

**THERE'S NO  
KARMA THAT  
CAN'T BE  
PURIFIED**

**VAJRASATTVA  
AND THE FOUR  
OPPONENT  
POWERS**

**SHANTIDEVA  
CENTER WITH  
VEN. ROBINA  
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commissioned by Lama Zopa Rinpoche to  
have the face in the likeness of Lama  
Yeshe to encourage students to remember  
that the guru is the buddha.

# **1. THERE'S NOTHING BETTER THAN PURIFICATION BY LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE**

There is nothing better to do than purification practices! Even if the Third World War that people talk about were happening, other than Vajrasattva practice, what else could you do? Even if the Third World War had broken out, there'd be no other way to spend your life than practicing Vajrasattva to purify yourself and benefit others. Even in the face of nuclear danger, there's nothing better to do than practicing purification. The immediate thing to do is to purify negative karma.

Even if you discover you have cancer – you go to a hospital for a check up and the doctor diagnoses cancer – there's nothing else to do but practice purification, to purify your mind of the causes of suffering rebirths, the negative karma that causes your consciousness to migrate into the lower realms. Even if you find out that you are terminally ill with cancer, AIDS or any other life-threatening disease, the

immediate solution is to purify as much negative karma as you can, to ensure that your next rebirth will be a good one, so that in your next life you can continue to practice Dharma, to actualize the path to enlightenment.

When some people find out that they have cancer or AIDS, they go on vacation to some pure land like Goa, Tahiti or Rio de Janeiro – which I used to call Rio Degenerated, but I haven't been there for a while! – anyway, to some place that Westerners consider to be pure lands. But that doesn't help. That doesn't solve your problem; that doesn't heal your sickness or purify your negative karma. It just distracts your mind from the problem. Similarly, drinking alcohol or taking other substances to suppress your fear, to not feel afraid, works for only a short time and is simply cheating yourself. Not only does getting intoxicated not solve your problem but it also leads to additional life problems. Therefore, even if you are going to die tomorrow, tonight, this hour, there's nothing else to do but purify your mind.

Besides benefiting yourself, to be successful in benefiting others, to have no obstacles for that, you also need to purify

your mind. To free numberless sentient beings, the source of all your past, present and future happiness, including not only temporary happiness but also ultimate happiness – liberation from samsara and the great liberation of full enlightenment – to bring these numberless sentient beings to full enlightenment by yourself alone, you need to actualize the steps of the path to enlightenment. What interferes with your doing that is your negative karma, your defilements.

Therefore, purification is very important; a key point in your practice. Even to liberate yourself forever from the oceans of samsaric suffering, the continuity of which has no beginning, you need to actualize the path that ceases the defilements, the cause of all suffering – karma and delusion, including the seed of delusion. Even for your own liberation from samsara, purification is the essential practice.

Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo advised that, out of meditation on that lam-rim and collecting merit and practicing purification, it is more important to spend time collecting merit and practicing purification. Here, meditating means

meditating on the lam-rim, the various points of the path to enlightenment (see page 9). Of course, practicing purification and collecting merit all involves meditation, but the specific meditation Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo was referring to was meditation on the path.

As we know from our own experience, we've tried a lot to meditate on the lam-rim, starting from guru devotion, the perfect human rebirth and so forth, spending time on that, but not much has happened in our minds. Even though we've spent much time meditating on the lam-rim, there's been no real change in our hearts. The words on which we've been meditating remain just words and haven't connected with our hearts.

There's a gap between our hearts and the words we've been repeating or reciting during meditation. Sometimes, instead of getting transformed, our minds have even gotten worse.

You might have heard this example used by Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo. A rock might have been immersed under water for a long time, but it still remains very hard and solid. Similarly, our minds have been around Dharma for a long time,

we've been reading and listening to teachings for ages, but nothing has happened; there's been no change in our minds. We have no realizations and our egos are just as big as they were before we met the Dharma, if not bigger! Perhaps our egos have become even more professional, more sophisticated, better qualified than they ever were. Anyway, I'm joking. However, if you've been meditating on the lam-rim for a long time and feel no benefit, your mistake is that you have not practiced enough purification or collected enough merit.

Pabongka Dechen Nyungpo also said in his lam-rim teachings that even if you have been doing many preliminary practices [of purification and collecting merit] along with your lam-rim meditation, if there's been no change in your mind, you need to examine your guru devotion.

There might be something wrong in your practice of that. You have to analyze what might have gone wrong in your guru devotion and fix any mistakes that you find by confessing past errors and correcting your future practice. If you fail to do this, you'll continue to collect the

heaviest of negative karmas, the greatest obstacles to realization and the development of your mind in the spiritual path, the path to enlightenment. If you are unaware of this and continue to do mainly preliminary practices and lam-rim meditation, not much will happen in your mind. What you are doing is good, but it won't transform your mind, won't bring you realizations.

Even in this case, therefore, purification is required. You have to recognize your mistakes and confess them, refrain from making them in future, and do whatever else should be done. In *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo said that of all the things you do in your life, the practice of purifying negativities and collecting merit is more important than meditation. This is what we are doing here at this retreat.

Also, for old students who knew Lama Yeshe, who was kinder than the buddhas of the three times, doing Vajrasattva practice is the best offering we can make to Lama. He wrote these teachings on the Vajrasattva practice and tsog offering, put together the sadhanas and so forth, so our doing one of Lama's favorite practices

would please him a lot and is repaying his kindness. Whether you're a direct or indirect disciple, it's the same.

## **MOTIVATION FOR VAJRASITVA PRACTICE**

Think of all your non-virtuous actions – all actions you've done motivated by attachment clinging to this life, ignorance and anger; all actions that result in only suffering. Think of all the actions that became negative karma. Think especially of the actions done out of the attachment that clings to the pleasures of this life, to a good reputation and so forth.

Think of all the ten non-virtues – killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, slander, gossip, harsh speech (which means saying words that hurt another person), covetousness, ill will and heresy – you have committed in this life and numberless times in your past lives.

Think of the times that you have broken the *pratimoksha*, bodhisattva and tantric vows in this life, and even if you haven't broken them in this life, you have broken them numberless times in your past lives.

Then think of the heaviest negative karmas, those created in relation to the

guru through harming the guru's holy body, not following his advice, disturbing his holy mind, generating non-devotional thoughts, criticizing or giving up the guru. Even if you haven't done some of these things in this life, you have done them numberless times in your past lives.

Think: "These negativities are obstacles that not only block my achievement of the realizations of the path to liberation and to enlightenment but also prevent my bringing every happiness to all sentient beings.

"On top of this, they cause me to be reborn again and again in samsara, especially the lower realms, where I have to suffer for an inconceivable number of eons.

"So, this is the only chance that I have to free myself from all these defilements and from the sufferings of samsara, especially the sufferings of the lower realms. This is my only opportunity to escape; this is my only opportunity to purify.

"Since death could come within this minute, I must purify all these negativities without even a second's delay. I must free all sentient beings, the source of all my past, present and future happiness, from

all their sufferings and bring them to enlightenment. Therefore, I myself must achieve enlightenment as quickly as possible.

“It is for this reason that I am going to practice the Vajrasattva meditation and recitation of the mantra”.

## **COLOPHON**

*Teachings by Lama Zopa Rinpoche given at Land of Medicine Buddha, California, 1999.*

## **2. THE TEN NON-VIRTUOUS ACTIONS AND THEIR RESULTS**

### **1. HOW WE CREATE A COMPLETE NON-VIRTUOUS ACTION**

Each of the ten non-virtuous actions has four components or factors. For the action to be complete, that is, to bring the full karmic result [lower realm rebirth], all four components must be present.

#### **1. THE BASIS OR OBJECT OF THE ACTION**

#### **2. THE INTENTION:**

The state of mind of the person performing the action. This has three parts: recognition, motive, and delusion.

#### **3. THE DEED**

Actually performing the action

#### **4. THE COMPLETION OF THE ACTION**

If any of the four factors are missing, the action will not be complete; nevertheless,

it will still bring suffering in the future.

The ten non-virtues are divided into three: three non-virtues of body, four of speech, and three of mind.

## **THREE NON-VIRTUES OF BODY**

### **1. KILLING**

**BASIS** A living being other than yourself.

#### **INTENTION**

**a. recognition:** You recognize unmistakably the person or being you intend to kill.

**b. intention:** You intend to kill.

**c. motivation:** You are motivated to kill out of anger, attachment, or ignorance.

For example, out of anger, killing an enemy or a being that annoys you; out of attachment, killing an animal for its meat or skin; out of ignorance, killing animals with the belief that they were placed on this earth to be used by humans for food, etc., or killing an animal as a sacrifice to a worldly god, believing this to be virtuous.

**DEED** You carry out the killing by some means, e.g., a weapon, poison, black magic, etc., either directly by yourself or

indirectly by ordering someone else to kill.

**COMPLETION** The other person or being dies before you do. (Suicide is a negative action that will bring suffering in the future but is not a complete act because factors 1 and 4 are missing.)

## **2. STEALING (TAKING WHAT IS NOT GIVEN)**

**BASIS** Something of value belonging to another.

### **INTENTION**

**a. recognition:** You recognize unmistakably the object to be stolen.

**b. intention:** You intend to steal.

**c. motivation:** One of the three poisons.

For example, out of anger, stealing something from someone you wish to hurt; out of attachment, stealing something you wish to possess; out of ignorance, stealing or cheating, thinking that it's not wrong.

**DEED** Whatever means you use to steal, e.g., taking the object secretly, not paying taxes or fees you owe, misusing donations, etc.; or getting someone to steal for you.

**COMPLETION** You think that the

object now belongs to you.

### **3. SEXUAL MISCONDUCT**

**BASIS** For lay people, improper time, improper place, or improper partner; for ordained people, any kind of sexual activity is sexual misconduct. (Some lam–rim books say that the basis is the person with whom you engage in sexual misconduct.)

#### **INTENTION**

**a. recognition:** You must be in no doubt that the act is sexual misconduct. (Other lam–rim books: You must have unmistakable recognition of the object of your misconduct.)

**b. intention:** You intend to engage in an improper sexual act.

**c. motivation:** One of the three poisons.

For example, out of anger one might rape the wife of an enemy; out of attachment, engaging in sexual misconduct with someone other than one's spouse or with someone who's already married; out of ignorance, committing adultery thinking that it's cool, or engaging in sexual misconduct thinking that it leads to enlightenment.

**DEED** The two organs come into contact.

**COMPLETION** [The two organs come into contact.]

## FOUR NON-VIRTUES OF SPEECH

### 4. LYING

There are many objects of lying, but most are included in the following eight: denying something you have seen, heard, experienced with your other senses, or known; or falsely claiming to have seen, heard, experienced with your other senses, or known something which you have not.

**BASIS** Another person who can understand you, and who can speak.

#### **INTENTION**

**a. recognition:** You must know that what you are saying is untrue.

**b. intention:** You intend to lie and deceive someone.

**c. motivation:** One of the three poisons. For example, out of anger, lying to hurt someone or destroy their reputation; out of attachment, lying to get something you want; out of ignorance, not thinking there's anything wrong with lying.

**DEED** Conveying the lie by some means, e.g., speaking, writing, making a gesture with your hand or eyes, facial expression, remaining silent, etc.

**COMPLETION** The other person understands and believes your lie.

## **5. DIVISIVE SPEECH (SLANDER)**

**BASIS** Two or more people, who have a good or bad relationship.

### **INTENTION**

**a. recognition:** You must have unmistakable recognition of the parties involved and their relationship/feelings for each other.

**b. intention:** You intend to cause division or disunity.

**c. motivation:** One of the three poisons. For example, out of anger, creating disharmony among people you dislike; out of attachment, speaking in a harsh or rude way to be accepted by a gang, or insulting the husband out of desire for the wife; out of ignorance, causing disharmony, believing that it's healthy, or causing disunity among followers of a religion you disagree with, believing this to be positive.

**DEED** You undertake either to cause

disunity among friends, or to prevent reconciliation among enemies, by saying something which is either true or false.

**COMPLETION** The other parties understand and believe what you say, and, as a consequence, become hostile towards each other.

## **5. INSULTING WORDS (HARSH SPEECH)**

**BASIS** Another person whose feelings could be hurt. (We can express insulting words to a non-human being or to an inanimate object, but the action is complete only when there's a being who understands and is hurt by our words).

### **INTENTION**

**a. recognition:** You must correctly identify the person you intend to insult.

**b. intention:** You intend to speak insulting words.

**c. motivation:** One of the three poisons. For example, out of anger, insulting someone you dislike; out of attachment, speaking in a harsh or rude way to be accepted by a gang, or insulting the husband out of desire for his wife; out of ignorance, using abusive or rude language thinking that it's cool to do so, or

not realizing the hurtful effect of your words, or thinking there's nothing wrong with hurting others' feelings.

**DEED** With a negative intention, you speak words pointing out faults, etc. in the other person, whether true or not, in a hurtful manner; or you get someone else to speak such words on your behalf.

**COMPLETION** The other person understands and is hurt.

## **6. IDLE GOSSIP**

**BASIS** Something meaningless or insignificant, which you treat as important. (It's not necessary that another being hears our words.)

### **INTENTION**

**a. recognition:** You believe that what you wish to say is important or meaningful, although it is not.

**b. intention:** You intend to express such words.

**c. motivation:** One of the three poisons. For example, out of anger, chattering idly in order to disturb someone you dislike who is trying to meditate or do something virtuous; out of attachment, indulging in gossip or frivolous talk about things you are

attached to, or to spend time with someone you're attached to; out of ignorance, thinking there's nothing wrong with spending time idly gossiping.

