

# TIBETAN BUDDHISM CENTER FOR WORLD PEACE

## San Antonio, Texas

### Key Practices of the Path:

#### A Condensed Lam Rim Overview for Western Students and Practitioners

#### The Initial Scope—Meditation 2, Part 1:

#### “Impermanence, Death, and Dharma”

The following is based on teachings by the Tibetan master Tsongkhapa from *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment (Lam Rim Chen Mo)* and the renowned Tibetan teacher Pabongka Rinpoche from *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, as well as teachings given by Ven. Thubten Chodron at Dharma Friendship Foundation in Seattle, Washington. Prepared and compiled by Christopher Moroney.

“*This life is as impermanent as a water bubble. Remember how quickly it decays and death comes.*”

—Lama Tsongkhapa, from “The Foundation of All Good Qualities”

We are studying and meditating on the gradual stages of the path to enlightenment—or the initial-, intermediate-, and great-scopes of *Lam Rim* topics—that were introduced to Tibet by the Indian Buddhist master Atisha, and further developed by the great Tibetan monk and philosopher, Tsongkhapa.

#### Review of the first initial-scope *Lam Rim* topic, “What Makes a Human Life Precious?”

In the first meditation topic of the initial-scope of the *Lam Rim* we talked about what makes a human life precious. This was to help us recognize the rare opportunity that exists for us in terms of making significant spiritual progress on the path because of our fortunate human life—to shake us out of a deeply ingrained tendency we have to take our current situation for granted, and to wake us up to the incredible opportunity we have for positive transformation right here and now.

We discussed how the Buddha is not asking us to believe in him or his teachings, but *is* asking us to thoroughly investigate them. If we’re uncertain about particular assumptions in Buddhism, we can take them on board tentatively like any good scientist would—as hypotheses. That way we can look into the Buddha’s teachings without completely committing to them, so we can test their logical or observable consequences for ourselves.

We talked about the freedoms we currently have from eight kinds of existences with no chance to practice the Dharma (*the eight freedoms*), as well as ten favorable aspects, or *the ten endowments*, of our present human life, both personal and societal, that are conducive to practicing the Dharma. We discussed the *short-term benefits* we can derive from this life—having a good life now, as well as preparing for our death and future rebirth—and we discussed the long-term, or *ultimate benefits* of liberating ourselves from cyclic existence and attaining complete enlightenment. We also talked about how to make our lives meaningful with *moment to moment benefits* by transforming everyday actions we engage in to help us develop and generate love and compassion. And we talked about *the rarity of this life*. It’s difficult to get a precious human life because it’s hard to create the causes for it. It is rare because there are so few human beings compared to other forms of beings. Through the analogy of the sea turtle surfacing to the ocean every 100 years, we can get a sense of how difficult it is to get a precious human rebirth and meet with the Dharma.

Now we move on to the second meditation topic in the initial-scope of the *Lam Rim*.

#### Impermanence, Death, and Dharma

Lama Tsongkhapa calls this topic “Mindfulness of Death”, and Pabongka Rinpoche gives it the title, “Remembering Death”. According to Tsongkhapa, one of the errors that keeps us from taking full

advantage of our precious human life is that we misconceive the impermanence of our life as if it was permanent. We continually have the thought, “I will not die today.” Everyone has the idea that death will come later, certainly not today. However, with each passing day we think, “I will not die today; I will not die today,” and we cling to this thought until the moment of our death. Finally, on the day of our death, we will have died on a day that we called “today”.

As long as we have this attitude we continually think only of how to achieve happiness and avoid suffering in this life alone. We think, “I need this and I need that,” and we don’t practice the Dharma because we don’t think about things of great importance like liberation from cyclic existence and achieving enlightenment. Although we may study, reflect, and meditate on the Dharma, it will be only for the sake of this life and whatever positive potential we generate won’t have lasting power.

With this *Lam Rim* topic, we begin by talking about the disadvantages of not thinking about death and the advantages of thinking about it. Our usual reaction is that we don’t want to think about death. It’s the thing that we least want to talk or think about in our lives, and yet it is the one thing that we definitely will do. The one certain thing that *all* of us have to go through and experience is the thing we least want to face. We don’t want to face the reality of it. And so we make death fearful by refusing to think about it. But it’s still going to happen, whether we think about it or don’t think about it.

