

**WORKING WITH  
OUR DELUSIONS  
& DEVELOPING  
THE COURAGE  
OF THE FOUR  
IMMEASURABLE  
THOUGHTS**

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**Picture** The Buddha of Compassion; artist unknown.

# **1. THE PURE NATURE OF OUR MIND**

## **LAMA YESHE**

By contemplating our stream of consciousness in meditation we can be led naturally to the spacious experience of nonduality. As we observe our thoughts carefully we will notice that they arise, abide and disappear themselves. There is no need to expel thoughts from our minds forcefully; just as each thought arises from the clear nature of mind, so too does it naturally dissolve back into this clear nature. When thoughts eventually dissolve in this way, we should keep our mind concentrated on the resulting clarity as undistractedly as we can.

We should train ourselves not to become engrossed in any of the thoughts continuously arising in our mind. Our consciousness is like a vast ocean with plenty of space for thoughts and emotions to swim about in, and we should not allow our attention to be distracted by any of them. It does not matter if a certain 'fish'

is particularly beautiful or repulsive: without being distracted one way or the other we should remain focussed on our mind's basic clarity. Even if a magnificent vision arises the kind we have been waiting years to see we should not engage it in conversation. We should, of course, remain aware of what is going on; the point is not to become so dullminded that we do not noticed anything. However, while remaining aware of thoughts as they arise, we should not become entranced by any of them. Instead, we should remain mindful of the underlying clarity out of which these thoughts arose.

Why is it so important to contemplate the clarity of our consciousness in this way? Because, as we have seen again and again, the source of all our happiness and suffering, the root of both the pains of samsara and the bliss of nirvana, is the mind. And within the mind is our habitual wrong view – our ignorant, insecure ego-grasping – that holds onto the hallucination of concrete self-existence as if it were reality. The way to break the spell of this hallucination is to see the illusory nature of things and recognize

that all phenomena are nothing but fleeting appearances arising in the clear space of mind. Thus the more we contemplate clarity of our own consciousness, the less we hold onto any appearance as being concrete and real - and the less we suffer.

By watching our thoughts come and go in this way, we move ever closer to the correct view of emptiness. Seemingly concrete appearances will arise, remain for awhile and then disappear back into the clear nature of mind. As each thought disappears in this way, we should train in this type of 'not seeing,' the more familiar we become with the clear spaciousness of mind. Then, even when extremely destructive thoughts and emotions such as anger and jealousy arise, we will remain in contact with the underlying purity of our consciousness. This purity is always with us and whatever delusions we may experience are only superficial obscurations that will eventually pass, leaving us with the essentially clear nature of our mind.

When you contemplate your own consciousness with intense awareness,

leaving aside all thoughts of good and bad, you are automatically led to the experience of non-duality.

How is this possible? Think of it like this: the clean, clear blue sky is like consciousness, while the smoke and pollution pumped into the sky are like the unnatural, artificial concepts manufactured by ego-grasping ignorance. Now, even though we say the pollutants are contaminating the atmosphere, the sky never really becomes contaminated by the pollution. The sky and the pollution each retain their own characteristic nature. In other words, on a fundamental level the sky remains unaffected no matter how much toxic energy enters it. The proof of this is that when conditions change the sky can become clear once again.

In the same way, no matter how many problems may be created by artificial ego concepts, they never affect the clean, clear nature of our consciousness itself. From the relative point of view, our consciousness remains pure because its clear nature never becomes mixed with the nature of confusion.

From an ultimate point of view as well, our consciousness always remains clear and pure. The non-dual characteristic of the mind is never damaged by the dualistic concepts that arise in it. In this respect consciousness is pure, always was pure and will always remain pure.



## **2. WHAT IS THE MIND? HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA**

*Here His Holiness the Dalai Lama explains the Buddhist concept of mind to the participants of a Mind Science symposium at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1995.*

I would like to explain briefly the basic Buddhist concept of mind and some of the techniques employed in Buddhism for training the mind. The primary aim of these techniques is the attainment of enlightenment, but it is possible to experience even mundane benefits, such as good health, by practicing them.

As a result of meeting with people from different religious and cultural backgrounds, including scientists and radical materialists, I discovered that there are some people who do not even accept the existence of mind. This led me to believe that Buddhism could serve as a bridge between radical materialism and

religion, because Buddhism is accepted as belonging to neither camp. From the radical materialists' viewpoint, Buddhism is an ideology that accepts the existence of mind, and is thus a faith-oriented system like other religions. However, since Buddhism does not accept the concept of a Creator God but emphasizes instead self-reliance and the individual's own power and potential, other religions regard Buddhism as a kind of atheism. Since neither side accepts Buddhism as belonging to its own camp, this gives Buddhists the opportunity to build a bridge between the two.

First of all, I would like to give a brief account of the general approach of Buddhist thought and practice common to both the Theravada and Mahayana traditions of Buddhism.

One very obvious feature in Buddhism is the element of faith and devotion. This is particularly apparent in the practice known as taking refuge in the three jewels: the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. To understand the role that faith and devotion play in this practice, emphasis is placed on clearly understanding the

nature of the path in which one is taking refuge, called Dharma or the Way by the Buddha.

The emphasis on first understanding the nature of the path, or Dharma, can be appreciated by considering how we normally relate to someone whom we take to be a great authority on a particular subject. We do not regard a person as an authority simply on the basis of their fame, position, power, good looks, wealth and so on, but rather because we find what they say on issues related to their particular field of expertise convincing and reliable. In brief, we do not generally take a person to be an authority on a subject simply out of respect and admiration for them as a person.

Similarly, in Buddhism, when we take the Buddha as an authority, as a reliable teacher, we do so on the basis of having investigated and examined his principal teaching, the Four Noble Truths. It is only after having investigated the validity and reliability of this doctrine that we accept the Buddha, who propounded it, as a reliable guide.

In order to understand the profound

aspects of the Four Noble Truths, the principal doctrine of Buddhism, it is crucial to understand what are known as the two truths. The two truths refer to the fundamental Buddhist philosophical view that there are two levels of reality. One level is the empirical, phenomenal and relative level that appears to us, where functions such as causes and conditions, names and labels, and so on can be validly understood. The other is a deeper level of existence beyond that, which Buddhist philosophers describe as the fundamental, or ultimate, nature of reality, and which is often technically referred to as emptiness.

When investigating the ultimate nature of reality, Buddhist thinkers take the Buddha's words not so much as an ultimate authority, but rather as a key to assist their own insight; for the ultimate authority must always rest with the individual's own reason and critical analysis. This is why we find various conceptions of reality in Buddhist literature. Each is based on a different level of understanding of the ultimate nature.

In the sutras, the collected original

teachings of the Buddha, the Buddha himself states that his words are not to be accepted as valid simply out of respect and reverence for him, but rather should be examined just as a goldsmith would test the purity and quality of gold that he wished to purchase by subjecting it to various types of examination. Similarly, we should examine the words of the Buddha, and if we find them to be reliable and convincing through our own reasoning and understanding, we should accept them as valid.

Another area in which we find the element of faith and devotion playing an obvious and crucial role is in the practice of Buddhist tantra. But even here, careful examination will show that the entire system of tantric practice is based upon an understanding of the ultimate nature of reality. Without this, one cannot even begin a genuine practice of tantra. So, in essence, reason and understanding are fundamental to the Buddhist approach on both the theoretical and the practical levels.

One of the fundamental views in Buddhism is the principle of dependent

arising. This states that all phenomena, both subjective experiences and external objects, come into existence in dependence upon causes and conditions; nothing comes into existence uncaused. Given this principle, it becomes crucial to understand what causality is and what types of cause there are. In Buddhist literature, two main categories of causation are mentioned: (i) external causes in the form of physical objects and events, and (ii) internal causes such as cognitive and mental events.

The reason for an understanding of causality being so important in Buddhist thought and practice is that it relates directly to sentient beings' feelings of pain and pleasure and the other experiences that dominate their lives, which arise not only from internal mechanisms but also from external causes and conditions. Therefore it is crucial to understand not only the internal workings of mental and cognitive causation but also their relationship to the external material world.

The fact that our inner experiences of pleasure and pain are in the nature of

subjective mental and cognitive states is very obvious to us. But how those inner subjective events relate to external circumstances and the material world poses a critical problem. The question of whether there is an external physical reality independent of sentient beings' consciousness and mind has been extensively discussed by Buddhist thinkers. Naturally, there are divergent views on this issue among the various philosophical schools of thought. One such school [Cittamatra] asserts that there is no external reality, not even external objects, and that the material world we perceive is in essence merely a projection of our minds. From many points of view, this conclusion is rather extreme. Philosophically, and for that matter conceptually, it seems more coherent to maintain a position that accepts the reality not only of the subjective world of the mind but also of the external objects of the physical world.

Now, if we examine the origins of our inner experiences and of external matter, we find that there is a fundamental uniformity in the nature of their existence

in that both are governed by the principle of causality. Just as in the inner world of mental and cognitive events every moment of experience comes from its preceding continuum and so on ad infinitum, similarly in the physical world every object and event must have a preceding continuum that serves as its cause, from which the present moment of external matter comes into existence.

