpoche: This is a classic question. This is, this is going to be difficult. But it is like that. Intellectually it makes sense that food is actually a projection of our mind; so it actually does not exist as a truly existing entity. But until you really actualize that and become like Tilopa or Virupa, skip one lunch and then you will know (laughter).

And by the way, just you know, probably I'm confusing furthermore, so-called ultimate truth and relative truth are both relative truth. Only for the sake of talking, we have to categorize like that. In the ultimate world, there is no such thing as ultimate truth and relative truth.

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Student C: But what do you do then when you practice, trying to visualize this Sukhavati, on the background there is a voice telling yourself... (Rinpoche: Oh, I see that)... that's it's all your mind's projection, what do you do?

Rinpoche: That's actually good. You know why – because that background talking is going to make sure that your Amitabha realm will not become another heaven – that's good.

Student C: But wouldn't that affect my confidence in terms of believing it?

Rinpoche: Eh, yes it might deconstruct some of the blind, blindly developed confidence, yes but that's good. This is good but at the same time because the; you know the undercurrent message of emptiness is there, you will also look at a public toilet and have the confidence that - Why not this is also Sukhavati? - Because of that emptiness thing.

This is why Nagarjuna said (Tibetan phrase) – For those who can accept emptiness, everything is acceptable. See right now – public toilet – No, no, no can't be Sukhavati, right? (Laughter) Or somewhere like a five-star swimming pool – Yes, that's how Sukhavati's swimming looks like but that distinction will go because of that background noise.

Student C: Allow me to ask one more, last question. Yesterday you were talking about eh, Amitabha and his colour in red in Tibetan Buddhism and its connection with passion. Just now you elaborate a little bit of that; what else do we need to know about that? Are there anything else we need?

Rinpoche: I'm sure there's a lot but I can't think of anything (laughter). I think actually there is something quite important one is; it helps, you know it's like you will confidently go to somebody who promise that he will do something to you, wouldn't you? Let's say somebody says – I promise you, I will promise that next time I will give you, I don't know a kilo of gold or something. So because there is that promise, you will go to this person because you know that he has promised.

So I think quite important this one because Amitabha has made, it's a bit like a promise, wish and aspiration that – WHOEVER thinks of me, whoever dying at that moment, I will appear. So you can claim so to speak you have the right and you can claim.

If you want more details of Amitabha Land, you can always read the sutras, I mean it's there, it's; but why don't you read this time with a slightly different attitude? You know Amitabha is resting, you know kind of eh; his back is resting on a wish-fulfilling tree supposedly. And each branch has supposedly (Tibetan phrase) – it's like five hundred miles and then within each leaf, there are Buddha realms and all kinds of things' happening there all the time.

You can read it in a more fantastical sort of avatar-film kind of way (laughter) but at the same time, this time you can read it – Wow, this is actually a teaching on ultimate truth because for, ultimately five hundred miles is no longer than this, right. It's a belief; remember the chopstick business. So Amitabha sutras, when you read – it has all this fantastical kind of you know like land. Those are amazing descriptive teachings on emptiness.

And also I should say there are a lot of symbolic; there is a lot of symbolic example, eh, example, symbolic teachings there because in the Amitabha Sutra, it says – 'Don't doubt'. Because even when you become a kind of higher bodhisattva, even slight doubt will not; it will cause, the effect will be; you're, you're already born in the Amitabha realm, inside the lotus but the lotus is not opening - so you will be wrapped into this lotus and you may not hear the teaching of Amitabha Buddha that clearly because you are wrapped inside the lotus (laughter).

In many ways it is a very symbolic teaching. Lotus representing your heart and your mind inside already there, but because of doubt this is not blossoming. Yeah, but we don't have to go through each and every one of them. Anyway I think that's about it you know. As I was telling mm, Steven, you know there's really nothing much to teach apart from that.

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Oh, there's one question here left. Okay you want to ask, okay, two questions.

Student D: Hello Rinpoche, you mention something about...

Rinpoche: Wait, wait, this one; oh, this one, okay.

Student D: You mentioned someone suffering from jaundice when they look at the conch or omelette. The conch becomes yellow and we have to constantly find assurance to make sure that it is not yellow. We have to find that teacher to make sure that we have that assurance so that we are confident. Can it be the other way round? If we are confident we know it's white and it's not yellow, can we not find this person to assure us?

Rinpoche: Oh, yeah, we can.

Student D: Okay, in the other question; meaning the other way round. If you want, if we are that confident, WHERE do we look for this so-called assurance teacher?

Rinpoche: Oh, again according to the Amitabha Sutra, prayer and aspiration, aspiration. You don't look for the guru; the guru will FIND you (laughter).

Student D: Oh, very good; thank you.

Student E: Rinpoche, I also have a question about the conch. Eh, you were saying that once the patient has had explained to them it's in fact white, not yellow; then they tell themselves this is white, this is not yellow. But if all your life you have seen yellow where it should be white, then how without any reference point can you know that it is white? How can you believe it is white if you have no idea what white is?

Rinpoche: Actually, that's why, why I didn't want to confuse too many people. Actually you are right; that's a very important point. Actually if there was no jaundice

issue, it's not even white. Conch is conch. All that white business came just because you saw it yellow, just because of that. Eh, that's, that's good. I didn't want to go through that, it's too confusing. Oh, okay, yes. There's still like two questions; okay three questions, okay.

