

**A VERY SIMPLE  
PRESENTATION  
OF THE LAMRIM  
FROM JUNIOR  
SCHOOL TO  
POSTGRADUATE  
KOPAN  
MONASTERY,  
KATHMANDU  
THE NOVEMBER  
COURSE 2019**

**EVERYONE CAN ACHIEVE BUDDHAHOOD,  
THE TOTAL CESSATION OF DELUSIONS  
AND THE COMPLETION OF ALL REALIZATIONS.  
THIS IS THE VERY MEANING OF THE WORD,  
BUDDHA.**

LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE

Artist: Denise Griffin



**LAMA THUBTEN YESHE, HIS HAND GESTURES SHOWING  
THAT HE IS SHAKYAMUNI BUDDHA AND HIS HAT AND  
IMPLEMENTS SHOWING THAT HE IS JE TSONGKHAPA,  
THE FOURTEENTH-CENTURY SOURCE  
OF THE LAMRIM LITERATURE.  
LAMA IS THE FOUNDER, WITH LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE,  
OF THE FPMT AND ITS FIRST CENTER,  
KOPAN MONASTERY**

# **A VERY SIMPLE PRESENTATION OF THE LAMRIM FROM JUNIOR SCHOOL TO POSTGRADUATE BY ROBINA COURTIN THE NOVEMBER COURSE 2019 KOPAN MONASTERY**

A ROUGHLY EDITED TRANSCRIPT, WITH  
SOME ADDITIONS, OF A WEEKEND  
COURSE AT FPMT'S LAND OF MEDICINE  
BUDDHA, SOQUEL, CALIFORNIA, IN 2005,  
WHICH SERVES AS MODULE 3 OF FPMT'S  
DISCOVERING BUDDHISM COURSE OF  
STUDY



**KOPAN MONASTERY  
KATHMANDU**

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Photo: Piero Sirianni



**LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE, THE SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR OF  
THE FPMT AND THE FOUNDER, WITH LAMA YESHE,  
OF KOPAN MONASTERY.  
RINPOCHE TAUGHT THE FIRST KOPAN  
NOVEMBER COURSE IN 1971**



**PART ONE**  
**INTRODUCTION TO**  
**THE BUDDHIST**  
**WORLDVIEW**

# **1. THE LAMRIM FROM JUNIOR SCHOOL TO POSTGRADUATE**

## **MOTIVATION**

Let's start with a positive motivation for our time together here, listening to these teachings.

“May this action, this sitting together listening to Buddha's ideas about happiness, about suffering, about how things are, all of the questions we ask about the meaning of life, help me develop my amazing potential of buddhahood.

“May I take some tools from this to develop this amazing potential so that I really can be of benefit to others, eventually leading them to their own buddhahood.

“May this action of being here together, listening, discussing, contemplating, be a cause for exactly that result.”

We'll sing a little prayer, the second two lines of which express that. The

first two lines are expressing our reliance upon the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, so, if we are Buddhist already we have that in our heart. If not, that's cool, we leave it.

Sang-gyä chö-dang sog-kyi chog-  
nam-la

Jang-chub bar-du dag-ni kyab-su-chi  
Dag-gi chö-nyen gyi-pä so-nam-kyi  
Dro-la pen-chir sang-gyä drub-par-  
shog

## **BUDDHISM: FROM INDIA TO TIBET**

One thing marvelous in the Tibetan tradition is the way the Buddhist teachings have been packaged. And it comes from this person called Atisha, back in the eleventh century, an Indian master, saint, scholar, practitioner, meditator. He was invited by the Tibetan king; there is a very long and marvelous story about how he got there. He lived the remaining fifteen to seventeen years of his life in Tibet.

Well, one of the things that he did was that he wrote this little text called

*Lamp for the Path.* It's a deceptively simple little text. He had been in Tibet for a while and he could see that they had kind of lost the plot. Buddhism had been there for a few hundred years by then. There were already these marvelous practitioners in Tibet, extraordinarily great yogis, holy beings, people getting realizations.

But somehow, if you look at Buddha's teachings extensively and deeply, all the philosophy, all the things that Buddha talked about and experienced, and all the things the Buddhist masters over the centuries, from the time of the Buddha up to that point, had talked about and realized, the commentaries on Buddha's teachings, the extensive philosophy, the extensive psychology, the extensive esoteric teachings, it's an enormous body of knowledge and it's very easy to get lost in it. It's like finding hundreds and hundreds of books on all levels of cooking, but you can't find the recipes in there, so it's very easy to get confused. He very kindly wrote this little text; and what he did was he took the essential points

from the vast literature of the Buddhist worldview and presented them in a very orderly way.

## **WE MYSTIFY RELIGION**

But I think we are not familiar with this approach when it comes to spiritual teachings. We don't think like that. In other words, we go searching for a cooking course, but we don't go searching for a graded course on how to get enlightened. I mean, getting enlightened is uncharted territory!

I think we mystify spiritual teachings, religion. The moment we hear the word "spiritual" we lose our common sense. Really. Then we necessarily think of spiritual as something beyond ordinary. We think of it as some special feeling. We think of it as something that happens when you close your eyes and cross your legs, something mystical, a vision, a special kind of dream. "Oh, I had a spiritual experience!" we'll say. It really is not appropriate. It's inappropriate to think this way. We also think of it as completely hit and miss.

The way you present information about cooking is that it has to be orderly and coherent, and the orderly way has to be in terms of the capacity of the cook, the simple stuff first and the more advanced as you go along. That's nothing surprising. Anything we've ever learned in our lives, we start in grade one and we eventually graduate. Whether it's six-month course or a weekend course, or a twenty-year course, you start at the beginning and you keep getting better. You can track your progress can't you? It's something we are very, very familiar with.

## **THE GRADUAL PATH**

What we're going to talk about here is from the point of view of one of the four main lineages of practice in Tibet called the Gelugpas. Over the centuries, different great masters have presented, in different ways, the teachings; and the particular tradition here is known as Gelug – adherents are Gelugpas – which is starting from Tsongkhapa in the fourteenth century. He used as his

source Atisha's text. And he calls this presentation of the teaching, in Tibetan, *lamrim*.

This lamrim then, what's it all about? What is it? The word translates as "gradual path." We can hear the meaning but we don't recognize the concept. But if we say it means "a course," suddenly it makes sense. As His Holiness says, it's like the education system.

The entire course is divided into phases of study and practice and Tsongkhapa refers to them as the lower scope, the middle scope, and the great scope. Well, you know what? I like junior school, high school, university. We get those concepts immediately. I like using them. I will use them!

## **LORD BUDDHA**

But first, who is Buddha and how did Buddhism get to Tibet? Very briefly, let's discuss. It was something like 500 years before Christ, I think, that Buddha was around. He'd been educated in the philosophy and psychology prevailing at the time,

which was pretty developed. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama says, it was these amazing Indians more than three thousand years ago who began the investigation into the nature of self. India was incredibly developed in philosophy, psychology, spirituality – but we know nothing about it in our Euro-centric Judeo-Christian traditions. We like the Greeks, don't we! Buddha went as far as he could go and then diverged in his own direction, specifically in relation to his own experiential findings about the nature of self.

He was the son of a king; people know roughly speaking the bits of his story. He was this prince who eventually started to question very deeply the meaning of life, the meaning of his own present life, his enormously rich and marvelous life, and realized that somehow he wanted to understand the nature of reality, he wanted to understand how to go beyond suffering. He could see that everybody was fraught with suffering, at one level or another. And so he left his kingdom



and he went off and practiced the various methods that were current at the time.

He eventually became enlightened, as they say, developed all the realizations, removed from the mind all the misconceptions – we are going to talk exactly about that. And then he taught for the remainder of his life, something like thirty years – he was 80-something when he passed away.

So, that's Buddha, very brief.

## **WE GRADUATE AS A BUDDHA**

What is it that we are trying to achieve? What is the result of this graded path, this lamrim, what's the result of this course? Well, it's an accomplishment called "enlightenment" or "buddhahood." This term "enlightenment" is used by lots of people in lot of traditions in lots of different ways.

The etymology of the Sanskrit word "buddha" is very tasty. It tells us exactly the result, which in turn tells us exactly the methodology. "Budh" implies the utter eradication from our

mind of all ego, all neuroses, all the attachment, anger, depression, etc., etc., that we assume are at the core of our being. For Buddha, they are not, thus can be removed.

“Dha” implies the development to perfection of all the goodness, the virtue, the wisdom within us: these are at the core of our being.

According to the Mahayana interpretation, this is the natural potential of all sentient beings – all “sem-chens”: the Tibetan word that we translate as sentient being but which literally means “mind-possessor.”

## **GETTING RID OF THE NEGATIVE**

This is radical! And there’s no view like that in neuroscience, in modern psychology. We give equal status to all these parts of us and just assume they’re normal.

None of us would think we can totally get rid of anger, ego and the rest because we just assume that we are born a certain way and that’s just the way we are. You just have to do your best, you know. We don’t think in

terms of growing the positive qualities and getting rid of the negative.

We do think this way when it comes to cake making, for example, or any other skill: you are not born as a cake-maker, but you've got the potential and you go learn how to become a cake-maker in a course. You're not born as a mathematician, but you can learn it. You're not born as Mozart, but, hey, you can become like him. We have courses, don't we?

But we don't have courses on how to become more loving, more wise, more compassionate. Look at the stunning degree to which we can learn piano. We are phenomenally brilliant, aren't we, in the West, technically brilliant in the things we can achieve, but we don't have that level of technical brilliance when it comes to the actual state of our mind; and that's Buddha's specialty. He's brilliant at helping us develop to phenomenal degrees our own very mind, which we ought to be hungry to get.

I mean, the courses on Buddhism should be packed with people. We

mightn't all want to be mathematicians, and we don't necessarily suffer because we are not a mathematician, but hey, we all suffer in terms of jealousy, and confusion, and depression and the urge to kill and lie and steal, you get my point here. We should be packing Buddha's courses. Buddha's expertise is the mind, and the capacity of the human to rid the mind of all the rubbish and develop to perfection all the goodness.

## **DEVELOPING THE GOODNESS TO PERFECTION**

“Enlightenment” is the term used to refer to the mind of the person who has done the job of perfecting their own positive qualities and absolutely removing the negative. Now those words themselves are kind of understandable, nothing shocking about the words; but when I tell you more precisely the qualities of the person who has achieved this, then it really sounds like science fiction – like “religion.” A mind that has removed all delusions and perfected all goodness

would necessarily pervade the universe, know that which exists as it exists, and have infinite empathy with all beings. We'll get into that later.

## **BUDDHA NATURE**

What Buddha is saying is – this is, just naturally, the potential of every being. An acorn, for example, just naturally is a potential oak tree. It's not as if you come along and you force oak treeness into it and now suddenly your acorn becomes an oak tree. It is just naturally, by its existence, a potential oak tree; an acorn in its nature is a potential oak tree. If you are a living being, you are just naturally a potential buddha. It's what defines us, Buddha has found.

## **ENLIGHTENMENT IS DOABLE**

The culmination of this course, this A-Z course to enlightenment, is this perfection, is this enlightenment. Naturally, you start in junior school. Then, when you have accomplished this, you go to high school, and so on and so forth until, eventually, you have

achieved it. It is as practical as that. The Buddha's approach is that type of practicality. It's not this mystical, cross-your-fingers-and-hope-for-the best sort of hit-and-miss affair that we think of as spiritual. Do you see what I am saying? And it's extremely important to think this way; it's really a sigh of relief, actually.

We all know we want to be loving and kind, we all know we don't want to be mean and depressed, but we kind of don't really know how. We sort of think well, we've heard about this thing called meditation and somehow, if you close your eyes, and put the incense on, and make the light low, and the music's sweet, somehow something will happen inside called spiritual. You understand what I'm saying?

It's not like that. The Buddha's approach is not like that. He says it's a really tough job, but it's a do-able job and you start at the beginning and you just keep going. You just keep going and you will get there. We all know practice makes perfect. We all know practice makes perfect. Well, the saying

they have in Tibetan is that “Nothing gets more difficult with familiarity.” It’s a different way of saying it. What a relief! The more you do it, the better you get at it. What a relief! It should give us great courage.

It’s good to know as a starting point that the goal of all of this is to achieve this buddhahood. Because why? Because you’re a living being and this is the potential of your mind. They say we possess buddha-nature. We don’t talk like that, right? We don’t say, oh, yes, an acorn possesses oak tree-nature. But we know exactly the meaning, don’t we? It’s a quaint way to put it.

Well, you’re a potential buddha. Very simple. That’s what it means: you possess buddha-nature. It’s not a little Buddha in there, hiding from you, for you to find. Like there’s not a little oak tree in there that, when you find it it’ll suddenly explode into life. We know that. You understand. An acorn is something that when you give it the right causes and conditions – the sun, the water, the soil, and time and patience – it will just naturally become

an oak tree. The same here. The same here. It's something very organic and natural; whereas, again, we don't think like that. We think it's something you've got to force.

## **WE'LL TOUCH THE SURFACE OF THE MAIN POINTS**

Okay, this lamrim, this packaging of Buddha's teachings, presented in an orderly and experiential way, is what we will be presenting this weekend in a very speedy way. One lama in Wisconsin, who is a professor at the university, he's retired now, Geshe Sopa – I think Wisdom Publications has now published the third volume of his commentary on Tsongkhapa's *Lamrim Chenmo*. It is not huge, the books, but he took twenty-five years to teach it, twenty-five years! Gradually, really slowly, really in depth.

We'll speed through and just touch the surface of some of the main points in a day and a half or two days or however long a weekend course is.

Okay, so far, so good? Makes sense? And if we've heard it a thousand times



before, does it make even more sense? Because that's the point. That's good. We need to hear this, again and again. Just like with your piano, you keep practicing the same thing. You don't say, "Oh, yeah, I did the c major scale, yesterday. Give me a new one, please." You've got to keep practicing, don't you? That's what we mean by practice! One piece of practice is to keep hearing.

## **BE PRECISE**

As we already know, when it comes to math and science and making cakes, we've got to be very clear about our terminology. If you check the cake recipe and it says a half teaspoonful of this, and a gram of that, you know you've got to go check up the meaning of a gram and the meaning of a half a teaspoon, otherwise you'll make a mess. We do understand very naturally in our daily, ordinary life the necessity for precision, for accuracy.

Again, that's something we're not used to thinking about in spiritual terms. We all bandy the word "enlightenment" about and assume

we're all speaking the same language. It's like we all bandy about the word called "love." I say I love you, you say you love me, and we actually think we are communicating. But if we actually defined our terms, we've probably got two completely different meanings.

Buddha is really big on accuracy, he's big on precision, and the Tibetans are past masters at this, I tell you. They don't know how old they are; they talk about an "arm's length" – they're not so clear and accurate about those things, but any of the ones who have studied, they know exactly the definition of love, the definition of enlightenment, exactly this and it's not this, and it is that, and therefore this. And that's not meant to just be intellectual, just like learning a recipe precisely isn't merely intellectual; you need it to get the cake. The Buddha's approach very much is that and, as I said, the Tibetans especially; their incredible monastic university system is based on the great Nalanda Monastery in India, which flourished up until the eleventh century.

## **A BIRD NEEDS TWO WINGS: WISDOM AND COMPASSION**

Buddha says a bird needs two wings, wisdom and compassion. Really, broadly speaking, we can say the wisdom wing is what we call the Hinayana approach to Buddhism, which is the Buddhism that's developed in countries like Burma and Thailand or known very commonly as Theravadin Buddhism. The other wing is the compassion wing. These two together, the combination of these two is the Mahayana path, the Mahayana course, and the goal of that is buddhahood.

What Buddha is saying is every living being has just necessarily the potential to achieve buddhahood, enlightenment. The goal of practicing this course we're describing this weekend – we won't get it by Sunday! Well, we might if we are ripe and ready! – the accomplishment, the end result, the culmination, is one's own buddhahood, one's own enlightenment.

And what becomes a buddha? Your mind, your consciousness. Buddha doesn't talk about a soul or a spirit. His expertise is the mind.

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## **2. IF IT'S MIND THAT GETS ENLIGHTENED, WE'D BETTER KNOW WHAT IT IS**

### **THE MIND IS NOT PHYSICAL**

As it's the mind that gets enlightened, we'd better know what Buddha means by it! What is the mind? Well, "mind" in Buddhism is used in a much broader way than we tend to use it in our own culture. It is used synonymously with the word "consciousness."

Mind isn't physical. If you're a Christian or a Muslim, or you talk about some non-physical part of you, it's known as the soul. But Buddha doesn't use that term at all. He would use the term mind, but it incorporates concepts, feelings, thoughts, emotions, unconscious, whatever you want to call it, what you even like to refer to as the spiritual part of yourself, whatever you like. All of this is your mind. The whole spectrum of your inner experiences is your mind, and in Buddha's terms it is necessarily non-physical. It isn't the

body. It's not the brain. From the Buddhist perspective perhaps you could say that what we observe in the brain is an indicator of what's going on in our mind – at least at the grosser level.

## **SUBTLER LEVELS OF CONSCIOUSNESS**

It's clear from all this that Buddha asserts far more refined, more subtle levels of awareness, or of conscious awareness, of mind, than we would ever posit as possible according to the philosophical materialist models.

Using the model of the mind taken from the esoteric teachings, from tantra, you can say we have gross level, subtle level, extremely subtle. We live at the grossest level, the sensory, which functions in relation to this body but which is not the body. This is the crucial point.

And in the long-term, by using the sophisticated psychological skill called concentration meditation, we will be able to plumb the depths of our mind and go to more refined levels of our

own capacity for cognition, sort of like accessing the microscope of your mind, in order to completely deconstruct all of the nonsense and get in touch with how things exist, thus removing one's own suffering, thus enabling us to benefit others.

A couple of years ago, in New York, His Holiness the Dalai Lama was participating in one of those many Mind and Life conferences. Maybe you've seen it. You should look on the web; it's very marvelous. Over these last fifteen or twenty years he's been meeting with all the best brains in the West on these scientific topics about the nature of the universe and the mind. Most of their discussions have been published; they're excellent books to read.

The main topic – I think it was in Boston, or Harvard or somewhere – the main topic was the capacity of the human mind to concentrate. Okay, the Western scientists were coming up with their findings that probably six seconds was the maximum; and they probably

defined what they mean by concentration.

Well, there's the Dalai Lama and the other Buddhists presenting the Buddhist case from their own experience: the human mind has the capacity to concentrate for several months.

This is based on the experience of the meditators who've practiced single-pointed concentration, a psychological skill created by the Indians well before Buddha came along. We'll discuss this later.

For us, six seconds is the best we can do because we don't have such skills in the West and we don't posit subtler levels of consciousness.

For us, our conceptuality is very limited in its capacity for memory as well. But for the Buddha we can refine our minds to an incredible degree of subtlety and clarity. Because these levels are more subtle, what they can cognize is more subtle, such as the past, the future, the minds of others, etc....

We would say, "Oh, come on, past lives? I don't remember a past life.



Don't be ridiculous!" Well, I'm sorry to tell you, you don't remember most of today! What are you talking about? Well, we can't remember most of today! The fact is, our gross level of conceptuality is simply not capable of this.

Now this is a whole realm that we don't even touch upon in the West because we don't assert it. It's the subtler consciousness that enables people to have what they refer to as out-of-body experiences, people have near-death experiences; I mean, it's universal. There must be countless people who've had similar kind of experience, but, of course, we can't accept it in the Western model because it's not a function of the brain. How can your brain leave itself, you know? You see my point. How can you be sitting on the ceiling? How can your brain sit on the ceiling watching the body down there? We know that's not possible. We hear these people have these experiences, but it's sort of weird because it doesn't fit with our very

strong conviction that mind is the brain.

Okay, it fits though, absolutely perfectly with the Buddha's proposition that the mind, the consciousness, has the capacity to go to more refined, more subtle levels of awareness. As I said, we can achieve that through these concentration meditation techniques. And these are around for thousands of years. He didn't invent them; he took them from the Hindus.

And that level of mind, consciousness, is what we experience in our dreams. It's very weird, our dreams. We go to strange places. You're fast asleep. You're not feeling anything with your body, but you have these very vivid experiences. You're not seeing things, you're not smelling things. Your body, your senses are virtually dead when you're in very deep sleep. So, there you are dreaming these vivid experiences. That's your mind. How can you say it's not? That's your subtle consciousness.

Now, meditators can access that level, but they have – it's like they wake

up at that level, but they're able to be completely controlled at that level. Whereas for us, we're kind of dragged along by our nose in our dreams, aren't we? It's rare to have complete control. You see my point? You go here, you go there, weird experiences, you fly, strange things happen. And we wake up, you know, like we've been dragged there. We didn't go there on purpose. You understand my point here? We don't have control like we do in our daily life, to the extent that we have control. That's your subtle consciousness, but we don't know how to use it. Meditators can go to that level.

In order to get the job done of deconstructing all the elaborate misconceptions in the mind that Buddha says have been there a long, long time, which is the way we see the world now – which he says is completely phony, completely misconception, completely mistaken – we can only really do that properly at a more refined level. We must necessarily in our progress on this

path, whether it's this life or the next, or whatever, we must access this more refined level where we can really do the work radically. We'll learn about that when we discuss single-pointed concentration meditation.

But there's masses we can do already at the gross level. Don't think there's not. You don't need to have single-pointed concentration in this life in order to make enormous progress, psychologically-slash-spiritually. There's no question.

## **MIND IS BEGINNINGLESS**

According to Buddha, our mind is not the handiwork of a creator, nor of our parents. Sure, Mummy and Daddy gave us a body, that's clear, but they didn't give us our mind. We have to think about that!

Well, the Buddha would say that consciousness goes into that egg and sperm. What consciousness? Whose? Well, previous moments of that very consciousness that entered into the egg and sperm.

The way to think of your mind is not so much - this box of stuff that you put things in. It's more, really the word mind is much more dynamic, kind of subjective word in Buddha's terms. It's the process of your thoughts and feelings itself. It's your very experiences themselves.

When did I begin? Our mind is beginningless, Buddha says. This is a nutty idea at first! Buddha's view is that our mind, our consciousness, comes from previous moments of itself. We don't need creating!

You know, you're either a person who thinks that God made you or, equally, you're a person who thinks that your mummy made you, aren't you? We all just assume that our mummy and daddy made us. You might as well say that they are your creators. That's what the materialist world says. You began in your mother's womb. The one thing you could say, probably most religious people and most materialists agree upon, is that you began in your mother's womb and somebody else

made you. You were a twinkle in somebody else's eye.

Buddha would say – well, I mean he's not rude; I'm being very direct here, he's very polite – but he would say that's an insane concept. He would say it's just demented. But don't just believe that, check it out and find out what's true, is what he would say. But Buddha would say that it's just not on that your parents made you. They give you a body, no problem. Of course, we say in the West that they make you because we only say that we've got a body. There isn't any other part of you.

If you're a Christian, at the time of conception, God puts the soul in there, into that egg and sperm, and that's what turns you into you. If you're a materialist, you are only the egg and sperm: they come together for whatever reason and they stick together, the rest goes down the toilet, isn't it? These two stick together and they begin multiplying and that's now you.

## **OUR MIND IS NOT THE HANDIWORK OF A CREATOR, NOR OF OUR PARENTS**

This beginninglessness is crucial to get our heads around; you need to think about it. The entire Buddhist worldview is based upon it. Thinking about your mind as this continuity of mental moments, thinking of it as uniquely your own. That is to say all of the thoughts and feelings and emotions. We're going to talk about this a lot in the middle scope of practice. But we're so used to thinking now that we are made by someone else. And I'm angry because she did this, and I'm jealous because he did that. We sort of disown our thoughts and feelings and think everyone else put them there somehow. Whereas, the Buddha's view here is what's in here is mine regardless of what triggered it, it's mine, it's my jealousy, my love, my compassion. Then think of it as sort of habits within this continuity of mental moments, in this mental continuum.

This consciousness is one's own. This is something that gets deeper and

deeper and deeper as one goes along as a Buddhist. You really learn to own what you think and feel. It's yours. It's your mind.

Of course, if you are a Christian, you know that you track yourself back to God. If you are a materialist, you track yourself back to your parents, grandparents, and then back to the monkeys. That's it, isn't it? That's the two main views on the earth.

Well, Buddha has this third one. He says you can't be made by someone else. The consciousness, this river of mental moments, it's its own entity, it's its own entity. And you can trace that river of mental moments back to a moment before conception, and a moment before that, and a moment before that.

## **MEDITATING ON BEGINNINGLESS MIND**

The real particular point here to contemplate, and it's very good to do a little meditation on this, is to go back in your memory, go back to yesterday, the day before, the day before, recalling the



day before, get back to when you were two, one. Imagine yourself in your mother's womb, and then get to the moment of conception and then, given that you're going back in this cause and effect process, links in a chain, dependent, this existence of this very moment is coming into existence in dependence upon the previous, just necessarily. It can't come out of nothing.

When Buddha talks about cause and effect he's not talking about the big capital C cause like a magician or like God. He's talking about it in an organic moment by moment sense. This moment is the fruit of the previous moment. That moment is the fruit of the previous moment. And you keep going back and you get to the moment of conception – remember, taking it as a hypothesis. Your mind isn't made by someone, it's got its own continuity, and you can't go back to anywhere other than the previous moment, can you? You have to go back to the previous moment before your mummy's egg and sperm meet.

Like I said, we have this deep instinct that there must be a moment when we began, when someone created us, like a magic wand. Whereas, we know perfectly well if we're looking at this cup we're not trying to find the creator of this cup are we, in that same sense. We have that feeling about ourselves, it's very curious. Why would we do this? Whereas a cup, we know from the materialists' point of view, it's a process of cause and effect. You know very well how cups come into being: "Well, this came from this, the paint came from that, and then the clay came from the stuff in the earth, and that came from this, and that came from that." There's a logical organic process going back and back. You don't look for some creator somewhere that sort of manifests a cup out of nowhere, which is what we tend to think about ourselves. Now I'm not being rude about it, we do think about ourselves that way because that's the teaching of most religions. Okay, so Buddha has a different view, that's all.

The mind is beginningless. Why is it beginningless? Emotionally - a shocking concept. Because if you are positing the process of cause and effect, if you've got this and it comes from that, if that is there it must have come from that, and if that is there it must have come from that, then you can't have a first "that," can you? You can't have a first "that." You can't have a first cause because in the very nature of cause and effect, *cause and effect demands a previous cause*. You can't find the first one. So, conclusion, Buddha would say: mind is beginningless. You can't have anything else, if you posit cause and effect. Such an interesting point to think about as a preliminary. Just to contemplate this. Because when Buddha talks about mind and how things happen, it's on the basis of this.

## **MENTAL CONTINUUM, A RIVER OF MENTAL MOMENTS**

A term they use a lot is, they call it your "mental continuum." Because my thoughts and feelings and emotions –

my mind – are existing today we can deduce logically that they were existing yesterday. If you keep tracking back, you'll deduce that there's an unbroken chain of mental moments – this one coming from the moment before, that one coming from the moment before. We go back there.

As I said, if you had perfect memory, that's what you'd do: you'd trace this second to the previous to the previous, until all the way back, to your mother's womb, and then back till the first moment of conception. What about the previous moment? The egg was in mother's body and the sperm was in the father's, but that moment of consciousness that entered into the egg and sperm came from a previous moment of that very consciousness – nothing to do with mother or father.

A few weeks before that, it was in a previous body; and previous body before that, and so on.

## **MIND IS DRIVEN BY THE LAW OF CAUSE AND EFFECT**

What's the simple law applied here? It's the law of cause and effect. Buddha is completely into the law of cause and effect and when he uses this in relation to beings, it's called karma. And that's the culmination of junior school, we'll go into the details. But it's really the law, according to Buddha, that determines the experiences of all sentient beings. It's the creative principal, you could say, in Buddhism.

This cause and effect principal, in general, though, we're all very good at it in the West and we understand perfectly well that what we call a microphone is just effect of a series of causes, isn't it? This came from this, which it came from that, the metal, the plastic, and then this, and then that, then that came together. There's countless numbers of conditions and causes that have to come together that culminate in what we call a microphone. We understand that. It's a process. You go back and back and back. Well, the same with the mind:

cause and effect. What is in here is coming from the previous moment. Simply, even in a technical sense, it comes from the previous moment and that existed because it came from the previous moment, it's like chicken and egg. You keep going back. And, remember, we're not talking about anything physical; we're talking about non-physical moments of consciousness.

## **MIND'S ULTIMATE NATURE**

Finally, of course, this mind of ours has the potential for perfection, for buddhahood; it has the potential innately; it's what defines it, in fact. It's not as if this potential is a choice:

“Well, I might choose to be a musician, but I think I'd rather be a footballer.”

Here it's like you don't have a choice.

The very nature of what your mind is is to become fully developed, to be completely free of nonsense, a buddha. This is how Buddha is saying. Just like the very nature of what an acorn is, what defines an acorn is its oak tree nature. You can't turn it into a pear

tree. You can't decide, "Oh, I think I'll turn it into a peanut." You can't. Its nature is to be an oak tree. That's it. Our mind, its nature is to become completely free of all the nonsense, totally developed in all of the positive qualities: buddha.

### **3. BUDDHA'S UNIQUE APPROACH**

Now let's discuss the approach that Buddha takes, where he's coming from, how he talks. Because I think, already, in the room, if we've not heard this before, let's say, we've got a lot of concepts about what we mean by spiritual, by what we think what practice means. Maybe we have heard it, but we've still got a lot of concepts. And so let's see how Buddha's talking. Okay?

What he's saying is – and I've already implied it quite a bit, said it directly, too – is that we've got this potential in our minds, in our consciousness, so what is it, right now, that is preventing me, this second, why is it, at this very moment I am not a buddha? Why is it I am not fully developed in the two wings? Why is it my mind isn't pervading the universe, seeing everything as it is, encompassing all beings? What is it? What are the things



that are preventing me? Well, it's stuff within the mind. Right? The potential of this consciousness of mine is to be absolutely pure and clear and all-expansive and all-wise and blah, blah. So, right now, it's completely polluted. It's a good analogy. Buddha's saying this: it's polluted by, as I've been saying, deluded, unhappy states of mind, the components of ego.

## **SPIRITUAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL: THE SAME**

Okay, what is the mind? How do we talk in ordinary terms? When we say the mind, we say the word “think,” “thoughts,” “concepts.” We understand that very easily. Then we have words called “emotion” and we sort of point here, the heart, for this. Then we confuse things by saying there is another part of us called “spiritual.” It's almost like a third part. Buddha doesn't talk like this.

In fact, what he says, what he's implying “spiritual” means, you're being spiritual when you are recognizing and acknowledging and

beginning to change your neuroses and developing your love and compassion and wisdom. If you're working on your attachment, if you're working on your anger, if you're working on your jealousy, hey, you're being spiritual. If you're practicing patience, practicing love, you're being spiritual.

Now, we would call that psychological, and we go to a therapist. But if we want spiritual, we go to a Tibetan lama, and we think that'll sort of give us something different, and they'll give us a *mala* and we'll say mantras and we'll see buddhas: we think that's spiritual.

But, if you hear about psychology from Buddha, about anger and jealousy and depression and love and compassion, we kind of think: that's not spiritual. But that's what Buddha means by spiritual.

Even though when we look at all the pictures in the paintings here: you're going to get pictures and *malas* and prayers until they come out your ears, so much! But even that is not necessarily only spiritual. They're

simply a set of tools that one can use, which are actually from the post-graduate level, from the esoteric level, from the advanced level, that we can utilize to help to do this constant job of getting rid of the junk, developing the good.

It's always psychological; Buddha is only talking psychologically. It's just that his view, his assertion of what we can achieve psychologically is pretty stunning when you hear about enlightenment. It's not as if suddenly when you're just dealing with ordinary depression, that's psychological, and when you're dealing with enlightenment, that's not psychological, that's spiritual. That's a real misconception. All of it, as far as Buddha is concerned is psychological because all of it is all the time to do with the mind – and we know the word mind is used in context of psychology. It's just that the word wasn't coined back then, was it? You know, Buddha didn't use the word psychology. I mean, who invented it? The Greeks; it's Greek

language. We utilize it. We bandy it about now in our culture.

For Buddha, psychological and spiritual, they're synonymous. It's the same meaning. Because what you're doing, the job that you are doing as a Buddhist, is psychological. If you're working on your mind, how can you say it's not psychological? It's just that his view of psychology is radical. He is far more outrageous in what he is asserting we can achieve, psychologically.

You know, if you talk about buddhahood, like I'm saying; if you go to your therapist and say, "I want to know how to get enlightened." "Well, you better go find a Tibetan lama," she'll say. "That's not psychological; I'm here to help you with your daily life." For Buddha they're not separate.

The way to say it, really, is we have an understanding of psychology to some degree in our culture – in fact, there are many models of it – but they are all very firmly based in the materialist view of the mind being the brain, of the fact that you are made by someone else, that you are created by your parents,

and it's not called spiritual. Whereas for Buddha the practices that we label spiritual are tools to help you develop psychologically all the way to enlightenment.

## **BECOMING YOUR OWN THERAPIST**

In the first scope of practice, junior school, we're dealing with even more fundamental things like body and speech, understanding basic laws about how things work, the natural law of karma, cause and effect. When we go to high school, the second scope, we really start becoming our own therapists, as Lama Yeshe would put it. Not joking, you know? Not joking. Exactly the point. Deeply understanding this mind of ours, really beginning to unravel it, really learning very profoundly how it functions, distinguishing between the so-called positive and negative, because that's the real nitty-gritty of the job.

Buddha's a supreme cognitive therapist. The Buddha's saying what we think impacts upon what we feel, which, therefore impacts on what we do

and say, and therefore impacts upon the world, and therefore – the crucial extra piece – determines our own futures lives, etc., etc. It all comes down to the mind.

## **CHANGING THE WAY WE THINK**

Buddha has far more radical ways of talking about the mind because he doesn't assert a creator, which is a shock if you think he's spiritual. As I've mentioned already, either we're philosophical materialists or we posit a creator. Well, Buddha doesn't. He doesn't assert a creator. He just doesn't say there isn't one. He has a way of describing exactly how things come into being, why I am the way I am, why universes, why happiness, why suffering. And his "creative principle," if you like, is called karma, the natural law of cause and effect, which you learn in junior school, so we'll do that tomorrow morning. The understanding of karma is absolutely based on the understanding of what the mind is.

On the basis of understanding karma, our practice is to do with changing the

way we think. He is saying that our minds are riddled with misconceptions, but deeply packed away, so deeply that it takes a long time to unravel them. Because we've not looked most of the time in our life, it's not part of our culture to investigate what we think and feel, until it's too late, until it's kind of some problem.

The methods that Buddha recommends we use to unpack and unravel our minds, these very skillful, sophisticated psychological techniques called meditation – again: they are psychological – enable one to go very, very deep, to plumb the depths of this mind of ours, to really become an amazing skillful therapist of your own self. This is very really, definitely true: I'm using very Western terms, but we understand these words.

We're learning to do cognitive therapy, we are learning to radically de-construct our elaborate conceptual constructions. It is radical, really, what we're attempting to do. And it's as scary as hell, because we all know that even a little bit of therapy, even a little

bit of looking at our feelings and taking responsibility is painful. We know this.

But, remember, we won't be looking into our past at what people have done to us to cause us to be the way we are; that's not the Buddhist approach at all. We will be looking deeply into our own minds in high school, the middle scope, and, first, we'll be looking into our own past, into karma, to discover what informs who we are now – and, the main thing, who we can become: finally, a buddha.

That's that. Another little piece that's important, extremely important.

That's that. Another little piece that's important, extremely important.



## **4. TAKE IT ALL AS A WORKING HYPOTHESIS**

### **DON'T BELIEVE A WORD BUDDHA SAYS**

Buddha, he'll say "religion," no problem; religion yes, but not creator, as I said. His deal is, "Hey, please do not believe a single word you're going to hear this weekend." The whole point of Buddhism is absolutely not to do with believing something in the way we understand "beliefs." I'm not criticizing that approach; I'm just saying that Buddha doesn't take it.

For example, I was brought up a Catholic, okay? We all know, as a Christian let's say, God is seen as the creator of the universe, the creator of me, the creator of the laws of morality, and so therefore God is to be obeyed; God is a punisher and a rewarder. Now, I'm not complaining about that; I'm just saying that's not how Buddha talks.

I mean, I was talking to a Catholic priest friend of mine years ago, and I

said what is it that defines something as a sin? – in Buddhist terminology, a negative action. He said it necessarily is something that goes against the will of God. Now, that’s very reasonable. If God created the universe, that means he created the law don’t kill, or don’t lie. If you do it, what makes it a “bad action” is because you went against God’s will. That’s totally valid. It fits. But it’s not the Buddha’s approach. He’s not a creator. Therefore he’s not a punisher, he’s not a rewarder.

Buddha would say, “don’t kill,” for example, in the junior school teachings. But he’s not saying don’t kill *because* he said so. He is saying don’t kill because he has found, from his own experience, that the action of killing is something – forget about the harm it does to others – that because it comes necessarily from a negative place in our mind, it is leaving a negative imprint or seed in our own mind, which will then necessarily ripen in the future as my suffering.

So, yes, it’s sort of like, your mother says, “Don’t go near the fire!” when

you're a kid. And you probably will say, "Why not?" And she will probably say, "Because I say so." Well, it's good enough, it works, doesn't it? It prevents you from getting burned. But eventually you have to learn, don't you, that the real reason she says don't go near the fire isn't because she's said so, it's because you will get burnt. Now, if you, for the rest of your life, here you are, 30, 40, or 50, not going near the fire "because Mummy said so" – you'd hope that by now we'd know the real reason.

### **CHECK IT, TEST IT**

I'm not being rude about Christianity; but you get my point. Eventually, you know, and your mummy hopes, you will learn the real reason not to go near the fire. Buddha is saying don't kill. Good enough even to respect that, but what he's saying is that what we do and say and think, just naturally, has consequences for oneself. And he's saying don't just believe me; check it out for yourself.

Again in just the same way, we understand very comfortably in our culture that what we mean by science is not something that we must believe. We know perfectly well, if I'm Einstein or if I'm Mr. So-and-so, the apple one – what was his name? Mr. Newton – if I'm Mr. Newton, and I've been telling you about my latest findings about gravity, you know that I just didn't have a vision of it last night or that it was revealed to him in a vision. You get my point here? You'd chuck me out the door as a bit of a maniac, if that's the case. You understand my point?

You check this: we say, "Oh, but it's scientific." Excuse me, when was the last time you checked on gravity? With proof? When was the last time you checked on  $E=mc^2$ ? When was the last time you verified Einstein? We really just go around believing Einstein. We say, "Oh, it's science." Well, excuse me, it's someone else's science, not yours. You're just believing it, just quoting it because someone told you. If we're materialists, we say, "Oh, I don't believe anything, I don't have any

beliefs.” Well, nonsense! Buddha says our minds are riddled with beliefs! Yes, some might be valid beliefs, but many are not. But for us, until we’ve proven them to ourselves, they’re merely beliefs. Think about this.

Buddha’s approach is exactly like the scientists’, which is a big surprise, because we don’t think of religion like that. So, Buddha is not a creator; he did not invent what is called Buddhism. He didn’t create it; make it up, in other words. He articulated it, yes, but based on what? His own experiences; his own observations; so, he’s presented it. And he doesn’t mind if we don’t like it. You can be rude about Buddha; he doesn’t mind. He doesn’t take it personally.

Let’s say you’re here tonight and you haven’t heard this stuff before and you think it’s a load of rubbish. It’s totally reasonable to walk away and say thanks a lot, goodbye, Buddha. He will not mind. He doesn’t want you to stuff yourself full of what’s called Buddhism. He wants, he demands, that you think about it, listen to it, and then eventually prove it. Get the proof of the

pudding, taste it – that’s if you want to – and then you continue to apply it in your life because it works.

Of course, it takes time to actually experience the truth of many of Buddha’s assertions about reality, but all the methodology for whatever Buddha realized himself is there for us to follow.

## **TAKE IT AS A HYPOTHESIS**

So, do not believe a single word you are hearing. Take it, in other words, like any decent scientist, take it as a hypothesis. We get quite anguished about reincarnation, for example: it’s huge one in our culture because it’s just seen as kind of ridiculous. More and more people these days do talk about it. Lots of people who do call themselves Christians just naturally, have the view of reincarnation. But it utterly, when you want to look at the big picture of Buddhism, it absolutely is at the center. You can’t have Buddhism and the whole picture, Buddha’s whole deal, without hypothesizing the non-physicality and the continuity of what’s

called mind or consciousness, which implies reincarnation.

And so taking something as a hypothesis is very reasonable. Scientists do this. A really good scientist is one who's got a mind that's open enough that can take something that initially is weird and then work with it. You understand my point? Otherwise, you have tunnel vision. That's a really important point. Take it as a hypothesis. You don't have to squeeze it inside yourself. You don't have to believe it. No one's asking you to do this. But at least give it some thought, you've got to say the words and act as if, in order to follow through on what Buddha's saying: if it were true that the mind is this and this, therefore this, therefore this, therefore this. If it were true.

The Buddha's approach is that you take that onboard and like anything, you learn about it first conceptually. Don't you? You learn the theory of cakes, first conceptually. It's got to fit, conceptually. Then you can get the fruit, then you get the result. Same

here. Same here. And eventually, Buddha says, we can verify it for ourselves, within our own mind. Eventually. We can.

## **HEAR THE TEACHINGS AS PERSONAL ADVICE**

Another crucial thing is to listen to the teachings as personal advice just like you'd listen to a recipe: it's personal advice so you can go and put it into practice. Well, it's the same here.

Listen to it as personal advice. Like I said, you mightn't like the advice, in which case you don't take it. You're the boss, not Buddha. That's the approach.

Finally, again, the point is, it's got to be experiential. You've got to see the results. It's got to be a methods that you'll use to help you become a happier, wiser, more compassionate human being. That's the purpose of all of this. And then, finally, longterm, to achieve your full potential, so that you can truly be of just spontaneous benefit to others.



## THE THREE POTS

There's a very nice, sweet way that the lamas advise for how to listen to the teachings. They talk about don't be like the three kinds of pots. Don't be like, I forget the order, but don't be like one kind of pot, or a mug, or something, that is upside-down. Nothing will go in. Useless. Waste of your time. Don't be like the pot that's got a hole in it, sort of like in one ear and out the other. And don't be like a pot that's full of dirty, yucky stuff, because whatever goes in gets polluted by it. So, in other words, be very open, focused, listen, keep it inside, process it, and really keep the mind very open – that's the one of not having dirty stuff in there, don't have the mind all polluted, full of misconceptions and strong views already, "What do you mean this?" and "What do you mean that?" "I don't think that's true, that's rubbish." No scientist would get very far with a very closed mind like that. Have the mind wide open, taking it as a hypothesis, thinking it through – to the extent that

we would want to, because we are, finally, again, the boss.

## **HEAR IT ALL AS ADVICE FOR YOURSELF**

Again, reminding ourselves of the way to listen to this is to listen to it as advice – or to at least to know it is advice. Whether you can put it into practice, that's up to you, but listen to it as advice. Not listen to it as interesting information to fill your head or not listen to it as advice for someone else. “Oh I wish my husband was here, he needs this!” I mean he very well might need it, I'm sure we all do, but you're here, so it's advice for you, Okay? Because we love to fix everybody else's problems.

What's going to happen here is we're presenting, as we have already so far, how Buddha thinks, presented from the point of view of the way the Tibetans have been practicing it over centuries, coming from the lineages of the great masters in India going right back to the Buddha himself.

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**NOW GO INTO RETREAT MODE**

I think that's enough for tonight. Let's go into retreat mode, which means, from the moment you walk out this door, you're on retreat mode, which means you mind your own business, you don't talk to anybody, you act like you're here on your own, you look straight ahead, you go do your own thing, you walk, you go to bed, you lie down, you look at the sky, you read a book, but don't talk, okay? Retreat mode is like that. It's very helpful. Try to absorb and think about or process whatever you've heard so far, really keep it internal and don't talk until breakfast time. That's really good to do that. Okay?

If you are living here and working here, if you're going to be talking, just for the energy of everybody else around, try and do it out of the way, that's all. It mightn't be so easy because people who don't live here want to go home, so once you get to your room or something, attempt to do that. It's not

like a law. No one's going to punish you if you don't. It's a recommendation because it could be useful, that's all. It's a useful technique to help you process this stuff – and the point of this is to process this stuff. After the end of breakfast, you can chat away.

## **SEE YOUR DREAMS AS DREAMS**

The other little thing, a bit of homework for tonight, is, before you go to sleep, make a strong aspiration, as the lamas put it, to “see your dreams as dreams.” The way they talk, they talk a lot about how everything is illusion, life is like a dream; so you practice observing that you're dreaming as you are dreaming. It's a very powerful thing to do. But when you think of dreams, we get very absorbed, as if they were real, and we wake up and we say, “Oh, it was only a dream, what a relief or how sad, it was only a dream.” When you're a little kid, you had something delicious in your dream, you're so excited and you wake up and it's not there. I remember that.

Our life, it's the same. We get so absorbed, because of our delusions, Buddha says. Practicing seeing your dreams as dreams is very beneficial. We can learn to think of life like that.

## **WHEN YOU WAKE UP, DELIGHT THAT YOU'RE STILL ALIVE**

And then the other thing to think, for your homework, is to make an aspiration before you go to sleep that when you wake up – if you do wake up! Don't assume you will; a lot of people won't wake up tomorrow morning, they will die. So, assuming that you will wake up in the morning, if you do, the moment you come back into consciousness, notice that you're still alive. It's sounds like a joke, really, but it's actually very helpful because it reminds you that everything changes, everything is impermanent. When you wake up in the morning, you think, "How amazing, I'm still alive in this body with this life and these conditions and this mind. How fortunate I am! I must make the most of it. I'll listen to Buddha's teachings, think about the

meaning, do some meditation, so I can develop my qualities so I can be of benefit to others. It's an amazing way to start the day.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama says doing some practice in the morning, the moment you wake up, puts your whole day into the right channel. And then make the strong aspiration, regardless of what's happening – you might wake up anxious, or depressed, or fearful, whatever's there, you know the junk that's always around – just think, “Okay, whatever it is, may I make something positive of today.”

## **DEDICATION**

Let's do a little prayer, dedicating for the benefit of all sentient beings whatever virtue, whatever positive energy we've created today. Buddha would say there's no single thought or action or word that we do, say, or think that doesn't leave an imprint in our mind. It doesn't just disappear into space. May these seeds ripen in the future as my own enlightenment, no matter how long it takes. Why? I can be

of benefit to all beings, which is my job, no choice.” And the second little prayer is just making the aspiration that compassion grow and grow in the hearts of all.

Ge-wa-di nyur-du-dag  
 La-ma sang-gyā drub-gyur-nä  
 Dro-wa chig-kyang ma-lü-pa  
 De-yi sa-la gö-par-shog

Jang-chhub sem-chhog rin-po-che  
 Ma-kye pa -nam kye-gyur-chig  
 Kye-wa nyam-pa me-pa-yang  
 Gong-nä gong-du pel-war-shog

All right. Thank you, everybody! Good night!

**PART TWO**  
**THE PRELIMINARY**  
**CONTEMPLATIONS**



## **5. WE NEED A TEACHER THE FIRST PRELIMINARY CONTEMPLATION**

Our lineage lama, the fourteenth century Lama Tsongkhapa, added to this little package that Atisha created back in the eleventh century a very important preliminary contemplation before entering the path. And this is the necessity for a spiritual teacher. And the way, having found one, as they would put it, to devote oneself to them.

So, why do we need a spiritual teacher and what is one? The Sanskrit word is “guru” and I believe it implies someone “heavy with qualities” – who doesn’t need someone like that! The Tibetan equivalent is “lama.”

Again, when we mystify all of these Asian things, we see all of these pictures of gurus and people kowtowing and prostrating and all of this stuff and it seems kind of scary and mystical. Well let’s deconstruct it, let’s

strip it away and look at the very heart of it, at the point of it.

I think if we look at our lives we can see that there's nothing that we have learned, nothing, that hasn't been taught to us by someone else, or that we haven't learned from another source like a book or watching somebody. There's virtually nothing. Since we were little children, our mummies taught us how to tie our shoelaces, wipe our little bottoms, and go to the toilet and get out of bed, put our clothes on, simple little things.

Since then whatever we have learned has been taught to us by someone else. And so it's fairly obvious, it's the easiest way to learn something, isn't it? It's the most practical. The quickest way to learn something is go find someone who's done it before, who's good at it, and ask them, "Show me please." It's obviously the quickest. It's silly and arrogant to think, "I'm going to teach myself." I mean you will spend many hundreds of thousands of dollars and many years researching how to make a cake instead of just asking your

mum. Think my point here: coming up with it myself by experimenting. How foolish! There's a lineage of cake gurus out there – it's called your mummy, your grandma, your great grandma – it just goes back and back. And that is all a lineage of gurus means.

The Buddhas talk about that a lot. There's a line of people going back and back, people who know how to do something who were taught it by someone before them who, in turn, was taught it by someone before them. It's a very reasonable thing, and it's really stressed in the Buddhist tradition. The lamas when they give a teaching, they would say they've learned this from their own lama who got it from the previous lama, and so on. And even when they publish a book, they give this like whole family tree that goes back and back and back, tracking right back to the Buddha. This indeed shows the authenticity of something. It's very reasonable, it's very good to see that something is tried and tested.

## HOW TO FIND A TEACHER

I always use this simple example of how I first learned to make a cake, from my mother, as an example of the benefit of having a teacher and how it works, and how in the Buddhist approach they would suggest to you how to go about finding one and the appropriate way to have the relationship with the teacher. And again just strip it right away, to make it very practical. Let's look at it.

The very first thing is you have to know you want to make a cake, you want to get enlightened; you have to know that. And you can see we all know, from the time we were children and sent to school we hadn't made that clear decision that we wanted to learn math, wanted to learn to write. Of course we were dragged by our noses and resisted mightily, because we didn't make the decision.

I remember a time myself when I was 11 or 12 and made the decision I wanted to study, suddenly everything changed, because now I wanted to. I went in, deep in. Because in my mind I

had decided, “I want to learn this.”

That, you can see, is a very obvious point; you’ve got to know you want it.

With me and making cakes, I think I was 26 when I decided I wanted to make a cake, I wasn’t five. I was living in London and I was a bit of a hippie and I think I wanted to make a carrot cake. I remember I went home to Melbourne to see my Mum and family and I said, “Please Mum, show me how to make a cake.” Well I’m sure she was totally delighted having waited twenty-something years for me to ask; and knowing my mind, that I’m so proud and arrogant, she hadn’t tried to force me. She was delighted to show me how to make a cake.

## **CHECK THE TEACHER’S QUALITIES**

Let’s look at that. Why did I ask my mother? Well, believe me, it wasn’t because I was being kind; I wasn’t so kind. It’s because I knew she knew how to make cakes. How did I know?

Because I tasted them. I had listened to that lama’s teachings.

## **CHECK WITH THEIR PEERS**

It's obvious that one of the ways to check is you check with their peers; within whatever realm that they live you check are they respected as a teacher by other people who seem to have a good reputation? You have to get a general sense of this, if you can. You check with her peers; they said she knew how to make cake. I did all of this intuitively not thinking about it, but it's actually what we do. I checked the cakes, I checked the peers. And you check their reputation in general.

From that point of view it's fairly easy to check the Dalai Lama isn't it? I mean, you ask any Tibetan and you can see immediately that he's valued as a very marvelous teacher. Everybody says he's a great scholar, he's a great practitioner. And then you look at the way people respond to him, and then you look at people who've known him over the years, who have talked to him, who've been with him: they see he is kind, compassionate, he's consistent, he puts his money where his mouth is. It's fairly easy to see because he's a very

well known person. But maybe not so easy with others who aren't so well known.

It's clear, whether you want to learn how to make a cake or whether you want to go learn how to make a shirt, you're going to do this kind of checking, aren't you? You're not going to just jump in emotionally and get all overexcited when you get to hear about some cake-maker because you think he's really handsome, "Oh wow, he's so divine. He must be a brilliant cake-maker. He makes me so happy." I mean there's no logic. Hitler made a lot of people very happy. They got completely overexcited. Well, look where he led them. You've got to use your common sense not just your emotions.

It's obvious if you want to make the cake, you're not going to jump into some course unless you even check a little bit. It's just reasonable, we all do this. This is exactly what Buddha is saying. But again unfortunately because we mystify religion and get all sort of excited about it and lose our common sense, we do think of it in

emotional terms. We go to some talk of some teacher and we get all excited, because he moves our hearts, we get all overexcited and we conclude he must be a good teacher. I'm sorry there's no logic there. You've got to check more, and be more grounded and more careful about it. You've got to know that what he is teaching is what you want to learn. You've got to know that he's valid. You've got to check his reputation.

## **CHECK THEIR STUDENTS**

You've also got to check his students, that's a very good way to learn about his qualities. When it came to my mother, when it came to finding a cake-maker, a cake guru, I checked my mother's students, meaning my sisters, who knew how to make cakes. They could make good cakes too, and they learned where? From my mother. There's some evidence.

Why do you need to do this? It's very obvious. Because I had no basis experientially for deciding that when my mother finally said, "Okay, darling,



now get the flour and put the two eggs and do this and do that,” I had no experiential basis for judging what she’s saying. I couldn’t tell experientially that she’s right. Do you see my point? It’s very simple.

But having checked on her, I can be confident from an inferential point of view, from an intellectual point of view, I can be confident that what she will tell me is valid. Because I won’t understand it, I won’t have any way to know experientially whether it’s two eggs or nine eggs because I don’t know that. You see my point here; it’s an extremely important point.

## **DON’T MYSTIFY**

I think we’re almost more serious about finding a proper cake-maker than we are finding a spiritual teacher because we mystify it. First we don’t even think, “Well, why do I need a teacher?” Because we think spiritual is like feeling, like emotion and something magical happening. It’s almost insulting. If you’re thinking from the Buddhist point of view, from the point

of view here, what you're trying to learn to do is become enlightened. This is uncharted territory. We don't even know how to understand our own depression, our own anger, and our own fears. I mean Buddha would say our minds are riddled with misconceptions about who we think we are, what's possible. What he is suggesting, as we've discussed, this potential is pretty incredible, from an ordinary point of view, so you'd really better check carefully whether a person is valid in their capacity to lead you to this thing called enlightenment. You've got to really do some checking, oh my goodness. And there is no hurry.

### **YOU NEED TO BE CONFIDENT**

The crucial point of the checking is that you, *you* have to be confident. I had to be confident, when I sat in that kitchen – I remember the moment, I remember the day, I remember the kitchen, I remember the house. And I remember the cake: it was an apple and walnut cake, it wasn't a carrot cake.

Really it's very interesting. Why do I remember it so vividly? Because it was the first time that cakes became real for me. And that's the point of a teacher, that's the simple function of a teacher. It's the human component. We all know that we can sit and read books about Buddhism, but then when we go to His Holiness the Dalai Lama's teachings, suddenly it becomes real. It's coming out of the human mouth, from a person who's valid, who has the direct experiences. It's got some real life, sort of like a switch has been turned on, it becomes alive. That's the function of a teacher. It's not just something intellectual. Because anyway, we have human hearts, we need to have our hearts opened, we need to open our hearts.

And so to have a relationship with the person who embodies these qualities, who is valid, this is very, very powerful. But we have to have the confidence before we can enter into that relationship; extremely important to be confident. Because when they start saying do this and do that, you've never

heard it before, you have no basis for judging whether it is valid from its own point of view, but you have to have confidence that this person is leading you in the right direction.

If I had then sat down in this kitchen and my mother had started to tell me how to make this apple and walnut cake and then I start saying, “Well what do you mean two eggs? Why not six? And what are you talking about this amount of flour?” and I start arguing with her, what a waste of time; my time and her time. I didn’t know how to make cakes. I checked on her, I wanted to make a cake, everything was set up so I sat there and I did what she told me.

Then as you go along, you start internalizing your cake guru, you start internalizing, because your mother has told you how to do it, so you remember the instructions, and next time you’re able to do it without her showing you. And you recall that she said do this and do that. You’re still tentative but now slowly you begin to develop your own experience of it, and then you begin to

verify it for yourself: “Oh, she was right, if you put too many eggs it’ll go this way. If you put too much flour, it’ll be that. She’s right, she said this. Look, now I’ve proved to myself.” That’s when it becomes your own experience.

**CHECK YOUR GURU VERY CAREFULLY – BECAUSE YOU’RE GOING TO END UP LIKE THEM!**

I remember I learned martial arts when I was living in New York, in the 1970s. I had done some before and I chose this teacher because the particular group suited me, not because the person was a valid teacher. Well then, for a couple of years I was studying with this teacher. Then I went to Melbourne and continued studying in a new place, and I had already gotten a couple of belts in New York. But after my first class the new teacher put me back to the beginners’ group, the white belts. I was completely insulted! But I thought about it and I realized that I had learned wrongly. Because I didn’t use my intelligence to choose, I based my choice of a teacher on the wrong things.

I didn't check enough. For a year or so I wasted my life learning wrongly, so I had to go back to square one.

That's when I realized we need valid teachers and the necessity to check up on them and be confident. Of course, that was just martial arts! Here we're talking about putting ourselves in the wrong direction of many lifetimes.

As Pabongka Rinpoche says, we need to check our gurus very carefully – because we're going to end up like them!

### **CONFIDENCE: “WITH FAITH”**

We need to check very carefully. And until we are confident, until I was confident, that it was valid, that my mother was valid, until then you don't start. Until you are confident – and you have to have a basis for your confidence.

Look at the word “confident,” its Latin root: “with faith,” “con fide,” “with trust.” That's a very interesting word isn't it? We say faith and it makes us scared; but when we say confidence, it feels stronger.

Well, faith in Buddhist terms is exactly that: it's confidence. Confidence is something based on your own wisdom, your own assessing. You're really confident now that that is right, you're really confident that person is valid because you have checked up. *You* have checked up. You have checked up. That's the point: because *you* have to make the decision.

We run around doing what everyone else says, we just believe what everyone else says. We think we're so scientific – but when's the last time you checked what was on the package? That there was so much protein, so much fat, or have scientifically researched your food to prove that it was right? Of course you didn't! You believed it. “Oh, it says right here on the package. Oh but it's all scientific!” Excuse me, but you didn't do the checking; you're just believing it. Blind faith. Blind faith.

We live our lives with blind faith, actually, and then we wonder why we get into trouble. “Some lovely person, he's gorgeous. . .” and then we get into trouble; and you deduce logically from

this that he must be a nice person. Then six months later you find out he's a creep. "Oh, I wish I would have known what he was like six months ago." Well, excuse me, it was all in there; you just couldn't see it because you were blinded by your own delusions. We've got to use our intelligence.

## **HAVING FOUND A TEACHER, HOW TO DEVOTE ONESELF**

Okay, having found our teacher – one can have many – then what is the way, what is the skillful way to get the best from that relationship? What is the skillful way? There're very extensive teachings on this in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, and if you study this stuff more extensively you're going to see this, and it's very hard to strip away the way of presenting it to get to the very heart of it.

The most difficult approach to develop, which is said to be the key to success, broadly speaking, is: the more confidence I can have in my mother, in other words the more totally open I am



to her, which I can only have if I have checked up and have confidence, the more open I am, the more I see her as just the best cake-maker in the whole world, the more likely I am to become a really good cook. If I get my delusions in there, if I get my own ego and nonsense in the way, it's kind of like sitting there and thinking, "She's a good teacher," but thinking "I'm not so sure, I don't really like the way she teaches me that, and do you really think she knows what she's talking about?" and questioning and arguing – who am I harming? Myself. I'm blocking myself off from really getting the knowledge.

The more open, the more pure, if you like, the more unstained, the more clear like a mirror my mind can be, and seeing her in the best way possible, the more likely I am to become, very quickly, a very good cake-maker. Now that's reasonable, we understand that. Now to put that in these terms here, the way they say it is, the practice is to see your guru as the Buddha. To see your guru as already fully enlightened,

as perfect. That sounds very different to us, that sounds quite difficult.

And one old lama, Ribur Rinpoche, someone who you might know, said this is the most difficult practice. The way they say it in the text is the basis of all our realizations, the basis of our capacity to develop and become a buddha. It is this capacity to have this pure attitude towards our teacher. It's a really tough one. Tough because in our world, with our delusions, with our attachment and our neuroses, and our criticism and our judgment, and our fears and our lack of trust and all of the nonsense polluting our minds, we see everything through that filter, we see people through that filter.

If I've got a deluded mind, an arrogant mind, I'm going to see my mother and think, "Huh, huh, who does she think she is? What's she telling me this for, and what do you mean this, and oh I don't think she's a very good cook, a very good cake-maker." The more deluded I am in seeing her, the less likely I am to learn how to make

great cakes, because I'm imputing my own junk on top of her.

With a teacher, having checked, having confidence, then beginning to practice and then verifying it for ourselves, we increase our confidence/faith in the practice, in the path, in the teacher. The more we can imagine this is the Buddha himself manifesting in this human form, it's like an embodiment of the Buddha, the more we are able to think *that*; whether or not the person from their side is a buddha, the more I can think that; the more likely I am to succeed, the more likely I am to get the benefit. That's the essential point.

Maybe enough for that now, we can talk more and then the more we say we can refer back to this one.

## **QUESTION ABOUT FINDING A PATH**

*Student* My daughter couldn't make it but she really wanted to come. And she would like to ask this question: how do you choose a spiritual path and how do you know that you're on the right path?

Which I think goes along with finding a spiritual teacher.

*Ven. Robina* Absolutely, it's exactly the same approach. Okay, let me ask you the question; this question is for your daughter. Ask your daughter, How would you choose which music school you would go to. Just say some practical answers. You answer now, tell me what you think.

*Student* This is my other daughter, she can tell you.

*Ven. Robina* Okay, so you answer that. Tell me what you think. Let's say you like music, so just give me a little process, imagine the steps you'd have to take to choose the right music school. What would you do?

*Student* You'd research in a book about the school. You'd visit the school, you'd take a tour, you'd talk.

*Ven. Robina* And all the time you're doing this you're checking up, aren't you? "Well is this what I like, is this what I want? Is this the place? Are these the teachers?" You're checking all the time, you're processing, aren't you? And then at some point, you're going to

become quite confident. Do you not think: this is the one I want. Would you not agree? You've done a lot of checking, haven't you.

It's exactly the same with a spiritual path. Just that you've maybe got to check more deeply, because it's not something so well known, maybe, even in this culture: Buddhism, for example, let's say you're going to factor in the Buddhist school you might like to go to. You've got to check very carefully, but it's the same process. There's no difference. It's not something to be mystified. You check, you think about it, you read, you look at things, you go, you think, you talk to people, until you have some kind of confidence. And that might take time, but that's fine. There's no rush. And as you move along you keep narrowing options down. Do you see? Would you not agree with this yourself? Have this discussion with your sister. What's her name?

*Student* Suzanne.

*Ven. Robina* Will you tell Suzanne that. Yes?

*Student* Will you tell your story about your life, how you chose your teacher?

*Ven. Robina* If you want to hear that. It's just that I won't tape that. You see, what this course is meant to be, you see our organization has this two-year correspondence course called Discovering Buddhism. This is the third module called Practicing the Path. Practicing the path, module three. But the trouble is the CD they're using now, I talk so fast, the recording was terrible and they couldn't understand very well. We thought we'd do it again. I've got to stick to the structure and I'm trying my best to do that. Yeah, I can talk about that if you'd like. At some point. An appendix.

It's break time now, if you feel like a break. Have a little wriggle. Take fifteen minutes and walk up and down.

## **6. DON'T WASTE THIS PRECIOUS LIFE THE SECOND PRELIMINARY CONTEMPLATION**

Okay, the next one to contemplate that kind of primes our mind to really begin to practice. . . By the way, don't think that practice is some mystical thing that happens when you close your eyes, that that's somehow practice, and that listening to teachings and thinking about it is not practice. It's a real misconception. Because the more we understand that what we're trying to do is change the way we think, then there are just levels, that's all, levels of practice in relation to levels of thoughts, levels of capacity, of our awareness.

Clearly, as I'm saying, in the long term we need to access subtler and more refined levels of our mind, which we never even touch now, that are mystical to us now. In order to really pull out the roots of the

misconceptions, to really deconstruct the delusions. But we've got to start where we are, which is at the grossest level. One thinks these things through, thinks them through. Eventually, with concentration in meditation, we go to more subtle level of analysis. But we use the grosser level now. Having thought things through, clarity and confidence comes.

## **DELIGHT IN OUR FORTUNATE CONDITIONS**

Anyway, the second point to think about to kind of prepare our minds, to energize us to want to practice, to want to continue to think about these things and these processes and to develop ourselves, is to contemplate the preciousness of this human life. Again in the texts it's all laid out in a very organized way in terms of eighteen different points, but I'm just going to talk about it all generally, in an easygoing way.

The whole point here is this: Atisha is saying – he's taking it straight from the Buddha of course. The Buddha's



teachings are saying that we've got this human life, and we know from the Buddhist point of view it's not coming from a creator, no one else gave it to us, Mummy and Daddy didn't invent us, God didn't invent us, the Buddha, as we are saying, is saying that our consciousness is going back and back and back, and human life is just one option of the many possibilities of experiences, many possibilities of lives – and we're going to talk more in detail about that later.

Human is just one. And the Buddha would say that human is maybe not the happiest level of life, happiest type of experience, but it's certainly the most useful, because we have a few qualities that other types of lives mightn't have. For example, an animal is a type of rebirth – that's a sentient being, an animal is a sentient being, a mind-possessor, according to Buddha; and there are all sorts of other beings that are disembodied that most of us can't experience, like spirits. Buddha would say humans, we're like .000001% of all living beings, us seven billion humans

are a minuscule percentage of all sentient beings.

As humans, we have an enormous number of extraordinary good conditions, external conditions and internal ones, basically, that we just totally take for granted. “Oh yeah, I’m human, big deal. Oh yeah, I’m fortunate.”

Actually, we don’t really think we’re fortunate, frankly. We think we’re unfortunate, we’re always comparing ourselves to others. We think others are more happy, others are better, others are more intelligent, our own innate sense of low self esteem is interpreting in such a mistaken way.

We should contemplate how extraordinarily fortunate we are from our own past hard work to have the miracle of a human life. We are born with a reasonably healthy body, and a reasonably sane mind. We’ve got reasonable conditions; we aren’t sitting there starving, grasping, trying to find one grain of rice: you can’t afford to think about developing your mind when you can’t even develop your body.

We're not completely overwhelmed by huge delusions, very deeply ignorant mind full of fury and rage and wanting to kill and steal or whatever.

And the main thing is that these conditions give us the luxury to think about the meaning of life. And, most amazing, we have access to spiritual teachings. When we talk about karma – we'll go into this and more detail, but let's just say here the main point is to contemplate the preciousness of this life from the point of view of its being an opportunity to practice.

## **DON'T WASTE THIS PRECIOUS OPPORTUNITY**

The way to think here is: we should be so blissful. The more we contemplate the preciousness of this human life, various advantages we've got, the more it gives us the energy to not waste it. "I'm so fortunate, it's like I've won the lottery so I must not waste it, I must use it to develop my potential."

That's the energy that comes from contemplating this point.

**PART THREE**  
**LOWER SCOPE/JUNIOR**  
**SCHOOL**  
**THE ESSENCE OF WHICH IS**  
**CONTROLLING OUR BODY**  
**AND SPEECH**

## **7. BE READY FOR DEATH**

### **LOWER SCOPE/JUNIOR SCHOOL**

Thinking about our precious human rebirth leads naturally and organically to the next point, which is the first point in junior school, these lower scope teachings. What Atisha's done is take from all the extensive teachings of the Buddha on what's called impermanence, which is based on the concept of cause and effect. Buddha is basically saying everything is in a state of flux, everything changes. We kind of go, "Duh, all right, I know that." But it's a major point in Buddha's teachings. He talks about it at a gross level and at a more subtle level, the subtle level is much harder to see and one does indeed need to realize this.

But the point that Atisha gets us to contemplate here is at the gross level and in particular the level of our own death. And his reasoning is, coming organically and naturally from the

previous contemplation is, “Hey, this life is so precious and I’ve worked so hard to get it and now I’ve got this opportunity and this opportunity and this one, and I’m so fortunate, I don’t want to waste it.”

Then you begin to contemplate the impermanence of this life because it could end at any moment. And this will increase one’s wish to not waste it. That’s the purpose of contemplating here at this point the impermanence of this life.

Let’s look at how Atisha would recommend we contemplate death, our own death.

## **DEATH IS DEFINITE**

The first point is that death is definite. You think about, from all the points of view – although it’s something we intellectually know, which is very obvious – that whoever comes into being, necessarily dies. Death is definite, death is definite.

Intellectually, he says we know it, but the point is this that Buddha is saying: emotionally we cling instinctively,

intuitively to a strong sense of our being permanent, unchanging. Intellectually it's clear to us; emotionally we're living in denial of it. And remember across the board, what Buddha is saying is, we have within the mind, our mind, a whole series of misconceptions about how we *think* things are, but in fact we're not in touch with *how* they are.

And so what Buddha is saying is, "Excuse me what I'm presenting is how things are" – he doesn't think that's being arrogant: he's telling you how things are, but he's not asking you to believe it, remember. By hearing his approach as to how things are, clearly what it does is, it smashes in the face of how we think things are, and this is where the practice is. Seeing how we think things are and taking his view and learning to think it through until eventually it goes, "Oh I see, it is like this." And then the way we think things are will begin to decrease. Because he says it's a mistake, but that's for us to find out.

## EVERYTHING CHANGES

How he says things are: everything is impermanent. There's not a single thing in the existence of the universe that is a product of cause and effect that doesn't change. The very nature of cause and effect is that it changes. In fact the subtle level of impermanence is the very coming into being of something implies the passing away of it. You can't have one without the other. You can't have anything that exists that is within the process of cause and effect that doesn't change. Come and go. Come and go.

Okay, death is definite. How you contemplate this, how you think about this. . . When you hear about somebody dying, your first response is, "Oh!" We're so shocked. "But I just talked to them yesterday!" Do you understand my point? That thought is coming from the misconception that somehow instinctively we thought that they were *alive*, you know. As long as we think, Lama Zopa Rinpoche says, we think, "I am a living person, I'm a living person. And Mary, I talked to her yesterday!"



She was a living person, how could she have died?” We’re shocked.

## A DYING PERSON

But Aunt Mary in the hospital, “Oh, she’s a dying person.” Look how we talk about dying people, in hushed tones. We look at them sadly, “Oh, how are you Aunt Mary?” We talk about Aunt Mary only in relationship to her dyingness, the sickness; she’s no longer a real person, is she? She’s a dying person. You don’t even want to include her in parties. Think about it. And this is because we have this misconception that somehow this dyingness is something that defines her, whereas livingness defines me. I mean, what a joke! As Lama Zopa says: “Excuse me, living people die before dying people every day!” You see my point? I mean it’s so clear. But we have this misconception and we dump that onto people.