In some Buddhist literature, we find that in terms of the origin of its continuum, the macroscopic world of our physical reality can be traced back finally to an original state in which all material particles are condensed into what are known as space particles. If all the physical matter of our macroscopic universe can be traced to such an original state, the question then arises as to how these particles later interact with each other and evolve into a macroscopic world that can have direct bearing on sentient beings' inner experiences of pleasure and pain. To answer this, Buddhists turn to the doctrine of karma, the invisible workings of actions and their effects, which provides an explanation as to how



these inanimate space particles evolve into various manifestations.

The invisible workings of actions, or karmic force (karma means action), are intimately linked to the motivation in the human mind that gives rise to these actions. Therefore an understanding of the nature of mind and its role is crucial to an understanding of human experience and the relationship between mind and matter. We can see from our own experience that our state of mind plays a major role in our day-to-day experience and physical and mental well-being. If a person has a calm and stable mind, this influences his or her attitude and behavior in relation to others. In other words, if someone remains in a state of mind that is calm, tranquil and peaceful, external surroundings or conditions can cause them only a limited disturbance. But it is extremely difficult for someone whose mental state is restless to be calm or joyful even when they are surrounded by the best facilities and the best of friends. This indicates that our mental attitude is a critical factor in determining our experience of joy and happiness, and thus

also our good health.

To sum up, there are two reasons why it is important to understand the nature of mind. One is because there is an intimate connection between mind and karma. The other is that our state of mind plays a crucial role in our experience of happiness and suffering. If understanding the mind is very important, what then is mind, and what is its nature?

Buddhist literature, both sutra and tantra, contains extensive discussions on mind and its nature. Tantra, in particular, discusses the various levels of subtlety of mind and consciousness. The sutras do not talk much about the relationship between the various states of mind and their corresponding physiological states. Tantric literature, on the other hand, is replete with references to the various subtleties of the levels of consciousness and their relationship to such physiological states as the vital energy centers within the body, the energy channels, the energies that flow within these and so on. The tantras also explain how, by manipulating the various

physiological factors through specific meditative yogic practices, one can effect various states of consciousness.

According to tantra, the ultimate nature of mind is essentially pure. This pristine nature is technically called clear light. The various afflictive emotions such as desire, hatred and jealousy are products of conditioning. They are not intrinsic qualities of the mind because the mind can be cleansed of them. When this clear light nature of mind is veiled or inhibited from expressing its true essence by the conditioning of the afflictive emotions and thoughts, the person is said to be caught in the cycle of existence, samsara. But when, by applying appropriate meditative techniques and practices, the individual is able to fully experience this clear light nature of mind free from the influence and conditioning of the afflictive states, he or she is on the way to true liberation and full enlightenment.

Hence, from the Buddhist point of view, both bondage and true freedom depend on the varying states of this clear light mind, and the resultant state that meditators try to attain through the

application of various meditative techniques is one in which this ultimate nature of mind fully manifests all its positive potential, enlightenment, or Buddhahood. An understanding of the clear light mind therefore becomes crucial in the context of spiritual endeavor.

In our own day-to-day experiences we can observe that, especially on the gross level, our mind is interrelated with and dependent upon the physiological states of the body. Just as our state of mind, be it depressed or joyful, affects our physical health, so too does our physical state affect our mind. As I mentioned earlier, Buddhist tantric literature mentions specific energy centers within the body that may, I think, have some connection with what some neurobiologists call the second brain, the immune system. These energy centers play a crucial role in increasing or decreasing the various emotional states within our mind. It is because of the intimate relationship between mind and body and the existence of these special physiological centers within our body that physical yoga exercises and the application of special

meditative techniques aimed at training the mind can have positive effects on health. It has been shown, for example, that by applying appropriate meditative techniques, we can control our respiration and increase or decrease our body temperature.

Furthermore, just as we can apply various meditative techniques during the waking state, so too, on the basis of understanding the subtle relationship between mind and body, can we practice various meditations while we are in dream states. The implication of the potential of such practices is that at a certain level it is possible to separate the gross levels of consciousness from gross physical states and arrive at a subtler level of mind and body. In other words, you can separate your mind from your coarse physical body. You could, for example, separate your mind from your body during sleep and do some extra work that you cannot do in your ordinary body. However, you might not get paid for it!

So you can see here the clear indication of a close link between body and mind: they can be complementary. In light of

this, I am very glad to see that some scientists are undertaking significant research in the mind/body relationship and its implications for our understanding of the nature of mental and physical well-being. My old friend Dr Benson [Herbert Benson, MD, Associate Professor of Medicine, Harvard Medical School], for example, has been carrying out experiments on Tibetan Buddhist meditators for some years now. Similar research work is also being undertaken in Czechoslovakia. Judging by our findings so far, I feel confident that there is still a great deal to be done in the future.

As the insights we gain from such research grow, there is no doubt that our understanding of mind and body, and also of physical and mental health, will be greatly enriched. Some modern scholars describe Buddhism not as a religion but as a science of mind, and there seem to be some grounds for this claim.

In general, the mind can be defined as an entity that has the nature of mere experience, that is, clarity and knowing. It is the knowing nature, or agency, that is called mind, and this is non-material. But

within the category of mind there are also gross levels, such as our sensory perceptions, which cannot function or even come into being without depending on physical organs like our senses. And within the category of the sixth consciousness, the mental consciousness, there are various divisions, or types of mental consciousness that are heavily dependent upon the physiological basis, our brain, for their arising. These types of mind cannot be understood in isolation from their physiological bases.

Now a crucial question arises: How is it that these various types of cognitive events - the sensory perceptions, mental states and so forth - can exist and possess this nature of knowing, luminosity and clarity? According to the Buddhist science of mind, these cognitive events possess the nature of knowing because of the fundamental nature of clarity that underlies all cognitive events. This is what I described earlier as the mind's fundamental nature, the clear light nature of mind. Therefore, when various mental states are described in Buddhist literature, you will find discussions of the

different types of conditions that give rise to cognitive events. For example, in the case of sensory perceptions, external objects serve as the objective, or causal condition; the immediately preceding moment of consciousness is the immediate condition; and the sense organ is the physiological or dominant condition. It is on the basis of the aggregation of these three conditions – causal, immediate and physiological – that experiences such as sensory perceptions occur

Another distinctive feature of mind is that it has the capacity to observe itself. The issue of mind's ability to observe and examine itself has long been an important philosophical question. In general, there are different ways in which mind can observe itself. For instance, in the case of examining a past experience, such as things that happened yesterday you recall that experience and examine your memory of it, so the problem does not arise. But we also have experiences during which the observing mind become aware of itself while still engaged in its observed experience. Here, because both observing



mind and observed mental states are present at the same time, we cannot explain the phenomenon of the mind becoming self-aware, being subject and object simultaneously, through appealing to the factor of time lapse.

Thus it is important to understand that when we talk about mind, we are talking about a highly intricate network of different mental events and state. Through the introspective properties of mind we can observe, for example, what specific thoughts are in our mind at a given moment, what objects our minds are holding, what kinds of intentions we have and so on. In a meditative state, for example, when you are meditating and cultivating a single-pointedness of mind, you constantly apply the introspective faculty to analyze whether or not your mental attention is single-pointedly focused on the object, whether there is any laxity involved, whether you are distracted and so forth. In this situation you are applying various mental factors and it is not as if a single mind were examining itself. Rather, you are applying various different types of mental factor to

examine your mind.

As to the question of whether or not a single mental state can observe and examine itself, this has been a very important and difficult question in the Buddhist science of mind. Some Buddhist thinkers have maintained that there is a faculty of mind called "self-consciousness," or "self-awareness." It could be said that this is an apperceptive faculty of mind, one that can observe itself. But this contention has been disputed. Those who maintain that such an apperceptive faculty exists distinguish two aspects within the mental, or cognitive, event. One of these is external and object-oriented in the sense that there is a duality of subject and object, while the other is introspective in nature and it is this that enables the mind to observe itself. The existence of this apperceptive self-cognizing faculty of mind has been disputed, especially by the later Buddhist philosophical school of thought the Prasangika.

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### 3. UNRAVELING OUR EMOTIONS

VEN ROBINA COURTIN

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

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

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

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

## **WHAT IS THE MIND?**

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

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

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

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

## **BEING OUR OWN THERAPIST**

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

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

Not an easy job. First of all, we're not educated to look into our minds. Second, we only notice we're angry, for example,



when the words vomit out of the mouth; or that we're depressed when we can't get out of bed one morning. Third, even if we do look at our feelings, often we can't tell the difference between the positive and the negative: they're mixed together in a big soup of emotions – and a puréed soup at.

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

Everything conspires against our doing this job.

## **NEGATIVITY IS NOT INNATE**

To give ourselves the confidence to even start, we need to think about how the negative states of mind are not at the core of our being, they do not define us, they are not innate, and thus can be removed.

This flies in the face of our deeply held assumption – one that’s reinforced by all contemporary models of the mind – that the positive and negative have equal status; that they’re natural; they just are who we are. If you ask your therapist for methods to get rid of all anger, jealousy, attachment and the rest, they’ll think you’re insane!

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

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

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

What are negative states of mind? They have two main characteristics (which the positive ones necessarily lack) and these are indicated by two commonly used

synonyms: “disturbing emotions” and “delusions”.