The Dharma approach to death is to face it honestly. Instead of letting the fear of death stay in the dark where it frightens us, we turn the light on and look at it for what it is. It puts us in touch with reality and energizes our Dharma practice. Remembering death gives us a framework with which to look at our life, appreciate it, and take full advantage of the opportunities that we have.

When we remember our own mortality, it helps us see what is important in our life and what isn’t important. It’s very helpful when we’re confused and anxious about some situation that has arisen and we don’t know what to do about it. We can think, “At the time I’m dying and leaving this life, moving toward my next rebirth, as I look back at this situation, what would have been the best thing for me to do?” Then we spend some time to really review the situation in our mind from the framework of remembering our death. The solution that comes to us will be clear, grounded, courageous, and far less emotionally charged than if we had gone with a knee-jerk reaction.

Or if we’re really angry at someone or something we can think, “When I’m dying and looking back on this, do I want to be thinking about how angry I was at this person or thing? Is it really going to be so important to me at the time of my death? Why put so much emotional energy into it now, if when I die it’s not going to have any relevance to me?”

Or when we find ourselves worrying too much about something, we can think, “At the time of death, is all this worry going to do me any good? No! I don’t need this worry. I don’t need to be so concerned about this.”

When we think about our life from the perspective of death, all of the little things that make us fret and worry and get anxious don’t matter anymore. Our mind automatically becomes more peaceful. This is one of the ways we can use the remembrance of death to improve the quality of our life. This is the reason why the Buddha talked about death and impermanence.

## **The six disadvantages of not remembering death**

### **1. If we don’t think about death, we won’t remember the Dharma**

If we don’t remember death, we’ll think only about this life, and get caught up in its many demands and activities—food, clothes, acquiring stuff, making money, building up our career, having kids, building up our reputation, watching TV, surfing the internet, going to concerts and parties, traveling, and on and on. When we don’t remember our own death and the impermanence of our life, we’ll forget about the Dharma. Who needs the Dharma?

This is how most of our society lives. Nobody wants to think about death. Unless it’s in our face, we pretend it doesn’t exist. The whole purpose of life becomes having as much pleasure as we can for as

long as we can. We run from one pleasure to another in our attempt to be happy.

In terms of our spiritual life, when we don't think about death, we don't think about the Dharma, and our practice becomes sporadic and shallow. We can't get ourselves to sit down and meditate, or we feel our Dharma practice isn't going well. One of the reasons for this is that we don't think about our impermanence and the fact that we're going to leave this life. Without properly thinking about that fact, we don't think about the necessity of the Dharma. And if we don't think the Dharma is necessary, what motivation is there for us to practice?

## **2. Even if we remember the Dharma, we won't practice it**

Even though we all know death will eventually come, we keep thinking, "But I will not die today, I will not die today." We grasp on to the idea that we are not going to die today, and think, "Oh, I can practice Dharma next year or the year after. I've got too much to do right now. I've got to get my career, my family, and everything else going on. When I have less to do, then I'll practice." We are forever procrastinating. So we don't feel any urgency about our practice. In the meantime, while we are not practicing Dharma, our human life is running out. Once our life ends, like water under the bridge, it is no more, and we will have lost our opportunity to practice.

## **3. Even if we practice, we won't practice properly**

Even if we do practice, we won't do it purely because our mind is concerned with worldly things. These are known as the *eight worldly concerns*, or the *eight worldly dharmas*. We'll come back and explain this one in depth.

## **4. Even if we remember the Dharma, we won't practice it consistently**

Even if we remember the Dharma, if we don't remember death, we'll lose the determination to practice it with conviction all the time. Our practice will lack intensity, strength, and consistency.

This explains why we'll practice for a while, and then lose interest. Then we come back to it and lose interest again. We're on again, off again. Because we don't think about death, we don't practice every day. Even if we do sit down to practice, there's not much depth to it. When we say our prayers, we say them as if we've got to say them just to get them done. Our practice lacks conviction and consistency because we haven't been thinking seriously enough about our own mortality. We don't have the intensity and interest that thinking about our death gives to our practice.