I mean even when we think of a person who’s dying, we think *that’s* permanent. A friend of mine and her husband, they split up, and then he was

diagnosed with some virulent cancer and was going to be dead in six weeks, so she went back to him to help him die. Well excuse me, he didn't die! She kept waiting! He was a dying person, but two months later, three months later, then six months later he's still alive. She had to leave him again. You understand my point? I mean he didn't die according to schedule, he was a dying person and he didn't die. And now two years later he's totally alive, he's a living person, he's changed categories. He didn't die. I mean we are so silly, you see my point.

Death is definite and it's something that is just natural. When we hear that Mary died, it's no surprise, it reminds us. That's the way to think about it. "Wow, Buddha is right. Death is definite, there's nothing certain. Wow, look at that." And the key thing to think is, "That will happen to me."

Everything that comes into being necessarily dies. But because of the ego-grasping, this primordial misconception, because of massive attachment, the main voice of the ego,

we frantically don't want to disappear. We want to be me. We can't bear to think that I will change, that I will die. We have this big fantasy.

Intellectually it would be silly to argue with it: "Oh of course I'm not going to die!" We know we will. But emotionally it's like that. We might as well say we're not going to. That's why we were shocked. Death is definite.

## **THE TIME OF DEATH IS UNCERTAIN**

The second point, getting closer to home now, is, the time of death is not certain. Even though we do factor in death to some extent – we have life insurance and things like this, pensions; and we read all about old people. We know we're going to be that eventually – if we're not already old people. Still, even if we're old, we haven't scheduled death in, have we? "Well next week is the dentist, and the week after that is death." Or even five years' time. We can plan vacations even in five years, but we don't schedule death. No way, because even though we

do know we will die, that death is definite, we don't like to think of the time of death is uncertain. Why? Because I still feel like a living person. How can I be dying next week? Not possible. I feel alive.

Look at the way we talk; it's an indicator of our misconceptions. "Oh I feel so alive," we'll say. Meaning we feel very good. Well excuse me, happy people die. You understand? Healthy people die. We might think, "Well, I'm not going to die yet. I'm not old." But young people die. And you keep adjusting that, don't you? I mean, when I was 40, 61 was old. Now, 80 is old. Where is Betty? Betty is old, she is 75. Aren't you?

*Betty* I'm 74! Unless you add a year for the Tibetan calendar then I'm 75.

Oh, Betty is old, she's 74. But she doesn't think she is old. She probably thinks somebody who is 85 is old. We all just keep adjusting because we don't like to put ourselves into that category. Dying people are over there, old people are over there, because we have this

deep instinct of grasping at a real living me.

## **FACE REALITY**

We've got to face reality. And the fact is, that sounds rather cruel. "What do you mean: 'Face reality?'" We think fantasies are nice. Well, Buddha says fantasies get us into big trouble. That's a fantasy to think I won't die. Not because he's trying to be cruel and sort of rub our noses in death. But he is saying that given that our consciousness is a continuity that didn't begin at the time of conception, and given that it will continue, and given that everything we say, do and think will leave seeds in the mind that will bring future results that will be my experiences – this is the view of karma, which we will talk about – then it just makes a lot of sense that death is an extremely important moment in your life. Because it's going to be a transition from this body to another body. It's a bit of a scary transition. We should be used to it, we've done it a million times, the Buddha says. But we're not

mentally used to it because we're clinging so powerfully to this present one.

## **LIVING IN DENIAL**

And to cling to anything so mightily, you know that with our Grandma's cup: it's so precious, you've got insurance on it and it's up there and so dear to you and you look at it every day. I mean you understand my point? But its nature is to break, you can't avoid that. But we live in denial of that because we've imposed all of this beauty and marvelousness and value and permanence onto it.

And so look what happens when it does break. You have a mental breakdown. You live in denial and you start freaking out. You've got to blame, you've got to sue somebody and it's so painful. And then we think we're suffering because the cup broke. We think we suffer because the person died. It's not true. We suffer – and this is Buddha's point – because we have a fantasy that it won't break, because we have a fantasy that she shouldn't die. In

other words, we're not seeing reality. Across the board this is how Buddha is talking. We are not facing reality. We don't see things as they are. We live in denial of things. We are not only not seeing how things are, we're imposing a fantasy onto it.

This simple meditation here we are trying to do: using Buddha's view of what's real, we're giving it a go, we're thinking about how he says things are and attempting to make that the way we think, in order to argue with ego's entrenched mistaken views. It's a practical reason.

The time of death is obviously uncertain. We all know we're going to die. Even that we can get to face. But then if I ask each one of us, "Okay, stick it into your schedule. Come on, do a ten-year schedule now, work out your schedule for your life, your plan. Now factor death in please." I mean, what a joke. Don't be ridiculous.

## **OF COURSE I WON'T DIE TODAY!**

Now even more instinctively of course, we're going to say, "Of course I won't die today. Tomorrow? Of course not. Next week? No, come on, don't be ridiculous!" There is this story about this astrologer, actually a Tibetan astrologer, who had done his own chart or something, and according to the chart he was going to die today. His own chart. He sat there thinking, "Where did I make a mistake?" He was totally convinced he was wrong. And what happened was, while he was trying to work out where he had made the mistake, convinced that he was wrong, the story is that he had this pokey thing and he was playing with it in his ear while he was thinking, sitting by the window with one of those wooden shutters, and the wind made the shutter banged against his hand and the pokey thing penetrated into him and he died – something like that! But the immediate impulse was, "Of course it's a mistake. How can I die today?"



And any one of us if we dared to think that thought and really go into it and make a meditation out of it, to use our creative imagination like we would use our creative imagination, especially when we were younger, to think of this gorgeous person and fall in love and have this beautiful dress and think for hours about it, imagining something, you see what I'm saying? Some of these contemplations you're using that skill, your creative imagination, to imagine that you're going to be dead. Imagine four hours time, I'm going to die. . . Forget about it! We don't even want to think about it, we can't see any benefit.

We've got good imaginations, we could do it. But it's too scary to us, we don't want to go there, because we can't bear the thought that we could die. And then to do the processing we'd have to do, like the people up on that building on September 11, 2001, think of the vivid stories, and the wives and husbands talking to each other, and "I love you, I love you," before they were burned alive in that building. I mean you've really got to speed up the

process of giving up attachment and recognizing impermanence when you've only got a few minutes. What Buddha is saying is, we can have the luxury while we've got this precious life to contemplate these things. To recognize the reality that the time of death really is uncertain.

Most of us, probably Betty can speculate, being 74, that it's possible that she could probably die sooner than a 20-year-old. But there is no certainty. I think I read about that footballer that died, a young man, you know. Whatever the reason was, he died. Now, believe me, he didn't expect to die. "No way, I'm young. No way, I'm healthy. No way, I'm happy," we think, fantasy, fantasy, fantasy.

Lama Zopa says, "Best to think, 'I will die today.'" If you really want to practice, best to think, "I will die today." Because then you won't waste your life. That's the point Atisha wants from us by contemplating these things right here, because it will energize us not to waste this precious life, not to waste this opportunity.

## **WITH A SPIRITUAL PRACTICE THERE IS NO FEAR**

And that brings us to the third point, the crux of it. At the time of death, at the moment when this consciousness – and the process of death I will go into very briefly – at this moment when the mind will eventually leave this body, what is important at that moment? What is useful to me in that moment? What will be useful to that consciousness that will leave this body and take another body, according to Buddha; what will be useful?

That's not the way we think of death because we think of death as the end of this person, and we see a big black hole that we'll sort of go into, that no one knows about; and that's how we think of it. We think of death from the point of view of the observer. We should think about death from the point of view of this consciousness moving forward to another body, another house, you've got to go to another house soon. It's a bit of a difficult transition. Clearly, the more attached

you are to this house, the more painful it is to move.

If we never confronted impermanence, our own, and never thought about death, the definiteness of it, the uncertainty of the time of it, well then that's how death will be, death will be a very scary time.

I remember a friend of mine, Lenny, who used to live around here and worked for years as a hospice worker, she said it's sort of a given that most people die with fear. She said the ones who didn't die with fear were those who had some kind of spiritual path. My feeling is there – it's not because they're such a high practitioners; you think about it, the only people who think about death are spiritual people, because they talk about God or heaven. Nothing wrong, I'm not complaining. Materialists, why would we think about death? Because as far as the materialist's view is concerned you disappear when you die, there's nothing left. There's no reason to think about death. You see my point? There's

no reason to prepare yourself for that event.

## **PREPARE FOR DEATH**

Whereas if you are a religious practitioner, Catholic let's say, you are preparing for that event because you're going to go to God soon. If you're a Buddhist you prepare for that event because you're going to move from this body to another one. It's an important event, it's a very important event that's going to happen in your life: your death. Like moving from your house, you prepare an awful lot for that. Look at the simple things we do that will happen in the future that we have to prepare for. We don't just say, "Oh, when it happens I'll deal with it." That's how we think about death. Just don't want to know about it. And, of course, when you've prepared for something like death, there'd be no fear. That's the point.

I mean, we prepare in the most elaborate ways for the smallest things that are going to happen in the future. Especially if you don't know how to do

it. Like your driving test. You don't just say, "Oh, when I get to the driving test I'll manage it then." Don't be ridiculous! You've got to train now, you know, it's obvious. It's such a simple point. If you think of death in this sense, not as some black hole that *I* will go into, but as simply a transition. This is the Buddhist approach. From this body to the next. Clearly a very important event to prepare for. And I'm not talking about having your nice coffin, the way people prepare, and the nice plot in the cemetery, all the external things. We're not discussing that. That's just for your body. By the time your consciousness leaves your body it's just a piece of ka-ka, so don't worry about it. The main point from Buddha's point of view is to prepare your mind.

## **HOW TO PREPARE?**

And how do you prepare for death? It doesn't mean you've got to imagine when you're dying, although that's helpful. You're not preparing for death by thinking about death. You're

preparing for death by knowing about impermanence *now*. How do you prepare for your driving test? By driving a car *now*. You see my point, it's obvious. How do you prepare for death: by thinking about impermanence in this way. Bringing yourself to face the reality of it.

### **A WAKEUP CALL**

The conclusion from this is it wakes you up. It's a wakeup call. It's a wakeup call. And that's the point that Atisha's stressing here: to prepare ourselves. In other words change the way we think now and therefore change the way we live our lives. That's how you prepare for death, that's how you prepare for this event. You put all the steps in place. Like you prepare for the wedding, you prepare for the driving test. You do the steps now and so when the day comes it'll just ripen in a natural way.

### **AT THE TIME OF DEATH, WHAT IS USEFUL?**

This third point is, at the time of death

what is it useful to me? Well, given Buddha's assertion that this consciousness of mine didn't begin at conception and goes back and back and back, and that it will not end at death, will continue just naturally – it's indestructible this consciousness of ours, Buddha would say; given that whatever I have said, done, and thought in this life, and in infinite previous ones, necessarily leaves seeds in my mind that just doesn't disappear; and given that seeds ripen in the future, as one's own experiences – so that you can quite literally say that Buddha is saying we are the creator of ourselves: what I'm experiencing now is the fruit of my past actions, and the more I do, say, and think now, produces my future experiences and actions; and all of the seeds I've already planted but haven't yet ripened – this is karma – will ripen as my future experiences.

So, given that negative states of mind – we haven't discussed this yet but we will – necessarily leave seeds in my mind that will ripen as suffering – it's



just a natural law, Buddha says. Buddha is saying that there is this natural relationship between my suffering and my negative states of mind, and there is just this natural relationship between my happiness and my positive states of mind; it's not punishment or reward, it's just something very organic.

And given that my positive seeds, my positive actions of body, speech, and mind – the word “karma” actually means “action” – leave a seed in my mind that will ripen as my happiness in the future. And given that my negative seeds will ripen as my suffering in the future just naturally. And given that I don't want suffering – I realize that, I know that by looking at my present suffering: I don't want any more please. And given that I do want happiness, then, finally, it follows logically doesn't it: at the time of death the only thing that is of any use to me is the positive seeds in my mind. That's it. The body will finish, the body is useless. All there is is my mind.

## **PRINCESS DIANA**

Princess Diana died at 36. I always think of her. This gorgeous aerobiced body, totally in love, everything is perfect, blissful, blah, blah, blah. She died. At that moment, the only thing that was any benefit to her were the seeds in her mind sown as a result of her virtue, her goodness, because they are what will cause her mind to take a reasonable human rebirth, with reasonable conditions, after her mind left her present body. The very minimum is this.

## **CONCLUSION: START PRACTICING NOW**

If that's true, then I had better prepare now by living my life in a reasonable way: by trying to remove the negative seeds that I have already planted and by trying to develop the positive ones. This is reasonable, based on these assumptions. At the time of death, when it comes, I must be ready, I have to be prepared. And the way to be prepared is by having thought about it, therefore, when it comes I'm not

shocked because I know it's natural that I die. And I'm prepared because I've lived my life by continuing to move on the path and practice. The main point here to realize at the time of death is the thing that really is of benefit to me is my virtuous imprints. The negative ones are worse than useless: they will ripen as suffering.

## **OUR USUAL ACTIVITIES ARE ESSENCELESS**

The things that I now see as most important in life, Buddha would say – and you analyze it according to his view and it's clear – they are totally essenceless. The things we do take as the purpose of life, you ask most people, it's almost like a mantra: health and family are the main point of our life. Everyone will say that's the point of life.

Well, the Buddha would say we are missing the point by saying that, because at the time of death if they were so crucial they would be a benefit to us, but they are useless. Your family, your husband, your children, your

possessions, your nice house, your nice body, your health, your reputation, money in the bank, all the things we spend all our time believing are the most important things – they're gone like a dream when we die.

At the time of death all the things you spend your life thinking are important and are sustaining and upholding you are of no use. They crumble. There's nothing. We all say at the time of death you can't take it with you, it's a very profound statement actually, but we kind of treat it like a joke.

What does this mean? We don't have to be fundamentalist about it and chuck out the husband, and chuck out the kids, and chuck out the reputation, and chuck out our money, no, no, no. Just change the way you see them. Change your attitude towards them. That's the real point, that's what practice is, and we're going to discuss that. Give up attachment to the house, the family, the body; give up the jealousy, the fear, the neuroses, the blaming. Because those imprints in your mind will be there when you die

and you do not want those. But you do want your virtue and your kindness and your generosity and your patience and your non-attachment seeds to ripen.

You don't wait until then to do it, it's too late. Start sowing now. That's how you lead your life. By recognizing that it's going to change, that it is definite, the time of it is completely uncertain, so you might as well be ready when it does come unexpectedly. It won't give a warning: "You've got ten more breaths left Robina, you better get ready." We might have; we'd be lucky. It's actually very fortunate, if you get sick before you die, because you've got time to prepare. That's actually really the Buddhist approach. You're very fortunate if you're on death row – don't misunderstand me. I mean, from this Buddhist point of view. You're forced, hopefully, to prepare. Although many of my friends on death row all agree, they still grasp at themselves as permanent, all the time hoping they'll get out, still living in the fantasy of being a living person.

## A QUESTION ABOUT DEATH

*Student* When you mentioned concentrating on impermanence, like within four hours I might be dead, and then say I do that, and all of a sudden here it is Monday morning – and this is also about attachment and give up the house and all the things we work for – and it's Monday morning and I've got to go to work. Can you address the reality of living in this world and giving up attachment, the house. . .

*Ven. Robina* Yes but Sweetie Pie, the crucial point here is, excuse me you have a name not just Sweetie Pie.

*Student* Catherine, but Sweetie Pie is fine.

*Ven. Robina* Okay Catherine this is the point, if you could get such realizations from that realization of impermanence and thinking about it you could very well, like the Buddha, give up his family, give up the kingdom, go off to the mountains and use that time to get enlightened. He suddenly focused and didn't want to waste time. That's great! But we don't all have the appropriate conditions in place to do

that. But you don't have to do that in order to give up attachment. At the time of death, Catherine, let's say, has got a life, and a family and money in the bank and she has all these things, but if she thought about impermanence, she sees it as a grain of salt. She sees it as essenceless. You've got it because you use it, but when you die you can give it up easily. You're going to have to give it up then, whether you like it or not, but you don't have to fight about it, fight yourself because you've practiced giving up, grasping at it. You've practiced giving up clinging to it. You've practiced giving up the jealousy in relation to the husband because you realize it can change at any moment. You live life seriously but it's like living it very lightly. But seriously at the same time. Because you're not grasping at it as real and permanent. That doesn't mean you have to move an inch out of your house. You keep doing what you have to do. It's internal, the real practice is internal. You see my point?

*Student* I'm so often not even aware of the attachment.

*Ven. Robina* No, we're not, Catherine; that's the interesting point. When everything is going nicely in our life, normal life, ordinary life, we don't think of it as attachment; we just think it's a normal life and it's called pleasure, reasonable. But when you lose a piece of it, check out what happens – we're going to go into this in more detail later that's the real powerful testing point. When we lose the thing, then freak out.



## **8. HOW DEATH AND REBIRTH HAPPEN**

At the time of death, by the time you've thrown off all of the Robina-ness and the human-ness and the Australian-ness and all of the female-ness and all the other things we identify as being the real me, by the time you get to the point before the consciousness leaves the body, that package has finished, gone. Human, Robina, Australian, female has gone, finished. There's only the consciousness left with all the imprints, all the seeds that I have planted as Robina and indeed all the seeds I've planted in the past that haven't yet ripened, so that all, that's left is your extremely subtle consciousness, they call it the clear light consciousness. This explanation, by the way, is from tantra, the postgraduate level of teachings, but it's good to know about it here.

And, it's like the repository of all the karmic imprints, or, if you like, it's your

consciousness programmed of whatever you have said, done and thought. Let's just go through now the death process, roughly speaking, in order to then talk about how the mind, at the time of death as it leaves the body, can take different types of rebirth and just the way it might be able to take, let's say, an animal rebirth or a spirit rebirth or a hell rebirth. Because, that's the context of this particular contemplation here you see.

Okay, roughly speaking – and these teachings about the process of death are actually, the way it's described, is taken from, I could keep using the analogy, from the postgraduate teachings, which is tantric teachings, the most esoteric teachings, the most advanced sophisticated teachings, where they deal very much with the subtlest physical energies as well as the subtler mind and so on and so forth. This little approach about the death process is taken from there.

They describe the death process roughly in terms of **eight stages**. And various things occur at each of these

stages. The aim of this type of explanation would be for when you're really an advanced practitioner, these great yogis who are able to access their subtler levels of mind using concentration meditation and are very much able to harness the energy at the more refined level of their physical energies as well as their mind; they're able to completely take control of this process. Finally when they pass away, they are able to pass away with absolute control going through the stages of death and choosing their new rebirth. They've got this power. And one is able to develop these skills. What is this process that the body and the mind go through?

## **GROSS CONSCIOUSNESS AND GROSS BODY CEASE**

Various things occur at each of the eight stages of this death process.. They call this dissolution, the dissolution of the different levels of our energy, they finish, they cease.

By the way, this is what's most interesting, that this process that's

described is exactly what happens every time we go to sleep. The tantric teachings describe in detail this process of the physical energies dissolving, ceasing to function, the various levels of our sensory capacities ceasing to function, the various levels of our mental capacity ceasing to function, is described in great detail in the teachings; we're just doing it briefly here. But it's what occurs every time we go to sleep. Because it's seen as something very natural. Tantra, or the Vajrayana, is describing in detail these energies that we're talking about.

## 1. VISION OF A MIRAGE

The eight stages are named in terms of a subtle vision that only the great yogis can cognize as they're going through the process of death.

**Earth element ceases** The first thing to cease functioning is your earth element. That we can see when we're wide awake and wound up, the earth element has the function of the weight and the heaviness and the strength of the body. You can all see when you're

beginning to become tired your body gets very heavy, doesn't it? It feels very heavy. And so what occurs at the time of death – this occurs at sleep too but is more radical at the time of death – the earth element ceases to function. And so physically, or experientially, the feeling here is of the body becoming very heavy, like sinking into the bed, sinking into the earth. We have that feeling when we go to sleep.

**Eye consciousness ceases** At the same time, the eye consciousness ceases to function. Now you check this. You're sitting there talking to someone and you're becoming very tired and you're struggling to stay awake as they're talking to you, right. And your eyes are open but you're really struggling but you're not really seeing them are you? You understand? Because what is happening is your eye consciousness is ceasing to function, it's absorbing inwards.

If you look at the whole experience of becoming very tired, there's this very powerful impulse to go in, you just can't resist it. You want to sink into

that unconsciousness, don't you? You see what I'm saying? It's a very powerful thing. What's occurring is the eye consciousness is ceasing to function; you can see this. You're struggling to stay awake in your eyes. You know when you're driving, you're struggling to keep your eyes open but it's really, really, hard and you can't focus on what you're seeing because all of the energy is absorbing inward. This is what happens at death. The difference is when you're in your car you can stop and walk around and wake up again. But when death is coming you can't reverse the process because the karma has now finished and death is coming.

This occurs by the way, this process, for everybody but sometimes it's super quick like if you die in a car accident. Other times it's more slow. And the ideal is to have it be more slow because if you're a practitioner you want to be aware of this at least. Only the great yogis really are aware of it, that these stages are occurring. It happens for us, but it's very spontaneous. The more we

can be aware, the better we can die, the more peaceful we can be at the time of death.

### **The mirror-like wisdom ceases**

Then at the first stage also what is occurring is the ceasing of other parts of the mind as well. They talk about a certain capacity of the mind to be aware of many things at once. This ceases. That's clear isn't it? When you're nodding off to sleep and trying to listen to that person, trying to see them even, you can't even hold anything that's going on. Your mind cannot hold it. You're just absorbing in very deeply. It's hard to resist that isn't it?

The various parts of the mind and body are ceasing to function. They're dissolving as they say. That's the first stage.

### **The vision of a mirage occurs**

Now there's a subtle thing that occurs that only the great yogis are aware of but it's very helpful for us, and we do this in meditation; we go through this process imagining it, in the beginning that's how you practice. You imagine

now, at the first stage there's this very subtle sign that's an indicator for yourself that this occurred, and that is you have this vision of, like a mirage, it's very subtle. When you faint this also happens. It's like a mirage.

Most of us when we go to sleep we're not aware of all this, just kind of boom all suddenly. Eight hours later you just wake up, you don't even notice the process. But it's all there for us to be aware if we're practitioners. There's this mirage that occurs that's an interplay of water and earth, because right now the earth element has ceased and now the most prevalent is the water element.

## **2. A VISION OF SMOKE**

Next, **the water element ceases** The liquid in the body begins to dry up. If you look at the opposite end of the spectrum when you wake up in the morning, all of your elements come back into place, at first your body feels very heavy doesn't it? Because you're earth element hasn't come quite back into play yet. Your eye consciousness,



your eyes when you wake up are kind of all dry aren't they, and you want to have a drink because the water element is only beginning to come back. It's a bit slow to come back into life again, from sleep. All of the elements have got to do their thing, as well as the senses have all got to wake up. And after a bit, we get all sharp and awake again.

**The ear consciousness ceases** We have that experience when we're tired. I'm listening to a friend but suddenly I lost that last fifteen seconds; I have no memory of what she said because I didn't hear it. We all have that experience. This is what's occurring: your ear consciousness is ceasing to function.

**The wisdom of equanimity ceases** At the same time there is this capacity of the mind to **distinguish between pleasure, pain, and indifference**. When you're nodding off to sleep, who cares? Normally this very vivid capacity we have to be able to distinguish in daily life when we're wide awake is not so clear now, it's ceased to function.

And also what occurs is the, it's a subtle sign here, it's like **smoky**. When you think about it, it's a bit like the interplay between water and the next one which is fire. That's how they say it's a subtle sign of smoke.

### 3. THE VISION OF FIRE SPARKS

The next stage, **third**, and this is a seamless kind of experience, now the **nose consciousness** ceases to function.

**The wisdom of discriminating awareness ceases** The capacity to distinguish between this and that and now, in particular, between friends, enemies, and strangers. Aunty Jane over there, whom you adore. And mean old cousin Fred over there, you couldn't care less. Whereas in life, very vivid: enemies, friends, strangers, very vivid. The mind's very sharp when we're in the awake mode, the live mode. Here, everything is absorbing. The mind is narrowing, narrowing, throwing off aspects of this package.

**The fire element ceases** The nose element, the nose consciousness, the

smell, and the fire element now, the heat in the body begins to cease.

**A vision of fire sparks** And the subtle sign here is, what you see is sparks. It's like an interplay between fire and air. They say it's like fireflies, sparks in a fire.

By now you can't hear, you can't see, your earth element has ceased, your body's like lead and can't move, the water element, the heat element, they've ceased. Robina is gradually deconstructing, ceasing. The pieces are gradually all falling apart. Because there are many pieces that all come together to form a person, aren't there? Like many pieces have to come together to form a cup.

#### **4. THE VISION OF A FLAME**

Now, the next stage, fourth, is the breathing stops. Even through this process, the breathing is getting heavier, the out breaths are getting longer, the in breaths are getting shorter and now what happens is the breath goes out and no longer comes in. The **air element** ceases.

The **tongue consciousness**, taste, ceases. And the tongue now turns blue at the root and gets very short. As Geshe Rabten said: “This tongue, which spent its life gossiping, is now useless.”

The **tactile consciousness** ceases to function. You check when you’re asleep and someone taps you, you can’t feel it. Okay, if they punch you really hard you’ll come back awake again. But, the senses have ceased. Isn’t it? And if you’re in a very deep sleep there’s no hearing, there’s no smelling, and there’s no tasting. They’ve ceased. Your mind is absorbed in this darkness of sleep.

Now the tongue element, the taste consciousness, ceases. The air element ceases, the breath stops and the tactile consciousness.

**The all-accomplishing wisdom ceases** The capacity of mind to even know who you are, what’s important, in other words this whole sense of Robina, who I am, all this stuff we hold so strongly to when we’re wide awake and alive, and our memory is very sharp. There is this very elaborate story we

have about who I am, and what I think, and my politics and my music, you understand. All this sense of me and my life, this is finished. No longer any sense of who you are, the importance of anything. Forget it, all gone. You've like completely lost your memory is a way to put it in our way of saying it.

## **IN THE WEST, NOW READY FOR THE BODY BAG**

By now you're ready for the body bag, as far as the West is concerned; you're dead. But you're not dead yet, according to Buddha. Please leave the body alone. This is one of the really important things if you want to help people at the time of death. The Tibetan Buddhist approach – in different traditions they talk in different ways – it's really important to make the situation as conducive as possible for a peaceful death, for the person dying. That doesn't just mean having their bodies look all nice. It really means keeping the environment very appropriate, not having rubbish and rabbiting on and talking and gossip

in the place, bringing all your own junkie emotions to the person. It's completely their experience. To have it very quiet, if they are a practitioner, you'd have people saying their prayers for them, because when you're in that process you can't remember anything. Unless your own practice is very deep inside you, you won't be able to access it.

I mean my friend, the one I mentioned before who had virulent cancer who got together with his wife again, and then they separated and then again he was very sick with his cancer, I'd ring him again every now and again and say his prayers to him because he couldn't hold it himself. He was on morphine anyway, it was very difficult you know.

## **HELPING OTHERS AT THE TIME OF DEATH**

It's really marvelous if you're a practitioner to have people around you doing your practice for you. Or you can even have a CD where you hear the chanting, where you hear the stuff. The

Buddhist approach in general is anything we hear or experience through our senses leaves a very powerful imprint on the mind.

**Helping animals** And this is a very marvelous way to help animals at the time of death, too. They don't understand the Buddha's teachings or the Dalai Lama talking about this or that, or the mantra, but it leaves a very strong karmic imprint in their mind. And also for an animal, it's very important to allow them to die peacefully, not just to kill them when they get sick. We'll talk about this when we talk about karma actually. But it's very helpful for the animal to die in a peaceful state of mind, where it can feel confident, where your presence makes it feel less fearful, where it can hear positive things, and leave a positive karmic imprint in the mind, same with the person. The best thing you can offer a person.

Bby the time you stop breathing, it could be a couple more days before your consciousness leaves. Now, your gross consciousness and the body that

comes along with the gross consciousness, which is like the vehicle of that consciousness, the grosser level is ceased completely.

And that's what happens with sleep, but obviously it's not that subtle at sleep because the breath is still there. But it's the same process, it's just that death is more dramatic, the breath completely ceases, the earth element completely ceases and you can't reverse it.

## **SUBTLE CONSCIOUSNESS AND SUBTLE BODY**

Now then the subtle consciousness is there and, if you're a practitioner, you'll be very conscious and aware at this point. I think even when you're not a practitioner, you could still be conscious and aware. That's why it's very appropriate not to just dump the body in a bag now and chuck it in the ground. You'd leave it for a couple of days. It's really important not to disturb the person. You'd have prayers happening, you'd have people doing their practices, you'd almost treat it



like a shrine room, very respectfully for this person.

What's going on during this process is very slowly, gradually, the subtle consciousness ceases, one keeps throwing off. . . There are detailed descriptions of this in a book called *Death, Intermediate State and Rebirth*. A very excellent book that describes this process. They might have it in the shop, I think. It goes into more detail; more technical, it goes into more detail about the different levels of the mind.

Here the subtle consciousness just gradually ceases to function. At the same time the subtler physical energies cease – they talk about, in tantric terms, like in yoga, they talk about the wind energies and the liquid energies, what they call the kundalini, the red one, the white one; the grosser levels of these are like the blood and the sperm that are in the male and female bodies.

And we have a subtler nervous system, they talk about 72,000 subtle channels in this nervous system. They're not visible to the eye but they are subtle physical energies. And the

way they talk in tantric terms is the consciousness rides in these channels. When we're wide awake and all the energies are existing, all awake, our consciousness is going through these various channels along with wind energy. As we're dying or going to sleep, it absorbs and all coming gradually out of all the other channels into the central channel.

## 5. THE WHITE VISION

Now all of the energies have gathered into the central channel and, through the stages of becoming ever more subtle, they talk about the white kundalini, which is mainly residing here at the crown chakra, gradually goes down to the heart chakra. They also say that the so-called eighty superstitions, various states of mental consciousness, gradually cease to function, and continue through the next stages. And this is the **fifth stage**, there's some subtle signs there that the yogis can recognize, like a **vast white sky**, they say.

## 6. THE RED VISION

Then the red kundalini, which is residing at the navel chakra, which is the source of all the heat in the body, rises up, comes to the heart chakra; then there is like a **vision of red sky**. Very simply, how they talk. This is a gradual process. And then the mind just keeps getting more subtle, more subtle, more subtle.

Then, like I'm saying, the great meditators are able to go through this whole process with complete control. They do it in their meditations. A person who is deeply absorbed in single-pointed concentration is effectively doing what occurs naturally in sleep and death but they are in control of it. And they are able to follow through with their consciousness, all the way to an ever more subtle degree, being conscious as they get more subtle and more subtle. Whereas, by the time we stop breathing, we're snoring, and unconscious for a few hours. Occasionally we might wake up, mightn't we, into our subtle

consciousness where we have a few dreams, but there's no control, we can't work with any of it, whereas the great yogis can.

Gradually the mind gets more subtle, more subtle, more subtle, the white vision, the fifth sign, the sixth one is the red one, and then the two come together at the heart chakra, where they talk about the extremely subtle consciousness residing.

## 7. THE DARK VISION

And then, the **seventh** one is like when they're [the white and red energies] covered somehow, they say. And it's now like dark, like a complete unconscious state; like a faint, very subtle, subtle. And then there is just this **black vision** if you like.

## EXTREMELY SUBTLE CONSCIOUSNESS AND EXTREMELY SUBTLE BODY

## 8. THE CLEAR LIGHT VISION

And then finally, the final stage occurs. This is when the mind is now ready to

leave the body. They call this the extremely subtle consciousness. It's the subtlest level of your conscious being, beyond which it can't be subtler. It's known as the clear light consciousness. And we've completely lost the plot by then, no awareness whatsoever, completely finished. Robina is totally finished, all the package, all the pieces of Robina, like Humpty Dumpty fell off the wall, completely deconstructed, finished, all gone.

All that is left is the extremely subtle consciousness linked inextricably with the so-called extremely subtle body, the wind energy. They join the indestructible drop at the heart chakra, the red and white kundalini that came from the parents at conception.

And so, what happens now is the mind is now ready to move out of the body and move into its new rebirth, propelled spontaneously, naturally, by the force of one's own karma. There's no concept of any one up there judging and putting me from here to there. It's just a natural, logical natural process, as Buddha would say, very organic.

## **AT DEATH THE KARMA THAT DETERMINES YOUR NEXT LIFE IS TRIGGERED.**

Okay, go back to the point before you stopped breathing. At that point, already the mind is more subtle. I mean, when you're very, very sick – I remember one time in India, I had a fever, a very high fever, and I had hepatitis and malaria together, right. I was very sick and one lama said I was close to death, actually. And I remember I was still conscious, I was still alive and conscious, but it was like I was going towards death, because I recall that my mind was very, very sort of sensitive and I just had to think of somebody who was living in London and I knew what they were thinking. Because that's what happens. Buddha would say clairvoyance, the capacity to access our more refined level of awareness, the ability therefore to see the minds of others, to see the past and the future, to see beyond the gross sensory capacity, is a natural consequence of practice. This would occur, and this occurred for me at that

time, I recall it. When my energies were becoming more subtle, my mind, the subtler mind, was more vivid, therefore was unencumbered by the grosser senses, which is what prevents us from seeing the minds of others. You understand.

You could say a person in this life has got clairvoyance, even just random moments of it, it's because of some past meditation where we've accessed the more refined level which is capable just naturally of seeing other minds and seeing the past and future. It's just a more refined level of awareness. Do you understand? By the time you stop breathing, already your mind is pretty subtle and already by now too, very powerful grasping is rising even if you've practiced. There is a very powerful grasping, which is just so strong, that then activates the karmic seed that is most prevalent from the way you have acted in your life that will be the main cause of your next rebirth.

## **IF THE MIND VIRTUOUS AT DEATH, A GOOD REBIRTH**

Just roughly speaking, you could say that if you spend your life being aware, being conscious, practicing like what we're talking here, being aware of impermanence, giving up attachment, giving up delusions, doing some practice, purifying your karma, then you could say that virtue is very prevalent. You've practiced virtue. Just like if you have practiced driving, when you get to the driving test you spontaneously drive, because you've practiced it. It's just obvious.

If you've practiced morality, and practiced giving up harming, and practiced giving up lying and practiced all these things we're talking about, then at the time of death that virtue will be natural for you; a very powerful morality karmic seed will ripen. Morality in Buddhist terms is defined as an action that doesn't harm another. Or even more proactively in the compassion wing, which we'll talk about, the love and compassion wing, where you actively benefit others. If



you're in the habit of doing all this, you've programmed yourself. By the time you're dying morality will just naturally ripen; then it will be encouraged to ripen because you won't have so much fear.

### **IF THE MIND IS FEARFUL AT DEATH, AN UNHAPPY REBIRTH**

When fear is there, and we'll talk more about this, fear is linked naturally to the ignorance in the mind, the delusions. If fear is there, because you've never thought about death, and you haven't practiced, you just followed your depression, and followed your jealousy, and followed your anger, and followed your badmouthing, and followed your gossiping, I'm not talking about being Hitler here, and this is going to very powerfully activate one of the negative seeds in the mind, of which we have countless, from countless past lives, that aren't ripening in this life.

It's all ripe and ready. And the negative seed will ripen and that will throw your consciousness, on autopilot,

and it will find its way to one of these suffering realms like a lion mummy's womb, strong aggression from having killed in this life, from strong harming others. Very powerful negative karma will ripen and it will throw your consciousness on autopilot into a lion mummy's womb, or into whatever the type of experience might be due to the karma you have created. If it's a virtue, your consciousness will find its way to another human realm, for example.

## **THE INTERMEDIATE STATE AFTER THE MIND LEAVES THE BODY**

What occurs before that is your consciousness enters what they call an intermediate state, which really is just like a dream state; it's just the same type of experience as a dream. And we know with dreams they can either be very nice, or they can be very scary. In general, we can't control them. You kind of get thrown about in your dreams all over the place, you fly, you go down here, weird things happen, nice things happen. It's rare that you

feel you've got complete control over your dreams. The great yogis are able to do this.

For most of us what will happen is, you're propelled by the force of your past karma, the one that ripened before you stopped breathing – let's say it is morality, that powerful virtuous karma – what will occur is your consciousness is now on autopilot, you go completely unconscious, you get the clear light mind and suddenly you wake up in a dream, you wake up in the intermediate state, the *bardo*. Just like you do when you go to sleep, you wake up in this strange experience.

But now there's just this instinctive sense – Robina is gone, Robina is finished – but there is still this powerful sense of identity, because that's ego-grasping, there's a strong sense of I-ness, but there's no longer a basis to grasp at, Robina is finished. There is an enormous amount of, they say, terror and fear and a very powerful grasping, instinctive grasping, to find another basis for the I to plonk itself

on. It's almost like you are frantically looking around for another rebirth.

And so, let's say it's strong morality, and they say this *bardo* can last up to seven human weeks. If a human being were observing, from the point of view of the experience of seven weeks, it would be seven weeks human time, it could be up to that, before that consciousness takes another rebirth; or it could be just a second, it depends on the person and their karma.

If you've got the karma to be born a human, well it's kind of hard to find a human rebirth, it's very rare. Again, just do the numbers. If we're talking about trillions of mosquitoes and ants and rats and all the creatures we can see and the vast majority of all creatures that live in the ocean; so there's an awful lot of possibilities out there of being reborn as an animal, a fish. I remember watching one of those animal shows, and I remember one of these creatures is a little insect under the earth. She was basically a baby machine. She gave birth to millions of creatures in her lifetime. Now if you're

human, if you're lucky, some people had twenty babies, it's rare, isn't it? It's obvious, just from the numbers point of view, it's harder to find a human rebirth than it is to get a mosquito rebirth. It's just kind of clear.

I remember one lama, in a very nice book called *The Art of Tibetan Parenting* that Wisdom Publications published, talking to the Tibetan mothers and how they approach rebirth and how they approach getting pregnant and how they do when they have the babies, it's a very interesting book actually.

I remember in there one lama was quoted as saying, at the time of two human beings in sexual contact, obviously male and female human beings in sexual contact, billions of consciousnesses are all hovering about trying to get in. It's kind of a hilarious prospect, isn't it? But billions, clearly from all the realms of existence.

And so we've got a human rebirth, I mean even just that alone is just so mind blowing for me. We've got a decent one, we've got a human rebirth,

we won the lottery. I mean it's just stunning. Because the Buddhist view would be, if you compare with all the options, like I'm saying before, this human one, is the result of enormous merit. Even though we look at the human realm and it's pretty crummy. I mean, look at what we do with this precious birth, look at what the humans are doing. Nevertheless, to just get one is the result of enormous morality.

And, we're going to talk about that when we talk about karma. We're coming to it, leading up to it.

## **QUESTIONS ABOUT BEING DISTURBED AT THE TIME OF DEATH**

*Student* I what's in a situation where a man who was working on property in a retreat center that I was managing collapsed one day. They took him to the hospital and they CAT-scanned him and saw something, so they immediately admitted him, so he was already on life support, then and then they were planning to give him an MRI

and get a better look at what was going on in his brain. And before they got him into the MRI he had a massive brain stem hemorrhage and went brain dead. But they decided to keep him on life support until his family could arrive to be at his bedside before they pulled him off the life support. And to make a long story short, that took four days because they were emigrating from Mexico and it was hard to get them up here. And in the meantime, other relatives and friends were showing up and there was so much disturbed emotion around him while he was on life support and I didn't have much input into the whole decision but it was so disturbing. I'm just wondering if that process damaged his mind?

*Ven. Robina* First of all, if you can just imagine yourself, happening to yourself. What's happening too is we look like we're brain dead because we define life by the presence of brain activity, but if you're using the Buddha's view, you define life by the presence of consciousness there. The grosser level of consciousness for sure

has ceased. In a coma means being like asleep, but we know that when you're asleep you can have dreams. No doubt a person like that is vividly, their dream mind is very vivid and it also means you can be very vividly aware of your surroundings.

I remember a time doing a retreat, in fact, when I would go to sleep after lunch and I would be in the dream state vividly dreaming, but I'd be totally aware of all the things going on as well. It was a very interesting experience. I've never had it before or since. Totally aware of all the noise, the people talking, everything that was happening, but completely dreaming at the same time.

Now that can be very common for people who are so-called brain dead. Their consciousness is there and they're hearing what is going on and seeing what is going on, as well as having all these weird dream experiences so they're very vividly aware. Of course, there they are freaking out. Not quite knowing what's going on, but sort of being aware of it.



And I've heard even evidence of somebody who told these experiences after he was unconscious, told in detail all the things the doctors did, what they said, because that's exactly what's happening. This is why, from the Buddha's point of view, it's so important to treat the place so purely and to give them confidence and to do their practice and to allow them to be calm because if you're not practiced, you're freaking out right then. And you're thinking what the hell is going on. You're in panic mode. You can't talk to anybody, you don't know what's happening, and everyone is all screaming and crying, your mother's there, your husband's there, your wife's there, oh my god your mind's in a freak out mode, isn't it? Of course it can be disturbing, extremely disturbing for this person. Whereas if the person is aware of this then you'd be even speaking to them and saying positive things and giving them positive things and so their mind can calm down so they can die with peace when they pull the plug on them.

*Student* I noticed the nurse whispering and encouraging.

*Ven. Robina* Good! There you go. Very good! Perfect.

*Student* I felt the need to leave.

*Ven. Robina* Of course they should have left. But people are not aware of this, you know. We're just kind of completely self-centered. "Oh my God, my husband's dead!" You know, like, excuse me back away. It's his gig, you know. Give him a break. Absolutely, you're very right. It's very important.

In that sense there's so much you can do for the person when they're dead, when they're so-called dead, brain-dead. And even when they are actually dead, the body with the breathing stopped, their consciousness is still there. That's why from the Buddhist view it's so important to make it so appropriate, so peaceful, so conducive, because it's so powerful for the mind, especially if the person is not prepared for this death. It's a huge shock to have this thing happen, it's a big shock to us, of course it is.

Yes?

## **IMPORTANT NOT TO DISTURB THE BODY EVEN AFTER THE BREATH HAS STOPPED**

*Student* My question kind of dovetails after yours. I work in an emergency room and oftentimes we have people die suddenly, traumatically, and just the environment has limitations. A Buddhist man dying suddenly and the priest came, he couldn't burn incense because it would put out the fire alarm and then we have bed availability issues. I was just wondering about the two days beyond the body dying, how important is environment in terms of allowing, supporting the consciousness?

*Ven. Robina* Well, you know, the ideal scenario is that one. That's why we've been trying to start here a hospice. The little two rooms are meant to be for people that come here to die. I don't know if we've got people in it at the moment, so that they can have that kind of approach. But one friend of mine's father passed away and the wife, they're both Buddhists, but she sort of freaked out of course, and rang the

hospital so that the ambulance came and put him into down here somewhere. And so we came in and we started right then, we were with him before he stopped breathing so we were doing all these prayers, which is what he wanted, talking about Buddhist.

Then we couldn't take him home, unfortunately, because already he'd been gone to the hospital. The daughter and I, we made sure that the ambulance didn't move him very roughly, took him very carefully in the body bag into the mortuary and then we worked out with the mortuary a way to leave him there as long as possible. They wouldn't let us go overnight and do prayers and things, so they kept him all day, then we put him in the fridge and they agreed to play some CDs of the Gyutoto monks chanting in the fridge, along with the other bodies. We assume they did it.

Then they allowed just a few more hours the next day for people to come along and do prayers. You just stretch the law as much as you can. In the hospital no, but in the mortuary they

didn't mind doing it. But it had to be within twenty-four hours, there was some law that it's got to be not more than twenty-four hours out of the fridge, so the fridge part didn't count. We added our hours from the first day and the second day, so it almost went to the two days. The best you can do. But the best, of course, is what many people do now is to die at home. And so what they do is they just don't call the hospital, they don't call the ambulance for two days. They don't call the doctor. Just let the person alone, you know.

*Student* What's the story about, you're saying, the different realms. I mean the dimensions. You're saying as a Buddhist you check that out, check everything out.

*Ven. Robina* Think about all this yes, check it out. You mean think about all this stuff?

*Student* Well yes, where is the proof of other dimensions.

*Ven. Robina* I understand.

*Student* That is why we choose our guru carefully.

*Ven. Robina* Let me talk about this when we talk about karma. It's a totally perfect question, but let's talk about that after lunch.

## 9. WE DO NOT WANT A SUFFERING REBIRTH LOWER SCOPE/JUNIOR SCHOOL

### OVERVIEW SO FAR

#### PRELIMINARY CONTEMPLATIONS

Let's continue. Reminding ourselves again of this packaging that we're talking about. We've very briefly looked at the **preliminary things** to get our heads around in order to really prime our minds to want to practice.

The first was the beginningless of this mind, its nature, not being created by others, and its potential. Some sort of a starting point is important.

Then we looked very briefly at the whole approach to **finding a spiritual teacher**, a lama, a guru, the necessity for this, and then the way, I mentioned just very roughly, I mentioned the appropriate way to get the benefit from that relationship.

And then we looked at this point that Atisha recommends we contemplate again and again to energize us to want to practice: thinking about the **preciousness of this life** that we worked so hard to get and have all these marvelous conditions that at the moment we take for granted because we don't really see them as a result of causes and conditions, but are so beneficial if compared to other types of rebirth. Even within this human realm we are so fortunate. Look at the enormous suffering of so many humans, no chance to practice the spiritual path. The whole point of thinking about this precious human rebirth is to give us the energy to not waste it, which means to use it to develop our marvelous potential.

## **JUNIOR SCHOOL, LOWER SCOPE**

Then we entered the first part of **the first scope of practice**, junior school, where we think about **death and impermanence**, one of Buddha's major teachings. But the way Atisha



presents it is in the context of, it follows naturally from thinking about the preciousness of this life, because we then contemplate how yes, indeed, it is precious but, hey, it is impermanent. It is definite it will stop, it will end, this life. The time of when it will end is completely uncertain, no one knows, although our fantasies think it's a long way off in the distance.

And then the third point being, what is the point, at the time of death is to have the mind completely ready, having given up attachment, given up all the neurosis, letting go of all the grasping and all these things, so the positive seeds in the mind can ripen at the time of death, carrying our consciousness along to the next life so that we can continue bopping along our path.

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## **NOW, THINK ABOUT THE SUFFERING OF THE LOWER REALMS**

This leads us to the next contemplation, which again is helping us to get some context and to prime our minds to really want to begin to practice, to put our money where our mouth is, which is the culmination of junior school, the first scope, which is where we abide by the laws of karma, which we'll talk about and will come to in a minute.

Here we now contemplate, given that I could die at any moment, and given that my consciousness goes back and back and back and back, and it's had countless past lives, and given that there are delusions in my mind, ego-grasping and the other delusions, it follows logically that there are countless negative seeds in my mind that I have created from my past lives, not to mention those of this life, that I haven't pulled out of my mind, that I haven't pulled out, that I haven't uprooted. And that these could ripen as terrible suffering lives in the future.

Given this, I should contemplate a little bit the likely possibility of suffering realms of rebirth in order to get a very strong sense of not wanting them.

This is where Atisha takes from all of Buddha's extensive teachings on, I suppose you'd call it cosmology, on the way the universe is, how the universe is structured, the kind of lives, the possibilities, the realms of existence, all of this. What Buddha is asserting, in general, is a whole spectrum of possibilities of mental experiences, just one of which is the human.

In Christian teachings, for example, it's just humans who have a soul. You're born as a human and then when you die, only you have got a soul. There are also animals, we all can see this, but according to Christian teachings they are made by God but they don't have a soul and they're really there for the benefit of humans, which is why it's fine in most cultures to kill them.

But the Buddhist approach is they're sentient beings like you and me, they are *sem-chens*, they are mind-

possessors. Which is they possess the same potential, their minds, too, are beginningless, their minds, too, have the potential to be enlightened. It's the nature of every mind that exists and in Buddha's terms, like I mentioned this morning, humans are just a tiny, tiny percentage of all sem-chens, of all minds that exist.

## **SUPERIOR BEINGS AND ORDINARY BEINGS**

And as I said, there's this whole spectrum of possibilities, of types of mental experiences, rebirth as we would call them, realms of existence. You could divide the whole universe into two kinds of minds: those that are the superior minds, those that have realized emptiness all the way up to buddhahood, highly advanced spiritual practitioners, they're known literally as superior beings – except Buddhism we put plural on that, not singular. Superior beings, and there's levels of them all the way to buddhahood, all the way to perfection.

And then you've got ordinary beings, those in samsara as they call it – and the defining characteristic of an ordinary being is this primordial ignorance is still within their minds. The defining characteristic of an arya being is the removal of the seeds of that primordial ignorance, meaning the realization of emptiness.

And we'll discuss this point later, in university.

### **THREE REALMS OF EXISTENCE OF ALL SENTIENT BEINGS**

Within samsara, those minds that possess this primordial ignorance, propelled by this ignorance to do all of the crazy things that we do, then you can say there are three realms of existence. The most advanced level within this, having ignorance still, so being ordinary beings, not out of samsara in other words, they are called **formless beings**. They have no gross physical energy and beings born like that are in this state as a result of a lot of concentration meditation, but not used skillfully because they have not

removed the delusions from their minds. This lasts for a long time, and they talk in terms of eons. But it's sort of a useless type of rebirth, because eventually the virtuous karma runs out, the gas tank runs out, and then grosser levels of suffering happen again.

Further along the spectrum you've got **form beings**, slightly grosser with some of the grosser physical energies, but still pretty subtle beings. And they are also the result of some meditation.

Then the third level you've got what they call the **desire realm**. And that's divided into six, and we are in that one. And all these are states of mind; it's not like places you could fly an airplane to get to. They're what we call dimensions, I suppose, if we speak in science fiction terms, the dimensions, the levels of existence. And they're all consciousnesses. Buddhist view would say there's not an atom of space where you won't find sentient beings. There are countless, countless trillions of consciousnesses, all manifesting in one form or another.

## THE SIX TYPES OF SENTIENT BEINGS IN THE DESIRE REALM

**The gods** Within the six, within the desire realm, which is a grosser level of rebirth, you have got six. And the peak of those, the best suburb in the desire realm, if you like, is called the god realms. And that really is, the closest thing to say about that is it's the equivalent of what the Muslims call paradise, the Christians call heaven and so on. And in Buddhist terms it's the result of karma; you get born there, no one puts you there. There's no concept of creator, there's no concept of being sent somewhere by someone else, judging you, you're good, you're bad. Karma takes care, as Lama Yeshe says. It's a natural law, Buddha says.

Beings in this god realm, they're very blissful beings; the result of a lot of virtue you get born there. Subtle light bodies. We have this physical energy and it manifests in different ways.

When a lot of morality and virtue has been created and doing a lot of good to others, your mind just naturally will be born as a god. This is like paradise; it's

like heaven, very blissful, extremely blissful. Because the grosser energy is very subtle, the mind is more subtle, and it's the fruit of virtue so it lasts a very long time. But this is where Buddha would argue that that type of rebirth, he would argue with the Christians and Muslims, they would say that type of rebirth is the culmination where you're in heaven with god. Buddha would say you've got a blissful experience of god realms yes, but it's not the end result. You haven't removed ignorance from your mind yet and that eventually will run out, the virtuous karma will run out, the gas tank will empty, and you've still got ignorance so you'll be born in the suffering realms again. This is Buddha's point.

**Human beings** Further on the spectrum you've got a couple of those god realms, then you have the human realm. Buddhism would say there's more than one, but here we are in one of them, so whatever. This is still the result of virtue, it is the fruit of virtue, to be born as human is the fruit of



virtue. But in general you could say it's of less virtue than those born in the god realms. But the Buddha's point would be, nevertheless, it's a much better rebirth from the point of view of wanting to practice. Because you haven't got such bliss, you're not so blissed out, to be caught up in the thrall of all this bliss, not realizing you've still got the delusions in the mind but they're not manifesting so you don't notice it, and that when the bliss runs out, you're back to the lower realms.

It's just like for us now, even relatively speaking, if we've got a fairly good life in this human realm, we call that happiness, and we get all, "Isn't this great, isn't this wonderful, I have this lovely husband, everything, I have no reason to do anything, why should I want to practice the spiritual path? I haven't got any suffering." But suddenly he drops dead on you or goes and chooses a younger model, leaves you and chooses a younger one. Suddenly now the pain and suffering is evident and painful, and that's because of attachment which blinds us from

seeing that happiness is not really happiness.

The human realm is a marvelous one to have if you want to pull yourself together, if you want to practice, if you want to realize, develop amazing love and compassion, all these marvelous qualities. If you want to realize wisdom and get rid of all the delusions it's the best rebirth to have.

**Animals** Then further along the spectrum you have the animal realm, which we can see is a very occupied realm of existence. You probably have more mosquitoes in one summer than you have beings in the entire human realm on any one given moment. Clearly there are countless beings, sentient beings, born as a mosquito, as an ant, as a tiny creature, as little creatures in your body. I've heard recently that under your arm pit you can't imagine the number of sentient beings that are there, which is really quite shocking to us. Not to mention the elephants and the giraffes and the birds, I mean there's an awful lot of them isn't there? It's very obvious.

**Spirits** Then further along the spectrum you've got an even worse, even more painful suffering realm called the spirit realm. And we are familiar with this from the point of view called the poltergeists and you see those movies, and the people being possessed and all that stuff. There's an advertisement on television for the latest one. There are all kinds of these beings, spirits and intensely suffering beings. Some very powerful, some very manipulative; and this is a very occupied realm of existence.

There is a whole group of them they call **hungry ghosts**. The suffering in general of the animal realm, the main delusion is the one of the really profound ignorance, deep, deep ignorance, which is the root of all of the ego for all of us. The animal way of experiencing is extreme suffering, very narrow, we'll talk about this a bit, narrow, narrow state of mind, very deeply suffering state of mind. The prevalent energy of the spirit realm, of all the kinds of spirits is this huge attachment, huge grasping.

Many people can see spirits. I remember in England years ago, I met a lot of spiritualists, a group of people called spiritualists that were really prevalent around Lancaster. I think spiritualists developed from there from the Victorian times. And I remember this one lady could see these weird dog spirits, all the time seeing other beings. From people's experiences we can see they exist.

But of course it doesn't fit in the Western materialist model; we just think these people are wacko and take no notice. But the Buddha would agree that there all are all kinds of beings.

**Hell beings** And even further along the spectrum from happiness to suffering, we have the hell realms, they're called the hell realms. The energy of which is mainly the enormous suffering of anger. It is interesting if we look over the centuries at the different spiritual paths, there are very many similar points here: they talk about heaven, they talk about hell, it's obviously people's experience to observe these beings, coming from high

beings experiences, of seeing these different realms.

Clearly, Buddhist approach has a different way of explaining the levels of them and how you get born there. That's the crucial difference. The Buddha would say all sentient beings have a beginningless continuity of consciousness, not one of them is created, no such concept. And every single one of them at any given moment is experiencing, just necessarily, the fruits of one's own past actions. We put ourselves in our different realms of existence. We create our own reality, Buddha says, by our own actions. And we're going to talk about that in detail when we get to karma.

Right here, coming to the point now, the main contemplation, the main thing to think about, having thought about impermanence and death, having thought about this precious human rebirth – they kind of follow on – you think about human rebirth: “Wow, I must not waste this because it's so precious, I must use it to practice.”

Then you think about how it can change any moment and you could die. Oh my goodness, you're even more energized to practice. And then you think about, "Well now, look at the options for me when I do die, if I were to die now. Look at all the negative seeds in my mind due to the countless past lives and I could get an enormous suffering life, like an animal birth for example."

Okay, this is a brand new concept for us. Most people who even think about reincarnation don't think it's possible to be anything other than a human because we identify with this package. But the Buddha is saying there is nothing innately human or male or female or dog or anything else about any of us.

## **HOW WE GO FROM HUMAN TO ANIMAL, FOR EXAMPLE**

Now let's talk about how you get reborn as a lion, because now this brings us to the contemplation here to think about the suffering of the lower realms as a wakeup call for us not to want that type

of rebirth, in order to go to the next contemplation, to think, “Okay, what am I going to do about this?” We’re taking ourselves step by step through each of these points.

All right, so, let’s just say we wasted our life. We’ve had a really precious human rebirth from our past morality but we had various karmic imprints that caused us to continue to kill and to lie and to bad-mouth and to get depressed and jealous – and again, not talking about Hitler here, I’m talking about a lot of ordinary humans like all of us. We got the decent life from the past but then we also got all the various imprints from the past, which we just take for granted, so we just follow them. Which is how we mostly do; we don’t try to change ourselves.

Most people in the world, with respect to all of us, whatever is in our mind we just take it as the status quo and we follow it. You’ve got a tendency to be jealous, you get jealous. You don’t think you can change it. You’ve got a tendency to be angry, you get angry. You don’t think you can change it.

You've got a tendency to kill, it's okay to kill. We just follow all our negative imprints. Of course, by the time of death – we've never thought about it, so the mind is freaking out – the negative seeds ripen very strongly, especially the killing one, which is the most intense negative action, it's the most harmful.

That's going to ripen and what will it do? It will put your mind on autopilot and before you know it, you get to the intermediate state. But not for very long; you have not much waiting around here, because there are plenty of lion wombs available, or panther wombs or tiger wombs, very aggressive powerfully harmful animals, with respect to them. And suddenly you find your mind now. . .

Okay, what happens in the intermediate is most interesting. You're in this bardo, intermediate state, driven by attachment, in a sense desperate to get another basis for another I; it's all kind of instinctive, no volition here. And then because of your karma, suddenly – they say it's almost



like you have a vision of the mummy and daddy in sexual union so here we're talking lion. Because of the karma, the karmic imprints, and secondly because you've got a strong connection with these two particular lion mummy and daddy, you've got strong karmic connections with those consciousnesses – from twenty-two lives ago, when you were born together, who knows what, it's highly complex. No one's running this show, by the way; karma takes care. It's a natural law. It's just the way things are, Buddha says.

What happens is you have this powerful vision of mummy and daddy lion in sexual union and because this is your karma due to your very strong aggressive killing karma to ripen, you will be attracted like a magnet. It will look really delicious, and you will run like a magnet to them. Then your consciousness joins their egg and sperm and you will get reborn in that womb.

Now, your extremely subtle consciousness, along with your

extremely subtle physical energies goes from the bardo into the lion mummy's womb and the very subtle wind energy, which is just inextricably linked to your mind, will now mix with the egg and sperm of the lion mummy and daddy.

Then your consciousness will begin to develop: all the karmic imprints will take on lion-type imprints and the body will join with the lion, you will turn into a lion, your wind energy will grow and develop into the lion physical energy, so you end up with a big hairy body and big claws. I mean, look at the claws, ready-made for what? For killing. As His Holiness says, "Look at our hands, they're made for affection." But lion claws, they're ready made for ripping the guts out of buffaloes for breakfast. And it's very soon that little baby lions will be just naturally doing that.

But, all the imprints are in there. The karmic imprints that were in the mind from the past, that you begin to develop as a human that were there from the past as well, now hugely manifest as this lion. "Lion" is just the fruit of past

actions. She's got this very powerful grasping, which we all have, but in the lion a million times more powerful, animals a million times more powerful. The energy of this ignorance is literally this very profound deep instinctive sense of self. It gives rise to huge attachment to getting what she wants, huge aggression as a tool to use to get what she wants, huge jealousy or whatever it is you can look at psychologically that lions manifest.

## **BUDDHIST PSYCHOLOGY REFERS TO ALL LIVING BEINGS**

Buddhist psychology refers to all living beings, by the way, not just humans. It doesn't take too much to look at a cat and a dog and by using the same words – and this is not, what is the word, anthropomorphizing, it's not doing that one. The Buddha would say, the way he talks about the mind, is what we all have. We can see aggression in our lives, we can see attachment; attachment is this manipulation to get what you want; we can see the methods we use to get what we want, which is

harming others. You can see this in a lion but kind of to the nth degree. And that is a lion's nature, the karmic imprints are so powerful and she doesn't have a choice, that's the tragedy of a lion, an animal rebirth.

The miracle of a human, if we're lucky, is we've got access to a few other options, because that's the good thing about a human rebirth. We call that making choices. We call it virtue, the ability to empathize. We can see how hard it is to make choices, but we've got it. Mummy lion, you can tell her a thousand times a day that the buffalo doesn't like to have its guts ripped out for breakfast. Mummy lion can't hear you. She doesn't have the capability.

## **THE SUFFERING OF A LION'S MIND**

Now what's interesting, her consciousness is like ours insofar as it's beginningless, endless, nonphysical, not created, and possessing Buddha nature. But while she is a lion, she can't access her virtuous states of mind. They are like totally buried under the

forest of weeds of aggression and ego and all the other stuff. And they are the only option she has, because karma, more than anything is like habit – we are going to talk about this – but she is just totally programmed to do what a lion has to do.

And, therein is the suffering, that's the suffering. We're not just talking the suffering of the buffalo here. We're talking the suffering of being an animal, at this deeper level. Okay, you can look at the suffering of being an animal, just in terms of it being used as a servant of humans, of its having no choice: the poor cow out there can't go get a nice warm house; the poor sheep can't go get its dinner. I mean the limitation of having an animal birth.

But at this deeper level looking at the suffering of the mind of an animal, this is how the Buddha would talk. The suffering of your cute little doggie woggie, whom we are so attached to, the suffering of your little cat's mind. Okay, we fantasize, and perhaps Buddha would say it's fantasizing, how our animals are so cute and so

gorgeous and so special and, “Oh, my cat sits with me every time I meditate, and it’s so this and it’s so that,” you know. Whatever.

But you know, put us all in a worst scenario and you’re going to see, not the real person, but you’re going to see the delusions. When hubby leaves me, then watch what arises, the pain, the hurt, the jealousy – but at least we can work with it. You put a cat in a situation where it’s got a little mouse, I’m sorry, your little cute cat who likes to meditate with you is gone out the window. You now have this vicious little creature who delights in harming the mouse. Now that’s called a suffering mind, I’m sorry to say.

Look at the dog. It’s a very cute little dog, so loyal and so devoted. But look at the dog when it hears a weird noise outside, look at its eyes when it’s screaming and barking in paranoia. It hasn’t got enough intelligence to know it’s just somebody coming home. I mean they’ve got other qualities, they’re quite sensitive with their

senses, but we're talking the mental consciousness here.

The Buddha's view is, hey, to be born as an animal is an acute, an enormous suffering. And the vast majority of sentient beings that we can see on this planet, for example, seem to be having that rebirth, due to their past karma.

The whole point here is – and I'm just talking the animals. Sure have compassion, which is coming later in the more advanced level, but right here, right now, this is not the way we think at all. This is a strange approach to have this: "Oh my goodness, look at this suffering. I do not want that, thank you very much, I no way want to be reborn like that when I die."

It's really priming your mind: from having thought about precious human rebirth, thinking how I must not waste it, then thinking, "Oh my goodness, it could change at any moment, I better not waste it even more." And then thinking, "What are the options when I die? Well I better not waste it at all!"

## QUESTIONS IN RELATION TO REBIRTH, EVOLUTION, ETC.

*Student* I'm only going to ask this and you promise not to jump all over me, it's that kind of question.

*Ven. Robina* You're really serious? You want me to promise that first? No, I'm sorry you have to not ask then.

*Student* Okay I'll ask it anyway. You talk about the human rebirth as being the rebirth where you have choices, where you can attain enlightenment, and I'm reading an interesting book right now where it's talking about our evolution and it mentions some people, Darwin, to a point where through fossils and scientific research we have evolved, whether it's from the ocean. How did rebirth occur before, if there is such a thing as evolution and we weren't human at one point and it's quite obvious as a species will probably become extinct: 99.9% of the species vanish from the earth so how can, can you speak on that?

*Ven. Robina* You mean how to reconcile Buddha's view with this view?

*Student* Yes.



*Ven. Robina* Okay, good. Okay, if we look at the materialists view, which is the one you just described, you're speaking from the external point of view of shapes and forms and universes. It's like looking from the outside we can see this is this, then it grew to this, and then it became this, and then soon it will all disappear. There's no contradiction. Buddha has detailed teachings on universes and how they come into being and the types of beings that occupy those universes and that particular form will finish and then that and that.

But here we're talking internal evolution. That is a brand new concept as far as the materialist world is concerned. There's no talk like this. Also, with respect, there's no talk like this in Christian terms because there's no talk of, you know you didn't exist before you were born. We're talking from an internal point of view. If you think of it this way, you've got billions of consciousnesses, forget this universe now, there's billions of consciousnesses and they are all doing and saying and

thinking things depending on what type of form they've got. And each one of those actions, and that's the meaning of karma – and we're coming to that, this is really part of that – leaves a seed in that consciousness.

Then that consciousness is conjoined with a certain level of physical energy. Like I've been describing, the very subtle wind energy with the very subtle consciousness and then propelled by the karma or the habits of that consciousness, it will go to a certain type of birth in a certain realm of existence.

Here we're talking the ones we can know about, that we look in front of us, we can see humans and animals don't we? They are the ones, the only two that we can see, it seems like. There're trillions of tiny little creatures and big fat ones like giraffes, and so on, and then so called human.

But if you think of it in this internal way, it's just a shape. A human is just a form that consciousness has created from past actions. The hands, these hands, they're the fruit of virtue

because, look, they don't have claws. We can have very long claws, but even our very long claws can't rip, we know how they break all the time. I mean, I know when I used to have long red nails, no matter how strong they were they would just snap. You couldn't rip the guts out of anybody with them!

## **KARMA'S LIKE PERSONAL EVOLUTION**

That is an evolutionary thing karmically, not an external evolution. Internally, morality ripened in this consciousness, so it propelled that consciousness towards a human realm that happened to be on this piece of thing we call Earth, it's not the only one Buddha would say. And my wind energy and my mind conjoined with Teddy and Agnes's egg and sperm, and then my mind went into a human body. But it's just a shape, it's a shape. And so in Buddha's view, a human shape is the fruit of some virtue and a lion's shape with claws is the fruit of a lot of aggression and negativity.

In time, these shapes will disappear from this earth. But hey, minds are beginningless and minds are constantly creating karma, so we're constantly creating new universes all the time. Yes indeed we can look externally and see that maybe at some point on this particular piece of earth there weren't anything as we call it humans but we were all bopping away in other realms, if we were human in past lives.

The "we" here isn't the way we talk in the West about the "we" like in terms of family lines, or the "we" in terms of like "we" were a monkey in the past. If you're a human you weren't a monkey. A monkey is an animal birth. But maybe what you can say is the shapes on this earth gradually evolved and so then eventually it got to a point where the shape was a reasonable human, and then what we call human consciousnesses started getting born into this shape, and then it started developing into humans. You understand what I'm saying a bit? That's the way, how to fit the Buddhist

view with the external view. Does that make sense?

*Student* Yes.

## **WE KEEP CREATING OUR OWN UNIVERSES**

*Ven. Robina* Eventually, of course, this piece of earth, it will degenerate and finally explode and be nothing left, but as long as the karma exists, as long as consciousness exists and we're creating karma and we've got delusions, we're going to keep creating our own universes.

“Hell” for example, it always sounds so shocking; as Lama Yeshe said, hell is not some place where the devil is waiting saying ha, ha I'm waiting for Lama Yeshe. Hell is a type of experience of enormous suffering created by that sentient being, it's the manifestation of the negativity of that sentient being. We, in that sense, literally create our own universes.

When I talk about karma after lunch, one of the ways our karma manifests is called environmental karma, meaning the physical world we occupy. It's not

made by God or superior beings, it doesn't just pop out of a big bang. The energy that determines the shape even of this world, whether it's beautiful, or ugly, or polluted, or volcanic, or whatever, is the sentient beings who occupy it and experience it. We are the creators of that by our past negative karma that we are born in a place where everything is going to explode.

And then eventually this universe will cease, but as always, as long as there's consciousness, which is endless and beginningless, but so too is physical energy endless and beginningless. If you talk in terms of the earth, air, fire, water the beginning of this universe is just subtle physical energy, subtle wind energy, and then gradually it develops into this universe not from a superior being doing it, not from its own side, but propelled by the force of the karma of the sentient beings who have created the cause to have this planet. We're the creators of it, karmically, in an evolutionary sense. Do you see?

*Student* Yes.

*Ven. Robina* Yes?

*Student* I was just going to say about this comment then that the scientists that come up and say that the human form has come from previous animals, they don't really look at consciousness at all.

*Ven. Robina* No precisely, that's the point. We only see it as an external, that's exactly right.

*Student* It's something that they don't even look at.

*Ven. Robina* No. We have mostly. . . we have been taught science. . . they don't have to contradict, but it's such a huge view and we in the West believe we have almost found the truth, and all these stories of evolution; it's quite shocking if you've got that view and you've seen it as the truth and you've taken that assumption for so long to begin to change it. It's very scary.

It's very interesting even now, there's a lot of talk, isn't there, people who are strongly Christian and believe in a creator, they say evolution just can't fit with that. That's why they're talking about trying to bring the Christian teachings back in, and the God one,

and scientists will mostly say that you can't believe in God if you really believe in science. And in a sense it's true, because they're so contradictory.

All it is I'm saying as a Buddhist, I don't deny that there's so-called evolution. But if you have a view of karma it's an added component, that's all. It doesn't contradict the evolution of this realm at all. But it has a few series of very basic assumptions that are quite different. It takes time for the mind to get around all the stuff.

*Student* Because the scientists are looking mainly at something that's physical.

*Ven. Robina* That's exactly right. That's exactly right. And that's why, it's so interesting, that many scientists see that the world is so amazing and their conclusion is that it must be created by somebody. Many scientists go towards the creator one. But people, I think, like Einstein go more towards the one, the Buddhist one, which is cause and effect, interdependent arising. It's very interesting.

Yes?



## DISAPPEARING SPECIES

*Student* This discussion has answered a question I've always had about cosmology, about there's all these beings wanting to be born into better rebirth there's only so many humans but the human population is booming and the animal population isn't doing so well on this sphere. I don't have to worry about that too much because there are other things going on ...

*Ven. Robina* It's a tiny, tiny part of it.

*Student* But okay so that's the result type thing.

*Ven. Robina* But this is the point of it, only a few animals are ceasing, only a few species. There's millions of fishes and insects, don't worry about them, there's plenty of them.

*Student* Mosquitoes for sure. And fleas.

*Ven. Robina* And cockroaches. And bacteria, there you go.

*Student* I think the thing that's always troubled me is that meditating on the precious human rebirth, I always really have to focus on the preciousness of the situation of the

human rebirth because I look around and I just see so many humans that don't have a clue. I have a hard time reconciling that I need to concentrate on that, as one of these stepping stones.

*Ven. Robina* It seems to me that something even like nuclear energy, this amazing energy, can be harnessed and used for good. But it can be used for bad. We don't have to be fundamentalists and chuck it out. Well the same with the human. Just because humans can make a mess of this life doesn't mean that a human birth itself is bad. We can certainly, by finding one example of one good human, like Mother Teresa, the Dalai Lama, Nelson Mandela, one human being that's enough for us to see, okay, there's a possibility there. The fact is it's the potential of the human mind that is the thing you want to strongly have. The potential, the capacity to change, that's the miracle. Of course we use it, unfortunately, to do harmful things but it's not concrete, doesn't have to be this way.