**DEED** Speaking without purpose, or getting someone else to do it for you.

**COMPLETION** Actually expressing the words.

## **8. COVETOUSNESS**

**BASIS** Another person's property, possessions (includes merchandise in a shop), qualities, children, etc.

### **INTENTION**

**a. recognition:** You identify correctly the object you covet.

**b. intention:** You wish to make the object your own.

**c. motivation:** One of the three poisons. For example, out of anger, wanting to buy something before someone you dislike has a chance to buy it, or wanting to deprive your enemy of his cherished possessions; out of attachment, wanting to possess many things, thinking that they will bring happiness; out of ignorance, wanting to buy many things thinking that it's good for oneself or for the economy, or as a habit or obsession.

**DEED** The wish to possess the object becomes stronger.

**COMPLETION** Deciding to find a way to make the object your own. The motive, deed, and final step are all part of one train of thought.

## **9. HARMFUL INTENT (MALICE, ILL WILL)**

**BASIS** Another being who would be hurt if you acted out your harmful thoughts.

### **INTENTION**

**a. recognition:** You correctly identify the being you wish to harm.

**b. intention:** You wish to give harm to this being.

**c. motivation:** One of the three poisons.

For example, out of anger, wishing to harm someone who has harmed you or who you dislike; out of attachment, wanting to kill your father to get your inheritance, or to harm someone to get his possessions; out of ignorance, wishing to harm others because of thinking that violence is good, or that you can do whatever you like.

**DEED** Putting more effort into the wish

to give harm, so that it grows stronger.

**COMPLETION** You decide to act out your wish and do something harmful.

## **10. WRONG VIEW**

**BASIS** Something that exists or is true, e.g., the law of cause and effect, the four noble truths, etc.

### **INTENTION**

**a. recognition:** You believe that your denial of the object is correct (that is, you do not recognize that what you are denying

is in fact true).

**b. intention:** You wish to deny something that exists.

**c. motivation:** One of the three poisons.

For example, out of anger, because of hating someone who holds a correct view, you deny what they say and assert the opposite; out of attachment, asserting some wrong view in order to get something you desire, or to impress or gain favour from someone in a powerful position; out of ignorance, not understanding what is true and correct.

**DEED** Thinking about carrying out the repudiation of the object by, for example,

telling others what you think.

**COMPLETION** Definitely deciding to deny the object.

## **2. RESULTS OF A COMPLETE NON-VIRTUOUS ACTION**

There are four different results of a complete karma (that is, an action that has been committed with all four components/factors present):

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

The future rebirth state you will experience as a result of having created a complete karma

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

Once your karma to be born in the lower realms has been exhausted and you take rebirth in an upper realm, you will have experiences similar to your original actions.

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

Once your karma to be born in the lower realms has been exhausted and you take

rebirth in an upper realm, you will have the instinctive tendency to commit the original action again and again.

#### **4. ENVIRONMENTAL RESULTS**

When born in the human realm, you will experience results of your actions in the form of environmental conditions.

##### **1. KILLING**

**Fully Ripened Result** Rebirth in one of the three lower realms.

##### **Experiences Similar To The Cause**

Later, in a human rebirth, you will have a short life or get killed, have ill-health, many troubles, no success in your activities.

##### **Actions Similar To The Cause**

You will have the habitual desire to kill and harm others.

**Environmental Result** Food, drink, medicine, and crops are scarce, always inferior and low in nutrition or potency; they are hard to digest and cause disease; most beings around you die before reaching the full life span.

##### **2 STEALING**

**Fully Ripened Result** Rebirth in one

of the three lower realms.

### **Experiences Similar To The Cause**

Lack of wealth, possessions and resources; you can never make ends meet; your things will be stolen or lost. What you do have is all just common property with others.

### **Actions Similar To The Cause**

You will have an instinctive tendency to steal.

### **Environmental Results**

You will take birth in a barren place, where crops do not grow or are destroyed or have no power to remove hunger, and there are shortages of food, and bitter frosts, hail, dry spells stay on too long; it rains too much; crops dry up or die off; and business ventures fail.

## **3. SEXUAL MISCONDUCT**

### **Fully Ripened Result**

Rebirth in a lower realm.

### **Experiences Similar To The Cause**

The people who work around you are unreliable; you find yourself having a lot of competition for your partner. Your relationships, all kinds, don't last.

### **Actions Similar To The Cause**

Having the tendency to be unfaithful.

### **Environmental Result**

You live in a place where there is urine and feces all

round, and mud, dirt, filth; everything stinks, and everywhere seems unpleasant and distasteful.

#### **4. LYING**

**Fully Ripened Result** Rebirth in a lower realm.

##### **Experiences Similar To The Cause**

Others do not believe you, even when you tell the truth. People are always deceiving you.

##### **Actions Similar To The Cause**

You will have the tendency to lie and deceive others.

##### **Environmental Results**

Your work in cooperation with others fails to prosper and people don't work well together, everyone generally is cheating one another and is afraid, and there are many things to be afraid of.

#### **5. DIVISIVE SPEECH**

**Fully Ripened Result** Rebirth in a lower realm.

##### **Experiences Similar To The Cause**

You will be lonely; you will easily lose friends; people around you are always fighting one another; people around you have an undesirable character.

**Actions Similar To The Cause** You will have the tendency to cause disunity.

**Environmental Results** The ground where you live is covered with obstacles like fallen tree trunks, thorns, stones, sharp broken glass; it is rough, dreary, and there are no streams or lakes or water springs; the earth is parched and poisoned, burning hot, useless, threatening; a place where there are many things to fear.

## **6. ABUSIVE SPEECH**

**Fully Ripened Result** You will be born in a lower realm

**Experiences Similar To The Cause** You will always hear distressing words. Others will abuse you, and even when you speak pleasantly, they will interpret it negatively.

**Actions Similar To The Cause** Having the tendency to be critical and hurtful.

**Environmental Results** You will live in a place where there are many tree stumps, brambles, nettles, sharp rocks, and thorns.

[According to Lama Zopa Rinpoche]:  
You will be live in a desert environment.

## **7. IDLE GOSSIP**

**Fully Ripened Result** Rebirth in a lower realm

**Experiences Similar To The Cause** Others will not take your speech seriously or listen to what you have to say.

**Actions Similar To The Cause** Having the tendency to talk continuously and fill any quiet moment with the sound of your voice.

**Environmental Results** Fruits don't grow, or grow at the wrong times, seem ripe when they are not, have frail roots; there are no leisure places like parks, glades, pools of cool water; and many things around make you afraid.

## **8. COVETOUSNESS**

**Fully Ripened Result** Rebirth in a lower realm.

**Experiences Similar To The Cause** You will be unable to achieve your aims and get what you want; you will never be satisfied with what you have.

**Actions Similar To The Cause** Your personality will be dominated by desire, and your attachment increases.

**Environmental Results** You will live in a place where the crops are poor and

material resources are easily destroyed or lost. Every good thing you manage to find starts to get worse, decreases as seasons, months, days pass.

## **9. MALICE**

**Fully Ripened Result** Rebirth in a lower realm.

**Experiences Similar To The Cause**  
You will be a person who easily becomes frightened and panicky. You always find yourself without help, or never find the help you need; or always being hurt by others.

**Actions Similar To The Cause**  
Having the tendency to hurt others. Your personality is dominated by anger, and your anger and hatred increase.

**Environmental Results** You live in a world of chaos, diseases spread, evil is everywhere; there is plague, conflict, and you have fear of your country's or others' external military; there are dangerous animals, and you are surrounded by harmful spirits, thieves or muggers, and the like.

## **10. WRONG VIEWS**

**Fully Ripened Result** Rebirth in a

lower realm

### **Experiences Similar To The Cause**

Being ignorant of correct views, and finding it difficult to develop realizations and correct understanding.

### **Actions Similar To The Cause**

Having the tendency to draw wrong conclusions again and again. Your personality will be dominated by stupidity, and your ignorance will increase

**Environmental Results** Having to live in a place where there are shortages of water and other resources such as food, and there are no precious things such as treasures, works of art, scriptures, or spiritual guides.

You live in a world where the single highest source of happiness is steadily disappearing from the earth, where people think that unclean and suffering things are actually nice and happy; where there is no place to go, no one to help, nothing to protect you.

## **COLOPHON**

The Ten Non-Virtuous Actions and Their Results *is based on a version by Ven. Sangye Khadro, with many additions from Lama Zopa Rinpoche's teachings.*

*The original version was compiled from various lam–rim books, including Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand, by Pabongka Rinpoche, Wisdom Publications; An Anthology of Well–Spoken Advice, by Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey, Library of Tibetan Works and Archives; and The Path to Enlightenment in Tibetan Buddhism, by Geshe Loden, printed in Australia.*

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*Additions from Lama Zopa Rinpoche’s teachings and headings were added by Robina Courtin at Ganden Shedrup Ling in Puerto Rico, February 28, 2014.*

### **3. HOW WE CREATE OUR OWN REALITY: KARMA**

**VEN ROBINA COURTIN**

#### **WHERE DO I COME FROM?**

According to Buddha we're not created by anyone, either a superior being or our parents. Instead, we're the product of our own past. In a simple sense, you could say you come from previous moments of yourself. Think of your mind as a river of mental moments – your thoughts and feelings of *now*, in the simplest linear sense of cause and effect, your thoughts and feelings of *now* come from the previous moment of your thoughts and feelings. And your thoughts and feelings of the previous moment come from – guess what? – the previous moment of your thoughts and feelings. You track it back to ten years ago, twenty years ago, in your mothers' womb. “Well, maybe I began a month before conception”. Well, no. If my mind existed then, it must have come from a previous moment of my mind. Then clearly you get back to the first moment of conception, when we all

assume we began. If you're Christian, God put a soul there, in the egg and sperm; and if you're a materialist, you are only the egg and sperm.

Well, the Buddha has this third option. The first second of conception in our mother's womb is the entry of our own consciousness into the egg and sperm. So you can track your consciousness right in this continuity of mental moments going right back to that first moment of conception. "Well, I must have begun then". Well, yes, relatively speaking, this package called "Robina" began then, but where did the body come from? Mummy and Daddy. Where did your mind come from? Previous moment of itself. So your mind is its own continuity of mental moments.

It's a very simple concept, actually. Not difficult for us to intellectualize, to theorize about. Your mind is its own continuity. And obviously, to assume this, you have to assume it's not physical. Because, clearly, if you think your mind is your brain, then you did come from your parents, which is the materialist view, that they "made" you, you know?

## **YOUR MIND IS YOURS**

And so the experiential implication of this is that your mind is *yours*. And that means the contents of it are yours. And so what are the contents of your mind? All the love and the kindness and compassion and wisdom and contentment and anger and jealousy and fear and paranoia and rage – all of this. This is the contents of your mind. So all of these, being contents of your mind, they too come from previous moments of that particular quality in your mind.

So this is a simple idea that implies reincarnation, isn't it? It's a simple concept. Not a difficult concept intellectually. But we're so familiar with the view that I come from mother and father and my anger comes from mother and father and my jealousy and my depression and my all the rest come from the DNA and the egg and the sperm and all the rest, you know. They play a role, no argument. But they're not the main thing. For the Buddha, the main things are your mind, your thoughts, your feelings, your emotions, your unconscious. Your tendencies, your feelings. All of this. This is yours. This is *yours*.

We come into this life fully programmed with all of our tendencies, with all of our characteristics. It's a big surprise to us. I mean, we accept we come fully programmed, but we think the programming comes from mother and father. It doesn't, Buddha says.

Tendencies in the mind are mental and mind is not physical and it comes from previous moments of itself, not from the external condition, which is called the brain.

One can see indicators in the brain of certain things, no argument with this. So this fundamental point of Buddhism is that your mind is yours. And whatever's in it is simply from you having put it there in the past. Hardly surprising concept – cause and effect.

## **KARMA MEANS INTENTION**

This is the essential idea of karma. Karma is a Sanskrit word, that is translated as “action”, really simply. Which implies reaction. Action-reaction, in this meaning: cause and effect. Seed-fruit, you know.

It's also, more fundamentally, translated as intention, will, volition. Every microsecond of everything we say,

everything we think and feel, and indeed do and say, with our body and speech on the basis of what's in the mind, is a karma. An intentional action that necessarily will leave an imprint, or a tendency or a seed in your consciousness and will ripen in the future in that consciousness as your experiences.

What goes on in our mind, in other words, is the main cause of our future experiences. This is what Buddha says.

This is a simple concept. Not a difficult idea. It's just a question of being able to say it and get our heads around it. It isn't complicated. We think it's complicated, but it's just because we haven't got the right words, you know. It's not a complicated concept at all.

Of course, it's not evident to us. So we take it as our working hypothesis. Buddha's saying basically: we are the creators of ourselves. It's a very simple point. Whatever's in your mind is there because you put it there, not because Mummy and Daddy did something to you. This flies in the face of the assumption that we all have that's the basis of our lives, and is, as Buddha would say, a misconception. That, you know, I am

angry because my father was angry. I am jealous because my mother was jealous. I am depressed because I have certain hormones. We always put an external reason to it, you know. Which sort of, for us, is a way of saying, “It’s not my fault”.

We’ve got this dualistic view. We assume we’re made by mother and father. We assume the anger and the jealousy and the depression are either there because of the genes or the DNA or they’re there because I’ve got a mean boyfriend, or because I had a lousy mother or a horrible husband or a bad kid or a horrible boss. This is the typical way we talk. And this is, in fact, the view of the materialist world. This is the philosophy of the materialist world that is backed up by the view that your mother and father made you, that you’re only physical.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY**

One has to know one’s mind, because that’s what we need to change. Yes, certain people’s external conditions make it quite tough – if you’re in a prison and you can’t open that door; you can say “Well, I can’t help being angry, I’m surrounded by mean people”. You might say that. But the ones

who are really practicing don't say that. They know that this is their physical condition, and this is indeed the result of their karma (and we'll talk more about that in a minute), and so they will adapt themselves to that condition and still work on their minds.