**Disturbing** Even though we can see that anger is disturbing to oneself – just look at an angry person: they’re out of their mind! – we fiercely live in denial of it; or we deflect it, so determined are we to believe that the external catalyst is the main problem. My friends on death row in Kentucky told me that they receive visits from an old Catholic man who, after thirty years of grief and rage after his daughter was murdered, finally realized that the *main* reason for his suffering was his rage, his anger.

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

In other words, anger, attachment and the rest are concepts, *wrong* concepts. It seems like a joke to say that these

powerful emotions are based in thoughts, but that's because we only notice them when they roar up to the surface as emotion.

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

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

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

## **ATTACHMENT AND ANGER COME TOGETHER**

The delusion that runs our lives is attachment. It's a profound dissatisfaction, neediness; a primordial

sense that something is missing, of being bereft, lonely, cut off. It's just there, *all the time*, in the bones of our being.

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

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

## **DELUSIONS ARE LIARS**

At the root of this, as Buddha calls it, is ignorance: *marigpa* in Tibetan:

unawareness: a fundamental unawareness

of how we actually exist. The function of this “ego-grasping”, as it’s called, is to isolate and concretize this universe-big sense of self, a deluded sense of “I”, a totally fabricated sense of I, whose nature is fear: paranoid, dark, cut off, separate, alienated, and overwshelming.

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

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

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

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

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

we've depolluted our minds of the neruoses, in fact.

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

### **OUR MIND MAKES IT UP**

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

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



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

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

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

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

need to do in knowing the way delusions work and therefore how to get rid of them.

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

Another characteristic of attachment is that it is the voice of the victim. We truly feel we have no control – cake is this incredible powerful thing, and I just have to have it. What choice do I have? That is attachment talking. Attachment gives all the power to the outside object. Which is why we feel like a baby. That's the victim mentality. And victim mentality, the one of hopelessness, the one of no control, that's the voice of attachment. Literally. That's exactly how attachment functions. Attachment is giving all the power to that object. It sees this truly delicious divine thing, which in reality our mind has made up, and then we believe it and then blame it.

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

“We make the body the boss”, as Lama Yeshe would tell us. We totally follow what the senses feel. We assume the

delicious cake is an object of the senses – of course, it is; but what we think we see isn't what's there. What appears to the sense of sight, for example, is not a delicious cake but simply the shape and colour of the thing. "Delicious cake" is a story made up by the mental consciousness, specifically attachment. This is a crucial point.

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

The senses are like dumb animals. Our tongue doesn't experience the hunger for the cake, it doesn't leap out of our face and grab the cake desperately; even our hand doesn't, although it looks like it. The hand goes out to the cake, but not from its own side. So what does? It's propelled by

the neurotic need to get the cake in the mouth. The mental consciousness, in other words. The thought. It is the story about what is chocolate cake, and I need chocolate cake, all the stuff about chocolate cake that is chattering away in the mind. That is where the delusions exist. Attachment is not a function of the taste. It is simply not possible. How can it be? Our tongue doesn't feel neurotic. Our tongue doesn't feel grasping, our tongue doesn't feel, "I want to have more cake", it is just a doorway through which this bunch of thoughts, these concepts, this sense of "I" grasps at the experience, isn't it? That is all. So the senses do not experience attachment. It is a logical fact.

## **WE ARE ALL JUNKIES**

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

of the five senses. Which makes it sound quite brutal.

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

## **NOTHING WRONG WITH PLEASURE!**

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

So where's the problem? Why do we suffer? Why are we frantic and anxious and desperate, fantasizing about the cake before it's even there, then shoving two pieces in when it comes, and then being depressed when we eat too much? Why all this rubbish? Because we have these delusions. Suffering doesn't come from

pleasure, it doesn't come from the senses. It comes from neuroses in the mental consciousness. But right now it's virtually impossible for us to have pleasure without attachment.

## **ATTACHMENT TO A PERSON**

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

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

So, love doesn't cause suffering, compassion doesn't cause suffering, the senses don't directly cause suffering, happiness can't possibly cause suffering – so what does? The cause of suffering is the attachment, first of all, the neurotic sense

of an “I”, a hungry “I” that sees this person, grossly exaggerates their value to me, gives too much power, puts the power “out there” in that person, just like the cake, which implies that we are devaluing the power of ourself. We’re giving all the power to this person, like it’s all out there, this person, vibrating, so delicious, so gorgeous, this is exactly how it feels. So attachment is hungry and empty and bereft and lonely. And is completely convinced that having that person is going to make me happy.

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

It’s the same with the person we loathe. We really believe that that person, from out there, from their own side, independently, definitely, is an awful person, as if ugliness is coursing in their

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

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

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

Usually the only person we wish to be happy – that's the meaning of love – is the person we are attached to. And the only person we are attached to is the person we love. So we assume because they come together, they're the same thing. It is just not accurate. We need to start going beyond those limits, which is so scary.

When we start practicing equanimity, we analyze: enemy, friend, and stranger – we try to cut through this narrow self-centred view of attachment, ignorance and aversion.

Right now we assume it is normal that when a person is mean to me, I don't like



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

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

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

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

When anger's strong, it triggers huge physical symptoms: the blood boils, the heart beats fast, the spit comes out the mouth, the eyes open wide in panic, the voice shouts. Or if we experience aversion as depression, the body feels like a lead weight; there's no energy, a terrible

inertia. And then, when we boost our serotonin, the body feels good again.

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

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

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

**Anger does not come from our parents.** We love to blame our parents! Actually, if Buddha is wrong in his assertion that our mind comes from previous lives and is propelled by the force of our own past actions into our mother's womb; and if the materialists are right in asserting that our parents created us, then we *should* blame them. How dare they create me, like Frankenstein and his

monster, giving me anger and jealousy and the rest! But they didn't, Buddha says. (Nor did a superior being – but we dare not blame him!). They gave us a body; the rest is ours (including our good qualities).

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

**Anger is not necessary for compassionate action.** His Holiness the Dalai Lama responded to an interviewer who suggested that anger seems to act as a motivator for action, "I know what you mean. But with anger, your wish to help doesn't last. With compassion, you never give up".

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

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

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

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

Of course, the lies that believe that I'm self-existent, that delicious objects make me happy, that ugly ones make me suffer, that my mind is my brain, that someone

else created me – *these* lies have been in my mind since beginningless time. But the method for getting rid of them is the same.

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

### **PRACTICE IS PAINFUL**

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

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

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

## **PRACTICE STARTS WITH MOTIVATION**

So how to begin? It all comes from motivation. We can start the day by

deciding we will begin, be very courageous. It starts from the thought. We tend in the West to dismiss thoughts. We say, “It’s only in the mind”, we give no value to the mind, even though we are caught in it. We give no value to just thought.

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

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

beneficial person. It starts with the thought, the motivation, the aspiration.

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

It arises in the mind due to causes and conditions. An imprint was left on the mental continuum by attachment before, thus planting the seed. Then there is the

condition, the object of attachment, the body of the opposite sex, and so forth. Of course, it is not necessarily always the *opposite* sex; this is just a general explanation.

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

Attachment is a causative phenomenon, arising from the seed, the imprint, of the delusion. Every time attachment arises – attachment to anything – it leaves an imprint on the mental continuum, like planting a seed, and that causes attachment to rise again. That leads to the action. Then again, the same problem: that action leaves imprints on the mental continuum. We become more and more familiar with that habit and then only engage in non-virtue.

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

endless sufferings in human rebirths as well.

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

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

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

When we're attached to somebody, we're attached to their body. Of course, it is not necessarily always the body. Sometimes

we're attached to the voice, a singsong voice, let's say; or to their knowledge or intelligence. Sometimes we are attached to their wealth, personality, smell, sense of humor, etc.

As for the body, if you look at the skin under a microscope you will see it differently than without a microscope; you will see many pores, and the skin cells look like mountains. There is no truly existent skin. It is just a collection of cells, atoms. Right now, though, you see the skin as beautiful, having colors, etc. But there is nothing there from the side of the object, not even the slightest atom is there from its own side. How you see the skin is according to your view; it comes from your own mind, it is your own mind's projection.

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

attachment to the blood coming from their body!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **THE OBJECT OF ATTACHMENT CHANGES**

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

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

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



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

### **ALWAYS DISSATISFIED**

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

months, weeks, days, hours, minutes, you never get satisfaction.

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

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

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

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

own projection, the exaggeration made up by your own mind.

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

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

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

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

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

It is a total mind-creation; your own mind creates the object. There is no beautiful body from its own side. Nothing like that exists from its own side. It came from the negative imprint left by attachment from the past. It is just the view of your karma; what you are attached to is only your own karmic view; only what you thought. You are attached to what your mind labels.

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

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

When attachment arises, be aware of it. Be able to recognize what is happening,

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

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

## **ATTACHMENT CAUSES SO MUCH SUFFERING**

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

action to become non-virtuous, which causes suffering in the lower realms.

Lama Yeshe used to say in his talks, when ordinary people are doing their love-making, there is no control, no wisdom, so the mind becomes totally unconscious. The mind in that act is totally unconscious, totally confused. I think what Lama meant by “wisdom” is, of course, Dharma wisdom, and in particular the wisdom realizing emptiness.