*Student* It seems so odd that so many beings would push so hard to get into the human rebirth and then just squander it.

*Ven. Robina* We don't push so hard to get into it. We don't even think about it. We just get it. We just get it and then because we have a view of self-existence, because we have a view that doesn't understand cause and effect, and that's the big tragedy – when we talk about karma we'll talk about that one – that's huge. And this is the reason eventually to have enormous compassion for sentient beings.

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## DEDICATION

Now let's have some lunch. We can finish with a little dedication prayer, thinking:

Okay, we've listened so far to

- the concept of a continuity of consciousness, its beginningless,
- therefore not created,

- the clear nature of mind, that it's nonphysical,
- its potential, especially of buddhahood.
- We've contemplated needing a teacher and how to check them and judge them and how to devote oneself.
- We've looked very briefly at the thought of this perfect human rebirth and how to be energized not to waste it.
- We then thought about therefore, on from this, how it could finish at any moment, so thinking about death and impermanence.
- We looked at the death process itself.
- And we looked at the concept of given that I could die at any moment and given that I've got countless karmic imprints, the potential for future rebirth, and we looked particularly there at suffering of being born as, say, as an animal, as one of the lower realms, so as to get a strong sense that, thank you very much, I do not want that.

All these thoughts have sown seeds,  
 so may they ripen as quickly as  
 possible in the development of my  
 own amazing potential so I really can  
 be of benefit to all suffering mother  
 sentient beings.

Ge-wa-di nyur-du-dag  
 La-ma sang-gyā drub-gyur-nä  
 Dro-wa chig-kyang ma-lü-pa  
 De-yi sa-la gö-par-shog

Jang-chhub sem-chhog rin-po-che  
 Ma-kye pa -nam kye-gyur-chig  
 Kye-wa nyam-pa me-pa-yang  
 Gong-nä gong-du pel-war-shog

## **BLESSING AND OFFERING OUR LUNCH**

One last little thing is just the way to think about our food. We'll call it a blessing, whatever you like. But instead the usual way we think about it; we see it there, we think, "Oh I like that, I don't like this" and it's just attachment and we just shove it in, politely of

course, but just wanting it. It's for ourselves.

Here we think of it differently. We first imagine that there is just oceans of food there, not just a little tiny bowl, think about the loaves and fishes, we imagine it's just multiplied to vast oceans of food, and then we just think, just imagine, using your creative imagination, all beings of the universe, the whole of the universe full, all the buddhas, all the holy beings, all the suffering sentient beings, trillions of them all of them, all of them experiencing the joy of receiving this food. We're so happy to offer it to them, imagine this.

La-ma sang-gyä la-ma-chhö  
De-zhin la-ma ge-dün-te  
Kün-gyi je-po la-ma-te  
La-ma nam-la chhö-par-bül

Then, as Lama Zopa Rinpoche says, having blessed the food and offered it like this, the bigger your stomach, the better! Please enjoy.

## DISCUSSION GROUPS

listen, after lunch, get into groups of like four people. Just grab three other people, sit anywhere you want, go where you would like and for an hour take any one of these pieces of information that you've heard so far. We've touched on about seven topics. Don't discuss karma yet because we haven't talked about it. But discuss the one of the lower realms, the possibility of this, discuss, maybe beginningless mind is really good, the mind being nonphysical and no creator. Take that one and just discuss and just jump in there and all talk and all bring up something and come to some conclusions and then bring any questions.

Are you all hearing me over there? It's really useful. You don't have to be all serious; you can talk about the weather and the gossip, as you want. But make even lunchtime useful and talk about this stuff. Make it fun, I don't care, but use the time as much as possible. This is really making the most

of your time. And then we can talk more when I see you back.

I always remember what my philosophy teacher, Geshe Tekchog, told us: twenty-five percent of what we get from the teachings comes from listening; seventy-five percent comes from discussion – they call it debate in the monasteries – thinking about it all, and meditating on it.

Thank you very much, everybody!



## **10. THE SOLUTION: RELY UPON BUDDHA, DHARMA, AND SANGHA LOWER SCOPE/JUNIOR SCHOOL**

### **SO NOW, WHOM CAN I TURN TO?**

And that brings us to the next thing to contemplate. “Oh my goodness! Whom can I turn to?” Whom can I turn to give me the methods to avoid this type of intense suffering? Which I do not want, thank you.

I mean, we don’t think like this at all. But we’re tracking this very carefully step by step. Organically, each point leads to the next, leads to the next. The next point here would be to contemplate what is simply called Refuge. Refuge in what? Go for refuge they say.

Well, the term also used is reliance, you rely upon. Let’s say someone tells you that smoking cigarettes can cause you to get cancer. I mean, at my most excessive I would smoke eighty a day –

Marlboros! Totally attached to cigarettes. I couldn't care less about lung cancer. Because I was so wanting my cigarettes, so totally in the moment wanting that quick fix.

It's conceivable, and this is what happens to quite a few of us, that you then hear about the suffering the cigarettes cause and so you're prepared to look at pictures of the ruined lungs, and if you're really skillful and you're brave enough, you'll say, "Oh my God, I don't want that." Won't you? You could say, okay you're using fear tactics. But when you're so attached to something, so caught up in something, we need to use fear tactics to help our minds get a bit of common sense.

First, let's say, if you've never heard of cancer, you'd think, "Oh don't be ridiculous, cigarettes cause cancer? Oh come on." Then they show all the evidence, they show the movie, they show the cancerous lungs and the sickness and you think, "Oh my god, I don't want that."

Then you think, "Well, whom can I turn to? Where's the doctor who can

give me the antidote to this?” You understand the point here, the thinking. This is the thinking here in relation to the suffering of certain rebirths, as we’ve discussed.

The next step is whom are we going to turn to to give me some methods to show me how to prevent this type of gross suffering. We’re not even discussing compassion yet here. We’re not even discussing attachment. We’re discussing what we do with our body, our behavior. This is why it’s called Junior School.

Here, we’re turning to the Buddha, the Buddha is our doctor.

## **TAKE REFUGE IN THE THREE JEWELS**

What’s a buddha? Here we’re talking in particular about Mr. Shakymuni Buddha, the person two and a half thousand years ago who brought what’s called “Buddhism” to this world at this particular time. In Buddha’s terms he’s not the first Buddha and he won’t be the last; he’s known as one of the founding buddhas.

What we're taking refuge in, what we rely upon, is the **Buddha**; we think about him: who he is, his qualities, his capacity. Then we look at his teachings, because if he's a decent person he's giving reasonable teachings. We look at his methods, his teachings, the **Dharma**; they use the Sanskrit word, Dharma, which is referring to the spiritual teachings. And that's the stuff we actually put into practice. And we also rely on the spiritual community, the **Sangha**.

Just very briefly on refuge. They talk about ultimate Buddha, relative Buddha; ultimate Dharma or absolute Dharma, relative Dharma; absolute Sangha, relative Sangha.

## **ABSOLUTE BUDDHA AND RELATIVE BUDDHA**

Actual "buddha" is when you have become fully developed. An enlightened mind has three essential qualities: infinite wisdom, infinite compassion, infinite power. This enlightened mind is free of all the

pollution and the goodness is developed to perfection.

A buddha has three essential defining characteristics.

**Infinite wisdom** The fully developed person, fully developed in wisdom, has achieved omniscience – literally. This is the natural potential of all minds, Buddha says. As discussed, the result of removing all delusions from the mind and developing virtue and wisdom to perfection is omniscience: the effortless capacity to see how things exist, without mistake. This implies the entire approach of Buddhist practice.

This omniscient mind pervades space, because finally how can something non-material be confined by space or time or matter? It cannot be. Just think about it conceptually. Necessarily when you're fully developed, your buddha consciousness, your enlightened consciousness, your mind, which is the continuity of this very mind now, stuck in this body, when it's fully enlightened it necessarily is knowing wherever there

are things to be known. Meaning it is pervading the universe. It can't be confined. It is everywhere. The mind of a buddha, the awareness, unpolluted, seeing things as they are.

**Infinite compassion and the wish to benefit others** Then there's the compassion wing. When that's fully developed, you have infinite empathy with all living beings. The misconception of a separate self has been eradicated. Not a fraction of distinction, not a fraction of discrimination; infinite compassion, love, affection for every being, equally. Which is, again, pretty insane. We find it hard to love even one person well!

This is cultivated, of course, from countless lives of practicing and perfecting love and compassion, affection for others. Love is "may you be happy"; love is just delight and affection for others and a wish they be happy. Compassion is empathy with their suffering that developed to an amazing degree of a sense of responsibility that it's my job to make others happy, it's my job to take away

their suffering. And we will discuss this in university, the great scope. Fully developed in this, beyond which you can't be developed further. Infinite empathy, love, compassion for every living being equally. Your mind will be full of this.

### **Infinite power to benefit others**

But there's another quality, too: infinite power: the effortless ability to do whatever needs to be done to benefit all living beings – based on compassion and wisdom – including manifesting in countless bodies throughout countless universes for countless eons to benefit countless sentient beings.

This all-knowing, all-compassionate, all-powerful unmanifest consciousness pervades all existence, just naturally.

Sounds like God, right? But not the creator part – that's massively different. And it's the natural potential of all minds.

**Relative Buddha** Now as far as being useful to sentient beings is concerned, absolute buddha is useless to us because we're not subtle enough to experience that mind. We can't

communicate with that mind. Out of great kindness and compassion, the Buddha manifests in a form, in forms, for the benefit of others. That's the relative buddha.

Here, we're talking about the buddha of our time, Shakyamuni Buddha, a person we can see, we can hear. That's the relative Buddha. The form that the buddha consciousness takes.

## **ABSOLUTE DHARMA AND RELATIVE DHARMA**

Then you've got the **absolute Dharma**. That is the actual realizations, the actual knowledge or realizations in the mind of a buddha and other so-called superior beings. From the moment you first realize emptiness, from the moment you first have a non-conceptual realization of emptiness, all the way on up to a buddha: they are superior beings. The knowledge or experiences of the Dharma within their minds, their realizations, that is the absolute Dharma, the actual Dharma.



**Relative Dharma** But again, we can't access that knowledge. We're not subtle enough. Out of kindness these holy beings express their realizations in words, which then get written down: that's called books. How kind they are. It's like Bach: the music's inside him, isn't it? It's his own realizations of all the music. Well, you know he can sit there smiling at you, but you'll never know how to become your own Bach unless he expresses his music in sounds and writes it all down in the musical language. That's the relative Dharma, the words in the books, the recordings, etc.

That's our real Refuge, the thing we need most. You could have twenty-two Buddhas in front of you, smiling at you. No use. But they give you words, that's the medicine. The Dharma is the real thing you rely upon, it's the medicine, that's what you take. You can go to the doctor but until you take the medicine nothing changes.

## ABSOLUTE SANGHA AND RELATIVE SANGHA

Then you've got the absolute and relative Sangha. The absolute Sangha, the spiritual community, are simply those *arya* beings, those superior beings. But you won't recognize them, it could be the homeless person down on the corner on Ocean Street. You see this smelly old homeless person, you don't know if it's an *arya* being; you can't tell because we're not clairvoyant.

**Relative Sangha** The relative sangha is monks and nuns, those who are living in the fullness of the vows expressed in the Vinaya. The existence of the sangha is crucial. Buddha would say that the presence in one place of four fully ordained people is the criterion for the presence of the Dharma, the living Dharma, in one place. The ordained monks and nuns represent the living Dharma. That's the relative sangha.

Broadly speaking we can say here is our spiritual community, ordained or not. But in order for the Dharma to be alive, it's dependent upon the presence

of four fully ordained monks and nuns. This is why in the Asian tradition, which is where Buddhism came from, there's a great appreciation for the sangha.

In fact there's a story in Tibet about some wicked king destroying the Dharma in the country – I don't know when. And there were only a few monks left and there weren't enough to hold further ordinations. They were so desperate to keep the Dharma alive in Tibet by keeping up the number of sangha in Tibet that they managed to get a Chinese monk to snuck over the border, thus making up the quota and hold ordinations. And out of respect – they must have worn blue – we have this blue thing on here on our donka, the shirt Tibetan monks and nuns wear. Out of respect, to honor that Chinese monk.

That's Buddha, Dharma, Sangha.

## **FORMALLY TAKING REFUGE**

A person can formalize their commitment to being a Buddhist in front of somebody, a teacher, a very short little ceremony. On the basis of having checked that the Buddha is a valid source, having checked the teachings carefully and therefore having confidence in their validity to the degree that we're capable, and on the basis of clearly knowing that we're sick of suffering and want methods to stop creating the causes for it, we then decide "I'm formally a Buddhist." You take refuge, you commit yourself.

Then at the same time, or later, you commit yourself to a series of vows. Buddha loves his vows! We will discuss this later, when we talk about karma.

This is very briefly what refuge is about.

## **11. LIVE ACCORDING TO THE NATURAL LAW OF KARMA LOWER SCOPE/JUNIOR SCHOOL**

Now we've decided we're going to rely upon the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha by taking their medicine, their advice, in order to stop future suffering. What's the medicine? Simple. Stop creating the causes of future suffering by giving up the causes. Not complicated.

Here, for the Buddha, we get to the crux of his view about suffering and its causes. All the thinking up to now – perfect human rebirth, impermanence and death, suffering of the lower realms, refuge, etc., etc. – is priming us, logically leading us, step by step, internally, logically, leading us to now want to practice. Okay, I'm relying upon the Buddha, I've seen he's a valid guy, I want to do what he says. What does he say? He says, "Honey, abide by the laws of karma."

## WHAT'S KARMA?

“Karma” means “action,” in Sanskrit. Buddha is saying everything we do, say, and think, every microsecond of what we do, say, and think is a karma, an action, which leaves a seed in our consciousness, our mind, which necessarily, being a seed, ripens in the future as our experiences.

In this sense, quite literally, we can say from moment to moment we are sowing the seeds of our future experiences and from moment to moment we are experiencing the fruit of our past seeds. We are the creators of ourselves, Buddha says. His Holiness says you could say that karma is “self-creation.” No one did us to us. The more you take the Buddha’s view of the mind, consciousness, our own, no creator, karma, the more you see what Buddha’s saying: that we are the creators of ourselves. No one made us – that’s a bizarre concept for Buddha, the ultimate in the victim mentality; that we’re the handiwork of someone else. Which is what we actually think!

## A NATURAL LAW

There are many ways of talking about karma. It's a law. As I said about Mr. Newton and the apple, the gravity thing, he didn't invent gravity. We know perfectly well that he didn't create gravity, he didn't make it up; he didn't have it revealed to him in a dream; he didn't have a vision of it. This is what we think about spiritual stuff. It's so bizarre. Someone has a vision and they go out and say, "This is the truth." Excuse me! We'd check out Mr. Newton and Mr. Einstein if they said this. We know they've done a lot of work in observing things and they've come up with some conclusions and have articulated it. And then it's up to us to go prove it's true. What Buddha says is that karma, cause and effect, is a natural law, like gravity.

**If you sow the seed, you'll get the fruit** One of the things about this law is that you sow a seed, you get the fruit. And you know what?

**If there's the fruit you must have sown the seed.** Sounds so simple. Quite powerful when it comes

to experiences. Because that's not how we think. And also we can see logically using the analogy of seeds, **seeds multiply**.

**One small seed can bring many fruits** These are some simple principles about karma. The energy expands.

## **NEGATIVE THOUGHTS AND SUFFERING, POSITIVE THOUGHTS AND HAPPINESS**

Another fundamental law of karma – and again this is something absolutely natural and organic, this is not a moralistic statement, and because we're used to thinking about it this way, it's hard to hear it, what Buddha is saying. As I said before, Buddha is saying there's this really natural relationship within me and my life and my mind between my negative imprints, my negative tendencies and my own suffering. There's just this natural relationship. It's not punishment, it's not unfair, it's just how it is.



And there's a very natural relationship between positive seeds, positive imprints, positive states of mind, positive actions and my happiness. In fact, Buddha says, negative actions ripen as suffering, positive actions ripen as happiness. Not punishment and reward, it's just how it is, Buddha says, from his observation.

## **THE FOUR WAYS THAT KARMA RIPENS**

One way to talk about karma is to present the four ways that our karmic actions from the past ripen in the present, or, indeed, the four ways that our present actions ripen in the future. Because there's nothing much we can do about the ones that are ripening now, except understand them as a basis for protecting us for the future. You learn from the weeds in your garden now.

### **1. THE FULLY RIPENED RESULT**

The main way that karma ripens is the realm of existence that you get born into. We discussed the process of the

sentient beings who led, who followed their delusions, followed the killing, followed the badmouthing, and then dies with a lot of fear, the anger rises strongly at death, that killing karma ripens and it throws their consciousness on autopilot into a lion mummy's womb. The fully ripened result is the first way that karma ripens, it's the type of rebirth we get.

In our case, we can deduce that a very powerful virtuous karmic seed – specifically, non-killing karma – ripened at the time of our past death, nourished most likely by lots of very powerful aspirations, which is all they mean in Buddhism by a prayer, strong aspirations to get a good life, strong aspirations to have reasonable qualities and a reasonable future perfect human rebirth so we can continue to practice, and practiced no doubt in the context of keeping vows of morality. The very powerful virtuous karmic seed, triggered at the time of our past death, drove us to our present mother's womb. Even just getting an ordinary human rebirth is the fruit of non-

killing. The perfect human rebirth component is all the other good qualities and conditions that we have in this life.

Now, Mother Teresa and Hitler had human bodies, didn't they? They're both human with noses and eyes and legs, and they speak and have intelligence and so on. But that's about where the similarities end isn't it? If they both sat in chairs all of their lives and didn't open their mouths and didn't act, you'd see okay, one has a funny mustache and the other one's the nice skinny old lady, but you wouldn't see much difference between them, right? It's when they speak and act that you can start to see the other ways that their karma has ripened. First way that karma ripens is just in the form you get born into. In the case here we're talking human birth. The karma was an action of non-killing.

## **2. ACTIONS SIMILAR TO THE CAUSE**

Then the second way that karma ripens is in terms of the personality and

tendencies that we have. This is called actions similar to the cause. Actions, meaning karma, “similar to the cause”: hear the words. If you look into your mind and you see you have a tendency to be angry, well that is an action, a karma, similar to the cause. Which is what? This moment of anger is similar to the cause, which is previous anger. In other words this is a way of describing your tendencies. Very simple.

Look into your mind and you see you’re a bunch of tendencies, a bunch of habits: generous, kind, loving, mean, fearful, depressed, angry, want to kill, want to lie, want to play football, want to play music – you name it, we’re a bunch of tendencies. Now this is what we call our personality isn’t it? Of course in the West, we think mummy made it this way or God gave us this personality.

Well, Buddha says, “You made you, sorry, you made you. Your mummy didn’t make you, your daddy didn’t make you.” For sure, she and Daddy

gave us a body, but they didn't give us our mind, our tendencies.

The commonest thing we say is, "I'm like this because my daddy's like this, I'm like this because my mummy's like this." Buddha would say, "Not true." You can be similar but the reason you're similar is because you each have created similar causes in the past and then you come together to be parent and child. Then of course her acting in that way brings up those tendencies in you. But if you didn't have a tendency to be angry, you can have an angry mummy until the cows come home, it won't make you angry. Anger has to be a tendency in you in order for you to be responding to someone else's anger. In this sense, quite literally Buddha is saying our mothers and fathers don't create us. Clearly they play a major role. There's no doubt about that. They're not the main one, that's the point, and we will go into this in more detail in high school.

The entirety of our personality, in other words, is a bunch of habits that we have brought with us from having

practiced them in the past. It's something very reasonable. If you play piano well, you're not surprised that you're good at it because you know you've practiced it for ten years. When I was a little girl, if I were brought up as a Buddhist I wouldn't be surprised by my tendency to be angry because I'd know I must have practiced it really well.

Another friend of mine, I always quote this story. We live around children and we can see that they stomp on the snails and harm the creatures, "Oh well, they're just kids. They've got to be taught otherwise." Nonsense! A friend of mine with a three-year-old son, she was taking the lice out of his head and he was in tears. "Mummy, Mummy, leave them alone, don't hurt them, it's their home." He was begging his mother to leave the lice alone and not harm them. She didn't teach him this. My mother didn't teach me anger. They were tendencies in our minds. This poor little Mr. BTK man, this awful man who did these awful things. What's his name?

*Student* Carl Rader. [Dennis Rader is the serial killer who called himself BTK – Bind, Torture, Kill – who tortured and killed many people in Wichita, Kansas from the 1970s onwards].

*Ven. Robina* That gentleman, you know who I'm talking about. Mr. BTK, that poor man. The Buddha said he's not some guy who is innately evil and should go to hell forever, which is what everybody thinks. He has got these incredible, appalling tendencies in his poor little mind since his conception. Now where did he get these? You check the animal realm. You check those animal shows that we think are so fascinating, "Oh this is nature." And then you see it from this point of view, from the Buddha's point of view, not being mean about them, having compassion, you look at how they torture each other. You look at how monstrous all those creatures are to each other. I mean it's a nightmare. It is torture all the time, ripping each other up into pieces, alive. Unbelievable suffering. We never think of it this way. But that's what it is. And

they're habits, tendencies, from having done it before.

This Mr. BTK obviously brought those tendencies with him very vividly into this life such that, when he's a little boy even he's torturing and harming. Of course he has to hide it, the world doesn't approve. He has ego, he wants to be loved by everybody, so doesn't want to go around shouting he tortures and kills people. It's a powerful tendency in his mind. Just like Mother Teresa's tendencies are powerful tendencies in her mind from her past practice of positive things.

In this sense we are literally the creators of ourselves, Buddha says. We bring with us a few of our tendencies, some positive, some negative. We're fortunate, aren't we, that ours are pretty minor negative ones. But even then we look into our minds and we feel so ashamed of so many strange things that pop up in our minds, people's weird fantasies and things. We're scared to talk about them. We don't know where they come from. "This is me," we think. They're a bunch



of tendencies from the past, whatever they might be.

### **3. EXPERIENCES SIMILAR TO THE CAUSE**

The third way our karma ripens is called the experiences similar to the cause and this is all the stuff that happens to you, that people do to you. How people see you, how they treat you, they kill you, they lie to you, they steal from you, they love you, they give you money, they take care of you, they protect you, they save you, they harm you, whatever it might be.

There's not a single experience any sentient being has that isn't the fruit of their own past karma. This is a fundamental law according to Buddha. And this is not how we think!

### **4. ENVIRONMENTAL KARMA**

The fourth one is environmental karma. Even the way we experience our external environment, not even meaning the trees; whatever it is, this room, we collectively are experiencing probably fairly reasonable harmonious

karma, non-harming karma. The walls aren't dripping with mold, the temperature is not so outrageous, the sound is relatively quiet, so it's quite peaceful environmentally. This is the collective result of this particular group of our own past actions of morality.

## **NOTHING IS RANDOM**

Now if we were sitting in a house full of noise, stinky smelling stuff, ugly stones and rocks, smashed up things, violence, that's the fruit of negative karma.

Nothing is accidental, nothing is random, according to Buddha. It can't be. In just the same way that we understand this when it comes to what we call science. Gardens, we know perfectly well, every single tiny, weird thing growing in that mass of green stuff in that garden has a cause. There's a logic to it, there's a science to it, there's a law to it. It's not just random.

Just because we don't know what the cause is, we can't just say, "Ah, well, there's no cause, it's just the way gardens are." We've got a handle on cause and effect when it comes to

science. We're useless when it comes to internal, when it comes to cause and effect from Buddha's point of view.

So: the way the environment impacts upon you is a result of your past actions. The way other people see you and treat you is a result of your past actions. Your own tendencies and habits are the result of your past actions. And the very form you have is the result of your past actions. You're the creator. Not in the magic wand sense as we think about a creator or a magician. Not like that. In an evolutionary sense.

We might say Mr. Smith of Smith's Microphones that creates the microphone, but we know it's not just some magical thing. It's process of cause and effect, you take this, and put this, and process this and it goes to this, intricate putting together of many causes and conditions is what produces the microphone. Well the intricate coming together of many causes and conditions is what produces Robina. She's not some invention of somebody. Buddha says that is superstition

## **12. ENTRY-LEVEL PRACTICE: THE TEN DON'TS LOWER SCOPE/JUNIOR SCHOOL**

Now, what is a negative action? Besides the five vows that you might take when you take refuge (we talk about these later), there's a simple packaging of the ten nonvirtuous actions – the ten don'ts – Buddha would recommend we avoid doing. This is our most urgent level of practice, Lama Zopa Rinpoche says. And why? Because harming others brings harm to ourselves.

We're not discussing compassion yet, this is coming later; we're not even beginning to discuss compassion. The reason at this stage is that we're totally caught up in our own happiness. Don't underestimate that. We get so holy: "Oh that doesn't sound very spiritual, I'm supposed to benefit other people blah, blah." Buddha says you can't begin to benefit others until you can benefit yourself, and you can't begin to benefit yourself until you know

why you're suffering and what causes you happiness. This is what we're very occupied with here, in the wisdom wing.

He's recommending there are ten things at this level of practice, the basic level, already profound, there are ten things we should attempt to avoid doing, getting involved in, to protect ourselves from future suffering. There are some of the **body**, some of the **speech** and some of the **mind**.

The mind is the bottom line when we go to high school and get into the second scope, we're really beginning, like I said, to become our own therapist, to begin to look deeply into the mind because there, right there, are the sources of the suffering and the sources of happiness. We become deeply familiar with our mind.

Here we're not deeply going into the mind but we're looking at the general laws of karma and learning to avoid misusing our body and speech and indeed beginning to protect our mind to some extent.

## **ZIP YOUR LIP AND KEEP YOUR HANDS TO YOURSELF**

But the very first level of practice here is mainly zip your lip and keep your hands to yourself. It's to do with the body and the speech. The great Kadampa masters and all the students in the generations after Atisha in the eleventh century in Tibet, they have this lovely saying: "When you're with others, watch your behavior" – just like our grandmas used to tell us. "And when you're on your own, watch your mind." Because the very first level of practice – and here in the junior school we're talking this level of practice, very first level – is you've got to control your body and speech.

Look at this world. It's body and speech that create the problems, isn't it? We can deduce, and we will discuss this, that the mind is the source but we can see the actual doers of the problems are the body and the speech. And you can imagine that if this world could have this understanding, that there are implications to oneself of one's own actions, thus control our

body and speech, what a blissful world we would live in. Can you imagine? Never a harmful word, never a harmful action. What an amazing paradise we would live in. Can you imagine? And this is the first level of practice. Oh my goodness.

Now again if the real job of the wisdom wing is in high school in the second scope when we become our own therapist, to deeply learn about our own mind – and we're going to talk about that – how can I possibly begin to become familiar with my anger if I can't control the crazy speech? I mean, it's impossible, isn't it? If you can't control your body and speech, there's no way you have any skill to observe what's behind it. Because they are such a loud noise, the body and speech are the grossest level of our being. If that's totally berserk, forget about seeing your own mind. Impossible. In order to even begin to do some meditation to start looking into your own mind, to become your own therapist, you've got to control your body and speech. If you have berserk body and speech you can't

even sit for more than thirty seconds, right? You go berserk, you go even more berserk.

The first level of practice is just control your body and speech. This much alone, amazing. I can't describe how incredible. It's for your benefit but, hey, look at the lucky rats and roaches: they get a life if you stop killing. It benefits them. They're sort of the indirect beneficiaries of the practice of the wisdom wing, you're the direct beneficiary. And that's perfect. But it benefits others if you don't lie, others benefit. If you don't kill, others benefit.

The main purpose here is because this will protect you from future suffering. And we're trying to get in touch here with our own suffering, with what causes it. We don't want the future suffering right, remember we talked. To protect ourselves, like those cigarettes, once you establish the result of smoking cigarettes, you'll stop smoking cigarettes. Maybe you haven't given up your attachment to cigarettes yet, which is in your mind. No worries. First stop putting the smoke inside.



## THREE NEGATIVE ACTIONS OF THE BODY

**1. Don't kill** any sentient being. Best.

**2. Don't steal**, or, as the Tibetans say, don't take the ungiven. So clear.

**3. Don't jump on the wrong partner – sexual misconduct**, and that usually means don't take someone else's partner and don't cheat on your own. And His Holiness says, don't rape.

## FOUR NEGATIVE ACTIONS OF THE SPEECH

**4. Don't lie.**

**5. Don't engage in idle talk** – don't go just blah, blah, a load of rubbish, with no concern of whether the person wants to hear it; don't just rabbit on about nothing. We spend most of our lives doing this.

**6. Don't abuse people.** Don't use harsh language.

**7. Don't badmouth behind their backs**, making trouble, making divisions between people, **divisive talk**.

We can see we mightn't run around doing too much harm with our bodies

but we sure use our mouths. We do a lot of harm with our mouths. Don't you think? Really protect your mouth.

Just refraining from these actions of body and speech alone, already you'd be an incredible person. You wouldn't harm others, you'd be subdued, you'd be disciplined, you'd be content in yourself.

Remember, at this stage of practice, what drives our wish to not harm others is that we do not want future suffering. That's crucial.

But not only are we the beneficiaries of non-harming. As Rinopche says, all the rats and roaches will have a party because we leave them in peace!

### **THREE NEGATIVE ACTIONS OF THE MIND**

The mind, it is the beginning of working on your mind; really, it's just a way of presenting avoiding what they call the three root delusions: ignorance, attachment and aversion. The three root delusions and we're gonna talk about this in more detail in high school.

**8. Craving** Here the commitment is to not have strong craving, to refrain from strong craving, that really unhappy, obsessive hunger, craving for something else, for something, either somebody else's or something. It's just really painful. It's an exercise of attachment that is not helpful to us.

**9. Ill-will** We need to refrain from this heavy level of anger; ill-will is wanting to harm others in the mind on the basis of anger. This one's so heavy. You just can't let go of the anger and you even want the person to suffer. That's not even saying to dealing with anger, just to refrain from ill-will.

**10. Wrong views** And the third one is a very gross level of ignorance. This very superstitious, narrow-mind, like an eye for an eye, a really ignorant mind that's functioning very strongly in the world. So many ways. Really deep kind of ignorance, of understanding of things. Just backing away from these a little bit.

Simply abiding by these ten don'ts, Buddha would say, is a perfect way to

live your life. Without even going into it much more deeply, if you just lived your life this way: blissful. You'll be more blissful, you'll be more relaxed, you'll be more calm, and you're sowing all the most positive seeds in your mind that will ripen in the future as happiness so you can keep on bopping on your spiritual path. Just this, this is the first level of practice. And you'll leave sentient beings in peace!

### **13. WHAT DEFINES AN ACTION AS NEGATIVE? LOWER SCOPE/JUNIOR SCHOOL**

#### **WHAT IS A SIN FOR CHRISTIANS?**

Let's go a bit further into this now, analyzing just why a negative action even is negative. If I'm a Christian, by definition, a sin is doing what God said not to do. I'm not criticizing; that's the Christian view. If you have faith in a creator, it fits. It's reasonable. Obeying God's law.

#### **WHAT IS A NEGATIVE ACTION FOR THE BUDDHA?**

But it's not the Buddha's view. Broadly speaking, Buddha would say, "Don't harm others" – the same as any reasonable ethical person. And the reason is, "They don't want to be harmed." Check yourself, it's very obvious. In other words, a negative action at this level of practice is one

that harms another. But this is not the reason that Buddha exhorts us not to do it. This is a crucial difference. It's got nothing to do with Buddha – it's a natural law. He's not a creator, he's not the boss. He's merely an advisor. He's seen from his observation that sentient beings don't like being harmed.

But, crucially, at this level of practice he's exhorting us not to harm others because it brings consequences to ourselves. Doing negative actions brings us our future suffering.

Of course, harming another is not the only negative action; it's the heaviest. Doing any action motivated by a delusion is a negative action insofar as you create negative karma, which results in suffering for yourself. But here we're talking about the heaviest ones: the ones that harm others.

## **THE FOUR CONDITIONS IN PLACE FOR A NEGATIVE ACTION TO BRING THE FULLY RIPENED RESULT**

All right. Let's talk a little bit more then about the mechanics of how we do actions, how we create karma. "Create" is a difficult word because we put magical meanings onto it. What's this process of sowing karmic seeds? How does it work? There's many ways of talking about this but I find this a quite useful way.

In order for any action we do, let's say an action of killing that ant, I always use that example, let's say there's an ant on my kitchen sink, in order for the action of killing that ant to leave a seed in my mind that brings the fully ripened result of future rebirths, in this case, suffering rebirth and indeed many as a result of that, because remember one seed brings many fruits, karma expands; in order for that action to bring a fully ripened result, that is to say for it to ripen at the time of my death and to throw me into a lower realm, there need to be four

conditions in place when I do the action. It's more detailed than this, but here's a rough idea:

**1. The object** There has to be the object, in this case a living ant.

**2. The mind involved in the action** There are two parts: The first is the mind engaging in the decision to kill: **intention**: actually it is synonymous with the word "karma": mental action.

Action, intention. Of course, we use our body and speech to carry out that intention, don't we? The first one that needs to be in place is the intention to do it.

The second part is the **motivation**: the key thing, what propels us to actually do it.

But we experience these as virtually the same thought; they come so quickly, we don't notice.

## **MOTIVATION: THE REASON BEHIND THE INTENTION**

Intention to kill, for example, and the motivation that compels it, so utterly come together that we don't analyze it,



as I said. But if we do break it down we will see very obviously that if I have an intention to kill an ant, there must be a reason I'm going to kill the ant. And the obvious reason mostly is what? "How dare that ant be on my kitchen sink." What's that state of mind? That is called aversion, which is the state of mind that is, when it's more volatile, called anger.

Now you wouldn't think you're being angry with the ant but that's basically what it is. Aversion is the direct opposite of attachment. Attachment is the craving to get what I want. We're going to go into this in high school. Aversion is the direct opposite. "How dare that ant be on my kitchen sink." Aversion is the response, in fact, when attachment doesn't get what it wants. And that's aversion. Expressed strongly, it's anger. Okay, I mightn't smash the little ant with fury and rage, but there's certainly aversion there, meaning dislike of that ant, and it's based on attachment. "How dare it be on my kitchen sink, disturbing my peace." That's aversion.

Now that's a pretty intense state of mind. It's far more powerful than attachment. Attachment is the source, but aversion, and therefore anger, is the most violent, therefore the most harmful, therefore the deepest negative karma. Just naturally. The motivation, the reason I want to kill the ant, the reason I intend to, is because of aversion. It's obvious.

**Motivation is most important.**

The motivation is the most important one. The motivation determines, in fact, the actual quality of the action and determines the karmic result, the quality of the karmic result.

**3. The action** Then there has to be the action, in this case killing the ant.

**4. The result** And then there has to be the result, in this case the death of the ant. Roughly speaking. Actually they say the death has to occur, for it to be a fully ripened result it has to occur before you die; technically.

We've now sown a negative seed in our mind that, unless we purify it, will multiply and then manifest as many suffering rebirths.

There are other factors involved, but I'm keeping it simple here.

Anyway, let's look further into karma and how it works.

## **WHAT'S INVOLVED IN DOING NEGATIVE – OR POSITIVE – ACTIONS**

But let's look into it more intricately. It's clear that killing is harmful; it's very obvious, no being likes to get killed, no being likes to be lied to, no being likes to be stolen from. This is fairly evident.

But that is not enough in order to determine whether the action you did leaves a negative imprint in your mind. This is a really crucial point. It's extremely important. In general, Buddha would exhort us all don't kill, don't harm, don't badmouth, don't lie, don't steal, don't this, don't that. And at this first level of practice there's no wriggle room: simply don't kill, not lie, etc. etc. Because you don't want to pollute your own mind with these habits. That's clear.

But if you want to get more deeply into really understanding the mechanics of it – and I think it's extremely important, we must do that, to see why he says it – we can look into these things and see what it is that makes something negative. We're going to do this more intricately when we look at the mind in high school coming after karma.

### **NO INTENTION: NO KARMA**

Let's take an example of Paula. Let's say Paula has an ant on her kitchen sink but let's say she has no idea it's there. She's chatting to her little daughter and being kind and giving her daughter her dinner and she mistakenly kills an ant. She has no intention to kill, right? Therefore no motivation to kill. But the object is there, she does an action, and the ant dies. But there's no intention. You could argue she creates virtually no karma, good or bad. You see my point here? It's very obvious. Karma is intention and motivation and then

followed through with the body and speech.

Whereas my ant: I intend, I see it, I have aversion, “Who do you think you are! Kill!” Now as far as the ants are concerned, they couldn’t care less whether you know or don’t know. They’re both dead, right? From the point of view of objectively looking, two ants are dead; but from the point of view of the doer, very different karma created. And it makes sense from this point of view. It’s very interesting isn’t it? Paula creates virtually no karma because your mind didn’t engage in it.

*Student* The being of the ant, depending on the degree of sentience, it would register the difference.

*Ven. Robina* No and that’s not the issue here. I doubt very, very, very much. Let’s leave this for a minute. No questions for a sec, let me finish the little picture then we can talk about it.

Okay, in general the point I’m trying to express here most of all is how we as individuals create our karmic actions and this is what we really need to be aware of in order to protect ourselves.

This is the main issue here. We're not discussing the ant here. That's okay, your point is fine, but the issue here is the karma that we create and how we determine what karma we do create and how we begin to protect ourselves.

## **KILLING WITH A GOOD MOTIVATION**

Another scenario could be Jennifer's got an ant on her kitchen sink and this little ant has got its legs mangled because she has somehow hurt it by accident. And there she is reaching out with compassion: "Oh this poor little ant, I can't believe it, I've hurt this little ant, look at it, suffering." Her little heart is opening up with compassion. Then she thinks, like a lot of us do: "Oh I must kill it and stop its suffering."

then she has an **intention** to kill, right? There's an **object** there, the ant, she does the **action** and the ant **dies**. But look at her motivation. Again a third ant is dead, it doesn't care, it knows no difference. Three ants, three dead ants. From an observer's point of

view, three murders over there: Paula, Jennifer and Robina.

But from the point of view of each of our minds: one had no motivation and no intention, one had a pure motivation and one had a lousy motivation therefore, karmically each of our actions leaves a different type of seed in the mind and will ripen in different ways.

Karma is not punishment, is not reward, it's an organic, natural law. If there's complete un-knowledge in your mind you can almost say you create no karma. If there's compassion in your mind you could say you create some good karma. And aversion is mine, I create bad karma. Meaning: our intention and motivation are what leaves seeds in our mind. We are the doers of that thing.

Again, in general we can assert, Buddha would say, don't kill, that killing is labeled a negative action. That's a correct statement. But you can see when it comes to the person who kills, you don't know, mind your own business, back off and don't judge. But

when it comes to yourself, you can learn to see deeply. This is extremely important.

## **COMPASSION IS NOT ENOUGH**

An interesting issue with Jennifer's scenario, from Jennifer's point of view, she even probably created some good karma because her compassion was so strong and her wish to save this ant from suffering was so strong. But, as His Holiness says, "Compassion is not enough" – or Lama Zopa Rinpoche says, "Meaning well, is not enough." We need wisdom.

## **WE NEED WISDOM**

What does that mean? Well in this case, that means you have to have the wisdom. . . Okay, let me use an example. Normal ordinary life, we know perfectly well if there's some kind of action we're going to take, we need to know the consequences of it, don't we? Before we take the action we need to know the consequences. We need to be well informed.



Let's say you go up in the mountains of Nepal, a lot of people have got cataracts up there. And you go: "Oh my goodness, these people with cataracts, I can't believe it, I've got so much compassion, I wish I could help them." Right? Now then you rush off with your scalpel, starting to cut their cataracts out – but you didn't check that you're not a surgeon yet.

Now we would never do that, would we? We are not so stupid that we wouldn't realize, we're not capable of helping. Our heart is breaking, we'd like to help but you're not informed. You haven't got the wisdom to know how. They'll thank you for leaving them with their cataracts. We would never do that. We understand that really well, don't we?

Now when it comes to killing an ant, because we're not used to thinking that an ant has got a continuity of consciousness, and we're not used to thinking of ants with karmic imprints in their minds, and we're not used to thinking that its future life is determined by what is arising in its

mind at the time of death. We're not used to thinking this way, but this is the Buddha's view. An ant is just like us. If it dies with a freaked out mind then we can fairly much deduce that if it's already got its little legs mangled, its poor little mind is freaking out and then Jennifer comes along and kills it, then it's going to be freaking out even more. It's more than likely that its fearful mind at that moment is going to trigger a negative karmic seed, which will cause it to go from the frying pan into the fire, to an even worse life.

If you're thinking in that point of view, then just to kill it is just a self-serving action. Not trying to be mean about it. We all do this. We mean well, but we haven't got the wisdom to know if it really will benefit that sentient being and that means of course in terms of its future life, which is the Buddhist idea. It's a big issue really.

## **KILLING OUR GRANDMA OR OUR DOGGIE**

And this is the same with killing your grandma too, or putting your little

doggie down, as we call it – putting it down or going to sleep, all these euphemisms. It's the same issue. You've got to have enough wisdom. In fact, often in the teachings Buddha would say before you really know how to benefit sentient beings, which is the compassion and love wing, you've got to have clairvoyance. Which is a shocking concept, but this is very much how Buddha talks. You've got to have the skill to really actually see the mind and the karma of those sentient beings before you really know how to benefit deeply.

But of course it's a relative thing. If you're not a doctor, but you know some small thing you can do to help a person with their cataracts, you do that much. The deeper your wisdom, the more you can benefit. The same here. You mightn't need to have clairvoyance but you have enough sensitivity because maybe you've got some confidence from karma that you know better to protect the ant and put it in a safe place and blow a mantra and protect it at least so it can die a fairly peaceful death

without being eaten up by another creature. That's the best you can do. If you can have more knowledge, then you act more. This is the approach here.

## **MOTIVATION BEHIND ALL OUR ACTIONS**

The point I'm really making here though is, in terms of the actions we do every split second, every one of them is motivated by something. Just naturally. Your intention is always motivated by something. The trouble is when it comes to stuff that we're very habituated to do, the usual stuff we do, the negative stuff especially, because we're so hardwired to do it from much practice, we don't even break it down. We don't even notice we have the intention; we don't even notice we have a motivation, it's just all on autopilot. And this is why we need to slow the whole process down and begin to observe our mind very, very deeply, which is why you have to do concentration meditation, so you develop the skill to see yourself really

clearly and to deconstruct your motives, your intentions, why you do things and begin to change it. This is what you're supposed to do. It's a very intelligent process, actually. We'll discuss being our own therapist in high school – because this is when we really begin to practice.

Motivation is the key factor that actually determines the quality of the action in terms of the karmic result that we will get, not someone else judging you, nothing to do with it. I can think of some of our friends in prison – I know from discussions with them, those who've told us what they've done and we never asked them – but like one guy I know who's killed. And when he talked about it – I've known him for years now, he's a very sweet guy and enormous good heart but very foolish – and so actually he ended up killing somebody in defense of someone else. And you could even tell from how he talked about it, there wasn't too much anger there but there wasn't really a wish to harm; to defend. It was a dumb action, you know. Now he's got a life

sentence. Se's called a killer, he's a murderer, and anybody who thinks about him is going to wish he goes to hell, and so on and so forth.

But you know his motivation wasn't so severe. It wasn't really to harm, it wasn't brutal. As far as the world is concerned, a killer is a killer is a killer but each person is different. Each person has got a different set of reasons, and a set of motivations. Until we know that person intimately, we can't afford to say too much. We can't afford to judge, we don't know.

## **WHEN ACTIONS ARE HABITUAL**

There's another thing under the heading of intention, another factor that plays a major role in the karma we create, and that is the extent to which it's habitual. And this is a very powerful one. Why most of us don't even notice what we're intending, much less motivating, for many of the things we do, is because we're on autopilot doing them. They're just second nature.

Look at the last time you killed a mosquito in the summer – let's say we

used to do this maybe. Even while you're just chatting away being friendly; you don't sit there having this intention, "I'm going to kill that mosquito. I hate that mosquito with great passion." Not that kind of high peak loathing. It's just spontaneous. If someone said, "What a cruel person, you are so angry." "I'm not angry, Robina." It's just habit. It was so spontaneous it was second nature.

## **THE FISHERMAN**

One of the examples I often think of is a woman I met whose son was a fisherman all his life. Since he was a little boy she said he was attracted to the water like a magnet. He even called himself Salmon. All his life he was a fisherman. For him, because he had this deep habit to kill that he brought with him from past lives because it was so habitual he didn't ever think of it as bad.

I've told the story many times before actually. This woman, Jess, came to see me when I was in Kopan, in 1992, our monastery in Nepal, and she came into

my room crying. She had been hearing the teachings of karma from Lama Zopa Rinpoche and she was in tears because she said just recently was the fifth anniversary of the passing away of her beautiful boy who died five years before, when he was 29. He died scuba diving. And he was a fisherman. She was just getting over the grief of this. She'd tried to console herself initially by thinking, "Oh well, he died doing what he liked." But now she's hearing about karma, the way Buddha talks, and it's all a very different view, and it made her completely miserable. She was in tears of grief for this boy that he could be in the suffering realms.

It was interesting. She talked about this boy and how since he was a little tiny boy he had this strong tendency to kill, to fish. He ran to the river like a magnet, he even called himself Salmon. He loved fishing; he was in heaven in his boat. He became a professional fisherman, for thirteen years a professional fisherman. And then he died scuba diving when he was 29.



It's interesting to use him as an explanation of how karma works. On one hand, due to past morality he gets born as a human and a really good life. He has very good experiences similar to the cause, good family, good friends, good environment; many good tendencies, kind, compassionate, wise boy, a lovely human being. But he had this unfortunate tendency to kill, like so many people.

And then, it's in a culture that doesn't fault killing, in particular fish. Most of our religions condone killing of one kind or other, and certainly killing animals is seen as okay because they don't have a soul. He doesn't see any fault in it.

Also, because it's a habit, and because he was attached to it, he can't see the suffering of the fish: that's the tragedy, that means you can't stop – because why would you? You're propelled by the force of your karmic habit and the pleasure that comes from it.

There he is, he goes fishing and he's a successful fisherman, quote unquote, because all the fish come. If the fish

didn't come he would have stopped, because he wouldn't want to keep going out there and get no fish and get no money and he'd starve to death. Getting the fish was the sign of success, as far as he was concerned – whereas, as we're talking here, all the fish coming is the karma of the fish to be killed by him; it's very personal karma.

### **WHEN WE'RE ATTACHED TO SOMETHING WE CAN'T SEE THE SUFFERING WE CAUSE**

Because the world sees it as good, he saw it as good; because he had the habit, he couldn't see the suffering he was causing. And this is an interesting point: his mother, who didn't have any tendency to kill, she wasn't a fisherperson, she went fishing with him just once to please him. She said it was so distressing in this boat, seeing these fish clearly really unhappy. To her it was clear the suffering they were experiencing. Of course she didn't want to say anything, he'd just think she was stupid, and he wouldn't have heard her anyway.

But he couldn't see that suffering, and this is the point I've made before. One of the tragedies of the habit to do something negative is you're so caught up in doing it, you're so enthralled by it, you're so attracted to doing it, it gives you such pleasure, it blinds you from seeing the harm you're doing to others. And that's the tragedy of it. He couldn't see the suffering. For thirteen years, for all his life, for probably twenty-five years of his life seeing flapping fish, never seeing them as sentient beings, never seeing it as suffering, therefore never stopping. You understand? Not criticizing, but this is the tragedy of all of us.

In this life, due to past non-killing, he's born with a human body. But he also has this very powerful tendency to kill, which is the fruit of the habit, it's the habit of past killing, which he brings with him. He then lives near a river so he runs to the river, finds it attractive because of past connections; loves to go fishing. Then he kills and kills hundreds of thousands of fish, never sees it as doing harm, so never

regrets it, never sees the suffering, blinded by it, never seeing all the karmic seeds he's planting in his own mind that will ripen as future suffering for him, never seeing this because we don't think like this.

Then the karma of past killing ripens for him and he dies young. Using killing as one example of the four ways that karma ripens, remember? If killing ripened at the time of his past death he would have got a lion rebirth or the fish rebirth or something, but he got a human rebirth; so we can deduce from this that the virtue of non-killing was the throwing karma that brought the fully ripened result, in this case a human life.

But then he had the other three kinds of karma. He had the first one: the tendency to kill, which is the action similar to the cause. He spontaneously followed that because it was a habit in his mind, never questioning it. Secondly, when he was 29, he got the experience similar to the cause of killing, which is you die young, or you get killed, or you get sick. Well, he died

young and he got killed. Probably the fish ate him up, who knows what happened down there. This is the result of past killing. The habit to kill is the result of past killing.

The environmental result, he didn't have that, the environmental result of killing is that the food is really polluted, the water is polluted, whatever you eat doesn't nourish you, it makes you sick; the environment itself is opposite to nourishment. That's the karmic result of killing, from the environmental point of view.

Clearly, he had the two: the habit to kill, which continued to increase his habit, just deepened and deepened and deepened and deepened his habit to kill; and secondly he died young, he drowned scuba diving.

## **WE DON'T THINK ABOUT CAUSE AND EFFECT LIKE THIS**

He'd never thought about impermanence, like the rest of us, never thought that killing was negative, like the rest of us. There he was, no doubt, in the water freaking out down

there, drowning. Who knows how he died?

Then the karma of killing, which was so strong a tendency, would have easily ripened as the main karma, which would have thrown him into suffering lives. She asked me where do I think he had been reborn. I suggested he go see Geshe Lama Konchog, this lama and great yogi and master who lived at Kopan who passed away a few years ago, a great meditator, very realized, they say. And so I said go and see him, just ask him. They very rarely tell you what they see, these holy lamas, many of them are clairvoyant.

She mentioned the name of her boy to him and just wanted to know what had happened to him when he passed away. He kind of accesses his inner computer and he said, “Ah yes, first he was born in the animal realms and now he’s in the hell realms.”

“Oh, my God, what will I do for him?” she said. He smiled sadly and said, “What do you mean, for him? For everybody!” Because there are countless sentient beings suffering in

the lower realms. And that was very strong for her mind, to have this compassion for all sentient beings.

Actually, I saw her years later, and she said it was helpful to hear this. These lamas never tell us these things – but Geshe-la chose to.

It's interesting. It's a really good example of how karma works. Take it or leave it, you don't have to believe it, I'm just telling you someone's experience.

## **FISH SUFFER!**

I remember watching something on Fox television, one of those dudes, one of those very volatile people on Fox television. I'm not complaining about Fox television, I'm just saying about one of these people. I don't know what his name was but he was very volatile and very conservative. And he was interviewing one of the PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) people, about how they're now finding evidence that fish suffer.

Well this guy was just absolutely panning the PETA man for aubsurdly

suggesting that fish suffer and daring to talk about protecting fish.

Well, I don't think it takes a rocket scientist to check a fish's behavior. I saw on the television recently, listen to this one, somewhere in China where the need to have the freshest fish is paramount so there's this big fish, they cook the fish without killing it. They serve it on the plate and it's being eaten, alive. And its little mouth is going [open and shut, silently], because all it can do is do this. Now if it was a pig, a pig would make a very big noise and you'd be embarrassed to eat it alive because it would be so disturbing to your mind. But because fish don't make a sound and its little body can't move very much, its mouth is just going [open and shut]. It's being eaten alive.

The thing is, bad enough that the fish is suffering, that it can't express it, but our ignorance is the worst thing – that we can't see that that is suffering. Even the guy who told the story on the American television channel, most people would laugh. Because there's unbelievable ignorance in our mind



about what a sentient being is and how it suffers. It's amazing isn't it? It's fascinating.

## **HABIT BLINDS US**

Ignorance is incredible because that's coming from the habit. When the habit is so strong to do anything, including good, you do it spontaneously. This little boy, age three, having compassion for the lice: that stands out for us because it's so unusual. That means he had compassion habitual in his mind from past practice. Just spontaneously compassion at the age of three.

Most of us: the opposite. This is the worst part about bad habits – you don't even know what you're doing. And this is the tragedy about negative karma, negative karma is that the more habitual the negative action is, the more easy it is to do it, naturally, the more you meet the conditions, the more you meet the fish in other words, to kill. And therefore the more blinded you are from even seeing the fish is suffering, because this is how the mind works; and it's very fascinating. We're

again going to go more deeply into this in the second part about the mind.

## **DRAWN TO THE ACTION**

One of the consequences of the habit to do something, when we're attached to doing it, one of the consequences is, because what we do with habit is what gives us pleasure, we go towards it like a magnet. Whatever you go towards like a magnet because of the past habit and because it triggers a good feeling in your mind, pleasure, then attachment arises, which exaggerates the deliciousness of the action, which blinds you from seeing the suffering.

I used to get really angry, harm people with my mouth because I was so caught up in my own righteousness, you understand, we all know that one, that you don't even notice that you harm that person until afterwards when you calm down and you feel mortified. Someone else with patience is standing right next to you and they can see the suffering of the person you're shouting at, but at that time you can't see it. We're all familiar with this.

And this is the killer of the habit to do negative things. It blinds us even from seeing the harm we're doing because we're so caught up in our own stuff, our own junk, our own righteousness, our own attachment.

BTK, exactly this one. He knows what he was doing was wrong, but as he said it was his sexual fantasies. I'm talking about the mind more now but we're going to go into this. We do what we are attracted to doing. It happens to be that for some people they get their kicks from torturing. Animals get this. We get our kicks from having sex with people or enjoying our chocolate cake, the "normal" stuff and we don't get criticized for this. And that's okay, I'm not criticizing anybody. But some poor people bring these animal tendencies with them and then of course, they're the ones that we think are evil monsters.

But BTK couldn't stop doing it because he got such a pleasure from it. That's not an excuse. Check yourself last time you couldn't stop getting angry. Joan talks about her depression.

It's there like a constant tune in her mind. It's not a question of not stopping it, it's just there all the time because it's so strong, some karma from the past. It's just there.

This is where Buddha's view, of understanding karma very clearly, understanding objectively what is morality and what is killing, what is lying, why is it bad and then you have it as a basis and you use that to look at yourself. Then you start to see what your own tendencies are and you realize you do have a tendency to kill and you see how you go towards it like a magnet. And you have a tendency to lie, and get depressed, and do this, and do that, so objectively you realize, okay, I don't want to do this, it's an old habit so I'm going to slowly start planting the new seeds. You don't make it go overnight but it's an effort to go against it. As we all know, that point where these two meet, that's practice.

## **WE FOLLOW OUR TENDENCIES**

To practice you've got to go against the status quo. You've got to look at the

status quo and see what is valid, what is not. Because you also might have a strong tendency to be generous. Don't stop that, increase it. But you've got to have a good reason to. The good reason we use now for continuing to do something is because it's our personality and therefore we think it's good. We use the wrong logic. It's good if it's beneficial to others and it's motivated by a pure reason. Generosity, keep doing it. Fantastic! Anger and lying, stop because it's not fantastic.

It needs a lot of precision and a lot of analysis and intelligence to really see your mind carefully. This is how karma works, it's very interesting. And every sentient being, from your lions, to your humans, to your giraffes, to your BTK's, to your Hitlers, to your Stalins, to your Mother Teresas, all are driven by the same law. A bunch of tendencies and so we follow our tendencies. We think this is who I am, I was made this way, I didn't ask to get born, okay that's cool. The naughty ones you try to hide because no one will like you but

you keep doing them, then you have guilt and so we just keep going in circles. It's crazy. It's incredible.

## **MOST PEOPLE KILL**

Look at the human world: most people kill something. People in the wars, snipers, multi-murderers, they have the tendency to kill, humans in this case. We think it's okay if you're in an army, you're given the right to kill. But my ex-gangster friends, the Mexicans in the prisons, they are not given the right so they're called gangsters, their called evil. But the guys, the snipers in the Army, they're given medals.

In Buddha's terms, karmic terms, we're so arbitrary. You've got the karma there, you could say that a person who is in the army, who is a sniper, who's got the karmic tendency to kill and is very good at it gets a medal. That's the experience similar to the cause of good reputation. They kill, which is a tendency, which will cause them to have enormous suffering, even though it's legal. But they've got the

karma to be respected for it; that's a separate set of karma.

A person in prison who's a gangster who's killed a few people, I know a few of them, they've got the tendency to kill but they've also got the bad reputation because they're called a gangster. It's outside the law. They've got the bad experience similar to the cause, a bad reputation, and they've got the tendency to kill. And they're not respected for it. But the killing is the same.

### **REMEMBER: THE FOUR THINGS IN PLACE TO QUALIFY AS A COMPLETE ACTION**

The point I'm making here is the four things that need to be in place in order for an action we do to bring the fully ripened result. Killing: there has to be the object, the mind involved in doing it, the action, the result. If it's a negative motivation and it's a habit, then you're just in the mode of killing. This is why most people kill mosquitoes, kill rats, kill roaches, kill fish, kill bears.

## QUESTIONS ABOUT MOTIVATION

### WHAT DETERMINES WHETHER SOMEONE IS VIRTUOUS?

*Student* When you talk about cultural differences, just playing devil's advocate again here. Just for an example, say there were these villagers in South America and now the missionaries come and they want to put their ways, Christianity or whatever. Well these villagers maybe for them stealing wasn't an issue, because there was a knife for the village and when someone needed it, they took it and they used it for a while and then when someone else needed it, it wasn't my knife. When these missionaries come and the villagers say, "Oh, that's a really nice knife over there, so I'm just going to take it or use it for a while." And the missionary might think, that's stealing, and punish them.

*Ven. Robina* What's the point you're asking?



*Student* What I'm saying is, the villagers they steal or whatever it is, but for them it's not stealing.

*Ven. Robina* What's the point you're asking?

*Student* Is that just not for the villagers, they've not in their own mind, have not sinned or created any bad karma, but from the missionary it's a different view, so are they creating bad karma or what? I guess my question is how do we distinguish between you say when something's feels bad or when you're harming somebody, that's bad karma? Creating bad karma.

*Ven. Robina* No, no. We talked about it yesterday. What determined whether you create bad karma, it was intention and motivation. What's your question?

*Student* Where did we come up with what is harmful and what is not?

*Ven. Robina* Who's we?

*Student* In our society, the culture. . .

*Ven. Robina* I don't know about that. You have to ask the Christians. The answer, I said it before, according to Christians, what is bad is what God said is bad. Whom are you asking

about? It depends on who you're asking about. That's the Christian answer. That's the Muslim's answer, I think the same. I've given you the Buddhist answer.

How you determine what is good or bad in general, in the Buddhist view is what is harmful in general is what harms others, that's a negative action. But whether you do a negative action is based on your intention and motivation for doing it. That's how you determine.

Even if you could say I could give you some money, which in general is called a good action, but my motivation might be really manipulative. Because let's say you're rich and I'm really manipulative and really sneaky, and I'm pretending to be kind to you, and actually my motivation is really mean and ugly, I don't create any good karma at all. You get money, you're fine. I don't create any good karma by giving you money. I create negative karma because my motivation was so manipulative. There's no good karma there at all. It looks like one, it's phony.

Her action of killing the ant with no intention, no motivation, looks negative but is not because her mind. . . This is the intricate point that Buddha is making is to do with motivation and intention. That's what determines it.

How did Buddha "come up with," as you put it, that harming another is a negative action: well it's fairly logical. Just do some market research and ask people, do they like being harmed. Hundred percent answer no. That's enough proof. That's a negative action; it's very clear, simple. It's based on sentient beings' wishes. They don't like being harmed. That's a really valid thing. To use that as your basis: just don't harm others. It's fantastic. It's incredible and it's logical, it's not religious, it's logical. That's the Buddha's view.

## **HOW DO WE DETERMINE THE VALIDITY OF A MOTIVATION?**

*Student* I watched a program last night on DVD on Tibet and what happened. In the Chinese eyes, they were brainwashed propaganda into believing

that they came into Tibet to help the Tibetans. Wasn't there a feudal system, the way they were treating their own. I'm just saying the people who immigrated to Lhasa in Tibet were thinking they were doing a good thing.

*Ven. Robina* Those were the words they were saying, but if we look into, I think, without too much clairvoyance you can look into the actions of the Chinese and I would say their words are those, but the motivation was anger, violence. With respect, you could say these Muslim terrorists, who really believe it is good to kill infidels. Sure their reason says this and this, but it's pretty empty. The real one is violence. You see their anger, there's enormous anger there. It's evident; they're not even pretending it's not anger. It's enormous anger. That's the real reason. That's psychologically what's happening. We put philosophical and political words on top of that. Like my gangster friends in prison. Their philosophy was it was good to kill your enemies. The reality was internally, violence and anger.

Words is one thing. What's really happening, motivation is internal, psychological. It's fairly easy to distinguish it. You see what I'm saying?

We believe our own propaganda, you know. Because I think if you've got a karmic imprint to do something, you've got to call it good. For a while when I was a bit of an old hippie and a political activist I decided I'd start stealing. The karmic reason is the karmic imprint from having stolen in the past, it was a negative one, it was greedy, it was to do with myself, but I had to call it good. I said it was good. I said, "Oh political, these rich people, blah, blah, blah," and so I felt justified. But it was a fantasy I put on top of the reality, which is simply the karmic imprint to harm others, to take what I want. See what I'm saying?

For ourselves, that's what we have to look at. I think without being arrogant about others, we can deduce it fairly quickly. Just look at the faces of those Israelis and those Palestinians. That's not kindness. They're not compassionate, they're not feeling

calm. They might have their politics but that's built on top of their delusions. They've made it "right" to kill others, to harm others because of this and this. Politics is just words and we're all political and we believe our own garbage propaganda. It's terrible.

## 14. THE POWER OF VOWS

### LOWER SCOPE/JUNIOR SCHOOL

When we take refuge we can also – at the same time or later – take all or some of the five layperson’s vows.

A vow is what? A vow is a strong decision to refrain from doing or saying certain things – vows are not about the mind; they’re always about behavior.

We can see the benefit in our own lives of making a strong decision. You can go, “Oh I must go on a diet, I must eat less,” but you keep eating too many chocolate cakes. Nothing ever changes. But one day you say: “I *will* go on a diet.” That’s all. Then you’ll do it. Look how it protects you. Once you’ve made that decision, then you’ll do it.

But for the Buddha a vow is way more powerful. It’s said in the Hinayana teachings that a vow in the mindstream of a person is a subtle physical form visible to clairvoyants.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche says that a person merely keeping purely their vow not to kill and not doing much other practice accomplishes infinite more purification and creates infinite more merit than another person who doesn't have a vow but who does bucket-loads of practices.

Why? This is crucial to understand. When we discussed how we create karma we showed that when there is intention in the mind – the intention to do or not do something – that's when a seed is left in the mind. Without intention, normally speaking, there's no imprint, no seed, so no karma created.

Well, in order to simply get another human rebirth after death we need masses and masses of delicious, rich seeds from intentional non-killing in our mindstream so that it's easy for one of them to be triggered before we stop breathing. We discussed it in the death process.

Throughout our normal daily life, when would we be creating lots of strong, intentional karmic seeds of



non-killing? Only when we decide to not kill. And the only time we decide that is when there is a creature – or our ex-husband! – right in front of us and we have to consciously decide “I will not kill.” That’s what leaves an imprint in the mind.

When we’re merely leading our normal lives and not thinking about not killing, we’re not creating any karma of not killing. Useless.

But with vows – easy! Buddha says – and this is why Rinpoche said what he said above – that vows are so potent that every second you are keeping them, even when we’re not thinking about them, twenty-four hours a day, even while we’re sleeping, we are creating masses of virtuous karma of not killing, therefore purifying our minds of those habits, and therefore also creating merit.

As Rinpoche says, being good is not enough. We need to live in vows.

This is the power of vows. And it’s an easy way to practice, to accumulate virtue and to purify negative karma.

## THREE SETS OF VOWS

There are three sets of vows according to three levels of the path.

First, the **vows of individual liberation**, or *pratimoksha* in Sanskrit: the five lay vows, for example, which I'll discuss in a minute, and the vows of monks and nuns. These are related to the wisdom wing, junior school and high school: how to help us discipline our body and speech in order to achieve our own liberation from suffering and its causes.

Second, **bodhisattva vows**; and third, **tantric vows**. Clearly, these are related to the compassion wing level of practice, university and post-graduate.

## THE FIVE LAYPERSON'S VOWS

**1. Don't kill** Of course, this means with intention, because the reality is we're killing all the time. Just breathing you're breathing in sentient beings; driving, walking, eating your veggies. All those little creatures have died growing and picking the veggies. Even if you're a vegetarian, countless beings have died just by your presence. It's

unavoidable, we can't help it. The vow here is to not kill with intention; you intend not to kill sentient beings.

And this is really stunning. It's a rare and precious thing, you're like a jewel on this earth. Because you can even see with most religions they say it's okay to kill non-humans, and it's okay to have wars in certain circumstances. But the Buddha would say – and this is why the Dalai Lama is an amazing example for this Earth – just don't kill. It can't benefit. It's only harmful. It comes from a delusion. The vow never to kill for the rest of this life is an incredible and marvelous commitment. You are like a precious jewel on this earth.

The rest are **2. Don't steal**, **3. Don't lie**, **4. Don't engage in sexual misconduct** and **5. Don't take intoxicants**.

That's five vows, you can take any or all of these.

## **BREAKING VOWS IN MAJOR AND MINOR WAYS**

**1. Killing** We break in a major way, which means breaking the vow at the

root, which means we need to take it again with someone. when we intentionally kill a human being. We break in a minor way when we intentionally kill another sentient being.

**2. Stealing** We break in a major way when we take something of value and in a minor way when we take anything that hasn't been given to us.

**3. Lying** We break in a major way when we lie about our spiritual attainments and in a minor way when we lie in other ways.

**4. Sexual misconduct** In the texts there are several things they describe, but keeping it simple we break it by cheating on our partner or taking someone else's, by raping, etc. There's no discussion of major or minor.

**5. No intoxicants** Basically this means don't take substances that make a mess of your senses.

We can keep our vows strong by doing the purification practice every night, the four opponent powers.

## QUESTIONS ABOUT KARMA

Okay now a few questions about karma before dinner. Yes?

*Student* I remember an example of a man I think it was World War II, he didn't want to kill but he ended up being a soldier and he knew in this particular situation that if he didn't kill a small number of enemy soldiers that hundreds of his own would be killed.

*Ven. Robina* Okay let's analyze it. He had the intention to kill right? There were objects there, living beings. He did the action and they died. Now, what was his motivation? Try and imagine.

*Student* To protect his own people.

*Ven. Robina* Now what's George Bush's motivation for killing the Iraqis? Just keep looking at it, I'm not trying to be smart or anything. Let's analyze it carefully. What would be George Bush's motivation for killing the Iraqis? What do you think? Give him the benefit of the doubt, what's his motivation? What's his motivation from the good point of view? To protect Americans.

*Student* Or his way of life.

*Ven. Robina* Whatever it might be. What would be the motivation of the Israelis to kill the Palestinians? To protect their people. And what would be the motivation of the lion to kill the tiger? To protect its people.

Now, what's new? That's why people all kill each other. Now the thing is in the Western world we would say defending others is a reason to kill. But the Buddha would make it more subtle and he would say it's not enough. Everybody kills for that reason. You have attachment for this group, so you defend them. You hate that group, so you kill them. That's not virtue. That's delusion. That's how come the Dalai Lama doesn't kill anybody. Because it doesn't help.

Okay then, there are infinite variations on that variation you just gave and we can discuss that more carefully but in general here, the main thing that makes an action of killing virtuous is the motivation, compassion – not for someone else, but for the person you're about to kill. Now that's a rare thing. You see my point? That's

what the compassion is. Not for someone else, everyone has that. Osama bin Laden has enormous compassion for his people. I think he's an amazing person but he has this immense rage towards the Americans and all the infidels, so that's not compassion. You just destroy your compassion. Unfortunately that's the level of compassion we all have now.

When I was a political activist I had enormous compassion for all the poor people, but to that extent I hated all the rich. I had enormous compassion when I was a feminist for all the women, but I hated all the men. You just can't do that, you know? You look at a man who kicks a dog, you have enormous compassion for the dog. Next second you want to punch the guy in the face. And it's the victim mode. Real compassion, which is the one the Dalai Lama is talking about, which is Buddha's one, you've got to have compassion for the person in front of you and then maybe there's some benefit because it's for their benefit. Otherwise it's not for their benefit.

Now that guy in the army, it would seem to me from hearing the story you just said, he was reluctant. He didn't want to harm anybody. But you see he can probably even kill people reluctantly, so you say he probably didn't create that much karma because his mind wasn't full of aversion. You've got to see what's in the mind. It's not superstition. He didn't have aversion really for those people. From what you just said, it doesn't sound like it. To that extent, he didn't create very negative karma. Every person is different we've got to look at it so carefully.

## **THE KARMA OF EATING THE FLESH OF AN ANIMAL**

Yes Joan?

*Student* What about your karma if you eat something that someone else has killed?

*Ven. Robina* Let's analyze the action. There in front on your plate is a piece of flesh, right? That we know was the body of an animal one time. Let's look at it. Did you have the intention to kill?



*Student* No.

*Ven. Robina* Was there a living being there, in front of you right there?

*Student* No.

*Ven. Robina* Did you kill a sentient being?

*Student* No.

*Ven. Robina* Did you ask someone to do it?

*Student* No.

*Ven. Robina* But it was done along there somewhere. Someone else did it, right? At some point.

*Student* Yes.

*Ven. Robina* Did the animal die before you?

*Student* Yes.

*Ven. Robina* Okay, so that one's in place but the other three aren't. Now this doesn't mean that everything we do doesn't have some karmic result. You can't say it doesn't because everything really is interdependent. There's no question. And if we look at say for example, let's take for example in India. Tibetans have always eaten yaks and things, meat. There were very rarely vegetarian.

But in India though, when they all lived down in the monasteries there, many of the local shopkeepers started killing animals in order to provide the meat for the Tibetans. His Holiness was almost in tears, someone told me. “This has to stop, you cannot do this.” That would be really heavy. If you’re literally helping create an industry where you can see it so starkly where there wasn’t one because – most Hindus don’t eat meat – where they actually started killing the goats so the Tibetans could get their meat, this was really, really heavy and His Holiness said absolutely this is wrong. Not being like the Pope or anything, but just giving them advice as their father. In that case, you could say, it would be quite heavy karma; where literally beings are getting killed directly for you.

Now various things are in place here. Another factor would be this, a friend of mine in Australia, a monk in Dharamsala, an Australian called Max, he was a member of one of the biggest butcher families in Australia. Mega rich from what? Killing probably hundreds

of thousands of animals. He never did it but he got all of his riches and his good life and his education and his nice sports cars from it. Lama Yeshe said to him when he became a monk, “You never touch meat. No way.” Because he had such a strong connection with killing, that for him to eat meat would have been a heavy action.

Now you could say that someone else who’s got no karma with killing and no tendency to kill and never kills and has never had anything to do with killing might eat meat sometimes, no big deal. There are so many variations. Many factors you’ve got to take into consideration.