The person who's got the chemicals that aren't working, that seem to be the trigger for depression, yes, you recognize that you've got those particular chemicals, but the depression is your mind, it's your viewpoint.

You might be around people who are mean and ugly who hit you all the time, and if you've got an angry tendency it'll make it easy for you to get angry, it's true. But if you're really being accountable, you'll recognize the anger's yours.

This is what we have to do. This is the toughest part. This is the part that's massive for us. So difficult because we're so used to this dualistic way of talking. It's always like, "It's not my fault. It's not my fault".

And that's the view of the materialist world, you look. It's an assumption of ego. "I didn't ask to get born, did I? It's not my fault. My mother made me. My father

made me”. So, the whole way ego works, Buddha says, is in its nature dualistic. It’s always, “Poor me, the victim”. Lama Yeshe would call ego the “self-pity me”. We’re always trying to defend ourselves, “It’s not fair”, “It’s not my fault”, “It’s his fault”, “I didn’t mean to”. Everything to try to deny accountability. It’s so painful for us to be accountable. This is how ego is, this is its nature. This is the way it is.

By listening to and thinking about the Buddha’s views of karma – that your consciousness, your tendencies, your experiences, come from our own past actions, not your parents; my mind is mine, I came fully programmed into this life.

And, of course, this includes our good tendencies and experiences as well, but we forget about those. We agonize, “Why do bad things happen to me?” We never agonize, “Why do good things happen to me?” We don’t care why, just give me more! But we have all the good things for the same reason: I created the cause to have them.

## **FOUR WAYS THAT KARMA RIPENS**

There are four ways in which our actions from the past lives – you know, before we even entered into this present womb of our mother – there are four ways those past actions ripen in the present. Or indeed, there are four ways in which our present actions leave seeds in the mind that will ripen in the future as one's experiences. It's a constant process, ongoing. Every microsecond of everything that goes on in our mind, and the things we do on the basis of those thoughts with our body and speech, this is the karmic process. This is constantly occurring. This is the natural process of cause and effect, constantly in play.

### **1. FULLY RIPENED RESULT: A REBIRTH**

The first, main one – they call it Fully Ripened Result – is the type of rebirth we get born into. So, you know, if we're materialists, or if we're Christians, for example, we both agree on one thing at least – that someone else made us. I was made by God. I was made by Mummy and Daddy. They're the same principle, aren't they? That you're made by someone else.

Which means it's got nothing to do with you.

Whereas the Buddha says, "Everything to do with me". Our past actions are the main cause of why my mind found its way to my present mother's human womb. Why blame your parents? They're just lying there having fun and you come along. So Buddha puts us right in the centre of responsibility of even why we're human in the first place. Which is kind of an interesting concept – who would have thought that you were the main cause of who you are? Big surprise!

Not more than a few weeks before conception in your mother's womb, your consciousness was in another form, another life. And at the time of that death, before you stopped breathing, very simply speaking, a very strong seed from having practiced morality – in the context of keeping vows of morality according to Lama Zopa Rinpoche – was activated that basically programmed your mind after it left that body to find its way to your present mother's human womb.

Your father and mother having sex is just a co-operative cause. They did not make you, they did not create you. Your

consciousness had very strong karmic connection with them from past history with those particular parents.

One lama said that at the time of a male and female human having sex, billions of consciousnesses that are recently passed away (and that's obviously not just from the human realm; Buddha would assert a whole spectrum of possibilities of types of consciousnesses existing in different realms) are all hovering around trying to get in. Well, we got in! From Buddha's point of view, we should be weeping in delight every day at how fortunate we are, getting such an extraordinarily fortunate life.

Clearly it's easier to get a mosquito birth, dog birth, a fish birth: we can see there are billions and trillions of other sentient beings, we can see this. But we got the human one. Amazing.

That's the first way our karma ripened – the type of rebirth we born into.

But, you know, Mother Teresa and Hitler both got one of those, so what causes the differences?

## 2. ACTIONS SIMILAR TO THE CAUSE: OUR TENDENCIES

That gets us to the second way in which our past actions ripened in the present. And this is our tendencies, our characteristics, our personality; our depression, our kindness, our wish to kill, our wish to lie, our being good at piano, our being good at math; whatever it might be.

And that's an interesting point, psychologically speaking. In Buddhist terms, we give equal status to whether you're good at love, good at anger or good at music. It's just a tendency.

But we see our artistic tendencies and our emotional ones in a very different light in our contemporary world, don't we?

For example, we're honoured to own responsibility for our being good at music.

“Why are you good at piano, Robina?”

“Well, I have musical tendencies and I practised really hard: *that's* why I'm good at it.

“Why are you good at anger, Robina?”

“Oh, that's my father's fault! Nothing to do with me!” No accountability whatsoever! We love being accountable for our being good at music, or maths, or

being a gymnast, you know, but not emotional stuff. We have this different set of laws when it comes to emotional stuff, which I find most fascinating – no logic at all.

The Buddha says, those tendencies – whether you're angry, jealous or just being good at music – are just tendencies. Why do we have a tendency? From having done it before. Quite simple. Mozart clearly had musical tendencies. Hitler clearly had other tendencies, and he expressed them, didn't he, in his actions.

Our mothers and fathers – this is a big shock to us – they're not the main cause of this. The absolute default explanation in the materialist world is it's all in the DNA and the genes, etc. That's why we always look into the past, to our parents, for the causes of why I am what I am.

Yes, Buddha agrees: look into the past, but not to your parents; look into your past lives.

Alternatively we see it all as conditioning. My mother was a musician, and everyone would say, "Yeah, Robina's good at music because her mother was good at music". Buddha would say, "No – Robina's good at music because she

practised it before. My mother had also practiced it before, and then she encouraged my music by teaching me. A simple point, but shocking to us.

So, your tendencies – they call this Actions Similar to the Cause. They're yours. You're fully programmed with every one of these from the first second of conception. Millions of these different imprints. Millions of these different tendencies. They're your own past habits.

### **3. EXPERIENCES SIMILAR TO THE CAUSE: HOW PEOPLE TREAT YOU, ETC.**

The third way that your karma ripens is called Experiences Similar to the Cause, and that's all the stuff that happens to you. The people and creatures you meet, the parents you get, the teachers, the abusers, the ones who are loving to you, the ones who rape you, the ones who give you a million dollars, the ones who are kind to you, the ones who steal from you, whatever it might be. The way you're treated and seen in the world. The main cause? Your past actions.

So Buddha puts every sentient in the very centre of our experiences. He says

our actions are the main cause of why we are who we are and why what happens to us. All the good and all the bad. This applies to giraffes, dogs, ants, fish, humans – all “*sem-chens*”, the term in Tibetan for “sentient being”: “mind-possessor”. We’re all mind-possessors.

Buddha says that there’s not an atom of space where you won’t find mind-possessors. Trillions of them.

#### **4. ENVIRONMENTAL KARMA**

And fourth, they call it Environmental Karma. Environmental karma, which is the very way the physical world impacts upon us. For example, here we are sitting in this room. It’s quite pleasant, isn’t it? It’s quite peaceful, pleasant view out there, it’s quiet, you know – the walls aren’t dripping with mould. It’s pleasantly painted. It smells nice. No-one’s threatening us.

We take this for granted – we never ask, “Why are we having a pleasant experience?” For the Buddha there are very real causes created by us: this pleasant environmental experience is the result of our collective virtue.

If suddenly the building explodes, or a gunman comes in, *then* we'd ask, "Why is this happening?" This would be due to our collective non-virtuous karma.

Basically, Buddha's point about karma is that suffering, which is when everything goes wrong – it could be externally, could be the people, could be the environment, could be in your own mind; when everything's out of whack, out of balance, disharmonious, when the elements are all crazy, when people are all fighting, when people are mean to you, when your own mind's berserk – all this is necessarily the result of negativity.

And happiness: same: the result of positive karma, virtuous actions.

## **I'M THE BOSS**

The four ways our past karma ripens in the present – the very fact that you're this human being, with this very particular family and friends and people who harm us and people who help us; all our tendencies; and even the way the physical world impacts upon us – are all the result of our own actions. Necessarily. It's just the way it is. It's a natural law. It's not blame, it's not punishment. There's no

concept of punishment or reward in Buddhism – that implies someone punishing and rewarding, doesn't it? And for the Buddha there's no one pulling the strings, no one running things.

Buddha says each one of us in charge. "We are the boss"! Big surprise! So if I am the boss of my own present experiences, if I am the cause of it, then indeed I can be the cause of my future experiences – which is why we should then check up: Do I like this life, do I like people punching me in the nose? Do I like having people being angry at me? Do I like being depressed and angry and jealous and poor and living in an ugly environment? No, I don't. Then, okay, there must be causes of this; what were they? Buddha lays it all out, all from his own observation, his own experience.

This is Buddhist practice.

## **FOUR WAYS THAT KILLING, FOR EXAMPLE, WOULD RIPEN**

Let me give one example of one action and the four different ways it ripens; let's say "killing". If we look at the world, one of the most harmful things we do with our bodies is to kill other beings, wouldn't you

agree? It's quite an intense way to harm any sentient being.

So, if as a result of the habit of killing in the past a strong seed of it is activated at the time of your death, it programs your consciousness to be reborn in a very suffering type of life such as an animal or a spirit, for example.

Okay. So we can deduce in our case, it was morality that ripened because we got a human life, which as we discussed is the fruit of non-harming, in particular non-killing.

But look at the human realm: most humans kill something, don't they? Can you see that? Due to past killing, therefore, they're born with the tendency to keep killing. This is the worst one.

The third way killing ripens is as an experience: you get killed or you die young, or you get sick.

The fourth way, environmental karma, would be the very environment itself, the food, the water, etc., harms us. For some people just eating peanuts can kill them – that's a particular environmental karmic result for a person from past killing.

And we have the collective karma now to have poisoned water, polluted air, haven't

we? The very elements themselves are harmful to us. That's the result of killing.

## **THE PRECIOUSNESS OF THIS HUMAN REBIRTH**

Q: I can't see how being born as a dog is necessarily lower.

A: I understand. I understand. Okay. Where that fits is this. As nice as dogs are, would you agree they're not very bright? I mean, you talk to them about developing compassion, they don't really get it. You try to explain emptiness to them, they're a bit thick.

Let me put it this way. If you want a really long neck, best to be a giraffe. Guaranteed. If you want to fly, be a bird. But, honey, if you want to work with your mind, make changes to yourself, quit the causes of suffering, etc., etc., probably best to be a human.

So, it's a contextual thing. It's not high or low or some kind of hierarchy – it's a question of what you want to achieve. Lama Zopa Rinpoche said one time, if just for a couple of minutes you could have a direct experience of the mind of your little cute dog, the suffering, the mental suffering of the most profound ignorance

of that mind would be so intense, you'd never want to waste another second of your precious human life. That's the ordinary ignorance of an animal's mind.

Now, we don't think this way in our culture, I agree. But just think about it – it's a different way to look at what ignorance is. We all have ignorance. Ignorance is the term for this ego-grasping that's this panic state that rises as soon as we're attacked or insulted or hurt or don't get what we want. Well, animals live in that one. Your dog has been living in your house for years, and it barks every time it hears the gate squeak. By now you'd think he would have learned that it's the gate squeaking. But he doesn't, the poor thing, because he's paranoid. His big eyes are round, he's barking like crazy; his unhappy mind, honey, is called deep, deep ignorance, and fear: fear is a function of ego-grasping, of ignorance.

Buddhist psychology, remember, refers to all living beings, not just humans.

## **4. THERE'S NO KARMA THAT CAN'T BE PURIFIED**

**VEN ROBINA COURTIN**

As Lama Yeshe says, “We create negativity with our mind, so we can purify it by creating positivity with our mind”. This is the process of purification.

If we are the creators of our own reality, our experiences, then we change things. Of course, easy to say, but very hard to see this, mainly because we're addicted to the samsaric way of interpreting life: that we didn't ask to get born, that it's not my fault: so deeply ingrained in us!

### **THERE IS SUFFERING: FIRST NOBLE TRUTH**

So, if we're sick of suffering, we'd better know how to accurately identify it. This is the First Noble Truth. There are three levels of suffering.

#### **1. The Suffering of Suffering**

This is in-your-face suffering; all the bad things that happen.

#### **2. The Suffering of Change**

Now this is a bit depressing, because it's what we actually call happiness. Buddha calls it suffering. It's a sneaky, honey-covered razor blade; it's basically when attachment gets what it wants. It looks to us like happiness, but it's just the junkie getting the fix. It's actually fraught with suffering.

### **3. All Pervasive Suffering**

The third kind of suffering, even more subtle – we don't even give it a name in our culture, or even in our religions – is being born in the first place with this body, which is the body of a junkie in a world constructed of junk, and to survive you need to ingest it. There's no choice: it's all in the very nature of suffering. That's the third level of suffering.

## **THERE ARE CAUSES OF SUFFERING: THE SECOND NOBLE TRUTH**

So, we're locked in suffering – the world is in the nature of suffering, the Buddha says. And why all this? Well, it's got causes – that's the Second Noble Truth. And guess what? There are two main causes, and we created both of them. It's scary – we think it all comes from everybody else.