## **5. By not remembering death, we get involved in a lot of negative actions.**

Another disadvantage of not remembering death is that our craving for things of this life increases, and in order to get them, we help some people and harm others. We develop attachment, hostility, and ignorance. We fight and argue with people. We don't think of the long-term consequences of our actions. If it's convenient to lie, we lie because we're not thinking about death, we're not thinking about karma, we're not thinking about the problems that our negative actions will bring us in the future. As we get more involved in negative actions, our mind becomes more obscured, it gets harder to practice and we get more confused. It turns into a vicious downward spiral.

## **6. At the time of death, we die with regrets**

Another disadvantage of not remembering death is that when we reach the time of death, we have a lot of regret. When we're dying, we look back on our life and we ask ourselves, "What have I done? How has my life been meaningful? We'll see that our possessions, the things we've yearned for and given so much of our attention to in the past, are of no benefit whatever. We'll see that we've spent our life trying to make people think we're important, trying to build ourselves up so we can believe we're worthwhile. We've lied to get more money; we've lied to cover up all the devious things we've done. We've spent our life getting angry at people, holding grudges, and not talking to some people for years and years.

At the time of death, we'll realize that we haven't made the Dharma part of our mind-stream, something that surely would have been of help to us. We won't know how to relax our mind and make it peaceful before we die.

By remembering death our mind stays very clear. If we remember death, we will remember that it might come on any day, at any time. This will make us want to have our emotional life in order. We won't want to have relationships with hard feelings and grudges. We won't want to have remorse and regret and guilt. By maintaining an awareness of death, we can clean up a lot of the emotional baggage we've been living with for decades, that just leads to confusion at the time of our death. It also will make our lives more peaceful now as well.

### **Elaboration of the third disadvantage: our practice gets mixed with worldly concerns**

Now we're returning to the third disadvantage of not remembering death: even if we practice the Dharma, we won't do it purely because our minds are concerned with worldly things. Issues involving reputation, competition, jealousy, attachment and anger can get mixed in with our Dharma practice. Because we aren't thinking about death and our own mortality, we lose the purity of our practice.

Specifically, there are eight worldly concerns (a.k.a. eight worldly dharmas) that can really distract us from our practice. These eight worldly concerns are at the line in the sand between what is a worldly action and what is a Dharma action. This is a very important point that is very easy to miss! Dharma action is not saying prayers and looking holy and making numerous prostrations in front of a big, beautiful Buddha statue on a big, beautiful altar. Dharma action is what our mind is doing—whether our mind is free of these eight worldly concerns or not. There is a story that the Tibetan teachers tell regarding this.

The Tibetans have many stupas and relic monuments. If you travel to Dharamsala in India you can see folks going for their daily walks around these relic monuments with their malas chanting, "*Om Mani Padme Hum, Om Mani Padme Hum...*" Then they talk to each other for a little bit and maybe share some harmless gossip about the neighbors. Then they chant: "*Om Mani Padme Hum, Om Mani Padme Hum...*" And then they talk a little bit more and chant a few more "*Om Mani Padme Hum's.*"

Well, there was one man who decided that he was going to practice the Dharma. So he started doing circumambulations around one of these stupas. His teacher came by and said, "It's very good you're circumambulating the stupa but it would be better if you practice the Dharma."

So the man said to himself, "I'll prostrate to the stupa." The next day he was out there prostrating up and down, up and down, over and over, perspiring profusely. His teacher came by and said, "It's very good you're prostrating, but it would be better if you practice the Dharma."

So the man thought, "Okay, I'll try something else." The next day he was back out there again, this time reading a Dharma text out loud and thinking, "Now I'm doing something holy!" Again his teacher came by and said, "It's very good you're reading the Sutras but it would be better if you practice the Dharma."

By this time, the guy was really puzzled. "Am I not practicing the Dharma? I was circumambulating. I was prostrating. I'm reading the Buddha's words. What do you mean by 'practice the Dharma'?" And his teacher said, "Transform your mind."

In other words, it's not the external things one does that determines whether one is practicing the Dharma. It's the mind, the mental state that's doing the external things that determines whether one is practicing the Dharma. We can never judge whether an action is Dharma or not Dharma from the action itself. We have to look at the mind that's doing it.