*Student* It’s in the butcher shop anyway.

*Ven. Robina* That’s not the point. That’s still not the point, we’re not talking about that, we’re talking more about our own self and the role we play and the karma we have and the tendencies we have. That’s the main issue. Yes, that is another factor. Let’s say in the West, you could probably say, that if you eat meat or don’t eat

meat, it'll make virtually no difference to the industry. Of course if it's the power of numbers and suddenly five million people stop eating meat, it would make a difference. It's true. If we live in India, that one monk stopped eating meat made the man go out of business. You could say it had a big impact. there are so many variables. Again, there's no saying that there's not some karmic responsibilities. There always is for everything we do, there's some result, there's some connection. In general they say the further away you are from the killing, the weaker the karma.

Equally with something good, the further away you are from the action, even though you're connected, the weaker. For example, the atomic bomb. There's a lot of history recently, stories about those atomic bomb guys on Hiroshima. The closer you are to the action, the actual bombers, the pilots, the heavier the karma. The further away, the little secretary who worked over there in the thing that processed the letters that came from the people,

the scientists, blah, blah, blah, she was still connected but much weaker karma. Everything is relative, everything is important for us to look into it and take responsibility, everything is related to what our tendencies are, ourself and our own particular position in the thing. There're many factors involved.

## **THE KARMA OF THE FISH TO BE KILLED**

Now another important factor, which we never think of in the West, is even if we all stop eating meat, it might not impact upon the industry one bit because animals have the karma to be killed so strongly that they're always going to meet a killer. It's a real interdependent scenario. That fisherman, since he was a little boy when he went to the river with his strong intention to kill based on his past karma, the fish were lining up with their little mouths open because they had the karma with him, to be killed by him.

I went fishing, wanted to impress a boyfriend who was a fisherman. He was pulling them in every minute. I couldn't get one. I had an intention but I didn't have any karma with sentient beings to have the karma to be killed by me. I got no fish.

The thing is, probably you could say if we stopped eating meat, which is the usual reason in the West to why we should just stop the industry, which is great, it's a fantastic motive, it's a pure motive even if it doesn't stop, it's a pure motive, it's an amazing thing to do, but don't be fooled into thinking it will stop, because animals still have the karma to be killed and fishermen have a very powerful karma to kill.

You talk to some fishermen, not criticizing, looking at karma, there's this immense addiction to doing something. Even fishermen go fishing and they put the fish back. They've got to do the process of getting the fish. The fish will still have the karma to get killed and you end up with a glut of fish no doubt. Which is okay, it's not the point here. Killing or not killing them is

not the point here. It's depending on the tendency we have.

The more strong your compassion to think I must stop eating meat because of compassion for those creatures, that's amazing karma for you. Someone else might stop eating meat because they don't like the red blood in their body. It's just completely attachment. That's nothing virtuous. Some people will be vegetarian but, excuse me, they'll have even organic vegetables that. . . they're going to bring in this creature to kill that creature so they can have nice pure veggies. That's actually heavier than eating meat. Using sentient beings to harm each other so you can have pure veggies. Excuse me, how sinister can you get. There's many ways to see all this.

The bottom line is first, we're talking about not harming others; then we're talking about based on what's in our mind the karma we create in relation to the actions we do. It's quite intricate. It needs a lot of internal looking, it's not some absolute answer to everything.

Like fundamentalists black and white.  
Not like that at all.

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## **BLESSING AND OFFERING OUR DINNER**

It's time for dinner. Think about dinner, it's going to be vegetarian but don't think you're so holy because there's no meat there, because thousands and thousands and thousands of insects have died in the picking and the growing of these veggies. Let's remember those sentient beings who gave their lives for us to have nice fresh veggies, as well as think of the people who cooked it and all the kind people who've done it, who shopped and everything and drove there and to and from and all the rest. Think of all the kindness of all the beings.

And think of this food as oceans of nectar, not one little plate, and then think of very happily offering it. Now just imagine a whole universe full of all the buddhas and all the holy beings and



all the suffering sentient beings, all the humans and gods, animals, pretas, hell beings, bardo beings and all of them experiencing the joy of receiving this food which we happily offer.

La-ma sang-gyä la-ma-chhö  
 De-zhin la-ma ge-dün-te  
 Kün-gyi je-po la-ma-te  
 La-ma nam-la chhö-par-bül

## **15. THERE’S NO KARMA THAT CAN’T BE PURIFIED LOWER SCOPE/JUNIOR SCHOOL**

### **MOTIVATION**

Let’s continue about how karma works and about how to purify it. But first, remind ourselves of our motivation: “We want to do this action of listening to the teachings about karma, to do this meditation on purification, so that we can develop our qualities, so we really can be of benefit to others, no matter how long it takes.”

Sang-gyä chö-dang sog-kyi chog-  
nam-la

Jang-chub bar-du dag-ni kyab-su-chi  
Dag-gi chö-nyen gyi-pä so-nam-kyi  
Dro-la pen-chir sang-gyä drub-par-  
shog

## **THERE'S NO KARMA THAT CAN'T BE CHANGED**

Buddha's view is there is nothing that isn't a product of the law of cause and effect, causes and conditions, and therefore there's nothing that can't change. Nothing is set in stone.

Again, you could say there are similarities between the Christian views, for example of other realms, insofar as when you die you might go to a pleasing experience called heaven and an unpleasant experience called hell. The difference in Buddhist terms is they don't last. Karma is sort of like how much gas you put in the tank is how much mileage you get; so how much karmic energy you put in your tank is how much result you get. A lot of generosity karma ripens in receiving lots of things, having lots of things, getting things when you need it. Morality might be the cause of getting a human life but that's just a human life. The cause for having anything at all on this earth, having even one cent to call your own, this is the fruit of generosity, of giving. The extent of the generosity

karma is the extent of the ripening of the karma. Like we think in terms of money and things like this, it's a very practical energy. This amount of energy put in gives you this amount of stuff.

## **KARMA RUNS OUT**

The Christian view of heaven is it's forever, it's the end result. Buddha would argue with that there's no experience in samsara that lasts forever. It will end, and as long as you haven't cut the root, ego-grasping, you will continue to have rebirth. The same with the suffering rebirth, it's not forever. Karma runs out, finishes.

The same with our own life: we might have something go really well, a relationship works for a certain while. Everything is going along and we think it's permanent: "Oh, I found my soul mate, the love of my life," and then before you know it five years later, ten years later, it all finishes and you're just stunned. You can't believe it. It's finished. No matter how hard you try you can't make it happen again. Karma finished. There's nothing left. It's like

the gas tank ran out, there's nothing left. Karma is like that. Something that could last a long time, it could last a short time. Things change.

We can see this. One day you're really rich and famous the next day you want to kill yourself because you're the worst in the world. I mean look at these people going to prison now, being rich and famous and successful and now the bottom of the pile, accused of fraud. A couple of these guys got twenty-five years, the Tyco guy and the other one, the Enron person. Twenty to twenty-five years in prison. Effectively they're going to die in prison. Things change. Karma ripens.

You could say that the experience is similar to the cause of being seen as very successful and of being respected lasted for a while and now the other karma is ripened. You can have all these different things happening in one life; we can see this. Just because you've had it for a while doesn't mean it's going to last forever. Things change.

## **THERE ARE CAUSES FOR EVERYTHING**

As I was saying before, there are causes for everything we have. It's not just a random thing. Suddenly we get money, "Oh I'm so lucky, I won the lottery." No such concept. "Oh I'm unlucky, I got stolen from." No such concept. Being stolen from is the experience similar to the cause of having stolen. Winning the lottery is the karmic result of having been generous. People not paying their debts is the result of having stolen.

Whatever it is we experience we can look at the action and we can look at the experience and it's not too difficult to see the karmic cause of it. What it might have been. They say that one of the causes of being beautiful, being seen as very pleasing, is patience. The cause of having anything is having given. The cause of people trusting your words, even if you're lying, is having spoken the truth in the past. The cause of people not trusting your words, even if you're telling the truth, is you're having lied in the past. It's got an obvious sort of logic.

## WHY GOOD THINGS HAPPEN TO BAD PEOPLE

Again, remember, in this life itself, there are three different ways your karma ripens. There is **1. Your tendencies; 2. how people see you and treat you; and there is 3. the way you experience your environments.** You could have one really good one, like living in a very peaceful, beautiful peaceful environment but everyone hates you. You could be living in a really disgusting environment but have a really good reputation. You could be very rich but have no one ever pay their bills. You could be very poor but people give you things. They don't all fit, it doesn't fit that you have that good experiences similar to the cause along with the good action similar to the cause. It can be a mixture. This is why bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people.

## MY MIND IS MY OWN

The general thing to get our heads around, the thing we need to get used

to, is the idea that my mind is mine, that whatever I say, do and think leaves a seed in my mind that will ripen in the future, and that whatever I experience now is the fruit of my past actions.

There are many causes and factors that have to come together to produce anything, just like we know with the microphone. It's not just one thing. Countless things have had to come together, the work of many, many people have had to come together in what's called a microphone. The same with this person. Many, many, many factors involved, many conditions, many causes, many things have had to come together in order to produce this person and in order to produce my experiences. Not just one thing.

Whereas you think about how we look now, we think it's one person's fault why something bad happens. We're very tunnel-visioned. There are many factors that come together.

The main emphasis here is on wanting to avoid our own future suffering, so we want to learn to abide by the laws of karma, know what to do.



This is where we begin to practice: abide by the laws of karma: don't kill, don't lie, don't steal, don't badmouth, don't gossip, don't this, don't that, because you don't want the future suffering.

This is the wisdom wing, remember, which has to do with one's own benefit, we're not discussing compassion yet, we're not discussing benefiting others yet. That's advanced, that comes eventually. That's the compassion wing, that's university and, like I said, we are still in junior school. And it's very step by step.

## **IT'S NOT HIT AND MISS**

In other words, the beginning of recognizing karma is already pretty incredible; it's developing this very strong confidence that you are the producer of your own future experiences. Rather than this view – even if you do think of reincarnation – we think it's just kind of pot luck, hit and miss, no one really knows why, what; you just kind of cross your fingers and hope for the best. I mean,

you don't think of your garden like that. It would be very superstitious, wouldn't it? You have to know what seeds to plant and you can predict what fruits you want. In fact, the very wanting of those fruits determines the choice of your seeds. It's exactly the same here. There is not a fraction of difference. Same principle applies.

## **PULL OUT THE SEEDS ALREADY PLANTED**

The most urgent level of practice, as Lama Zopa Rinpoche points out, is to refrain from harming others, in other words refrain from creating causes for future suffering.

The next level is this one: purification. We need to pull out the seeds that we have already planted before they ripen as my suffering. Given Buddha's view that our consciousness is a beginningless continuity that's going back and back and back, and it's had countless lives – and it goes without saying, in Buddha's view anyway, we've had all kinds of suffering lives and done all kinds of

negativities, been animals before, been lions before, been dogs before, harmed others before – so there's lots of karmic seeds in our minds that haven't yet ripened. And so obviously, while we've got this decent human life, we can make some choices to refrain from harming others. We can also use the opportunity to pull out the seeds we've already planted before they ripen. This is common sense.

## **PURIFICATION: THE FOUR OPPONENT POWERS**

There are four steps in this process of purifying negative karma. And really it's a psychological process; it's your mind engaging in a certain way. Very much that. As one of my friends in Adelaide calls it, you can say it's the four Rs: **Regret, Reliance, Remedy** and **Resolve**. It's called the Four Opponent Powers.

As Lama Yeshe says, “What purification *is* is the power of your regret, the power of reliance, the power of the remedy, the power of the resolve.” It's the intensity of your own

mind engaging in these four steps that purifies the karmic seeds you have planted in your mind.

If I'm a Christian, God made me, so therefore the purification of my sins is dependent upon God's forgiving me. It's a crucial point. Here it's got nothing to do with that. Of course Buddha forgives, he's a nice guy; he's compassionate, of course he's going to forgive you, but that isn't the issue here. That's not the point. That's not the point at all.

## **1. REGRET OUR NEGATIVE ACTIONS**

The point is you engaging in this process of first regretting, taking responsibility for having said and done and thought, or said and done first this and this and this action. What you do is – like we're going to do tonight – is you check your day. You check back on your day what you said, what you did with your body and speech that might have harmed others. Let's say we had a fight with somebody, we can really look at something there. Really regret that we

said those words and did that thing. But what is really, really important here to cultivate – and this is an attitude that we do not have, so it really takes us time to consciously cultivate this – is this very appropriate attitude of regret.

## **NOT GUILT**

Right now, because we're still caught up in ego very strongly, because we're so caught up in the huge attachment to be loved by others and to be approved by others – this is a very deep one and we will talk about this tomorrow – then we have enormous attachment to how people see us. Therefore we have guilt. And guilt is mixed with the aching sense that we did do something wrong, but the guilt is like a very hopeless attitude that beats ourselves up and feels very impotent and is very mixed with this fear of being rejected and all of this kind of thing, fear of what other people think of us, and we're desperate for them to tell us it's okay so we will feel relieved. We're desperate for this. Unless we get forgiveness from

somebody, we never really feel any better. We're very reliant upon someone else telling us we're okay.

And the Buddha would say. . . well, the attitude here is not that one anyway. It's very much to do with yourself. His Holiness one time was asked the difference between guilt and this regret. He said, "Guilt is looking into the past and saying, 'I did this and this and this and this and I am a *bad* person.' Beating yourself up and we all know this very, very well. We recognize we did this and this and this, but we usually make it worse than it is. We exaggerate it and we feel so bad, but we feel so hopeless. We stay stuck in it, like impotent. It's not useful; it's a useless state of mind. It drags us down. And really in a sense you can say, it's actually not taking responsibility at all. Because we're addicted to guilt, we're addicted to self-blame. It's very interesting. That's ironically a function of ego.

Regret, as His Holiness says, is very simply it's recognizing yes, indeed, "I did this and this and this," but then you

think, “And what can I do about it?” It’s a hopeful attitude. It’s a courageous attitude because you’re taking responsibility, you’re acknowledging you did in fact say those words and you did in fact do that action and you did do this and you did do this. “You’re right, I did!” But the regret here is so specific.

## **LIKE TAKING POISON**

What it is here is this: it’s just like if you’ve just eaten your dinner and someone says, “There’s poison in it.” The attitude of regret that you would have then is exactly the attitude of regret that we have to cultivate here. In other words, you say, “Oh my God, what a fool! I can’t believe I’ve taken poison! Quick, where’s the doctor?” You rush off to do something about it. You don’t sit there going, “Oh, I’m a bad person, I ate poison, I’m so stupid, I ate poison.” Every day you’re getting sicker and sicker and, “Oh, I’m such a bad person, I ate poison.” I mean, how useless right? You’ve got to do something about it.

## **ALL OUR ACTIONS BRING CONSEQUENCES TO OURSELVES**

We have no sense in our life, emotionally and mentally, no sense that there are any consequences to myself of what we do, say and think. We know it when it comes to food we eat and cigarettes we smoke and things we do that affect the body – are you hearing my point here? We know there's a consequence to myself of eating bad food, we know there's a consequence to myself smoking cigarettes, but we don't really know that there's a consequence to myself of lying and stealing and killing. We kind of think if we get away with it and no one sees us it's okay. It's a bit like that, this attitude. We don't notice there are consequences to ourselves of what we do and say with our body, speech and mind in terms of our own happiness and suffering. This is the view of karma.

## **BLAME OR DENIAL**

It's a very marvelous view actually. It's sort of something very organic. It's very



powerful, because it demands you take responsibility. Because the usual mode we have is this guilt or this blame.

“What do you mean, I ate poison? It’s his fault!” “Go to the doctor, Robina.”

“No! I didn’t do it. It’s his fault!” That’s how stupid we are. Guilt is just as stupid. We also have the other one, we have denial. “What do you mean I took poison? I did not!” We either have guilt, blame or denial. I mean, how useless.

This one is: acknowledging it, as painful as it is, but recognizing it’s just an old karmic habit, recognizing that it doesn’t define you – this is extremely important – but it’s nevertheless a habit. And that the doing of it is what deepens it in your mind and thus causes you to continue to have suffering. And you know what, you’re tired of suffering, you’re fed up with suffering. Actually this attitude of regret is not beating yourself up at all. It’s a really healthy attitude that acknowledges there are consequences to yourself from what you do, say and think and it actually acknowledges a

very sound sense of self-respect. Because you know you don't want more suffering, and you are tired of suffering. "I deeply regret this from the depths of my heart. I regret killing others. I regret killing. I regret lying. I regret stealing from others. I regret harming them – because I don't want the future suffering of the seeds that will ripen in my future."

You're not looking at others yet. This is the second step here; we look at compassion in the second step of this practice. This first one we have to cultivate, it's like compassion for yourself, based on the recognition that what you do and say and think produces your happy or suffering experiences. It's quite tasty, you know. It's very grown up. Take responsibility. But for kindness, not the usual habit of beating ourselves up. We have to consciously change the words. Say these words: "I regret this because I don't want the future suffering."

Regret, in and of itself, has no meaning. *Why* do you regret? Usually it's because someone won't like us

anymore, because we're fearful of being rejected, it's totally self-centered. Here, it's because we're taking responsibility. It's something we have to cultivate. You really could say that it does demand, doesn't it, that you have a good relationship with yourself, a respectful relationship. It's extremely important. This is the first step. It's so important.

If you can't acknowledge you've taken poison you can't do any of the future steps. You can't find the doctor. You can't take the remedy. And you can't resolve to never do it again. You've got to first acknowledge that you've done it, said it, thought it.

## **REGRET ACTIONS OF BODY AND SPEECH**

The first thing you do, we contemplate just the things we said and did today with our **body** and **speech** that harm others.

**Regret actions we don't remember** Then, of course, if it makes sense to you, you can regret whatever you must have done the rest of this life that you don't remember.

Most of the things we've done in this life we have no memory of. "Whatever I've done," you think, "that has harmed sentient beings in this life with my body and speech I regret from the depths of my heart, because I don't want those seeds to ripen as my suffering."

**Regret past life actions** And then of course you can think, "Whatever I've done since beginningless time with my body and speech in countless past lives that have left karmic seeds in my mind now, that I don't remember, of course I don't, but given that my mind is a continuity I must have sown a lot of seeds so I regret them from the depth of my heart. Anything I've ever done to harm any sentient being with my body and speech; and all the delusions and the ignorance and all the delusions, I regret these from the depths of my heart." Very strongly. Acknowledging, regretting for my own sake.

**Regret actions of our mind, our delusions** Then we think the old ancient old habits, the attachment, the anger, etc. "I deeply regret having all

this nonsense in my mind. Whatever I did in the past that caused me to have this habit, I regret it from the depths of my heart because I don't want future suffering. I'm exhausted. I know that."

## **2a. RELY UPON THE BUDDHA**

Then the second step, reliance. "Whom can I turn to, to give me the methods that I can use to purify my mind?" This is reliance. It's got two parts: **the first part is called Refuge**. This is the attitude, we mentioned it already, of relying upon the Buddha and so on and so forth: reliance.

But let me describe this again, be very clear about it. If we are Buddhists already we bandy this term about. "Oh yeah, I took Refuge last week." "Oh yeah, I'm a Buddhist, I took Refuge." What does it mean? Let's use the poison analogy again. Let's say you haven't taken poison but you've heard about some amazing doctor in Timbuktu who can cure every poison possible, who's got every antidote. You hear about this doctor right. And you go, "Oh, that's interesting, yeah sure."

And then you'll forget all about it. You don't really care because you haven't taken poison, because you don't need him.

Now watch what happens when you need him, when you've taken poison. "Oh my God, who's that doctor again?" And you'll do anything to get there, you don't care. Now you'll absolutely listen to every word he says, you'll take his words seriously and you'll totally rely upon him because now you need him. Why? Because you don't want suffering.

Well this exactly is the attitude of Refuge, a person who's wanting to take Refuge, rely upon the Buddha. Why would you want to rely upon the Buddha? I mean, what do you want the Buddha for? Think about it. Not because he's just some nice handsome guy. The reason you want to rely upon the Buddha and practice what he's saying is because you've heard about his teachings on karma, and it makes some kind of sense, and you know you don't want suffering, so you know that you need his methods.

He doesn't purify you, he doesn't make it go away. You do. You need him because of his methods, like you need the doctor. But you do the work. In that sense you rely upon the Buddha. This first part of the practice, and we'll do it tonight, you visualize in this case, above your head the Buddha in a certain way, blah, blah, blah, reminding yourself of your reliance upon the Buddha whose practices you wish to use to purify your mind.

## **2b. RELY UPON SENTIENT BEINGS**

The **second part of reliance is where you develop compassion** for sentient beings. Why is that called reliance? It sounds curious. "Reliance" in the sense that you're trying now to develop compassion – this is now the compassion part – you're now wanting to develop compassion for sentient beings, to think about their suffering. Not your own, that's the first one, regret. Now you think about their suffering, you think about those you have harmed – and, if you can, you

think about those who have harmed you – and your heart is reaching out to others now. You have empathy for them.

Insofar as you're trying to develop huge compassion for others, you *need* sentient beings, don't you? You need suffering sentient beings. They're like grist for the mill. In that sense, it's a quaint way to say it, you rely upon sentient beings because you need the presence in your life of suffering sentient beings in order for you to generate, to activate, this strong compassion. Compassion isn't some abstract thing in your heart. You've got to see suffering beings in order for the compassion to come. In that sense, you rely upon suffering sentient beings.

As one old lama, Geshe Sopa, said, bodhisattvas, these highly advanced practitioners, "They *need* their enemies." To develop such compassion you need enemies. We'll talk about this when we go to university tomorrow.

You think this way, you contemplate that, the suffering of others and you



make the determination, “I must purify myself for the sake of sentient beings.”

### **3. TAKE THE REMEDY**

The third one is the remedy, you take the medicine. You apply the antidote – it's often called that. Really you could say in this tradition there is a whole medicine cabinet of medicines that you can select. The particular practice we'll do tonight, the visualization of the Buddha in the aspect of Vajrasattva, and the recitation of his mantra, is said to be a very potent medicine. All the Tibetan lamas really praise it as a very powerful medicine. But, anything here could be the remedy: going off and helping others, saving the lives of animals, helping the sick, doing something good for others: everything you do that's the opposite is the antidote; that's something that purifies.

The particular practice is of course said to be quite powerful; mantras are said to be very powerful so why not conjoin those with something else. Often you can see in your own life you've got the old habit to lie, you can

do your purification but in your daily life you can resolve to tell the truth. But now let's say you kill. Let's say you want to purify killing from having killed in the past, from having an abortion or killing fish or killing all the ants and the roaches or whatever. You regret, you do the purification, you do the practice, but particularly in your own life you'd make the effort to go and save the lives of a few animals. Go buy some worms and pop them into the earth instead of having them killed for fish bait. That's very powerful, I tell you, very powerful.

If you've got sickness – sickness karmically is the fruit of having harmed others in the past, it's the experience similar to the cause of having killed in the past – so by purifying your karma plus going and helping others, helping sick people, can be a powerful direct antidote to that type of action. You do the practice.

#### **4. RESOLVE TO CHANGE**

The fourth one, as one lama said, is really the most important. It's the

resolve to change. Here I think you can say it's like the first step, it really does demand that you have a good relationship with yourself, a sense of self-respect, and here particularly a sense of recognition, a confidence, that you can change. I think when we look at ego we're so stuck in this sense of hopelessness. "I'm stuck with this, this is who I am. What can I do?" Much anguish because of this. Well, Buddha is simply saying it's just not true. We can change. It is what's happening now, but we can change. That's part of the reason so many of us are feeling so hopeless. We don't think we can. This fourth step is very much understanding the process of karma again and the power of the mind, power of intention.

We all know, like I mentioned before, you want to go on a diet but you don't really make a decision to, and so you keep eating too much. Until one day you finally decide, then you make this strong determination to change. That's this fourth step. That's resolve. You take hold. Based on your confidence that you know you can change you,

realistically. . . the things that are really ancient habit, take it in small steps, you be very realistic with yourself.

Let's say you have a habit to be angry and speak bad words, shoot your mouth off. You know you can't say, "For the rest of my life I'll never be angry, I'm determined." You can't say this. You can't even maybe say for twenty-four hours. But you maybe can say for five hours; or if you're going to go to bed after you do the practice maybe you can say for eight hours, because you'll be asleep and you won't get angry. You'll keep your vow, won't you? It's very realistic and you'll feel in the morning very confident because you've kept your vow and the next day maybe you can take it for ten hours. Step by step you take yourself very realistically, you don't just be in panic mode. We're usually in panic mode. "Oh my God, I'm angry again, I'm so bad, I can't stand it." We get all freaked out. We're not really realistic about it.

If you've taken Refuge and if you've taken vows, then you would definitely reiterate your vows as well as we can: "I

will never kill again, I will never lie again.” Now, we might be scared to say that because we think well how can I be sure? But the point is this: it’s like when you do AA, you’re really doing it for twenty-four hours. Every twenty-four hours you’re reiterating that you won’t lie, kill, steal for the rest of your life. Every time you do that it’s like doing pushups every day. You keep getting stronger. You keep strengthening that very determination. That’s how it grows. It’s not stuck in stone that you’re a killer forever more, or angry; you can change. And so by saying, I will never do again you keep reiterating that, you strengthen that capacity.

## **MOLD YOUR MIND INTO THE SHAPE YOU WANT**

And that is what protects you from doing and saying it next day, just like that vow not to eat too much food, you know. It protects you. When you go to eat the piece of cake again you remember your commitment, so you keep it and your hand stays in your lap.

That's how vows work. That's how this resolve, this determination to change works. It's based on confidence in yourself, courage, determination. And it is what makes you change. As Lama Zopa Rinpoche says, "We can mold our minds into any shape we like." It's very powerful.

And when we begin to taste this capacity, it is very empowering, because we start to realize I can do something with myself. I'm not a victim of circumstances. I'm not produced by other people. I can make choices. And that gives enormous confidence, enormous courage. It's a very powerful practice actually. It's a very, very powerful one. But you've got to give yourself the space and time to do it and to think internally, and, as I said, to develop this relationship with yourself: a kind relationship, a confident relationship, a courageous relationship. It's a very powerful practice, I tell you. That's what we'll do.

## **QUESTIONS ABOUT PURIFICATION OF KARMA**

Would you like to ask some questions about karma, any kind for just a few moments? We can answer those and then we can do the practice.

*Student* I do have one question.

*Ven. Robina* What, Sweetie Pie?

*Student* The purification, is it of the karma from today or is it for past karma as well? Or can't we do anything about that?

*Ven. Robina* Well if you look back at what I was saying, Joan, about regret. From what I said there, what can you deduce from that, do you think? How does it sound, what does it sound like I'm saying? What do you think?

*Student* For everything.

*Ven. Robina* But can you see. . . what was I saying about regret? Tell me what you heard, with regret. What was I saying? It's interesting to hear what you heard. What did you hear me saying when it came to regret? The first step.

*Student* I'm not quite sure. I heard so much today to be quite honest.

*Ven. Robina* Okay. Regret is the acknowledging of various things we

might have said or done today, today for a start, that have harmed others; then of this life. If you can think of things that you've done to harm others in this life? Not to be personal about it, but yes, can you for example?

*Student* Oh yes. Backstabbing. . .

*Ven. Robina* You don't have to confess; I'm not asking you to confess! I'm just asking, you can imagine there are some things in your past in this life, even yesterday, day before, day before last week, last year, ten years ago, that you might have done to harm others? You can remember some of those things?

*Student* Of course.

*Ven. Robina* Right. Remember, if the karmic thing is the way Buddha says, every time you did that you sowed that seed in your mind. And as long as you haven't taken it out it's growing, and growing, and strengthening and getting stronger, and it's going to manifest as the habit to keep doing it, or manifest as that kind of thing happening to you. You understand my point here?

*Student* Yes.



*Ven. Robina* It's like a seed you have planted in your mind. Right? Now if you can imagine you've had countless lives, let's say, as Buddha says you have, and you've been animals and you've killed many beings in the past and you've done all those kind of actions too, let's imagine. Then you've sown those seeds in your mind, and unless we've pulled those seeds out, unless we've purified those seeds, they're working away inside us getting stronger and stronger and will one day manifest as suffering.

This is a simple way of talking. Now, you don't want suffering in the future do you? You know that because you don't want your present suffering right? The attitude of regret is acknowledging that you've said and done and thought this thing and this and this and this and acknowledge your old stuff and then you say, "I regret having done this because I don't want the future suffering." You're acknowledging it, you're owning it. It's the first major step. Do you understand my point?

You acknowledge whatever the seeds are in your mind that you haven't yet pulled out. You mightn't remember them, but it doesn't matter. You see my point Joan? We're thinking of all the countless past seeds that haven't yet ripened, that are waiting to ripen. You can't purify the seeds that have already ripened, it's too late; it's grown. But we regret the things that haven't yet ripened. Part of this process is owning it, taking responsibility, acknowledging I did do this, and I have done that, and I do do this, and I've got this old habit. Rather than all the guilt and the denial and the blame and all the other rubbish we have. You hear my point?

*Student* Yes.

*Ven. Robina* Okay, so that's the **first** step.

Then you think, "Well, whom can I turn to to give me some methods that I can use as the medicine here." In this context we're talking about the Buddha being our doctor. You with me? That's the **second** step.

And then you begin to think about compassion for others, also part of the

second step; regret is like compassion for yourself. You with me? You have compassion for others now, those you have harmed. Even by just being the way we are now, we've harmed others, even without intention. All the ones we've harmed, so we have compassion for them. And we have compassion for those who've harmed us, which is tougher, but very important. Why? Because they are going to suffer in the future for the harm they've done to us. We have compassion for them. We think we must purify ourselves for their sake – the first one is for our own sake.

Then the **third** step is you do the practice. It's like the medicine you take.

And the **fourth** step is you make the determination to change. That's like sowing the new seeds in the garden.

You with me?

*Student* Yes.

*Ven. Robina* Does it make sense now?

*Student* Absolutely.

## HOW AND WHEN SEEDS RIPEN

*Ven. Robina* Okay. Go on sweetheart.

*Student* On one level it seems like a very simple thing like a give-and-take type of thing where it seems like a very balanced thing, if you steal from somebody then you will be stolen from and that type of thing. But then on another level it seems like a rather complex thing, because in the grand scheme of our lives, I was just wondering how do certain seeds become placed where they are placed?

*Ven. Robina* Sure. It's sort of like talking about the simple principles of botany: you grow a seed, you have the earth, you give it water, the sun has to shine and then it will grow. That's fairly easy to understand; if you've never heard of botany before, that's a good start, isn't it? That's the principle of how botany works.

Well, karma is like that; we speak about it in a simple way. But if you want to start working out exactly why and when, and this amount of temperature, and that amount of sun, and that particular time on that particular thing, with the soil this way and turned that way, it's highly

complex. The mechanics of it. Right? Same here. We don't even discuss the mechanics. We're discussing the principle. That's enough for us. I think so. As we advance, we see it more intricately.

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## **DEDICATION**

Now we finished with a dedication, thinking, "How fantastic: throughout the day listening to all these things, trying to process it, analyze it, think about it, aspire, have courage in my potential, wish to benefit others, all of this, how marvelous."

"We dedicate all of this, the sowing of all these seeds, for the sake of sentient beings. And when we do become a buddha who else will we benefit? Other sentient beings. This is for them. Long term, that's why we're sowing the seeds.

"And may compassion," we think, "grow and grow in the hearts of all."

## **RETREAT MODE**

Now let's finish for the day. There are three things I want you to do.

First, go into retreat mode. This is really good; it's really excellent to do this, this one night; absolute silence for your own sake. Decide to look just straight ahead. They say yogis and yoginis look straight ahead. Like you're here on your own, that's the best way to think. You're here on your own, even if you're sharing a room; you're on your own. There's no need to be polite. No need to chatter away. Just that we feel nervous sometimes, we feel we have to. But act like you're on your own. Watch your mind, relax, read, go to sleep, go for a walk or whatever you want to do, you're on your own. That's the way to think.

And retreat mode is also thinking you're on your own, acting as if there's no one else around. It's the best way, it's perfect, very freeing for the mind. Just be with yourself.

**SEE YOUR DREAMS AS DREAMS**

Second, when you hit the pillow, make strong aspirations to see your dreams as dreams, to be aware of your dreams as you're dreaming. Not so much remember them when you wake up – and that's okay, too – but to be conscious while you're dreaming that you're dreaming. It's a good practice.

**DETERMINE TO MAKE THE MOST OF THIS PRECIOUS LIFE**

Third, as soon as you wake up – if you're so fortunate as to wake up! – notice that you're awake, be amazed and delighted recognizing that you're totally impermanent, you have no idea when you're going to die, it could have been today but it wasn't. Delight that you didn't wake up in a lower realm, as Lama Zopa says. How fantastic!

Then decide to make the most of this precious life, these marvelous conditions that I worked so hard to get so I can keep listening to Buddha's views, think about the meaning, aspire to practice for my sake and the sake of

other sentient beings. In the morning you do this.

Then be silent again until the end of the first session. Helpful to be this way, it makes the most of the time. Like a little retreat.

That's it. Thank you everybody. Good night.





**PART FOUR**  
**MIDDLE SCOPE/HIGH**  
**SCHOOL**  
**THE ESSENCE OF WHICH IS**  
**CONTROLLING OUR MIND**

## **16. OVERVIEW BEFORE MOVING ON TO HIGH SCHOOL**

### **MOTIVATION**

Good morning. Well here we are again. Please notice you're still alive. Did you remember to do your homework this morning and notice it when you woke up? It does sound funny to us, doesn't it, but it's very practical. Let's just be delighted here: we mightn't feel it but let's start by thinking it.

“Delighted that we are still alive, that this gas tank of intentional non-killing that we spent so much energy and time and effort filling last life, which is the main cause of the even why our breath continues to go out. You're not alive because you're young or healthy, they're not the main reasons, they're secondary reasons. The main reason is past morality, and the main cause of our having a life and the main cause of our having a wish to practice a spiritual path is from incredible practice in the

past: many aspirations, many wishes, a strong understanding of morality, of benefiting others. And this is why we are sitting here right now thinking of more than merely eating, sleeping, and going to the toilet – which if you break down most of life, that’s it, that’s the summary of it.

“How amazing, how fortunate! And how tragic to waste this opportunity, how tragic to waste it. How to get the essence from it, as they would say, is to use it, as Lama Tsong Kapa says, to use it as a tool for enlightenment.”

Now sing our little prayer, the first two lines expressing our reliance upon the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, so if you feel you are a Buddhist then you reiterate that in your heart. And the second two lines expressing this altruistic motivation, this wish to use this life – to make an altruistic motive – use it for enlightenment, which means: “So I can become a buddha. So why? So I can be of spontaneous benefit to others, to fully develop my true nature of empathy and love for others: this is what we really are, mixed

with wisdom: the compassion that wants to benefit others mixed with the wisdom that knows how. This is what a buddha is. And this is our nature, our potential.

“May the action of continuing to listen to Buddha’s teachings, this lamrim, cause exactly that.”

Sang-gyä chö-dang sog-kyi chog-  
nam-la

Jang-chub bar-du dag-ni kyab-su-chi  
Dag-gi chö-nyen gyi-pä so-nam-kyi  
Dro-la pen-chir sang-gyä drub-par-  
shog

Now let’s remind ourselves of what we’ve discussed so far.

## NATURE OF MIND

The first one was to get some background for us, which we need especially in our culture because we have such different view about what the mind is, about what the mind is, to understand this: in general, that it is something that is **not our body**, that it is not something created by others, it

is something that is absolutely our own. It's a name given to all the contents, thoughts, feelings, emotions, unconscious, subconscious, intuition, instinct, you name it. This is mind, consciousness.

That it's **beginningless**, because it's a product of cause and effect. This is the law that Buddha says everything that exists functions according to. It's a natural law. And everything, not just flowers and trees and moons, which is how we think in the Western world, but everything, especially all our thoughts, feelings, emotions and experiences, are all to do with **cause and effect** within the mind itself. Thus the mind keeps going back and back and back. The continuity of it itself is a product of cause and effect. If it's cause and effect then it can't have a first moment. This mind of ours is beginningless. As soon as you say it began then, which means it began out of nowhere, then it's not cause and effect. Then the whole thing collapses. Given the hypothesis of cause and effect, then mind is beginningless. There's no other option.

But also it's extremely important to understand its potential. What is the mind in its nature? What is mind in its nature? It's **potentially a buddha**. That's what our mind is. "What's an acorn, Mum?" "Oh darling it's a potential oak tree." That's what it actually is, isn't it? It is brown, it is small, it is cute, you can shine it up and use it as jewelry, it's true, but it's not what it really is. We are human, we are this, we are female, we are Australian, and we are that, we are something, we are a nun, but that's not what we *really* are. What we finally are is a potential Buddha. That's our job. We become a nun, we are Australian, we are female, we are this, we are that in order to help us become a buddha. Because that's what we really are, finally. That defines us. This is how Buddha talks. It gives us some courage.

Because Buddha would say our mind is **naturally pure**, meaning this. It's like water. When you say water you mean that pure, clear stuff. You don't mean the pollution in it, that's not water, is it? That's an additive, it

doesn't belong. Well that's here. The virtues, if you like, the positive qualities, they are who we really are. They are our nature, they are what defines us, and their full development is what a buddha is. The delusions, they're there, loud and clear: check it out. But they don't define us; they're like pollution, they're additives. This is a crucial point to get our heads around, that Buddha is making. Confidence to move even one inch forward and our life is based on this idea. We thought about that.

## **FIRST PRELIMINARY CONTEMPLATION: THE NEED FOR A SPIRITUAL TEACHER**

The next point we think about is the one that Lama Tsongkhapa inserted into this packaging that Atisha developed in the eleventh century; he put this point in in the fourteenth century. He said it's really important to think about the need for the teacher. In the texts, it's presented very formally and in very great detail, about the need for a guru and how to find one and then



how to devote oneself. We just touched very broadly on the main points: the **necessity** for a teacher and how we go about **looking for** one. Then the general point having found one, based on our strong confidence this person is valid, is worthy, is valid, can lead me to enlightenment, and then developing the attitude this person **is the Buddha**. They are the Buddha. And to this extent, I will progress. To the extent of my capacity to do this. One old lama, Ribur Rinpoche, said it's the most difficult practice.

## **SECOND PRELIMINARY CONTEMPLATION: PRECIOUSNESS OF THIS HUMAN LIFE**

Then we went into Atisha's point to prime our minds to really begin to practice, to think about the first step, which is impermanence. He says think about the preciousness of this human life and have a sense of **not wishing to waste it**, which gives us the energy to even want to practice. We talked about that. This life, we've got so many

advantages; and we just do some market research and compare with just other humans, how fortunate we are.

Born in a country that's relatively free, we've got a relatively good life, relatively good health, relatively good mind, good conditions, friends, support, leisure, the time to think about other things than eating, sleeping and a going to the toilet or killing others or all the stuff that preoccupies the world. How fortunate we are.

**Don't waste this life** How tragic to waste this precious opportunity. Because all it is – really you think about the perfect human rebirth, this so called perfect human rebirth, it's a resource. And we all know the meaning of a resource: it's something you use to get something. To think of yourself like this, we don't normally do, because we're so caught up in the ego, so caught up in "I." We can't get a sense of what the purpose of our life is.

**Not knowing who we are** Thinking of it this way, you think of yourself as the fruit of an awful lot of morality, so you kind of created this

marvelous thing, yourself, and then we spend the rest of life worrying about it. It's like having a knife and getting anxious and shining it and keep shining it and keep sharpening it and keep looking at it and putting it away and taking it out and thinking what's the purpose of a knife and what's the meaning of it and putting it away, doing this, doing that, playing with it, never quite getting what the purpose of a knife is. We kind of waste our lives like this. What am I? Who am I? What's the purpose of my life? We shine ourselves up and make ourselves fat, change the shape here, and get that and put this and have another house and put ourselves in it and do all these things, preoccupied with the thing itself. It's so obsessive, so narrow-minded. Get some space. We are this marvelous resource, this marvelous tool that we created, so let's use it skillfully.

**Wasting this resource** Right now we use it to eat, sleep and go to the toilet, when you break it right down. Well, dogs are much better at it than

we are actually. They're very skillful, they don't waste much time and it doesn't cost any money. Really and truly they're very, very skillful at eating, sleeping and going to the toilet, which is what we do when you break it all down, if we're not using our lives skillfully. They don't have to have a house; they just lie down and go to sleep. Then they stand up again, it's so unattached if you think about it. But we create entire universes. They say that bedrooms are getting bigger and bigger these days, more grand, more magnificent. Scientists develop mattresses now, just so you can sleep.

These great yogis don't sleep at all. According to a Ven. Roger, Lama Zopa Rinpoche's attendant, for Rinpoche sleeping is "a disgusting waste of time." He doesn't need a mattress, he doesn't need a bed.

We spend all that time sleeping and all that time having to go to work. . . getting educated first so that we can go to work so that we can get money so we can buy food, basically. And build a house to keep this thing in, isn't it? Not

joking, it's sort of true. And then of course, that's the best we can do in this life, so we make it more and more important. The type of work we do gets higher and higher, that's the peak of this society, to have a really good job, a really good profession, being really respected doing this and this and this, and when it finally comes down to it in this commercial world we live in, scientists are building mattresses, scientists make toilet paper, scientists develop advertising on screens for toilet paper. All the skills we use are turning into things to wipe our bottoms and things to put in there that go out into the toilet and so you have to wipe your bottom when it's finished. I mean, think about it. Break it all down. It's kind of harsh but you can't say it's not true.

Well, it's kind of a waste of this life. Buddha would say what a tragic and tragic and terrible waste. Sure, wipe your bottom, okay, nothing wrong; keep clean, nothing wrong, but have a bigger purpose to life.

**Remember our true nature** When you remember your true nature, remember your potential, when you know what your nature is, you know what your potential is, then you use your life to develop that potential. It's very obvious, so simple you know? That doesn't mean you've got to be all holy and go to the mountains, you don't have to. You can if you want to, it's great. That's the way to go quickly.

**Reason for existing** Meanwhile stay in your nice house, keep your bottom clean and do all those things and eat yourself nice food and have a good education, but have a bigger reason for it. I'm doing this, why? I can develop myself, so I can have space and time to hear the teachings so I can get enlightened. I can benefit others. That's your long-term goal. His Holiness in general says do what is most beneficial. Always. And if you have to choose between short-term benefit and long-term benefit, choose the long-term, if you can. And of course, in this context, future lives, your long term potential.

Then you enjoy the process. You can have your food and you can have your nice pleasure and you can have your nice house, but that's not the purpose, which is what attachment says: that's the purpose of life, family, this, this. No, something bigger is the purpose. It's a very reasonable view. If you get so caught up in junior school that this is the purpose of life, if you forget you're getting into junior school so you can go to high school, you lose track don't you? You get obsessed with grade one. You're doing grade one, great, you've got to do it. But it's gone soon and you move to the next step. Why? Because you're moving to the next one. Why? You're moving to the next one. Why? So you can graduate. You have a long-term perspective there. That's how we're thinking here. Get some perspective.

For this reason lift ourselves up out of the misery and the fears and the panic and the worries and the dramas and the toilet paper and all the rest and have this bigger view – because that's our true nature. That's why, it's

something practical, not something holy, it's practical. Because we won't be happy until we've totally removed all the nonsense from our minds and become who we're really are. Who we really are is a buddha. Not it yet. Like an acorn is not an oak tree yet, but it's so tasty to say, it's as if the oak treeness is there bursting to get out. It's like that. When we have that view, we've got a long-term perspective. We need that. Thinking about this precious human rebirth gives us that idea and causes us to have the energy to want to not waste this precious resource. It's a precious resource, don't waste it.

## **JUNIOR SCHOOL: DEATH AND IMPERMANENCE**

Then that primes our mind ready to enter grade one, where we start to contemplate impermanence. Atisha takes from Buddha's extensive teachings on the nature of how things are in their nature: changing.

**Death Is definite** He takes the particular point about death, our own death, and we contemplate the



definiteness of death, the certainty of death. The very nature of coming into life implies death. Death is part of life. We see it as something alien and separate but it's part of life. Should be factored in, it's something natural; we've got to factor it in, you know; do things in the context of the definiteness of my death.

### **The time of death is uncertain**

And then of course, the second point is the uncertainty of the time of death.

"Oh my goodness, I better be ready just in case." Just like you've got your driving test coming up but they've told you we don't know when it's going to be, we'll let you know. You've got to be ready just in case it comes tomorrow. It's very obvious, it's very simple. It's an example we understand so easily, all the things we prepare for and plan for. Isn't it? We can understand it. You know you're not sure when the appointment is going to be, you know you've got to be ready, because it could come tomorrow, boom. Now I'm ready.

It's the same with death. You don't even get a warning with death. Well,

not likely. You're lucky if you do. You're fortunate if you do get warning, doctor says. But even then there's no guarantee you're going to die in the six months they give you. Like my friend, he didn't die in the six months. He stayed alive. And another friend of mine on death row is preparing for his death but also going through all these appeals to try to get out, get out, get out and he dies of leukemia; comes from behind, grabs him; wasn't prepared for it. Friend of mine went to Los Angeles to help his father die of cancer and he got better. They're all cheering and having parties and he dies of a heart attack the next day.

These aren't jokes, they all sound so cute. They only sound so cute because we're so entrenched in the view of permanent me, undying me, living me. We've got to shake that. Come to terms with reality, and then there's something natural, no longer fear, just natural. So be prepared for death. Knowing I could die at any moment.

**What's important at the time of death** Then the crux of it is knowing

what's important at the time of death. Or given this perfect human rebirth, given this stuff we're talking here, this whole viewpoint, then what's important clearly is the virtuous imprints in my mind. That's it, that's all that matters at that time. Nothing else. Negative imprints are worse than useless. The house, the family, the toilet paper, the gorgeous mattress, the husband, the babies, that's useless at that time, at that moment they're no help to you. What's a help to you at that moment, given that your mind continues, is your virtuous imprints. You better start storing them away now. Very practical.

## **JUNIOR SCHOOL: SUFFERING OF THE LOWER REALMS**

We then moved to the next point in thinking that, "Given I could die at any moment, given that I've had countless lives, and I've had countless suffering lives where I've created very much negative karma. . ." it's just the way it is, we're all like it, Buddha says, join the universe. Every living being is like this, what with these countless of

imprints. Just a few of the positive ones have ripened to be this package for this life; just a few of them, just a few of our good qualities, as well as a few of our bad.

But we've got masses of other negative ones there, from all the heavy past actions we've done; it's just how we all are. If they do ripen, they're going to ripen as quite acute suffering. And so we looked a little bit, taken again from Buddha's teachings about the whole universe and the realms of existence, we looked a little bit at the suffering of the lower realms.

**The suffering of animals** Atisha says we need to contemplate, to think about, the suffering of beings, just even an animal which is one we can see. Hell beings and spirits sound too abstract for us, but animals, right in front of our face. Use them as a contemplation, use them as a meditation and think differently. Take Buddha's view about what an animal is and just look at it differently, instead of the usual view we have, just remove our own view, because Buddha is saying our view is

incorrect – and that’s for us to find out, okay? He is saying what an animal is, a lion, a tiger, a dog, generally speaking to get that type of a rebirth, at the time of death is the fruit of a very negative karma ripening. Depending upon the quality of the negative karma, you’ll get that type of life. A lion, you can see, has much more aggression than say, what are some animals that aren’t very aggressive? Maybe there aren’t that many.

*Student* An elephant.

*Ven. Robina* An elephant is not aggressive? Excuse me! You see elephants when they’re angry? They’ll destroy anything in its path.

*Student* A bunny rabbit.

*Student* A deer.

*Ven. Robina* Deer don’t fight when they’re angry? Look at those big antlers! They fight with each other over the girls, don’t they?

*Student* A rabbit.

*Ven. Robina* Rabbits don’t fight?

*Student* Penguins.

*Ven. Robina* Penguins they don’t fight? They don’t hurt each other? Well

there you go. That's all of it, there you go, join the club. They have anger. Any animal that doesn't, is not aggressive? Can we think of one? Anyway it's an interesting thought.

*Student Ants.*

*Ven. Robina* Ants aren't aggressive? Look up close, they're monstrous. They eat each other alive, they do terrible things. They get their dead brother over there, they can't wait, they start eating him before it's even dead.

Anyway never mind. We can kind of see there are some, maybe a little more passive than others. They're not all predators like the lion are they? Like that anyway, in that way. So, never mind, the point here was, depending on the negative karma, born as different kinds of animals.

**How do animals suffer?** Looking at just the animal as an example. How to understand an animal's suffering? There's the obvious one, the very obvious one, of just having not much choice, especially the animals that are used by humans. Forget the others, forget the wild animals; even just those

animals being used. But really if you look at even the animal that hasn't got much control over its life. It can't go get its breakfast if it hasn't got food, if it's locked up in a pen somewhere, it can't do much, they're pretty hopeless.

The general thing about an animal is the prevalence of incredible ignorance. The same ignorance as ours, this primordial clinging to a sense of self, but multiplied a million times, such that they mainly function on delusions, they are completely programmed by their delusions. There's very little virtue. A virtuous state of mind, remember – and we're now going to go to deeply into this today in high school, we better hurry we're running out of time we've got high school and university to do yet; okay, I'll speed up on this one. We went through the animal birth we've talked about that. I won't carry on about that. We think about the suffering of the animals so that we can think wow, thank you very much, I don't want that.

## **JUNIOR SCHOOL: REFUGE**

Then think whom can I turn to to give me the methods to not be born this way. We turn to the Buddha, we take refuge, we rely upon the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, as we said.

## **JUNIOR SCHOOL: KARMA**

Now we began to look at what Buddha says, what are his instructions, what is his medicine; now we begin to put our money where our mouth is. Now we begin to practice, **we abide by the laws of karma**. This is Buddha's deal. Karma: cause and effect. Karma is meaning cause and effect, when he refers to sentient beings. Cause and effect is the law as far as Buddha is concerned: we know this in the West from our science, we accept that. Buddha is referring to it in relation to the mind and sentient beings' experiences, and when he refers to that he calls it karma, and it means "action," as we talked.

Every single thing that we say, do and think is an action that brings a reaction. **It leaves a seed and**



**brings a fruit.** Necessarily everything. There's nothing that isn't a karma. Nothing we do, say or think that isn't a karma. Everything necessarily is. Its nature is that, its nature is that it will leave a reverberation or a seed that will bring a type of experience in the future.

**Karma expands.** Tiny seeds bring many fruits. If you sowed the seed, you'll get the fruit. If the fruit is there you must have sown the seeds. Simple points, but if we can start to apply it, it's very powerful in our life.

Then we touched very briefly on the **ten nonvirtues**, using this as a little guide for living your life. Minimally, at this stage of practice refraining from doing the negative things. Already this is sublime, level of practice, sublime. Harnessing our energy first, beginning to control the body and speech and, to some extent our mind, in this first scope.

The consequence of this, and if we just practiced this first stuff, if we left school after junior school, if we really take karma away with us, based on thinking about the other things, and

abided by the laws of karma – didn't harm, didn't bad-mouth, didn't lie, didn't kill, didn't steal, controlled your mind a bit – you'd be a blissful person. And, you wouldn't harm others. They'd be happy. It's an amazing way to live your life. Minimal level, junior school.

## 17. THE FOUR TRUTHS FOR THE NOBLE ONES MIDDLE SCOPE/HIGH SCHOOL

But we can go further. We move into high school. We've got some control over our body and speech now and a little bit over our mind and now we start to look more deeply into the causes of suffering. We go into the mind itself.

One way you could present this second scope of teachings, the second scope of practice, this high school, is the Four Noble Truths – actually, the truths aren't noble; they're the four truths, the four facts, for the noble ones, those who've realized them.

We'd look more deeply here at what is suffering, **the first noble truth is there's suffering**. Looking into what is suffering in a deeper way and then looking at **the causes of suffering, the second**, based on the recognition that **we can be free of it, which is**

**the third noble truth.** And the **fourth, doing the job of getting rid of suffering and its causes.**

We're getting more deeply here now into suffering. The first level we just talked about the suffering of the lower realms. Here we're now looking at the suffering of even having this life, and the suffering of being caught in attachment and the other ridiculous delusions. Let's look at this one.

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

The first noble truth is that there is suffering, Buddha says. There are three kinds.

**Suffering of suffering** The first kind is the gross kind of suffering. First, this refers to the lower realms, which we briefly discussed.

But also in this human life, this suffering is referring to the unhappy things happening: starving, being hungry, living in a war zone, people being mean to you, all the things we call ordinary daily life suffering. And if you think about it very simply, it's

when you get what you don't want or when you don't get what you want. That's what we mean by suffering. In our ordinary daily life. Our life is fraught with that. It's very clear.

**The suffering of change: what we call happiness.** This refers first to upper realm rebirths. In comparison with the lower realms, they're blissful, they're happy. But Buddha says they're also in the nature of suffering, because they end and we go again to the lower realms.

But, again, this suffering also refers to our experiences in this human life. It's more subtle. We don't even call it suffering, and this is where we really begin to look more sophisticatedly now at the way the mind works and we become our own therapist.

This second kind of suffering Buddha calls it simply the suffering of change. It refers actually to what we mean by happiness. All Buddha is saying is this, the happiness we have now is like a honey-covered razor blade. It's actually in the nature of suffering. Because, simply speaking, when we get it, it

doesn't last and then it eventually changes into what we mean by suffering, the suffering of suffering.

There's a third, even more subtle level of suffering, **all-pervasive suffering**. But we won't go there now.

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

To understand this more deeply we need to go into the second noble truth, which are the causes of suffering. What are the causes? Because if the third noble truth is that we have the potential to be free of suffering, then we better know what suffering is, so we can acknowledge it and recognize it. We'd better know, crucially, the causes of it.

## **TWO MAIN CAUSES OF SUFFERING**

For the Buddha there are two main causes of suffering – there are countless causes and conditions in general, but he focuses the two main ones, such that when we remove those, we can quit suffering. They're the ones

that if we change those, that's the source, that'll help everything else crumble, and we can get out of suffering.

**Both causes are in me!** And these two, Buddha says, are both inside ourself, which already is shocking for us. Because “Why are you suffering, Robina?” “It’s Joe.” I mean we think totally that and “I’m an innocent victim, aren’t I? How dare you do that to me?” Check how we feel. It’s very deep inside us, this innocent “I.” “Self-pity me,” as Lama Yeshe calls it. Quite cruel almost, but you check it. It’s very true.

In other words, we don’t factor ourselves into anything when it happens. We don’t factor ourselves into anything in the experience of the chocolate cake. We just think: “What can I do, this delicious chocolate cake out there. Look at it. It’s vibrating deliciousness at me, begging me to eat it. I’m just an innocent victim, I can’t help it.” You check, it’s how it feels, isn’t it? It’s how it feels.

**Innocent victim** That's how we think about suffering as well. I'm this innocent victim and things happen to me, things get done to me. I mean, my life got done to me, didn't it? Someone did it to me. That's how we think. That's the ego mind. That's delusion, Buddha says, it's victim. It's fantasy, it's not accurate. He says we can be free of suffering. There are many factors and causes for it, but there are two main ones we have to focus in on. And if we change these ones, hey, that's the source of enlightenment, it's the cause of enlightenment. The two are both inside myself.

## **FIRST CAUSE OF SUFFERING: PAST KARMA**

We've looked into karma already.

Let's say, out of the blue, Joan punches me in the nose. Our first response is shock, "Why me?" We don't have an answer for that on our earth usually. "Why me?" We never can find the answer to this. "Why me?" Buddha has an answer. He says it's your past action, Robina. Twenty-two lives ago,



when Joan's consciousness and yours knew each other, and who knows what the relationship was because that's how come you even are together again now; there's no way you're going to meet a person if you haven't got a karmic connection with them, it's not possible. It's not random. There is a cause for everything.

Secondly, why she harms you is because you have harmed her. Simply speaking. Remember, if the fruit is there you must have sown the seed. The fruit is: being punched. I must have sown the seed. If the fruit is in your garden you must have sown the seed. You don't think, "Who sowed that seed in my garden? Look at that fruit, it is not mine!" Of course it is! If it's in your garden, it's your fruit, you must have sown it. This is in my garden, it's my punch, if I get punched it's my garden, it's my fruit, I must have sown the seed. It's logic. The first cause of my suffering is my past action, my past karma. I set myself up to be punched.

## **I AM THE CAUSE OF MY HAPPINESS TOO**

This is the same for happiness, by the way. But we never ask, “Why do good things happen to me?” Do we? You check this. “Why do bad things happen?” Because the ego in us is obsessed with all the bad things, obsessed with the victim, obsessed with “poor me.” We never ask why the good things happen; we don’t even think there’s a reason. We don’t care. We just grasp at it and want more. You understand? It’s very interesting.

But we should ask. And that’s what should blow our minds. The fact that we’re just sitting here right now in this group, relatively harmonious, a peaceful environment, and everything’s kind of fairly pleasing in this nice place, and nice food and people taking care and the pleasant garden and no ugly noises, no ugly smells, this is like a miracle. This is the fruit of phenomenal virtue on the part of every single one of us, and we must have created it collectively because here we are experiencing the fruit collectively. This

is a collective karma, meaning each of us has created the cause to be here together discussing this type of thing in this environment from way who knows back when. We should be weeping in tears of gratitude at our past virtue, every time even the smallest good thing happens. But you know what we do instead; we grasp at it and have attachment. “It’s my right, gimme.”

## **WE ARE THE CREATORS**

This shows how bizarre we are, Buddha says. No sense of responsibility, no sense of cause and effect. The karmic view puts you squarely in the center of every experience you have. You are the creator of it, you’re the main cause. Many factors, yes; but you are the main cause, not Joan. It’s a very powerful view actually. Takes time really, because our view now is absolutely different. It’s the exact opposite.

## **SECOND CAUSE OF SUFFERING: DELUSIONS**

Now the second cause of my suffering, which really is the main one: the

delusions that impel the past action. And if it's a punch, let's say, it must be anger. My past **karma**, an action: the punch; and my past **delusion**, anger. The two causes of my present suffering. Simple.

If we understood this, we'd stop the karma growing right there. But we don't. We feel like the innocent victim, get angry, and punch right back. That keeps the ball rolling. That's samsara, and it never ends.

We talked about how to tackle the first causes back in junior school: stop doing negative actions now and purify the past actions before they ripen.

Here we're dealing with the main causes, the delusions. And the key delusion to understand here is attachment.

## 18. THE WORKSHOP IS IN THE MIND MIDDLE SCOPE/HIGH SCHOOL

### MENTAL AND SENSORY CONSCIOUSNESS

What are the delusions? What *are* delusions?

Let's look at the mind again, in general.

First of all you've got **mind**. Then within mind you can say you've got the two ways it functions. This is important. You've got **mental consciousness** and **sensory consciousness**. They're all a function of the physical, as far as the modern view of the mind is concerned, but not for Buddha. What Buddha is saying, there's consciousness, and there's body. Two separate things but linked together.

Mental consciousness, which is thoughts and feelings and emotions, intellect. Then one is sensory, which is the experiences of the mind through

the medium of the body. This is the way to say it. Technically, in Buddhist terms, eyeball is not what sees things. The eyeball is just the physical medium through which the mind, that part of our mind, eye consciousness, functions in order to perceive shape and color. It's not just splitting hairs; it's a major point. Ear consciousness is that part of our consciousness, mind, that functions through the medium of our ear, through the drum and all that business, in order to perceive sound.

## **THE SENSES ARE LIKE DUMB ANIMALS**

The sensory consciousness is really very limited. It's got a very limited capacity. But we make the body the boss, as Lama Yeshe says. Big mistake. For example, we will say, "Oh wow, look at that delicious chocolate cake." And we will say, "We see a delicious chocolate cake. We smell a delicious chocolate cake." Technically not true, according to Buddha. Eye consciousness perceives only shape and color. It has no more capacity, it

doesn't know. . . the word "know" or "cognize" are the same meaning, and that's the function of mind. Mind cognizes, consciousness cognizes, and it cognizes in various ways, knows in various ways.

Eye consciousness cognizes only two things: shape and color. Ear consciousness, it can't hear divine Miles Davis. I'd say, "Oh wow, that's Miles, I can hear Miles there," because I'm a big fan of Miles Davis. But ear consciousness doesn't know that. It only knows or perceives or cognizes sound. They're very dumb animals, they're like dumb animals, the senses; they're very limited, very limited level of capacity of awareness.

But we give them so much more power because we don't have such a good understanding – this is using Buddha's approach – to how the mind works. As Lama Yeshe says, "We make the body the boss." He says we have the senses, yes we do, you see they're very powerful. They're the interface between me and the world, aren't they? Without the senses we have no way of

experiencing anything because this is the level we function at. We're living in a sensory universe now. Buddha calls it the desire realm. We have this gross body that's the interface between us and others, it's very gross. So, senses are limited.

## THE WORKSHOP IS IN THE MIND

Then we have **mental consciousness**. Actually what's happening when we meet the chocolate cake is a whole pile of things. I'll use this as an example in a minute of how the mind works. Okay, we've got sensory consciousness, which have very little capacity – and I'll explain the relationship in a minute – then we have mental consciousness. And that's where the workshop is, as Rinpoche says; that's where the workshop is. That's what we have to become familiar with, that's what we have to get to know deeply, and that's where we have to be our own therapist. And that's what we have to change, because that's where the potential for enlightenment is. And



that's where all the potential for suffering is. This is the point.

Even knowing the sensory is not your mental consciousness is already powerful. You don't get fooled by what the senses tell you. It's an extremely important point to really become a good practitioner.

Now let's leave the senses alone, now let's look at the mental. I'll come back to the senses in a minute and the function they play in relation to the chocolate cake.

### THREE CATEGORIES OF STATES OF MIND

Now, within the mental consciousness you could say there are three components, broadly speaking: **positive** states of mind, **negative** and **neutral**. That's it, no fourth category, very simple.

I like to call the so-called **neutral states of mind** the mechanics of our mind. They're not neutral insofar as they're not important. It means they're neither negative nor positive, virtuous

nor nonvirtuous – we'll talk about them in a minute.

The mechanics of our mind include discrimination, concentration, alertness, good memory, etc., etc., and whether you're a murderer or a meditator, you need these. They enable us to function.

## **NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE STATES OF MIND**

The negative and positive states of mind are our business; this is now where we are really beginning to move along on this path, now we're getting into the real nitty-gritty of the real work of being a practitioner. All the time abiding by the laws of karma, that's fundamental, but here we begin to look into the nitty-gritty, really look deeply into the mechanics of the cause of all our happiness and all our suffering, which is our own mind. Now we're beginning to see how it works.

## **WE GIVE EQUAL STATUS TO GOOD AND BAD**

In the West, when we look at who we think we are, at our very nature of self, at the person, we give equal status, you check this, we give equal status to the negative and the positive qualities. We give equal status as far as the person is concerned, the very nature of the self, to anger, love, jealousy, all the good and all the bad. We say, “Well I didn’t ask to get born. We all start in our mother’s womb, somebody else made us, and we don’t really know why we’re like this. It’s just the way we are. We’re all like this, it’s just the way we are.”

Buddha disagrees as you can see. We bring it with us, we do have these things, but he is saying the positive qualities, they are who we really are, they are innate to us, they are the core of our being and the negative ones aren’t. It’s a very interesting point. It needs a lot of thinking about. It gives us all the encouragement to want to do something about it.

If it’s true I can be free of suffering, and if it’s true, I now know what

suffering is, then I better know what causes it. If it's true my water will be free of pollution and if I now can recognize what pollution is, I have to mainly know what causes it, because then I can stop doing it. That's the crucial one.

## **NOT MORALISTIC**

We talked a bit yesterday when we talked about karma how Buddha sees this. Not as something moralistic, not as some statement from on high that Buddha has decided, "That's a good thing and that's a bad thing, and you better do this and not do that because I say so," which is the Christian view. Not criticizing again, just stating. I mentioned a discussion with a Catholic priest friend of mine years ago: what is a sin, what is a negative action, what defines it? He said, "It's that which goes against the will of God." Now that's perfect if there's a creator, that's correct. You shouldn't question. It's correct; do what God says. Perfect. Perfect.

## **NEGATIVE ACTION: THAT WHICH HARMS OTHERS**

But that's not the story here. Buddha says, like we talked, a heavier negative action is something, simply speaking, that harms others. It's very simple, that's what defines it, in general.

Remember we talked?

But then of course, we looked at how we create karma, and just because a negative action is that which harms others, it doesn't follow that when you do that action that you've created negative karma – and the example being when you had no intention to kill the ant. The ant died, so it is yes technically a negative action, but you didn't create a negative action, because there was no intention. We looked at that part which is really important again to understand. But in general here, how you define a negative action, karma, is in that way.

## **FIRST INTENTION, THEN MOTIVATION**

Then, we can say when it comes to a negative action that harms another,

there're various things playing a part. There's your mind mostly, first of all, which is the intention, and then the motivation. Where the motivation comes in, that's the negative state of mind. In the case of the killing, the aversion, that's the negative state of mind. Everything we do with our body and speech is propelled by the mind. Okay, in the case of killing the ant it wasn't because there's no intention there, it was an accidental thing. But in general, when we do negative actions they're propelled by a negative state of mind, which is the motivation.

## **MUST KNOW THE NEGATIVE**

The negative states of mind, therefore, are the ones we have to learn to understand, because they're the ones we're trying to change. By knowing the way the negative states of mind function, it tells us what the positive states of mind are. But here we're still in junior school and high school, in the wisdom wing, we're still focusing on understanding the negative, we're still

focusing on refraining from the negative.

There's no big talk yet about doing the positive. That actually is more advanced: the love and the compassion, which we're coming to, is university, because that's on the basis of harnessing and controlling and knowing our own mind and our own body and our own speech, which is this one. We are understanding here how to not harm with our body and speech, we're learning how to understand the negative states of mind.

## **GET OUR HANDS DIRTY**

We need to understand this, just like when Buddha tells you your water can be depolluted, you've got to start now getting your hands dirty, don't you? Wading into that disgusting water, testing out what it is, finding out the nature of the pollution. You're not just sitting there thinking, "Oh yes, it's nice pure water, don't talk about pollution, I don't want to talk about pollution." You've got to taste the pollution, you've got to get in there and really get

yourself dirty in order to understand the nature of the pollution and to know what causes it, so you can remove it. You're preoccupied with the pollution. Are you seeing my point? You've got to be.

Why though? You see your reason why: so you can finally have pure water. And then the compassion wing is like you even purify more the pure water and develop love and compassion and all the positive qualities. We are preoccupied here with the negative ones, which is why often when we get caught up in this we can get very depressed. "Oh God, Buddha goes on about suffering all the time and negative states of mind all the time, can't we talk about something nice please?" But we're still working out all the pollution here, we've got to know about it deeply. You can't just pretend it's not there. Do you see my point people? Are you seeing my point?



## WHAT IS A NEGATIVE STATE OF MIND?

Okay, let's look at then what is a negative state of mind. Well, there are various synonyms, as I said. One is "disturbing emotions." There's very many terms: there's destructive emotions, disturbing emotions, mental afflictions, there's all these different terms, you might see them. There are all referring to the same thing: negative states of mind.

## NEGATIVE STATES OF MIND CAUSE US TO BE MISERABLE

There are two main characteristics that these negative states of mind have. And one is indicated by this term

**disturbing emotion.** Even if we became familiar with just this, it would give us great courage to want to go beyond it because this is what suffering is. Just the suffering of being angry, just the suffering for yourself of being jealous, being depressed, being this, being that. It's so obvious, isn't it, it's so clear that it's so painful for you. Not discussing anyone else here. It's

painful, it's painful, it's a disturbing emotion. That's the same as a negative state of mind.

As soon as we hear “negative” we kind of get guilty. But don't think like that, be brave. Just hear it okay?

## **NEGATIVE STATES OF MIND CAUSE US TO BE DELUSIONAL**

Another characteristic, and this is a really tasty bit, another characteristic that these negative states of mind have is indicated by another term, another synonym, **delusion**. Delusion. If someone accused you of being delusional, like if someone said to Joan, “God, you're so delusional Joan,” she'd be really hurt. “I'm not insane, I'm not delusional!”

But actually – again using Joan as an example because she's talked about her depression, or me talking about my anger – then Buddha would say the extent to which we're caught up in the depression or we're caught up in the anger is the extent to which we are delusional. You look at yourself when you've got your depression. Everything

is so fearful, isn't it? You're fearful, you're scared, you're panicked. It's like the world is this awful place. Then when you've calmed down it looks quite different, right? While you've got your depression or while I'm in my anger and freaking out and shouting at this person who's feeling so hurt, the world appears a very bizarre place. Monstrous and out there against you and suffocating and the heart is beating. Well that's just plain old delusional. Excuse me; you're insane while you're doing that.

I mean if someone said to me or Joan you're insane, we'd be very hurt. But Buddha is saying that. He is saying that being caught up in any one of these negative states of mind, to whatever extent and for however long, to this extent we are insane. To this extent we are delusional. To this extent we are out of our mind, all these words we say.

## **WE'RE ALL DELUSIONAL: IT'S JUST A QUESTION OF DEGREE**

In our culture, we just take as a given that everyone has a bit of anger, a bit of

this, a bit of that, and we call that normal. We bring in the delusions into our normality. Buddha just has a more radical, more refined view of what is insane, what is delusional. Are you seeing my point? He says we're all delusional; we're all insane, it's just a question of degree. And that really is the best way to say it.

Which is quite shocking, because what it also implies is the level to which we can be amazing. If we just take as normal a bit of anger, a bit of jealousy, a bit of this, a bit of that and that's a rounded normal person, then you can't really move very far from this, you're stuck with that. By saying that all attachment, anger, pride, jealousy is delusional is also saying that we can get rid of it. He is more subtle in his assessment of how we are crazy and he is more subtle in his assessment of how we can be so amazing. You see my point? That's the flip side. It's very interesting, what he is saying.

## **NOT SEEING THINGS AS THEY REALLY ARE**

Delusional simply means, you're out of touch with reality, you're not seeing things as they are. It's very obvious, when Joan's caught up in her depression and her fears, you can't see past your own nose, can you? You're just freaked out about "I," isn't it? This overwhelming sense of I, and that's the point about the negative states of mind.

## **IGNORANCE: THE ROOT DELUSION**

Because they're rooted in the main delusion, this one called ignorance. This primordial, deeply instinctive misconception about the very nature of our self, so instinctive that we don't even know it's there, we can't even label it, we don't even name it, because it's just constantly there. It's like a constant pain that's there; we're never free of it so we just assume it's normal. And that is this ignorance, the deepest one, the root of all our suffering; psychologically speaking the root even of any of the other ones: attachment,

depression, anger, fear, they're all just variations on the theme. They're all the voices of this ego-grasping, this ignorance, known as ego-grasping.