One is the **1. past karma**, the past action, that left the seed in your mind when you did the negative action that is now ripening as your suffering. And the second cause, and actually they both subsume down to this one, is the **2. delusions** in the mind that cause you to do the negative action in the first place, which then again manifests when you punch me in the nose and I say, “How dare you”, and I punch you right back, and the ball keeps rolling.

## **TWO LEVELS OF PRACTICE**

### **1. WATCH OUR BODY, SPEECH AND MIND LIKE A HAWK AND REFRAIN FROM DOING HARM NOW**

So, in relation to these two causes of suffering, there are two main kinds of practice. And as Lama Zopa Rinpoche says, the first one, the most immediate, the most urgent, is in relation to the second cause of suffering, the delusions: do not respond in a deluded way to the good and bad things that happen every day, which are the fruit of our past action.

You own these karmic appearances as yours, so you do everything in your power to not respond with negative mind, body, or speech. You do everything in your power to avoid harming the person back or grasping at the good things; you watch your mind like a hawk and try not to sow more negative seeds. That's your first immediate practice. Every minute, watch your mind like a hawk, watch your body and speech like a hawk. You avoid at least creating more negative karma in relation to the situations of daily life.

The second one is where you now have to take care of the karma you've already created in all the countless past lives, the seeds that are lying in your mind, latent, waiting for the conditions to ripen as your suffering. They haven't ripened yet; so you've got to get ahead of the game, you've got to pull them out, or at the very least weaken them. And that's what purification is.

## **THE FORCE OF OUR PAST HABITS**

But before we get into purification, first let's look at why it's so hard to do the most immediate level of practice, the most

urgent: to watch our body, speech and mind and not create negative karma now.

So it's a tough one, because the tragedy of karma is, we're brainwashed, we're completely conditioned, we're completely habituated, we're completely brainwashed – not by others but by our own past actions, habits. We are propelled by the force of our past habits.

Now, when it comes to good things, aren't we fortunate? For example, a friend of mine taking the lice out of her three-year-old son's head, and the little boy cries, "Mummy, Mummy, leave them alone, don't hurt them. It's their home". The little boy is full of compassion. He's three. She hasn't taught him this. So *he* is propelled by the force of *his* past karma, which is his compassion. We can deduce logically that he has practiced compassion in the past so that now it arises just naturally. How fortunate that spontaneous compassion arises in his three-year-old mind and he cries with compassion for the lice in his own head! How marvelous! Programming is good when it's virtuous karma.

Look at Mozart: his mother gives him a piano at the age of six, off he goes writing,

his sonatas. We can deduce that he's programmed with music. When I popped out of my mother's womb, shouting and kicking, we can deduce that I was programmed with anger. So, it's a tough one when the programming is negative, because whatever's happening to you appears bad, not fair; it feels so spontaneous that you believe that anger is totally right.

Another example I use, a friend of mine, another mother of a child – she said when her little boy first saw the fishing, he ran like a magnet. She hated fishing. She never taught him this. He saw fishing and he ran like a magnet. Why? Because he had the karma to kill. We can deduce he's been in the lower realms in the past, he's finished that karma, but the tragedy is, he didn't purify all aspects of it. He's still got the residual result, which in this life is the habit to keep killing. The habit is very strong. The three-year-old boy with compassion, he didn't have to think about it; it just spontaneously came because he'd practiced compassion in the past. So this little boy, he must have practiced killing in the past. He saw the river, the fishing, attachment is instantly activated. He was

magnetized by the fishing, it looked so delicious to him. And the thing you run like a magnet to is a thing you've done before, then you put your attachment glasses on instantaneously so it will look good to you, it will therefore trigger a good feeling, therefore logically you assume, "Oh, this must be good because it gives me a good feeling". So then he pursued it. He followed the fishing. He became a professional fisherman.

She said she went fishing with him one time, to please her boy. And she found it unbearable. All she could see was suffering fish. All she could see was the fish, who by their body language were clearly showing that – poor things – they would rather be in the water, please! The poor things can't shout; they haven't got a voice. Their poor little eyes can't show much; the best they can do is wriggle their body, isn't it? I mean, if he had the addiction, the attachment to killing pigs, you'd *know* the pigs were unhappy – they'd squeal and kick and try to run away on their little legs. Who'd want to go pig killing? Nobody. We go fishing because they die seemingly peacefully, poor things – they don't make a noise.

So he can't see suffering. All his life he's killed fish; he's attached to it. He's addicted to it. Every single day going out – and the feeling of feeling good. This wonderful feeling comes from attachment to something. So, because the world accepts fishing, no-one's going to argue with him. If he was attached to killing poodles, he would've been in trouble – keep it secret, snuck out at night. No. Fishing, everyone does it so no-one tells him it's not good. So he never questioned it.

But his mother, having no attachment to fishing, all she can see, nakedly, is the suffering of the fish. He literally couldn't see it, and this is the proof that we make up our own stories based upon what's in our minds.

So, because he had a habit to kill and attachment to it, then his rose-colored spectacles caused it to look good. He couldn't see the suffering. Literally. He was a lovely human being, she said, a kind, lovely, generous man. But he was blinded; and that's what attachment causes – so sneaky. It blinds us from seeing the truth. She saw suffering; he couldn't see it. He'd been doing it for

years, killed hundreds of thousands of little fishies. He felt blissful. This is the tragedy of habit.

## **JUNKIES FOR PLEASURE**

So we are propelled by the force of our past habit. And that, conjoined with the attachment – you're lost. Completely lost. That's why it is so hard to change – because we are junkies for pleasure. We are junkies for pleasure. That's this human realm. Buddha calls it a desire realm. So that means we are junkies for pleasure; we are born with these senses that crave their objects. The moment we get the object, that's what we mean by happiness. If we feel happy, then we logically deduce the action we did must be good.

The same with the torturer – I remember reading about one of those guys years ago, a multi-murderer and a torturer. He said, from the time he could remember, he was compelled to kill, to torture and kill creatures, little ants and animals, because it gave him pleasure. And then of course as he got older, he graduated to humans.

He intellectually knew it was wrong; because he could see the world didn't

approve, but you know, he had to keep it secret, of course. But he was totally addicted to the pleasure that it gave him. Why? Habit from the past, programming from karma.

We think in the West, Oh, he's just this devil, he's an evil person. But the logical reason he did it is because of his past killing, no doubt as an animal, torturing – look at animals, they torture each other all the time. Constant. They're just addicted to torture. Being tortured and torturing – that's what animals do. Worst, most intense suffering. This guy – karmic imprint, you know, of torture. And what happened? He got pleasure from it: habit meets attachment equals pleasure. And the logic is, “It must be good, because it gives me a good feeling”. Of course, the world doesn't agree, so he's going to keep it quiet. There's always this conflict in his mind. But he is addicted to the pleasure.

Look at our pathetic little habits, you know. Overeating, smoking, junkies for sex, maybe... look how hard it is to get past our old habits, and we've got pathetic little habits, you know. Imagine if you got born with the habit to torture! What a terrible suffering – can you imagine? Or

just to even kill fish and not realize it's suffering, not realize it's negative, all because it feels good. This is why attachment is so tricky.

This is why we have to have really logical, intelligent minds to have a sound basis for what is good and what is not, and then judge our experiences according to it. And then struggle to change our old habits. It's a tough job, because we are propelled by our habits. We're on autopilot, you know. We think we make choices. We think we're intelligent. We're not. We're just junkies for habits, you know, craving to get good feelings. Stuff the food in, whatever we do. So we have to look into our minds carefully, and then struggle to change the habits. And it is a struggle, we all know that.

So that's the immediate level of practice, the most urgent, as Rinpoche says, the here and now, dealing with what arises every second.

## **2. PURIFY THE KARMIC SEEDS THAT HAVE NOT YET RIPENED**

This other one – the purification – is to deal with the seeds that haven't even manifested yet, that one can see no

evidence of. This is called purification. And as Lama Zopa says, we are insane not to do this practice every day.

## **PURIFICATION IS A PSYCHOLOGICAL PROCESS**

So, like all this work in Buddhism, this process of purification is practical, it's psychological. A really easy way to remember is – and I like this one – is to call the steps the Four Rs. There are different orders of these, according to the practice, but I like this particular order.

The first one is Regret, the second one is Reliance, the third, the Remedy, the fourth one, Resolve, the determination to make changes.

### **1. FIRST OPPONENT POWER: REGRET**

So the first one is you've got to acknowledge what you've done wrong. If you've taken poison, let's say, the very first step is to recognize that you've done it. You've got to first acknowledge there's a problem. It's pretty reasonable. You've first got to acknowledge you've eaten poison. "Oh, what a fool! Quick, what can I do about it?" Then you find yourself a

decent doctor; then you do something to purify it, you apply the antidotes. Then you determine never to do it again. This is reasonable; it's practical, it's common sense.

Trouble is, when it comes to morality, we seem to have this other set of rules and we get all guilty and ashamed and neurotic, or we blame; we're ridiculous. We do everything to avoid responsibility.

## **BLAME, GUILT, DENIAL**

When it comes to doing things like killing and lying and stealing, instead of simply acknowledging it, we want to find someone else who's fault it is. That's as ridiculous as trying to find someone to blame for the poison in my dinner. You're dying, but all your thoughts are for blaming. Blame is pretty useless, which is our typical mode.

Another typical mode is guilt – “Oh, I ate poison. Oh, I'm such a bad person. I ate poison”. Every day, you're getting sicker and sicker...”Oh, I'm such a bad person, I ate poison”. We love to live in this one. Completely useless. Complete waste of time. Totally impotent. It's the same as blame, but you're the person

you're blaming. One is anger, one is self-blame. They're the same problem.

The third one, even more ridiculous – and we love this one –”Robina! There’s poison in your dinner!” “There is not!” We call it living in denial.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY**

So we’ve got to be accountable. This entire process of purification is based upon the understanding of karma and on the recognition that you don’t want suffering. Regret, the first step, is all about yourself.

So, we have guilt, now, which beats ourselves up. “I’m just a bad person”. Blame or guilt, we run to these spontaneously because they are a natural response to having ego-grasping, of having this ignorance that clings to the self-existent me. It’s this dualistic state of mind that naturally blames others, or naturally blames yourself. And we have to conquer that. We have to argue with that wrong view.

One time His Holiness was asked the difference between guilt and regret. It was such a sweet answer, but quite profound. He said: “With guilt, you look into the past and you go, “I did this and I did that and I

did this”, and then you go, “and I’m a bad person”. We just assume naturally that if I’ve done bad things, I must be a bad person. That’s how we think. That second thought is the view of ego, the view of ego-grasping, that over-exaggerates the badness, and paints the entirety of myself with that brush.

The same with blame. “You are a bad person. You did this and you did this and you did this and you’re a bad person”. This is what all delusions do; they exaggerate. And it’s just not accurate. Forget being not morally right – it’s just not accurate. It’s an exaggeration. It isn’t accurate to conclude because you’ve killed and lied and stolen, that you’re a bad person. You’re not. That’s mistaken. Your *actions* are bad, no problem with that. That’s clear. That’s more precise.

But the point here is, then His Holiness said, “With regret, you also look into the past and think, “I did this in the past, and I did this, and I did this...” but then you think, “What can I do about it?” Now, we have to cultivate this consciously, it doesn’t come naturally. Instead of saying, “...and I’m a bad person”, you then say, “What can I do about it?” You change the

thought. We have to cultivate that view. That's what regret is. It's wholesome, courageous, and optimistic.

You could say that regret is like compassion for yourself. Like the poison, the reason you say, "Oh my God, what an idiot! Quick, where's the doctor?" – it's obvious why you say this. You don't have to state it: you know that poison will cause you suffering, and you know you don't want suffering. Well, same here. You're sick of suffering, and you understand that having harmed others will cause you suffering.

## **WE HAVE TO SAY THE WORDS**

So, when we do this practice at the end of the day, you speak out to yourself what you have done to harm others. You bad-mouthed your husband, you talked about your girlfriend behind her back, you took the pencil at work and you never returned it. I mean, maybe you're not going around torturing and killing too many people, but whatever it is, you've got to acknowledge it. "I did do this and this..." And then you check the main things throughout this life – maybe you had an abortion, maybe you

went fishing, maybe you're a hunter: you acknowledge it, and you regret it.

And, of course, this step is most important if you have taken vows: lay or monastic vows, bodhisattva vows, tantric vows. It's vital to regret having broken them, and not just this life but in the past as well.

And this is regret. You acknowledge what you have done to harm others and, because you don't want suffering yourself – this is the motivation behind regret (compassion for others comes in the second step), you regret having done it. “I regret this. Why? Because I'm sick of suffering. I don't want the suffering that will come from this if I leave that seed in my mind. Because if I do leave that seed in my mind – that poison – it will ripen as my suffering and – hey! – I do not want suffering”.

This attitude does not come naturally to us. Guilt comes naturally! Even if we say the word regret, it still feels like guilt. So, we have to spell it out to make it a new thought. It's a really crucial point, I tell you. It's not enough just to say, “Oh, I regret killing and lying and stealing”. It

feels like guilt, so you've got to change the words.

The simple, most fundamental thing about karma is that everything you do and say and think leaves a seed in your mind that can ripen as that experience for yourself in the future. You just have to think: do I like being stolen from? Nope. What causes people to steal from me? I must have stolen from them. So if I've just stolen a pencil, then I'll get stolen from in the future. I don't want that. It's just logic; you've got to think it through, if you apply the law of karma, you know.