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

## **BUT ATTACHMENT CAN BE REMOVED**

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

Then, when you reach the levels of the path to enlightenment such as the right-seeing path and the path of meditation

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

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## **5. UNDERSTANDING THE ROOT DELUSION: THE IGNORANCE THAT BELIEVES IN AN I THAT DOESN'T EXIST LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE**

Let's concentrate for a few moments on what I'm saying. [Silence.] We believe, "I am here, in this building." We believe, "I am in America, Soquel, Land of Medicine Buddha, Land of Medicine Buddha, Land of Medicine Buddha! I'm in this gompā, I'm in Vajrasattva retreat, I'm on this cushion, I'm in pain! I'm tired! I'm sleepy! I'm exhausted from a long day! What is he talking about? What is he mumbling about?" Anyway, thinking like that.

We think there's a real one, a real I, a real me, here doing Vajrasattva retreat, or listening to teachings. Here, sitting on this chair, or on this cushion – a real me listening to teachings. Now, I is your label; me, I.

You point to your body and label it I: "I am going out." You don't pick up a book and point to it and say, "I am going out!"



No. You point to your body and apply the label, “I am going out.”

And as your mind does the activity of thinking, you label, “I am thinking.”

As your mind meditates, “I am meditating.” By first thinking what kind of activity your mind is doing – for example, it’s wandering – you say, “I am wandering. I am not meditating.” “Are you meditating now?”

“No.” You check the mind, then you say, “I am wandering,” or, if it is meditating, being transformed into virtue by analytical or fixed meditation, you say, “I am meditating”; you call, or label, it, “I am meditating.”

In exactly the same way as in this example, when you say “I,” instead of pointing here [at your chest], point at this table; label I on this table.

So now, you have labelled I on the table, but where is that I on the table?

You cannot find I on the table. Even though you label I on the table, you cannot find it anywhere, on any corner of the table, inside the table, above the table – you cannot find I anywhere. Not only that, but this corner of the table is not I,

this other corner is not I – no part of the table is I. Even all the parts of the table together are not I.

So now, like this, it's exactly the same, exactly the same, even though our mind constantly labels I on this association of body and mind [Rinpoche pointing to his chest], constantly, twenty-four hours a day, labels I on this association of body and mind, exactly as in the example where your mind labels I on the table – even if you label I on the table, you cannot find I on the table – the table is not I, nor is I on the table, inside the table, or anywhere else; you cannot find I on any part of the table, and even the whole thing is not I – in the same way, I cannot be found anywhere on the association of body and mind. If you look for your I, you cannot find it, from the ends of your hair to the tip your toes – your little toes, your big toes – nowhere can it be found. You cannot find your I anywhere. It is neither inside your nose nor on the tip of your nose! I'm joking!

Anyway, I is nowhere to be found, not even inside your body.

Normally you believe I to be inside, but

even if that's what you normally believe, apprehend – that there's a real I inside the body, there's a real me inside the body – if you look for it, you cannot find it. When you start to analyze, it cannot be found. Where is it exactly? Look for it. Where is it exactly, inside the body? Where is it exactly, inside the chest – the part of the body where we normally believe the I to reside? It's somewhere there, within the body. We don't think that the I is outside – we think that it's inside, inside the chest. But if you try to identify exactly where the I is located, it cannot be found. There is no particular location. You can't find it. If you look for the I, you cannot find it or its particular location.

Even though you normally believe that the I is there, somewhere inside your body, inside your chest, if you really check inside where it is, its exact location, you cannot find it.

## **SUBTLE DEPENDENT ARISING**

When you think that the nature of the I is dependent arising, subtle dependent arising, the real I that appeared to you at

the beginning and that you apprehend, disappears. It immediately becomes empty. It becomes empty, as it is empty in reality. If that real I that appeared to you were true – that you believed at the beginning to really be there – if that were true – according to the way in which it appears, the way in which you believe – if that were true, then even after analysis it should still be there. Even after your analysis of its dependent arising, it should remain. You should be able to find it. But it is not there.

Even when you meditate on the chakras, a real I seems to exist, but there is no real I existing in this body the way it appears to exist, the way you apprehend, or believe, it to exist. That I is not there, neither on the body nor inside the body. The body is not I; nor is the mind. Even the association of body and mind is not I; these aggregates are not I.

Without going through the Madhyamaka or lam-rim analyses of emptiness – for example, if the aggregates are I, then what happens, what illogical consequences arise? If the body is I, what illogical consequences arise? If the mind

is I, what illogical consequences rise? – without going through all those detailed analyses, what I have just mentioned gives you an idea of how the aggregates are not I. From that, you can understand, or get the idea of, the rest.

## **SUBJECT & OBJECT CANNOT BE ONE**

Even this association of body and mind is not I. As the texts state, the aggregates – this association of body and mind – are what is received.

They are what is received, and I is the receiver. I received these aggregates this time; I is the receiver. I is the subject who receives these aggregates, who has received, or taken, them. The I is the receiver. Can you say “taker,” that I is the taker? Like take-away food! I is to be taken away, like take-away food! I is to be taken away. Anyway, I’m joking...well, there is a way in which this can be true.

In Tibetan, we say *nye-wa lang-cha lem-pa-ko*. *Nye-wa lang-cha*: what is to be taken, the aggregates. The aggregates are what is to be taken, and I is the taker, who takes them. I is the subject and the

aggregates are the object, what is to be taken. I is the taker of the aggregates. *Nye-wa langcha*, and *lem-pa-ko*; *langcha* is what is taken and *lem-pa-ko* is the taker.

So, there are two. The I created the cause of these aggregates; the continuity of this I created the cause of these aggregates, this samsara. Then this I has received, or taken, these aggregates. So the aggregates are what is to be taken and I is the taker. Subject and object. Therefore, they are not one. Therefore, the aggregates are not I, cannot be I, the subject.

Because aggregates are what is to be taken – the object. I is the taker of that object. So they cannot be one.

Similarly, an ax and the tree it cuts cannot be one. One is the object, the other is the subject, so they cannot be one. The cutter – the ax – and what is to be cut – the wood – cannot be one. The wood that is to be cut is not the cutter, the ax.

## **POSSESSOR & POSSESSION CANNOT BE ONE**

In that way, there's one reason. The other

reason is similar. [We say] “My aggregates, my aggregates, my aggregates.” Even from the common, language point of view, “my aggregates” shows that the aggregates are the possession, and my, or I, is the possessor. “My aggregates, my mind, my body.” Even normal language shows that these two are completely different; two completely different phenomena. They are not one. They are totally different phenomena. “My aggregates, my body, my mind” shows that they are possessions, and from that it follows that my, I, is the possessor.

Again, through that reason, you can see that there’s no way in which the possession, that which is possessed, can be the possessor, I.

There is no way. The two are totally different phenomena. They don’t exist separately, but they exist differently.

## **THE LABEL & THE BASE CANNOT BE ONE**

Perhaps another thing to mention is this. The aggregates, the association of the body and mind, is the base to be labelled, and I is the label to be applied – what the

base is to be labelled with. Again in Tibetan, I is dagchö, the label to be applied, and the aggregates are dagshir, what is labelled, the base to be labelled. The aggregates are the base to be labelled, and I is the label, what is labelled on the base. Thus again here, one is the base, the other is the label. Two totally different phenomena; two totally different phenomena. They don't exist separately, but they exist differently.

If they did exist separately, it would help a lot if you were a criminal!

It would help a lot. Because then you could say, "It wasn't me that did it; it was the body. I didn't do it"! Or you could say, "This mind did it, not me"! You could have many arguments! In court! You could argue in court, "I didn't do it – the body did it; the mind did it." If what you did was criminal or something for which you'd get punished, you could say, "The body did it; the mind did it. I didn't do it." But if it was a situation where you had something to gain, then you could say, "I did it"!

Say your body did something that normally brings millions of dollars, but



nobody saw it. If your I had no relation to your aggregates, you could say, “I did it”! Since doing the action that brings millions of dollars didn’t depend on the body or the mind doing it, you could take the credit, “I did it. I should get the money”! You could argue like that. If there were something good to gain, something that you like or want to acquire, you could say, “I did it.” But if what you’d done were criminal or subject to punishment, you could say, “It wasn’t me”!

Anyway, I’m saying that if the I existed separately from the aggregates, it could be very helpful. You could do that. Maybe you could still argue, “I didn’t do it because I cannot find the I anywhere. I cannot see the I, so how could I have done it?” I’m joking!

What I’m trying to say is that since the aggregates are the base to be labelled and I is what is labelled on them – the aggregates are the base and I is the label – they are two totally different phenomena. Therefore, they are not one; the aggregates are not I.

## **THE MIND IS NOT THE I**

Similarly, the mind is not I. It's the same – you can use all those reasons that I mentioned regarding the aggregates, with the mind, to understand that the mind is not I. Your mind is not you. My mind, your mind – that shows it is not you. Your mind is not you; my mind is not me.

If something that the I possessed had to be I, were the I, then everything you possessed would be you. Your car would be you. Your kaka would be you!

It's exactly the same with the table, as I mentioned before. You can find the I nowhere on these aggregates. Neither are the aggregates the I.

Exactly the same. Even though you label I on the table, you cannot find I on the table. The table is not I. Exactly as you cannot find your I on the table even though your mind labels the table I, exactly like that, even though your mind labels I on the aggregates, you cannot find I anywhere on the aggregates. Neither that, nor are the aggregates I.

When you get a feeling that the aggregates are not I, when you cannot find I on the aggregates, this understanding

makes very clear what is the base and what is the label; you are able to differentiate. Now you are able to differentiate between the base and the label. After this analysis, you are able to differentiate what is the base and what is the label I.