## **IN SAMSARA**

And this is what Buddha means by being “in samsara”: having this ordinary. . . and this second kind of suffering. . . the first kind, we don't have the first kind of suffering too much in relation to say, war zones or starving countries, you see what I'm saying? We've got a very happy life in comparison – and this is the point that Catherine was making earlier. And this is Buddha's point about the second kind of suffering: we don't think we have much suffering if we hear the word suffering. But when we hear the second kind of suffering - even having the happiness we have, and the sign that it's suffering is when it goes – look how you feel: total panic, total freak out, when he leaves you. When you've got him, you don't even think you've got an attachment – and we're going to talk about attachment more – you don't

even think you're suffering. But when he leaves you it's unbearable pain.

Well, the Buddha is saying that the one that we call happiness, which is having him and having all the happiness, is actually totally linked to the other one, because if you didn't have attachment, when he left you wouldn't have any pain. The happiness we have now is completely linked to the suffering we have now. We are swaying between both.

And if you look at daily life, a thousand times a day, you get happiness, the green light comes, "Oh I'm happy!" you know? The red light comes, now you get suffering. Each is linked to the other.

## **19. BE YOUR OWN THERAPIST MIDDLE SCOPE/HIGH SCHOOL**

### **IDENTIFY DELUSIONS**

In relation to the two main causes of my suffering there are two levels of practice. The first one we already talked about, the karmic one: stop creating more suffering by refraining from harming others; and pull out the karmic seeds, in the long-term, all the ones that I've planted up until now, we have to do the job of doing the practice of purification; pulling out the seeds before they ripen.

But the most immediate level of practice now is, referring to the second cause of suffering, the delusions that drive our actions: we need to identify them, and harness them. The most urgent level of practice, as Lama Zopa Rinpoche says, is to work on the mind. First work on your body and speech, refrain from the action. Now, work on the mind.



Like I said yesterday, this is more sophisticated than working on the body. The working on the body is the first level, at least don't punch. Refrain from punching, even if your mind is boiling. Simply speaking here, don't respond with a punch because at least you don't harm someone and sow heavy negative seeds in your mind.

## **BE YOUR OWN THERAPIST**

Then, in this second scope, in high school, the nitty-gritty, tasty, tasty, tasty level of practice is learning to be your own therapist. Seeing your mind, noticing the anger rising and learning to work with that and change it. That's the real immediate practice to do. And this is what's so difficult.

To even see what's in our mind is already difficult for us. Right now in our culture because we're not used to looking at our mind, it's not part of our education, we're brought up and educated to wipe our bottoms, tie our shoelaces, do this, do that, go to school, learn math. We use our intellectual capacity to an incredible degree in this

culture, but we don't learn emotional things. We don't learn how to see our mind. We don't learn techniques where we can look into the mind and understand it, be our own therapist. No way.

The way we think of therapy in the West, the way we think of psychology in the West, is we're all born this way, you do your best, you struggle along, and if things get so bad then you have to go and find a therapist. The very nature of going to a psychologist or a therapist means you really feel bad about it because you're such a disaster area now. It's sort of like we're just brought up to just hop into a car and get onto the freeway: no one teaches you to drive; it's just the way life is, you don't drive. And then if you have a crash, you have to go find someone to help you. Well, it's a bit backward isn't it? If you learn how to drive, how skillful, you can avoid the crashes when they come.

That's all Buddha is saying. From day one, start to know your mind. Be taught about your mind. Be taught about your

body and speech, be taught about your mind. It's your mind, it's your anger, it's your jealousy, darling, it's your love, it's your compassion. You have this potential so then can you imagine being brought up with this, plus the capacity to see what you're feeling and thinking well before the crash. Well, by the time we're 20, we're going to be an amazing human being, aren't we? Can you imagine? Not to mention 60 and 70 and 80.

## **VICTIMS**

All this undealt-with, garbage inside us, which we've never known how to process, which we've never seen, and then we spend our lives blaming everybody else for it, then we blame someone for making us. Talk about victims! Buddha doesn't use this word but, oh my goodness, it's a perfect description. Everything is done to us. And then if we don't know we can change, we're stuck with it. No wonder we feel guilty. No wonder we have panic every day. Because we've buried it comfortably or we've pushed it away

mightily. For those of us who have a lot of depression or fears, it's because we've buried it all and have been terrified of looking, because we haven't been taught. It's all pushed away there. It's got to come out somewhere, so it manifests as panic and fears and all the stuff that we have; depression, all these internalized things, repressed, packaged, shoved in.

It's kind of interesting. I can see a person like myself who's very volatile in my life. I didn't suppress, you know? Okay, I did. We all suppress so much. We all don't see so much of what is going on inside of us, that's clear. The advantage for me was: I didn't repress too much so I didn't go crazy – I probably made everybody else go crazy!

I'm thinking of myself, you know. I don't have depression, I've not had that or loneliness, that kind of thing. At a subtle level, we all have it; Buddha is saying this is how we all are. I'm just talking at a grosser level. But I've had lots of explosive energy, that's what I've had to control, my explosiveness and

my harming others with my mouth and so on. You see my point?

I can see with some other people who say have fears and depression, maybe they're very kind people and aren't angry and don't harm others; but the flip side for themselves is whatever is arising in there, because you need to be a good person and a kind person, they've pushed it down. You see what I'm saying? You recognize, don't you Joan? It makes sense what I'm saying, doesn't it? It's interesting. I'm only saying Joan because she's talked about it. You can see with Joan she's got a very kind, friendly persona, friendly approach, she probably doesn't go about shouting and yelling at people.

We're all cut out from the same thing, we are just different shapes that's all. We've all got some kind of fears, depression, anxiety, love, hate, this, that. This is the Buddha's deal. Each of us has got our own particular kind of recipe.

In general, the point here is to begin to own what happens to us. Why does Joan harm me? Past karma. Owning

that already is very powerful; it causes me to be less fearful in the response because, when you really internalize the karmic one, already just that is a cause for not being angry.

A friend of mine who was in Tibet, was tortured, abused, his father murdered, his brother murdered, he finally escaped. Incredible suffering. And I said, “Do you ever get angry?” He kind of laughed and said, “Angry, what for?” That’s a shocking answer, isn’t it? Even more shocking what he said then. He said, “What for? It’s our own fault.” All he meant was: it’s karma. But he has so integrated the view of karma in relation to both the good and the bad that for him it’s just something natural, in the bones of his being, like innocent victim is in ours.

If you really know that you create the causes for something, why would you be angry? Because anger is, “How dare you do it to me. I’m an innocent victim.” You see my point? It’s very interesting. When you’ve really internalize the workings of karma, already that psychologically is

profound for you. You don't feel such a victim. Because you own the fact that you're part of this scenario. Where something went wrong, where the person harmed you and the person stole from you.

As Lama Zopa says when we really get this, we see what happens to us as our own karmic appearance; we don't see it as something out there that we're an innocent victim of, that we didn't create the cause for. And when it's the good stuff, it's just the same. We own the good stuff as well. This both lessens attachment and lessens anger. Because you feel a part of it, you feel connected to it, rather than an innocent victim outside of it, which is what we feel now, both with the bad things and the good. This is how ego works. Kind of interesting.

Looking into the two causes of suffering and then of course working upon both, doing the purification of the karmic seeds from the past and then learning to know your mind well, become your own therapist.

## **20. ATTACHMENT RUNS THE SHOW MIDDLE SCOPE/HIGH SCHOOL**

There are three main delusions, Buddha says. The main one this **ignorance**, which is the root, root, root, the mother of them all, this primordial grasping at this sense of self and the sense of everything as having an inherent nature, like we talked, out there, existing causelessly from its own side. That's how we think about self. We can refer to it as ego-grasping.

### **ATTACHMENT IS A LIAR**

The main voice of that ignorance is attachment. Let's look at attachment because effectively, in the four noble truths, attachment is the main cause of all our suffering. Let's look at that.

The two main characteristics all the delusions have: one is the disturbingness, they are disturbing when you've got them, and two is they're delusional, they're liars, they're



liars. Another way to say, as we talk is, when you're caught up in it, you're seeing things that aren't true. When Joan has got her depression, things appear in a way that isn't accurate. It's like she's put her really dark, ugly glasses on: everything looks horrible. Same with anger, same with pride, same with jealousy, same with all of them. They've all got their own flavor. They're all liars, they're all voices of the primordial ignorance, they're all voices of ego-grasping, and they're all liars. And then we believe in the lie and we follow it. That's samsara.

Let's look at the root one, not the root, root, but the root one effectively for day to day life, and that's called attachment. And this is really difficult because when we use even this word in our culture we use it interchangeably with the words love, happiness, joy, pleasure. Please, throw out all your definitions, all your assumptions now and listen to this view, because Buddha used this word in a very specific way.

## **ATTACHMENT EXAGGERATES**

In general all the delusions, another way of describing it, is they exaggerate, distort certain aspects of their object.

And so equally when attachment is in the mind, the function of attachment is to exaggerate the delicious qualities of something. When attachment is in the mind, the thing or the person or the situation that you're attached to, that you're hankering after, appears more delicious than it really is. And attachment also exaggerates the role of the object in making me happy.

When anger is there, the state of mind of aversion, the thing, the person, the situation appears more ugly than it really is; and anger exaggerates the role of the object in making me suffer.

## **THE CHOCOLATE CAKE**

Let's use the chocolate cake as an example. What's extremely hard here now – because we're so on autopilot with this process, with this mode we're into, it's so ancient within us, we're so brainwashed to be caught up in these delusions – they all happen

spontaneously. We have practiced them literally to perfection from life after life after life, so to deconstruct this is extremely difficult. You need to really have the microscope of your mind onto it. And that means you've got to have concentration meditation, because you've got to look so carefully, so carefully; and you can't even do that unless you've even heard the teachings about what these all are so that you've got a label for what you're seeing. Like you can't do gardening until you know the names of what you see, you've got to study botany first. Well, here we're talking Buddha's botany.

## **WHAT'S INVOLVED IN EATING THE CHOCOLATE CAKE**

what's happening with the chocolate cake is a bit like this, there's a whole bunch of things going on, and we're going to include the senses here, too. The normal way is like this. Inside us, we have this aching kind of neediness, and this is the energy of attachment by the way, but we just take it for granted. There's always a sense of wanting

something more, always a sense of something missing, always a sense of not sure, maybe there's something missing, there's this aching feeling and it usually manifests as low self-esteem, and I'm hopeless, and I'm no good. Do you understand my point? There's this constant aching kind of neediness for something and it manifests itself in a million ways. That's attachment. It's real subtle actually. The word attachment sounds so simple. "Oh I love chocolate cake!" That's just the tip of the iceberg. It's coming from this aching sense of missing, of lacking, of not having. And so it manifests as incredible neediness, yearning, neediness in a neurotic sense. And it's just there all the time.

Depending upon the kind of karmic imprints you have, the kind of habits you have with certain kinds of phenomena and things from past lives, that will then attach itself to that type of thing.

## ATTACHMENT SELECTS ITS OBJECTS

**Beauty** We watched a movie last night, I was supposed to be doing my retreat but I was watching a movie. I watched that one, have you ever seen De-Lovely, that Cole Porter picture? Have you seen that? It's kind of interesting because you could see this rarified, in a worldly sense, world he lived in, very rich, he was always surrounded by beauty. He seemed a very lovely man, very kind, very patient, very sweet, he didn't get angry, but this massive attachment, we'd say in Buddhist terms this massive, aching, yearning, neediness, for something. Never satisfied with just one person, he had this one and that one, and this one and that one. But always attached to beauty, needing, hungry for beauty and nice pleasing things around him. But this aching missing something inside of him, you could see it very clearly.

**Heroin** Now a junkie has dumped their attachment on to heroin. That's got a certain kind of consequences, look at it. Another person is constantly

needy for people to love them. “Oh she’s so needy,” we’ll say, this little emotional needy person who needs other people to approve of them. Frankly, that’s the one we’ve all got deeply. They say the need to be approved of or known, approved of, is the deepest attachment of all. They talk about the yogis in the mountains, who’ve given up sex, drugs, and rock and roll, they’re still thinking about what the people down in the village are thinking about them. It’s interesting, but that can be very strong for some people.

**Furries** Some other people it’s money, for others it’s power, for the Furries it’s their stuffed toy. Have I talked about that in this class? I’ve been reading about it. There’s a whole lot of people now calling themselves Furries, Plushies, all these sort of words; their main object of sexual engagement is their stuffed toys. And they identify themselves as animals, but in a cute cartoon-like way, as animals. They all have these conferences in hotels and they all wear

their raccoon tails and they are Joey Raccoon, Mary Fox and they do all these things.

If you think of it karmically, which we don't in the West, but the Buddha's explanation, you think of the preoccupation we have, and especially since the Thirties and Forties and Fifties, with cartoons. What are cartoons? The personification of animals. That's the function of attachment: we've embellished and exaggerated to an insane degree, which we think is harmless and just a fantasy, the concept of a mouse and a duck and a fox, all these animals, right; we've personified them, so it's this cutesy thing that everybody, all children, we think it's wonderful.

## **KARMIC IMPRINTS FROM THE PAST**

Well the Buddha's explanation – this is me speculating, but using karma as the logic. One of these boys, when he talked about his own experience when he was six years old or seven, he was at the sports at school and he got turned

on by the Mickey Mouse mascot, not by all the girls kicking their legs in the air. Of course, he thought he was weird, he didn't know why he's like this.

And it's the same for BTK, I'm sorry for that gentleman, since past lives torturing animals, harming, he brings his strong imprint with him to where he gets his intense pleasure. . . his attachment is to harming people. You see my point? It's the same logic.

A person like this little boy, who gets turned on by Mickey Mouse mascot, meaning attachment sees a shape – ears, a big mouth, big eyes, right? All it is is a piece of cloth cut in a certain shape, which we now with familiarity call “Mickey Mouse” because we've been brainwashed into Mickey Mouse. I'm not blaming Mr. Disney here, I'm just talking how karma works. It's a form that has a very real form and shape.

You can imagine from past lives a lot of incredible attachment to fantasy, which we even think of as creativity. As a child preoccupied for hours thinking about and wanting and yearning your



little Mickey Mouse, and your little bear, and your little tiger, and your little this, and it's leaving powerful imprints in the mind.

Next life, attachment so strong we call it sexual, that's all. Attachment is attachment. Very strong involvement in certain activities, yearning for, attracted to doing it, it develops into this huge attachment next life. It multiplies from life to life like a million times. And the stronger the attachment, the stronger the pleasure. There's this little boy turned on now, his little thing stands up, when he sees Mickey Mouse now.

## **ATTACHMENT TO FEMALE FORMS**

Now my friend, when he was six years old, my Greek friend Panos, in Athens, who's totally into sex – he says I'm allowed to talk about it. I'd always feel guilty when I'd mention it, but he says, "Please, you have my permission, Robina." He said when he was six, walking along the street in Athens with his mummy and he sees a naked lady

on a poster in the cinema and he said, “Mummy, why is my penis standing up?” Same for him. It wasn’t Mickey Mouse mascot, it wasn’t torturing, it was a lady’s body: that shape. Now we call that normal and with respect, we call that a gift from God; we call it a sacrament, we call it a special gift from God. I’m not being rude now, but the Christians would say that this one of sexual union is a gift from God.

Well, Buddha would say it’s attachment. Much so, from so many lives he’s programmed his mind in liking female forms, seeing them as far more delicious than they really are – because if you really analyze it, it’s just two pokey things up there and a hole down here and two legs. You get my point? You really dissect it like the Mickey Mouse mascot. You understand my point here? Attachment is such, that now he just sees it and everything works its little job, the little thing stands up and things happen. This is how karma works, this is how attachment works.

## **INSTINCT IS JUST HABIT**

Then you make it far more than it is, that's how attachment works; we are breaking it down. Of course, because we are born with it and it's "instinctive" as we would say – and all instinct is, in Buddha's terms, is the habit of thinking and thinking and thinking from past, past, past that something is a certain way to the point now where it happens spontaneously. That's all instinct is. And then we take it as true, we see it as true.

The guy who loves the Mickey Mouse mascot, he always thought he was weird, now he's suddenly gone on the web and found thousands of people all over the world, especially in this country, who all agree with him. Suddenly now because it's what he feels, he says, "Now I've finally found who I really am." But that's how we all feel about everything. We take it as real.

## **ATTACHMENT TO VIEWS**

I remember when this young white supremacist boy talked about how

when he first read Hitler, “Finally I found who I really was, finally I found the truth. He spoke all the words that I knew were true and that were in me, now I’ve found it.” Because he had karmic imprints, that’s all. He had karmic imprints from those types of thinking, so it comes together and this life, he’s got those instincts rising up, all those thoughts, and then he reads Hitler and it becomes real for him.

That’s how we are all. But because what we are born with is instinctive, and because it’s instinctive, and because we believe someone made us like this, and “Mummy and Daddy made us” and “I began in Mummy’s womb,” which reinforces the view of no cause and effect, we reinforce that view, we think this is who I am, it feels good, so it must be right.

So the Furry feels good about having sex with his Mickey Mouse toy, or whatever it is. BTK felt good because even though he knew it was wrong, the karmic imprint so powerful he couldn’t say no to it. Why? Because he got so much intense pleasure from it, so

called pleasure. Now we all do this and that's why Buddha is saying the pleasure we get now is the junkie mind, basically. We're addicted to certain things. BTK was addicted to torturing and killing. Little Mickey Mouse man was addicted to his Mickey Mouse, seeing it more than it really was, seeing it as good. We're addicted to a female form or male form, or whatever it might be, or food, or this or that, or whatever the object might be. And then, because it's so strong in us and comes spontaneously, it feels so real, we believe it's true, we have to follow it. Right? This is samsara.

### **JUST BECAUSE IT FEELS GOOD DOESN'T MEAN IT'S RIGHT**

The point the Buddha is making is: yes, we have these instinctive things due to past actions, but we've got to step back, look in the first stages when you're learning in junior school about karma: What is right? What is wrong? Why is it? What is this? What is this? You have a basis now, you have a basis of what morality is, and then you refer to that

to where you're at. Then you notice you want to torture people or even just want to get angry: you recognize this is not appropriate, but you see it's a karmic imprint. You don't beat yourself up; you know you've got some work to do so you start to change. But you've got to have a reference point.

The reference point we use now is, for whether something is good or bad, is "Oh, it feels good." I mean how childish can you get? If you've got good imprints from past virtue and you are naturally generous or naturally kind, that will make you feel good. Now please go for it! Don't do it because it feels good, do it because you've checked against your basis of morality and you know it's a valid action. Are you seeing my point here? You want to be very rational about it. Then we have to refer to where we were at in relation to that, and not get guilty like we do now. "Oh I'm so bad, I'm this, I'm that."

## **DON'T BELIEVE OUR STORIES**

Okay, Joan's story, from past karma, some reason, whatever the cause are,

this depression, these fears come. It isn't who I really am, it is just there, they're negative actions, they are coming from ego, don't put yourself down, it's just the way I am, but it's not who I really am, I can grow new little seeds in me. And so meanwhile, you bear the pain but you don't follow it. As Lama Zopa says, you don't believe in it. Meaning you don't believe in the story it tells you: that the world is horrible and it is awful and it is this; that the Mickey Mouse mascot is divine, the chocolate cake is so gorgeous, that I must have it, which is what attachment is saying. Frantic. And then the energy of neediness is strong there, and the story is on top of it, so you're ready-made to shove the cake in.

### **BELIEVING I'LL GET HAPPY WHEN I GET THE OBJECT**

The other lie with attachment, the big lie that attachment tells us, is when I get it, then I'll get happy. That's the killer. When I follow it, then I get happiness. Then there's this deep instinctive belief that when I get the

cake, when I do the torture, when I get the Mickey Mouse mascot, when I have sex with that girl, then I'll get happiness. We have to have the object; the energy of the attraction is so violent, isn't it, when it's a very strong attachment. All this is attachment. The energy is so intense, meaning, we're propelled by the force of our karma. It's like this force behind us pushing us towards doing the torture, towards eating the cake, towards having sex with the object, towards whatever it is that we're attached to. That force we feel, like we've got no choice.

A friend of mine in prison who now got a life sentence in California, where they've got the three strikes thing: the third felony you get arrested for, even petty theft, stealing the video, the third one – life sentence, mandatory. It was even upheld in a referendum last year; all the people in California voted to keep it in. During one of his thefts, he said "I saw myself walking into this house. I didn't want to steal that television. I saw myself taking this television, I didn't want to take it." No



one believes that. Everyone goes, “Oh you cheat, liar, you’re just a thief.” But that’s how karma works.

Look at us and our own pathetic habits, such as eating too much cake. You don’t want to eat a second piece, but you’re propelled towards it, aren’t you? That’s how karma works. When you understand and use karma as your reason for explaining it, it at least gives you some ability to bear it. Rather than the one we usually have, “Oh my God this is who I am, I don’t know how I got born this way, this is just how I am and I can’t do nothing about it.”

Again, the way attachment works is from the past karma, the imprint, the habit of doing it. It causes you then to meet those types of things and people and experiences again, it causes you to see them as more divine than they really are, coming from. . . then this hankering and this empty sense of missing something, which is the energy of attachment. The more that, the more divine it looks, therefore the more you believe it, “When I get it, then

satisfaction will come. It will relieve the pain of the emptiness.”

## **THE MORE WE GET, THE MORE WE WANT**

But you know what? That’s the junkie mode. We all know, as my mother used to say to me, “The more you get, the more you want.” That’s the Buddha’s point. That’s the tragedy of attachment. We truly believe that when I get it then the satisfaction will come. It’s like an ache, a pain and I’ve got to get that thing to assuage the pain. That’s the junkie mode. We’re all junkies, it’s a question of degree. We’re all deluded; it’s a question of degree. We’re all insane; it’s a question of degree. This is how Buddha’s talking.

## **IF NO ATTACHMENT, NO ANGER**

And attachment, this one, is the one that’s the main one. If we didn’t have attachment, there’s no way we would have anger. Because anger is the response when attachment doesn’t get what it wants. If you’re so hugely driven towards getting that thing –

look at a child, the attachment comes and like little three-year-olds, they're sort of naked, there's no control over their emotions yet.

We're much the same, but we at least control the way we appear, we sort of do it politely. But we're still like a three-year-old in there. And so when the three-year-old, when someone else, Johnny her brother, comes to take the cake, she bursts into tears, stomps and yells, because she didn't get what she wanted. That's anger. And we're still doing it, look at us. But we justify it philosophically now, we justify it psychologically. Anger is the response when attachment is thwarted. Attachment is beneath even anger. There would be no anger if there were no attachment. No way, not possible. It's very interesting.

## **DELUSIONS ARE LIARS, ARE HABITUAL**

The function of all these delusions is they are liars, they are strongly imprinted in us, they're habitual. They are liars in the sense that they make the

thing seem more delicious than it is. They're liars in the sense that they make us believe that if I get it or do it, I'll get happy. The energy of attachment is this ache, this pain – you look at even when it's just the cake, you've got to put it in your mouth, it's so painful, you feel so distressed. We shove it in. But we all know that it's not happiness, because the more we do it the more miserable we get – not to mention fat and everything else. That's the junkie mind. This is the attached mind. It's very interesting isn't it, you've got to admit.

## **QUESTIONS ABOUT ATTACHMENT**

It's time for a break but let's just have a few questions about this business.

## **EXPECTATIONS**

*Student* I'm still trying to grasp the attachment.

*Ven. Robina* Alright, Sweetie Pie. Go.

*Student* If someone creates an expectation. . .

*Ven. Robina* What do you mean?

*Student* Say they were going to do something and then they don't do it, then your response to that is?

*Ven. Robina* I'm sorry, I'm confused now. You're talking about someone else or yourself? What are you talking here?

*Student* It seems like there's expectations. . .

*Ven. Robina* But Sweetie, are you talking about yourself or someone else? What are you talking about now?

*Student* Let's say there's someone who says they're going to do something for you or with you, and they don't do it. They don't follow through, and your response to that could be anger, disappointment, confusion. Is all of that. . .?

*Ven. Robina* Of course, that's a sign of attachment, Sweetie. Of course it is! That's the point. In other words, our ordinary life is suffused with attachment. Ordinary things that we take as ordinary, that we take for granted and assume it's normal, Buddha is saying is mental illness. We've got to adjust our view of mental illness. We're all mentally ill. Yes,

you're mentally ill, that's right. You get depressed, you get sad, you get upset, you get disappointed, you're mentally ill Babe. That's what Buddha is saying. You're right, yes.

In other words he's saying it's possible to not be like that. That's the marvelous point he's really making. It's possible to be not angry, not depressed, not jealous, not upset, not freaking out, not attached. That's the thing that's so shocking to hear, and that's all Buddha is saying. Take away all the religious terminology – that's what he is saying. We have the potential to be absolutely free of suffering, that's his point.

We don't factor ourselves in: we're innocent victims. Innocent victims get angry, innocent victims have resentment, and depressed, and how dare you and we have expectations. I'm this innocent thing, "Wow, how dare you don't turn up! What right do you have? Who do you think you are, not to turn up for our appointment at six o'clock." Like I'm an innocent victim. "You did it to me." That's how we are. That's samsara.

*Student* You were just saying that right now our mind is more like a soup.

*Ven. Robina* What I meant was, right now for us, all our emotions and our thoughts and our concepts are all just mixed together in a big confusion, because we've never looked, we've never distinguished, we've never even had a thought that we could. Right now, we start to look, it's very hard to see one bit from another. It's hard to distinguish until it's very, very loud. Right now we don't even know we're angry until the words are vomiting out the mouth. Joan doesn't really notice her depression – well, she does, because it's there most of the time – but often a person won't even know they're depressed until one day you can't get out of bed. But what I'm getting at is, it's been going on for so long, so deep, so down, and so far so many tiny millions of things happening, and because we're never looking down there, we only notice it when it's really loud. It's like you don't even know you can't drive until the crash is about to come. How stupid.

Right now it's impossible to see one bit from another.

## **CHANGE TAKES TIME**

*Student* But my question is how do we go about doing this?

*Ven. Robina* Darling that's the job! That's what I'm talking about all day!

*Student* I know, but the thing is we're so unconscious with what we're doing, how do we...?

*Ven. Robina* Okay, let me ask you a simple question. You've got a great big fat garden there, absolutely entangled in weeds and this and that and flowers and roses, and it's a great big fat mess. You can't see one piece from another, right? And you know no botany. And you've assumed this is normal. And every day you look at it and you get depressed, and miserable and guilty and hopeless, and what to do and I can't do anything, and I don't know what to do. Well, how would you start going about changing it? You tell me. What are the steps? Practical, what are the steps?



*Student* The only thing I know from a practical point of view is when a negative. . .

*Ven. Robina* Talk about the garden please. Use that as the example. Tell me simply what would you start, the very first step, what is your very first step?

*Student* If I could recognize the weeds, see that's the problem.

*Ven. Robina* Okay, now wait. One step at a time. How would you learn to recognize the weeds? What would you do?

*Student* I'd have to ask somebody.

*Ven. Robina* You'd go to botany school dear! That's your first step, isn't it? But even before that, you've got to know it's possible, that you can weed this garden and to change it and turn it into something marvelous. We don't even know that right now. Right now the status for us is, we've got this great big entangled garden, full of weeds, overgrown stuff, inside us. We assume this is who I am, we assume it's normal. We feel the pain of it every day, we never even look at it – why would we?

– we assume it’s normal. This is what life is.

Suddenly one day you hear that you can start to change it into some marvelous garden, and the very first step is, “Oh wow, it’s possible!” That’s your first step. Then you have to go, learn to know how to recognize what you are seeing, because you’ve never looked, because it’s looked so ugly, you can’t bear to look at it. You’ve got to start now investigating it. Just looking at it is not enough, you’ve got to go to botany school where you learn the names. Now when you look, because you’re now brave to look, because now you know you can change it, and you’ve got some courage now, you can start labeling all the pieces. But you’ve got to do a lot of work first.

That’s my point here. When we hear attachment and love now, we hear them as the same thing. Right now, I’m looking in there and I can’t see a rose from a weed because I think they’re the same, they look so similar. I keep making the mistake about what it is, it’s good, it’s good. Then I suddenly

learn, “One is a herb and one is a rose, a weed and a rose,” I start to learn by writing them down separately and thinking about it and learning it and memorizing at theory school, “That is what a rose is and that is what. . . I see, it’s got these characteristics.” Now I look again and I begin to see, “Oh, I see, that’s attachment, that’s love. They’re different.”

It takes time. It’s a very intricate job I’m talking about. Then you keep doing that. And then part of the process here is, bearing. . . once you begin to understand you can change it, now you look at the same old garbage, you don’t mind so much anymore. Before, we were hopeless and couldn’t bear it so it was painful to look. Now we’re brave to look because we know we can change it. You start by going to botany school – and here we’re talking Buddha’s psychology, not Jung not Freud. They all use the same words, but my goodness, there’s a different understanding of them. That’s up to you. If you want Buddha’s, you’ve got to listen to Buddha’s teachings on the

mind, you've got to listen to the Buddha's model of the mind. And then you've got to start meditating on it and thinking about it, and thinking about it, and thinking about it, and slowly, slowly, slowly you'll get more and more skill. But every time you look, you'll see more clearly. It's a very gradual step-by-step, intelligent, disciplined process.

Do you see? That's how you do it. But it's not magic overnight. We are so attached to being happy that when we hear spiritual practices, when we get attached to meditation and some fantasy that when I do it, it will all go away. It's just the same as attachment to chocolate cake. I'm not saying that you're saying that. I'm just saying. It's a long-term thing, we're in for the long haul. But it's a precise, clear, intelligent, disciplined activity I'm talking about.

## **WE CAN CHANGE OUR MIND!**

*Student* The specific thing I was thinking about was motivation actually. I think about my own motive, my reason for wanting something, I can

never really clarify why it is I'm doing something.

*Ven. Robina* Well, don't worry. You don't have to accept the status quo; you change your motivation, you make it what you want it to be. It's your mind, you can decide what you like. Just because the status quo is you're confused about what your motivation is, who cares what it was. Decide what you want it to be. It's very simple. What do you want it to be? What do you want your motivation to be?

*Student* To be helpful.

*Ven. Robina* Right.

*Student* I don't know if by doing a particular task that particular task that I'm thinking of, is really helpful.

*Ven. Robina* Sweetie Pie, there's two things there. A bird needs two wings. Compassion is the wish to be helpful. That's what compassion is. Compassion is defined as when you see someone suffering, you see it and you feel their pain. And then the bigger one is, "May I do something about it." You're saying that. How marvelous! That's compassion wing.

But compassion is the wish to help others, but compassion is not what gives you the skill to help others; that's wisdom. Wisdom is what you're doing when we're talking right here. What we've talked up until now is all the wisdom wing. You put yourself together: the more clear you can be, the more clear you can understand your mind, and your nonsense, and your confusion, the more clear you can be about yourself and put yourself together. That informs your compassion because what wisdom gives you is the ability to see. . . your heart reaches out, that's compassion. But wisdom, which is the work you do on your own mind, removes all the junk from your own mind so you can see past your own nose now, which means you can see what would help. And you do that. But that comes from wisdom, not compassion.

## **MOTIVATION, MOTIVATION**

You have to have the motivation. That's why we always start everything with a pure motivation. What's my

motivation? You state it, you're making a new motivation: "I am doing this, I am doing that, I want to do this so I can develop my qualities, so I can be of benefit to others." That becomes your motivation and that informs everything you do. And then you develop the wisdom: by getting rid of your own junk you get two things: 1. your own happiness, and then 2. you get wisdom, you get clarity, you see what's going on. That gives you the ability to choose, "I know with confidence this will help": one word, one action – or doing nothing. That's wisdom. That's what gives you the ability to know. Your motivation is the wish to help. Your wisdom is the skill to do it. They're two things.

*Student* I guess I'm in too much of a hurry to get the skill.

*Ven. Robina* And that's called attachment. No. That's attachment.

*Student* I see.

*Ven. Robina* That's attachment. That's what makes us feel anxious and in a hurry. It's like attachment to see the plant grow, you're kind of anxious

every day that it's not coming up. I'm sorry, it's got its own laws and it will come when it's ready. You feed it, you do the right thing, you do all the causes and conditions, it will come when the time is right. That's what patience is.

*Student* Yes.

*Student* I'm thinking of how to apply this. When you talked about first of all stemming the karmic habit in body and speech, refraining from the habit. To me at that point, if I have a habit of attachment or aversion and I recognize that, then it can be a signal there's some delusion at the root of it.

*Ven. Robina* Well the delusion is the attachment and the aversion, so what do you mean besides that?

*Student* What I mean is not acting out of the aversion or attachment and looking inwards: "Why am I reacting this way" or "Why do I want to react this way? What is the actual delusion."

*Ven. Robina* What you mean is what you're looking at is the attachment and trying to understand how it functions? That's the way to say it.

*Student* Yes.



*Ven. Robina* Yes, that's your job.

*Student* Instead of acting it out. . .

*Ven. Robina* Yes, that's your job.

*Student* But when something is really subtle and I can't tell whether it's attachment or love, if I could ask myself that question of: "If I don't get this, am I going to be disappointed?"

*Ven. Robina* That's right. Good point. That's a good test. Yes that's right, a good way to do it.

She's saying that when she sees the impulse to follow attachment or follow aversion, she doesn't want to follow it with her body and speech, and then she wants to look inside and check it out. It is good to check. . . the test if it's an attachment, "If I don't get it, how would I feel?" That's a good way to think. Because then you know that's attachment.

But the point in this is also: we need to be doing this job all the time – this is being your own therapist – an ever deepening knowledge, an ever deepening skill at it. But at the same time we've got to be. . . like when you're in a relationship with a person and

there's enormous affection there and you love the person very much, it's inevitable there's attachment, too, and it's impossible to expect yourself to be in that relationship and have no attachment, just like that. You've got to be brave to know you've got to engage in the relationship, and engage in the thing, and engage in the activity with the pure motivation, and then you catch the attachment when it comes and you work with it.

Sometimes, if it's really heavy attachment to something like heroin, you can't do that. The object is so intense it will destroy you: best to say no. Cut right away. But some objects, it's okay to be with them, because it's a good person, you understand my point here? Don't be scared of attachment, because you mitigate it with the love and the constant good motivation. Don't be scared of the attachment, don't treat it fundamentalist, "Oh God I'm a sinner, look at me." You're going to have it for a long, long time, but be in the middle of it, but constantly grow the love, and grow the patience, and

grow the generosity, and motivate purely, and then purify as well – and then by having it you learn about it.

*Student* That's very helpful. . .

*Ven. Robina* Don't avoid, don't be scared. I mean if it's a destructive thing, like a really heavy action you're attached to, best to absolutely say no. No choice there. We've got to say no to some, definitely, for our own sanity. Like torturing: just don't do it. We've got to have enough skill to know to say no.

*Ven. Robina* If the person is a good person and a good relationship and there's something good there, it's going to come with the junk. By having it you'll learn about the junk, so real grist for the mill. Go for it.

Do you want a quick break? Ten minutes, or fifteen.

## **21. DON'T BELIEVE OUR KARMIC APPEARANCES MIDDLE SCOPE/HIGH SCHOOL**

### **THE CHOCOLATE CAKE: BREAKING DOWN THE PROCESS**

Now, let's get back to the chocolate cake. What's happening here is this.

You see the cake: the eyes see the shape and the color. That's instantly – like I mean this is all happening in sort of a millionth of a second, all this stuff, it's so perfectly programmed inside us, we do it to perfection – the **eye consciousness** perceives shape and color, that triggers instantly the **mental consciousness** where the memory is stored from having eaten and seen and touched and tasted this thing before.

Up comes the **label** “chocolate cake” and it's accurate. It's fine: this is a chocolate cake. You even could be a professional cook and just by looking at

it, **triggering your memory** and your knowledge, you could actually deduce that it's a really good chocolate cake. That's a relative reality; nothing wrong with that. That's a fact. It triggers in you because you've eaten it before and because you've had pleasure, because it's triggered pleasure before – and again the key word is it “triggers” the pleasure, technically. Right now we think it's the main cause of my pleasure; we think the pleasure comes from the chocolate cake. This is not correct. You could say that the chocolate cake is merely a catalyst. It triggers your capacity to experience pleasure. That's the way to say it.

## **NO DELUSION YET**

That memory is there. You recall having had pleasure. All of this is fine. None of this is delusion yet. None of these little thoughts that have arisen all so instantly in the mind, they're not delusion. This is fact: It's a fact it's chocolate cake; it's a fact its shape is a round thing; it's a triangle; it's this, it's

a good one; you've had it before; it triggered pleasure – none of that is a mistake. None of that is delusion.

## **NOW ATTACHMENT ARISES**

But, the trouble is what also is triggered instantly along with all of this, is attachment. The second the pleasure arises, attachment kicks in. And it's so powerful it permeates all the other things, so the overall experience is attachment. And that means instantly you see it, it appears self-existent, out there, having this inherent deliciousness, like as if deliciousness is inherent in the cake, as if when you made it, you put a spoonful of deliciousness along with the chocolate and the eggs. It's like, in other words, you check, it looks delicious to you out there, doesn't it? It looks delicious, like it is delicious, in itself delicious. And you believe it a hundred percent, right? You believe it. You don't ever doubt that. And you believe the cake is delicious. . . In other words, you don't think for one split second that the

delicious cake is a story that your mind is making up. We don't think that.

## **“CHOCOLATE CAKE” IS AN ELABORATE STORY**

But that's what Buddha's saying. That's what Buddha's saying. That actually, we are making up an elaborate story. We can't argue that it's not a cake. It is a cake, relatively speaking, there's a relative level here. It is a cake, it's not a toilet. It is delicious, it's not an ugly one. If you are a professional cake-maker, you can relatively speaking, say that. These are facts. There's no argument about that at a relative level.

But, the energy, the experience we have of it, is mainly informed by the ignorance, which sees it as inherent, not just inherent delicious, but inherent cake – that's an even harder one to see. We see it as inherently delicious if we have attachment there.

Let's say you have aversion to chocolate cake; let's say you get really sick if you eat chocolate cake. When that person sees it, it'll be a whole other story, the eye consciousness perceives

shape and color, it will trigger the label called chocolate cake, it will trigger the memory of having had it, it will trigger the disgust and the horrible experience that was triggered by the having of it. Right? The overall experience that you will have will be then formed by the aversion that is triggered instantly. Now the cake appears to you as something disgusting. It appears from its own side out there, inherently in and of itself, disgusting, as if you put a spoonful of disgusting-ness into it when you made it. That's how it appears to you.

Each of us believes our own picture, don't we? It's a picture because clearly the cake can't be simultaneously disgusting and delicious, can it? Like it can't be simultaneously chocolate and carrot cake. It's either chocolate or carrot cake. We've both got it correct. Check, check, it is chocolate cake. We've got that right. But, then one person puts a lie onto it and says it's ugly, another person puts another lie onto it and says it's delicious – and



they are the stories made up by the mind.

Even more subtle, we can even say that we're projecting chocolate cake onto it. But, actually there's no chocolate cake from its own side: that's a deeper one. We're looking at our attachment as a liar now; but seeing that one tells us how even ignorance is a liar, and that's another discussion. Attachment or aversion are liars, how they project their own story coming from our own experience, our own story, and our own stuff.

You know when a racist sees a certain person of a certain race, they see somebody disgusting. When a person of that same race sees that person, they see a person who is lovely. Again, as our mothers would tell us, all these secret little Buddhist clichés that our mothers have, "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." Deliciousness is in the eye of the beholder. Ugliness is in the eye of the beholder. It is so obvious. It's profound, that statement, but we just say it like a cute thing. But, it's absolutely the point.

Of course we don't think it's like this. We can hear it now, rationally. But, because we're brainwashed into attachment, we just go into it, automatic, default mode. There's no questioning. We're brainwashed. We're totally programmed to see it like this. And then of course – this is the point, as Lama Zopa Rinpoche says – “Bad enough that you see it in a way. . .” that it's not, meaning gorgeous, delicious, or ugly, whatever it might be, the story you project – “Bad enough you see it this way, but the worst part is you believe it's true.”

That's the point. That's what keeps us locked into samsara. That's the trick, to catch that and, as Rinpoche says, “Everything is your own karmic appearance.” For someone like me who's got the habit of being angry, then people will appear to me as very annoying and ugly and horrible and destructive and this and that. Bad enough I see them this way, but it's because of my karmic appearance, from my habit, but the worst part is, if I believe I'm right. Then, I'll hold on to

it. And look at the world, that's why we have wars.

## **DON'T BELIEVE IN OUR KARMIC APPEARANCES**

The practice is to see the old habit coming strong, you keep seeing these ugly, awful people but, when you are practicing, you then catch yourself and think: "It's true, I see them this way and I'm feeling furious." And when you can calm down a bit, you can start to say, "But it's not true, Robina. Things don't exist how you see them. This is just your anger talking. They're not really like that from their own side."

That doesn't mean they didn't harm you; that's another discussion, too. We are not saying they didn't harm you. But, anger is the response, it's a certain way of interpreting a person who harms you. Attachment is a certain response to a cake believing that it makes me happy. Buddha's not saying when you put the cake in your mouth it doesn't trigger some pleasure. He's not arguing with that. What he's arguing with, is this over-exaggerated view of it,

that it's from its own side delicious and when I get it, it is the main cause of my happiness. In other words, the junkie mind, that interpretation, he's arguing with that. And, even just this, to distinguish these two things is quite difficult.

And, I'll say well, "What do you mean? He did harm me." Buddha's not saying that. He's not saying the person didn't harm me. He's saying my anger, my over-exaggeration of his ugliness, my saying he's this, he's the cause of my suffering – that is not true. That's what's not true.

## **ATTACHMENT LIES**

It is true it's chocolate cake. It is true that relatively, when you put it in your tummy it will trigger pleasure. That's not a lie. But, the rest of it is a lie. From this we make it more than it is, from this we say, "It is the cause of my happiness and when I get it, I'll get this and then I must do this. . ." and we manipulate to get it, and then we freak out when we don't. All that is the lie. It's like we over-exaggerate the whole

thing. That's how delusions work and that's what we have to catch. This is how we have to see things. This is being your own therapist.

## **WATCH OUR MIND LIKE A HAWK**

It's like you've got to be on the case all the time. It's not just every now and again, sitting on your cushion, being holy. This is your full on day-to-day job, because delusions are occurring all the time. Being your own therapist is what you are supposed to be doing all the day. That's the point. And like any job we start to do, it's difficult in the beginning. You just stumble and you feel very tired doing it, but eventually you get used to it, and do it naturally and that's when you're really beginning to practice. . . Not beginning, that's when you are really getting some more experience from the practice, when you really can see your mind, have the courage to see it, change it right there, or struggle with it, work with it, and move forward. That's practice.

## **22. DISTINGUISH BETWEEN DELUSIONS AND VIRTUES MIDDLE SCOPE/HIGH SCHOOL**

Here we are again, and we're in high school mode here, talking about the mind. Looking in the context of the four truths for the noble ones, in particular looking at what suffering is, and looking very briefly at the second one, which is the causes of suffering.

### **THE SUFFERING OF CHANGE**

The first type of suffering is the gross kind: getting what you don't want. The second kind is getting what you do want, but through the medium of attachment. Because let's face it, it's the only way we get happy now, isn't it? It is the getting of what we want. We're living in a junkie world where we're forced to get the junk, and that's what we call happiness. Suffering is when you don't get the junk and happiness is when you do.

All Buddha's pointing out is even the getting of the junk is in the nature of suffering – and we know this when we think of junk. We don't know it when we think of chocolate cakes and people and life, because we say that's "normal": of course that's happiness. We take it as a given that you have happiness when you get the things you want, and you get sadness when you don't. We think that's life. Buddha's saying that's suffering, and we can go beyond it. We can get more profound level of happiness if we can give up attachment.

Of course it's like when you go to botany school and you learn about that weed and you do drawings of it and it's just on a page on its own, it's easy to see it and identify its qualities. If you go to your garden and you try to identify it when it's mixed up with the other things, it's very hard, isn't it? When we have love and attachment right now, it's extremely hard to distinguish, because for so long we think of them as the same. Here we are trying to see it in a new way.

There you are in this relationship: the child, the friend, the husband, whatever it might be. Like we're saying, don't back away from it because you "shouldn't have attachment." You'll do nothing and you'll be paralyzed, you just become frozen and you'll cut your heart off. We've got to be brave and know that, given that we do have attachment, we can't expect it to go overnight. Then, we choose a reasonable relationship, a reasonable job, good friends, at least friends who won't harm you. In other words, if you are attached to a person who beats you up every day, that's kind of dumb. It's like being attached to heroin, you're hurting yourself.

But, if you've still got attachment, you might as well at least choose an object that won't be that destructive. In the end, you've got to go beyond, in the sense of attachment, going beyond attachment. But, at least if you've got a friend who is kind and is loving and who's working on their mind too, well that's a reasonable relationship. Nothing wrong; go into that.



## **GLAD TO SEE ATTACHMENT**

Of course, you've got attachment, but then you use the relationship to help you distinguish, and every time they do what you don't want, every time they don't get up on time, every time they don't meet you on time, every time they eat their breakfast too loudly, every time they do the tiniest things that annoys you, then you know that you are grateful, because that's showing you your attachment.

## **ANGER: NOT GETTING WHAT ATTACHMENT WANTS**

Because "annoyance" is just a simple little sweet word for "aversion." We say "annoyed," "frustrated," "irritated": that's called anger. Let's give it its proper name. Just a mild version of it, that's all. Because aversion is a response when attachment doesn't get what it wants. Because what you want is to hear no sound when he's eating his breakfast. That's what you want. You are attached to getting no sound and then if you hear slurping, it's irritating, right?

I mean I can't imagine how you all sleep with people every day, and they fart and they snore. I mean no wonder you have aversion for your partner! It's asking too much of yourself to keep thinking of them as divine and gorgeous when they fart and snore! I think you should have your own room. Really, I think people really demand too much, you demand too much of yourself in relationships, living one inch away from this person. You're demanding too much.

I mean the guys in prison, they kill each other when they are in their cells in the Security Housing Units, I mean I don't blame them. I'd kill somebody if I was sitting in an eight-foot by ten-foot cell, twenty-three hours a day, years on end! It's too much, you are expecting too much of yourself, I think. When we have so much attachment and irritation and neuroses, no wonder relationships all break up. No wonder sixty-five percent of American relationships – and that's the ones that are called marriage legally – break up. I'm not surprised.

## **PROTECT YOURSELF FROM YOUR ATTACHMENT**

This is something interesting, too. The more you know your own mind, the more you know the extent of your attachment, your irritation, your annoyance, your this, your that, your own delusions, then you protect yourself. You give yourself an appropriate condition that doesn't exacerbate them too much. It's just common sense. It's being practical. You don't beat yourself up because you are attached if you are living with a person every day. I mean you wouldn't expect an alcoholic – hear the words carefully – to give up attachment to alcohol while continuing to drink alcohol. You wouldn't. You know it's insane.

A person who's aware enough of their own mind knows that they need to remove themselves from the object if they can't handle it. This is extremely important. Conditions play a major role. Your mind is the main thing, we've got to start giving it power; but, it's not the only thing. The condition called the alcohol, the drink, is a major

condition that activates your attachment, and it's so intense that you must remove yourself from it.

Now, in some relationships we need to do the same thing. Some people they say, "Oh, we love each other so much but we can't live together." That means you've got so much attachment and so much aversion you fight all the time because your attachment is so intense, and therefore your aversion is so intense, you are always in each other's faces. Well, then you can't live together. You're right. Separate, much better, more healthy.

## **BLAME YOUR ANGER**

The person you fight with so much at work: maybe it really is just best you leave, because you can't handle the amount of anger you have. And you don't blame yourself, you just know you can't handle it. And you don't leave it, because you think that person's a creep. That's the usual way we leave. "He is so horrible. I must leave the job." Don't blame him. Blame your own anger. He might be a creep but your

anger is what's causing you so much suffering and your anger is what causes all the problems, not his being a creep. That's his problem. Your problem is your anger.

## **CONFUSING MY THOUGHTS AND THE PERSON'S ACTIONS**

And this is the business about karma and about your own mind, this incredible clarity we have to develop that enables us to see this clearly, to enable us to see this, to distinguish myself from the other person, to distinguish my part of it, to see my part, my thoughts, my feelings, my emotions, my junk and to distinguish it from that person's. Right now with the delusions, we're locked into the other object. We're so caught up, we can't see that what I'm thinking. . . we think that what I'm thinking is his stuff, and we can't even distinguish between what he's doing and what I'm thinking. We think it's the same thing and that's what delusions do. They absorb into the object. Attachment so absorbs into the object that you can't distinguish

yourself from the object. That's the one; that's the killer of attachment.

*Student* When you were talking about your Tibetan friend, he definitely could say, "Yes, I was harmed."

*Ven. Robina* Yes, my Tibetan friend who was tortured in Tibet and in 1987 participated in some of the demonstrations there. All the monks and nuns were demonstrating and he got arrested, got tortured. Then he left the country, and his father and brother were murdered. There's no argument, of course, he knows he was harmed. But, the point is because he had the view of karma deep in the bones of his being – it's just what he sees as the truth, like we see the opposite is the truth – even as it's happening to him, he completely knows he's part of that; he's an interdependent part of that scenario, that due to past suffering, he has now created the cause to be harmed. He just knows that. As it's happening even, he knows it. There's not a problem in his mind interpreting it in this way. Because that's his interpretation of it, he doesn't get

angry. Because anger – you look at the words of anger. Look at the words. “How dare they do that to me?” Now, that means I didn’t do anything to create it, doesn’t it? It means I didn’t do anything to deserve it. Do you see my point?

## **A FEW LIVES BETWEEN PUNCHES**

I remember years ago, in London, when I was a very radical feminist, when blokes in the street would say something to me about my body, I’d punch them in the nose, or other places, and abuse them verbally. I’m serious, I did! I remember this particular man: he punched me back! I was very surprised because they usually didn’t do that. It was very interesting! There I was running down the street and he was running after me after I’d punched him in the nose – I remember, his fish and chips went flying! – and he caught me and then he hit me back!

Now, let’s just say someone hadn’t seen me hit him first. . . . Or, let’s just say people did see me hit him and then

they saw him hit me back, and then, if I started saying, “Who does he think he is? Who do you think you are? How dare you hit me?” They would have all laughed, right? “But, Robina, you hit him first. What are you talking about?” Do you see? Well, that’s karma. It’s just that it was two and half lives ago. That’s the problem.

*Student* He could go through the suffering of being harmed physically.

*Ven. Robina* He would feel the pain. He would feel the pain, yes.

*Student* And he doesn’t feel the added psychological damage of the anger.

*Ven. Robina* No anger. That’s exactly right. That is the point, and that’s what’s shocking because we think they come together, because we all have the view of the innocent victim.

I remember again, two years ago in New York I was participating in a conference with a whole bunch of ex-prisoners that Richard Gere’s foundation had invited, also His Holiness was also invited; all of them, all the people who had worked with Buddhism during their incarceration. A



couple of people like me, were invited as well. And what was very interesting, they all had their own experiences, their own dramas, their own sufferings, struggling with their racism and different things, really in the same way as all of us, lots of anguish and drama and suffering and “Why?” and all this painful stuff we all have – using the Buddhist explanation - because we don’t have an understanding of why it happens. That’s the major reason we have so much anguish. Why? Do you see?

There also at the conference were two young Tibetan nuns who totally had this Buddhist view, in their minds, in their hearts, it invests their practice, it informs their practice. So, there they are talking about their experience of being tortured daily, physically, sexually brutalized daily in prison, for however long; I don’t know the details, I don’t remember. Now, it was really clear to look at them, to hear them, first that their suffering was far worse than everybody else’s. It was also really clear that they weren’t angry. They weren’t

full of anguish. Their eyes weren't tortured and full of pain and "Why?" and drama. They weren't on serotonin, they weren't seeing psychiatrists, they weren't having mental breakdowns, they weren't depressed – because the view is, because the view of karma.

And they even had compassion for their torturers – "because we knew we must have harmed them in the past," one of them said. And, of course, because he will suffer in the future because of the harm he has done to them.

## **BECAUSE OF KARMA, WE CAN BEAR THE SUFFERING**

The karma is the basic one. It explains why you have a situation. You are able, therefore, to bear it because you know you're not an innocent victim, because you're brave enough, it's a confident view. A victim is not confident. Because you have this view. . . you don't want the suffering; you please would rather walk out the door. It's not comfortable to be tortured, for God's sake. But, you don't have all of this other

psychological junk on top of it. Because they had their practice and they had their compassion and they had their stuff, they're able to, it gave them courage and strength to bear it. And they, even, because of the view of karma, had compassion for their torturers, as I said.

## **THE WAY WE LABEL**

I mean that's a very different way of seeing things. In other words, this is what Buddha is saying: everything is to do with how you see it. The chocolate cake, look at the example: it's how you see it. Even the prison, even the torture, it's how you see it. Finally, that is emptiness actually: that, from its own side, nothing has an inherent nature this way or that. Everything, Buddha says, is our own projection. Our own: from imprinting, from habit, from interpreting according to delusions, things that come to us, we meet them, the harm comes. We interpret it that way and we keep reinforcing it that way. That keeps deepening samsara. But, everything has

come from our own past experiences and everything even is interpreted by our own minds.

As Lama Zopa Rinpoche said to several people who write to him from prison, he writes back to some of them, he said to one, “It’s how you label it.” People in Tibet spend years attempting to find a little, smelly, dark cave locked away on their own, locked away on their own, and they call it heaven, they call it hermitage. Okay, it’s not quite the same when there’s lots of noise in a prison, where it’s very angry and violent. But, it’s how you label it. If you look at all the labels, you label, you believe you’re a criminal, you believe this, you label yourself, that you are labeled “in prison,” and somebody else is doing it to you. All this elaborate stuff we have. Well, of course, it’s suffering. Of course, it’s pain. All of our lives we’re like this, we’re all these victims in these self-imposed prisons, that we think other people do to us.

*Student* Your Tibetan nun friend would be much free-er...

*Ven. Robina* Darling, it's called deluded mind. I'm not being mean about us now. It's just simply called having attachment, anger, anxiety, fear, that's all it is. And it's a question of degree. All these things we call the manic-depressive label, the bipolar label. It's simply having attachment and aversion. We have a thousand bipolar episodes a day. When you get what you want, the mind gets all over-excited. When you've really got a very extreme mind, you get very over-excited and you think you're Mozart, you think you can fly in the sky. That's the really up-mode of the maniac attachment gone berserk with no thermostat.

And then, where does it go? It's an inflation, it's not an accurate state of mind to think you're Mozart and that you can fly in the sky. Do you see that's a really extreme level of attachment? Eventually, where can it go? It can only bubble up and burst. It can't go anywhere but deflate. Down to "Oh, my God." The higher you go, the further down you go. When you get the green

light, you get the up mode of the bipolar. When you get the red light, you get the down of the bipolar. We have a thousand mini bipolar episodes a day. You see my point here? I'm not trying to make it simplistic. Using Buddhist psychology, all the experiences we have can be explained, by utilizing, by talking about these states of mind.

Here in the second scope we're looking at. . . the first scope we look mainly at the karmic one, leading up to karma, and we have to see cause and effect: that what we do, say, and think will produce results. We look particularly at the doing, saying and thinking of negative things: harmful things to others result in future suffering for us. We don't want suffering, so we back away from doing harmful things to others. We aren't even analyzing it much on the first level of karma. You're not going into it too deeply.

You are looking at it fairly reasonably and realizing that doing things that harm others with your body, speech, and mind are what will bring harm to

you. What comes around goes around, as we all say. Because you don't want further suffering, you start to control yourself. You start to watch your body, speech, and mind.

Now, we move to the second scope where we start to look in a more sophisticated way, having got a bit of a handle on our body and speech, we're looking at a more sophisticated way, at the deeper causes of even the karma, which is the mind itself, the delusions themselves. We are looking at what the characteristics are of these delusions.

The liars, the misconceptions. . . and why they are called negative because they cause us, okay, why they are called negative is because they are coming even from the powerful sense of self, powerful me, inherent from my own side, this separate, lonely, bereft I-ness, which then gives rise to strong neediness to make that I happy, which then causes us to manipulate this and that, to get this and that, to shove it in to make me happy, which then causes me to get angry when we don't get what we want, and causes us to get angry

and to harm the people who thwart us, who thwart our attachment, which is called anger and aversion. And then brings us to depression, which is internalized aversion, which brings us to pride which is an over-inflated sense of who I think I am, and all these other delusions. They all come like this.

And these are the source of our actions of body and speech, which sow the seeds in the mind, but ripen as future suffering and so the ball keeps rolling. We try to understand deeply the workings of the mind here. And, this is really the day-to-day job, incredible.

Attachment is this over-exaggerated, distorted, neurotic misconception that sees the thing or the person or the event as more than it really is. Out there, from its own side, such that if I get it, I'll get happy. And then, such that if I don't get it, I get angry. That's what anger is. Aversion is thwarted attachment, basically, to whatever degree you have it.



## **PRIDE AND LOW SELF-ESTEEM**

Let's look at a couple of other delusions just for a bit of help. We hear the word pride quite a bit, arrogance. If we're accused of being arrogant, it's not very comfortable, is it?

It's difficult when we hear this because we think, "I don't have pride. I have low self-esteem. I think I'm terrible." We all have low self-esteem. In fact, His Holiness the Dalai Lama when he heard about the extent of low self-esteem in our culture, he said, "That's a mental illness." And it's true. We have enormous low self-esteem, self-loathing, guilt. But, it's a bit painful to hear it, but it's the flip side of pride. Low self-esteem is the down mode of when you feel like you're being deflated, when someone hurts you or insulted you. But the fact is we wouldn't have low self-esteem if we didn't have arrogance and pride. This is a very curious thing. You check, it's very true.

First of all, any of the unhappy states of mind, any of the delusions, any of the misconceptions – the delusions are

misconceptions – have this component of being emotionally disturbing, right? Any of the disturbing emotions, any of the misconceptions or delusions, their one main thing is they’ve got the very loud voice: I. There’s a better way to say it: they are the voices of I, but the neurotic, fearful, grasping, fantasy I. And the energy of I is fear. The energy of this neurotic I is fear. And the more we look into all our delusions, the more we’ll see they’re completely based in fear. Fear of I not getting what it wants. I has to get what it wants. I being insulted, I being less than I really am, I am not that, “I,” that fearful, panic I, that’s the neurotic I that we grasp at one million percent as real, which Buddha says is a complete fabrication. And this is a very hard thing to see.

I’m not talking about that I yet, because of this, we have the other things: attachment, anger and then pride. Pride or arrogance is a delusion, a delusion we are talking about here, not a virtue; it’s the state of mind that is based on the over-exaggerated I and is the attitude that “I am more than I

actually am.” It’s an over-inflated sense of your being better at something or more important at something. And, it works in a very subtle way and it’s quite pervasive actually. And, it’s like in terms of whether you are more beautiful, more tall, more short, more whatever it might be; it could be the tiniest thing.

When it’s in the mind, it’s always referencing everybody else in relation to this. And when there’s that type of mind, when we see other people who are more happy, and more beautiful, and more rich, what does that bring? “Oh, I must be no good.” That’s what low self-esteem is. We’re always looking at others and always comparing with others. Then because we think they are more happy, and more famous, and more beautiful, and more thin, and more this, and more intelligent, so then low self-esteem comes. “I am no good.” But, it’s nonsense. Both the feeling that you are more important and the feeling that you are less important, are both

distortions. They're both delusions. They're the flipside of the same coin.

We think of low self-esteem as some kind of a virtue almost. But, it's not. It's an appalling state of mind. It's awful. But, it's the same quality as arrogance. Arrogance is looking in the mirror and saying, "Oh, I'm so beautiful." Low self-esteem looks in the mirror and says, "Oh, I'm so ugly." The reference for both is I and they're both a mistake. Do you see? They're both exaggerations. All delusions exaggerate. Pride exaggerates your beauty. Low self-esteem and self-hate exaggerate your ugliness. They're both distortions. They're both not accurate. Do you see my point? And, low self-esteem is the result of deflated pride. It is deflated pride. If you didn't have arrogance, you wouldn't have low self-esteem. This is a very interesting point.

## **PRIDE AND SELF-CONFIDENCE**

We say confident, self-confidence, for example. And, we say humility.

Humility is almost like a dirty word because it seems like you lower yourself

even more. Having humility seems like low self-esteem to us and then, having self-confidence sounds like pride. Then we think we've got to give up pride, we've got to give up self-confidence. Then to have humility means we've got to have low self-esteem. We make it all confused. But, let's look at these.

A simple little example, you could think of two people, let's say coming into a crowded room, they're both gorgeous, both beautiful. One has self-confidence, let's say, and one has pride, let's say. Because self-confidence is not deluded. It's not based on the neurotic I. It's not comparing. It's not fearful. It's simply content with what you are. Don't think of it as arrogant. We think self-confidence and arrogance are the same. But, self-confidence is being content with who you are and it's not based in fear. You understand? You are happy with who you are. You're content with it, and it's not comparing with others. You're content in yourself.

Okay the two people who are so totally gorgeous let's say they are best in their field or something, let's say.

And one has got not much arrogance and is very self-confident and very contained in themselves and very relaxed. That means that person walks into the room and they are very un-self-conscious. They are happy to meet other people. They are happy to meet people who are more beautiful than they are. They delight in this person. They want to learn something from this person. They have no fear of what people think. They're content. And, that very contentment – and this is again a characteristic of non-ego – is like when you are not self-conscious, when you are un-self-conscious. You understand? When it's just natural, and you are not thinking of me. You are actually thinking of others, in a very natural, un-self-conscious way.

The arrogant person is walking in utterly absorbed in “I,” fearful, panic-stricken, worried about meeting someone who's better, worried about what people are thinking. That's pride. And terrified of being seen as less, almost waiting for the insult, and then when they discover someone more

beautiful or when someone says, “You are not so beautiful”: devastated, collapsed into low self-esteem. I am so bad. You understand? That’s pride.

The delusions are linked, they are the voices of the neurotic I and their energy is fear and they’re self-conscious. There’s a sort of vivid I-ness. But the virtues, there’s no sense of self-conscious “I.”

## **VIRTUES ARE PEACEFUL**

In fact, virtue it’s very interesting. If the two main characteristics of the delusions are: one, they are disturbing, that is when you have them you are very uncomfortable, and two, they are delusional, they’re liars, then, the two characteristics of the virtuous states of mind are simply that they are not disturbing and they are not delusional. Their not being disturbing means when there is more love in your heart for another, even for a moment, than there is attachment; you’re not disturbed, you’re feeling quite peaceful. In its nature, virtuous states of mind makes us peaceful, make us relaxed, calm.

Nonvirtuous states of mind make us fearful, panicked, unhappy.

If let's say Joan and I are chatting away and having a friendly talk and each of us is listening to the other and we're saying yes, yes, and I laugh when she tells me a nice story and she delights in something that happened to me – that means, you could say, at that moment we're loving each other. I mean it sounds more dramatic than we would think, because we think love is lovey-dovey, huggie-feely; attachment, in other words. But, love really means I'm delighting in Joan's happiness. Love really means she's delighting in mine. That's it and it's very un-selfconscious and very kind of friendly.

When love is more prevalent between us, just in that sense, what would be the experience? There's no vivid sense of me. I'm noticing Joan. She's got no vivid sense of her. She's more noticing me. There's not a vivid sense of she and me. There's more a sense of we. You understand? And, it's very harmonious, very friendly, easy-going, no dramas.



Now, watch what happens when we start to argue. Suddenly, the “we” has gone out the window. There’s now a vivid Joan and a vivid Robina, isn’t there? I’m feeling all hurt and I, I, I, and she’s feeling all hurt and I, I, I. She’s saying, “You did this, Robina. You, you, you,” and I’m saying, “You did this to me, Joan. You did this.” We’re all suddenly dumping on each other. There’s a separateness and it’s painful and disturbing, isn’t it? You see?

Again, the characteristics of the delusions is they’re disturbing and it’s coming from the neurotic I. It’s I, I, fearful, painful, embarrassed, self-conscious, and it’s delusional, lies, fantasies. The characteristics of the virtues is that they’re not disturbing and – you know what? – they’re not delusional, which is an interesting point. It means they’re not liars. And, why is that? Because Buddha’s saying everything anyway is interdependent; everything anyway is existing interdependently. When you’ve got virtue in your mind, there’s a sense of

interdependence, isn't there? A sense of connectedness.

Well, that's how things are. That is how things are. To some extent, not fully yet, because we haven't realized emptiness, to some extent when you're being kind and harmonious and peaceful and friendly and generous and loving, even a small amount, to that extent you are seeing things as they are. There's a sense of connectedness, interdependence.

As soon as the delusions kick in, there's a sense of separateness, concrete, separate, inherent, me-ness, she-ness, bad-ness, good-ness. It's delusional. Do you see?

## **HUMILITY AND SELF-CONFIDENCE**

The person who's got self-confidence has the quality of humility. Humility is what? Humility is delighting in someone else's qualities, praising someone else, happy to see their good qualities. It's very interesting. I remember years ago watching on the television in Australia a program,

before I was a Buddhist, a program about some famous people. There were interviews with two people, an Australian cricketer – cricket is huge in Australia like in England and India and Pakistan and those countries, all the British Empire. Cricket is huge – so, this cricketer called Donald Bradman, he's famous in Australia, he's like your Babe Ruth or your Michael Jordan, back in the 1930s. And then there was another, this famous English ballet dancer called Margot Fonteyn, right? I was totally into ballet when I was a kid, and I loved her.

I remember watching both of them and it was clear that first of all they were at the top of their field; they are seen as the best, but it struck me that they were both incredibly humble; really kind, un-arrogant, friendly, praising other people. And, you could tell everybody adored them. They had such a good reputation.

I remember reading about another person who's a really brilliant actor, and it's clear he's not angry. He's kind and polite and people adore that

person, too. It's interesting – arrogance and anger really are closely linked.

Atisha has this saying and I always get them mixed up but they both work. He said, "The best patience is humility." He might have said, "The best humility is patience." I think they both work perfectly. You check. They really go together.

Humility is a good quality and it comes with self-confidence. Low self-esteem is a lousy quality and it comes along with arrogance, the flip side of arrogance. It's very interesting to think of it this way. And it's painful because we all have low self-esteem. But, it's linked to the concrete "I" and that's how we suffer: this concrete I-ness. All the time we're referring ourselves to others and we keep seeing, as I said, people more happy, more beautiful, so that makes us that much more miserable because we always sort of see it in reference to ourselves and it's meaningless. It's absurd. That's how ego works.

## HOW TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN ATTACHMENT AND ASPIRATION

Yeah? Go, Sweetie.

*Student* You say that there's a difference between attachment and preferring something or having desire for it.

*Ven. Robina* Well the words “desire” and “attachment” in Buddhist psychology are synonymous, so ordinary words in English, let's say “to want” something “to aspire to” something they're completely different.

*Student* The difference is, or how to distinguish whether it's attachment is your reaction to it. . .

*Ven. Robina* Well that's a good way for us to see it because we can't see it while we're in it.

*Student* If you have something you're aspiring towards and it doesn't happen, if you feel disappointment, is that attachment?

*Ven. Robina* That's right; that's a sign of attachment, yes.

*Student* Not to have attachment you just let it go and not have any?

*Ven. Robina* No, it's far more subtle than that but they're good enough words. Attachment is unbelievably pervasive, it's extraordinarily subtle, it goes so deep down into our psyche, way more than we would ever think of when we use the word attachment. We just see the grossest levels of it, when we think of the chocolate cake or something. It's extremely subtle. To be really free of attachment you'd be a highly realized person, you'd be a very evolved being. Do you see what I'm saying? The energy of attachment is that. The expectation: as soon as I think I want it, we expect it to happen, we manipulate to make it happen, we talk about "control freaks": that's attachment. Expectation: that's attachment; manipulating to make it happen: all of that's attachment. They would say now we're mainly motivated by attachment. It sounds a bit depressing, but it's so subtle within us. Yeah?

*Student* With attachment, if you're in a relationship and you break up or your mother dies, is there a normal sadness

or a normal. . . without it being really attachment?

*Ven. Robina* I understand. Again remember we're talking about attachment here at a incredibly subtle level. The reference point being here the freedom from all delusions. If you were to meet a person who is free of all delusions and that means would have the compassion wing fully developed, would have enormous love, compassion, empathy for others, that would be a stunning person. I'd imagine, let's say, I think I used the example of the Dalai Lama. He is said to be a highly evolved being, I can't prove he is. . . but whatever, so that means he has no attachment, no anger, no pride, no jealousy, no delusion, no ego-grasping, has enormous love and compassion for others. Okay, let's assume he's like this. When he talked about his mother dying, he cried.

Now, when we cry, because we strongly grasp at I, and we therefore have attachment and all the others, even to a minor degree, it's still "I" based. When he cried it's probably out

of compassion. There's no grasping at any sense of "I." When you've given up attachment you don't walk around looking indifferent and cold. You're full of love and affection and warmth, and he's in tears daily with all his Tibetans coming, suffering, he cries with compassion for others when he sees their suffering. But there's no neurotic "I" involved in it at all.

*Student* And only he would really know that it was either compassion or attachment?

*Ven. Robina* What do you mean only he would really know? In our own minds, you mean? No, we need to learn to know, that's what wisdom is.

*Student* He would know his own mind. . .

*Ven. Robina* Yes, he would know himself, yes. Absolutely, yes.

*Student* I would know which it is I'm doing.

*Ven. Robina* This is why this job here of being your own therapist, as I'm talking, which we're really learning in high school here, in the second scope of practice, where we learn about the



causes of suffering, we learn about the delusions. We need to listen and listen and listen to the way Buddha talks about them, think and think and think more and contemplate more the difference between the positive and the negative, recognize and distinguish between them.

It's not how we talk in the West; and it's a very marvelous approach, and it just takes time, processing and the more you know it well, like anything – when you're really a great musician, a very intricate knowledge you can have. You just keep learning it, keep thinking it, keep studying it, keep meditating on it and your knowledge and your awareness keeps growing, keeps growing, keeps growing, and you keep uprooting at ever more sophisticated levels, the way the delusions function.

Right now it's like we're this one big soup of emotions. Not only are there chunks of soup, we're puréed soup. You can't even distinguish one piece of something from another. Love and attachment for us are virtually synonymous right now. Anger and

righteous trying to make something better are synonymous for us right now; we can't distinguish. We've got to do a lot of inner checking, inner looking, and not be scared about it, not be fundamentalist about it. It's just a very marvelous thing to do, to have this level of self-awareness. This is all Buddha is talking about.

## 23. HOW SUFFERING ENDS

### MIDDLE SCOPE/HIGH SCHOOL

Let's remind ourselves of the first noble truth – there is suffering; and the fourth – how to stop suffering and its causes.

There are **three kinds of suffering**. We looked at the first two. The bigger level of this one is the lower realms; we went into that a little. But in this life we can say that it's getting what you don't want, being in a war zone, people being mean to you, having cancer, being sick, so a very obvious sense, that's clear.

The **second** kind we looked at, is the **suffering of change**, which, at the bigger level refers to the upper realms, including the human. But in this life it is what we think of as the happiness, which is the **happiness of a junkie**. The happiness that comes when we get the attachment object, which is nothing other than suffering, because it doesn't

last and leads inexorably to the suffering of suffering.