So you've got to be logical. Think it through. Make it real for you, not just some religious feeling. Not some weird, guilty feeling. That's useless. It's practical – I regret having done this because I don't want to be stolen from, I don't want suffering, I'm sick of it. Yet again I've shot my mouth off – shouted at people. I'm sick of this habit. First of all, too, you can even right now see the suffering and the hurt it causes you, the pain of that anger, you're feeling all caught up in it and fed up with it and you're so sick of it. You've got to feel that pain and be fed up with it. "I'm

sick of this suffering, I'm sick of this boring habit".

And, of course, the main suffering we do not want is to be born in the lower realms, which is the main result of negative actions. We really have to think these things through.

And we're just talking here of the habits that we do that harm others; we're not looking at just our own emotional problems yet. We're looking at the actions of our body and speech first – what we do to harm others first – killing, lying, stealing, bad-mouthing; there's only so many names for them. You regret them. Remember the things, your old habits in this life – you know, maybe you're addicted to sex and you harm people with your sexual attachment; but you look at the suffering you're causing yourself.

## **THE BUDDHA'S VIEW OF MORALITY**

You see, this is a very interesting point, let's look at this a bit more – Buddha's view of what morality is. It's a really important point to think about. The usual view we have about morality, which is why we're like children and resisting it

mightily, is because we think it comes from somebody on high forcing it upon us: either God or our mother or the judge or the police, you know. We think it's done to us.

It isn't like that, not for Buddha. I asked a Catholic priest, a friend of mine, "What defines something as a sin?" He said, "It's going against the will of God". That is what defines a sin: something you do that is against the will of God. Now, that's reasonable if God is the creator, and that's reasonable if you are a Christian. That's appropriate. That's correct.

But that's not the Buddhist definition of a negative action. Going against Buddha's views is not what defines something as negative. It's got nothing to do with Buddha! That's like saying, "Why is smoking bad? Oh, because my doctor told me not to". Your doctor's merely a messenger. The reason smoking's bad is because it'll hurt you, dear.

For Buddha, what defines killing as bad is really simple; it's because it harms another. Buddha says this is a conventional truth that you can prove quite quickly. You just do your market research in this world, in this room and

you ask around, “Do you like getting killed, stolen from, lied to, kicked in the teeth?” Everybody will say no.

So we can deduce logically that a negative action is one that harms another, because you’ve just proven it by agreeing we don’t like it. That’s what makes it negative. It does not come from somebody on high, it’s not set in stone; it is not, in other words, self-existent. It is a dependent arising. That’s Buddha’s view; it’s a natural law. So, what a negative action is is one that harms another.

But in this very first stage of practice where you regret doing actions that harm others, the reason first – you have to hear this point – the reason you regret having done it is not for the sake of others yet; it’s for *your* sake, remember? So, a negative action is defined as an action that harms another; but at this first step, you regret it because your doing it programs your mind to keep doing it and to have it done to you, not to mention being born in the lower realms.

So, you regret it because *you* don’t want the suffering. This is a crucial point. We’ve got to understand this, not just be vague about it. “Oh I do my Vajrasattva practice,

oh I regret lying, killing...” We don’t even give it thought, you know, we just wishy-washy gloss over it.

So a negative action is defined as one that harms another, but at this first stage – and this is the very meaning of the first level of practice in Buddhism – in the first scope of practice, junior school, I like to call it – His Holiness uses this analogy as well: the way the teachings in the lam-rim are structured, it’s like the education system. In Tibetan medieval language they call it the Lower Scope of practice. So junior school level of practice is to control your body and your speech.

The reason you will regret killing and lying and stealing and bad-mouthing – and there’s not that many actions you do with your body and speech that harm others, sexual misconduct, lying, killing, stealing, you know, shouting at people, harsh speech, talking behind backs; there’s only so many. “You know what, I’m sick of this suffering, I’m sick of the pain it causes me right now and I do not want the karmic fruits of this in the future. No way! So I regret having killed, lied, stolen, etc. etc”.

Then it makes it very real for you, because it's about yourself. Don't feel bad about this. Don't feel guilty, like I should just be having compassion for others. Compassion's the Great Scope – that's university, people! You've got to recognize your own suffering before you recognize the suffering of others. You've got to be sick of your own suffering – this is what renunciation is – you're sick of your own suffering. That's why you've got to contemplate what these ridiculous things that we do, do to *ourselves*. Don't gloss over this step, it's extremely important.

So, you regret the things you did today, yesterday, this life, in beginningless past lives – the things you've done with your body and speech to harm others. “I regret anything I have ever done, since beginningless time to any sentient being”.

And of course, for those of us with vows, deeply regret our broken vows: pratimoksha vows – vows of individual liberation, the vows you take for junior school and high school – if you've broken those, then you deeply regret having broken those. If you've taken bodhisattva vows, then you deeply regret having broken your bodhisattva vows. If you've

taken tantric vows, you deeply regret having broken your tantric vows, because these are lifelong vows. So you regret these, hugely, because you don't want the suffering that this can cause in the future: being separate from our lamas, the Dharma, the Buddha's teachings, not to mention other suffering.

And if Buddha is right in asserting, as he does, that we've had beginningless lives, that we've had countless lives as animals, and that mightn't be the most suffering life, but that's where we do the most harm; animals just in their nature harm and get harmed. Look at one whale: it opens its mouth for one mouthful of one breakfast on one day and forty million creatures go in. And you get guilty because you killed one person. Get some perspective, please! That's a lot of sentient beings. So they live in a killing environment; they live on killing, animals do. So, the harm we've done to sentient beings as animals is inconceivable in comparison to what we've done as humans.

So if our minds are beginningless and we've had these lives, we've done countless things and that means those karmic seeds are on our minds now. So,

you better regret them, because you know you don't want that suffering again! "I regret anything I've ever done to any sentient being since beginningless time". Regret the lot! Because I do not want suffering – we've got to add that thought. "Because I am sick of suffering. Because I do not want suffering". You've got to say that. That's what makes it real, and not just some nice religious feeling. Not just guilt.

That's regret, the first of the four opponent powers.

## **1. SECOND OPPONENT POWER: RELIANCE.**

### **a. REFUGE**

Now you think, "Well, good! Whom can I turn to? Where's the doctor, please?" So you turn to Mr. Buddha. He's our doctor. Second step: Reliance.

There are two parts in Reliance: the first is reliance upon the Buddha; that's called Refuge. So what does that mean? Let's look at this again, carefully. If I'm a Christian, I would rely upon God, because he's my creator. So how I get purified is by requesting him to forgive me. Well, Buddha will forgive you; he's a nice guy, I

promise. But it's got nothing to do with purification. Nothing. It's nice to be forgiven, but it's not the point. It is not the discussion. Quite different.

So we rely on Buddha because he's our doctor – he's got the methods; he's got the medicine. So, “Thank goodness I've got a decent doctor”, you think. And you do a little prayer, you visualize Vajrasattva, the particular manifestation of Buddha that all the lamas praise as the best one for this practice.

In the bodhisattva path, the Buddha manifests as like, gorgeous, you know, jewelry on his arms and ears and throat, and silken clothing; they call it the royal aspect. This is coming from tantra, where that's a whole different discussion and it has to do with enhancing the senses and energizing them. It's quite different, another level. So, Buddha in that aspect is called Vajradhara, or in Tibetan, Dorje Chang.

When I first became a Buddhist, I really like this name “Dorje Chang” and I asked Lama Yeshe, “Who's Dorje Chang, Lama?” and he said, very simply, “He's the biggest Buddha, dear”. I was very proud to know I liked the biggest Buddha! So basically,

that's the tantric aspect of Shakyamuni Buddha.

For this purification practice, we use another aspect of Vajradhara, who looks the same, but he's white: Vajrasattva. He's particularly to do with emptiness, because realizing emptiness is when you've finally cut the root of the delusions, and that's when we actually purify our minds. Until then, by doing this purification practice we are simply stalling the ripening, we're weakening the seeds, we're like burning them, we're not pulling them out completely. Until you've realized emptiness, you will never cut the delusions, you'll always have more suffering. We need to stop their ripening, though, and that's what the purification process does. So, one relies upon Vajrasattva.

So, we visualize him above our head, and then we take refuge, say a prayer remembering the Buddha, grateful to have a Buddha, and we imagine him as our own lama, who manifests as the Buddha for our benefit, to show us the way. That's what refuge means. You rely upon the doctor.

Now, you've got to look at what it means, "rely upon the doctor". Why would you rely upon a doctor? Two reasons: one, because you do not want more sickness and you need their medicine; and two, because you are confident they're a good doctor. It seems kind of obvious; you don't go to a doctor because they've got a cute nose. So you rely upon their advice. It's perfectly reasonable.

Here, of course, this implies having thought about the Buddha, seeing that he's valid, and wanting to rely upon the Buddha because you want his medicine so that you can heal yourself.

In other words, if you've never thought about suffering, and you haven't regretted anything you've done wrong because you haven't thought about suffering and its consequences, then the Buddha will be pretty meaningless to you. If you haven't taken poison, or you don't realize you've taken poison, you might have heard about some amazing doctor who's got every antidote to every poison on earth, and you go, "Oh, how interesting. But how boring. Who needs him?" You don't care. But check how you feel when you've discovered you know you've taken poison;

you're going to hang on every word that doctor says and take his advice perfectly.

## **b. COMPASSION**

The second part of Reliance is where you have compassion for those you have harmed. It's a bit curious that it's called reliance. The lamas put it like this: here we are, now wanting to cultivate compassion for the suffering of others. Whom do we rely up, or need, in order to accomplish compassion? Suffering sentient beings, of course. If we never meet a suffering sentient being, how could we ever cultivate compassion. It's in this sense that they say we "rely upon" sentient beings.

In the first step, Regret, it's like having compassion for yourself. You're regretting the harm you've done for your sake. Now here, what you need to cultivate is compassion for those you've harmed, and you regret for their sake and want to purify yourself for *their* sake. But you can't have that until you've got the first one. Compassion is based upon this first one, on Regret. You can't have compassion for the suffering of others until you've got this real sense of renunciation for your own

suffering. It's impossible, you can't. You've got to have this one first.

Why? Very simple. Renunciation has two parts: The first part is: you are sick of suffering. Now, we all know that – we're all sick of suffering. But the second part's crucial: you now know *why* you're suffering – your past negative actions and your delusions. When you've got these two, that's renunciation.

Compassion is these two as well, but instead of yourself, it's applied to others. One: you see people suffering, and you find it unbearable. But, two: you now know why they are suffering, and that's the big shift here. You now know why they are suffering: because of their karma and their delusions: They, like you, are the source of their own suffering. You don't have compassion because they're poor innocent victims, which is the only people we usually have compassion for now; we love to have compassion for innocent victims, usually animals and children.

Now you see others suffering and you know why they're suffering. It's a crucial difference and one has to cultivate it carefully. Again, it's completely based on the teachings of karma, so one has to think

of this so carefully, analyze it so carefully. Because the feeling we have now is guilt and shame and hate and blame, you know.

Our compassion now on based upon there being no karma. We only have compassion for innocent victims, because we assume the cause of suffering is the horrible oppressor. Buddha says, “Wrong view”. Actually, when you’ve got this view of compassion, you’ll have even more compassion for the oppressor. That’s a fact. Why? Very logical. It’s like a mother for her junkie kid. Everybody else hates him – he lies, he steals, he’s a pain to be around; but the mother, her heart breaks for him. Why? Because he is causing himself suffering. That’s the basis of compassion.

You see people who are the victims of harm, you realize it’s the result of their own past actions and your heart breaks for them, but you have even more compassion for the people who caused it, because the people who are the victims are just finishing their suffering and the ones who caused it are just beginning theirs.

Once you’ve got this first for yourself, which is renunciation: I’m sick of suffering, I know why I’m suffering:

karma; then it's easy then to have compassion for others. You can't get it properly until you've got it for yourself. This is a reasonable psychological kind of progression, and all of it's based on karma.

Now, in this second part of the second step, Reliance, you think about compassion now. You think of those you've harmed, and you know what it's like to suffer so you know what it's like for their suffering. You regret for their sake, now. Compassion for others.

And if you're brave enough, you can have compassion for those who have harmed you, because they're going to suffer in the future. And of course, the dynamic of all this is you know you caused them suffering in the past, that's how come they're causing you suffering now. When you've got karma down, you can own it so strongly.

## **WITH THE VIEW OF KARMA, NO BLAME, THEREFORE NO ANGER**

In 2003 I remember, in New York, I was there for a conference that Richard Gere had organized: a bunch of ex-prisoners, when His Holiness was there. Twenty ex-

prisoners who had been meditating in prison: black and white, male and female, Puerto Rican, Mexican: a cross-section of American society. So people like me who had worked with people in prison were invited as well. We had this very nice talk all day, just a lovely conference, you know? And they all met His Holiness.

Richard also invited two young Tibetan nuns who'd been tortured and sexually abused in prison for a couple of years, basically for just being nuns. So they were telling their experience.

First of all, if you could quantify suffering, then it was obvious to all the Americans that the suffering of the nuns was more than all of theirs put together. But second, it was really clear they weren't angry, which is a big surprise to us. Because we have a victim mentality, and because we think we're innocent victims, and we think suffering is caused by others, we assume anger is normal; because anger is blame, isn't it? Anger is the response of the innocent victim.

But if you have the view of karma, you don't have blame. The nuns were sad, there were tears, but they weren't angry. And that's a big shock to us: we assume

anger is normal; in fact, we'd think you're not normal if you don't have anger.

But these nuns, at the end of their talk, they said very quietly, “And of course, we had compassion for our torturers, because we knew we had harmed them in the past”.

This is a huge point. This is why we can't just gloss over karma, we've got to really give it thought. And this is the basis of all of Buddha's teachings. It is a way of spelling out the law of cause and effect. Really think it through – it's the basis of all practice. And it's the basis of compassion.