This is why Buddhism emphasizes our motivation over and over again. That's how we cut out all the hypocrisy. If we're not mindful of our motivation and we think being religious means doing all these pious looking external things, then we've really lost the plot. We may be doing something that looks great externally, but if we have the same old mind, we're still not transforming.

This is a very important point—to always be very aware and question ourselves, "Why am I practicing? Why am I doing this? Is it so I can get recognition from my fellow Dharma practitioners? Or praise from

my teachers? Or even approval from the Buddha?” We bring a lot of our old behavior patterns into the Dharma. If we’re not aware of our motivation, it can all come up. We always need to ask ourselves, “What is it I’m really seeking to get from what I’m doing?” This is what differentiates a Dharma action from a worldly action.

A worldly action is one that is motivated by concern for the happiness of this life—“My happiness now. My pleasure now.” This life’s happiness. That’s a worldly motivation. While there’s nothing particularly wrong with this kind of motivation, it doesn’t rise to the level of altruism that a human being is capable of, and that makes the attainment of enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings possible.

### **The eight worldly concerns**

The eight worldly concerns, or eight worldly dharmas, are ways in which the attachment to the happiness of this life manifests. It’s a framework with which we can evaluate our own motivations and see if any of these eight worldly concerns are involved in them. There are four pairs of these concerns and each pair involves an attachment and an aversion to a specific thing. They are:

1. Attachment to having material things and aversion to not having material things.
2. Attachment to praise and aversion to blame.
3. Attachment to having a good reputation and aversion to having a bad one.
4. Attachment to pleasant sensations and aversion to unpleasant sensations.

As we go through these, think within the framework of these questions—which ones do we have? Are there advantages? Are there disadvantages? What are the disadvantages and what can we do about them?

### **Attachment to having material things and aversion to not having material things**

We like to possess stuff. We want material things—clothes, cars, shoes, houses, boats, vacations, diplomas, degrees, money—you name it, and we can be probably be attached to it.

The material things, in and of themselves, are not the problem. There’s nothing wrong with having material things. It’s the mind that is attached to them and clings to them that is the problem. “I’ve got to have these things to be happy.” “I’ve got to have these things to consider myself worthwhile or consider myself successful.” Or “I’ve got to have these things to be able to face the world and present myself to the world.” Or “I’ve got to have these things just to feel good.”

We always want more and we always want better. Our whole economy is built around this first worldly dharma. Advertising encourages it. We’re encouraged to want and to crave and to need and to get attached to things. We all have different things that we’re attached to. Our minds can get attached to anything and everything. Give it the opportunity, and it will stick to something.

The other worldly concern in the first pair is aversion to not having material things. We’re encouraged to be miserly. We don’t want to give our things away or share them with others because we don’t want to be separated from *our* stuff. Look how hard it can be for us to give things away, to throw things out. We feel like we’re losing something. Even to give money away to a charity we feel if we give it away we won’t have it.

We also have aversion to not getting things. A card or gift on our birthday or anniversary. Or we don’t get a raise, we don’t get that extra money, or the economy goes bad and our money isn’t worth as much. People killed themselves when the stock market crashed in 1929. It’s all because of this clinging to material things and aversion to not having them.

This attachment and aversion isn’t due to our culture. The Buddha gave these teachings over 2500 years ago in ancient India, so it’s not just the society. Our society definitely develops and aggravates this

tendency—even exploits it—but this concern is there in all societies. It's the mind.

Our attachment to having material things and aversion to not having material things create confusion in our lives. The problem is not with the material things. The hundred dollar bill is not the problem. Our attachment to it is the problem. Our state of mind is reflected in how we relate to material things. If we have a lot of things and we can't let go of them, there's a lot of attachment. If we have a lot of things and we can easily give them away, then there is nothing wrong with having a lot of things, because there's no attachment in the mind. The idea is not that we have to give everything away and become ascetics.

On the other hand, there are things that give us a lot of problems because we're so attached to them. All the sentimental things, the little knick knacks and family heirlooms. We can be attached to any kind of junk we want to. The mind of clinging and attachment is the difficulty.

We often give gifts to other people with an impure motivation, for example, giving someone a gift so they'll like us. Giving someone a gift so that every time they use it, they'll think of us: "I'm giving this to you so you'll think how generous I am." Whenever we give a gift to our spiritual teacher we have to be really mindful about why we're giving it. It's a challenge to give them a gift with a pure motivation. With a lot of gurus, almost everything they get, they turn around and give it away.