The **third** one, the most subtle, that we don't ever consider, which is unique to the Buddha's approach to life, is called **all-pervasive suffering**.

Using the junkie analogy: the **gross suffering** is the suffering the junkie gets when they can't get the junk: extreme, intense pain. **Subtle suffering** is when you get the junk, it's the illusion of happiness, but all it is is a brief respite from the gross pain. And every time you get the junk it increases your need to get more junk. The lie of attachment is when I get the object I'll get happy, but in reality what you get. . . as my mother said, "The more you get, the more you want." Actually what you're doing is increasing your attachment, which is the killer. This is the second kind of suffering.

The **subtlest suffering** is like you're born with a body and a mind that are the body and mind of a junkie, so in order to simply exist, you are forced to ingest junk, which is the entire world we live in, the objects of the five senses.

Being locked into that scenario, that's **all-pervasive suffering**. Being born with this mind, these delusions, into a desire realm – and basically the world is the five sense objects – being forced to ingest them in order to even survive. That is the third level of suffering, all pervasive suffering, like no choice. With this, suffering realms never end.

## HOW TO STOP THE THREE KINDS OF SUFFERING

By refraining from harming others, you cease the **suffering of suffering**. That's the suffering of the lower realms and, even in the human life, the bad things that happen. We stop this by the junior school, the lower scope of practice.

By subduing attachment, you cease **the suffering of change**, and that is the higher rebirths, such as human and gods and, in this human life, when the good things happen. We stop this by the high school, the middle scope of practice.

By realizing emptiness you cease **all-pervasive suffering**. In the

Mahayana presentation of the teachings, emptiness – which itself is a high school, middle scope, teaching – is presented in the framework of the six perfections of the bodhisattva. That's university, the great scope of practice. We're going there now.

*Student* Could you recap that again please?

*Ven. Robina* Gross suffering is the lower realms and, in this life, when you get bashed up and harmed and raped and hurt and don't get enough money and live in a war zone and starving: the gross suffering. By giving up harming others, you stop this one. This is junior school practice. That's the method.

The second one, more subtle, by giving up attachment, you stop the second kind of suffering: the suffering of change. This is high school practice.

By realizing emptiness, by giving up ignorance, the root delusion, you stop the third one. Altogether, that's liberation, nirvana, the cessation of suffering and its causes.

And all this is the accomplishment of the wisdom wing.

Now we need to develop the compassion wing, realize bodhichitta, practice the six perfections, and become a buddha.

## **EVERYTHING IS CREATED BY THE MIND**

Again, remember this is Buddhist religion, but call it psychology, because there's not a single thing that we've talked about here that isn't about the mind. Do not pretend it's not the mind we're talking about here. It's just that Buddha's got a far more different and maybe more radical, I would say, more sophisticated view, of just what mind is and what its capability is. Do you see my point? Then when we think of it as mind, we are forced to bring it on the earth, not just lah-de-dah-de-dah. Not just hear it's something we better believe. You've got to do it, you know. It's extremely important to hear it like this.

## **END OF HIGH SCHOOL**

Okay, that's the second scope, this is high school. Already you're becoming a

pretty amazing person. You've controlled your body, speech and mind, you've really harnessed it, you've got incredible confidence in yourself, you know that what you experience is the fruit of your own past actions, you've really got a harness on your delusions, you're not giving power to them, you're learning to be already an amazing human being. You'd be an amazing human being if you've accomplished even a little bit of all of this. Step by step, we are moving forward, psychologically progressing.

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## **SEE OUR LUNCH DIFFERENTLY**

It's lunch time. Let's think of our lunch differently. The status right now because of being brainwashed for countless lives, is it's something out there, delicious from its own side that I'm craving to put into my mouth, because I'm hungry. It's just mindless attachment. We want to make a different action. We're still going to be attached, but we make it different



before we put it in. We don't believe in appearances, so we think of it as empty. We think of it as having no inherent nature, it's just like the chocolate cake: it's a projection of our minds because of habit, so we then see it this way. We don't believe it. It doesn't have an inherent nature, in fact.

Now imagining, we transform it in our minds into an ocean of blissful nectar, an ocean of it, in the sky. And then we think of offering this to all the holy beings, all the Buddhas, all the bodhisattvas, all the holy beings. And then we think of all the suffering, sentient beings, and all the realms of existence, all the gods, humans, animals, pretas, hell-beings, all the suffering beings, all ignorant of cause and effect, all causing themselves unbearable suffering, all not knowing why, all suffering so intensely and continuing to harm each other. Such compassion for them. We make this aspiration that they all delight in this and get everything they need, all the happiness they need and that it

removes all of their suffering.

Delighting in this. So happy to do this.

La-ma sang-gyä la-ma-chhö

De-zhin la-ma ge-dün-te

Kün-gyi je-po la-ma-te

La-ma nam-la chhö-par-bül

The bigger your stomach, the better  
now! Enjoy it!

## DEDICATION

Now, we just dedicate this thinking,  
this talking, this aspiring, this  
analyzing, this contemplating we've  
just done since this morning, how  
marvelous.

“All these seeds we've planted in our  
minds. May they ripen – we remind  
ourselves of our motivation – may they  
ripen in the future as quickly as  
possible in the development of my  
marvelous potential, my buddhahood  
so I really can be of benefit to countless  
living beings. May this be the result of  
this action.”

Please enjoy your lunch and see you  
very soon.

Ge-wa-di nyur-du-dag  
 La-ma sang-gyä drub-gyur-nä  
 Dro-wa chig-kyang ma-lü-pa  
 De-yi sa-la gö-par-shog

Jang-chhub sem-chhog rin-po-che  
 Ma-kye pa -nam kye-gyur-chig  
 Kye-wa nyam-pa me-pa-yang  
 Gong-nä gong-du pel-war-shog

**PART FIVE**  
**GREAT SCOPE/UNIVERSITY**  
**THE ESSENCE OF WHICH**  
**IS PRACTICING**  
**COMPASSION**

## **24. OVERVIEW BEFORE MOVING ON TO UNIVERSITY**

### **MOTIVATION**

Okay why are we doing this? What do we want our motivation to be? Why are we doing this? We know we want to develop our qualities, we know we want to be more happy, less neurotic, less miserable. We know that, and we're beginning to get confidence that it's possible. Isn't this marvelous? And then we look at others and we see they're in the same boat. We know they want the same, so we want the same for them. That's compassion.

Think:

“On the basis of developing our own qualities finally all the way to buddhahood, may we be able to benefit every single sentient being. How amazing! For this reason we listen to these teachings, process, think about, all the rest.”

Sang-gyā chö-dang sog-kyi chog-  
nam-la  
Jang-chub bar-du dag-ni kyab-su-  
chi  
Dag-gi chö-nyen gyi-pä so-nam-kyi  
Dro-la pen-chir sang-gyā drub-par-  
shog

## THE PRELIMINARY CONTEMPLATIONS

Alright. We've been through, we've looked at the **nature of our mind**, the fact that it's got this marvelous **potential** to be perfect, to become Buddha, is its natural state. We must develop into it, we must become it. We can do that because it's changeable. The virtue's inherent within us, virtues are innate, they are like at the core of our being, they are who we really are. And the negative qualities aren't.

**Our mind is our own**, it's **nonphysical**. It doesn't come from a creator, doesn't come from parents, is our own. What's in our mind is ours and it goes back and back and back, and it's the process of cause and effect,

chicken and egg, and it will continue to move forward.

Then we looked at the **necessity for a teacher** to show us how to do this job; a person who is qualified, who is valid. We need to check very carefully, very stably, in a very grounded way, check on the qualities, check on the path, check on the teachings, check on the students, check on the reputation, check on all this, until we become very confident that first this is the path you want and these are the teachers and we are prepared to trust them to lead us to enlightenment. Then, seeing them as the Buddha, practicing this.

Then, moving to the next point that Atisha asks us to contemplate, which is the **preciousness of this marvelous opportunity** we have right now: this life, this leisure, this space, this time, this intelligence, this healthy body, this situation that we're in. It's not random; it's the fruit of enormous merit on our part. We set ourselves up to have this marvelous opportunity so let's not waste it. Let's use it as the resource that

it is to help us get enlightened. How incredible.

## **JUNIOR SCHOOL: THE LOWEST SCOPE**

**Death and Impermanence** Then we contemplate: “Yes indeed, it is precious, but my goodness, it could end at any moment.” **It will in fact end** at any moment, **the time of our death is completely uncertain**, and at the time of death **the only thing that is of any use to us is our positive qualities**, not the negative ones, not all of our possessions, not our reputation, not our money, not all of this stuff that we spend so much energy on.

**Suffering Rebirths** Then we contemplate even more that we will die at any moment and all of these negative karmic imprints from countless past lives could very well ripen as extremely **suffering rebirths**, causing us to completely lose the plot, completely lose it into all sorts of suffering experiences, thus no way we can



practice, no way we can transform ourselves.

**Refuge** We don't want that kind of suffering so we turn to the **Buddha**, the **Dharma**, the **Sangha**. We utilize these tools in our life to help us develop our qualities. And so then we finally begin to practice.

**Abiding by the Laws of Karma**  
The culmination of this first scope, this junior school level of practice, already profound, is to abide by the laws of **karma**. We listen very carefully to Buddha's teachings on what to not do and to what to do, what to avoid and what to actually practice.

We learn the basics of the **ten nonvirtuous actions**, to refrain from these; and just living this way already, marvelous. You won't harm others, they benefit and you benefit directly. Because the negative seeds won't ripen, that when you die, because you thought about it, your mind will be happy, the habit of practicing virtue will naturally ripen the virtuous karma, it will throw your mind on autopilot into a really good rebirth where you can continue to

practice your spiritual path. Very practical.

Just like if you're a gardener and you can decide what seeds you plant because you know the fruits of those seeds and so you can even have a plan of fifty years time. You can show me your empty ground now and say, "Look Robina, in fifty years I will have this and this and an oak tree here and a peach tree there and roses there." And I'll say, "Oh, wow, you're clairvoyant!" But you'll say, "No, no, no, I just know botany, that's all, no big deal."

Well the same here, the laws of cause and effect. It's a law, it's practical like that. If you want to have a really good life, you **practice morality**: don't harm others, don't kill, don't lie, don't kill. If you want to have people trust your words, then don't lie. If you want to be born with a very fine healthy body then don't kill. If you want to be born and have people trust what you say then don't lie, as I said. If you want to be born with enough things to have in your life so you can keep on practicing, you'd better be generous. It's really

practical, bring it down to earth. Stop mystifying all this stuff.

We're so mystical, so confused. Buddha says it's practical: you learn to know what to do, so that you get that result; you learn what not to do so you don't get that result. Just like you do with food, with gardening, all the things we understand in the ordinary physical world; we live by these laws. But when it comes to our spiritual practice, when it comes to goodness and badness, we completely lose the plot, and live in fear, you know. So silly.

## HIGH SCHOOL: THE MIDDLE SCOPE

Then we moved to the second scope, we moved to high school now and we started looking more deeply, more sophisticatedly at the **deepest causes of suffering**, which is in the mind, which is even the cause of why we create karma: the mind, the mind itself. We need to understand the mind.

We began to look a little bit at this, understanding positive states of mind,

negative states of mind. Understanding how the negative ones cause us suffering, are **disturbing**, and are **deluded**. How they function, how they are liars, how they lead us up garden paths, and how the tragedy is because they are so familiar, we are so familiar with them, we believe in what we're seeing. As Lama Zopa says, "Everything is our karmic appearance": the people we meet, how we see them, how they treat us, has all to do with our past actions. We get sucked into it. Then we feel like a big victim, "They did this to me, they did that to me, not fair, poor me, I didn't ask to get born, it's not my fault."

We begin to grow up here, we begin to get more mature, we begin to grow up. We get courage to see ourselves, to take responsibility, and all the time the reference being our own marvelous potential. Just seeing your own negative qualities in and of themselves will make you depressed; we spend our lives doing that. To see negative qualities in the context of the fact that

you can change them and become positive: wow! That's fantastic.

We looked more deeply at how even **the nature of this life is suffering, too.** Not just having the grosser level of suffering but even the subtle level of suffering, this one of that even this happiness we have now is nothing other than suffering, because it's motivated by attachment. It's like the happiness of a junkie, it's polluted.

## **OUR POTENTIAL TO BE FREE OF SUFFERING, FULL OF HAPPINESS**

Whereas what Buddha is saying – this concludes this high school – Buddha is saying, actually, if we look at the Third Noble Truth, if we look at our potential, the potential we have for happiness, very simply, is phenomenal, phenomenal. Far more radical in his view of what we can achieve than we ever think possible in our ordinary Western world. He says you can't imagine the levels of contentment, fulfillment, bliss, clarity, joy, happiness that we can achieve. Not in a hysterical

sense of happiness like we think about it; but we can't even find words for it because it doesn't even come into our experience at all.

But if you can even just imagine not having a fraction of attachment, anger, pride, jealousy, fears, confusion, being unbelievably courageous, being extremely wise, seeing the minds of others, being very blissful, very joyful, your mind absolutely under your control, no crazy thoughts, no crazy nonsense, no deluded emotions, being very relaxed, very funny, very blissful, very kind, very loving, very compassionate, can you imagine? We understand the words. Buddha says we can become this.

## **RENUNCIATION OF SUFFERING AND ITS CAUSES**

Following this contemplation in this second scope of practice in high school, what we get is an even deeper, more powerful wish to go beyond suffering. They call this renunciation. We've finished the wisdom wing now. The

culmination of this all together is a very profound renunciation.

Simply speaking as Lama Zopa Rinpoche says, you've got renunciation, you've accomplished it when "just the thought, just the thought, of another moment of attachment is so disgusting it's like being in a septic tank." In other words, when we're so advanced and our understanding is so refined, even just a moment of attachment, the thought of it even, is so revolting because we've so deeply understood how it causes so much pain and suffering to ourselves and how it causes all the other delusions and all the gross suffering in the end. That's the source. It's pretty amazing.

## **THE MIRACLE OF RENUNCIATION**

Another way to say it, is the wish to give up – not happiness, never think this; it's such a mistake – but to give up suffering. But crucially, by finally now understanding that the delusions and karma, my delusions and my past actions, are the cause of my suffering,

now I have some confidence to know how to change it. That's the miracle of renunciation.

If you were to complete just this wing, graduate at high school, you'd achieve nirvana. You'd meditate on emptiness, you'd cut the root of even the deepest delusion, the self-grasping, the ego-grasping, and you would achieve liberation from suffering. No longer need to be reborn; finished, achieved enormous bliss, your own liberation, as they call it.

But here on the Mahayana path the culmination of the middle scope, high school, is renunciation: two things: being fed up with suffering and knowing its causes. We know what suffering is and we know why we're suffering. That's the miracle.

And now we can look out there and see the world and realize that we're all in the same boat, we're all suffering, so we want to go on to university. We want to develop the compassion wing as well.



## **25. WHAT IS COMPASSION?**

### **GREAT SCOPE/UNIVERSITY**

Now we can see suffering everywhere. Look at all the suffering of suffering, suffering of change. Look at all these people harming each other. Why? Because they think others are the cause of their suffering. And look, they don't realize that what they're doing now is going to harm themselves in the future. This alone, this ignorance of karma alone, is such a profound reason to have compassion for others. You never had that until you have compassion for yourself, which you get from thinking about karma in the first and second scopes.

In general, compassion means seeing the suffering of others, or seeing that what they're doing will cause them suffering, and your heart reaching out. That's compassion. Love is seeing others and wishing them to be happy, delighting in their happiness, wanting them to be happy; that's love.

## **WISDOM WING IS THE BASIS**

The entire compassion wing is the development of love and compassion, to degrees that we can't even conceive of as real. Why? Because Buddha would say, once we have grounded ourselves in the first two scopes, junior school and high school, and we've got such a profound understanding now of what causes suffering, what causes happiness, for ourselves, of course it applies to all beings. Now we can open our hearts, beginning to expand our consciousness to encompass others and continue all the way to opening your heart until eventually you've encompassed all beings without exception, see their minds perfectly and only wish, spontaneously, to benefit them as long as samara exists.

## **A BIRD NEEDS TWO WINGS: WISDOM AND COMPASSION**

It's all to do with love and compassion, this is the point. And this is the action wing. It's like the wisdom wing is where you put yourself together. Like wisdom is you go to school and learn how to

become a surgeon. Compassion wing is the action of cutting out the cataracts. You can have compassion but you can't do that without the wisdom. You've got to have both. You can't have one wing. You need both wings. Wisdom wing is not enough, just becoming liberated yourself from suffering is not enough. You've got to also have the one of wanting to help others, because we're all in the same boat. Once you put the mechanics of it all together in the first and second scope, easy to do the compassion wing now. You've got a sound basis.

## **WHAT IS COMPASSION?**

Let's just, in general, look at compassion right now and look at what we mean by it in the ordinary world. Based on our assumptions that things happen unfairly, of evil people over there and nice people over here, monsters over there, victims over here, this is the view we have of the world.

With this view, look at the people we have compassion for now: we have compassion for those we're attached to;

we love them, too. And we have compassion for the victims, don't we? If you're a fanatic Osama bin Laden person you're very compassionate for your people, and they're the victims. To that extent, you have hate for those who do it to you, because your philosophy tells you that they cause it. Then, you feel righteous in dropping bombs on them, killing them, collapsing buildings, killing as many as possible, calling it a noble action. This is the wicked thing about religion: how we turn it into something as a tool to suit our own delusions. It's so naughty, you know.

Equally, you get some fanatic American, Christian, I don't care what label you have, who truly believes that Americans are these victims and these monster Iraqis and these monster Osama bin Ladens are these evil people, and we must drop bombs on them, so therefore they justify it with their Christianity, calling it good. You have compassion for the victims called America and to that extent you hate the oppressors.

Look at the world, look at your own life, look at rats and dogs and cats, we all do it. This is the view of the world, and Buddha is arguing with this view.

## **WE'RE ALL IN THE SAME BOAT**

Having done the first and second scopes, having looked at karma, the law of cause and effect, and at the way the mind works, we then are very comfortable in taking responsibility for our own stuff and really developing ourselves and really growing up. It's easy now to look at the whole world, all the victims, all the oppressors and see them all in the same boat: this life as a victim, next life you are the oppressor; the oppressors of this life are the victims of a past life, and will be the victims of the future; the victims of this life are the oppressors of past life and will be the oppressors of the future. We just go round and round and round. You hit me, then I'll hit you. "Oh, but she hit me!" "Oh no, then you hit me back." "But she hit me, it's her fault."

Look at us all, never taking responsibility! That's the reason to

have compassion for sentient beings, that's the Buddha's point. Not because you're attached to this group and you feel sorry for them. That's not really compassion at all. It's better than nothing. But it's not much help because in the end the aggression, the anger towards the oppressors, and the wrong philosophy that they are the main cause of the suffering of the victims, that's what puts you deeper and deeper and deeper into the bigger hole of samsara. Because Buddha would say it's a misconception.

## **COMPASSION FOR THE HARMERS**

What is real compassion? Well, compassion has to be equal for all beings, for it to be genuine compassion. Compassion is simply seeing that others are suffering or – this is the point – that others are causing themselves suffering by doing stupid things. From this point of view – it sounds shocking to say this for the world, but you check – actually you'd have more compassion for the pilots on

September 11 than you would for the victims.

In one way you can see this, in this sense: the victims are experiencing the fruits of their past harming, the extent of their suffering – you can only imagine the extent of the causes; who knows what life, when? – that caused that suffering. They now have just finished that suffering by having that terrible result, they’ve purified that. The very having of suffering is the finishing of those seeds. That’s logical. The fruits that fall off the tree, that’s the finishing of that seed, isn’t it? If you have suffering, that’s the fruit of your past negative karma. Then if you have it, it’s now finished. This is one attitude to have very much and we’ll talk about it in this wing, the compassion wing. This is a very marvelous attitude to have towards your suffering: it’s the fruit of your own junk coming past, coming up, now you experience it: “Oh great, what a relief.”

There was this rabbi, a Kabbalah rabbi that I was in a conference with a few years ago in Florida – because he

said they have a view of karma also – he said they have this saying: that every time something bad happens you think, “Great, one less debt to repay!” It’s a really good view, you know.

That’s the view here. That’s how come those nuns can be so stable in the face of that suffering, those Tibetan nuns. They know it is their own seeds ripening, so then you bear them; that gives you the courage to bear them and even to be grateful that it’s now finished.

Then you have the pilots, coming with their huge philosophy, of justifying enormous rage, justifying killing as many people as possible, as being a religious action and a cause for them to go to heaven – I mean talk about deluded! I would argue. You would have more compassion for them because their suffering is going to be infinitely worse than the suffering of those victims, in the future; they set themselves up for unbearable suffering in the future.



## THE LOGIC OF COMPASSION

Then of course, it includes the ones who are victims, because of course you have compassion for the victims. Of course you have compassion for the dog who's being kicked – but again this is the point – the reason you have compassion is because that dog out of ignorance set itself up to be a dog and to be harmed because of its past actions. That's the reasoning for the compassion. Like the mother for the junkie kid, everyone else can't stand them, but she sees what he is doing to himself, she knows that he is suffering because of his own habits, that he is harming himself.

This is the real one, because you got this in the wisdom wing in relation to yourself; you've really got this one down. You're not falling into the dualistic trap of victims and oppressors; when you know why you're suffering and are fed up with it – that's like compassion for yourself – then easily you'll have compassion for the guy who kicks the dog, because out of his ignorance he doesn't realize that

he's causing himself to have future suffering. When we've got this attitude, which we can all only get from the karmic one, and when we understand delusions, which is in the first two scopes, you have a basis now, a sound basis for very solid profound expansive compassion.

Trying to develop compassion without the wisdom wing is developing the deluded view of compassion, which we have now, which is only for those who we are attached to and only for the victims. You're still not even beginning to address the anger, the blame, all the nonsense, the wrong philosophy. This is the approach here, you see.

## 26. HOW TO DEVELOP LOVE AND COMPASSION, THEN BODHICHITTA GREAT SCOPE/UNIVERSITY

I'm going to go through now a little packaging of eleven different points, eleven things to contemplate, again in a psychologically orderly way, one leading to the next, which leads to the next, that culminate in the development of what is called bodhichitta, the eleventh.

The **recognition of karma** is the **culmination of the first scope** and the recognition you don't want future suffering.

The **culmination of the second scope** is this deep **renunciation**.

The **third scope** – there's two actually: the one of bodhichitta and also the one of realizing emptiness (we'll talk about that) – but the one of **bodhichitta is the culmination** of this incredible development of love and compassion.

What **bodhichitta** is is an aspiration, actually. The words go like this: “I must become a buddha as quickly as possible because the suffering of sentient beings is unbearable.” Bodhichitta is the aspiration that you must become a buddha as quickly as possible and it’s based on the development of this phenomenal love and compassion that you’ve got. It’s this driving force, it’s like the force that drives you now to become enlightened as quickly as possible. It becomes a single-pointed focus for you.

And it also has the component of wanting only to benefit others, every second.

They say from the first moment of accomplishing this bodhichitta in your mind, the first moment you accomplish that quality, there’s no longer the thought of the usual neurotic “I” arising in the mind. Already you are beyond “I.” No longer the thought of “I,” only the thought of others.

These eleven steps, meditations, are a combination of two methods for

developing bodhichitta. One is the **six causes and one effect** technique and the other is **exchanging self for others**.

## 1. EQUANIMITY

What's the very first step we need to. . . apart from the wisdom wing; on the compassion wing itself, what is the very first practice we need to do? It's called equanimity.

All these words we all know, they're all just English words, whereas Buddha is big on defining his terms. Like, if you learn math you've got to define "seven," you've got to define "two," you can't just make up your own definition, you'd be very confused. Here we've got to be really clear about the definitions of these terms.

In this context, what equanimity is is, again, a very specific state of mind. And what it is is the heartfelt – when you've achieved it, when you've accomplished it – it's the heartfelt recognition that enemies, friends, and strangers – and let's face it, there's no fourth category – enemies, friends and strangers are equal, are equal.

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

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

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

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

The object of our aversion are called enemies.

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

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

## **ATTACHMENT FOR FRIENDS**

There are those you like, whom you are attached to. And who are they? Simply, they're the ones that do what you want. Not being mean or anything, that's just it. They do what you want, they suit you, they agree with you, they like what you like, they appear pleasing to you therefore, and so they're the ones you can afford to love. They're the ones you can say "Okay, I want you to be happy."

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

Look at animals for us, look at how we relate to animals. It's very obvious. You can have incredible compassion for that little cute poodle. Remember a few years ago – was it San Jose somewhere? – some road rage bloke

got out of his car and went over and stuck his hand in and grabbed his little poodle off the front seat and chucked it into the traffic, and it died. Now he was practically hanged.

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

We say we are attached to certain types of people, we’re attached to what we call our husband – or maybe not, who knows! We’re attached to our children, or we’re attached to whoever the person is, generally speaking because they suit my needs. A thing called a poodle, if I like poodles, they suit my needs so I become so attached to it. Then what do I do? I impute all sorts of qualities onto that poodle,



which, excuse me, it just doesn't have. Like with the chocolate cake. You make the poodle far more gorgeous than it really is. Look at it. Our pets, it's embarrassing what we do. We call it love, we call it compassion, we call it helping animals.

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

We always limit whom we love and whom we don't. The Buddha's deal is, there's not a single sentient being on this earth whom we shouldn't have compassion for and love for, and not just humans, it's not just a few animals, it's every single sentient being. It's a very big basis: all the mind-possessors, because they're all in the same boat.

They're all being born human one life, animal the next, spirit the next, hell being the next, they're enemy the next, they're friend the next, but fundamentally there's some things that we all share: the wish to be happy, the wish not to suffer. Have to establish this, think about it, see how it's logical, first.

## **HOW TO MEDITATE ON EQUANIMITY**

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

These types, all of these meditations we're taking about, by the way. . . it's

very surprising, because we think of meditation as some trippy thing where you close your eyes and you visualize something like a buddha, or you watch your mind or something. But – and we’re going to talk about this in a minute – you do concentration meditation, and then you go to the second mode of meditation and you do analysis. This is all you’re doing. You’re taking these things you’ve heard and you think them through in a very careful, clear way in order to trigger a feeling for them. That’s meditation. We’ll talk about this in a minute, it’s coming.

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

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

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

In other words, in this equanimity meditation what we're trying to do is get a bit of space between ourself and these three people. See them separately from me. Right now we see them as extensions of myself: the friend is an extension of me, so my friend, whom I want to be happy, whom I totally adore, we can't even separate them from ourself. Aversion the same. We see people only in terms of what they do or

don't do to me. A friend is a person who helps me, an enemy is a person who harms me, and a stranger is a person who does neither. You think, very simple.

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **FRIEND**

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

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

and ugly simultaneously. They're both projections of the mind. Enemy and friend are projections of the mind.

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



**ENEMY**

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

**STRANGER**

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

to you. They've neither harmed nor helped. But many Americans will look avidly at all the Iraqi news because the Americans are in there, you see. It's attachment and aversion, friends and enemies.

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

Look at the Israelis and Palestinians, it's amazing. Israel is so tiny you could jog across it without getting too puffed out. Look at the energy there of the people who occupy that piece of Earth, all believing it's their land, fighting over it, hating each other, and then putting all their philosophies onto it. Frankly – I'm not being rude about anybody – but I think if you think you're the chosen people, already you're in big trouble. I mean really, I think you've got to be in big trouble if you start to think this. I don't care whether you call yourself Christian, Jewish, Hindu or Muslim, or Buddhist for that matter. That's really a very difficult statement: the chosen people. Oh my God. But everybody thinks this, they all think they're special. Mormons

think they're unique and special, the Seventh Day Adventists completely convinced that they're right. The Catholics totally believe they're right. No doubt fundamentalist Buddhists are completely believing they're right. Everybody has this concrete, fixed view we're right and these poor people down there who aren't. I mean, it's crazy.

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

If I put up here in front of you my enemy, my friend, and my stranger, you won't notice any difference, you can't tell. There's no big "E" engraved on the forehead of the enemy. There's no wings on the friend. You'll put your own projections onto them. They have noses and arms and legs and toes and fingers, they all want to be happy, they all go to the toilet, they all get depressed, they all get constipation.

There's equality there, it's very easy to see it, but we're so tunnel vision in our views, believing in our own karmic appearances.

## **2. EVERYONE HAS BEEN MY MOTHER**

On the basis of the recognition that all are equal in the wish to be happy, you now have a sound basis for wanting them to be happy, which is what love is, and a sound basis for wanting them to not have suffering, which is what compassion is.

If you don't really see that all beings want to be happy and don't want to suffer, you don't have a basis for loving them and having compassion for them, because love is: may you be happy. Love is: may you be happy. And compassion is: may you not suffer. Then you have the space to begin to love enemies and love strangers and have compassion for them. Now, no space; no logic. This is the logic.

The next one is outrageous, it's really getting your head around the numbers: given that Buddha says we've all got

continuity of consciousness, every single sentient being, every single *sem-chen* is a mind-possessor, a living being, their consciousness necessarily is beginningless. Just do your numbers, it follows logically. If it were true, then every single sentient being, we would bump into them countless times. It just goes without saying. If you just do a few little numbers on your computer. If there are countless living beings, and we've all had countless lives, you'd be able to compute quite quickly that we've all bumped into each other countless times, even they'd been my mother countless times.

Actually I put this to a mathematician, and he thought it was ridiculous! I don't remember his thinking now.

"Mother" is just a choice here because mother is considered to be a person who's been very kind to us. For many of us this seems like an oxymoron. We've got to do extra hard work and seeing even how our mother is kind and we'll do that in a minute. So, good enough this one, you just get your head around

the numbers one, which, again, is so expanding for the mind. And to see it as logic based on the hypothesis, remember, that Buddha says our mind is beginningless, that Buddha says there are countless sentient beings, all of whose minds are beginningless. It follows logically that they've all been my Mum. I mean it's insane, but it fits with the logic.

### **3. THE KINDNESS OF THE MOTHER**

Then you think of their kindness. The mother is kind. Now how is the mother kind?

Now this is a very interesting point, because my feeling is, you check now, with our usual narrow view of attachment and all the rest, what we even mean by "kind" is really faulty. You check what we mean by kind. I go to the café and I order chocolate cake and I get it and she gives me a discount and a bigger piece: "Oh, you are so kind!" She gives me a small piece or gives me carrot cake: I do not call her kind. In other words, a person's only

kind when they do what I want. You check. That's what we mean by it; it is so wicked.

Now you know yourself, when you work hard at your job and the boss is really mean and ugly and doesn't thank you because you don't do what they want, you are mortified and feel so sad because you know you worked so hard, but he doesn't thank you, because you haven't satisfied him. He doesn't call you kind at all, but you've been very kind, in fact: you've struggled away; you've done your job.

Whether you get the cake you want or not, doesn't matter. That little waitress, "Hello, my name is Sarah, I'm your wait-person," and takes your order and writes it on a little note, and goes to the cook and hangs it up, and he puts the thing on the plate and she – this is in Denny's anyway, I watched them – and she comes over, and gives you a knife and fork wrapped in the napkin, she gives you water with ice – all that work, for carrot cake or chocolate cake: same work, same kindness. She's worried about her own problems, worried about

her constipation. She's kind, either way. Kindness has got nothing to do with whether you get what you want, excuse me.

Already hearing this, we can see our mothers are kind. I don't care how neurotic, how ugly, how maniac, how deluded they are; we've all got mummies like this, to some degree. Join the human race – duh. Mummies are cut out of the same cloth as you, they're called deluded sentient beings.

## **WE BLAME OUR MOTHER**

But again, it's very interesting; we have this view that Mummy made me, we have this view that Mummy created me. Already it's not surprising we blame our mothers. I think you should blame your mother, quite frankly, if she did really make you. If it is really true what we say in the West, that she literally created you, your mummy and daddy, let's say – if you really look at the implications of it, it's quite profound – then I think it is absolutely right that if a person who is deluded, paranoid, jealous, angry, limited,



selfish dare to make me with my anger and my jealousy – because it's their fault, they made me – and then throw me out on my own in this world and say, now it's my responsibility. I mean we should be up in arms. We should be killing every one of our mothers, I agree!

In our psychology, we love to blame our mums, but we feel bad about it because we know we turn into mums eventually as well. But actually, I think if your mother really did make you, you are right to blame her. Think this point through, it's very interesting. How dare she! I mean it's a fascist thing to do; to make me with all my delusions and give me a lousy life.

But the fact is Buddha says she didn't make you, Robina. She is sitting there having sex with your daddy and you come along. She's minding her own business and you come along. Don't blame her! You set yourself up, honey child, from countless past lives with this person, to have this mother who's mean and paranoid and ugly and depressed and hurts me.

I was just having a conversation recently with this person about her mummy – and we're all the same because we've all got mummies like this. At some point we hate our mothers and see their delusions so vividly. I remember the day, I remember the moment my mother fell off her pedestal for me. Do you understand what I'm saying? The moment when she stopped being like this perfect goddess, like you think your mummy is when you're little. I remember the moment I started seeing that she was an ordinary human being and I found fault, and it was devastating. But that's what we do, we put them up there like they are God, just like we think of God, I swear, as the creator.

We daren't blame God, but we love to blame our mothers. Now this is not saying that our mother isn't deluded, isn't angry, isn't jealous; more than likely we are right: she is. But there is no reason to not thank her for her kindness, for the effort she made. That means we've got to start searching the

things that she has done, that have been supportive of me, that have helped me. You don't have to be a rocket scientist to do that. Excuse me.

## **HOW IS SHE KIND?**

Even if your mother gave you away at birth, you have every reason to continue to weep with gratitude at her kindness. You know what? She didn't kill you. There are probably millions of abortions every year, millions. I've heard figures somewhere. You could even probably argue that there are more sentient beings, more humans who get conceived, who die before they're born than those who get born. I bet.

Now, we are very fortunate; look at us, still alive. And the first cause of this is our mother's decision not to abort us, the first cause, the main cause. Not the main, the main one really is our past morality, but here we look in terms of the relative reality and try to look at our mother and see a reason to see how she's kind, that it didn't occur to her to abort her daughter. I know I had an

abortion, when I was 23. I was unquestioned about it. I did no way want this kid. I didn't think of it as a kid.

Someone I know when she was 17, she got pregnant and she decided she wouldn't have an abortion. I even encouraged her to. Me and my sisters said, "Come on, have an abortion." She didn't want to; back in the 60s. She was brave, she had the daughter, and then she had it adopted.

She decided not to have an abortion. In spite of encouragement by everyone else, she decided she would have this daughter. She had the daughter, she gave it away because she figured she wasn't qualified, she was 17, it was difficult, whatever the reasons but her motives were pure. Now this daughter, because she's so fixated on her mean mother who gave her away at birth, so obsessed with that, she can't really see the real story: that her mother was kind. She did what she felt was best, and she's never forgiven her and the mother's heart breaks even though she's 55 now, her heart breaks still.

She's worked with it, but her heart breaks at this rejection, for this child she spent her life trying to find and truly she does have a strong affection for. That's heartbreaking. That's from a mother's point of view, you know. It's very interesting.

### **SURE, SHE'S DELUDED**

Our mother, who's angry and deluded and neurotic and dominating and all these things, right, you're absolutely right, she is those things. But it's only because we feel such victims – and I'm not being mean about it – because we feel so enslaved, so fearful, that all her delusions, all they do is trigger our own. You know, it's our fears, it's our stuff, it's our inability to know what we think and feel. We blame her for it, of course. And we're right in what we're seeing, but her suffering appears so much worse to us because we haven't dealt with our own suffering. When we've dealt with our own suffering in the wisdom wing, it's easy to see your crazy mother, your deluded Mum and you have such compassion, because

you're no longer enslaved in that victim role, because you've put yourself together. Then we can easily see the mother, the kind things she's done.

## **SHE TOOK CARE OF US**

She fed us, she sent us to school, she showed us how to wipe our bottoms and tie our shoelaces. Even you could say there's more reason to think of her kindness, because if she is deluded, is mean, is angry, and is paranoid, she put up with me when I was squalling as a kid, and wiped my dirty bum. That was much harder work for her then if she'd been a compassionate, kind person. To make an effort to get out of bed when she was thinking about herself and all miserable. How grateful we should be to our mother. It's so clear, really.

Because of our own delusions we can't do it, it's too painful for us. And when you're deluded yourself, that is like you put your deluded glasses on and all that does is attract whatever delusions there are in a person, all we see are their delusions. The more

deluded we are, the more we see other people's delusions, it goes without saying. The more virtuous we are, the more we put our good glasses on, the more we can see, the virtues come to the fore. What we see in a person is a reflection of our mind, not what's there. It is there with them, but we're not seeing the whole picture. That's the point. When we see friend, we're blinded. We only see the gorgeous things, all sparkly, we can't see their delusions. When we see enemy, we can't see their virtues; all we see is their delusions. It's our doing, you see.

#### **4. REPAY THE KINDNESS OF THE MOTHER**

So, our mothers are kind. If all sentient beings have been our mother, then it follows logically that all sentient beings are kind. Then it follows logically, "Of course I must repay their kindness." The more you think of a person's kindness, the more you have the wish to repay it. This is clear. When you really see a person's kindness, when they've done a big favor for you, you

really want to do something to repay their kindness. When we start to think about the kindness of the mother, we want to repay the kindness. Not just to the Mum of this life, which we think about, but now we're talking about all sentient beings: we must repay their kindness. Oh my goodness.

Clearly, this is a very radical process; step by baby step we do this type of thinking in meditation, as well as in our daily life, shifting all the misconceptions from the mind now that we believe are the truth: slowly, slowly. Then our heart naturally begins to open, open, open, open. This whole compassion wing is a continuous opening of this mind to encompass all others, finally. Step by baby step.

## **EXCHANGING OURSELVES FOR OTHERS**

### **5. OTHERS ARE EQUAL TO ME**

Then we continue – I might get these steps a bit mixed up, but never mind. As a sort of a background for this, in general you can say in the wisdom wing



the main obstacle, the main problem, is attachment. But here, in the compassion wing you can say the main obstacle to the development of compassion, love, and finally bodhichitta, is what they call simply self-cherishing. We cherish self most. It's self-cherishing, or as we would simply call it, selfishness – which is so painful to hear, that word – means putting me first.

Now, the next one we think about is how we try now. . . like we did in the very beginning, we tried to see our enemy, friend and stranger are equal, now we try to see how all others are equal to me. Same type of thinking, but now the reference is myself.

That all sentient beings – and we've now thought about them as all wanting to be happy, all been our mother countless times, their kindness, want to repay their kindness – now we begin to actually be even more radical now and we move into a whole set of practices that is called exchanging self for others. It's an amazing, radical, quick way to help us quickly develop incredible

levels of love and compassion. Now, exchange self for others.

## **A SEPARATE SENSE OF SELF**

Now, this is just natural and instinctive as long as we grasp at the self. The very grasping at the self, which is the primordial misconception, is even what gives us a sense of being a separate person from others, which is what then causes us to even invent enemies, friends and strangers out there, separate from me. It's a complete delusion. So naturally, having this view, we obviously put self first automatically, instinctively, naturally, automatically. And so we're trying to conquer that. Here, we are trying to exchange self, I, for others, meaning beginning to develop love and compassion for others more than one's self.

Now this whole approach is very interesting, because if we come to this approach with a lot of self-loathing, a lot of low self-esteem, having not done much work on the wisdom wing, then we're going to mis-hear this. There's a

little exchanging-self-for-others text called *The Eight Verses*, and in one of those verses it says, “When you’re with others, think of yourself as the lowest of all.” Well, like we’ve already talked, already we do that. “Well excuse me, Buddha, I already hate myself, what do you want me to do? I already do this! What do you mean?” Clearly the person who wrote that text, Langri Tangpa, talking from this point of view of this exchanging-self-for-others approach, doesn’t mean that.

## **A SUITABLE VESSEL**

It’s obvious, as Pabongka Rinpoche, the author of one of the lamrim texts that we all use quite a bit called *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, what he says is that in order to hear these types of teachings, this exchanging-self-for-others teachings, in the appropriate way, you need to be a suitable vessel. And all he means by that is a person who’s done the work of the wisdom wing; a person who’s put themselves together in the wisdom wing: understood karma, taken

responsibility, developed therefore an amazing sense of your own self, a lot of self-confidence, an ability to know that you can change, a sense of responsibility. It's only that person who can hear this instruction properly: put yourself as the lowest of all; exchange yourself for others. It's an outrageous thing to say.

## **MOTHERS DO IT**

What are some examples of this, because we don't normally think like this on our Earth. But I think mothers are a good example. Sure, they're totally motivated by attachment, but they do, on the basis of that, still have massive love and compassion for their babies, there's no doubt. I remember watching a movie years ago, a documentary, about all the outrageous things that mothers would do in order to save their children: I mean, jumping into floods, running into burning houses, lifting up entire cars, doing the most insane things. Do you see my point here?

Now if you think about that for a second, if you think about the state of mind of that person, running into a burning house, there is no way a person with fear and timidity and low self-esteem could do that; think about it for a second. You've got to be a very courageous person, even for five minutes, don't you? You've got to be really not thinking of yourself because if you start to think, "Oh my God, I'm running into a fire," that's the end of you. You back away. You see my point here? For that mother, at that time, so overwhelmed by the suffering of that child in that fire, literally not thinking about herself for that few minutes. You think about it, it has to be this way, doesn't it?

Well, that is what here is being talked about as the capacity that we've all got, eventually when we truly have exchanged ourselves for others, when we become a bodhisattva. When truly it is only others we ever are thinking about. I mean it's hard to think even this is possible. It's so out of the realms of what we think is possible

psychologically. We would not trust that if we heard that a person was like this all the time. We wouldn't believe it's true. You see my point? Because we don't think it's possible, because we factor in self-centeredness as something natural and normal, whereas Buddha says we can go beyond it.

## **SEE THE LOGIC OF EXCHANGING SELF FOR OTHERS**

This whole exchanging self for others – and this begins with this particular technique, and there are a few more after this of this eleven – this is from this approach; this radical, paradigm shift, complete shift, in the whole way you see everything. You're beginning in this one to truly practice seeing others as more important than you. It's as scary as hell to even begin to think about it, especially if we have so much self-clinging already, which we do. But at least we can begin to think about it, to see the logic of it, because it's the quickest way to smash self-cherishing,

but even the self-grasping; it quickens, it hastens the whole process of removing the misconceptions of I. The whole point of it here is to radically shift our emphasis away from this instinctive sense of self and doing what it wants all the time to doing what others want, to seeing others, to putting them first.

## **TWO IS MORE THAN ONE**

There's all these little kind of techniques they use, of ways of thinking, of practicing. Like you think for example, it sounds so silly but they're small little things you use in your mind to try to see the logic of this. If you have the choice between \$1.00 and \$2.00, one apple and two, in general we'd prefer two. If you want to buy one house or two houses for the same money, of course you'd take two. You'd get excited; you'd feel like you got good value for your money. Then, two sentient beings is more than one, isn't it? I'm one, there's two over there. Conclusion: they're more important.

Now it's so ridiculous, it's so simple, you can't fault it, but it's too hard for us. It's like, "Excuse me, what are you talking about?" You can't even hear it properly, because we're so overwhelmed just naturally by the ego-grasping that clings to me as self-existent, which brings the attachment and the selfishness and all this stuff that just naturally arises in us, that we think is normal. We're talking something pretty incredible here.

We're trying to shift others to be more important, so we begin to think this one. Begin to see others at least first as equal to me in wanting to be happy – and this you can't refute. That's fairly easy to prove. Then we start to exchange self for others after we've done the first one. First, in your meditation you practice this, and then, in your daily life when a situation arises and you want your way about something, you practice giving the other person their way. We're not talking big high things up here, we're talking little tiny baby little incremental steps. This is how you



grow anything, isn't it? You go from grade one, not from grade one to grade twelve, you go to grade two first. You step up organically, logically. You practice in your daily life actually trying to put others first.

### **PUTTING OTHERS FIRST, BUT MIXED WITH ATTACHMENT**

Now this is interesting because a lot of us do this already, but you know what, it's mixed with a lot of attachment. A lot of us have very much a lot of vested interest in benefiting others, as our means for getting what we want ourselves. And again I'm not being mean about it, but a lot of people are much more self-centered and truly go into what they want and just go ahead and do it. Other people have the same attachment but they're attached to other people loving them so deeply, attached to being seen as a good person so strongly, they will run around sacrificing their lives for others. But this is not healthy, it's not healthy. Do you see my point here? Does it make sense what I'm saying?

We've got to know our own mind well. You could say, for example, in a relationship where a person has really been a victim and she's married to say some brutal guy who beats her and does all these things, it's very common in relationships of all kinds. She is really like running around constantly putting him first, trying to make him happy because she's terrified that he'll blow his top again, you know. But it's not really coming from a pure place, and she's terrified, and she's not looked at herself. She's got enormous aversion in there for him, but she never expresses it – until one day, she goes berserk and shoots him.

That's not healthy, that's not what's being recommended here. We've got to know our own minds well. And maybe, if you're that kind of person, what you need to do is speak up; that's what you need to learn to do. Speak up, establish some courage. We've got to be careful in understanding this really properly. Exchanging self for others, seeing others as more important.

Because if you have low self-esteem and you think others are more important, you've got a problem. That's not what's being said. You have to be a confident, together, brave, courageous person who takes responsibility, who is not a victim, that kind of person, that's how we have to be. Then, the putting others first is really profound. Letting go of your own stuff, "Oh sure, of course, please, you're right. Of course, please, you have it." Tiny baby things like this. That's a perfect example of putting others first. Giving up self-cherishing. Giving up self-centeredness.

## **6. THE DISADVANTAGES OF CHERISHING MYSELF MORE THAN OTHERS AND**

## **7. THE ADVANTAGES OF CHERISHING OTHERS MORE THAN ONESELF**

The various contemplations here, then, are to contemplate the suffering to yourself of being self-centered and then contemplate the benefits to yourself of

cherishing others. Just little things like this to really just remind yourself, for your own benefit still. His Holiness often says things like: “You want to benefit others? Practice compassion. You want to benefit yourself? Practice compassion.” Or he says: “You want to be selfish? Be wisely selfish, benefit others.” Very good point.

## **TONGLÉN: GIVING AND TAKING**

### **8. TAKING UPON MYSELF THE SUFFERING OF OTHERS: PRACTICING COMPASSION, AND**

### **9. GIVE AWAY ALL MY HAPPINESS: PRACTICING LOVE**

You keep moving through all these little techniques, and they culminate in the practice that really is at the heart of this approach, of exchanging self for others. And this is a simple little practice, technically; emotionally, unbelievably difficult to do it really well, to really get the result. And it's called, in Tibetan, *tonglén*. It means

simply giving. . . *tong* means giving, *len* means taking.

## THE UNIQUE CHARACTERISTIC OF BODHISATTVA'S LOVE AND COMPASSION

Here we are trying to develop an even more profound level of love where we say: “Hey, it’s my job to do it, to make them happy.” That’s the unique characteristic of this bodhisattva path, this extraordinary level of not only do I want people to be happy but I say it’s my job to do something to make it happen. You make it your responsibility. His Holiness calls this universal responsibility.

Then we’re trying to develop compassion, which is, “May you not suffer,” but you go to the next level which is called great compassion and that is: “It’s my job to take away their suffering.” This is the one of the bodhisattva, this incredible sense of responsibility.

If you’ve achieved nirvana on the wisdom wing and you have cut the root of samsara, you’ve gone beyond the

delusions, when you die you'll just zap into bliss for a few eons; you won't get reborn again, because your motivation has been, "I must get out of samsara, I must get liberated." If you're a bodhisattva, you do the same work but your motivation is, "I must become a buddha for all sentient beings," so even when you don't need to take rebirth, you're going to get reborn spontaneously, because your motivation has said, "It's my job to take away their suffering, it's my job to make them happy." It's the unique one, it's very amazing.

This tonglen is a method for developing this.

## **SMASH PUTTING SELF FIRST**

What it is really is a little technique that you're using to help you smash your own self-cherishing, to help you radically smash putting self first. Practicing imagining totally taking upon yourself the suffering of another and giving them all your happiness; you're practicing doing this.

Now, hear this carefully. The aim of this meditation is not to take on the suffering of another, it is not to give them your happiness; you can't do that. But it's imagining you're doing it as a technique to help you radically get rid of self-cherishing and hugely develop genuine love and compassion. Now, does that make sense? Maybe you should ask me questions before we continue about that if you want to. Any questions so far?

## **HOW TO DO TONGLÉN**

What is this practice? It's very easy. You visualize in front of you – let's say your dearest friend at first, the person you adore, the person you love very much, even very attached to – and you imagine them with some suffering. They might actually have some suffering but you imagine them with some suffering.

This technique: please hear it carefully, because we often misunderstand it. What it is is a method for developing love and compassion. That's it, love and

compassion. What is love again, remember? Love is the wish that others be happy.

What you're doing is you're using your breath, real simple. One way to do it is you imagine a rock at your heart and that's your self-cherishing, that's your concrete self-centered, "poor me" in there, and you want to try and smash it. It's just a little technique you're using, a way of thinking, visualizing, creative imagination.

## **FIRST, BREATHE IN THE SUFFERING**

Then you use your breath, you breathe in first, you do the taking first and you imagine all their suffering, like a headache let's say, you just think when you're breathing in, you're breathing in all their headache, all their yuck and it comes like yucky smoke, and it comes into your nose. And you're imagining as you're doing this. . . you're not thinking: "Oh, I'm taking on their suffering, oh I better get ready for it," all clenching like that. That's not what you're concentrating on. You're not



thinking of I at all, like the mummy and the fire. You're thinking of the person's suffering. You're doing this, but you're focusing on the person: "Oh, what a relief they're free of suffering now. I can't believe it. I'm so happy they're free of suffering now." As you take it away, you're thinking, "Oh, what a relief, look, they're free of suffering, their headache is gone, I'm so happy."

You see my point? That's what you're thinking. Meanwhile, like the mother, you're almost not even noticing – "Hey, I can handle it, don't worry. I can handle it": smash your rock. You're thinking about, "Isn't it marvelous, they're free of suffering." Just like it was your most precious child. Many parents say, "Rather me than them." That's what you're thinking here. You're imagining this, so happy that they're free of suffering – and meanwhile you bring it into you and it smashes your self-cherishing.

## **SECOND, BREATHE OUT THE HAPPINESS**

Then you think, “May I give them happiness now. I’m going to give them whatever I’ve got: my health, my wealth, anything.” You just imagine it, imagine it, breathe out blissful white light. And you imagine them receiving it. “Oh, so happy that they’re happy now.”

I mean, this is how we think about ourself, it’s very interesting. We know how to think this when we alleviate our pain; we are so happy our pain has gone, right? We know how to think that. And when we get something wonderful we’re so delighted, aren’t we? Well, we are trying to think exactly this – for others. That’s it. We know how to think like this for ourself: so, exchanging yourself for others. It’s so simple.

## **NEED TO PRACTICE IT**

Of course we have to practice this. Even if we do have people we love enormously, we don’t love them to that extent. I don’t think I love anybody that

when they're happy, I'm so blissful like when I'm happy. I don't think I've ever had that. Does anybody have that experience? You understand what I'm saying here? Especially if you have incredible suffering for so long, the relief, the bliss of no longer having it – that's what we're trying to have for others. But the difference is, one extra piece here, is we're saying, "I can bear it, I can do it, I can take it." That's the technique.

The aim of this, eventually when you've done this again and again, and again and again, and again and again and again, is you just keep getting better at it, until eventually don't be surprised that you will be able to give your car, give your money, even give your life for another if you needed to, because you've practiced it.

*Student* It's like, fake it till you make it.

*Ven. Robina* Fake it till you make it! Everything is fake it till you make it. Learning everything is faking it until you make it, but that's all we're doing here. We're using these simple little

ways of thinking, kind of like you're brainwashing yourself into becoming compassionate and wise. Nothing wrong with that. You see my point?

Because Buddha finally says it's all to do with how you see things. We've brainwashed ourselves for countless lives to the point where the views we have of the world now are instinctive – we don't think they're even views. But we're trying to shift those and replace them with these views: this attitude, this one of wisdom, the one of compassion, the one of love, the one of karma, the one of emptiness, the one of all this other business – a different way of seeing the world; that's all we're doing really, it's nothing mystical. The culmination of this is you will become a buddha, infinite compassion for all sentient beings, infinite wisdom, no fraction of ego left, you'll see their minds perfectly and you'll never stop benefiting them. That's the point. And that's what's attainable. And this is the method of how to get there. It's grounded, doable, it's down to earth.

Yes, the results are pretty mystical. You can say this, if you were to meet a person who was a buddha and could see all their qualities, it would be mind blowing. Yes, you could say it's mystical, but the methods are practical, the methods are practical. That's tonglen, that's the heart of all this stuff. All these little ones up till now, which you contemplate again and again, you come to this one and this is where you do the radical, paradigm shift.

## **10. GREAT COMPASSION**

The conclusion of this is extraordinary compassion for others, such that you for sure only want to take their suffering away; and complete affection, enormous affection. The beginning of love is simply the thought: may you be happy, but as you keep developing it, it grows into enormous affection, it grows into feeling. Right now we've grown jealousy and anger and all these into feelings, haven't we? We're trying to change that. We develop loving and compassionate feelings; but the feeling is the result of thinking it, and thinking

it, and thinking it, and thinking it, until eventually it's spontaneous, where it becomes automatic.

## **11. BODHICHITTA**

Then, from this, bodhichitta comes. Because realize now that your compassion and love are so enormous now, and you see the suffering of all sentient beings, you see them causing themselves suffering, its unbearable, like they're your most precious children. But you realize, you check, "I want to take away their suffering but am I qualified? I'm not."

Here now is bodhichitta. There are two parts: one: "I must only benefit others; no choice." And, longterm, "I must become enlightened, I must become enlightened as quickly as possible because the suffering is so unbearable."

## **NOW WE HAVE EXCHANGED SELF FOR OTHERS, BUT THERE'S MORE WORK TO DO**

Right now, we try to have bodhichitta as our motivation, but it's a phony one.

Of course it is, it's faking it. We're talking here now, when we get it, actually, when it's an experiential, direct, actual, spontaneous drive, and from that moment forward there's no longer the thought of the usual self-centered I. You've been letting go second by second all the way up here, but finally no longer a thought of I, no longer a thought of I. You truly have exchanged self for others. You truly now exist for the sake of others, but you've got more work to do. You haven't finished, you don't become a buddha yet. You're pretty stunning but you haven't become a buddha yet, so you've got more work to do, more work to do, more purifying to be done, more obscurations to remove from your mind, more realizations to develop. But it's a pretty major sign post, milestone.

We can't even begin to count the qualities of a person with bodhichitta. . . If it were Lama Zopa Rinpoche teaching, he'd keep us here for a week, because he is limitless in his experiential knowledge of bodhichitta.

## 27. PERFECT THE COMPASSION WING: THE FIRST FOUR PERFECTIONS GREAT SCOPE/UNIVERSITY

We're still in university here. We might not have time for postgraduate today. I'll mention it in passing.

Having achieved bodhichitta, we move to the next level of practice: the six perfections of the bodhisattva, essentially perfecting the two wings of the bird. With the first four we perfect the compassion wing and with the last two we perfect the wisdom wing. End result? buddhahood.

The first one is called **generosity**; the second is called **morality**; the third is called **patience**; the fourth is called **enthusiasm** or **enthusiastic perseverance**, or **joyful effort**; the fifth is called **concentration**, the sixth one is called **wisdom**. Let's go through these.



## **FIRST FOUR: PERFECTING COMPASSION WING**

You can say that the first four are where you finally perfect the compassion wing; it's all the work you do in relation to others. The compassion wing is totally to do with working with others. You can do this in your meditation as well, in the mountains, but the focus is others.

## **LAST TWO: PERFECTING THE WISDOM WING**

In the wisdom wing the focus is yourself. In the wisdom wing you are not thinking about others, you're thinking about yourself, but in a really healthy way. Taking responsibility, stopping blaming others, you're backing away from others, you're looking at your mind, you're knowing it very deeply, you're becoming your own therapist, you're controlling your body and speech, all for your own benefit. The focus is I, necessarily, the correct way to see it. And it's for your benefit. The second one, the focus is others. You're thinking of others, they're the

reference point for everything your thinking: others. This is the compassion wing.

The first four are where your perfecting the compassion wing, the last two are actually you perfecting the wisdom wing. It's taught in this way here. If you were just doing the wisdom wing only, you'd do the concentration and wisdom there and you'd finish that. But here it's taught as the last two perfections of the bodhisattva.

Basically, the bodhisattva is bopping around from life to life dealing with sentient beings, doing all these things of practicing these first four and then in their meditation practicing the last two. Perfecting the wisdom wing where they finally cut all the misconceptions, all the delusions, the root delusion from the mind by realizing emptiness; and then in the first four they're constantly working in relation to sentient beings developing this generosity, developing patience, developing the others. Let's talk about those now.

## 1. GENEROSITY

The first one, generosity, is very interesting. Lama Tsongkhapa, the fourteenth century lama, says in one of his lovely lamrim texts, very poetic little verse text called *Songs of Experience*, and he says, “Generosity is the wish-fulfilling jewel with which you can fulfill the hopes of all sentient beings. It’s the basis of the activity of the bodhisattvas in that it develops the selfless and undaunted courage to lead all sentient beings to enlightenment.” That seems like a lot of generosity. What does it mean? It means that it’s the doorway to connecting with others. Giving.

Because right now we don’t give much at all. We only give anything to people we’re close to, and then usually only what we don’t want, or what’s easy to give. What we’re doing here is a major way to smash the I, you think about it, break down the barriers between yourself and others; really have this very profound sense of responsibility to give sentient beings what they need. According to your

ability of course, but you keep developing this.

There's different levels of giving.

**Giving material things.** Then there's a second level, which is more profound but often for us we find it easier, is giving advice, **giving spiritual advice.** We love doing that. We are great at doing that. We'll give anybody advice! But give five dollars? Not so sure.

Giving is this way; when you practice seeing others and seeing what they need and, if you can, you give. And you practice it, you consciously practice giving. And it's a powerful way to break down the barrier between self and others, it's powerful. Because of attachment, one of the functions of attachment, of course, is what we call possessiveness: this is mine; and we identify that thing, that person, that house, those possessions, that money in the bank, it's like an extension of me, isn't it? It's the nature of attachment, it's what it does. Of course, I'm not going to give "mine" away. If I've got extra of it, fine. If there's anything left

over – we think in terms of money – if there’s anything left over at the end of the month after I’ve paid my phone and paid my cable and bought my food and bought this and been to the movies and done that and have a massage and given money to my friends and this and that, then I might give something. That’s how we think.

But maybe the way we’ve got to think – giving money is very hard for us in the west because we concretize it so powerfully. One Tibetan Lama said once, “You’re very generous in the West but not with money.” Very curious; kind of interesting. Money is the thing we know so well. We reconcile everything at the end of the month. If we reconciled our good and bad karma every month, we’d be Buddha by now! We have no clue how many negative karmas we’ve created, or positive. We all know how many cents we’ve spent or how many we’re owed. It’s the thing we can get our head around, the numbers.

## **MONEY IS THE FRUIT OF GENEROSITY**

Well, “money” is a name we give to the fruit of generosity from past lives.

That’s all. That’s it. It’s the name we give to the fruit of generosity. It’s having the resources to do things for ourselves; and all of that is the fruit of generosity. When we even understand this we will be sad not to give, because all we’re doing is using up the money in the bank and not investing more.

Because being generous creates more seeds for you to continue to get. Okay, you don’t do that only for that reason, but when we understand that we would be sad not to give, because we are just using it all up, using up our merit. How sad. They say bodhisattvas when they give something they feel like we feel when we get something. So happy to give.

Giving, it’s obvious, is a major way to open your eyes and connect with others, and then to have a sense of responsibility.

The commonest way we think about homeless people, we’d rather avoid

them. We have this long thought, “Maybe they’re junkies, and maybe they’ll buy alcohol, maybe they’ll buy guns, maybe they’ll buy heroin. . .” If we do give money, we want them to buy what we want them to buy, like a banana or something. We practically want a contract with them before we give them anything. They might not do what we want! How dare they!

Well maybe you have an open mind and you decide in advance, before you go downtown, you bring, not your dollars, excuse me, not even your fives, maybe a few tens: fives would have been twenty years ago, hundred years ago, fifty years ago, would have been generous. But you just decide.

## **BUDGET GIVING INTO YOUR LIFE**

First of all, one of the attitudes to have, is you budget giving into your life. You don’t wait until, “If I have enough left. . .”; you just decide, like the Mormons, they give ten percent. I think it’s very powerful to do this. You just decide, “I’m going to give something.”

Like anything, it's painful in the beginning, of course it is. But you start. You factor it into your life, "Okay, I'll decide I'll give fifty a month to homeless people," whatever I want, just decide. It'll be nervous in the beginning, but be practical, but really see your resistance to it, really see the pain it causes you, the panic that comes. We all feel so poor. We all feel so poor.

## **HAPPY TO PAY OUR DEBTS**

Another point that I think is amazing to practice generosity – and this is not talked about in the Buddhist teachings because there were probably a few debt collectors then, but you look at our lives now, everything is based on debt, isn't it? Everybody has credit cards, everything we do you pay with credit cards now. You get your service and at the end of the month you pay for it. Your cable, your phone, everything, all your utilities, everything you do is paying at the end of whatever it is.

I think an amazing way to practice generosity, before you even begin to



give extra, you start practicing – and I’m serious – being happy to pay your debts. It’s an amazing way to start changing your attitude. I’m not even asking you to give more. I’m asking you to really develop the habit of thinking, “I’m so happy to pay my Visa bill.

Aren’t these people kind, they’ve given me the opportunity for one month, they’ve given me credit for one month.”

Of course, they’re making money out of it, but from your point of view, isn’t it marvelous that you can get money just like that.

I know when we need money for the prison project, I’ll use my credit card. I’m so happy I can borrow five thousand dollars, borrow two thousand dollars. Aren’t they generous?

Poor homeless people, how come they’re on the street? Why they’re on the street is because they have no credit. No one trusts them. Most people live in far more debt than most homeless people. But they’ve got credit because they have a good reputation. They can afford to be living in ten, twenty, fifty thousand dollars worth of

debt. Homeless people have no debt. But they can't even get credit. That's how come they're on the street. I'm not on the street because of the kind of Visa company, because of the kind bank, for whatever reason they trust me. You should be weeping in tears of gratitude to the bank, to these people, these institutions, for trusting you enough to lend you their money. You should be so happy to pay this debt plus their twenty-two percent, whatever they want. I'm serious.

But you check our mind: resentful, paying our bill. Resentful to pay the phone bill, resentful, we hate paying bills, because we are not generous, because we don't like giving. We're happy to take their service: the phone, the T-mobile, their company, their thing, their this, their that, we're happy to have all this, it's our human right, but we don't like to pay our debts. I mean, excuse me, no wonder we're miserable, no wonder we've got poverty mentality, no wonder we don't get any money. I'm not even asking you to give more, just be happy to pay what you

owe every month: your mortgage, your this, your that, be happy to pay it, generous, so grateful. I tell you, that alone is amazing practice. You begin to relax now and start to give more. Because it's our mind, that is the problem; it's our mean, tight, greedy, grasping, poverty-mentality that's the problem. We all think we're poor. It's unbelievable.

*Student* Since we're supposed to have countless debts with sentient beings and you said it's very easy to give things we're not attached to, but if there's something very precious, whatever it is?

*Ven. Robina* What are you talking about? What's the question?

*Student* When you're thinking in meditation of sharing everything with sentient beings, it's really hard to think, "I'll give, gladly, my car or my house."

*Ven. Robina* What's the point then? What's the point?

*Student* I don't know. . . How far to do you go with that?

*Ven. Robina* I'm not saying that you do that though. I'm not saying to do

that. Why don't you just start being happy to pay what you owe? That's what I'm saying. Be happy to do this. Start where you are and then you progress naturally. There's no point in thinking things that you can't think yet, like you can't carry a weight that's too heavy. I'm not trying to say you think. . . you can say that if you like, if you want to, you could. Nothing wrong with that, if you want it, that's fantastic. You give something, but I'm saying two different things. Budget in some giving, but really begin to think differently, all you have to do is think differently. And remembering that giving now, the present now giving nourishes your past giving seeds, which will ripen as getting. I swear. I swear.

## **GIVING IS THE CAUSE OF GETTING**

Our prison project – we've been going for nine, nearly ten years now – we've never had any money, but we've developed and I'll say the courage, in our prison project, to say not, "Oh, we can't do that, we can't help those

prisoners, we haven't got any money," which is the usual view. We say, "We must do it," and then we find the money to do it. And I swear, nine years, we've not gone broke yet. Every month we've never known if we'll have enough money to survive. We now have a budget of eighteen to twenty thousand dollars a month, we have benefactors, we have five, six, seven staff, we pay some salaries. We're doing so many things. That's one point.

The second point, what we do, we are basically a Dharma center, Liberation Prison Project, but our guys are in prison, that's all. We get 300 letters every month, we've got 300 people banging on our door desperate every month for Dharma. And they can't just receive a poster and then come to a course. We have to find out their address, find out what kind of books they can have. We have this very complicated database because it's so difficult to serve prisoners: you have to know what weight paper, whether they can have staples, whether they can have hardback, whether they can have this,

five books, two books, you have to have an invoice, you have to pay for it, so much complex information about every single one. Then we have to buy books from all the publishers, we've got 300 titles, we have a person fulltime wrapping the books, going to the post office, sending the books. We give them away. We are generous, unbelievably generous. We never think for one second about getting anything in return.

I think our generosity alone is a cause for why we receive anything. I've really learned this. And I feel very confident in saying what I'm saying. We never beg. I don't ask people, I know people who've got money, I don't ever beg, ever, ever. It's up to them to want to offer. Often you see people who aren't so rich, give lots of money, but people who even have quite a bit of money might give you a hundred dollars. But you thank them, you're so grateful, you're not being mean, never not grateful.

But you can see that generosity has got nothing to do with having anything.

Poor people give us sometimes a thousand dollars. Prisoners send us five dollars; they get fifty cents an hour. Themselves, they send *us* money. They're so grateful. The one thing is as an organization we never beg, and we continually give. So far, we've still survived, I'm amazed.

## **GENEROSITY OPENS US TO SENTIENT BEINGS**

Generosity is an attitude, and it's a way to open yourself to sentient beings. Because we think about money all the time, but for myself, only for myself, for me and mine, that's it. Not being mean about it, I'm only talking from my own experience, that's how I can say it.

## **THE SIGN OF HAVING ACCOMPLISHED GENEROSITY**

Oh, by the way, when you've perfected generosity – we've just talked about one kind – you can give your life for another. Blink of an eye. That's the level of generosity that they're finally talking about. As Kirti Tsenshab

Rinpoche said one time: For a bodhisattva who sees a starving animal, the action of cutting off their hand and offering it to the animal “is as inconsequential as a leaf falling off a tree.” Now that’s insane, isn’t it?

The logic of this is such compassion, such empathy with the suffering of others, like a starving animal, to feed a starving animal – and clearly there’d be no butcher shop around the corner; they wouldn’t cut it off if there were, that’d be silly; bodhisattvas aren’t stupid – but if there’s no other food, “No worries mate: eat.” And it’s “as inconsequential as a leaf falling off a tree.” One, because they’ve practiced all this compassion; but two, because they’ve got wisdom. There’s no way in the world, if you’re still grasping at an inherent I, and you haven’t realized emptiness, that you could do this.

With ego, compassion’s got a really low ceiling. Beyond ego, compassion can soar limitlessly. That’s the level to which we can develop giving, generosity. Even this body is meaningless, who cares because there’s



no longer an identity; ego-grasping, I: finished.

There's a story of one of the past lives of the Buddha where he saw a starving tiger, and the tiger mummy, she was about to eat her babies, she was so hungry. And he gave his own body to the mummy because he had such compassion for her, for the negative karma she would create by killing her own babies. Without a second thought, his entire body. Many stories in the lives of the great saints, the great bodhisattvas, of giving their bodies completely, not a problem. Gone beyond ego, so gone beyond self-cherishing, this is the level of which Buddha says we can develop.

## 2. MORALITY

The next one is called the practice of morality. Well actually, from day one, all we're talking about is morality, but there are two kinds of morality. There's the morality of the wisdom wing, which is **refraining from harming** others, and that's the main emphasis of the wisdom wing.

The second one, in compassion wing, is actively **benefiting** others. Already just refraining from harming, like I said, that's a pretty stunning practice. When you stop killing, you're helping yourself because you're not creating negative karma, but my goodness, the lucky rats and roaches get their lives. Cheers all around.

Here we're talking mainly now the practice of morality, continuing to do this of course, but now actively benefiting others. Whom do you benefit? Well you benefit the poor, you benefit the sick, you benefit those in prison, you benefit the crazy, you benefit whoever needs to be benefited. That's called helping others. It's very simple.

Like with generosity, you don't have to panic and think, "Oh my God, I've got to give everything away, I've got to give away all the things I can't give." No, you start where you are, but you begin to think differently; you think it first. You've got to train in your mind first before you do something, same with giving.

## **BUDGET HELPING OTHERS INTO YOUR LIFE**

Like with generosity, also how about factoring in, how about budgeting in some morality time, some helping time into your life. Again we will always say, “When I’ve done this and I’ve done that and had a massage and my meals and done this and paid this and gone to work, then if there’s any time left, I might help somebody.” Budget it into your life.

## **HELPING A STRANGER, HELPING A FRIEND**

And of course, we love to help our friends; we love to help our lovers, and our friends and our families and all that. That’s okay, but like with generosity, as one lama said, “Giving a hundred dollars to your best friend or giving five rupees to a smelly beggar – giving five rupees to a smelly beggar is an infinitely superior action, because it was difficult for you.” Helping your friend is great. Well how about helping strangers? How about helping enemies, if you can?

But meanwhile, start where you are. Reach out of yourself, that's what all of these are about; reaching out of the self-cherishing to see others. The generosity is about that and the morality is about that: helping others. You decide a certain amount you do every week or every day, or you keep your eyes open and you see who needs helping, you notice and you reach yourself out of yourself, and you do that. That's it, practice it, practice it, practice it. Morality, benefiting others.

### **3. PATIENCE**

The next one is patience, and this is very interesting. In fact, there's a whole level of practice in the exchanging-self-for-others stuff, back at *tonglen*, there's a whole approach to practice called transforming problems into happiness. We can talk about it here because it really is the practice of patience. Let's look freshly at patience, because we have such misconceptions about it.

Mostly now, I think, what we mean by patience is what we really mean by irritation and frustration, kind of

waiting for that horrible thing to go away. That's not patience, that's irritation. Patience is really a very powerful state of mind, a very courageous state of mind, believe me.