### **3. THIRD OPPONENT POWER: THE REMEDY**

So now, the third step. Now you take the medicine. You apply the antidote. You can say in Buddhism there's a whole medicine cabinet of remedies, but all the lamas in the Tibetan traditions praise this particular meditation, this particular visualization, this particular mantra as a really potent medicine. Often this step is simply called “applying the antidote”.

So, you know, anything here would apply. If you've got a habit to kill, you

make a point of saving lives. You go get a bunch of worms and instead of having them killed as bait, you release the worms. It's a powerful thing to do. Or one of your practices could be, one of your antidotes could be to help sick people: anything you do that's opposite to the thing you're regretting. If you're regretting lying, you make a special point of telling the truth. You must do this anyway in your life. They are necessary.

But here, in this step, the very powerful practice, very powerful antidote, remedy – and one has to think about why it's powerful, not just because it's religion, you know – this very potent medicine of visualizing Vajrasattva and saying his mantra. This is said to be a very powerful medicine that works at a very deep level of your mind. So, one does this visualization of Vajrasattva purifying the various actions of your body, speech and mind and reciting the mantra.

All the lamas say that any practice that involves saying the Buddha's name, visualizing, reciting their mantras, is hugely powerful, far more powerful than practices that don't involve the Buddha. They talk about the “power of the object”,

the object of one's thoughts, actions, etc. So doing this practice of visualizing nectar coming from the Buddha and purifying your negative actions of body, speech and mind while you recite the mantra, is like an atomic bomb on the negative karmic imprints.

That's the third step.

#### **4. FOURTH OPPONENT POWER: RESOLVE**

And the fourth one, as Pabongka Rinpoche says, is the most important: Resolve, or the determination to change. If you can't own responsibility for what you've done wrong, you can never make the decision to change, can you, because you don't want to own it. First with regret and then the determination to change, you're really becoming accountable. You're really growing up. You're becoming mature. And you're becoming your own friend. That's why this practice is so crucial to do. Not just to gloss it over, say, "Oh I've done my Vajrasattva mantras..." That's not enough, I tell you. That's just not enough. You've got to think through these four steps. It's psychologically really

profound. It's being your own therapist, as Lama Yeshe puts it, I'm not kidding.

Things really shift if we can do this properly, because this is where we get the courage to know we are in charge of our life and we *can* change. Because it's the power of our own will, our own determination to change.

So this fourth step, again, is so practical: you make determination not to do again. So, if you have taken vows – I will never kill, I will never lie, I will never steal – you've taken those five lay vows, and they're lifetime vows, so obviously you need to reiterate that vow.

Every time you say “I will never kill”, it's like digging that groove deeper in your mind. It's not enough to say, “Oh, yeah, I took vows twenty years ago. Twenty years ago I vowed I wouldn't kill”, but you've never thought of it since. It's like saying, “Oh, I'm a pianist, I played piano twenty years ago”. You're not, unless you do it every day. We see these things as so self-existent. It's not enough. It's an ongoing, dynamic daily thing.

If every day you say, “I will never kill”, I mean, excuse me, guess what the result will be? It's hardly rocket science. If every

day you say it, that protects you every day from ever killing. It's obvious. It's so embarrassingly obvious. But we forget these things. So you need to reiterate your vows. I will never kill. I will never steal. I will never lie. I will never whatever they are. I will never break my bodhisattva vows. I will never break my tantric vows. You need to say this every day. Reiterate your commitments.

And it's not just because you're hoping God will make you good or Buddha will bless you; it's you training your mind. Like if you do pushups every day, guess what? You keep getting better at it. We understand it when it comes to creativity and art and learning things, but we think this is "religion" so we don't understand why I should say every day I'll never kill. Because you're training your mind in that direction. Because everything comes down to the thought. All you're doing by becoming a Buddha is programming your mind with positive thoughts. It's nothing more secret than that.

Then, of course, you don't lie to yourself, as Rinpoche says. If you're not ready to say I'll never do it again, if you haven't taken the vow, and you're still going

fishing every day or going hunting, then don't lie to yourself and say "I'll never kill again"; you're not ready. Be realistic.

Look at our old habits, like getting angry. So maybe you'll say, "Okay. I see the reasonableness of not getting angry. I'm going to give it a go. I won't get angry for five hours". Or you might say, "I won't lie for ten hours", – and because you've got to go to bed soon, when you're asleep, you won't lie, believe me; you'll keep your vow!

Be realistic; it's an incremental thing, and you've got to take this seriously on board. That's why you can't just do your mantras and think, "I've done my practice". It's not enough. It's a serious psychological procedure that you're involved in. Practice is real; it's you dealing with your own mind.

So, give yourself a timeline. And when it comes of course to your delusions, your neurotic thoughts, the things that harm you only – and I didn't mention this in Regret – but of course you can think of your own rubbish: your own angry thoughts, your depression, your jealousy, which are destroying you. You can deeply regret these because it's obvious the

suffering it causes you; because you're sick of the suffering.

Now here in this fourth step, you maybe can't say", I'll never be depressed again"; it's not possible, if you're caught up in the middle of it. But you make some decisions for yourself; realistic, humble decisions.

"Okay. I'm going to watch my mind like a hawk. I'm going to do my best tomorrow".

Any vows you've taken, you must reiterate them at this step: I will never break my lay vows, I will never break my bodhisattva vows, I will never break my tantric vows, etc.

If you haven't taken vows, and if you can start to say I will never kill, lie steal, etc., then great.

Take it at your own pace. Make decisions every night with this practice, and you will change. "We can mold our minds into any shape we like", as Lama Zopa Rinpoche says. We're the boss, remember.

## **5. UNRAVELING OUR NEGATIVE 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 our 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 understand 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 aeons 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.

## 6. THE BENEFITS OF BODHICHITTA LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE

The sutra *Do-de phal-po che*, which contains teachings on bodhichitta, says, “The holy, altruistic mind of enlightenment, that purest of attitudes, is a treasury of merits”.

The *Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life* says, “How can one measure the merits one collects by generating the precious thought that is the cause of all happiness of all transmigratory beings and the medicine that cures the suffering of all sentient beings?”

From where does every single happiness, both temporary and ultimate, of every single sentient being come? From bodhichitta. What is the one medicine for every suffering that sentient beings experience? That, too, is bodhichitta. Therefore, there’s no limit to the benefits of bodhichitta; there’s no way to realize how much merit you can collect with it. You can’t say it’s this much; it’s immeasurable. The merits you can collect

with bodhichitta are numberless. That is the straight translation—“How can the merits collected by generating the precious thought that is the cause of the happiness of all transmigratory beings and the medicine for the suffering of all sentient beings be measured?”

With the mind of bodhichitta, each breath in and each breath out become a cause for the happiness of all sentient beings. With this purest of attitudes, bodhichitta, every breath you take benefits each sentient being and with each breath, with every action, you create skies of merit.

Therefore, if you want to accumulate the conditions necessary for attaining realizations on the path to enlightenment, you should put all your effort into developing your own precious mind of bodhichitta.

When you think of fulfilling your wishes, it's not suffering you want. Normally, you don't wish for suffering. What you wish for is happiness. Of course, the happiness that most of us wish for is actually suffering; what we usually think of as happiness is not pure happiness. However, as far as what we wish for is concerned, from the

side of the wish, what we are looking for is happiness, not suffering.

That said, every single happiness—from that of full enlightenment, through liberation from samsara and the happiness of future lives, down to even the happiness of this life—depends on merit, good karma. Without good karma, nothing works. Without good karma, the cause of happiness, you can't enjoy even the slightest happiness. Without merit, there's no comfort; everything depends on merit. Realizations of the path, temporary happiness, even the work of this life, such as success in business—every single thing depends on merit. So, what's the best way to collect extensive merit? It's by practicing bodhichitta, meditating on bodhichitta.

Also, the merit you collect with bodhichitta is inexhaustible, unceasing. It doesn't stop until you reach enlightenment, and even after you reach enlightenment it continues. You continuously experience the result; your mind remains in the state of peerless happiness. Not only that. As a result of the merits you collect with bodhichitta, you liberate numberless other sentient beings

and bring them to full enlightenment. Without discriminating, you bring sentient beings equaling the sky, every single one, to the full enlightenment of buddhahood.

The teachings say that merits collected without bodhichitta are like a “water tree”. I think that means a banana tree—the fruit comes, you use it once and the tree no longer bears fruit. In other words, if merit is created without bodhichitta, you experience the result once and it’s finished. Merit collected with bodhichitta is completely different—you enjoy it all the time, lifetime after lifetime, and even after you achieve enlightenment, you keep enjoying it. Such merit is inexhaustible.

That’s why you should put all your daily life’s effort, everything you do, into developing bodhichitta. Whether you are happy or unhappy, whether you encounter problems or are problem-free, whatever your circumstances, favorable or unfavorable, whatever conditions you find yourself in, you must put every single effort into this, into living your life with the attitude of bodhichitta.

Now, when you do the Vajrasattva sadhana or other practices, even though

they begin with bodhichitta motivation, when you come to the mantra recitation, *again*, just before you begin to recite the mantra, dedicate very precisely by thinking, “Each mantra I recite is for every hell being, each mantra is for every hungry ghost, each mantra is for every animal, each mantra is for every human, each mantra is for every sura, asura and intermediate state being”.

Even though you begin the practice with bodhichitta motivation, make sure that when you come to the actual recitation of the mantra it is directed more to the benefit of others than yourself. Make sure that instead of feeling in your heart that it is “I, me” for whom you are reciting the mantra, you feel that you are doing it for others. Make sure very precisely that each mantra you recite is for others, not yourself. Instead of filling your heart with “I”, fill your heart with others. Begin your mantra recitation like that; during the session, recite the mantra with as much bodhichitta as you can generate; and every now and then, check your motivation to make sure that your attitude is that of more concern for others than yourself. If it's not, fix it.

If you want to be a lucky person, if you want good luck in your life, bodhichitta is the best way to create the good luck you desire. If you want to be lucky, put all your effort into practicing bodhichitta all the time. If you are a good hearted person you are truly lucky because gradually all your wishes get fulfilled—your wishes for your own welfare and your wishes for the welfare of others. You can stop all your defilements, your mental stains and errors, and accomplish all realizations, enabling you to liberate others from suffering and do perfect work for other sentient beings. Your good heart allows you to accomplish your own aims and those of others. That’s the definition of a really lucky person—one who has compassion for others, loving kindness, bodhichitta.

It also says in the Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life, “Since merely thinking of benefiting others transcends making offerings to all the buddhas, what need is there to say how extraordinary it is to actually attempt to bring happiness to every single sentient being without exception?”<sup>11</sup>

Here Shantideva is saying that even

thinking of benefiting others is much higher, more special, much greater and more extraordinary than making offerings to all the buddhas. Therefore, if you go beyond this extremely beneficial thought and actually *try* to bring happiness to all sentient beings without exception, actually *work* for their happiness, what need is there to say how extraordinarily beneficial this is, how far it surpasses making offerings to all buddhas?

Also, in his commentary to Maitreya Buddha's teachings, *Do-de-gyän [Mahayanasutralamkara]*, Arya Asanga says that benefiting one sentient being is more meaningful than making offerings to buddhas and bodhisattvas equaling in number the atoms of the world. How can it be that benefiting one sentient being is more meaningful than making offerings to not just one buddha but to buddhas equaling in number the atoms of the world?

This is incredible advice, similar to that given by Shantideva when he was talking about the benefits of bodhichitta, how extraordinary it is merely to think of benefiting others. For example, when we generate bodhichitta motivation, the

thought of achieving enlightenment for sentient beings, the thought of benefiting sentient beings, merely this thought, just this wish, is greater than making offerings to all the buddhas.

## **HELPING OTHERS IS AN OFFERING TO THE BUDDHAS**

I mentioned before that when we help sentient beings we can also think of it as an offering to the buddhas. This is a very useful way to think.

There are many ways in which we can help sentient beings. I'm not just talking about our pet dogs and cats—and whether we keep them for their happiness or ours is also a question—but also insects. Actually, perhaps we should also keep insects as pets—mosquitoes, spiders... especially the ones we don't like! Anyway, whatever sentient being we benefit—domestic animals, insects, hell beings, pretas, people—and whichever way we help them—for example, giving a Dharma talk to help somebody with depression or some other mental problem, medicine for illness or food or money to a beggar—sincerely trying to help either physically or mentally, we can always combine two

things: making charity to that sentient being and an offering to all the buddhas.

If, for example, you give food or money to a beggar, you're giving immediate help to that sentient being but at the same time it becomes the best kind of offering to the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions. Why? Because what the buddhas and bodhisattvas cherish all the time is sentient beings; nobody else. They are constantly working for sentient beings, cherishing only sentient beings. Therefore, when you help sentient beings you are helping the numberless buddhas and bodhisattvas. That's the reality.

Even if you don't think that your helping a sentient being is an offering to the buddhas and bodhisattvas, in fact it becomes the best kind of offering you can make, the most pleasing offering possible. As I also mentioned before, even though you don't directly help the parents, when you help their children you make the parents happy, because what they cherish most in their lives, what they hold most dear in their hearts, is their children.

Similarly, if you harm a child you harm its parents, and in the same way, therefore, if you harm sentient beings you

harm the buddhas and bodhisattvas; it displeases them greatly.

A child is like its parents' life, or heart, and the buddhas and bodhisattvas cherish sentient beings in the same way.

Therefore, if you do good things for sentient beings, if you benefit them, offer service to them, you are not only offering service to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas but the very best kind of service.