Before, it was unclear to your mind; these two things were unclear. His Holiness the Dalai Lama would say those two are mixed up, as if the table were mixed into the base, as if the table were inside the base.

His Holiness Ling Rinpoche used to say that the definition of the object to be refuted is the appearance of the base and the label as undifferentiable.

For your mind, in your view, the base and the label – for example, the base to be labelled “table” and the label “table” itself – are undifferentiable. His Holiness Ling Rinpoche explained during a commentary on the Seven Point Thought Transformation at Drepung Monastery many years ago that this is the object to be refuted.

You are unable to differentiate between the label and the base. Your mind is very

confused. Your mind is in a state of confusion. What appears to your view is that these two – the base, the aggregates, and the label, I, are undifferentiable. Now, through this analysis, you can see clearly that they – the label, I, and the base, the aggregates – are two totally different phenomena.

### **WHEN THE REALIZATION OF EMPTINESS OF THE I IS REAL, IT IS SO POWERFUL**

Now, even if you have one hundred percent understanding, or recognition, that the base, the aggregates, is not I, that the I exists nowhere, I would not call that having realized emptiness. In other words, you understand through the four-point analysis, the analysis of the four vital points, that if the I is inherently existent, it should exist either as oneness with the aggregates or as completely separate from them; it has to be pervaded by being either oneness with the aggregates or existing separately from the aggregates. But simply understanding that the inherently existent I is neither oneness with the aggregates nor does it

exist separately from them – having a clear idea that the aggregates are not one with the I but also don't exist separately from the I – this awareness alone, the ability to distinguish between label and base, is not the realization of emptiness. Even if you had this awareness – the ability to distinguish label from base – even if the difference between the base and the label had become clear for your mind, still I would not say that you had realized emptiness.

When you realize emptiness – not just that there is no I, not just the feeling that there is no I – you should feel something very intensive. It should be very much more than that. Your understanding should be something very intensive. Not just the feeling that there is no I. The feeling should be something very deep; the feeling “there is no I” should be very intensive, very deep. You should feel as you would if you'd had a vision that you had received a million dollars, that somebody had put a million dollars into your hands, and you had totally, one hundred percent believed that you actually had all that money – and then

suddenly realized it was just a hallucination! It's gone! Like that, suddenly you realize that it's not there, it has totally gone.

What you have believed, were one hundred percent convinced of, and so strongly clung to, grasped at, is suddenly, totally non-existent.

There's nothing to grab onto, nothing to hold onto. Suddenly, it's totally non-existent. Nothing of what you have been holding onto, cherishing as if it really exists, is truly there. Nothing of what, so far, you have never had any doubt about, have been grasping at continuously, holding onto like a cat grabbing a mouse – all its claws clutching tightly together – nothing of that I exists. Suddenly, that about which you have never had any doubt since beginningless rebirths – even since this morning or since you were born into this life – suddenly, it doesn't go anywhere. Suddenly, there's nothing there. Maybe it's gone to the beach! Or to the mountains! To a retreat center! Anyway, it doesn't go anywhere.

Just there! Suddenly! You realize there is nothing there. Suddenly, it is not there.

You realize that it's totally non-existent.  
Totally non-existent.

There's nothing to hold onto. It's lost.  
Totally lost. Just right there – where it  
was – totally lost. Not that it's gone  
somewhere, but right there, it has become  
totally lost. There's nothing to hold onto.  
You feel something very intensive – not  
space, but empty, like space. During that  
time, there's no dual view, there's no “this  
is I and that is emptiness”; no “here is the  
subject, perceiver, realizer and there is the  
object, emptiness.” It's not dual; non-  
dual. At that time, the view that should  
appear should be non-dual, not “this I is  
meditating on emptiness, seeing  
emptiness. Oh, that is emptiness.”

Instead, there should be a very intensive  
understanding, seeing very intensively  
that . . .the I is empty. It's not just  
thinking that there's no I; it's not just that.  
It's not like, after searching for the table,  
the labelled table, the general table – not  
the inherently existent table but the  
general table, the labelled table – looking  
to see if any part of the table is the table –  
it's not that – or if perhaps the whole  
collection of parts together is the table –

it's not that either – and only after all that, then thinking that the table does not exist. It's not that kind of experience. Nor is it like analyzing the body to find if the I is inside the body or on the aggregates, or understanding that the aggregates together are also not the I, then, after all that analysis, at the end, coming to the conclusion that there's no I.

Because you cannot find it, thinking that there is no I. It's not just that.

**WHEN YOU SEE EMPTINESS,  
THERE IS EITHER UNBELIEVABLE  
JOY . . .**

The right way of perceiving that the I is empty is an extremely deep, intensive experience, but there are basically two kinds of experience you can have. You can feel incredible, that you have discovered the most precious thing, such as a wish-granting jewel. Or like a person who has been looking for or waiting to meet a dear friend for many, many years – praying, wishing, to meet that person for many years – and then, after all these many years, suddenly meeting that friend. Or like you've been waiting to get a billion



dollars for a long time and then suddenly you get the money. In other words, when you see emptiness, you feel unbelievable joy; incredible joy that makes you cry.

### **. . . OR UNBELIEVABLE FEAR**

The second kind of experience is one of unbelievable fear, incredible fear. Not just any kind of fear. Not just the fear of being attacked by somebody; not that kind of fear. It's a very deep fear; something deep inside your heart, in the very depths of your heart. A very deep fear. The other fear is not fear of losing the I – something is going to happen to this I, but it's not losing the I. The ordinary is fear that this real I is going to receive some harm, but here, something that you've believed in – not only from birth but from beginningless rebirths up until now – something that you've believed in one hundred percent, only now, only now you realize that it's not there. Only now you realize that it's totally nonexistent.

This can cause an incredibly deep fear to arise.

As I often say, even when you recite *The Heart Sutra*, when you say the words, “No

ear, no nose, no tongue...no ice cream! No coffee, no chocolate, no cigarettes, no drinks...!” – if fear comes into your heart when you say “no this, no that,” if fear arises, that’s a good sign. Fear arising means your recitation of *The Heart Sutra*, The Essence of Wisdom, is hitting, or touching, the root of samsara, hurting it. Your recitation of *The Heart Sutra* has touched the root of samsara, ignorance; has hit it.

Your recitation of *The Heart Sutra*, your way of thinking when you recite *The Essence of Wisdom*, is fitting – like an arrow or a bomb. As an arrow hits its target, as a bomb or a torpedo hits its target, the enemy at which you aimed, like that, your recitation of *The Heart Sutra*, those teachings on emptiness, your way of thinking, your meditation, has hit its target, the object of ignorance, the inherently existent I – the I that is apprehended by simultaneously-born ignorance. You have hit the target you’re supposed to hit. The target that you are supposed to hit with the arrow or bomb of your recitation of the words of *The Heart Sutra* and thinking on their meaning is

the object to be refuted, the inherently existent I.

Fear in your heart means that you have hit the target.

The texts explain that it is highly intelligent practitioners who have the experience of incredible, blissful joy, tears running down their cheeks, and feel as if they'd found an unbelievably precious jewel, and less intelligent practitioners who feel fear when they realize emptiness. At that time, you should not try to escape from this fear – trying to do so is your greatest obstacle to realizing emptiness. Instead, you must realize that this is the one time, the one opportunity, to realize emptiness – the only wisdom that can directly cut the delusions, the root of samsara, the gross and subtle defilements, bringing liberation from samsara and full enlightenment. Knowing this, you must go through the fear; you must complete your experience. Go through the fear like crossing a river.

Otherwise, if you block your own progress the one time that you have the opportunity of realizing emptiness, if you run away from that, like running away

from teachings, from meditation courses, especially my meditation courses – of course, those are good to run away from! – if you run from the fear that arises when you realize emptiness, that is no good at all.

**BUT DON'T BE AFRAID THE I WILL DISAPPEAR; THERE IS ALWAYS CONTINUITY OF THE LABEL I**

However, you never have to worry about the I ceasing, because the I never ceases. The I that is the label never ceases. The I never stops, never ceases. Why is there always continuity of the I, the label? Why is there always continuity of the self? Because there is always continuity of consciousness. Even after enlightenment, the consciousness continues forever.

Even though the body might change – one body stops, another body is taken – the continuity of consciousness is always there, even after enlightenment.

Therefore, the continuity of the I never ceases. It always exists because the base, the continuity of consciousness, always exists.

Therefore, thinking, “I’m going to cease,

I'm going to become non-existent" is totally wrong.

When that feeling arises, the appearance of losing or having totally lost your I, you shouldn't be worried that that appearance means you're falling into nihilism. Because of that appearance, you should not be worried that you are falling into nihilism – just as you should not be worried that the I is becoming non-existent. There are two things – one is the fear of falling into nihilism; the other is the worry, "I am becoming nonexistent."

You should not be scared of those things. If you do get scared, you'll block yourself from realizing emptiness; this one opportunity to realize emptiness will have arisen and you'll have blocked it yourself.