## **WHAT'S IMPATIENCE?**

Let's look at impatience, let's look at anger, even just aversion or impatience or anger or irritation or annoyance, all these variations. Let's look at those. Really look at it carefully and you'll see that it's the response to something that you just can't bear. Really, it's like panic mode comes, you just can't bear this thing. This thing's going to destroy me if I have it. It's like a big fear. The red light, "Oh my God, this red light, I can't stand it!" Or the person being mean, not to mention things like being tortured, forget that one; we're just talking ordinary little baby daily examples.

You think like this, you look at ordinary daily life: a thousand times a day you're going to meet something that you don't want: the red light, the mean person, the unkind thing, the

ugly noise the husband makes when he eats his breakfast. I mean, baby, baby little things, we're not talking big major things yet. And just notice your response, and we never really even think of this. We're always getting irritated, getting annoyed, and that means in the mind, "Oh this wretched thing, why is it like this, it shouldn't be this way, who does he think he is?" We mightn't be expressing big anger, but we don't think it's anything terrible. We just say, "Oh well, it's just normal life." We're doing it a thousand times a day. That's called anger. It's the opposite to patience.

## **PATIENCE IS BRAVE**

What's patience? Patience is not just gritting your teeth, waiting for that mean thing to go away. Patience actually is a really brave, courageous attitude that welcomes that thing; that doesn't just put up with it, "Oh, all right then," passively, which is how we think about patience. "Be patient, come on!" Put up with something. No, no, no. It's an active, active state of mind that

says, “Great! Great!” You welcome it. Why? Very simple. Not because you’re a masochist, but because it’s the most powerful way to purify attachment. Because attachment is the neediness to get that green light, get what you want.

Welcoming the opposite, welcoming the carrot cake when you ordered chocolate cake, not just putting up with it, and cursing under your breath, actually actively greeting it, going into it, welcoming it, being happy it’s there. This is amazing, as Lama Zopa says: it’s like we need to learn to like problems, like we like ice cream. Not just putting up with it, actively welcoming it. I mean, it sounds a bit crazy but it’s a very profound and it’s the quickest way to change your mind. It’s the quickest way to really be happy. I mean it, it’s amazing, it’s amazing.

If we can be brave enough, once a day, try it. Not just put up with it, welcome it. Because the fact is, remember, aversion, irritation, annoyance, upset, all these things, anger, are all responses to thwarted attachment. If attachment, as Buddha

is saying, is the real source of our suffering, and we talked a lot, enough about it before, then we should be so happy when we get an opportunity to purify it. And you purify it when you don't get what attachment wants. It's very simple. It's so simple.

## **PUTTING UP WITH THE PAIN**

I think this attitude of transforming problems, it's just like Lance Armstrong, it's like all these amazing sports people. Lance Armstrong loves problems, he loves the high mountains, he loves the pain. He's not a masochist. If he didn't, he wouldn't be a good cyclist. You see my point here? If he didn't welcome that tough pushing against his muscles, which is called pain, it's very simple; if he didn't welcome that and see it as a good sign, if he resisted it and hated it, he would be insane and he wouldn't even be a cyclist. He wouldn't go that far, he'd stop. Are you seeing my point?

## **EMOTIONAL PAIN**



We understand this when it comes to things like achieving being a cyclist or I read about years ago in San Jose, this group of young guys who were getting ready for their IPO (Initial Public Offering), of their start-up. They worked for nine months, eighteen hours a day, seven days a week. That was called pain, that's called being tired, exhausted, worried, anxious, that's extreme suffering. But they were happy to do it because they knew the result would be fantastic. Lance Armstrong was happy to have that pain. I remember reading in the *New Yorker* about the level of pain that he experienced, an article about him; amazing. It would be like torture. He welcomed it, he didn't just put up with it; he went into it and was glad. Why? Because it was countering his weak muscles, which is why he couldn't be a cyclist, so he needed that pain to go up against in order to be a better cyclist. It's so simple.

## **WE CAN'T BEAR EMOTIONAL PAIN**

Here we are talking emotional pain. Now this is the one we can't bear. We're like babies in response to what we don't like. Then we get angry, we blame other people, we sue, we do all these things. We've just got to learn to welcome the problems. Now Buddha has a wonderful saying – Shantideva says it, I think, "If you can change something, hey, change it, no worries; if you can't, why bother? Give up, why care?" If you can change something, you don't have to sit there and be a masochist and have pain, if you can change it, great. But if you can't – and I tell you much of the time we can't; the red light is a simple example. If you could just with some magician mind go click and turn it to green, please do so, don't worry, do it. But we mostly can't, so then you might as well be patient for those two minutes. And that's not – like we think of it in the world, as I said – passively putting up with it. That's a weak mind. It's delighting.

Okay, if you don't even notice the red light because you're busy chatting away, you have no practice to do; it doesn't matter, there's no problem. But if you see yourself getting all tight – and that's why by the end of the day we are so exhausted because we're going from the attached mode to the aversion mode a thousand times a day. We're resisting, and we curse, and we hold on, and we try not to get angry, and then we're kind of tight and tight and tight. No wonder we're exhausted by the end of the day! Our mind is doing all this nonsense.

We have to practice first seeing the thoughts and then reversing, changing the thoughts, just changing the words. In the beginning you don't believe the words: that you're happy that the light is red. But eventually you will, believe me, if you say it often enough. It'll be something that you get good at, you get courageous at. Like the tough cycling, like working eighteen hours a day, seven days a week; you get used to it.

And then really, you become brave. It is a brave attitude, it's a very

courageous attitude. Welcoming problems, dealing with problems: the problems that come from people being mean to you and the problems that come from obstacles in your life. We have all these. We don't need to ask for problems, they come on our head like rain every day. It's a very profound state of mind, patience. It's amazing.

## **THE SIGN OF HAVING ACCOMPLISHED PATIENCE**

They say in one of the texts that you've accomplished patience – this is again pretty insane level – you've accomplished patience, you've perfected patience, when “in the face of even everyone on this earth harming you, lying to you, stealing from you, even killing you, you happily work in response to that harm for their benefit.” That's the test.

I mean just even think of one person, the person as it says in the *Eight Verses*, that person whom you've been so kind to, when they're mean to you, when you can bear that and be happy knowing you've purified your karma,

and it's made you stronger and wiser, and you welcomed it. That's amazing, I tell you, incredible.

So much of our daily suffering is from so much anger, no patience in the way we're talking here. No brave mind, we're not brave, we're like children. And then because we have the victim mode we totally get into the suing, blaming mode. We're full of so much anger and ill-will, not just impatience, anger and ill-will, wanting others to suffer. It's terrible, look at the world, so shocking.

We're talking here mental, we're talking here mind, we're talking here thoughts, we're talking here cognitive. This is cognitive therapy we're talking here. Huge.

#### **4. ENTHUSIASM, JOYFUL EFFORT, ENTHUSIASTIC PERSEVERANCE**

The fourth one is called enthusiasm, joyful effort, enthusiastic perseverance. This is very interesting, this one. And it's really interesting to look at it in the context of the opposite states of mind:

and that is simply called laziness. This is quite surprising, but you'll understand it when I talk about it.

Okay, enthusiastic perseverance, what's that? As I said, the opposite is laziness so let's look at the three kinds of laziness.

### **THE FIRST KIND OF LAZINESS: CAN'T BE BOTHERED**

The first one is what we all mean by laziness: can't be bothered, too much effort, got to have a sleep, got to have a rest. Let's look at those guys who worked eighteen hours a day, seven days a week. If they had this first kind of laziness, they wouldn't have made their IPO in time. They had to go against their deep impulse to have to sleep. Because they were so focused on their goal, they bore the suffering, which is patience, but they persevered through the tiredness. They didn't give up, they kept going even though they were exhausted; they kept going and kept going and kept going, dragging themselves out of bed every day – in other words, enthusiastically doing it,

because they could see the benefit.  
That's enthusiasm.

Even the first kind of laziness, we can see we have that one so deeply, because we're such children, we're such babies: as soon as we feel a bit tired, we have a mental breakdown. Really, we almost collapse. We panic, we're going to have stress and anxiety, and we're going to burn out, all these things. We've got to relax and have a massage, and be calm and look at the trees, and go away for the weekend and go trekking, because you can't bear the thought of being tired.

## **HAPPY TO BE TIRED**

I mean, excuse me, check when you're really attached to somebody, when you're younger, into drugs and having parties all night: you went all night spacing out, dancing, smoking, exhausted in the morning, but really happy, right? Your body was exhausted but your mind was happy. It just proves what you can do. Those guys ended up tired, exhausted, but somehow part of their mind was happy because they

knew they were achieving their result. That's enthusiasm. Who cares tired?

I used to do kung fu, our Chinese teacher – we would do pushups on our knuckles, practically dying on your knuckles – he said, “Relax! It's just your body. Relax! It's just your body.” Because when your mind is strong, the body is just this, you know? It gets tired, who cares? It's not your mind that gets tired. Okay, your mind, because it depends upon the body, if your body's exhausted, of course our mind is spaced out; it's true. But if you really can train and be happy with it, and really train your mind to stay focused, and be happy even though your body's tired.

## **SLAVES TO OUR BODIES**

You see, we're such slaves of our bodies, the moment we have a pain, we have a mental breakdown, the moment we have tiredness, we have a mental breakdown, because we're so terrified of pain, which is attachment, desperately wanting to feel good. But if we're really courageous, Lance



Armstrong, don't tell me he didn't feel exhausted. He had enthusiasm. He joyfully made effort to go against the tiredness and the exhaustion, because he wanted the goal.

It's clear, if your mind is strong, your body will do anything. This is the attitude to develop. Like I said of those IPO guys, if they just gave into their need to sleep every night, "Oh I have to have my eight hours sleep, otherwise forget it," they wouldn't have made their IPO, they would have been a failure. They had no choice, they had to go without sleep. If you really want to achieve something, then you will do that.

The point we're talking here is the in the context of the great bodhisattvas, who have enormous compassion for sentient beings, and so for whom the thought of sleep, as I said before for Lama Zopa Rinpoche, is a disgusting waste of time. Because every time they're sleeping they're not doing anything to help sentient beings. I know it sounds like a joke, but they have that level of compassion.

**GESHE LAMA KONCHOG**

Now there's a great yogi, Geshe Lama Konchog, and I'll tell a couple of stories about him. He was an amazing practitioner from the time he was a kid. Just an extraordinary being. And then he went off to the mountains and meditated for twenty-five years. For years he didn't eat and he didn't sleep. Now this is possible. First of all these guys who are so highly developed, they've got such control over their subtle energies and their mind, plus so full of enormous compassion, bodhichitta, a high being basically, gone beyond ego, incredibly developed in all these things we're talking about.

For him, his first few years in this little cave up in the mountains, six feet of snow in the winter, where Milarepa used to meditate, didn't even have a front on it, it was so small, only four feet high, couldn't stand up in it. He did his own meditation practices on his particular deity, Vajrayogini, from two in the morning until eight at night. A few breaks, I suppose, in between. And then from eight at night until two in the

morning he would prostrate. He didn't sleep.

## HE LIVED ON THE ENERGY OF THE AIR

And, there's this practice: the Tibetan doctors make this type of medicine, they call it *chu-len*, they get all the essence from the rocks, and the flowers, and all those things and they mix it, and it's especially blessed and all this, and the great yogis especially live on these. You just eat this stuff; "taking the essence" it means. You drink it with water and that's it. You get very skinny but very strong. He didn't even live on that *chu-len*, he lived on wind *chu-len*, he was able to live on the essence of the air. He ate the air basically!

He didn't eat and he didn't sleep. I mean, it's insane in our ordinary terms. That indicates for him the level of his realizations: the level of his bodhichitta, the level of his compassion, and therefore, without doubt the level of his enthusiastic perseverance, not to mention patience,

not to mention morality, not to mention generosity, not to mention all the wisdom wing. Step by step.

It's really good, I think, for us to really look at what we can achieve. Sure we can't do it yet, but don't panic. The five-year-old kid who goes to see Michael Jordan or whoever the latest basketball star is, is totally inspired. He can't even bounce a ball yet, but he holds that vision of his potential and he never gives up. That's enthusiasm. That's enthusiasm

## **THE SECOND KIND OF LAZINESS: I'M TOO BUSY, I'LL DO IT LATER**

The second kind of laziness is real scary, it's really depressing. "Oh, I'm too busy. I can't do it, I'm too busy." In other words, it's procrastination. And I think we are all masters of procrastination. And what do we procrastinate? Forget about spiritual practice; look at our daily lives. We put off doing the things we don't like to do, that take too much effort. We go towards the things we prefer to do.

Bone lazy basically, but this is a subtle level of laziness.

You might work really hard. . . (In terms of spiritual practice. . .) You might not have the first level of laziness, you might work really hard, but you're doing things you want to do, you're doing the things of eating, sleeping and going to the toilet and making money and doing all of this. "Oh, my practice? I'm too busy; I'll do it when I have time." We're talking in terms of our spiritual practice now. It always comes last. That's the second kind of laziness. But in general, we recognize it as procrastination. And what do we procrastinate about? The things we don't want to do. We've got to really watch our minds. This is a real subtle kind of laziness. Because you will never achieve the goal, ever, if you have that.

### **THE THIRD KIND OF LAZINESS: NOT POSSIBLE! I CAN'T ACHIEVE THAT**

The third one is even more sneaky, even more subtle, more pervasive, and

it's the one that truly, deeply ingrained in the ego believes, "Oh, I can't do that." We almost think of it as a virtue. It's like two kids go to the basketball, they see Michael Jordan, amazing basketball, "Wow amazing, amazing," or whoever it might be, your great hero, Tiger Woods or somebody, he's golf, and you watch and you watch, and you think amazing, and you go home and one kid says, "I'm going to become like that, I can do it." They can't even bounce the ball, can't even pick up a golf stick, they don't care, they know they can do it.

They persevere through the gross kind, they learn to practice, to focus, to go against the tiredness; they learn to put it first, they don't procrastinate, they don't put it off, they keep doing it, believing they can do it. That's the three kinds of laziness conquered.

The other kid goes to the gym for a while, gives up. Can't be bothered, too much effort, need a sleep, no time. And then he says I'm too busy at school, I can't do it. And then he's really saying,

“Oh, I can’t do it, I can’t be like Michael Jordan, that’s just Michael Jordan.”

Well, excuse me, we recognize these don’t we? The three kinds of laziness.

Therefore conclusion: no enthusiasm, no perseverance, no effort, no joyful effort. We’re desperate to stay in our comfort zone. It’s too scary for us to move. We’d rather just be comfortable, which is basically attachment.

Desperate to be comfortable, to have a nice comfy money in the bank, do a few nice things, and think a few nice thoughts, and maybe go to a class if I feel like it, every now and again, and maybe meditate when I feel comfortable, maybe read a book every now and again, and maybe give a few people something, only when it’s comfortable, only when it’s comfortable. We’re desperate to not get outside our comfort zone.

## **PRACTICE IS GOING BEYOND OUR COMFORT ZONE**

But practice, by definition, is going beyond your comfort zone. Practicing

anything, basketball, cycling, practicing Dharma. Going beyond the status quo.

And the trouble is we're so wicked, we lie to ourselves. We say, "Oh, I did my practice." But it's like going to the gym and you decide you want to do pushups, because someone says you're going to get really fit and healthy if you do pushups. You start doing pushups, or you go on the thing at the gym, and then as soon as it gets uncomfortable, you stop. "Oh good, I went to the gym. Yeah, I went to the gym today." But in fact, you know perfectly well, if you stop doing pushups the moment it hurts, your muscles will never, ever change.

Well that's what we're like with our practice. No wonder we don't make progress, no wonder we still get angry and jealous and neurotic, because we don't push against the stuff. We don't push up against our junk and go beyond it. We don't test ourselves, really. We don't taste the pain, because we're terrified, because we're lazy in these three ways. You understand? We



all recognize. In other words, we hold ourselves back.

Therefore we have these terrible regrets. Our head is full of ideas, what we want to do, but we just can't put it into practice because of these three kinds of laziness. The putting off one especially, and the one most of all: "Oh, I can't do it anyway. It's just not possible." Single-pointed concentration? "No, I can't do that." We're such babies. Practice is going beyond what we can do already to something we can't do. It's just nature, it's what it means.

We love to say all the prayers: "Oh may I become a buddha to benefit all sentient beings." It's so easy to say this. But when it comes to being patient or doing a little job for somebody that we feel we can't do: "Oh, no I can't do that." Then we say our prayers: "Oh, may I benefit all sentient beings."

That's enthusiastic perseverance, just a little.

## 28. MOVING TOWARDS WISDOM: THE LAST TWO PERFECTIONS GREAT SCOPE/UNIVERSITY

Now we come to the last two  
perfections: which are **concentration  
meditation**, using it to finally cut the  
root of all problems and get **insight**  
into how things exist ultimately. The  
method used to get insight, based on  
concentration, is called **analytical  
meditation**. “Analyze” is a fancy word  
for “to think about.”

Across the board here you can see  
how Buddha’s talking, is this: he’s  
saying: “Hey guys, from my own  
experience I have found it to be so, that  
things change, death is definite, your  
consciousness is continuity, you could  
possibly be born in the suffering lower  
realms, you have this, you do this,  
karma is the law that determines  
whatever happens, all the experiences  
you have are the result of your past  
actions, the delusions are the main

cause, attachment is this. . .” – all these things, all of this is a series, I’ve been presenting all weekend, a series of words: presenting Buddha’s view about the mind, about happiness, about suffering, about how to achieve happiness, about how to remove from suffering; it’s a series of techniques. I’ve been telling you all these recipes, basically. It’s a bunch of recipes you’ve been hearing.

Of course the puzzle for us is always, “How do I put these recipes into practice? How do I internalize this information? How do I make it my experience? This is what we often are puzzled about.

First we listen, then we contemplate the meaning, then we realize it all in meditation.

## **WHAT IS MEDITATION?**

Well, the word meditation in Tibetan, *gom*, means “to familiarize.” That’s it. When Tibetans say “meditate, meditate” they’re saying “familiarize your mind, familiarize your mind, familiarize your mind.” That’s what

they say: familiarize. That's the word they say: *gom*, familiarize.

Familiarize with what? You're working on your mind, remember? Meditation is a function of your mind. Remember your mind is your consciousness, your thoughts, your mental consciousness. You're familiarizing your mind with what?

## **FAMILIARIZING OUR MIND WITH HOW THINGS ARE**

Well, two ways of saying it. With how things actually are, remembering that the attachment, anger, pride, jealousy, fundamentally the ignorance, all are not seeing things as they are. First you can say we need to familiarize our mind with how things are. And how? By listening to Buddha's presentation, thinking about it, discussing it, and eventually internalizing it in meditation.

## **FAMILIARIZING OUR MIND WITH THE POSITIVE**

Another way to say it, is to familiarize your mind with virtue, with the positive

qualities. That implies, doesn't it, that our minds at the moment are familiar with delusions. And it implies that we are familiar with the nonvirtues right now, with the delusions, with the negative states of mind, the anger, fears, depression, jealousy, blame, ignorance, this, that. We need to practice virtue and give up practicing nonvirtue.

## **ACCESSING THE MICROSCOPE OF OUR MIND**

In order to be capable of familiarizing our mind with how things exist, especially this, and especially here - ultimate reality emptiness - we need to train it to be focused. We need to access the subtler, more capable levels of our consciousness. We need to develop the microscope of our mind. Then it's easy.

The technical term in Tibetan translated as "calm abiding." It's called *shiné* in Tibetan, *samatha* in Sanskrit. The culmination of this kind of meditation is that you have accessed the subtler level of your consciousness,

which we don't even posit as existing in our culture, remember? When you've used these tools, these meditation techniques, you've developed a very subtle, more refined level of awareness that's absolutely effortlessly able to focus, effortlessly able to focus, and therefore penetrate at ever deeper levels the way things are.

If you look at our minds right now, they're all over the place, aren't they? We just assume this is natural. The moment you wake up, your mind's off on a thousand different journeys. And we feel like we're being dragged by our nose in all those different directions. We don't even tend to think we can have any control over those directions; we really think like someone else in there is pulling me along, isn't it, because our minds are so uncontrolled. We have never tried to control them. And we don't even think we can, in our culture. We don't get taught techniques at school how to control our minds, because we don't understand.

This technique is from the amazing Indians, Buddha didn't invent this. It's

a very skillful psychological technique. It's got nothing to do with what we think of as religion. It's a really practical technique that enables us to focus the mind and then to really plumb the depths of this mind of ours, go way beyond the conceptual, which is all we think as existing, and the sensory, to a far more refined level of awareness.

## **WITH THE FOCUSED MIND WE CAN GET INSIGHT INTO REALITY**

The reason to do this isn't just to feel good. The reason to do this, it's sort of like you've now sharpened, honed your mind to this amazing tool. Like any tool, you've got to use it for something. What do we use this sharpened, focused mind for? In the second mode of meditation, which you can call insight meditation. This is the meaning of the word *vipassana*.

Buddha teaches various vipassana meditations. One is, the one that's well known, is a way of focusing on sensations of the body in order to

develop insight into impermanence. But we're not discussing that here. We're talking about developing insight into emptiness.

First of all, this capacity in the first mode to focus the mind is pretty amazing. When you've really accomplished this, or if you saw a person who had accomplished this, they would look as if they were dead: virtually no breath, no activity at all. Because their mind has gone to a much more refined level of awareness that we don't even think of as existing, in the West, because in the West we only talk about the conceptual and the sensory. That's it. But the Buddha is asserting, as I'm saying, there's far more refined levels.

## **SUBTLE CONCEPTUALITY**

When you're at this very subtle level, when you've got single-pointed concentration, or even a reasonably refined level, you can choose to use it conceptually, in the second mode of meditation, in order to get insight; it's super skillful.



## COMBINING THE TWO

Well, your concentrated mind is absolutely still, and it's also razor-sharp. In the clear state of concentration you then conjure subtle conceptuality and analyze whatever it is you want to analyze – dependent arising, let's say – in order to trigger an insight into emptiness. That's called analytical meditation.

This skillful level of subtle conceptuality is like a fish that is able to move through the water and not even make one tiny ripple. That's the capacity of conceptuality at a far more refined level, when it's completely in control, this amazing level of mind, this capacity we have to analyze things in the second mode, in the most incredible sophisticated way, very quickly, to cut through all the misconceptions, all the crazy thoughts, all the nonsense, all the misconceptions of anger, attachment, and fear, finally all the misconceptions of ignorance that cling to this self-existent solid primordial me-ness.

## **In concentration meditation**

you're training the mind to cease going completely berserk all over the place, following all the nonsense thoughts.

Ideally, go to the mountains for a couple of years and you'll achieve this calm abiding, this single-pointed concentration. Whether you do that or not, still you keep progressing in this way.

The more subtle your mind is able to get to, the more refined, more capable it becomes, the more easily you can do the second mode, which is where you do the actual work of changing the way you see things, by doing subtle analysis. And it triggers the **insight**.

## **WE NEED INSIGHT INTO KARMA, IMPERMANENCE, EVERYTHING**

What's in the meaning of the word insight? Look at it very simply. We don't talk like this in a daily way, but if you're sitting there listening, when you're a little girl and the math teacher is telling you about arithmetic and she explains how you add things and

subtract things. In the beginning, it's a bit puzzling isn't it? You're kind of listening and listening. And then at some point you'll go: "Oh, I get it!" That's an insight. You heard some information, you process it intellectually, and then suddenly you've got a feeling for it. It means you got it, the light went on. That is insight. Are you hearing me? It's very simple.

All we're talking here in general, throughout our entire Buddhist practice, is the need to get insight into karma, impermanence, and all the points of Buddha's worldview. The classical way you would take this information in your formal meditation session would be this: one, you would sit down, do your focusing to the extent that you've got it; two, you go to the insight mode, you'd take the topic you want to think about, meditate on in other words – impermanence, death is definite, those three points remember – you'd take that and you'd focus and you'd think through, analyze, the various points until eventually you understand it, get insight into it.

And at some point – you keep doing this, your mind gets more subtle – you’re going to get deeper and deeper insight into the truth of this, just like you do with the math or anything else. There’s nothing mystical. You see my point here? It’s very practical, it’s not mystical. And the same with all these meditations on equanimity, seeing the mother as kind, love, compassion, tonglen. It’s exactly the same. The stronger your clarity, your concentration, the deeper your insight, the more easy it is to go through the different things, the more easy it is to visualize the enemy, the friend, the more easy it is to think through the things – you’re with me? – the more easy it is to trigger the genuine feeling of that, to get the insight into it.

In your meditation session, when from your analysis a feeling of the topic is triggered, you stop the analysis and you concentrate on the insight. You hold that feeling. When that wanes, you go back to the analysis. Like that, back and forth, until eventually you develop genuine insight.

## **FINALLY, INSIGHT INTO EMPTINESS**

Of course, here, at the sixth perfection, we're talking specifically about insight into emptiness. They say eventually you go evermore deep, evermore deep, evermore deep, and eventually when you're meditating on emptiness, you finally get the insight intuitively, directly, non-conceptually, into the meaning of emptiness. You finally get it. Then if you focus on that and you perfect that, you keep focusing on that until eventually it becomes completely oneness with your mind. Do you understand the process I'm describing here? It's very, very simple. We mystify it with all these words, that's the problem: "meditation," "visualization," "insight," all this stuff.

## **FIRST, INTELLECTUAL; THEN, EXPERIENTIAL**

In other words, speaking simply, concentration and insight are things we know already, all the time, whether you're learning math or you're learning how to make a cake. It's just you don't

sit down like this, cross-legged, do you, and think about the recipe. Because you've got to use your hands, you see? But any knowledge, if you want to get it experientially. . . Mathematicians, they know it first intellectually, then they know it experientially – then they can really be very creative with their math. You've got to have concentration; if you can't concentrate, you can't do anything. We're talking here concentration at a much deeper level and then we can get the wisdom, the insight, into how things are finally.

## **29. HOW TO ACCESS THE MICROSCOPE OF OUR MIND GREAT SCOPE/UNIVERSITY**

Let's look a little bit at how to develop single-pointed concentration. The process is described in nine stages. It's this gradual process of developing, as I said, a very sharp, focused attention. Why? So that we can unpack and unravel the mess in our mental consciousness and get to see reality as it is.

So in concentration meditation you're developing this concentration to be absolutely clear, sharp and still – and I'm talking as I've said many times – to a degree that we don't even posit as existing in our Western culture. It's uncharted territory for us. But let's hear the words, it's interesting.

### **EXCITEMENT AND DULLNESS**

The process of developing this, as I said, is described in nine stages. I won't present that here. I'll speak simply

about it. They say that the two main obstacles that we have to overcome in order to get concentration are the tendency of the mind to get over-excited, all over the place, scattered, when the mind is over agitated, over thinking, over conceptual, blah, blah, blah, excited mind. And that's attachment energy, essentially.

And the other obstacle? The mind that is dull, spaced-out, sleepy. In meditation, these are the two main obstacles. The excitement one is simply the mind that's over-agitated, you can't keep it quiet; we all know that. The other extreme in meditation, you sit down and you close your eyes, and you try to meditate, and within three minutes you space-out, even fall asleep. That's the other extreme, that's the really gross level of what they call dullness. Are you hearing what I'm saying? The mind is all dull and spaced out and it's not clear about anything. That's a disaster, that's useless; it's the opposite to concentration.

But when the mind is over-bright and sharp and going all over the place here



and there, and can't keep still, it's insane, you can't keep it quiet. It's like a busy kid. The whole process of developing concentration is the process of going between these two. Bringing it away from all the crazy over-excited to make it become quiet, and bringing it away from the dullness, to be sharp.

When you're doing the practice, it's a constant thing of bringing the mind back from being over-excited, and then as soon as you do this you get the mind to be calm. But as soon as you get the mind calm, the mind becomes dull. Then you have to bring it back from being dull, and as soon as you do this, the mind's over excited. It's constantly bringing the mind to find this invisible spot between these two.

It's a very colloquial way of talking about it, what concentration is. And so when you're doing, very purposefully, this type of meditation to get this concentration, it takes enormous effort.

Venerable René, if any of you have a chance to go to his teaching, he is resident over at Vajrapani, and he's a meditator, has been, for twenty years. I

remember interviewing him years ago in Mandala magazine about his meditation; he did a year-and-a-half retreat one time in order to get single-pointed concentration. Basically he's a professional retreator, since the eighties he's been doing this. He's a very special person, very holy, very humble. He leads retreats, too.

He said that you need incredible discipline and must make great effort.

## **HAPPINESS IS OUR NATURAL STATE**

Also, one of the things that's very interesting about this, it's just an interesting point to make: you know how all the time talking about how Buddha says our good qualities are our natural state; that's who we really are, they're at the core of our being and that they have a natural relationship with happiness. Buddha is really saying we've got to the potential to be really phenomenally happy, peaceful, joyful, content, fulfilled, whole, whatever words you want to use. This is just

something very natural to mind,  
Buddha says.

This is what's interesting: happy mind, happiness, in the sense we're talking here, of being a peaceful mind, is the extent to which your mind is not caught up with anger, attachment, fear, neurosis, worry, all the dramas.

And so we can see that even when our mind is relatively peaceful, there's still this residual anxiety there. We don't really feel very peaceful states of mind, because the mind is always there with the over conceptual nonsense, right.

Venerable René also said that maybe he just touched upon the fifth of the nine stages of meditation in that retreat. This is very encouraging, isn't it? And he said there's no question, and I'm paraphrasing, that the bliss, the joy, the contentment, whatever words you want, that his mind experienced, even at that level, was superior to any pleasure he'd ever experienced through his senses.

All that points to is when the mind, even temporarily in meditation, is free of all the neurotic thoughts, it's

extremely peaceful and blissful. Are you hearing me? It's nice to have a person you know who experienced this.

They talk about when your mind gets more subtle in meditation, what you're just necessarily doing is you're subduing all the crazy thoughts. You literally get to a point in your concentration meditation when there's no such thing as a thought just arising spontaneously like we do now; crazy stuff just constantly comes, doesn't it? We just think it's natural; and it's always attachments or fears or worries or anger or jealousy or resentment, all the stuff. If you really could slow-motion your mind down, you'd be able to see the character of each of those thoughts. And it always has to do with the I and all those worries, you understand.

This is technical, it's not some hit and miss thing. What Buddha is saying is when you've gone beyond all delusions and perfected your mind, you will never have neuroses again, it truly is gone completely, this is what he's

saying we have the capability to achieve.

But even just saying temporarily, if you have a good focused meditation, your mind is naturally peaceful, joyful. Naturally.

## **ADVANTAGES OF CONCENTRATION**

As well as the joy, having developed just single-pointed concentration – not even describing realizing emptiness yet, we're not even describing getting rid of all your delusions yet – as Lama Yeshe puts it, you have an extraordinary sense of well being. Also, you really have gained control over the delusions to a huge degree. You can put your mind exactly where you want, how you want, really down to the tiniest thought. It's like this effortless thing that you've accomplished, which is a stunning idea. It's an amazing idea actually. But this is what Buddha is saying we can achieve.

All this means is that your mind is crystal clear. We can't even imagine having such states of mind all the time,

not just occasionally, out of the blue. It's constant. You're in charge. And as Lama Yeshe puts it, you also experience an extraordinary kind of physical pliancy, they call it. Your body is as light as a feather.

And you'd experience bliss, literally, as I said – the natural state of our mind when the delusions are not functioning.

And you'd have clairvoyance, the capacity to cognize more subtle phenomena, such as the past, the future, the minds of others, etc. This is natural. Buddha says we need this in order to really benefit others.

Pleasure is not the aim of meditation; it's a bonus. The purpose of gaining concentration, and therefore these qualities, is so that we can use this microscope of our mind to realize reality.

## **PREREQUISITES**

There's a whole series of prerequisites to indicate to yourself that you're ready to go to the mountains to do this, speaking metaphorically – well, it usually is going to the mountains,

because then you can have a really conducive environment. They say one of the things to be even ready to go off to do single-pointed concentration, and it could take a couple of years, it depends on the person, you've got to be really already well practiced in all the stuff we've been talking about so far. Really **subdued** your delusions, really comfortable with whatever you're given, have **no society responsibilities, not care what food you eat, not care what clothes** you have, really very **content**. You have an unbelievably content mind, with no worries about food or this or that. Because if you're sitting up in the mountains trying to meditate and you're worried about everyday things of course it's a joke, you can't. You've got to be way beyond all that.

You've got to have an **environment** where it's really peaceful, very pure, the **water** is clean, and the **food** is good and you've got good **support of friends** who can cook for you and support you, because it's the best you focus just on your meditation. Best,

they say, to be in a place that's been blessed by the presence of **holy beings**, been blessed by the presence of other great meditators. It gives something at a more subtle level, meditators really are aware of this, it makes a very big difference to the place.

## **BLESSED BY THE PRESENCE OF HOLY BEINGS**

I remember again Venerable René, when I interviewed him I was interviewing him at our monastery in Nepal in Kathmandu, Kopan, in the valley there, and it's up on a hill, and it's relatively peaceful but it's quite busy really and you can hear the stuff, can't you; down in the valley you hear all the Hindus waking up in the morning with their four-, five-thirty a.m. prayers; and you hear all the monks chanting, and the dogs barking, you hear lots of noise, you hear stuff going on.

He did his year-and-a-half retreat at our center up in the mountains near Granada, in Spain, where Lama Ösel



was born. It's a holy place, His Holiness the Dalai Lama has blessed it and everything. But he said, when I interviewed him at Kopan, he said his mind became more subtle more easily at Kopan. Because it's said to be a very holy place. That's something you mightn't see at an obvious level; you look at Kathmandu, it's a totally polluted place. But they all say, the holy beings say it's a very blessed, special place, even though it's polluted. At a subtler level it's very, very potent with blessings. This is something interesting. They say especially if it's a place where lots of meditators have been before it's a really perfect place to do some practice.

## **CONCLUSION**

As you can hear, it's a very technical thing we're talking about. I say even a communist could do it, technically you're right, but the prerequisite for doing this – and this is the point, the main one – is if you haven't even begun to look at your delusions and look at your anger and look at your jealousy,

and you're overwhelmed by all the garbage, forget about trying to get concentration. You're not ready to go to the mountains yet – you're ready to start practicing in your own house, but forget about achieving it. You've got to have gotten to a certain degree of renunciation and not caring about the ordinary worldly things, really have gone beyond that, and not to be caught up in the usual junk of lots of the anger, jealousy and fears and dramas. If you have all that, forget about going to the mountains. But we must start somewhere, right?

Anyway, no time here to go through the nine stages. It's all in the lamrim books, so you can read them there.

## **30. FINALLY, GET WISDOM GREAT SCOPE/UNIVERSITY**

### **UNDERSTANDING EMPTINESS, GETTING WISDOM**

Now we perfect the sixth perfection: we get insight into how things exist finally, ultimately. What does this mean? As you can see, across the board, we've been talking about how Buddha is saying: "Hey guys, you see the world this way, this way, this way, as permanent, someone created you, Mummy and Daddy made you, you began in your mother's womb, you think your suffering and happiness are somebody else's fault. . ." But he's saying, "I don't agree with you. I think it's like this" – and he presents his way of seeing how the world is: karma, the mind, delusions and virtues, etc., etc., etc.

Being a Buddhist means you listen to what Buddha says, you think about it, and then you keep processing it yourself, attempting to verify what he's

saying, initially intellectually. That's what you have to do. We're trying to "get insight" into what he's meaning until eventually it's experiential for us, until we've eventually familiarized our mind with it.

In other words, Buddha is saying that we've got it wrong about how the world is. We're mistaken in our views, he says. And because we have these mistaken views we therefore suffer. That's the point. Being a Buddhist doesn't just mean filling your head with Buddhist philosophy and psychology so that you can pass your exams. No, the reason to fill your head with Buddha's views is to attempt to verify for yourself his assertion that our misconceptions are the cause of our suffering.

In other words, the extent to which our minds are caught up in the nonsense is the extent to which we suffer and is the extent to which we harm others. We have to try and get in touch with reality.

Here, though, the final thing we absolutely have to get insight into, which is what cuts the root of all the

nonsense, finally, is this one called understanding emptiness, developing wisdom. It's the culmination of the wisdom wing, in other words.

## **THE KING OF LOGICS**

Paraphrasing Lama Tsongkhapa, Lama Yeshe says that dependent arising is the “king of logics” to prove emptiness.

All of Buddha's teachings, from grade one to graduation, are based upon the assumption of emptiness, and are leading us to emptiness. Emptiness is implicit in all the teachings. This is the unique characteristic of Lord Buddha's view.

You could say that the view of self-existence – which is what Buddha argues with, which is exactly the opposite view of emptiness – is the assumption of the views of samsara. All the views – my mother and father made me, or a creator made me, I didn't ask to get born, it's not my fault, I'm just the body – are all based upon the assumption of self-existence, and this is the exact opposite of the Buddha's view. The exact opposite.

And so, the point of it all is, as always with Buddha, we need to make it experiential. I mean, we can read all about emptiness, we can squeeze our brains, as Lama puts it, we can get all very excited when we hear about emptiness, but unless we understand how to internalize it, it's just filling your head with words.

Let's try to unpack it, demystify it, and see how it applies to our daily life. Because if it doesn't, it's completely useless.

## **EVERYTHING IS A VIEWPOINT**

One way of describing what Buddha's saying is that everything in our mind is a viewpoint, an opinion, an attitude, an interpretation of the people and things and events that fill our lives.

Things exist, and we can even agree on their bare existence – cups, toilets, love, omniscient mind – but it's how we interpret them, understand them, their causes, etc., etc., that distinguishes the different views. There are the samsaric views, the Christian views, the scientific views – they're all viewpoint.

And, of course, Buddha has his own very specific views about how things exist.

For example, Buddha uses the term “superior being.” Well, we all know from being Christians that’s exactly how they talk about God. The same term, superior being. You hear the characteristics of God: omniscient, all-knowing, all-powerful, pervading the universe, seeing everything. Well, Buddha agrees with this: there is omniscient mind, it pervades the universe, it knows everything, it is infinite compassion. You could say they agree on this. But the difference is in the view, the interpretation of *how* that omniscience exists, its causes, etc. The Christian teaching, the Muslim teaching, etc., is that it’s self-existent, it exists from its own side, it’s intrinsic, inherent, it doesn’t have causes. The Buddha, however, says that, just like everything that exists, it’s a dependent arising, and he also says that every being possesses the potential to become a Buddha. And, of course, the creator religions say that this superior

being is the creator of everything. Buddha disagrees utterly. We don't need creating, he says; we already exist.

## **WE'VE GOT IT WRONG**

Christianity would interpret the world one way, materialism interprets it another way, Buddha interprets it in yet another way. It has to do with interpretation, it has to do with view.

What Buddha is saying is that we do not see correctly how things exist. We get things right to the extent that we can say, "I'm Robina and you're Fred," "That's a cup and not a knife." That's cool. Correct. But we don't get much right, other than that. We get it wrong, he says.

Things do exist in the world. Things exist. But as Lama Zopa Rinpoche puts it, the delusions in our mind, the neuroses, the misconceptions, the wrong views, the negative states of mind, what they do is decorate on top of what does exist layers upon layers upon layers of characteristics that simply don't exist there.



And the point of all this? Buddha says that all these wrong views in our head are why we suffer. And correcting these views, cultivating the correct views about how things exist, is the method to stop suffering.

## **DON'T BELIEVE A WORD BUDDHA SAYS**

Buddhism is basically Buddha's own direct findings, his own experiences about how things exist and what's possible. And of course he would say confidently that his views are the correct view. He's allowed to say that; anyone can say that. But you have to back it up with your findings, your proof, etc., etc.

Buddha's like Einstein. If I were Einstein here, and I start telling you about  $E=MC^2$  and I say, "This is the truth!" well, you would hope I would be confident that it is true! If I'm sitting here saying, "Well, I'm not sure if it's true," you're laughing and you tell me to shut my mouth, don't confuse you. If I'm not confident, keep quiet.

We want Buddha to be confident that he is right. But he's not asking us to believe him: this is a crucial point that we're not used to hearing when it comes to spiritual teachings. He's asking us to check out his findings, to discover the truth of them – or not! – for ourselves. It's up to us; we're the boss, not Buddha.

Like with Einstein, we need listen to what Buddha says and then, with confidence, decide to use his views as our working hypothesis in order to discover the truth of them for ourselves. How else can you work with something if you don't propose it? Working with Buddhist ideas has nothing to do with believing it, squeezing it inside yourself, not like that at all. And it's got nothing to do with liking it or not liking it. It's either true or it's not. And we have to find out. That's the Buddhist approach.

Also, like Einstein, every word that Buddha says is from his own direct experience, his own findings. He didn't make it up; he's not speculating; he

didn't have a vision or a dream about it; it wasn't revealed to him.

That's why you need to check the Buddhist centers carefully, check the Buddha's teachings carefully, check the people who teach, check the Dalai Lama, that he's a valid person who represents Buddha's teachings. If not, be careful! Don't confuse yourself.

## **WISDOM MEANS SEEING THINGS AS THEY ACTUALLY EXIST**

We hear a lot about "wisdom" in Buddhism, but it's not some special holy word, all high and fancy.

"Wisdom" simply means being correct. If there's one cup on my table and I say there are two, that ain't wisdom, honey, that's ignorance.

Of course, the wisdom Buddha's saying we can accomplish is a pretty outrageous level of wisdom: seeing the universe as it exists without mistake. That's the level of wisdom we can accomplish; he calls it omniscience. I mean, my Catholic mother was shocked by that! It's quite radical.

What sees how things exist is the mind, and that's Buddha's expertise. According to the Buddha's model of the mind in our mental consciousness we have positive, negative and neutral states of mind; there's no fourth category. And these are technical terms, not moralistic.

## **NEGATIVE STATES OF MIND ARE NOT IN SYNC WITH REALITY**

The negative states of mind have two main characteristics: they're disturbing and they're delusional. They're liars, they're not in sync with reality. The virtuous states of mind have the characteristic of being peaceful – just check the last time you were loving, kind, generous; you felt peaceful. And, there's a sense of interdependence there. You've got a sense of connectedness with others, which means you're in sync – to some extent – with interdependence, which is reality.

When you're caught up in anger, depression, jealousy, it's a nightmare,

isn't it? It's like hell. These states of mind are deeply disturbing and they're delusional. You've got this vivid, vivid sense of a separate, unhappy self-pity me, as Lama Yeshe calls it – lonely, bereft, not fair, poor me, things are done to me, me. Hungry, needy, wanting something more, resentful, angry, hurt, low self-esteem – this is samsara, being caught up in this junk, that's samsara.

## UNAWARENESS

And the root, the mother, of all these lies in the mind, these neurotic emotions, these wrong views, is simply called “ignorance.” Like all these words, it's got a very specific definition. “*Ma-rig-pa*” in Tibetan; “unawareness.”

Unawareness of, finally, how things actually exist. Or, as they say in Buddhist language, the ultimate way, that things exist. This ignorance causes us to be utterly blind to this reality. As His Holiness the Dalai said recently, this ignorance has two functions: the first one is the mere ignorance of how

things are, just merely not knowing; but that's not the main problem. This ignorance also has an added problem of having made up its own fantasy story, and that's the one we're believing in now, which is the story, the belief, that everything exists in and of itself, from its own side, intrinsically, which is precisely the exact opposite of reality. This is so abstract for our minds.

Before we even go into the meaning of what ignorance is – you know, what ignorance thinks: that everything exists out there, from its own side, in and of itself, without depending on anything – let's just look more broadly at how things *do* exist conventionally, because that leads us to understand their ultimate reality.

## THE TWO TRUTHS

Buddha talks about how things exist in two ways – well, many ways, actually. But this particular way of presenting it, he calls the two truths: conventional truth, the way things exist conventionally; and the way things exist finally, or ultimately. Initially

when we hear these, they seem totally contradictory. But in reality, they are like flip sides of the same coin, and our job is to get to see that, to understand that, first intellectually.

The shorthand for how things exist conventionally is “dependent arising,” or “dependent origination.” Things exist interdependently. Things exist *in dependence* upon this and that, conventionally. And then ultimately, the shorthand is “emptiness”: “emptiness” is the nature of reality ultimately. This is the way they talk.

Let’s unpack these ideas, let’s look at the use of these words, because part of our problem is we don’t even know how these words are used. We can’t get our head around the general concepts. You know, thirty years of hearing Buddhism, we still haven’t got a clue what emptiness is because we haven’t even technically got ourselves sorted out, how to use this terminology. We mystify it.

## **THE WORD “EMPTINESS”**

Let's look at the word “emptiness” itself. In the most simple sense, it means “absent,” doesn't it? It means “not there.” If I say, my cup has no water in it, we would simply say, “My cup is empty.” What we mean is, there is no water in my cup; it is empty of water; water is absent from my cup.

## **EMPTY OF WHAT?**

Clearly, Buddha's not telling us that things are empty of water. So, what is he saying? What is he saying things are empty of?

Okay. If you're not colour-blind, let's say, you're going to agree this white cup is not red. You agree, don't you? This cup is not red. We would simply say, “You're right, Robina, it's not red.” The Buddha would say, using this language, “the cup is empty of being red.” It's a fancy way to talk, but we can hear the meaning very simply, can't we? It's just that we don't speak like this. We don't say, “The cup is empty of being red,” but the use of the word



there is exactly the meaning. The cup is not red.

And why would he tell us it's empty of being red – I mean, it's empty of being lots of things. The point is, he would only tell a person who is colour-blind that it's empty of being red because that person *thinks* it's red, because their mind is making a mistake, is seeing it wrongly. This is crucial to understand.

## **ESTABLISHING WHAT DOES EXIST**

Okay. You can see the cup is white, right? Well, you could say, “White exists on this cup.” It's a quaint way to talk, but you understand the meaning, don't you? “There is white on this cup.” White is a phenomenon that exists on the cup.

Now, because of that we can see there's no red on this cup. We can also say, “The absence of red exists on this cup.” Would you agree with that? That on this cup, wouldn't you agree, there is an absence of red? Let's discuss.

There is a good reason for talking this way. In Buddhist philosophy there are several synonyms for “that which exists” – and Buddha is all about our discovering “that which exists.” That’s his big thing. Because he says we’re in la-la land right now, believing in things that *don’t* exist.

Whatever *does* exist is necessarily a phenomenon, an object, an existent. The definition of an existent is “that which can be cognized by mind,” a valid state of mind, obviously – and there are precise ways of defining what is valid and what is not. And what we’re attempting to do in this pursuit of wisdom is to eventually cognize all existents precisely as they exist, no more and no less: that’s omniscience.

So, you agree, right, that there is an existent, a thing that can be cognized by the mind, called white? And it exists here on this cup, yes? Would you agree with that? White does exist here on this cup, doesn’t it? It is something that your mind can cognize.

Okay, how do we know it exists? Well, we have to first establish it

conventionally. We need to label it, define it, then check that it fulfills the definition and make sure there are no other valid cognitions of it that contradict this. Then we can all shake on it and agree that this object, this phenomenon called white, exists here on this cup.

## **COGNIZING THE ABSENCE OF SOMETHING**

As I mentioned, let's say I am colour-blind and when I look at white I see red. I'm making a mistake, aren't I? Remember, we've established the existence of this conventional phenomenon called white by defining, etc., etc., and agreeing upon that – that's what “conventional” means: by convention it's called white.

When I see a red cup when you show me a white one, I am making a mistake. I am seeing something that doesn't exist, but which I totally believe does exist. You can't just bully me into believing it; you have to help me to see the truth. And how do you do that? You help me correct the mistakes: you

check my eyes, my glasses, the lighting, the various dependent arisings. You fix the problem. Then I look again at the cup and what will I see?

Well, interestingly I will *not* see white, at least not initially. Because I'm so used to seeing red, I'll get a big shock – "Oh my God, the cup is not red!" In other words, what I see is the vivid phenomenon called "the emptiness of red." I will cognize the absence of red on that cup. Makes sense, doesn't it?

When we hear "emptiness," we tend to think of it as meaning "nothing." But the "emptiness of red" is a very vivid thing that does exist, isn't it? But for whom? It's obvious that this is only relevant to someone who always saw red when white was in front of them. Now, having fixed the problem, that person will see the absence of the thing they always thought was there.

## **ABSENCE OF KEYS**

Let me give you another example. Let's say you are running late and you rush to the front door and on the way you

open the drawer where you always keep your car keys. You *know* the keys are there, you totally expect the keys in the drawer. But when you open the drawer you get a big shock. “Oh my God! No keys!” What did you just see in the drawer? The absence of keys, the emptiness of keys. It’s a very vivid thing, isn’t it?

Now, if I look into your drawer and I’m not expecting keys, all I will see is a boring drawer with nothing in it. I see nothing. But you see *something* very vivid – the absence of a thing that you thought was there. And that’s the idea about emptiness. And the only person who will see that vivid thing called emptiness of keys is the person who *expects* keys to be there, who *believes* keys are there. Seeing nothing is nihilism.

### **ABSENCE OF \$10,000**

An even more vivid example. Let’s say you have been saving your dollars: every day your savings account grows and finally reaches ten thousand

dollars. You know it's there with such certainty.

But one day you open up your bank statement online and all there is there is zero. But believe me, you won't see zero dollars! You will vividly, shockingly see the absence of your precious ten thousand dollars! The emptiness of ten thousand dollars is a very vivid thing for you.

## **ABSENCE OF THE INHERENT SELF**

Buddha is saying, "Robina, you need to cognize the emptiness of the self-existent I." Why? Because for eons I have been imposing on my self – the conventional self that does exist – a characteristic that doesn't exist there. The mistake we make – our ignorance makes – is seeing an inherently existent self where there isn't one. And we do this with everything. We see an inherently existent cup where there isn't one, an inherently existent dog where there isn't one, an inherently existent everything, where there isn't one. We've been decorating on top of

what does exist – a conventional I, a conventional cup – the characteristic called inherent existence, which doesn't exist and never has. Buddha wants us to see that absence, that emptiness.

And where does that absence of an inherently existent I exist? On the conventional I does exist. Just like the absence of the red cup exists on the white cup that does exist, and the absence of ten thousand dollars exists right there in the bank account of zero dollars.

## **THE BIG MISTAKE**

Buddha's saying that for eons we have been believing in this big mistake. Where did you learn this? We didn't. We've believed it since beginningless time. And all of our suffering, all our attachment, all our anger, all our pride, all the wars, all the dramas, all the rebirths – all are the consequence of this misconception. This misconception is the primordial misconception that is the source of all suffering.

But we can't see it, because it's totally assumed as the truth. It's the default

mode in our minds. We can't even begin to comprehend the meaning of "I see myself as inherent."

"Seeing emptiness" is a very meaningful way to say it. It's the emptiness of the fantasy "I" that you thought was there. And, just like with the keys, or the dollars or the red, the person who'd see the absence of the inherent I is, of course, the person who always believed it was there.

You would see the absence of your inherent I only if you had clung to and believed in an inherent I, in the first place. It has nothing to do with vacuous space, vague nothingness. It's a very vivid, vivid thing, when you can get it.

When you see a zero in your bank statement but totally expected \$10,000, you won't see zero dollars, for sure! That's nihilism, which we often mistakenly think is the meaning of emptiness: as if we chucked all the dollars and ended up with nothing. No! It's not like that! You will vividly see the *absence*, the *emptiness*, of ten thousand dollars.



As His Holiness says, it's not as if when we search for the inherent I, the I that we think exists, that we throw out everything and end with nothing. Not at all. When we search for the I among the aggregates, our parts, what we find is the massive thing called the *absence*, the *emptiness* of the I that we always thought existed.

Of course, the emptiness of this inherent I is far more radical than the emptiness of red or ten thousand dollars; red can exist, ten thousand dollars can exist, but that kind of I could *never* exist.

Buddha's telling us that we need to cognize the emptiness of the inherent I, it is not some fancy religious trip he's putting on us; it's not some abstract construct. It's utterly experiential.

And the realization of it is what cuts the root of suffering.

## **WHAT DOES INHERENT MEAN?**

Let's talk about what it means, "inherent I," "intrinsic I," "self-existent I," "I that exists from its own side," "I that exists in and of itself." For the

Prasangika-Madhyamakas, they are all synonyms for the mistake our mind makes, for the mistake that this ignorance in the mind makes.

If something existed inherently, it would necessarily not depend on anything else. And this is Buddha's fundamental point. If we think even roughly, we'll see there is nothing that exists that doesn't depend on something for its existence.

## **THE MIDDLE WAY**

In the Buddha's teachings, there's different levels of understanding emptiness, and each of them removes a little bit more of what they think doesn't exist until eventually you get to the highest view, the Middle Way, and within that the view called the Consequentialists, or Prasangika, which is Buddha's actual intent. His Holiness talked about this recently: when we finally have the true view, according to Nagarjuna, who clarified this fifteen hundred years or so ago – I don't remember when – it sounds so radical, so scary: that there is nothing

from the side of the cup, the I, the table, the mala, the flower, there is nothing from the side of a thing that makes it that thing.

We think there is, and we desperately cling to there being something inherent – something in the “thing” that makes it the thing. That’s what we think.

That’s what this ignorance thinks, and we desperately want this. We cling to this, because our deep instinct is to think that there being nothing from the side of the thing means nihilism. And that’s why it’s so tricky.

The moment we hear that there is nothing from the side of the thing that gives it its thingness, we immediately hear it as, “Oh, there’s nothing there.” Nihilistic. We chuck the baby out with the bath water. Instantly, we hear it this way. We can’t help but hear it this way. Buddha says that’s one of the extreme views deep in our minds. We go too far, we chuck too much out.

And then as soon as we hear about dependent arising, that things exist in dependence upon this and that, we don’t hear that properly either. We

hear it as, “Ooh, what a relief!” and *grasp*. “Thank goodness there is something there after all!” We reify it. We put too much onto it.

These are the two extreme views that our mind lunges between like drunken sailors a thousand times a day.

### **DEPENDENT ARISING MEANS EMPTINESS AND EMPTINESS MEANS DEPENDENT ARISING**

What Lama Tsongkhapa says we need to do, is every time we hear “emptiness” – that there is nothing from the side of a thing that makes it a thing, there’s nothing in and of itself that is making it that, there is no I from its own side, there is no intrinsic, inherent me in there that makes me, me – instead of instantly going to the nihilistic view and chucking the baby out with the bath water, we need to consciously bring ourselves toward the Middle Way and say to ourselves – which is counter-intuitive for us – “Aha, Robina. My “I” being empty *means* it is a dependent arising I. There

is an I: there is an I that exists in dependence upon this and this.”

And then every time we hear about dependent arising, that there is an I existing in dependence upon this and that, instead of clinging onto it and exaggerating it and reifying it, we will again go towards the Middle Way and say, “Aha, Robina, that means it is empty of existing from its own side.”

Right now, these are opposite to us. Because what Buddha’s saying and what Tsongkhapa really runs with is, that when you think “emptiness,” it should remind you it means “dependent arising.” And when you think “dependent arising,” it should remind us that that means “emptiness.” They in fact are the two sides of the same coin. In fact that’s the true Middle Way. That when you think “emptiness,” you think “dependent arising,” and when you think “dependent arising,” you think “emptiness.”

## **WE MUST KNOW THE RIGHT WORDS**

We have to practice thinking this, because intuitively we go to the two extremes. And this is very meaningful, this is very tasty, experiential. It's not just intellectual clever stuff. This is why it is crucial to have the right words. Buddha's main gift is his words. If you can't put it into words, then we're just being lazy. We have to practice, because words are how we communicate.

There's an old Danish guy in the Santa Cruz called Age, he's ninety-something now, and he was a friend of Lama Yeshe's, and he is a Taoist. Lama asked him one time, "Tell me what you think, what your philosophy is?" and he said, "Oh, no, it's beyond words. You can't describe it." And Lama said something like, "Ah, you're just being intellectually lazy. You're cheating. If you can't describe it, then what good are you to sentient beings? How can you help?"

He took this to heart, and he said he spent twenty years thinking through

the entire philosophy and writing a book, explaining it to people, making it coherent.

Because if you don't have words, how can you hear Buddha's teachings? It's not possible. We have to have words and the words have to be correct. If I just sit here and bliss out to you about how amazing, how special the taste of the cake is, wow, it's beyond words – how mean of me! I have to give you the recipe, don't I? And that's words. *Then* you can get the taste.

Buddha's main gift is his words. Words are deadly serious, because they lead you to the taste. So get your words right. That's why you need to listen to authentic teaching. Check carefully before you read, there's so much junk around, you know, that's called Buddhism. Be very careful what you listen to, whom you listen to. You should check. You know, we all love His Holiness, for example; we think, "Oh, isn't he wonderful, he makes me feel good." Well, I'm sorry – Hitler made people feel very good! No logic. Check up on your facts, you know; don't just

go by feeling. Have some confidence, have some certainty.

## **ESTABLISH THINGS AS EXISTING CONVENTIONALLY**

If things exist in dependence upon various factors, and if they're empty of inherent existence, then we need to think about it, we need to prove that it's true. And to do that, as I said before, we have to start by establishing something in order to discuss how it exists. How do we do that? Well, we start with the name, and then we have to define it. A definition has two parts.

“Mummy, what's a cup?”

“Well, darling, it's that flat-bottomed clay container with a handle on it.” I can see it, can't I? “But Mummy, what does it do?” “Oh, it holds my tea, sweetheart.”

The first part of the definition tells you its conventional characteristics, its substance, and the second part tells you its job, what it does, its function. “It holds my tea.”

But I'm not confident yet. I can't just believe what you tell me. I now have to



check that it does, in fact, fulfill its function. I pour tea into it and if it holds the tea, then it does the job we said it does. But there's more: we now need to check that there are no other valid cognitions in the minds of anyone else that contradict that. And if there aren't, then we've established a cup, haven't we? And then we all shake hands on it and agree.

That's conventional reality in general. It's a cup literally "by convention," by agreement. And Buddha says that that's how everything exists.

## **FIRST, THINGS EXIST IN DEPENDENT UPON CAUSES AND CONDITIONS**

Let's look at the different levels of dependent arising, taking it one step at a time, leading us to the subtlest level. The first way in which things exist is in dependence upon causes and conditions; they come into existence in dependence upon countless causes and conditions. And when it comes to the thing called a person, that's called karma, isn't it?

When I first learned this from Khensur Rinpoche Jampa Tegchok, who was the abbot of Sera Je monastery for seven years, he was the abbot of our monastery in France for ten years and my philosophy teacher in England in the late 70s. He used the example of the object called “Robina.” He said that it can be said, that everything in the universe up to the first moment of Robina is validly a cause and condition for the existence of Robina.

I’ll never forget it, and at the time it sounded pretty cosmic. But let’s look at the logic of it. It’s scientifically true. You can start anywhere you like. Let’s discuss this cup here. Let’s say Mrs. Smith was the designer of this nice cup. We can say, obviously, one of the first causes of this cup is Mrs. Smith, isn’t it? Her mind imagining, conjuring up this design. We can say that, can’t we? Very clear. We know it didn’t fall out of a tree like this. A human mind created it. So, Mrs. Smith had a mother, didn’t she? And if Mrs. Smith didn’t have a mother, there could not be Mrs. Smith.

Mrs. Smith's mother had a mother, and then you can't help but say Mrs. Smith's mother had a mother, and where can you find the first mother? Because as soon as you posit one, you've got to posit the previous one, which is the simple logic of cause and effect. That's the simplest level of dependent arising. As soon as you posit a thing, it has to have a cause.

Then you've got another angle – you think of the clay. Well, clay came from a mountain and that came from previous something and that turned into something else. Then you think of the paint. Everything you look at about this cup – once you start, you *cannot* do anything but keep going back and back. Of course, we are desperate to find the first cause – but logically, given cause and effect, such a thing cannot exist.

It's fascinating: we always want a first cause. As His Holiness said one time in his conversations with scientists: "Big bang? No problem! Just not the first big bang, that's all!"

This is a result of having in the depths of our mind the view of self-existence. This is the view that is actually manifesting in the philosophies that assert a creator – that there is a “first cause” and it’s called “God.” Buddha says it’s irrational and illogical. If you posit a law of cause and effect you cannot have an effect without a cause. There is nothing we can point to, that exists, that didn’t come from something a moment before. (But you can have a cause without an effect: if you have an egg, you don’t have to get a chicken, you can break the egg any time you like. But of course, if there’s a chicken, it has to have come from an egg; and you know that that egg has to have come from a chicken, and so forth.)

If there is an effect – and everything that exists at this moment is itself an effect, isn’t it? – it assumes a previous cause, so you will never find a first one. But we frantically want there to be a first cause. “But, but, but there *must* be,” we’ll say. We ask the question: “When did it begin? When did

delusions begin? When did suffering begin? When did karma begin? When did everything begin?”

We’ve got this view *because* we cling to self-existence, because we have this misconception deep in the bones of our being. We assume there has to be a first cause, because grasping at self-existent me, grasping at “self-existent anything” is the opposite to cause and effect.

The first level at which things exist interdependently is in terms of their existing in dependence upon causes and conditions.

## **KARMA IS THE FIRST LEVEL OF DEPENDENT ARISING FOR THE OBJECT CALLED ME**

Karma is a marvelous example of this. Let’s look at the phenomenon called me or self or I. So, right now, we can see we cling to a sense of self that’s very vivid, that’s very solid, separate, lonely, bereft, self-pity, self-conscious, angry, depressed, fearful – all the drama. We live in the bubble of this sense of a separate, lonely me, don’t we? There’s me, and there’s everyone else. This is

the biggest lie. This is the experiential, emotional consequence of believing in “inherent I.”

Like I said, we don’t *think* we believe “in inherent I,” we don’t even know what it means. But this is the experiential consequence of it. Fear, drama, anxiety, anger, depression, low self-esteem, loneliness, poor me – these are the experiential consequences of this primordial mistake.

The deepest assumption about this me is, that there are no causes coming from me; I didn’t ask to get born, it’s not my fault, everything is done to me, things seem to happen randomly, unfairly. There’s this deepest, pervasive feeling of being an innocent victim, that whatever happens to me has *nothing* to do with me – including the good things! But we don’t mind them, we don’t mind if there are no causes: just give me more please!

We don’t want the ugly things done to me, so we have huge aversion and anger and push it away, and we do crave the lovely things so we have attachment. Attachment and aversion

are the consequences of this ignorance, the natural outcropping of ignorance, because we assume an I to have things *for*. We assume an I that doesn't want suffering. It's an assumption deep in the bones of our being. This is the experiential consequence of this mistake that our ignorance makes.

But thinking about how I am the result of past karma, I'm the result of past actions – you hit me because I hit you before, you're generous to me because I must have been generous to you before – it loosens the grip of this lonely, bereft self-pity me. We can begin to realize that I am in fact an interdependent scenario, not some lump of poor me plonked on this earth by someone else. That's why to talk about karma, to think about karma is the most marvelous way to loosen the grip of the “self-pity me,” to loosen the grip of the ego, of the ignorance. It takes time, of course.

The first level of dependent arising is that things exist in dependence upon causes and conditions. There is a cup that does exist – in dependence upon

countless causes and conditions. But you will not find a cup among any one of those causes and conditions. This is the first level to think about. And what this means is, you think about this and what it brings – this is the point – is the conclusion: “Oh, I see! Therefore there’s no cup from its own side.” You see the absence of the inherent cup: emptiness.

## **HOW TO APPLY THE LOGIC OF DEPENDENT ARISING TO UNDERSTAND THE EMPTINESS OF THE CUP**

How do we get to realize the emptiness of the cup? Am I supposed to just sit there and think, “The cup is empty, the cup is empty, the cup is empty,” waiting for some vision to come. Ridiculous! In a sense you can say that you don’t sit there thinking about emptiness; you sit there thinking about dependent arising. And that thinking, that logical analysis, triggers the conclusion, “Oh, I see – therefore, there’s no cup from its own side, therefore the cup is empty of existing from its own side.”



Emptiness is the conclusion you come to, having thought about dependent arising. It's a very practical thing. It's not cosmic, because very simply, if you think about how the cup exists interdependently, this proves that it is absent of existing independently. Obvious – they're the opposite.

If it is empty, if it is interdependent, it is empty of being independent, isn't it? If it is interdependent, it is empty of being independent. Independent and interdependent are opposite. If it is interdependent, it lacks being independent. Simple. That's the simple way of talking.

And here we're talking about the simplest level of dependent arising: that things are empty of existing independently of causes and conditions. You keep looking for the cup but all you find are the causes and conditions of the cup, which is what triggers the insight, "therefore there is no cup from its own side."

## **SECOND, THINGS EXIST IN DEPENDENCE UPON PARTS**

Now, the second way the cup exists in dependence upon various factors is, that it exists in dependence upon its parts. There is a cup, but you won't find cup apart from its parts. But we think there is, and our language cheats us. Our language is really tricky. It reinforces self-existence.

Back in the seventh century, Chandrakirti, this Indian great commentator on Nagarjuna's teachings on the Middle Way, which are at the heart of all the teachings on emptiness in Tibet, he talked about using the example of a chariot. "Well," he said, "in order to look for this inherent chariot that we think is there, let's break it down into its component parts, to search for this inherent chariot." You won't find anything left over after you have dismantled all the parts, and instinctively we think we will.

Of course, the very tasty example is the self, the I. So, we can do this little meditation. First, remember, you have to establish the existence of the self,

conventionally: label it, define it, check that it fits its definition, that's there's no valid cognition that contradicts it. Then you'd do an analysis in your mind, you'd do it very rigorously. You would start to break down the component parts of your own self – just like with the chariot – and you'd put them all out there in little piles. All the hard bits and the soft bits and the mucky bits and all the bits of your mind – the negative states, the positive ones – as many piles as you want. Keep stripping it away, deconstructing this I into its component parts in this rigorous search among the parts of the self for the inherent self, which we're so convinced is in there somewhere.

We believe *totally* that we'll end up with this naked self-conscious little I that's now been exposed, that's the owner of all the parts. We talk like this: "I did not do this." "I am a special person." "I am so fat and ugly." "I am not this." "How dare you say that about me!" We really believe there's a component in there called I or self that is, as my friend Pende puts it, walking

hand in hand with the other components, the parts, the mind, the body, etc., etc. We believe there is this me in there that kind of runs the show, a mini-me, a landlord, the boss.

Even conventionally, the Consequentialist Middle Way view says you won't find that one. Let's do an exercise to prove it. Okay. My table has a cup, a clock and a vase. Can you see this? So, how many phenomena did I mention? Four. My table, the cup, the clock, the vase, right? Four phenomena. We're talking conventionally here, nothing tricky. If it's a true statement that I just made, you must point out four separate, distinct phenomena: you have to point out a table that is not a cup, not a vase, and not a clock, right? A clock that is not the table, the cup, the vase. Etc. You have to point out four separate phenomena. There's a table, there's a cup, there's a clock, there's a vase. You agree, don't you? And we can do that, can't we? Easy enough.

Okay then. Another statement: I have a nose. You agree? And I have a foot.

And I have a hand. How many phenomena? Three? No. There are four phenomena, aren't there: I, nose, foot, hand. Do you agree? Same discussion. If those four phenomena do exist conventionally, you have to find four separate, distinct phenomena, each of which is distinct, is not the other, don't you agree? Same as before.

Well, there's my foot – cut it off!  
 There's my nose – you can have it!  
 There's my hand. Now, where's the I?  
 Where is the I that is not the nose, not the hand, and not the foot. Oh dear. . .  
 Most annoying, isn't it? You can't find a separate I.

It's just the same with the cup. Cup has a handle and a base – there's the base, there's the handle. Where's the cup that *isn't* the base, that *isn't* the handle? Where's the I that *isn't* the nose, the foot?

### **THREE LEVELS OF DEPENDENT ARISING**

The grossest level of no-self that Buddha initially argues with is the view that there is a permanent, partless self

separate from everything else: unchanging and unitary. The lower Buddhist schools of thought take this view as gross selflessness.

The next level of selflessness, which is subtle selflessness for all the lower schools, is that there is no substantial, self-sufficient self. But they all end up positing that there has to be *something* there among the parts that is called I, each of them positing something different.

The Consequentialist Middle Way view says no, there isn't; there doesn't need to be. For them, the truth is that there is no inherent I; that from the side of the parts – because there is nowhere else there could be an I – there is not an iota of anything that makes it that self. Everything exists like that, they say.

This is the most radical, the scariest view! And it's what leads to the subtlest level of dependent arising, that the self is merely labeled. And it's said that you don't realize this subtle dependent arising until you have realized the complete lack, the total absence, the

emptiness of an inherent I among the parts.

### **THIRD, THINGS EXIST IN DEPENDENCE UPON THE MIND THAT LABELS THEM**

Cup is merely a name the mind imputes upon the parts, which is the valid base for that label: the handle, the base, the clay, the this, the that.

“Robina” is a name we impute upon the parts of Robina: the aggregates: the body and mind.

Our instinct is almost to then think, “Oh, good there are the parts, there is something!” No. Body is a name imputed by the mind upon its parts; mind is a name imputed upon its parts. Same discussion – you can’t find a handle among the parts of the handle, because “handle” is merely a name imputed on its parts. You can’t find a hand among the parts; it is a hand, it does hold a cup, but it’s merely a name imputed by mind upon the valid base, which is the fingers and the thumb and the palm and the wrist, etc.

Everything exists like this. Prison is made up by our mind; love, anger, jealousy, hell, enlightenment: they all exist in dependence upon the mind calling them that, buying into their being that.

But nevertheless they do function as that: as prison, a cup, a self, anger. They *must* in order to establish them as conventions. You can't call a cup a knife, just because you feel like it. You have to establish it conventionally, and it has to function, and we have to agree to it. But ultimately you can't find it. But these two together is the tricky job to be done.

As Lama Zopa Rinpoche says, "When we have realized emptiness, realized how things actually exist, it's as if there is nothing there, but there is. But what exists is so subtle it's *as if* it's an illusion, it's *as if* it doesn't exist." Or, as we'd say in the West, "It's all smoke and mirrors."



## **WHEN WE KNOW EMPTINESS, THERE IS NO FEAR**

When we have realized the emptiness of that fantasy I, as Lama Zopa says, “Then there is no fear.” Fear is finished, because fear is the main emotion of all the delusions, in particular ego-grasping. This ignorance is known colloquially as ego-grasping, and its main job is fear. Fear and panic.

Rinpoche is a Sherpa and was recognized when he was very small as the reincarnation of a previous yogi called Kunsang Yeshe up in the mountains in the Mount Everest region of Nepal. He was a lay meditator called Kunsang Yeshe. Eventually he left home and went to this little hole-in-the-wall in the mountains, which is now known as Lawudo. I think it was where they stored the radishes or the onions; “Lawudo “ means “radish” or “onion,” I can’t remember which. Anyway, he pulled out the radishes and moved in, and that became his little home for the last twenty-five or whatever years of his life. He got to be known as the “Lawudo Lama.” And so

when he died, like all the great yogis he had complete control over the process and could choose his rebirth.

From the time Rinpoche was a tiny boy, apparently, when his mother would go outside to chop the wood, little Zopa (he wasn't called that then; I can't remember his name) would be *gone*, you know. He's crawling up the hill towards the cave. And from the time he could talk, he'd always be going up that hill, always. He's relentless, very determined. And his mother would say, "Come home!" He'd say, "No! *That* is my home," pointing up to the cave.