Thinking like this helps you practice tolerance, or patience. It helps you to not get angry at other sentient beings, to not arouse ill-will, to avoid hurting or harming them. It is very helpful. Inflicting pain upon a sentient being is like inflicting pain upon the buddhas and bodhisattvas.

That's not to say they experience pain in the same way that we suffering sentient beings do but it is certainly displeasing.

Therefore, when you offer service to a child or an old person, when you give things to others, for example, when you make charity to a beggar or even throw a party for others and offer them food and drink, remember that you are also making an offering to the buddhas and bodhisattvas. If you are aware of this, if

when you give to the sentient being you also intentionally think you are making an offering to the buddhas and bodhisattvas, you combine two things. The sentient beings derive benefit from whatever you have given them and you collect merit by making an offering to the buddhas and bodhisattvas with your intentional thought.

If, at such times, you consciously think, “By helping this sentient being I am also making an offering to the buddhas and bodhisattvas”, if you remember that what you are doing with this sentient being also affects the buddhas and bodhisattvas, that doing something good pleases them, two things get done and you collect much more merit than you would have by simply making an offering, thinking of only the Buddha.

When you make charity, whether it’s an offering to monks, monasteries or refugees, homeless people or the sick, at that time remember that you are also making offerings to the buddhas and bodhisattvas; you are giving to sentient beings but offering to the buddhas and bodhisattvas. In this way you collect far more merit, an unbelievable amount.

The sutra *Do-de phal-po che* says, “The holy, purest thought of enlightenment is a treasury of merit (or fortune); from this come the buddhas of the three times”.

This means that numberless past, numberless present and numberless future buddhas have all come from bodhichitta, that holy, most pure thought of enlightenment. The text goes on, “From this [bodhichitta] comes the happiness of all the world’s transmigrators”.

The Tibetan phrase here is *di-lä jig-ten dro-wa kun-gyi de-wa jung*. *Di-lä* means “from this”. The next term, *jig-ten*, requires a little more explanation.

## **THE MEANING OF “JIG-TEN”**

The sense is “change”, but to make it clearer we should say “changeable aggregates”. We also have the term *jig* in one of the six root delusions, the one called five wrong views, *ta-wa nga-ta ta-min nga*. One of those is *jig-tsog-la ta-wa*, the view of the changeable aggregates. Here, *jig* is the same, meaning change. *Ta-wa* itself simply means view, but the implication here is wrong view, so together it becomes something like changeable wrong view. *Jig-tsog-wa*

means changeable collection. What is that changeable collection? It is the five aggregates.

How does ignorance, the root of samsara, arise? How does that ignorance, which is the wrong view of the *jig-tzog-la* happen?

First, we have *mig-kyen*, the objective condition. The mind looks at the aggregates, which are impermanent and therefore changeable in nature, and labels them “I”. The thought thinks of the transitory aggregates and makes up the label “I”, the merely imputed I. But this I, which is merely imputed by that thought, doesn’t appear back to the mind as merely imputed. At that moment, you are not aware that the I is merely imputed by the mind.

Right after the I has been merely imputed by the mind, the negative imprints left on the consciousness by past ignorance, the concept of inherent existence, immediately *project* that the merely imputed I is inherently existent. Right after your mind merely imputes the I, just like imprints left on a film in a camera, the imprints left on the mental continuum by past ignorance—not just

any ignorance, but the ignorance of inherent existence—immediately *project* the hallucination of inherent existence onto that merely imputed I . Buddhas cannot see this inherent existence; bodhisattvas who realize emptiness can't see it; and when you analyze, even you can't find it—because it doesn't exist. What those buddhas and bodhisattvas see is a *non-inherently* existent I. That's what they see.

However, with us, as soon as our thought merely labels I, in the very next moment, that merely imputed I appears back to the same continuity of thought as *not* merely labeled by mind, as existing from its own side. The very next moment of mind apprehends, “Oh, that's true, that's a real I there”. So, that real I appearing as true, seeing that real I appearing from there as true, is the wrong view, *ta-wa*.

Now you can understand the meaning of *jig-tzog-la ta-wa* a little better. *Jig-tzog* means changeable collection, in other words, the aggregates; *ta-wa* means view. When the next thought moment of the same continuity of the thought that merely imputed the I *believes*, or apprehends,

that what is appearing to it is true, is something real from its own side, then at that time the *jig-tzog-la ta-wa*, the wrong view, happened. This wrong view is established on the aggregates, which are changeable by nature—like a table-cloth covering a table.

You can see the evolution, but since the wrong view is of the I, why does the term contain the aggregates, *jig-tzog*—the changeable collection (*tsog* means collection), the changeable aggregates? Why are they mentioned here, what's the connection?

Well, by understanding the evolution of the wrong view, you can see why. By thinking of the aggregates, your mind labels I. First you think of the *base* and then you apply the label. The cause, or reason, for the mind applying a label has to come before the label; the reason, or cause, of the label has to come before the label. They don't come together; the cause comes first. So, why is the particular label I chosen? Because first the base is identified, then the appropriate label applied

It's the same with any phenomenon. By looking at the base, thinking of the base,

seeing the base, hearing, touching, smelling or tasting the base, the mind that experiences the base and then creates the label, this or that. Depending on the base, the thought makes up the label and that's how all phenomena come into existence, happen.

Abbreviating *jig-tzog-la ta-wa*, the view of the changeable aggregates, we say *jig-ta*. *Jig* means change and *ta* means view, but although literally it comes to changeable, or transitory, view, that's not what it means. It is not the view that is changeable or transitory; the view is of the I. Change refers to the aggregates; the view is to do with the I.

Why am I describing ignorance here? Why, along with the wrong view, are the aggregates brought up? If you think of the evolution, you can understand. But now I should finish discussing the quotation from the sutra.

“From this comes the happiness of all the world's transmigrators”—the term here is *jig-ten dro-wa*, so perhaps it should be translated as “transmigratory beings dependent on change”, since *jig-ten* means dependent on change.

It means that the I, the being, exists by

depending on the aggregates. That’s what the “change” refers to. It means aggregates, which are transitory in nature, *jig-ten*. It really depends on the context. Actually, *jig-ten* is a general term that means both the world and its inhabitants—not only the place but also the beings that live there. It depends on the context. Usually it means suffering beings, *jig-ten*; samsaric beings, *jig-ten-lä de-pa* and *jig-ten-pa*—“those beings who are beyond dependence on change” and “those beings who are dependent on change”, respectively. In this context, *jig-ten-pa* means samsaric beings, “those who are dependent on change”, and *jig-ten-lä de-pa* means “those who have gone beyond samsara and are not suffering beings dependent on the aggregates”, which are changeable in nature, suffering in nature, that is, samsara. So *jig-ten-lä de-pa* means those who are beyond *jig-ten*

Here, *ten* means dependent on something; those who are dependent on change, which means the aggregates, transitory in nature, but also suffering in nature—that means samsara. Thus, *jig-ten-pa* means beings that are dependent on change, which means the aggregates.

The aggregates are changeable in nature, suffering—that’s samsara. The aggregates are samsara.

“From this, the happiness of all the transmigratory beings dependent on change”—*jig-ten dro-wa*, dependent on change. That describes the aggregates, samsara. Beings who are dependent on the aggregates, which are changeable and suffering in nature—that’s samsara, the continuity of which circles from one life to the next. Beings that are dependent on that are called samsaric beings, circlers.

The next line says, “From this, *all* good things, all goodness praised by the victorious ones comes” or “From this, one receives *all* the goodness praised by the victorious ones”. It can be translated either way.

From bodhichitta, there is no doubt that you can become a buddha, one who is the victor over, who has conquered, defeated, destroyed, not only the delusions but even the subtle negative imprints of delusion. So, “From this, there is no doubt that you can become the principal victorious one”—amongst holy beings, the principal one, buddha, the most perfect of beings.

The next line: “With this, the

defilements of all the *jig-ten* will cease”. Here, the *jig-ten* can mean all worldly beings. You can say, “All the defilements of worldly beings will cease”, but to my mind—I don’t know how it sounds to others—worldly has the connotation of “not being free from worldly concern, attachment clinging to this life”. Such beings are worldly beings, those who have not renounced attachment to this life. To me, “worldly being” has more this meaning than “samsaric being”, although here, worldly means samsaric. The Tibetan is *di-ni jig-ten kun-gyi drib-pa se-par-gyur*—“With this [bodhichitta], the defilements of all the *jig-ten* will cease” is the word-for-word translation—the meaning is the defilements of all samsaric beings or, you can say, the defilements of all the beings dependent on change, which means the aggregates, as we discussed above. All these defilements will cease.

On the other hand, I’m not completely sure what *jig-ten* refers to because even *arya* beings, like arhats, higher bodhisattvas and buddhas as well, exist by depending on aggregates. Even those who are free from samsara but still have subtle defilements—like arhats and higher

bodhisattvas—exist in dependence upon aggregates. Not aggregates that are suffering in nature but those that are changeable in nature. Those who are free from samsara, arhats, don't experience suffering, but they do depend upon changeable aggregates, *jig-ten*. So I'm not sure how widely the term *jig-ten* extends. Usually it means just samsaric beings but perhaps it can also cover those who still have subtle defilements—arhats and higher bodhisattvas.

## **THE BENEFITS OF YOUR OWN BODHICHITTA**

While this quotation from *Do-de phal-po che* explains the incredible benefits of bodhichitta in general, you can also use it to think of the extensive benefits that come from your own bodhichitta. Thus, your own holy mind of bodhichitta is the treasury of all merit. Of course, you can't relate the buddhas of the three times to your own bodhichitta, but they all do come from bodhichitta in general. Like numberless past, present and future buddhas arose from Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's bodhichitta—not *all*, but numberless—you can relate to it like that.

The happiness of numberless transmigrators dependent on change comes from *your* bodhichitta.

The happiness of all migratory beings comes from bodhichitta in general, but with *your* bodhichitta, you can still bring much happiness—the happiness of this life, future lives, liberation and enlightenment—to numberless sentient beings. Your bodhichitta can cause numberless hell beings, numberless hungry ghosts, numberless animals, numberless humans, numberless suras, numberless asuras and numberless intermediate state beings to experience all happiness up to enlightenment. All that comes from *your* bodhichitta, is caused by *your* bodhichitta.

You can even think very specifically. For example, your, one person's, bodhichitta causes numberless ants to experience all temporary and ultimate happiness up to enlightenment. Think how many ants you can find at just one spot, how many thousands there are in a nest under a rock. There are so many more in a field or on a mountain. There's no question how many more there are in one country. Like that, if you expand from one spot and think how

many ants there are in this world, this universe, numberless universes, you can realize how many there are and how your bodhichitta brings them all happiness up to enlightenment.

Think how your, one person's, bodhichitta brings *all* happiness to numberless other insects, numberless fish in the water, numberless shellfish on the rocks, on the piles supporting piers, in this world, in this universe, in numberless universes. If you think by elaborating in this way—the numbers of shellfish, for instance, are unbelievable, countless, and your bodhichitta, the bodhichitta of one person, you, can bring all happiness to all of them—it's incredible.

Think of other sentient beings one by one. The worms in the ground—your bodhichitta brings all happiness to numberless worms. Caterpillars, those hairy ones that walk in such long, well-disciplined straight lines—uncountable, numberless caterpillars in just one spot, let alone this universe, numberless universes—your bodhichitta brings every happiness to them all. Or on the beach there are so many tiny crabs—you can see them when the tide goes out. They make

all these little holes in the sand and when they come out looking for food the seagulls try to eat them. Think how many there must be in this universe, in numberless universes. The bodhichitta of you, one person, can bring them all happiness up to enlightenment. Think how unbelievable that is.

Even without thinking about the numberless hell beings, hungry ghosts, humans and so forth but merely thinking about the different kinds of animal and how each type is numberless, it is incredible that your, one person's, bodhichitta can cause them to experience all happiness up to enlightenment and, as it says here, "With this [bodhichitta], the defilements of all those dependent on change [*jig-ten*, all the samsaric beings] will cease". The bodhichitta of you, one person, can eradicate the defilements of each of the numberless animals, of whom even each type is numberless. Your bodhichitta can eradicate not only their suffering but also their two types of defilement. It's unbelievable. There are so many different kinds of animal and even in this world, each one is numberless. When you think how many there must be

in numberless universes and what one person's realization of bodhichitta, the good heart, can do, how much it can benefit others, it's really unbelievable.

Think how many flies there must be. Even on one cowpat there are thousands upon thousands of tiny flies keeping themselves busy, and that's just on the ground. In the air there are so many more. You don't notice them when the sun's not shining but when it's out you can see these huge clouds of flies in the air; uncountable numbers of tiny flies. From these few examples from the animal realm, just these few kinds of insect, you can understand how many suffering sentient beings there are.

Here I'm just talking about one spot on the ground but you should think of this world, then of numberless universes—how many unimaginable numbers of sentient being are suffering. Therefore if you, one person, have bodhichitta, it can stop all their gross and subtle defilements and put an end to all their suffering. That's incredible.

## **THE ONLY SOLUTION TO SUFFERING**

There are many animals, such as snakes, tigers, leopards and so forth, whose only food is other animals. They don't eat plants; they don't live on potatoes or carrots; they don't grow vegetables. All they eat is other sentient beings. Snakes eat mice, frogs and so forth. There are many sentient beings whose only food is other sentient beings; who, due to karma, depend on killing others for their very survival. If you keep such animals as pets you have to feed them other sentient beings. For them, not eating others is suffering because they can't survive in any other way and killing others is also suffering, since by harming others they create negative karma. Tigers in zoos, for example, have to be fed goats. Anyway, there are many sentient beings like this.