A very clear commentary on the Mahamudra by Ketsang Jamyang (I'm not hundred percent sure that's his name), which is regarded as a very effective teaching, explains why this appearance of the self becoming non-existent happens. It happens because it has to happen. Furthermore, it is a sign that there is no inherent existence on the I, the merely

labelled I. There is no inherent existence on that I, and the experience of its becoming non-existent shows, proves, that. When you have this experience, you see the Middle Way, the Madhyamika, view. You see the Middle Way, devoid of the two extremes of nihilism and eternalism.

## **REALIZING EMPTINESS IS THE FIRST STEP TOWARDS LIBERATION**

I would say that realizing that the object of ignorance – the concept of the inherently existent I – is empty, realizing the emptiness that is the negation of the object to be refuted, is the first step towards liberation.

I'm not saying that by that alone you have entered – of the five paths to liberation – the path of merit. I'm not saying that. But it's like you've taken a step towards liberation, because that wisdom is the main thing that directly ceases the defilements.

## **CONCLUSION: THE I EXISTS BUT NOT HOW WE THINK IT DOES**

Just to conclude now – before we all go to sleep! – as I mentioned before, how when you label I on the table, it's not there – in exactly the same way, when the mind labels I on these aggregates, it's not there either. The aggregates are not the I; the I is not there. I exists, but it's not there. The I that is labelled by your mind exists, but it's not there. Even that is not there. Even that. Besides the real I that you believe to reside in the heart, inside your body, not being there, even the I merely labelled by your mind, which does exist, is not there either. I'm not saying it's not here [in this room], I'm saying it's not there [on your aggregates].

So now, the I that is merely labelled by the mind exists. That is here, that exists, but even that cannot be found on these aggregates, on the base of the aggregates. It doesn't exist on these aggregates. The merely labelled I exists because the base, the aggregates, exists. In the same way, the base, the aggregates, which are merely imputed, exists, but it doesn't exist on the gathering of the five aggregates; it doesn't

exist there. The merely labelled aggregates exist, but they don't exist on the collection of the five aggregates. They don't exist there; they cannot be found there. So that's clear. The merely labelled aggregates cannot be found on the collection of the five. They don't exist there.

In exactly the same way, for each aggregate – for example, the aggregate of form, the general aggregate of form – it's exactly same. The same logic applies. The merely labelled aggregate exists but it doesn't exist on that base. Empty. It doesn't exist there; it's not there, not existent on this base. The aggregate of form does not exist on the collection of the limbs, either in all their parts or on the whole collection together. So there's no question about the inherently existent, real aggregate: it doesn't exist anywhere.

The real one appearing from there – the aggregate, the general aggregate of form – exists nowhere. Similarly, if you go to the parts of the limbs, to the arms, head, legs, stomach, and so forth, all those merely labelled ones exist, but they don't exist on their own bases. Even the merely labelled



head cannot be found on the collection of its parts, the brain and everything else. If you look for head, it cannot be found there.

Like that, it's the same for the arms, the legs, the main body – everything down to the atoms – that which is merely labelled exists, but it doesn't exist on its own base. Even the merely labelled atom exists, but it doesn't exist, cannot be found, on the collection of the particles of the atom. And it's the same for even the particles of the atom – they can't be found on their own base either.

Thus, everything from the I down to the particles of the atoms, or, from the general aggregate of form down to the particles of atoms, which appears as something real, is not there. It's totally empty; every single thing is totally empty. What appears to your view, your hallucinating mind, seems to be something real, from there – but it's not there.

Starting from the real I down to the real particles of the atoms, what appears is not there; it's totally empty – not space, but like space; totally empty, non-existent.

That was form. How about the aggregate of feeling, that which is labelled on the thought, the mental factor that experiences pleasure, indifference and suffering? It's the same with the aggregate of feeling – the merely labelled aggregate of feeling exists, but cannot be found on its base. It's also the same with the aggregate of cognition, which discriminates phenomena as bad or good, as this and that, as friend and enemy, fat and skinny, long and short, and so forth. The merely labelled aggregate of cognition exists – because its base exists – but it doesn't exist on that base. So that's the same. Then, if you analyze the pleasant feeling, the suffering feeling, the indifference, you cannot find those feelings on their base. Similarly with the aggregate of cognition – you can do the same analysis, but neither can cognition be found on its base, even though merely labelled cognition exists.

It's also the same thing with the aggregate of compounded phenomena.

It's also labelled, merely imputed, because its base exists. Subtracting feeling and cognition from the fifty-one mental

factors, the rest are called the aggregate of compounded phenomena, labelled that, but that aggregate cannot be found on that base.

Finally, it's the same with the aggregate of consciousness. Merely labelled consciousness exists, but it cannot be found on its base, like a carpet on the floor. The merely labelled consciousness doesn't exist like that. The mind, which knows phenomena, which does the function of continuing from one life to the next, perceiving merely the essence of the object, that knowing phenomenon, she-pa, because that mind exists, your mind labels it nam-she, consciousness. But using the same analysis I mentioned before, neither that consciousness nor the split seconds of consciousness can be found on their respective bases.

Therefore, starting from the I down to the split seconds of consciousness, each aggregate – form, feeling, cognition, compounded phenomena and consciousness, down to the split seconds of consciousness – everything that appears to our mind, to our view, as real, as something real existing from there, is

totally non-existent. Normally, after making all this analysis, you should meditate on this emptiness; let your mind dwell in it for a while. Looking at everything as empty, let your mind stay in that state of emptiness for as long as possible. That's extremely good, very effective.

### **DWELL IN THIS EMPTINESS OF NON-EXISTENCE FROM ITS OWN SIDE**

So that's reality; that's how things are. This is reality, so let's place our minds in this state for a while. Concentrate for a little bit on this conclusion that the whole thing is totally empty. Everything – from the I down to, and including, the particles of the atoms and the split seconds of consciousness – is totally empty from its own side.

[Long meditation.]

The final thing is that it's totally non-existent – from its own side. It's totally non-existent, but non-existent from its own side. So the second part of that expression makes the way of thinking or the experience correct – seeing it as not

just empty, non-existent, but empty, non-existent, from its own side.

Like this, the nature of everything else in existence – forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangible objects, hell, enlightenment, samsara, nirvana, happiness, suffering, life's gains and losses, virtue, non-virtue, everything – is totally empty, non-existent. But, non-existent from its own side.

**WHILE EVERYTHING IS EMPTY,  
THEY DO EXIST – MERELY  
LABELLED BY MIND**

So, while things are empty – everything is totally empty from its own side – they exist. They exist in mere name, by being merely labelled by the mind – which also exists in mere name. Things exist as merely labelled by the mind, which itself also exists in mere name. Everything is unified with emptiness and dependent arising, as Guru Shakyamuni Buddha realized and Lama Tsongkhapa praised highly. Lama Tsongkhapa himself also actualized this emptiness – which is unified with dependent arising, subtle dependent arising – this right view, this

wisdom, which is the only one that can cut the one particular root of samsara: the ignorance, the hallucinating mind that – while there’s no I on these aggregates, including the inherently existent I – through negative imprints left on the mental continuum, projects on to these aggregates the appearance of an inherently existent I and then believes it to be true; the ignorance that believes this inherently existent I is true, that it really exists.

This particular root of samsara – the ignorance that apprehends the I, which is merely labelled by the mind, as existing from its own side, as not merely labelled by the mind – can be cut only by this specific wisdom, only by this right view, this wisdom, this right view. Only by generating that can you be totally liberated from samsara, from the entire ocean of sufferings of samsara, which are divided into three – suffering of pain, suffering of change and pervasive, compounded suffering. Within samsara, there are the specific sufferings of each realm and the general sufferings of

samsara, such as the six, the four and the three.

It is only with this wisdom, this particular right view, the Prasangika view, that you can be totally liberated from the oceans of samsaric suffering – all the specific sufferings of each samsaric realm, and the three, four and six general sufferings of samsara. By ceasing the cause – delusion and karma – you can achieve the sorrowless state of total liberation from samsara, and only with this wisdom, the Prasangika view, can you also eradicate the subtle defilements, achieve full enlightenment and be able to do perfect work for all sentient beings, leading them to enlightenment as well.

I'd better stop here, otherwise we won't finish until tomorrow morning!

To escape from this hallucination, to be liberated from this hallucinating mind, we take refuge and keep precepts. Refuge is the very foundation of the Buddhadharma, the gate through which we enter the Dharma path.

We take refuge and vows to make certain that we practice, to make sure that we devote ourselves to actually practicing

Dharma. That is the fundamental reason for taking refuge and vows. In order to liberate others from the hallucinating mind, ignorance, first we ourselves have to be liberated from the hallucination, from the hallucinating mind, from all these sufferings that we have been caught in since time without beginning, for beginningless lifetimes. Thus, refuge and precepts are the basic means, the very foundation of the path, for liberating both ourselves and others from the hallucination, from the hallucinating mind, from all suffering, and gaining the ultimate happiness of the highest, full enlightenment.

***Teachings of Lama Zopa Rinpoche  
given during a Vajrasattva retreat  
at Land of Medicine Buddha,  
California, in 1999.***



## **6. THE FOUR IMMEASURABLE THOUGHTS**

**LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE**

How wonderful it would be if all  
sentient beings were to abide in  
equanimity, free from the  
discriminating thoughts of anger  
and attachment that hold some  
close and others distant.

May they abide in equanimity.  
I myself will cause them to abide in  
equanimity.

Please Guru-Buddha, bless me to be  
able to do so.