Often when we give gifts to people, it's not with a completely pure motivation. As a result, when we give somebody something and they give it away, we get very offended—as if they don't value us because they gave that thing away. If we've really given it, it no longer belongs to us. It belongs to the other person. They can do whatever that want with it. So we really have to check our motivation for giving.

### **Attachment to praise and aversion to blame**

The next worldly concern is attachment to praise. This is the mind that loves to hear ourselves getting complimented. "You look so good. You're so nice. You have such a good figure. You're so handsome. You're so beautiful, You're so talented. You're so sensitive. You're so kind. You're so brilliant. You're so creative." Whatever it is that we want to be identified with, we love it when other people acknowledge it. We feed off the nice words about ourselves. If we don't get enough praise, we can even manipulate things in certain ways to make sure we get the praise we want to hear. For instance we'll say something like, "I really messed up on that job," hoping that the person we're talking to will take that as a hint to say, "No, you did a really good job!" Or we'll say, "I really feel like I look terrible today," and the other person is supposed to compliment us: "What do you mean, you look *great!*" Or if someone we're close to doesn't praise us enough we get angry at them.

Conversely, we have a very strong phobia about any kind of criticism. When people tell us about our mistakes, even if it is a mistake we actually made, we get mad at them. Even if we made the mistake, the other person is bad and wrong because they saw it. We get angry at them. Or we get angry at people because they mistakenly thought we made a mistake. We're so sensitive. We don't want to hear one slight word that might indicate that we're not the picture of perfection.

You can see the problems we get into because of our attachment to praise and aversion to blame. Somebody criticizes us, then we get angry and we speak harshly to them. Or we try to divide their relationship with somebody else. We bad-mouth them to somebody else, to split them up. Or we make up some lies just to get even at this person who harmed us. We gossip for hours about all these horrible people who don't see how wonderful we are. We get very confused and create a lot of negative karma because of this very strong attachment to praise and aversion to blame.

If we don't know how to evaluate ourselves with a clear mind and see what our good qualities are and what we need to improve on, then we usually go through life with the feeling of "I'm not very worthwhile." We have low self-esteem. Because we don't believe in ourselves, because we can't look at our own behavior and our own mind and recognize what our own qualities are, we need other people's praises and kind words to build up our own confidence. We need other people to tell us what those things are. We think that if other people tell us we have those qualities, then we must have them and we must be good people.

Conversely, if they tell us that we've bungled something, that we're awful, then we must really be awful. We completely believe what other people say about us. That's why we get so mad when they tell us unpleasant things. If we didn't really believe what they said about us, why get mad at them? If we had the ability to evaluate ourselves correctly, then why get mad if somebody else sees a fault that we know we have? We know we have it, what's wrong with admitting that we have it? Everybody else sees it. It's like somebody telling you that you have a nose on your face. It's there. Everybody sees it. "Yes, I made that mistake." Why get so mad when other people say it? We get so mad because we don't do the kind of internal evaluation that honestly looks at our own weaknesses.

Similarly if somebody blames us for something we didn't do or they exaggerate what we did do, we get upset and belligerent. Why be upset if we didn't do it? Again, if we were able to look at ourselves, and we knew our own reality, if somebody's accusing us of something that isn't our problem, then why be upset about it? We get upset only because we're attached to what other people say, we're attached to what they think. It's only because we're out of touch with ourselves that we completely give all this power to other people's words.

As an antidote to the attachment to praise and aversion to blame, at the end of the day look and see what went well and what needs to be improved. We look at our own lives in a very honest way without being overly critical, without being overly judgmental, and without our proud, arrogant mind. Just look and see "What went well today? What did I do well?" And feel happy about it. Not to get proud, but to rejoice and acknowledge that the quality's there.

And when we've messed up, let's acknowledge it. It's not so bad. It's not such a catastrophe. It can be purified. It can be amended in some way. If we do that, then we're not going to give the power of our self-respect and self-confidence to other people. We're going to retain it for ourselves because we'll be able to look at ourselves accurately. That would solve a whole lot of problems for us. If we constantly rely upon what other people say about us and think it's true, we're going to get awfully confused.