From the time he could play games, his sister said, he'd always play the role of being a lama, sitting on a throne and having a pretend bell and dorje, and leading pujas and making mud pie *torma* offerings. He'd say, "All my benefactors are coming" and he'd mention the names of his benefactors from his past life!

His mother, of course, decided she'd better check with the local lamas, who decided, yes, he seems to be the

reincarnation of Kunsang Yeshe. Then he became known as a Rinpoche, “Precious One.”

Anyway, years later Rinpoche told the story about when he was eight years old and up in the mountains with his manager at a monastery. There was this big river and on the other side of the river he could see these “strange, pale-faced people with straw-coloured hair” – Anglo-Saxons! He really wanted to meet these people. There was this little rickety bridge, it seems, and his manager kept saying, “No,” but he insisted. There he was, holding a little bowl of potatoes – being a Sherpa, you know, you bring your gift of potatoes – and when he was halfway across the bridge he fell in the water – they don’t learn to swim up there!

In retelling the story Rinpoche said, “The head was bobbing up and down.” Not even “*My* head” – “*The* head”: a very objective statement. He said he noticed his manager running along the river bank, shouting and yelling. Then, Rinpoche said, “Hm, the thought occurred to me, ‘the person known as

the Lawudo Lama is about to die” – this very clear, rational observation as he’s going up and down for air. And then he told us, “I didn’t know anything about emptiness, but there was no fear.”

What we can deduce from this, in my opinion, is that he already had in his mindstream the realization of emptiness: that’s why there was no fear, that’s why he would think, “the person known as the Lawudo Lama. . .” instead of the huge massive panic-stricken thought of “I!!!” that normal people have.

Of course, in our culture, we would find this utterly inconceivable. You’d be called mentally ill if you proposed this possibility to Western psychologists! Because Western psychology is based – like I said, not just the religious teachings but the materialist teachings as well – based on the assumption of a self-existent I. We say it is natural to have fear. We call it “instinct for survival.” We assume fear, jealousy, anger, paranoia, upset, depression, all the rest are normal behavior. Animals

have it. Humans have it. Everything is based upon the assumption of this as reasonable mental health.

To hear that Buddha says you can remove all these neuroses from your mind and go beyond all fear, and develop infinite wisdom and infinite compassion for all sentient beings: there's no concept like this in our contemporary views of the mind and what's possible to achieve.

Sor someone to be drowning and to observe what's going on with a clear mind, and for the thought to occur that he was about to die, and to have no fear: all this fits the behaviour of a person who has seen the truth of emptiness; who knows there is no self to cling to.

It's easy for us to say these things in nice religious terms – nirvana, buddhahood – but we need to hear it as real, doable, actual psychological possibility.

This ignorance, this ego-grasping – this deep, deep primordial delusion – this default mode, this ancient, aeons-old habit that we come programmed

with from countless lives, along with its branches called attachment and anger and all the rest – this is what we call normal in the world. But Buddha says we’re all mentally ill. We’re all living in a mental asylum in our own head.

All the delusions see something that isn’t there. Attachment projects a delicious, divine cup – the mistake called “attachment,” the delusion, the lie; aversion – another lie – projects “ugly, revolting cup.” Ignorance informs both and it projects a self-existent beautiful cup, a self-existent ugly cup on the dependent-arising cup. In other words, ignorance underpins all the other delusions. It’s the deepest assumption underneath attachment, aversion, depression, jealousy and all the rest. Once you remove that underpinning, all the other samsaric views collapse in a heap of nothingness.

The deepest assumption, the deepest mistake is this belief in the “inherent me.” Like I said, it’s so subtle, we don’t realize we think it. No one taught us this. It’s just the default mode. We were born with it. It’s in fact the motor that

propels us to even take a rebirth in the first place. So, it's pretty primordial.

Once we understand the branch delusions – how they misconceive, how they exaggerate – then we can begin to understand the root delusion, the ignorance that clings to the self-existent I, the ego-grasping.

Once we've seen the emptiness of the fantasy I, we've pulled out the root and then, of course, the others collapse, the branches die. There's no longer anything to be attached to, or to be angry about, or to be depressed about.

And then we're well and truly on the road to enlightenment!

## **ANY INHERENTLY EXISTING PHENOMENA?**

*Student* Is there any phenomenon that has inherent existence?

*Ven. Robina* No. Buddha says it's a contradiction in terms. You cannot have such a thing. If something were inherent, it would mean it existed without depending on anything. And that is simply an impossibility. Everything that exists necessarily exists

interdependently. By definition, all existents are dependent arisings.

This is where Buddha disagrees with the eternalistic view of “creator” and “soul.” They’re unnecessary. But we have instinctive need to hold onto *something*, as if somehow “inherent” is above everything else. And that’s very much the feeling. I remember talking to a friend of mine – she’s a Buddhist now, but she was a Christian, and very sincere Christian – and she said she had a real struggle when she heard that a Buddha was ordinary first, and then *became* Buddha. That seemed to diminish buddhahood. Whereas she was more comfortable with the idea, which is the Christian one, which is that God is always above everything. And has always *been*. And doesn’t exist in dependence upon anything. It sounds like it’s diminishing God.

But Buddha would say if you analyze very carefully, you’ll see something that is inherent can’t exist. It’s the opposite to existence.



In fact, things exist *because* they are empty of existing from their own side. Because they're empty, they can exist.

*Student* You just blew my mind...

*Ven. Robina* Okay, good! You see, our instinct is to think “empty “ means “nihilistic,” so we hear the opposite. It kind of splits our head open! We've got to keep remembering, emptiness *means* dependent arising, dependent arising *means* emptiness.

## **HOW TO MOVE FROM INTELLECTUAL UNDERSTANDING TO EXPERIENTIAL**

*Student* I was wondering, do you have any advice for taking our understanding of emptiness from the intellectual to the experiential.

*Ven. Robina* Yes, let me tell you how. It's not difficult. Have you ever learned anything you didn't know before? A certain science or a skill? Give an example. What is it? What have you learned? Okay, you've learned piano. Okay. When you first began, it was merely intellectual knowledge, don't

you agree? Wasn't it? And even then, when you looked at those weird looking notes on the sheets of music, you thought, "What is this stuff?" You couldn't get head around it, even intellectually, could you? Then you started learning the theory, didn't you? And then slowly you started putting your hands on the piano and you could gradually translate that boring intellectual stuff into something experiential. What was the main that thing you did every day?

*Student Practice.*

*Ven. Robina* And then guess what happened? It became experiential, didn't it? That's how we learn everything. Nothing special. Well, this is how you get enlightened. There's *nothing special*. You just have to do it: start with the words, the theories, then through thinking and meditating, they eventually become your experience.

If you had the wrong ideas about Bach's music, this theories, you'd never play it right. You've got to have the right words, and then you just think about them every day, you analyze, you

meditate on it, you think about it, and gradually, slowly, over years, months, years, the penny begins to drop, until eventually it becomes your direct experience. *It's exactly the same process.* You just have to be patient and persistent. Do you see what I'm saying? That's the answer.

Then, of course, in Buddhism, especially in Tibetan Buddhism, you've got all these kit of tools that hugely help this process happen. Which seem to be the more religious side of things. The delusions, in our mind, the misconceptions, the obstacles are so strong, so huge, that without these extra tools we can't get far.

My analogy is this: Let's say you see Michael Jordan getting all these balls in the hoop. (I'm probably twenty years out of date, but I always think of Michael Jordan.) And you go, wow, I'd like to do that. You go to him and you say, "Hey, man, please show me how to get the ball in the hoop." Right? Looks easy, doesn't it? You go boom, boom, boom, you get the ball in the hoop. Because you can see, with basketball,

the essence of it is getting the ball in the hoop.

Now, he will tell you, “Okay, good. First I want you to go off for ten years, study basketball theory, go on a special diet, do lots of jogging, build up muscles, train in this and that. . .”

And you say, “No, no, no – you didn’t hear me. How do I get the ball in the hoop?” And he’ll repeat his answer. Why? Because obviously, even though getting the ball in the hoop looks so easy, you have to have amazing skills and training and years of practicing other things that don’t seem directly related to getting balls in hoops before you can do it effortlessly.

Same with your mind. The idea of familiarizing our minds with these new ideas until they’re our own direct experience is the job, but we need to do many other practices to prime our minds to be able to do it.

The Tibetan Buddhist call them “preliminary practices.” You’ve got to purify your mind. You’ve got to create masses and masses of virtuous karma that prepares your mind to do the

actual job of being your own therapist every day and getting the realization of emptiness. All the prostrations, all the water bowls, all those different things that seem so abstract and so disconnected from practice, that seem so un-psychological, so “religious.”

But when we understand their function – and we have to think about this carefully – they’re the ones that prime our minds, that enable us easily to get the realizations. Then we can realize emptiness.

## **THE BEHAVIORAL IMPLICATIONS OF WORKING WITH THE CONCEPT OF EMPTINESS**

*Student* Say I’ve learned to understand the concept of emptiness. How does that next make the leap to feeling less fear, guilt...

Ven. Robina I understand. Initially, it doesn’t seem evident to us, doesn’t it? This is why you’re asking the question. That’s why another way to put emptiness is to see things as interdependent.

Remember the example of the young Tibetan nuns who were tortured? Now, if with the usual view that we have of “I didn’t ask to get born, it’s not my fault, I don’t deserve this. . .” we experienced what they experienced, we would literally have a mental breakdown, wouldn’t we? And we’d be angry, we’d be freaking out, we’d be raging, we’d want to blame, we’d want to sue – look at the mental torture we’d have in relation to those kinds of things.

But they said, “Of course, we had compassion for our torturers because we knew that we must have harmed them in the past.” This is essentially the view of the first level of dependent arising of the self: that we created the causes for our own reality; that this self is nothing other than the coming together of all the past causes. That there can’t be such a thing as a self that experiences things that the self didn’t cause in the past. Karma is dependent arising, and dependent arising is the flipside of emptiness.

Because, if you look at the normal ego response, the way we have ego now,

– Lama Yeshe calls it “the self-pity me”  
 – and I’m not trying to be cruel, now.  
 But it is the way we suffer. And if we analyze, if we unpack self-pity, unpack anger, you see it is “poor me, I didn’t do this, I don’t deserve this, why is this happening, there is no cause, I don’t understand it, why me, what did I do to deserve it.” Would you agree this is the way we think about suffering now? That is coming from the philosophy of “I didn’t ask to get born.” That’s coming from the philosophy of “no cause and effect,” of “no karma,” of being an “innocent victim.” That’s the philosophy of the world. That’s why we suffer so terribly in the face of bad things happening.

If you have the view of karma, it causes you to own responsibility for this thing that’s happening: you’ve made your bed and now you’re lying on it; which means there’s no fear, which means you’re confronting it, which means you’re accepting it, and then it even means you can have compassion, like those nuns.

That's a very different way of interpreting a situation, isn't it? And all of this is implying: therefore this is not existing from its own side, therefore it isn't *causeless*. Because the way we have ego now, it's all causeless. "Why is this happening?" and panic and fear. And that's because we are grasping primordially at "innocent victim me" who didn't ask to get born.

That's a way of expressing emotionally how it feels to have ego; whereas if you have this other one, it's more spacious. You recognize why. You know you did it. It's more spacious and it's linked to interdependence, which is the flipside of emptiness. One has to think about it again and again and again. It's a practical thing, you know. It sounds so abstract, to hear about "understand emptiness." It really means to see interdependence, and karma is a perfect example of how things exist in dependence upon various causes and factors and things, you know. It makes us so brave, so fearless.



Does it make sense a little bit? So, thinking about interdependence is the way to put it.

Saying “emptiness” seems a bit abstract, because interdependence is the flip side of emptiness, because the way ego is, “grasping at the self-existent me” – this is the label for it – is the one of thinking there’s no cause, thinking it’s not my fault, thinking “poor me” and therefore the panic and the fear and the rage and the guilt and the shame and all the junk that arises when bad things happen. Does it make sense a bit?

And so finally, after years and years of much analysis and logic and thinking and meditating, one finally gets the direct insight into emptiness. That’s when we finally have seen directly the absence of this fantasy “I” that we’ve been clinging to for so long. That’s when you cut the root of delusions. Because there’s no longer the misconception of the I. Therefore there’s no longer fear, no longer anger, no longer attachment. We have a way to go before we completely finish it all

and become a buddha, but we've made this major shift when we've realized emptiness.

That's the real purification. That's when we cut the root of suffering and its causes.

*The teachings in this chapter were given in Missoula, Montana, at the FPMT center, Osel Shen Phen Ling, in 2011.*

## **ONE STEP AT A TIME**

One keeps doing these things, all these steps, you keep perfecting, keep perfecting, until you've completely perfected each of the first four perfections and then you perfect your concentration and then perfect your insight into emptiness. Finally, you perfect the six – generosity, morality, patience, perseverance, concentration, and wisdom – and you have now removed even the subtlest imprints from your mind, the delusions, even the subtlest smell of them, and you finally become a buddha.

This is it, speaking very simply.

Going this route, the paramitayana, the perfection vehicle, it'll take a few eons, apparently. But because the suffering of sentient beings is so unbearable to us by now, we would speed up the process by entering into the Vajrayana, tantra, postgraduate.

**PART SIX**  
**TANTRA/POSTGRADUATE**

### **31. THE PSYCHOLOGY OF TANTRA, BY LAMA YESHE TANTRA/POSTGRADUATE**

Lord Buddha taught his path to enlightenment at many different levels, according to the needs and capabilities of the many different sentient beings. His most advanced teachings, given in his esoteric aspect, Vajradhara, are known as Tantrayana or Vajrayana. Tantra is the quickest vehicle to buddhahood, full enlightenment.

According to Lord Buddha's Sutrayana teachings, the cause of human beings' problems is desire, so it must be avoided. According to tantra, however, this very desire is used on the path to enlightenment. On the basis of strong renunciation, the great compassion of *bodhichitta*, and the right view of emptiness, practitioners take the resource of their own pleasure energy and, in the deep concentration of *samadhi* meditation, unify it with the wisdom realizing emptiness.

Eventually this leads to simultaneously-born great blissful wisdom, which in turn leads to enlightenment.

## **PLEASURE, NOT PAIN**

In tantra we are dealing with pleasure, not with pain, you must understand. The person who is qualified to practice tantra is someone who can cope with pleasure, who can experience pleasure without going berserk. This is the tantric personality. If a person is always miserable, tantra does not work for them because there is no resource of pleasure to be utilized.

We are dealing with energy that we already have. The human body is the gold-mine of tantra. It is tremendously valuable, our most precious possession. From the tantric point of view, our pleasure resource is composed of the six distinctive characteristics of a human being: the four elements (earth, water, fire, and air), the channels of our subtle nervous system, and the blissful *kundalini* drops existing within them.

What we need is a skillful method to harness this powerful energy so that we can achieve more and more satisfaction in our everyday lives, until we discover total satisfaction, the highest happiness of enlightenment.

This bliss that we talk about is not just sentimental pleasure. It is a profound experience beyond our ordinary imagination. And it concerns the serious business of bringing the energy of the entire nervous system into the central channel.

These techniques are really something for the Western mind, I tell you. You people like to work with material, with energy, don't you? You like to play with it, fix it, change it, manipulate it. Well, tantra helps you do exactly that – but here we are talking about inner energy, your own pleasure resource.

## **TANTRA IS ACTIVE**

Tantra is very serious, very profound, and we do need it. I tell you, we need it badly. In fact, without tantric practice, enlightenment is not possible. In this

twentieth century, there is a tremendous explosion of delusion. It is our karma to have so much distraction. Good things are happening in our lives, but many bad things are happening too. We need the super-atomic energy of these techniques to lift us out of this confused, materialistic situation that we are caught up in.

In the lam-rim, you see, we present the philosophy and methods intellectually. To some extent I can convince you intellectually, but this conviction is like clouds in the sky. When the intellectual conviction is strong, you say, “Oh, yes, I’m convinced.” Then the clouds disappear, and you think, “Oh, now I don’t know any more. What can I do?” You are discouraged, and your spiritual practice becomes weak.

Tantra is active, and I like that. You act and you get something immediately. Inner fire is very quick; it will surprise you. With other meditations it may be very difficult to achieve any result, but with these, suddenly you feel that something is



happening. You might even shock yourself. They are a sensitive, quick way to convince yourself that you are improving.

## **WE HAVE SO MUCH POTENTIAL**

“How can I meditate like this?” you might think. “I am not a great meditator. I’ve just come to this course, and what does this monk expect from me? Suddenly I’m being forced to meditate. Anyway, I have created so much negativity, how can I do advanced practices like these?” You should not think this way, okay?

I tell you, you never know what you can do. We cannot see our own potential. Maybe in a previous life you were a great meditator. You never know. Right now your mind might be completely distracted, then suddenly one day your potential opens, and you have a good meditation. This happens.

Look at Milarepa. I don’t think that you people have created more negative karma than Milarepa. How many people did he kill? Do you remember? He was a criminal, wasn’t he? He

admitted it. But he had strength. He created heavy negative karma, but he was also able to have perfect renunciation, perfect bodhichitta, perfect right view. He said good-bye to samsara.

For me, Milarepa is a good example for us. Look around in the world. Sometimes those who create strong negativity, who create big samsara, have big liberation-success. And those who don't have success in samsara don't have any liberation-success either; they are just numb. You understand, don't you!

My point is, you never know with human beings. You never know what you can do. Everybody should try as much as possible to do the inner fire meditation. Try! Be brave! Even if you are not successful, at least you get some experience, and that is good enough.

## **BE INSPIRED**

Sometimes it is good to think about the lives of the great yogis so that you know what you have to do. Even after learning lam-rim, there are times when

you are still not clear. If you look at their lifestyles, at the way they practiced, many things become clear.

We can see from their stories that intellectual knowledge of Dharma alone is not enough – we have to practice. There are many stories of learned people asking for guidance from someone who has not studied any of the vast treatises but who has really tasted the few teachings he may have studied. I remember His Holiness Trijang Rinpoche saying many times in his teachings that when it comes to practicing, many intellectuals have to go to beggars on the street and ask, “Please tell me how to practice Dharma.” Even though these scholars may have learned the entire sutras and tantras and may teach them to many students, still they are empty when it comes to practice. His Holiness was saying that this is happening in the Tibetan community – and it is good for you people to keep in mind, too, isn’t it? Can you imagine spending twenty or thirty years learning the entire Dharma and still not getting any better in

yourself, not even knowing how to begin to practice Dharma? You think that is not possible, don't you? I'm sure you think that sounds totally stupid, yet it is happening.

## **NOT JUST PHILOSOPHICAL**

You understand, then? These meditations are not something philosophical. You have to act, to transform. Something has to happen. I think it is a good idea that when you know even a little bit of something practical, as much as you can, you act. Then it becomes real. Take karma, for instance. When we talk about karma, we intellectualize so much. We need to come down to earth. Karma is not something complicated or philosophical. Karma means watching your body, watching your mouth, watching your mind. You try to keep these three doors as pure as possible. That is karma, isn't it?

In Dharamsala, where His Holiness the Dalai Lama lives, there are many monks who are, perhaps, not so learned, who stay on the mountain for

many years leading an ascetic life, meditating and doing retreat. On the other hand, there are those who are greatly learned, who don't want to live ascetic lives. I don't know why this is. Those who are not so learned stay there on the mountain really trying to taste something. I think they get the chocolate, while those famous learned ones don't. They miss the chocolate. It doesn't matter who you are, if you want to taste something, you have to go to the taste-place.

It is exactly the same in the West. Many people have incredible intellectual understanding of Buddhism; this is not difficult for them. But it is dry, intellectual understanding and does not fertilize the heart. I think this is a problem, definitely. There are professors, for example, who have studied Buddhism for years. They have high degrees and have published books on the lam-rim and tantra. Yet many of them are not Buddhists at all. I'm not putting them down; they admit it. They can read Lama Je Tsongkhapa's lam-rim so fast and translate it using such

incredible words, but they say, “I am not Buddhist” – which means they don’t actualize what they write about. For them it is just theory. To me this is shocking. I can’t understand it. I am confused. True!

On the other hand, there are those who have heard only the lam-rim – let’s say, heard about the negative mind – and they begin to look inside themselves and begin to meditate. They begin to watch. Slowly, the lam-rim becomes part of them. But those intellectual people think that the negative mind is somewhere else, way up on Mt Everest. “It doesn’t refer to me,” they think, so they don’t care.

Many of my students who are interested in learning more ask me, “Lama, should I learn Tibetan?” I say to them, “If you want to learn Tibetan, learn it. If you don’t want to learn it, don’t. There’s enough information available in English and other languages.” I have my reasons for answering them this way. I’m sympathetic to Western students, and I’ve been watching you. Many of my

students have learned Tibetan, but after they have learned it, they seem to practice Dharma less. I am shocked. This doesn't make sense to me. The Tibetan language is not a holy language. In every culture you learn a language. It's part of samsara; you're learning a samsaric trip. In learning Tibetan, instead of learning a Western trip, you learn a Tibetan one. I am not so interested in my students learning the Tibetan language. What's important is to taste the chocolate. It does not matter how small a piece you get - as long as you taste it, you are satisfied. That is all. I think that is all Buddhism can do.

I remember His Holiness the Dalai Lama saying one time that, when he visited some Kagyu monasteries, he saw many monks who were not so learned but who were practicing seriously, doing retreat, leading ascetic lives and experiencing many hardships. His Holiness said that these monks studied something, a small part of a commentary perhaps, then immediately put great energy and effort

into meditating on it. And then there are some Gelugpa monks, for example, who are very learned but who are not putting so much energy into their practice. I'm quoting the Dalai Lama's words, okay, I'm not giving my own interpretation. His Holiness expressed the wish for balance between those Kagyupas who put incredible energy into practicing meditation without much learning and those Gelugpas who are incredibly learned but do very little practice. I am sure His Holiness is not joking. He has no sectarianism. He was impressed by those Kagyu retreaters.

I will make my point again. As soon as you understand one subject clearly, put it into your heart and practice it, then you will get the chocolate. Is that clear? I want you to understand this. For example, when someone has shown you exactly how to make pizza from the beginning to the end – how to combine the tomatoes, the mozzarella cheese, the herbs – that is enough for you to make it and eat it and enjoy it. But Western people are easily confused. If someone comes along and says, “Oh,



you don't know much! You can't make pizza because you don't know how to make curry," you will think, "Wow! Now I can't practice at all." Of course, I am not saying that you should not learn. Learn the essential things clear-clear, then put them in your heart and integrate them.

## **WE NEED THE TEACHINGS**

According to the great Sakya Pandita, someone who has not received the teachings but still tries to meditate is like a person without arms or legs trying to climb up a rocky mountain. This needs to be interpreted in the right way. It means that if you don't get the information about making pizza, trying to make pizza is a disaster. But you cannot say that people who don't know how to make curry cannot actualize pizza. That is nonsense. Many people make big mistakes in this area.

There are other misconceptions. Lama Je Tsongkhapa has said that first you have to study extensively; next, you must understand how to practice the teachings; then you should practice day

and night. When you see the words, “first this, second this, third this,” you may interpret them as meaning that you have to study for thirty or forty years before you even start to meditate. We do have such conceptions.

Let’s pretend that I am such a Gelugpa man. I say to one of my students, “How long have you studied Buddhadharma?” He answers, “Ten years.” Then I say to him, “Ten years? You can’t practice anything! Ten years’ study means nothing. In order to be able to practice you have to study at least thirty or forty years, because first you have to study for a long time, then you have to understand everything, then finally you must practice day and night. Lama Je Tsongkhapa said so.” It is easy to be misled.

Can you imagine? For twenty or thirty years you should only study; you cannot practice. You have to study! Then for another twenty years you just think about everything, checking it. Then for the next twenty years.... I mean, what is this? Misunderstanding

in this way is like putting Lama Tsongkhapa in the bathroom, isn't it?

When you understand the three negativities of body, the four negativities of speech, and the three negativities of mind, this is enough for you to learn to avoid them. To practice the ten moralities, you don't need to learn the entire sutras and tantras, do you? I want you to understand this. It is essential that we bring right understanding of Buddhism into the Western world, not an understanding bound by cultural chains. When everything is clean-clear in your own mind, nobody can create obstacles for you. All right!

When Lama Tsongkhapa was still a teenager, he did a retreat on Manjushri. Relatively speaking, he had not yet studied anything, but he went into retreat and had many experiences. What do you think about that? Lama Tsongkhapa's way of practicing unifies listening, analytical checking, and meditation. Then sutra and tantra are also unified, and this does not mean just mouth-unity of sutra and tantra.

## THE MEANING OF INITIATION

Lama Je Tsongkhapa mentions that before giving Gampopa teachings on the higher subjects, Milarepa asked him, “Have you received initiation?” Gampopa replied that he had, so Milarepa gave the commentary. And there is another quotation here that says that initiation is essential, that it is the root of realizations, and that receiving tantric teachings without an initiation causes both the teacher and the disciple to go to the lower realms. By showing that all the perfect lineage gurus gave initiation, Lama Tsongkhapa proves that it is necessary.

Now, what is initiation? It is the beginning of the experience of meditation and concentration, the beginning of the activation of penetration into the nature of reality of all phenomena. Initiation leads you into the mandala of the deity, the totality of the experience of the deity. It is an antidote to the dissatisfied, samsaric, fanatical, dualistic mind. During initiation you should completely let go of your

preconceptions and fixed ideas of yourself as this or that. You are so attached to your limited self-image – that’s your problem. Instead, identify with the wisdom-mind of the deity: your own perfect potential.

In the teachings there is much emphasis on great bliss as the basis of the initiation experience. Of course, if you don’t have blissful experiences in your daily life, then it is difficult to experience bliss in your meditation, isn’t it? But you do have! Buddhist tantra is realistic, scientific. It explains that we all have some experience of happiness, of bliss. Tantra is not asking us to have some kind of supernatural belief. We learn to work with and expand our natural physical and mental resources of pleasure, then we take this energy and unify it with the wisdom understanding emptiness, thereby achieving liberation.

Don’t think that initiation means that this monk gives you some incredible power. No, you should not look at it this way. You already *have* the qualities of profound wisdom and great loving-

kindness within you; initiation simply activates them.

The quality of the initiation you receive is not dependent on a Mickey Mouse teacher like me. It depends on you. It has to do with your own individual transformation. I am not qualified according to the Buddhist tantra point of view, but superficially I have received the initiation and commentary and have done the retreats.

When you receive initiation from someone like me, although I am just a confused monk, if you can, without pushing, visualize that you are receiving it from Guru Heruka, who has an infinitely blue, radiant light-body. Then, with the motivation for self-growth so that you will be able to benefit others as much as you can, you should ask me sincerely to give you the initiation. If you think about this in a profound way, you will become profound.

The important thing is to have to some extent a dedicated attitude. In fact, according to Buddhist psychology,

unless you have, you will never be satisfied. Instead you will be bored and lonely. It is logical psychology that dedication to others brings you the satisfaction that you crave. To receive an initiation to achieve some kind of power for your own ego is not good, but to request initiation in order to dedicate yourself to others and thereby achieve something for yourself is sincere and totally truthful.

Even though a hundred people might participate in an initiation, you don't all receive the same energy, the same experience. That too depends on you – and not just on your bodily participation. Receiving the inner experience of initiation depends on the participation of your mind and on your ability to let go. Each of you experiences the initiation according to your own skill and level of development.

## **INITIATION IS NECESSARY**

Initiation is a serious business. Naropa had to wait twelve years to receive an initiation, and he had to do outrageous

things before Tilopa would give it to him. But you are very lucky: I let you do normal things! And in ancient times initiation would not be given in public like this, to a hundred people, the way we often do in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition nowadays. There would be only a few people at a time. And you would not receive it all at once like we do now. You would receive the first part, for example, then you would go away and digest it and practice and reach that particular level, then come back for the second part, and so forth. It is interesting, isn't it? It is easy for us now. Lama Tsongkhapa emphasizes that as much as possible we should go slowly: penetrate, meditate, concentrate. And we shouldn't be too concerned if our meditation during initiation seems to be only at the level of imagination and not our actual experience. That is still good enough – don't think it is not. Simply to imagine the experience plants seeds in the field of your consciousness, and slowly these seeds will grow. Just like the hamburger: first someone had to



imagine it, then slowly it manifested in the American culture.

At the end of an initiation, feel, “Good, now I am enlightened!” Make the determination: from now on I will not project the hallucinations, the concrete conceptions, of my self-pitying mind, the resource of misery. Instead I will identify with my divine wisdom-energy, the resource of pleasure, and offer this to all people.

And remember, as long as you maintain mindfulness and don’t lose your head, it doesn’t matter how much blissful pleasure you have, whether you call it samsara or whatever. With the right attitude, the right motivation, our pleasure becomes liberation, absolute okay-ness.

## **SEEING YOURSELF AS A DIVINE BEING**

All right now. I want you to understand that you need to strongly identify yourself as a deity, a buddha; you need to have intensive awareness of your body as the deity’s body, your speech as

the deity's mantra, and your mind as great blissful wisdom.

The reason you see yourself as a deity, the appearance of simultaneously born blissful wisdom – and the environment as a mandala – is to transcend mundane appearances and mundane actions. You have to actualize this transformation.

Normally when we receive this commentary, there are many rituals to do, such as tormas to offer and prayers to say to the lineage gurus. There are a lot of things that are usually done, but this time we give them up. The most important thing, however, is to continuously visualize ourselves as a deity – and that I'm *not* going to give up. And because this is a retreat situation, we should practice strongly. It is very important. This is our style.

Why do we have so many different deities in tantra? Because each deity arouses different feelings and activates different qualities within us. Choose for your practice whichever deity feels more familiar to you.

## DIVINE PRIDE

If you find it a bit of a culture shock to see yourself as a deity as they are depicted in the drawings, or with a Tibetan face, don't worry. Your body is already beautiful and handsome, so leave it as it is and just change color. Actually, seeing yourself as a deity has nothing to do with Tibetan culture. When you project your usual self-pitying image, you think you are not involved with a culture, but you are. Instead of seeing yourself in that way, transform yourself into blissful, radiant light and cultivate strong divine pride. This is important.

The characteristic of all the deities is universal love and compassion. We need love, don't we? We need compassion, don't we? We are craving for someone to love us and take care of us, aren't we? They manifest our archetypal ideal so that we can identify ourselves with the energy of universal love and compassion, actually become universal love and compassion. And then your worries about whether or not somebody loves you dissolve. From the

Buddhist point of view, psychologically it works that way. When you generate the strength of love and wisdom, this unhappy energy disappears.

You can see how this works in your everyday life. If you are full of self-pity, crying and having nervous breakdowns, people don't come near you, do they? They are scared to be around you. But when you are strong in love and compassion, you can't keep people away from you! This is natural. Because we are looking for happiness, who wants to go to a miserable place, who wants to look at a miserable man or woman? I don't! You understand?

Tantra believes that we need powerful transformation. Identifying with such profound qualities as a deity's and seeing yourself as infinite, radiant light are powerful methods for eliminating self-pitying concepts and garbage-imagination.

What is our problem? Our problem is that we think, "I am the worst person in the world. I am impure. I am full of hatred, full of desire. I am ignorant." These concepts of yourself are totally

negative. You must purify them. From the time you were born until now, you have been carrying your self-pitying view: cry, cry, fear, fear, emotion, emotion. Always, you are aware of your shortcomings and apply tremendous pressure on yourself. You regard yourself as worthless. You punish yourself. You project yourself as ugly – but nobody makes you ugly; other people think you are beautiful.

Tantra says that the nucleus of each human being is divine, pure. This is why it is important to identify yourself so strongly as a deity, to identify yourself as completely developed. It is very important. Instead of seeing your body as something miserable, transform it into a radiant light-body. Outwardly this might seem strange, but inwardly there is meaning. The moment you visualize this light, your dualistic concepts break down, your concrete concepts are no longer believed in.

The radiant light of the deity helps us to touch reality. This is the most important thing in the world, isn't it?

Most of us are unaware; we don't touch reality. Even though we walk on this earth, we don't touch the reality of this earth. The deity's mandala expresses inner and outer reality rather than a fantasy world of projections.

Western actors explain that when they are playing a certain person in a movie, they have to go through some experience as that person in order to express his feelings and actions realistically. Because of his training, somehow deep inside the actor is the person he is portraying, even when he is not acting. This is a good example for when you become the deity. Your psychic energy has to transform convincingly into the blissful, radiant light-body.

## **THE DEITY IS ALREADY WITHIN YOU**

Westerners often have a problem with deities. "Why should I see myself in this way? This is just another fantasy, another delusion. It is difficult enough just to be a man or a woman. I have enough trouble in this world with my

complicated views of who I am and of how to relate to a man's world or a woman's world. Now I have to change my appearance. I have to wear another mask." No! When you visualize yourself as the deity, it is not to show another manifestation. The deity is the manifestation of the profound qualities you already have within you. They are within you. To recognize and comprehend that, you visualize yourself as the deity rather than identifying with the feeling, "I am ugly. Nobody wants me."

Tantra considers it very important to knock out such symptoms of ego. There is no point in holding garbage-concepts of yourself. Everyone is perfect – you just need to recognize it. In tantra, perfection is not something coming next year; or if you are religious and do good in this life, maybe next life you will go to heaven. Heaven is now! You bring heaven into everyday life. Your home is heaven, and everyone you see is a god or goddess. To ask why you need to manifest as Heruka means that you don't understand that the quality of

the deity is the quality of your own being.

## **YOU ARE YOUR MIND, NOT BODY**

Remember, your face is not you, your blood is not you, your bones are not you. The nucleus of you, of your life, is your consciousness, your mind, your psyche. Your body is just like a robot pushed around by a computer; it is the manifestation of the computer of your consciousness. From the Buddhist point of view, your consciousness is the essence of you.

From the time you were born until now, you have manifested in so many different ways, sometimes angry like a monster and sometimes so peaceful and beautiful. These manifestations – angry-looking, jealous-looking, loving-kindness-looking, great compassion-looking, great wisdom-looking – do not come from your blood and bones; they manifest from the power of your consciousness, the power of your psyche. In the West we think that the body is the boss, don't we? We are



overwhelmed by it and intoxicated by its pleasures, and we put the mind in the garbage. We end up with our mind as the slave of the body. But it's our mind that puts us in a miserable concentration camp, not our body.

The point is, the mind is powerful and can manifest anything. And when you can convincingly see yourself as handsome or beautiful, your self-pitying concepts will vanish. You will become the manifestation of your own profound qualities. Everyone can do this.

Actually, we have two bodies, as we will discuss soon: our physical body and a more subtle psychic body. Your consciousness does have the ability to manifest as a radiant light-body, and when you understand the quality of the subtle body, you can learn to manipulate the energy of your inner nervous system and to control your blood-and-bone body.

## **NOT JUST PRETENDING**

Feel that you actually are the deity: youthful, beautiful, full of kundalini.

Some people think that you should only pretend to be the deity. This is no good. You are not pretending. The more strongly you identify yourself as the deity, the more the transformation comes and the more you extinguish fear and uncontrolled emotion. We say that we do not like to waste time, but we *do* waste time when we participate in self-pity and the fearful “I.” Kick out self-pity by having the strong divine pride of being the pure, divine deity. Do not pretend. Be convinced inside. If you feel unified with the deity, transformation comes naturally. When you are out of the meditation session, you may be surprised to find that you are still the deity.

And remember that all appearances are illusory and non-dual in nature, and all the illusions are empty. Recognize that all the empty illusions are blissful in nature. Bring your attention inside to this blissful state.

## **WE MUST PRACTICE**

It is important to have a firm practice. Sometimes students who have listened

to Dharma teachings for many years say, “I am confused! I don’t know where to start. I’ve received so many teachings from so many lamas, but I don’t know who my teacher is or what meditations to do.” Even though these students have studied many subjects and have received a hundred meditation techniques, still they are lost. This shows that something is wrong, doesn’t it?

The beautiful thing about Tibetan Buddhism is that we have a clean-clear structure from beginning to end. We have a clear list that shows us how to check up. Perhaps you people find all this structure boring, but Tibetan Buddhism is alive today because of its clear structure. All four traditions have a clean-clear way to enquire, to judge. From my point of view, this is to be appreciated very much. If there are ten stages involved in going from here to there, and if some information is missing, you cannot go all the way, can you? If you have a firm structure, you don’t get lost.

Since you claim to be Buddhists, since you claim to be meditators, you should know that the principal concern of Buddhism is the mind. The mind is the nucleus of samsara and nirvana. Whatever experiences we are having in our lives manifest from our minds, remember? Since we are getting a Buddhist education, we should be aware of what we need and what we lack. In Buddhism we say that the human being is great, automatically great, because when we really want to see, we can – with our inner wisdom. I think I trust this lam-rim explanation of the human being.

To some extent, you do know what you need. When you are hungry, you know you are hungry so you search for food, don't you? When you are thirsty, you know that if you drink something you will solve the problem. It's the same when you feel any kind of dissatisfaction: you simply try to solve the problem. Deal with the gross levels first, then slowly, slowly, the more subtle. Be practical. Use your inner wisdom – and act!

Remember, we are all responsible for our own lives. Don't think that this Tibetan monk will give you enlightenment and make you powerful. It is not like that. Just think, "At this time in my life I have come together with this monk, and I will judge him realistically. I will not just accept what he says but will check up on whether it is right or wrong. I will debate with him for the rest of my life. And as much as possible I will try to be mindful. I will take responsibility for my life and dedicate it for others by growing in the strength of loving-kindness and great wisdom. Therefore, I will serve others as much as possible. This is my motivation. Whether this monk benefits me or not, my motivation takes care."

Try to be reasonable in the way you grow. Don't ever think it is too late. Even if tomorrow you die, as long as today you keep yourself straight and clean-clear, a happy human being, that is the main thing. It is never too late. If you can keep your situation happy

today, you can follow the middle way to reach the greatest happiness.

Now, I want you people to understand and be technically clean-clear, then I want you to practice. It is so worthwhile. For many years you have been working on evolutionary yoga, but as I said, it is a bit like dreaming. Now you are not dreaming. You are in the real situation. If again you just go blah, blah, blah, it is not good. This time we are not joking. If you mistake the button, you are going to go to the wrong place, so be careful. This time you are really doing something.

Everybody should try. If you never try all these meditations, you can never be successful. If you try, you might surprise yourself, so I want all of you to meditate. If you do not, you should be ashamed for inviting me here! Okay. I want you to understand that I did not come here just to get mozzarella cheese. I am not hungry for mozzarella cheese; I can still get satisfaction from Indian things.

Remember I told you that if you want to practice, you should expect hard work. I want everybody to be a hard worker; in fact, I made it a condition at the beginning of the course that you should expect to meditate. These meditations are not just for writing down on pieces of paper, for intellectualizing about. It is important to hear the teachings, but then you must meditate and have experiences. I don't want this to be intellectual. That is not my interest.

I want you to be inspired to get something from all this. I am also responsible, aren't I? I have a responsibility to do something for you. If you do not do a good job, then I cheat you, you cheat me, we cheat each other – it is quite heavy karma. Because, I tell you, this time we are doing a very serious thing. If you are not serious, it is extremely shameful.

So, please practice. It is a very simple thing. It is not complicated, it is not philosophical, it is not some kind of psychology. It is very simple: you just do it. If you want me to be happy and to

live a long life, you should try to do the meditations. That is all.

Milarepa and the others like him had so much renunciation. For many years they lived on the mountains like animals, eating nettles and grass. And remember all the effort Naropa put into running after these teachings - he almost died twelve times! We have such a comfortable life here in this nice, well-heated house. If we don't meditate, we are shameful. Milarepa is the right extreme; we are the wrong extreme.

This is such a profound teaching, so as much as possible we should use it in a meaningful way. Then you are satisfied and I am satisfied. It is so worthwhile. I want everybody to taste some satisfaction, to have to some extent a profound experience. Everybody. Then you can share with others; by simply being yourself, you share with others.

I am not worried about whether we cover all the subjects in this text. Even if we get only half way through, I don't care! The most important thing is that



you really touch something inside yourself, that you are doing something. Then I have no doubt that some transformation will happen.

If you don't have any experiences now, during the course, I am almost certain that you won't have any later; when you go home, you will go back to your old habits. But if you meditate strongly now, you will really taste the practice and be convinced, and then when you go back home, you will be inspired to continue your meditations.

## **THE RIGHT MOTIVATION**

It is important to have the right motivation. Mental attitude is very important when you interpret your life and your world. Wrong motivation brings pain, disappointment, and the extreme side of life. Again, think like this: "For the rest of my life, it is my responsibility to grow in mindfulness and happiness. Each day I will expand the loving-kindness I already have. When I wake up each morning, I will open my wisdom-eye and see more and more deeply the inner universal reality.

And I will serve others as much as possible. I make the determination that this will be my way of life.”

## **WE WILL MEET AGAIN**

If we are successful, then I would like to teach you again and again and again. I cannot help but do it again. When I started teaching Western people, I saw that you responded well. Most of the time when I tell you to meditate, whether you are capable or not, you try to do it. This is the beauty of the West. I opened my eyes and saw that the Buddhadharma helped Western people, and that’s why I became interested in you. I got so much energy to teach you. If you practice well, I would like to give another course. I pray.

*Excerpted from The Bliss of Inner Fire,  
Wisdom Publications.*



**PART SEVEN**  
**PUTTING IT ALL INTO**  
**PRACTICE**

## **32. HOW TO INCORPORATE DHARMA INTO YOUR DAILY LIFE**

Okay, so let me just talk now a little bit about how to set up a daily practice, how to internalize all this stuff. I'm sorry to use always simple examples but it's so important. If you are trying to become this amazing, sophisticated gardener, who knows everything very deeply, you've got to do an awful lot of intellectual work first, don't you?

You've got to go to university, to botany school, and learn all these things, and study hard, and memorize it all, and really become familiar intellectually before you can do a decent job. You do it gradually, you do both study and practice.

### **STUDY FIRST**

Well it's the same here. Spiritual practice needs the same steps. If you really want to become this amazing buddha, which Buddha says finally is

your potential – and many people who are Buddhists aren't necessarily aiming for that but we're talking that way here; many people who are Buddhists think of Buddhism as just a way to calm their mind down and watch their breath. I'm not criticizing that, but that's sort of like a tiny part of grade one. That's fine, better than nothing. But this deal here, which is the tradition in the Tibetan monasteries, the monastic universities, which comes from the great monastic universities in India, takes the whole caboodle, from A to Z, all the way to omniscience, to enlightenment.

That's very much the tradition in Tibetan Buddhism. If you recognize that's your goal, and you want to aim for that no matter how long it takes, then you've got a lot of work to do. You've got to hear the teachings, the information, then familiarize your mind with it by studying, analyzing, thinking, debating, memorizing.

## **THEN INTERNALIZE**

But then what you do is you have to learn how to know how to internalize it

all, to make it your own experience. And that's where the techniques of meditation come in as a very marvelous tool.

Another way to say it, your job is finally to bring your mind into sync with how things are. Here we're talking about the way Buddha says how things are and what a Buddhist is is obviously a person who concurs with Buddha. You see my point, otherwise you wouldn't be doing it, so take that as a given here.

What you're doing, even as you go along familiarizing your mind with what Buddha says, part of the process is not just blindly believing it as you go along, filling your head with the knowledge, you're processing it. Just like with botany. You're not just blindly believing it, you're checking it out. They tell you do this and then you find out from your own experience: "Oh wow, it is that way." You test it, you taste it, you make it real for you. What practice is is this constant ongoing listening to what Buddha said, thinking about it, meditating on it, and doing

other practices that support that until you get: “Oh I get it, that’s what he said, I see now, that’s how it is, right, I get it, I verify it.”

## **A PROCESS OF VERIFICATION**

I’m talking about looking at the process of how to internalize all this, which is the process of verification. What you do is you listen to the teachings, you come home, you write in your book, you think about it and then you start putting your hands on in the garden and then you test it, don’t you? You say, “Oh wow, that’s true.” Don’t you do that?

And if you discover it’s really wrong then you will stop. You won’t do it. That’s what the Dalai Lama says you should do with Buddhism. It’s a gradual process. You can’t prove reincarnation straight away. It’s only when you get clairvoyance from meditation that you develop a subtler mind that you finally can see the past; it’s really finally then that you’ve verified experientially. But you’ve got an awful lot of stuff to do intellectually,



conceptually before there, which can be very, very reaffirming.

I can say to you I haven't got clairvoyance but I can certainly say whatever thinking I've done and clarifying and putting into practice what makes sense to me up until now: so far, so good. I'm comfortable to say so far, so good. I'm comfortable to say for me, no contradictions yet. Because it's a process.

It's like trying to prove that  $E=mc^2$ . Well, maybe you're only at grade five, but so far, so good. The multiplication works, the addition works, the subtraction works, the algebra works. It's an ongoing process of verification. That is what practice is.

When you can think about karma – I can't prove past lives yet, but all I can say to you is this, for my mind: that the presentation of cause and effect, the presentation of karma, the presentation of mind being nonphysical, the presentation of there being no creator, the presentation of not being created by my mummy and daddy, the presentation of all of that experientially

for me has already had an enormous impact. So far, so good, why should I complain? Keep moving and as long as I keep moving, the very process of moving through it is the verification of it for yourself.

Just like with math, you go to all your math classes, you just don't bring it all home and memorize it blindly, do you? You don't just learn only every single thing in the math teacher says – in the beginning you do, you learn your tables or whatever you do; but eventually you are really working with it experientially, creatively, aren't you? Do you see what I mean? Then you're making it real for yourself. That's how you progress. The same with music, the same with cakes, and the same with Buddha's teachings. You make it real for yourself based on the fundamental principles you've learned.

## **LISTENING, THINKING, MEDITATING**

Practice hugely consists of listening, thinking about it, listening, thinking, and then finally, in your concentrated

meditation when you get that – and it might not even be in this life, and that’s okay – you directly realize it as the truth. You’ve got to go according to your own level, you keep moving gradually step by step by step, according to your own pace.

## **PRELIMINARY PRACTICES, PRIMING OUR MIND**

Another way to talk about the whole thing, about practice, is this: the heart job, like I’ve been saying, of being a Buddhist is working on your own mind, changing your mind, finally comes down to being your own therapist, like we talked, right? But then you’ve got all these other practices like prostrations, and water bowls and all the holy things, all the stuff that you think, “Oh, God where does that fit in? What’s that got to do with it?” Very often we can think that’s practice: “Oh I’ll do my prostrations, that’s practice. Hearing the teachers now, that’s not practice.”

We kind of get all confused and can’t put all the pieces together. But if you think of it like this, another good

analogy for my mind is this: what is the essence of basketball? It's getting the ball in the hoop. Finally, everything comes down to that, if you think about it, doesn't it? You get the highest score, the number of times you get the ball in the hoop. But look at the complication of what basketball is and all the things you've got to do. You've got to learn to bounce the ball, and be fit and have this, and eat this way, and do jogging and do this, you've got an enormous amount of work, and then be part of the team. All of this is why? You can get the ball in the hoop. But if you start losing the plot a bit and you start thinking that basketball is simply bouncing the ball or basketball is simply jogging, you're losing the plot.

Getting the ball in the hoop is changing your mind into seeing the truth. That's it. That's the bottom line. You can say all the other things you do – let's say you went to Michael Jordan. "Hey man, please show me how to get the ball in the hoop." That's the idea, right? Get the ball in the hoop. And he'll say, "Okay, for five years you've

got to develop discipline, do this jogging, eat this food, and do this, and bounce the ball a thousand times, and do your skipping rope.” And you say, “No, no, no man, you didn’t hear me, I want to get the ball in the hoop.” And he will repeat his answer.

Are you hearing my point here? You need to work a long time to prime your body and mind to be able to what seems so simple: get the ball in the hoop.

Same here: our minds are ready to even lessen attachment much less realize emptiness. We need to prime our mind with years of good, hard, disciplined practice: the various purification practices such as water bowl offerings, prostrations, mantra recitations, etc., etc., etc. By doing these practices you will find that you can begin to work on your mind, get the ball in the hoop. You have to prime your mind to enable it to change. It takes masses of purification and masses of merit!

You’ve got to take those on as and when you feel comfortable. Don’t just

jump into prostrations or jump into water bowls, it might have no meaning. But they're things that are actually said to be very powerful purification practices that can help you really deeply remove the junk from your mind that makes it easier next day to control your anger.

There's many ways of working on your mind, many levels of working on your mind. Do you understand what I'm saying? We take on those practices as and when we're ready. That's up to us; we're the boss, not the Buddha. Do you see?

## **MORNING PRACTICE**

Okay, morning practice. Your practice in a day consists of some formal practice because it really helps our mind to have a discipline, a formal practice where you focus on something morning and night; it's really good. His Holiness says it starts your whole day and the right direction if you do something in the morning.

Morning, you could have an altar and do some water bowls: a good way to

start the day: it reminds you of your path, your purpose, it connects you to the buddhas.

Don't think, "Oh well, when I have my breakfast, when I do this, then I'll do it." Because before you know it, you won't do it. It's a really good discipline, I've found, to do it before you do anything else major, before you have your breakfast, before you do anything. If you live in a house with other people or with children especially, it might be more difficult but it's just like anything, once you decide and it does need discipline it doesn't come naturally, you don't want to. But it's really excellent even if it's ten minutes.

And I think the components of a good meditation, you could do a visualization type one, we didn't do any of these this time. You could do visualizing Tara, the female Buddha, or Chenrezig. You can do something like that very simply, short, or you could do something like just visualize the Buddha, take refuge. Just read a few things, say a few mantras of *om mani padme hum*, and then finish. Even just

something small to begin the day with. To have a good combination of some concentration even for two minutes try to focus on your breath, some thinking about something, like you take something to read, you read it, you process it, in the quiet of your own seat. And then you dedicate. That's it. I swear. That's the simple way to start.

## **EVENING PRACTICE**

And then night time you finish with the four opponent powers. If you did just this much at night you've done a marvelous thing. I tell you, it's the most profound practice, it's incredible practice, the four opponent powers with Vajrasattva. And as Lama Zopa says, we are insane not to do it every day.

Then of course you can develop that, grow your practice, you would take refuge and the five layperson's vows.

Eventually as you move along you could take the bodhisattva vows – we didn't go into them. And then you would take initiations in the first stages of tantra.



You keep adding components to the basic structure of a daily practice. Start with something short in the morning, or long it's up to you, but be consistent. To do one hour one day then do nothing the next is not helpful. Better to do ten minutes every day and then you build it up solidly. Does that make sense?

Go one step at a time, according to your capacity.

## **RETREAT FROM TIME TO TIME**

It's excellent to go off on retreat from time to time, even for a weekend. It helps everything go in deep.

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## **DEDICATION**

Okay let's dedicate again. Let's just think, "How fantastic, all been together, all this virtue we created – virtue is just a word, meaning good qualities that's all –listening, thinking, analyzing, being harmonious, talking together, sowing very marvelous seeds in our minds, how fantastic. May they

ripen as quickly as possible, as quickly as possible, so I can become a buddha so I can really truly be of benefit to others no matter how long it takes. Keep this as your long-term goal. It doesn't matter how long it takes. It's amazing.

Ge-wa-di nyur-du-dag  
La-ma sang-gyā drub-gyur-nä  
Dro-wa chig-kyang ma-lü-pa  
De-yi sa-la gö-par-shog

Jang-chhub sem-chhog rin-po-che  
Ma-kye pa -nam kye-gyur-chig  
Kye-wa nyam-pa me-pa-yang  
Gong-nä gong-du pel-war-shog

Okay. That's it everybody! Thank you so much, very kind.



## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**afflictions.** *See* delusions.

**anger.** Aversion. A *delusion* that exaggerates the unpleasant qualities of a person, object, event, etc., which arises when *attachment* doesn't get what it wants.

**attachment.** Desire, craving, clinging, grasping. On the basis of the root delusion, *ignorance*, the main cause of *samsara*, a *delusion* that exaggerates the pleasant qualities of a person, event, action, object, etc., including the self and one's own body, based on the assumption that the having or doing of it causes *happiness*, thus giving rise to expectation, possessiveness, and fear of losing it; one of the main causes of *suffering* at the time of death.

**aversion.** *See* anger.

**beginningless.** All minds, as well as the four elements that constitute the physical world, being governed by the law of cause and effect – this moment of *mind* or matter being the product of a previous moment of that mind or matter – necessarily cannot have a

causeless first moment, a beginning.

*See* karma.

**bodhichitta** (Sanskrit; awakening mind or attitude). The effortless and continuously present wish in the *minds* of *bodhisattvas* to (1) only benefit others, and (2) never give up perfecting themselves and becoming a *buddha* solely for the sake of others. In *tantra*, also refers to *drops*. *See* compassion; Mahayana.

**bodhisattva** (Sanskrit; awakening person). One who has accomplished *bodhichitta*. *See* Mahayana.

**buddha** (Sanskrit). Enlightened being. A person who has achieved *enlightenment*; when capitalized, refers to *Shakyamuni Buddha*. *See* bodhichitta; deity; Mahayana.

**buddhahood**. *See* enlightenment.

**clear light**. Extremely subtle mind, very subtle mind. According to *Vajrayana*, the subtlest level of *mind*, linked inextricably with the extremely subtle *wind*, which occurs naturally at the eighth stage of the *death process*, then leaves the body and goes to another life. Accomplished *yogis and*

*yoginis* can meditate on *emptiness* with this mind at the time of death, even becoming enlightened then. *See* extremely subtle body and extremely subtle mind; gross body and gross mind; subtle body; subtle mind.

**compassion.** Empathy with the *suffering* of others, and the wish that they be free from it and its causes, which gives rise to the wish, “I myself will free them from suffering,” known as great compassion, the unique characteristic of the compassion of the *bodhisattva*; this, in turn, gives rise to *bodhichitta*.

**concentration.** When accomplished in *meditation*, a deep state of focus at a level of *mind* far subtler than the level of consciousness of the day-to-day mind, a level of cognition not posited in contemporary psychology. The fifth of the *six perfections* of a *bodhisattva*.

**consciousness.** *See* mind.

**death process.** As explained in *Vajrayana*, the gradual breakdown of the physical and mental components of a person, described in eight stages,

from the gross to the subtle to the extremely subtle, that culminates in the *extremely subtle mind and wind* leaving the body, going to the *intermediate state*, and then to another life determined by the karmic *seeds* triggered during the process. *See* clear light; gross body and gross mind; reincarnation; subtle body; subtle mind.

**delusions.** Afflictions. Within the categories of positive, negative, and neutral states of mind that constitute the *mental consciousness*, negative states that necessarily distort or exaggerate or embellish whatever they cognize, which are adventitious and therefore can be removed. With *karma*, the cause of *samsara*. *See* anger; attachment; ignorance; liberation; suffering.

**dependent arising.** Every phenomenon exists – “arises” – in dependence upon (1) causes and conditions (impermanent phenomena only), (2) its parts, and, most subtly, (3) the *mind* labeling it, and therefore is empty of *existing from its own side*;



the way things exist conventionally.

*See* emptiness; karma.

**desire.** *See* attachment.

**desire realm.** A realm of *rebirth* within *samsara*, which, in turn, includes six realms: those of *gods and demi-gods*, humans, animals, spirits (often referred to as *hungry ghosts*, one category of spirit), and hell beings. *See* form and formless realms; lower realms; *samsara*.

**Dharma** (Sanskrit). Refers here to Buddha's teachings; the second of the *three jewels*. *See* refuge.

**eighty superstitions.** The conceptual states of *subtle mind* that dissolve during the fifth through seventh of the eight stages of the *death process*.

**emptiness.** Because everything that exists – a self, the *aggregates*, a thing, an event, an action, etc. – is a *dependent arising*, it is therefore empty of *existing from its own side*; the absence in everything that exists of this impossible way of existing. *See* *arya bodhisattva*; ignorance; liberation; meditation.

**enlightened being.** *See* buddha.

**enlightenment.** Full enlightenment, buddhahood. In the *Mahayana*, the *enlightenment* of a *buddha*, the state of having removed all *delusions* and their *imprints* from the *mind* and having accomplished all virtues, forever; characterized by three essential qualities: (1) omniscience, (2) *compassion* for all *sentient beings*, and (3) the power to do whatever needs to be done to benefit them; according to the Mahayana, the potential of every *sentient being*.

**existing from its own side.** Existing inherently, truly-existent. The way every phenomenon appears to exist, that is, without depending upon (1) causes and conditions (impermanent phenomena only), (2) parts, and, most subtly, (3) mind labeling it; an impossible way of being that the root *delusion, ignorance*, grasps at as real, which gives rise to *attachment* and the other delusions and causes the *sufferings* of *samsara*. See dependent arising; emptiness; liberation; meditation.

**extremely subtle body and extremely subtle mind.** Very subtle body and very subtle mind. The extremely subtle *wind* inextricably conjoined with the subtlest level of *mind*, which at conception in the mother's womb mixes with the white *drop* from the father and the red drop from the mother in the *indestructible drop* at the heart *chakra*, where it resides throughout life until it leaves the body at the time of death and continues to another life, propelled by past *karma*. See clear light; death process; gross body and gross mind; subtle body; subtle mind.

**five sense consciousnesses.** The gross consciousness, or *mind*, that functions through the medium of the five sense bases, which are subtle physical energy, of the (1) eyes, (2) ears, (3) nose, (4) tongue, and (5) touch. See gross body and gross mind; mental consciousness.

**form and formless realms.** Two of the three realms of existence within *samsara* – the third being the *desire realm* – which are achieved as a result

of deep meditative absorption. *See* concentration; meditation.

**four opponent powers.** *See* purification.

**FPMT.** Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition. The name given by *Lama Yeshe* in 1975, at *Kopan Monastery*, to his growing network of Tibetan Buddhist centers worldwide. FPMT, Inc. is now established as a non-profit corporation in Portland, Oregon, with which some 160 centers and projects worldwide are affiliated, and of which *Lama Zopa Rinpoche* is the spiritual director.

**full enlightenment.** *See* enlightenment.

**Gelug** (Tibetan). One of the four main traditions of Tibetan Buddhism, founded by *Lama Tsongkhapa* in the early fifteenth century; the others are Nyingma, Kagyu, and Sakya.

**geshe** (Tibetan; spiritual friend). The title conferred on graduates of the ten-to-twenty-year program of philosophical and psychological

studies at *Gelug* Tibetan monastic universities. *See* Lama Tsongkhapa.

**gods and demi-gods.** Occupants of the two highest of the six realms of the *desire realm*, whose experiences are blissful and whose bodies are made of light; the result of *virtuous karma*. Occupants of the *form and formless realms* can also be “gods.” *See* samsara.

**great compassion.** *See* compassion.

**gross body and gross mind.** The blood, bones, sense organs, and so forth that make up the body of a human being (and most animals), which serve as the basis of the gross *mind*: the *five sense consciousnesses* and the grosser level of conceptual thoughts. *See* extremely subtle body and extremely subtle mind; mental consciousness; subtle body; subtle mind.

**guru** (Sanskrit; heavy with knowledge). Lama (Tibetan). A person’s spiritual teacher. *See* guru devotion.

**guru devotion.** Confidence that the *guru* is the *buddha*, the *deity*,

expressed in thought and action, formalized in such practices as *Guru Puja* and other deity practices.

**happiness.** The result of *virtuous karma*. See karma; motivation; suffering.

**hell.** See lower realms.

**His Holiness the Dalai Lama.** The current Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, born in 1935, is the fourteenth in this line of reincarnated *lamas*, revered as the manifestation of the Compassion Buddha; the spiritual and, until 2011 when he resigned, political head of Tibet.

**hungry ghost.** See lower realms.

**ignorance.** The *delusion* that grasps at everything, including the self and the five aggregates, as *existing from its own side*, gives rise to *attachment* and all the other delusions, is the root cause of the *sufferings* of *samsara*, and is eradicated by realizing *emptiness*. See dependent arising; liberation; meditation.

**imprints.** Karmic seeds, or potentials, left in the *mind* when actions of body, speech, and mind are done, which

ripen as future experiences. *See* karma.

**inherent existence.** *See* existing from its' own side.

**intermediate state** (Tibetan: *bardo*).

A state of existence that a person takes the moment their extremely subtle mind leaves the *indestructible drop* at the heart *chakra* at death until taking another life in *samsara*, lasting anywhere from a moment to forty-nine days; said to be similar in experience to a dream. The intermediate state body is subtle and has no resistance to matter and is similar in appearance to the body of the next life. *See* death process; extremely subtle body and extremely subtle mind; reincarnation.

**karma** (Sanskrit). Compounded action, action, *intention*. The intention (mental action), underpinned by a *motivation*, to think or do or say something that impels an action of body or speech, which leaves *imprints* or seeds in the mind that, unless eliminated, will result in the future as (1) a type of rebirth in *samsara*; (2)

the habit to keep thinking or doing or saying it; (3) an experience similar to it; (4) an environmental result. Used loosely to refer to the natural law of cause and effect – that *negative karma* produces *suffering* and *virtuous karma* produces *happiness* – that plays out in the minds and lives of all *sentient beings*. See negative karma; purification; reincarnation; virtuous karma.

**karmic appearances.** The way things, people, events, etc., appear to *sentient beings* – as pleasant, unpleasant, etc. – according to their past *karma*.

**Kopan Monastery.** The monastery established in 1970 by *Lama Yeshe* and *Lama Zopa Rinpoche* in Nepal, five miles northeast of Kathmandu, where now some 350 monks study the full range of topics of the main *Gelug* monastic universities, such as Sera Je, one of the colleges of *Sera Monastery*, with which it is affiliated. Its sister monastery of 350 nuns nearby, Kachoe Ghakyil, follow the same course of study, with a newly



established branch of 20 nuns in Sarnath, India. Kopan also holds courses throughout the year for visitors from other countries, including the annual November Course, the first of which was in 1970, taught by Rinpoche.

**lama.** *See* guru.

**Lama Tsongkhapa** (1357–1419).

Scholar, *yogi*, and teacher, founder of the *Gelug* tradition of Tibetan Buddhism; author of many texts, including *Lamrim Chenmo*.

**Lama Yeshe** (1935–1984). Lama Thubten Yeshe; the *guru* of *Lama Zopa Rinpoche* since he was 14. Born in Tibet and educated since childhood at the Je college of *Sera Monastery* in Lhasa; escaped into exile in 1959 and settled in Kathmandu, Nepal, in 1967; founded, with Rinpoche, the *FPMT* in 1975 after they started teaching Dharma to people from the West at *Kopan Monastery* in 1970.

**Lama Zopa Rinpoche.** The spiritual director of the *FPMT*, which he founded with *Lama Thubten Yeshe*. A

Sherpa, Rinpoche is recognized as the reincarnation of the *Lawudo Lama*.

**lamrim** (Tibetan; graded path). Path to *enlightenment*. Coined by *Lama Tsongkhapa*. Buddha's sutra teachings, based on *Lamp for the Path* by Atisha (982–1054), presented as a course of study and practice according to three levels of capability: (1) lower, motivated by the wish to not be reborn in the *lower realms*; (2) middle, motivated by the wish to not be reborn in *samsara*; and (3) great, motivated by the wish to become a *buddha*. Practitioners of the *Lesser Vehicle* practice the first two levels; those of the *Mahayana* practice all three. See *Lamrim Chenmo*.

**Lamrim Chenmo** (Tibetan; The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path). The most extensive of *Lama Tsongkhapa's* commentaries on the *lamrim*.

**Lawudo Lama.** See *Lama Zopa Rinpoche*.

**liberation.** (Sanskrit: nirvana.) Liberation from *samsara*; liberation from *suffering* and its causes.

Achieved when the *delusions* and their *imprints*, the obstacles to liberation, have been removed from the *mind*, thus eliminating the causes of *samsara*; the goal of the *Lesser Vehicle* practitioner. *See* emptiness.

**lower realms.** Three realms of rebirth among the six of the *desire realm*: those of (1) the animals, (2) the spirits (often referred to as hungry ghosts (Sanskrit, *preta*), one type of spirit), and (3) the hell beings; the result of *negative karma* and each characterized by their own particular *sufferings*. The vast majority of all sentient beings are said to exist in the lower realms. *See* reincarnation; *samsara*.

**Mahayana** (Sanskrit; Great Vehicle). The path of the *bodhisattva*, the goal of which is the *enlightenment* of a *buddha*; includes *Paramitayana* and *Vajrayana*.

**mantra.** A series of Sanskrit words and/or syllables, some of which are recited in conjunction with the practice of a particular *deity* that are

the verbal expression of the qualities of that deity.

**meditation.** In Tibetan, *gom*, to familiarize. A process of familiarizing the mind with (1) that which is virtuous and (2) that which is true. There are two types of formal meditation techniques (taught in the *Mahayana* as the fifth and sixth of the *six perfections*): the goal of the first, calm abiding, is to gain single-pointed *concentration*; and the goal of the second, special insight (or wisdom), is to gain a *realization* of *emptiness*, which is induced by the concentrated mind precisely and logically analyzing, for example, *dependent arising*. In *Vajrayana*, concentration by *the yogi or yogini* on themselves as the *deity* is combined with insight into emptiness. Realizations of any of the points of the path to *enlightenment* can be gained by combining concentration and analysis.

**mental continuum.** Mindstream. The *beginningless* and endless continuity of *mind* of individual beings.

**mental consciousness.** The various conceptual states of *mind* as well as *subtle mind* and extremely subtle mind. *See* five sense consciousnesses; mental continuum.

**mind.** Consciousness. Defined as that which is formless, or clear, and which can cognize or know; includes both *mental consciousness* and the *five sense consciousnesses*. *See* beginningless; extremely subtle body and extremely subtle mind; gross body and gross mind; mental continuum; sentient being; subtle body; subtle mind.

**morality.** Virtue; ethical; positive action or thought. *See* positive karma.

**motivation.** Usually used to refer to the attitude that underpins an *intention* to think or do or say something: a negative motivation causes the *karma* to be nonvirtuous and the result *suffering*, a positive motivation causes the karma to be virtuous and the result happiness. *See* negative karma; virtuous karma.

**negative action.** *See* negative karma.

**negative karma.** Negative action, negative karmas, nonvirtuous action, nonvirtuous *karma*. With *delusions*, the main cause of *suffering*. See purification.

**nirvana** (Sanskrit). See liberation.

**nonvirtuous thought.** A *delusion*, such as anger, jealousy, arrogance, etc. See karma; motivation.

**omniscience.** See enlightenment.

**Pabongka Rinpoche** (1871–1941). An influential Gelug lama of the Me College of *Sera Monastery* in Lhasa, Tibet; the main guru of the Senior and Junior Tutors of *His Holiness the Dalai Lama*.

**Paramitayana** (Sanskrit; *Perfection Vehicle*).

**Perfection Vehicle** (Sanskrit: Paramitayana). The *Mahayana* sutra teachings.

**purification.** The weakening of *negative karmas* and *imprints*, often accomplished by doing practices such as Vajrasttva and the Thirty-five Buddhas in conjunction with the four opponent powers: (1) regret, (2)

reliance, (3) the remedy, and (4) resolve.

**realization.** An understanding of any of the points of the path to *enlightenment* gained through the union of the two kinds of *meditation*.

**realms.** See *samsara*.

**rebirth.** See *reincarnation*.

**refuge.** Heartfelt reliance upon the *three jewels*, Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, on the path to *enlightenment*.

**reincarnation.** Rebirth. The natural process of continuous birth and death within the various realms of *samsara* that all *sentient beings*, propelled by the force of their past *karma*, have been going through since *beginningless* time and will go through until they achieve *liberation*. *Buddhas* choose to be reborn in the various realms for the benefit of others, for as long as *suffering* exists.

**renunciation.** The wish to be liberated from *samsara*, based on the understanding that the happiness that comes from *attachment* is in the nature of *suffering*, and that suffering is caused by *karma* and *delusions*.

**Rinpoche** (Tibetan; Precious One). An honorific when addressing or referring to reincarnated lamas and one's own *guru* or other lamas.

**samsara** (Sanskrit; cyclic existence). Being caught up in the process of death, the *intermediate state*, and rebirth in the desire, form, and formless realms, propelled by past *karma*. Also used to refer to the aggregates of a person going from one life to the next in the various *realms*. See death process; ignorance; liberation; lower realms; reincarnation.

**Sangha** (Sanskrit; spiritual community). The third of the *three jewels*. A group of at least four fully ordained Buddhist monks or nuns; often refers to Buddhist monks and nuns in general.

**seeds, karmic** See imprints.

**sense consciousness.** See five sense consciousnesses.

**sentient being.** In Tibetan, *sem-chen*, *mind*-possessor. Refers to all beings other than *buddhas*.



**Shakyamuni Buddha** (563–483BC).

The fourth of the one thousand founding *buddhas* of this present world age, Lord Buddha was born a prince of the Shakya clan in North India, renounced his kingdom, achieved *enlightenment* at the age of thirty-five, and then taught the paths to *liberation* and enlightenment until he passed away at the age of eighty.

**six perfections.** Final stages of the *bodhisattva* path: (1) generosity, (2) morality, (3) patience, (4) perseverance, (5) *concentration*, and (5) wisdom, or *realization* of *emptiness*.

**spirit.** See lower realms.

**subtle body.** The system of *channels*, *winds*, and red and white *drops* inextricably linked with the *subtle mind*. See death process; extremely subtle body and extremely subtle mind; gross body and gross mind.

**subtle mind.** The *eighty superstitions* and the *minds* of white appearance, red appearance or red increase, and dark, or black, appearance that occur during the final four stages of the

*death process.* See extremely subtle body and extremely subtle mind; gross body and gross mind.

**suffering.** The various levels of experience of *sentient beings* in the three realms of *samsara*, caused by *karma* and *delusions*: (1) the suffering of suffering, (2) the suffering of change, and (3) pervasive, compounded suffering. See ignorance.

**sutra** (Sanskrit). The *Lesser Vehicle* and Perfection Vehicle discourses of Buddha; a scriptural text and the teachings and practices it contains.

**tantra** (Sanskrit). The teachings and practices of the *Vajrayana*; a text containing those teachings.

**Ten nonvirtuous actions.** (1) killing, (2) stealing, (3) sexual misconduct, (4) lying, (5) harsh speech, (6) divisive talk, (7) idle talk, (8) craving, (9) ill-will, (10) wrong views.

**true existence.** See existing from its own side.

**Vajrayana** (Sanskrit). Tantra. The more advanced of the two stages of the *Mahayana* path to enlightenment.

**virtuous karma.** Positive *karma*. An action of body, speech, or *mind* driven by a positive *motivation*, which causes *happiness*.

**virtuous thought.** Positive thought. A virtuous state of *mind* such as love, *compassion*, etc. *See motivation*.

**vows of individual liberation**  
(Sanskrit: pratimoksha).

**winds.** According to Vajrayana, various subtle air energies that flow in the *channels* of the body, which enable the body to function and which are associated with the different levels of *mind* – it is said that “the mind rides on the winds” – and which, with the channels and the *drops*, constitute the *subtle body*. *See* extremely subtle body and extremely subtle mind; gross body and gross mind.

**yogi and yogini** (Sanskrit).

Accomplished *Vajrayana* male and female meditator respectively. *See* meditation.