How wonderful it would be if all  
sentient beings had happiness  
and its causes.

May they have happiness and its  
causes.

I myself will cause them to have  
happiness and its causes.

Please Guru-Buddha, bless me to be  
able to do so.

How wonderful it would be if all  
sentient beings were free from  
suffering and its causes.

May they be free from suffering and  
its causes.

I myself will cause them to be free  
from suffering and its causes.

Please Guru-Buddha, bless me to be  
able to do so.

How wonderful it would be if all  
sentient beings were never  
separated from the happiness of  
higher rebirth and liberation.

May they never be separated from  
these.

I myself will cause them never to be  
separated from these.

Please Guru-Buddha, bless me to be  
able to do so.

## **STRENGTHEN BODHICITTA**

The purpose of meditating on the four  
immeasurables is to strengthen our  
bodhicitta. Just as a mother constantly  
thinking of her child who is sick  
intensifies her wish to free the child of its  
sickness, so too by meditating on the four

immeasurables we can strengthen and expand our bodhicitta.

Each time we meditate on these four thoughts we collect limitless skies of merit and it is particularly rich to do it with tong-len since this strengthens our bodhicitta.

Depending on how much time there is, one can meditate on all four immeasurables each session or on just one of the four, spending more time and going more deeply into that so the mind changes. You can recite each one many times but even if you only recite it once, the important thing is to make the meaning harmonious and oneness with your heart and mind.

If you do this meditation well it will benefit the world. You can overwhelm sentient beings who are evil-minded and would harm others. You can overwhelm them and bring them to the Dharma. When you do this meditation for one country like the USA, you create the cause to become the leader of that country. If you generate loving kindness for the whole world, that becomes the cause to be a leader for all sentient beings. If you

want to help sentient beings you have to become their leader so you can change their minds and change their actions. So it is very important to do the actual meditation, not just reciting words. And when you do this, particularly think of the terrorists who cause so much destruction in the world. This creates the cause to have control over them so you can guide them. Of course, it may not happen right away but as you create more and more merit it happens. So think of the terrorists and the leaders in mainland China who cause so much harm; by changing their minds so many other people will benefit.

Begin by reflecting on the **disadvantages of the self-cherishing thought:**

1. The self-cherishing thought has been extremely harmful to me in the past since beginningless rebirth and also to others.
2. It not only interferes and blocks me from obtaining ultimate happiness and liberation but even this life's happiness and peace right now.
3. The self-cherishing thought will continually harm me forever in the future.

It will never allow me to achieve ultimate happiness and peace.

Think, “The self-cherishing thought does not allow me to obtain liberation and enlightenment, or the happiness of future lives or even the moment to moment happiness of this life. It is the greatest obstacle to achieve happiness and realizations and to do perfect work for other sentient beings and myself.”

## **IMMEASURABLE EQUANIMITY**

### ***Immeasurable wish:***

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were to abide in equanimity, free from the discriminating thoughts of anger and attachment that hold some close and others distant.

### ***Immeasurable prayer:***

May they abide in equanimity.

### ***The immeasurable thought of taking responsibility on oneself to attain every happiness for others:***

I myself will cause them to abide in equanimity.

***Immeasurable request:***

Please Guru-Buddha, bless me to be able to do so.

Sentient beings are suffering in samsara because they are under the control of anger and attachment that discriminate some sentient beings as close and others as distant, so generate the immeasurable thought of equanimity.

While you are reciting the prayer you can do the *tong-len* practice. Think about how sentient beings suffer because they are under the control of discriminating thoughts such as anger and attachment and how this makes them create so much negative karma.

When you think of the human beings on this small earth that we see when we travel around, it is unbelievable how much they suffer. Even just their problems are unbelievable. This is without thinking of the suffering of the naraks, the animal realm, preta realm, devas and other human continents. All these problems are due to the discriminating thoughts.

For example, right now your friends and people you know are going through so many problems and so much suffering due to being under the control of the discriminating thoughts of anger and attachment. When you think about it, when you look at the world, it is so unbearable for your mind. There are so many beings and they are suffering so much, repeatedly. It is not that they suffer just once from these discriminating thoughts of anger and attachment, they are constantly tormented their whole lives. Whether they live for thirty or forty or even one hundred years, they suffer and endure problems their whole lives due to these discriminating thoughts. First there is great mental suffering and then physical suffering. Mental ill health leads to physical ill health.

While you are reciting the prayer three times, take all this anger and attachment on yourself along with all the problems caused by them. Take on the true cause of suffering and the true suffering, the two obscurations. Take this right into your heart and onto the self-cherishing thought. It is the self-cherishing thought

that causes everything undesirable that you and others have to experience and interferes with the success of all your wishes and those of others. So take all the problems and sufferings caused by the discriminating thoughts of anger and attachment as well as the anger and attachment into your heart. Think they enter in the form of pollution and destroy your self-cherishing or ego. It becomes completely non-existent.

You can particularly think of those delusions that disturb your mind most, such as anger, jealousy, clinging-attachment or desire. Mindful of how they torture you, never giving a moment of peace, think how numberless other beings have to experience the same suffering and take these disturbing emotional thoughts onto your own self-cherishing.

Think that you are taking these from every hell being, every hungry ghost, every animal, every human, every sura and asura being, and every intermediate state being. Take from every single living being including your enemy.

His Holiness explained the tong-len practice when he was giving the *Lama*



*Chöpa* commentary. He said to visualize taking on the sufferings of others along with their causes in the form of pollution, or as fearful sharp weapons (like the wheel of sharp weapons that Vajrabhairava holds) that completely destroy the self-cherishing thought, or in the form of ugly, terrifying creatures that completely devour the self-cherishing thought. Use whichever method is most effective.

If you visualize them in the form of pollution then you should absorb them into the self-cherishing thought, the I that you feel inside the heart, inside the chest. Not outside, in the belly or the head, but right inside the chest. The I that makes you think, "I am the most important one. This I is the most precious and most important one." This is the I that you care most about, always concerned that it might get cold, or it might get a headache, or it might get sick or it might fall down! You are always trying to protect this I against something that might happen to it. This I is what you cherish most among sentient beings.

When you do the tong-len practice everything is absorbed onto this I and it becomes completely non-existent. It is like when you see a mirage: there is an appearance of water in the distance because of the way the sun reflects off the hot sand but when you actually reach the spot where the water should be, there is not even a drop of water there, it never existed. In the same way, the I that you have always cherished so much is completely non-existent right there. When you feel this non-existence of the I, that there is not the slightest trace of an I existing where you believed it to be, then you are seeing the “emptiness on the I”. Try to experience this as much as possible.

If some fear arises when you are meditating on emptiness, for example when you are reciting the *Heart Sutra*, it means that your meditation has been worthwhile. Why worthwhile? Because the meditation has affected your mind. Fear arises because the meditation was able to harm the ignorance grasping the I. If your meditation is unable to harm the ignorance grasping the I, fear will not

arise. Even though the I is merely labeled on the base of the aggregates, it does not appear to be merely labeled but appears as though it were existing from its own side. Ignorance holds that truly-existent appearance to be one hundred percent true and then self-cherishing arises which holds this falsely appearing I to be very precious and important.

When your meditation comes nearer to the object of ignorance—the truly-existent I which is in fact completely non-existent—you start to become aware of the non-existence of this I. That which is false appears as false. As this awareness of the non-existence of the I you have cherished so much arises, fear also arises. So when you do this meditation, the pollution is absorbed onto the I or the I is devoured, and then the I that you cherish so much becomes non-existent. Meditate on this emptiness by concentrating one-pointedly on it for a while.

There is no such thing as I existing on these five aggregates—each one is not I nor is the collection of all five the I<sup>4</sup>. When you look for it, you discover that the real I is totally non-existent. Totally

empty. But this doesn't mean that I doesn't exist. The I does exist but it exists as a mere imputation. It exists but it's like it doesn't exist. The label and the base appear indistinguishable and I appears to exist from its own side. Then you let yourself believe that appearance and you create the root of ignorance holding I to be true. From this ignorance come the three poisonous minds<sup>5</sup> and the 84,000 delusions. We let our mind believe that the I and the aggregates exist from their own side and the minute we do that we open ourselves up to all the sufferings.

When you finish the meditation on emptiness you can repeat the practice of taking or move on to the next immeasurable thought of loving kindness.

At the end of each immeasurable it is important to generate the strong determination:

“Now the stable realization of immeasurable equanimity, etc. has been generated in my mind and in the minds of all sentient beings.”

And feel great joy.

When you come to dedicate, recollect the awareness you previously generated of

the precious I you cherish so much being completely non-existent. Even though that truly-existent I does not exist, still there is an I that is left—one that is meditating and performing the action of dedicating. This is the I that is merely labeled on the aggregates. Because the mind is doing the action of dedicating the body, possessions and merits to all the sentient beings, there is the thought, “I” am dedicating to other sentient beings. So this “I” is merely labeled on the aggregates according to that activity. Dedicate your merit to other sentient beings with this awareness that the I is merely labeled, that it is a dependent arising. Just as you have realized the I doing the dedication is merely labeled on the aggregates, so too are your merits, body and possessions, as well as the sentient beings. They are all merely labeled.