But if we can look at ourselves, then if somebody comes along and tells us we made this mistake, we can check up and say, "You're right, I did. Thank you for pointing that out." And we don't feel like we're losing any of our ego territory because we admit our mistakes. So what if we made a mistake? As long as we have the Buddha nature, underneath we have this very firm foundation for confidence. So what's so wrong about admitting our mistakes?

This is something we need to do some in-depth meditation on. And we need to do it repeatedly, because this worldly concern of praise and blame is a very deep-rooted one.

### **Attachment to having a good reputation and aversion to having a bad one**

The next pair of worldly concerns is attachment to having a good reputation and aversion to having a bad one. This pair is slightly different from praise and blame. Praise and blame refer to the nice, ego-pleasing, pleasant words said directly to us. Reputation refers to the opinion that a large group of people have of us. For example, whatever field of work we're in, we want everybody in our field to think that we're good at what we do. We want to be known as competent, reliable, talented and wonderful. Whatever it is—our career, our hobbies—we're all attached to having a good reputation in that field. One person wants to have a reputation as a good guitar player. Another person as a good skier. Another person as a good mechanic.

Again the problem lies not with the reputation, but with our attachment to the reputation. We want everybody in that big group to know how good we are. We want to have a good reputation in our family. We want the family to know that we're successful. We want to prove ourselves to the family. We can also have such an attachment in a Dharma group—we want everybody in the group to think we're wonderful.

Conversely, whenever we hear that a bunch of people are talking behind our backs and spreading bad rumors about us, we go completely berserk: "My reputation! They're all criticizing me! Nobody will respect me. Nobody will listen to me. Nobody will come to me for business. What's going to happen to me?" You can see the kind of turmoil that attachment to reputation creates in our life. It also explains why

when we go into a room, we have a very difficult time listening to other people; we're too busy presenting them with the image that we want them to have of us.

We have this image that we want to create in the public eye. When we go to meet strangers, we pull out our business card, "I am the Director of this, Chairperson of this, Head of this... And these are my hobbies." Especially when we meet new people—we almost try to package ourselves and sell ourselves. Here's my personality. Here's how you're supposed to think of me. Don't you like me? We're very attached to this kind of reputation. If the person on the other end is completely blasé about all of our great qualities, we feel very offended. If they cut us off or are bored by our exposé of ourselves, we feel very offended. And we are completely uninterested in what they have to say. We can't listen to them; we are too busy creating our own good reputation.

### **Attachment to pleasant sensations and aversion to unpleasant sensations**

This last set of worldly concerns is attachment to pleasant sensations and aversion to unpleasant sensations. This is attachment to any kind of pleasure that comes to our senses.

For example with the eye sense, we always want to see beautiful things. We want to have beautiful paintings in our house. We want to have a beautiful house. When we go on vacation, we want to stay in a beautiful place. We want to have clothes that are attractive. We want to have a car that looks really cool and is a beautiful color. We don't want to see ugly things. We get very upset when we have to see ugly things. So we spend all of our time trying to see beautiful things and avoid all the ugly things that we don't want to see.

We're attached to sounds coming to us via our ear sense. We want to hear beautiful music. We want to hear lots of beautiful music. Beautiful sounds. Anything that is beautiful to our ear. We don't want to hear anything awful to our ear, like screeching brakes, or nails on a chalkboard, or whatever TV news program we love to hate. Again, we spend our time trying to get beautiful sounds and trying to get away from the ugly ones.

Smells. We want to smell beautiful things with our nose sense—fragrant flowers, good food, or whatever it is you want to smell. We don't want to smell the bad things. We have sprays and air purifiers to get rid of those.

We want to have nice tastes coming through our tongue sense. We are very attached to food. This is one of the big ones. Have you ever noticed how much time we spend talking about food? This is really indicative of the amount of attachment we have for it. We talk about all the good places to eat. We talk about good recipes and what we ate at certain places. We talk about what we want to eat. We go out to a restaurant and spend half an hour discussing everything on the menu so as to ensure we pick the best food from the whole menu. And then of course when it comes and it isn't as good as we want, we get very upset. "Waiter, waiter, come here, come here!" We talk in a loud voice and everybody in the restaurant turns around to stare. "This is overcooked; this is not what it's supposed to be!" And we get very offensive. "Take it back! Make me something else!"