Student F: Rinpoche, I have some questions to ask. The first question is I heard that Buddha has no aspiration; then why we practice we need aspiration?

Rinpoche: I didn't get that question.

Student F: I heard that Buddha has no aspiration. (Rinpoche: Oh, I see) Then why do we practice we need aspiration?

Rinpoche: Right, again ultimate, relative what do you call it? Ultimate, relative question, isn't it? Going back to the elephant and the nightmare, remember. Okay let's say you are having a nightmare, right? An elephant is about to step over you. Do you wish the elephant to go away? How can you wish? – Elephant does not exist, it's a dream. Okay, next question, okay.

Student F: The next question is what is merit?

Rinpoche: What is merit? I've already answered yesterday. It's a good poetic name for good karma. Do you have question? No, okay. Here Billy, you want to ask question? Here this one, yeah; so this will be the last, right? Okay.

Student G: If you do not want the guru to look for you and you want to look for the guru; do you know a guru who knows how to make good omelette and you can make the same good omelette as his, and not turn out to be a burnt omelette?

Rinpoche: Guru does not look for student, I think. They always find. Is that what you're asking? - If you want to find?

Student G: Because if you need longing for the omelette, you must know somebody who knows how to make omelette and to eat.

Rinpoche: Well I think I know but that's only my thinking. I think most of these questions are answered – Yes to go to Amitabha Pure land, very important to long for the Amitabha Land which is another name for enlightenment.

There's one kind of important question. It says – Most of the old people just want to go a cozy place, not really enlightenment - after they die. I think you know this is why to, to exposing oneself to the dharma right from the beginning is quite important. But eh, you encounter people who have no dharma background but then they are about to die; and for them we still can't really, we still have to help; so for them at least longing for some kind of cozy place called Amitabha realm is a stepping stone. We should encourage that.

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Okay, I think questions are like a rabbit; oh, you (the translator) want to ask a question, okay ask.

Translator: Okay, Rinpoche, just according, from Chinese; I heard many Chinese Buddhists say that if we resolve, aspire to be reborn in a Pure Land, it may not that good because it takes a very, very long time to get enlightened. It's better to aspire to come back to this world so that you can quickly attain Buddhahood and benefit beings.

Rinpoche: Yeah, yeah, those, you know marketing strategy (laughter and applause).

Translator: But how does it work, because it causes doubt in people who might otherwise be inclined to be reborn in Pure Land?

Rinpoche: What kind of doubt?

Translator: I have no wish to be reborn in Pure Land because it's taking too long. I rather be reborn onto earth.

Rinpoche: Sure, why not; let them go there. I would say that's my attitude because it's the same, the same juncture they end up anyway. Really ultimately that's it; and for lots of people, it's probably much better, otherwise all this emptiness, clarity, Nagarjuna, Madhyamika business – just too painful (laughter).

Yeah for many, you know I tell you. You know I was telling you this is why I brought the issue 'the belief'. Some of these people have a JUST AMAZING BELIEF that there is a Western, the Buddha Amitabha and his realm. And they are BILLION TIMES faster than someone who has gone to Buddhist schools, who are very well versed with Nagarjuna, Aryadeva, Chandrakirti.

Okay eh, I shall really consider this an opportunity for myself to accumulate merit, sharing swords regarding Amitabha and his Land. In the beginning of both teachings, I have taught and realized all the people who, has been; who you know, people request me to pray for the death, dead – family members summoned them. I didn't want to mention earlier; you don't want to, I don't want to feel uncomfortable. But I'm sure you know, especially belief like sutras like Amitabha Sutra is VERY important to be taught and discussed – the ghosts, asuras, they really get SO MUCH confidence and so much soothing feeling. And I've summoned the ghosts of three realms here and to them I also like to dedicate the merit.

Eh, Amitabha is also considered Amitayus, in this case 'Boundless Life'. By the way again, you know don't think that – Oh, maybe we shouldn't read Amitabha Sutra because it attracts ghosts (laughter). Really we are billion, trillion times more dangerous than ghosts. Ghosts are the most harmless.

Okay, again the merit of discussing the Amitayus related subject, I shall dedicate the merit to the longevity of all the great beings, spiritual and secular. Also the longevity of Amazon River, I mean the Amazon forests, jungle actually I should say; North Pole, South Pole, Mount Everest, and longevity to fresh water, fresh air. Amitabha is also considered as Hayagriva at times and I shall dedicate by the power of the wrathful manifestation of Hayagriva, it will extinct the lives of those who make, you know create pollution.

You, you have received teachings on Amitabha Sutra. You should also you know make it practical; so after receiving these teachings, those who wish to, please take a vow that you will go to Starbucks with your own cup (laughter), that you will never shop in Borders Bookshop but instead small individual bookshops. That, of course what need is there to mention not going to McDonalds. That's it.

FINITO

**(transcribed from audio recording - AMITABHA SUTRA by Dzongsar
Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche**

Singapore 21 & 22 Mar 2010)

<http://www.sakyatenphelling.org/buddhism/recorded-teachings/>

Dedication of Merit –

ge war di yi nyur du dak

Through this merit, may I quickly

orgyen lama drub gyur ne

**Accomplish the level of the Oddiyana Lama and
through that**

dro wa chik kyang ma lü pa

May all beings, without exception,

de yi sa la gö par shok

Be established at that level.



OM ĀḤ HŪM VAJRA GURU PEMA SIDDHI HŪM