When you generate the four immeasurable thoughts of equanimity, immeasurable loving-kindness, compassion and joy, first of all you create infinite merit just by generating each one of these. But on top of that, if you can do the tong-len practice with each one, then

by taking on the suffering of infinite sentient beings, infinite merit is accumulated. And when you do the dedication you dedicate to all the sentient beings so again infinite merit is accumulated. Through knowing this skillful means and putting it into practice you can accumulate inconceivable merit in a very short time; then that much work is finished.

The remaining immeasurable practices—the immeasurable thought of loving kindness, immeasurable compassion and then immeasurable joy—follow the same pattern explained for the immeasurable equanimity.

## **IMMEASURABLE LOVING KINDNESS**

### ***The immeasurable wish:***

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings had happiness and its causes.

### ***The immeasurable prayer:***

May they have happiness and its causes.

***The immeasurable thought of taking responsibility on oneself to attain every happiness for others:***

I myself will cause them to have happiness and its causes.

***Immeasurable request:***

Please Guru-Buddha, bless me to be able to do so.

When you recite the verse for immeasurable loving kindness, do the practice of giving. Think that you give away your body (which you can imagine to be a wish-fulfilling jewel), your merits and all your possessions to every single being in all six realms.

When you do this practice of giving don't just give those things that ordinary people regard as being happiness because these are simply in the nature of suffering. Of course you do want to offer sentient beings temporary happiness, but if you only think of sensory pleasures it is very limited, the real happiness is the ultimate happiness of enlightenment. So even though you recite the word "happiness" in your heart you should be thinking "enlightenment".

When you say “please bless me to be able to do this” the meaning of “blessing” is to receive every single quality of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha yourself. Whatever activity we do our main objective should be to cause happiness to all sentient beings. Our wish is to cause every single being to experience perfect happiness up to and including enlightenment. So when we ask for blessing we are asking to be successful in accomplishing this.

We are not asking for something that doesn't exist! The Guru-Buddha to whom we are directing these requests has all these qualities. Buddha is a perfect object of refuge, one who is free from all sufferings and without the slightest discriminating thought towards sentient beings. Buddha only has compassion towards everyone, whether the sentient being worships Buddha or not, whether the sentient being criticizes Buddha or praises him, from Buddha's side He works equally for all sentient beings. It is because of these reasons that we can receive blessings no matter how much negative karma we have created and no matter how evil we may have been.



What is the meaning of “blessing”? In Tibetan the word is *jin-lab*. *Jin* is quality, the realization of the merit field, *lab* is transformation of the mind. So we are requesting our mind to be transformed into the practice, into all the qualities that the merit field has. We are not just asking for inspiration, we are asking to receive the blessing of all the realizations from guru devotion up to enlightenment. We are asking to develop all the infinite qualities of the Buddha’s holy body, speech and mind. We are asking to transform the mind into the path and to actualize all the qualities that the merit field has.

We train the mind in *tong-len* and in daily life we should also practice this by helping sentient beings however we can. When others are bearing hardships take them upon yourself and give the profit to others: like carrying a heavy load for others.

Give over your comfort and happiness to other sentient beings. Don’t just do the visualization and then when others actually need help, do nothing! The point

of doing the visualization is to train ourselves to help others.

Start by doing small things that bring happiness and comfort to others and gradually build up. Sooner or later we will even be able to make charity of our bodies as the Buddha did. As our bodhicitta gets stronger and stronger we will eventually be able to do perfect work for others just as the Buddha does, emanating countless forms to be able to benefit them.

At the end of the meditation think:

“Now the realization of immeasurable loving kindness has been generated in myself and all sentient beings”.

And rejoice.

## **IMMEASURABLE COMPASSION**

### ***The immeasurable wish:***

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were free from suffering and its causes.

### ***The immeasurable prayer:***

May they be free from suffering and its causes.

***The immeasurable thought of taking responsibility on oneself to attain every happiness for others:***

I myself will cause them to be free from suffering and its causes.

***The immeasurable request:***

Please Guru-Buddha, bless me to be able to do so.

With the third verse, immeasurable compassion, again take on the sufferings and causes of sufferings of all sentient beings. Each time you do the practice of taking the sufferings of sentient beings, you collect infinite merit.

Take on the whole package of sufferings that each being has to experience in each realm. Not just the sufferings themselves but also all the causes of those sufferings—the delusions and karma. Feel this with every hell being, every hungry ghost, every animal, every human, every sura and asura, every intermediate state being. Take their sufferings right into the heart and think that this destroys the object of ignorance, the emotional I and the self-cherishing thought completely.

Each time we generate compassion, loving kindness and equanimity we are working for all the people in this world. We are working for all the people in Iraq and other violent countries. Every time we meditate on the wishful thought of loving kindness, however many sentient beings you direct this thought towards you create the merit to be born that many times as a wheel-turning king and you create the cause to bring those sentient beings to enlightenment.

[*Note:* Rinpoche puts the mainland China officials in his heart when he generates loving kindness. This creates so much merit and then you can dedicate for them, for their happiness.]

Every time we meditate on compassion we make our minds closer to compassion for all sentient beings and that brings us closer to generating bodhicitta. This is not just the limitless compassion of the arhats but the great compassion of the bodhisattvas. Bodhicitta has two intentions: seeking happiness for others and for self. When you have bodhicitta it is an incredible blessing for the whole world and for your own country.

Bodhicitta is the total transformation of the mind, there is no thought of seeking happiness for self, the only thought is to benefit others. This brings blessings and benefits to all beings in the area and so much happiness and prosperity.

By entering the Mahayana path, as you go deeper and deeper, you are able to offer more and more benefit to sentient beings. Ninth and tenth level bodhisattvas can do incredible benefit for sentient beings. Once they achieve full enlightenment even every second they can illuminate numberless sentient beings. Even each beam from a buddha's holy body is able to liberate numberless sentient beings and buddhas manifest numberless forms to fit the needs of each sentient being in every second. Very high bodhisattvas who have achieved the realization of the path of unification are able to manifest as boats or bridges for sentient beings and buddhas can effortlessly manifest these things and bring sentient beings to enlightenment, guiding them from life to life.

So here when we are meditating on the lam-rim, it's not a simple thing. This is

what liberates oneself and liberates others. We are liberating ourselves every session, every day, accumulating so much merit. Practising guru yoga benefits all sentient beings, so every day that we practice it, so much work is done to enlighten sentient beings.

Even when we recite a mala of OM MANI PADME HUM, we should dedicate it to all six-realms' sentient beings, including those in Iraq and Afghanistan. Everything we do is for others. We study, we practice and we become good examples and an inspiration to the world, to many sentient beings, able to transform their minds into the path of compassion. We study and we practice and then as much as we can, we educate other sentient beings in compassion and wisdom. It goes on like this. By meditating and practicing compassion we are able to benefit other sentient beings and bring so much peace and happiness to the world. We ourselves practice Dharma first by understanding karma and delusions, taking vows and stopping giving harm to others, then on top of that we develop compassion and try always to benefit them.

Otherwise, we could become like all those violent people and terrorists.

At the end of the meditation think:

“Now I and all sentient have generated immeasurable great compassion in our minds.”

And rejoice.

## **IMMEASURABLE JOY**

### ***The immeasurable wish:***

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were never separated from the happiness of higher rebirth and liberation.

### ***The immeasurable prayer:***

May they never be separated from these.

### ***The immeasurable thought of taking responsibility on oneself to attain every happiness for others:***

I myself will cause them never to be separated from these.

### ***The immeasurable request:***

Please Guru-Buddha, bless me to be able to do so.

After making this request think that you receive all the qualities Guru Shakyamuni

Buddha has to be able to offer every happiness to others.

Do the practice of giving. This time, give away all your three times merits and all the temporary and ultimate happiness including enlightenment that will result from these merits. Give everything to all beings. Think that they receive whatever they need, whatever they want. What they really need is the guru and teaching, what they want are the usual objects of desire.

Each time you give your body, you collect infinite merit; each time you give your merits of the three times, you collect infinite merit; and each time you give your possessions, you collect infinite merit. So rejoice and dedicate.

## **CONCLUSION**

The practice of generating the four immeasurable thoughts can be repeated more than once. The purpose is this: just as when her one beloved son is sick, a mother will think about him more, over and over, and her compassion will thus increase, by reciting the prayer of the four immeasurables and doing the meditation many times over, your loving-kindness



and compassion will increase. There is no rule saying, "If you recite it more than three times you will be jailed, or kicked out or something!" His Holiness mentioned and it is sometimes mentioned in the scriptures that when you are not with a group of people, you can generate bodhicitta by reciting the prayer seven times. In the Vajrayogini practice it says to recite the prayer seven times. So, you can recite it many times in order to expand the bodhicitta.

These four immeasurable thoughts are not only to be generated at the beginning of the practice, they are to be carried over into our daily lives and continually implemented in practical ways. What the prayer is saying is "I'm going to do this all the time from now on, even in the break times. This is how I am going to benefit and offer service to other sentient beings." That is the idea contained in this prayer.

The idea is to generate the thought, take the vows and carry on the practice even between sessions. You shouldn't have the idea that break times are a break from practicing—they are a break from sitting practice, not from practice itself.

It is very important to practice these four immeasurables. This is making a very important decision in life, how you are going to live your life and offer service to others. When we engage in this practice our life is totally transformed into Dharma. It changes from being a meaningless life into a meaningful life. Instantly our life is exalted and transformed from being ordinary.