We're so attached to food. All the time. We eat and then we want to go have ice cream and chocolate or whatever it is that we're attached to. We are so attached to having good things to eat. And we have so much aversion to eating bad things.

We want to feel nice soft things with our tactile body sense. We want to have beautiful things to touch. We want to be warm enough. We don't want to be cold but we want to be cool enough; we don't want to be hot. So much time is spent just to make sure that our body experiences everything that is most marvelous. We enjoy ourselves in this hot tub or that swimming pool. We spend our precious human life that we can use to attain liberation and enlightenment, running after sense pleasures.

### **Disadvantages of the eight worldly concerns**

One of the chief disadvantages of these eight worldly concerns is that we totally waste our time. We can be using this life to get in touch with our Buddha potential and make it grow. We can use it to develop our



internal peace, loving-kindness, openness, receptivity and compassion. Instead of using our time to develop these qualities, we use it to get material things. We use it to make sure that we are getting enough praise, protecting our reputation, looking for nice things to eat, to see, or to hear. We completely waste our time.

In addition, by seeking all these things that we like, or running away from things we don't like, we create a lot of negative karma. If you look at the reasons for doing the ten non-virtuous actions, they all relate to these eight worldly concerns. Why do we steal things? Because of attachment to material stuff or attachment to reputation. Why is there unwise sexual behavior? Attachment to tactile sensation. Or attachment to reputation, attachment to praise. Why do we speak harsh words? Because somebody offended our reputation or somebody didn't give us the material we need or somebody stole from us or somebody doesn't appreciate us. Or somebody burnt the food.

The disadvantages from the Dharma point of view of engaging in the eight worldly concerns become very clear. Not only do they make us very confused and unhappy this lifetime, they make us create the negative karma to wind up with more problems in our future lives. Also, they completely obscure us from utilizing our beautiful, inner human potential. Therefore the line in the sand between a worldly action and a Dharma action is whether an action is done motivated by one of these eight worldly concerns or not.

## **Review**

All this discussion was done under the topic of thinking about death because by thinking about death, it will give us a way of looking at our own life so that we can live more peacefully now, prepare for our future lives and realize our own potential. If we don't think about death, we will not think about the Dharma, so we will not think about using our potential or planning for future lives or doing anything spiritual. If we don't think about death, then even if we think about the Dharma, we procrastinate, we postpone our Dharma practice. Or even if we remember the Dharma, we don't do it purely because our mind gets all mixed up with the eight worldly concerns. For example, we start being generous in order to get a good reputation.

If we don't think about death, then even if we practice the Dharma, our practice isn't consistent; it isn't intense; it isn't energetic. We're on again, off again. All our excuses and rationalizations overpower us and we create a lot of negative karma by acting destructively. And then at the time of death, we will have a lot of regret when we look back on our whole life and ask ourselves: "What was the meaning of my life? What was the purpose? What do I have that I can take with me?"

Whether we will have a lot of regret or not at the time of death depends on how we acted during our life: if we have been very attached to the happiness of this life, seeking material things, praise, reputation, sense pleasures; if we have been spending all of our time trying to hold on to our material possessions, from being criticized, from having a bad reputation, or from experiencing anything unpleasant sensually. As long as we spend our time like that, then at the time we die, we're going to have a lot of regret, because what have we done with our human potential? Nothing. We may or may not have gotten all the pleasures we wanted but they are all over now. When we die, the pleasures we had in this life from the eight worldly concerns are all like last night's dream.

When we wake up in the morning, it doesn't really matter what we dreamed about last night, because it's over. Similarly we might have been completely obsessed with somebody criticizing us yesterday: "How can they do this to me?" We get so upset because of this criticism. Or we might have gotten so entranced when somebody said: "I love you" and "You're so beautiful" and "You're so talented and creative." But today, all the things that happened yesterday are gone. They no longer exist. The pleasure, the pain, and the aversion—they are like grains of sand falling through our fingers. There's nothing to show for it at the end of the day. Why get so upset, anxious and neurotic about all these attachments and aversions? Better to use our energy to transform our mind, i.e. to practice the Dharma.