A while back in Singapore, where we frequently liberate many animals—frogs, fish and so forth—we bought five snakes from a restaurant in order to liberate them. When we opened the sack they were in they couldn't crawl away immediately because they'd been sedated. It was as if they were drunk or on drugs! The thought

came, if we release them, they'll eat mice, but if we hadn't freed them, they'd have become the restaurant's evening special. Either way, it's a problem. What we have to do is to free them from samsara; that's the only solution—free them from delusion and karma. Until that happens, either mode of existence in samsara—killing others or not killing others—is a problem. The only solution is to free them from samsara.

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DHARMA CENTRE**

Therefore we ourselves should practice Dharma as much as possible and, if we can, spread Dharma and help other people understand it. If we can help those sentient beings who have precious human bodies understand the teachings and get them to practice Dharma as much as possible, we can effect that solution right away, right now. You can't explain Dharma to snakes; you can't teach them to meditate! You can't start a meditation centre for snakes, mice or tigers. You can't establish a retreat centre for mosquitoes, organize retreats for mosquitoes! There's no way they can understand Dharma. Not

even dogs or cats can understand it.

It's important for you to practice Dharma as much as possible yourself, to actualize the path, and to help other people, those sentient beings who have human bodies, understand Dharma; to get others to practice Dharma. Actually, it's unbelievably urgent, an emergency. The only sentient beings you can really help to understand Dharma, the path to liberation and enlightenment, are other human beings. In this way, they can avoid being reborn in the lower realms, as hell beings, hungry ghosts or animals. They don't have to be reborn as mosquitoes. They can be saved from rebirth as snakes, tigers or other harmful animals. You can liberate people from rebirth in the lower realms, where you're in danger if you try to survive and in danger if you don't.

Who can you help right now? Human beings. The only way you can help animals is by taking them around holy objects or purifying them with blessed water. You can give them a little help like that but there's no way that you can make them understand and practice Dharma. It's only human beings you can help right now.

Therefore, you should make every effort

to help human beings purify their past negative karma and protect their present karma by living in vows, by abstaining from negative karma. In that way they can liberate themselves from rebirth as, for example, those harmful animals we've been talking about. Not just that, but also free themselves from samsara and bring themselves to full enlightenment.

It's essential that you practice Dharma yourself as much as you possibly can. And thus we see how very important the Dharma centre is; how it plays a crucial role in saving, liberating, rescuing human beings from reincarnating back into the lower realms. The Dharma centre is an emergency rescue operation, like when police go in with all that noise—sirens blaring, red and blue lights flashing, helicopters whirling—to rescue people in distress! Like that, the meditation centre plays a very important role in the emergency rescue of people, human beings, using the seat belt and life jacket of the lam-rim—meditation on refuge and karma immediately saves you from falling into the lower realms again. Then, on the basis of that, the centre helps bring people to liberation from samsara and

enlightenment. The meditation centre, the Dharma organization, plays a very important role in this. This is the way to empty the lower realms, to ensure through Dharma that no more harmful sentient beings get born—doing sincere work with pure motivation solely for the benefit of others.

## **NUMBERLESS BEINGS DEPEND ON YOU**

Thus your bodhichitta is unbelievable. It's unbelievable how much benefit you can bring to numberless sentient beings in *each* realm. Therefore, now, you can see how crucial it is—how the happiness of numberless sentient beings depends on you, how it's in your hands. That means it depends on how much you practice bodhichitta, how much effort you exert trying to realize bodhichitta. It is crucial, *most urgent*, that you realize bodhichitta, train your mind in *this*.

Thus, the practice of bodhichitta becomes very important in your daily life. In all activities, under any circumstances—when you are happy, when you're experiencing problems—at all times, never separate from bodhichitta.

Never stop wishing that all sentient beings be happy. Never lose your determination for sentient beings equaling the extent of space to have all happiness and to be free from all suffering and, in this way, to lead them all to enlightenment.

If you live your life with this attitude constantly in mind, then, if you have taken the bodhisattva vow, you are able to protect it, by the way. Even though there are many different vows enumerated, if you live your life with this attitude, you take care of all those different vows. This attitude encompasses all those vows. If you never separate from bodhichitta in all your activities, each merit you create contains the three types of bodhisattva morality and the other paramitas as well.

## **COLOPHON**

*Lama Zopa Rinpoche gave this teaching 7 March 1999.*

## **7. YOU CANNOT FIND THE I ANYWHERE**

**LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE**

The real purification comes when we've realized emptiness.

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 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*; *lang-cha* 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 axe.

## **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 centre! 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.

So, 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.

## **COLOPHON**

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

## **8. DEPENDENT ARISING: THE KING OF LOGICS TO PROVE EMPTINESS**

**VEN ROBINA COURTIN**

Paraphrasing Lama Tsong Khapa, Lama Yeshe says that dependent arising is the king of logics to prove emptiness.

All of Buddha's teachings, from grade one to graduation, are based upon the assumption of emptiness, and are leading us to emptiness. Emptiness is implicit in all the teachings. This is the unique characteristic of Lord Buddha's view.

You could say that the view of self-existence – which is what Buddha argues with, which is exactly the opposite view of emptiness – is the assumption of the views of samsara. All the views – my mother and father made me, or a creator made me, I didn't ask to get born, it's not my fault, I'm just the body – are all based upon the assumption of self-existence, and this is the exact opposite of the Buddha's view. The exact opposite.

And so, the point of it all is, as always with Buddha, we need to make it

experiential. I mean, we can read all about emptiness, we can squeeze our brains, as Lama puts it, we can get all very excited when we hear about emptiness, but unless we understand how to internalize it, it's just filling your head with words.

So let's try to unpack it, demystify it, and see how it applies to our daily life. Because if it doesn't, it's completely useless.

## **EVERYTHING IS A VIEWPOINT**

One way of describing what Buddha's saying is that everything in our mind is a viewpoint, an opinion, an attitude, an interpretation of the people and things and events that fill our lives.

Things exist, and we can even agree on their bare existence – cups, toilets, love, omniscient mind – but it's how we interpret them, understand them, their causes, etc., etc., that distinguishes the different views. There are the samsaric views, the Christian views, the scientific views – they're all viewpoint. And, of course, Buddha has his own very specific views about how things exist.

For example, Buddha uses the term “superior being”. Well, we all know from being Christians that's exactly how they

talk about God. The same term, superior being. You hear the characteristics of God: omniscient, all-knowing, all-powerful, pervading the universe, seeing everything. Well, Buddha agrees with this: there is omniscient mind, it pervades the universe, it knows everything, it is infinite compassion. You could say they agree on this. But the difference is in the view, the interpretation of *how* that omniscience exists, its causes, etc. The Christian teaching, the Muslim teaching, etc., is that it's self-existent, it exists from its own side, it's intrinsic, inherent, it doesn't have causes. The Buddha, however, says that, just like everything that exists, it's a dependent arising, and he also says that every being possesses the potential to become a Buddha. And, of course, the creator religions say that this superior being is the creator of everything. Buddha disagrees utterly. We don't need creating, he says; we already exist.

## **WE'VE GOT IT WRONG**

Christianity would interpret the world one way, materialism interprets it another way, Buddha interprets it in yet another

way. So, it has to do with interpretation, it has to do with view.

What Buddha is saying is that we do not see correctly how things exist. We get things right to the extent that we can say, “I’m Robina and you’re Fred”, “That’s a cup and not a knife”. That’s cool. Correct. But we don’t get much right other than that. We get it wrong, he says.

So, things do exist in the world. Things exist. But as Lama Zopa Rinpoche puts it, the delusions in our mind, the neuroses, the misconceptions, the wrong views, the negative states of mind, what they do is decorate on top of what does exist layers upon layers upon layers of characteristics that simply don’t exist there.

And the point of all this? Buddha says that all these wrong views in our head are why we suffer. And correcting these views, cultivating the correct views about how things exist, is the method to stop suffering.

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

Buddhism is basically Buddha’s own direct findings, his own experiences about how things exist and what’s possible. And

of course he would say confidently that his views are the correct view. He's allowed to say that; anyone can say that. But you have to back it up with your findings, your proof, etc., etc.

Buddha's like Einstein. If I were Einstein here, and I start telling you about  $E=MC^2$  and I say, "This is the truth!" well, you would hope I would be confident that it is true! If I'm sitting here saying, "Well, I'm not sure if it's true", you're laughing and you tell me to shut my mouth, don't confuse you. If I'm not confident, keep quiet.

So we want Buddha to be confident that he is right. But he's not asking us to believe him: this is a crucial point that we're not used to hearing when it comes to spiritual teachings. He's asking us to check out his findings, to discover the truth of them – or not! – for ourselves. It's up to us; we're the boss, not Buddha.

Like with Einstein, we need listen to what Buddha says and then, with confidence, decide to use his views as our working hypothesis in order to discover the truth of them for ourselves. How else can you work with something if you don't propose it? Working with Buddhist ideas

has nothing to do with believing it, squeezing it inside yourself, not like that at all. And it's got nothing to do with liking it or not liking it. It's either true or it's not. And we have to find out. That's the Buddhist approach.

Also, like Einstein, every word that Buddha says is from his own direct experience, his own findings. He didn't make it up; he's not speculating; he didn't have a vision or a dream about it; it wasn't revealed to him.

That's why you need to check the Buddhist centres carefully, check the Buddha's teachings carefully, check the people who teach, check the Dalai Lama, that he's a valid person who represents Buddha's teachings. If not, be careful! Don't confuse yourself.

## **WISDOM MEANS SEEING THINGS AS THEY ACTUALLY EXIST**

We hear a lot about "wisdom" in Buddhism, but it's not some special holy word, all high and fancy. "Wisdom" simply means being correct. If you say there are two cups on my table, that ain't wisdom, honey, that's ignorance. There's one.

Of course, the wisdom Buddha's saying we can accomplish is a pretty outrageous level of wisdom: seeing the universe as it exists without mistake. That's the level of wisdom we can accomplish; he calls it omniscience. I mean, my Catholic mother was shocked by that! It's quite radical.

What sees how things exist is the mind, and that's Buddha's expertise. According to the Buddha's model of the mind in our mental consciousness we have positive, negative and neutral states of mind; there's no fourth category. And these are technical terms, not moralistic.

## **NEGATIVE STATES OF MIND ARE NOT IN SYNC WITH REALITY**

The negative states of mind have two main characteristics: they're disturbing and they're delusional. They're liars, they're not in sync with reality. The virtuous states of mind have the characteristic of being peaceful – just check the last time you were loving, kind, generous; you felt peaceful. And, there's a sense of interdependence there. You've got a sense of connectedness with others, which means you're in sync – to some extent – with interdependence, which is reality.

When you're caught up in anger, depression, jealousy, it's a nightmare, isn't it? It's like hell. These states of mind are deeply disturbing and they're delusional. You've got this vivid, vivid sense of a separate, unhappy self-pity me, as Lama Yeshe calls it – lonely, bereft, not fair, poor me, things are done to me me. Hungry, needy, wanting something more, resentful, angry, hurt, low self-esteem – this is samsara, being caught up in this junk, that's samsara.

## **UNAWARENESS**

And the root, the mother, of all these lies in the mind, these neurotic emotions, these wrong views, is simply called “ignorance”. Like all these words, it's got a very specific definition. “*Ma-rig-pa*” in Tibetan; “unawareness”.

So, unawareness of, finally, how things actually exist. Or, as they say in Buddhist language, the ultimate way that things exist. This ignorance causes us to be utterly blind to this reality. As His Holiness the Dalai said recently, this ignorance has two functions: the first one is the mere ignorance of how things are, just merely not knowing; but that's not the

main problem. This ignorance also has an added problem of having made up its own fantasy story, and that's the one we're believing in now, which is the story, the belief, that everything exists in and of itself, from its own side, intrinsically, which is precisely the exact opposite of reality. This is so abstract for our minds.

So, before we even go into the meaning of what ignorance is – you know, what ignorance thinks: that everything exists out there, from its own side, in and of itself, without depending on anything – let's just look more broadly at how things *do* exist conventionally, because that leads us to understand their ultimate reality.

## **THE TWO TRUTHS**

Buddha talks about how things exist in two ways – well, many ways, actually. But this particular way of presenting it he calls the two truths: conventional truth, the way things exist conventionally; and the way things exist finally, or ultimately. So initially when we hear these, they seem totally contradictory. But in reality, they are like flip sides of the same coin, and our job is to get to see that, to understand that, first intellectually.

The shorthand for how things exist conventionally is “dependent arising”, or “dependent origination”. Things exist interdependently. Things exist *in dependence* upon this and that, conventionally. And then ultimately, the shorthand is “emptiness”: “emptiness” is the nature of reality ultimately. This is the way they talk.

So let’s unpack these ideas, let’s look at the use of these words, because part of our problem is we don’t even know how these words are used. We can’t get our head around the general concepts. You know, thirty years of hearing Buddhism, we still haven’t got a clue what emptiness is because we haven’t even technically got ourselves sorted out, how to use this terminology. We mystify it.

## **THE WORD “EMPTINESS”**

So let’s look at the word “emptiness” itself. In the most simple sense, it means “absent”, doesn’t it? It means “not there”. If I say, my cup has no water in it, we would simply say, “My cup is empty”. What we mean is there is no water in my cup; it is empty of water; water is absent from my cup.

## EMPTY OF WHAT?

Clearly, Buddha's not telling us that things are empty of water. So, what is he saying? What is he saying things are empty of?

Okay. So, if you're not colour-blind, let's say, you're going to agree this white cup is not red. You agree, don't you? This cup is not red. So we would simply say, "You're right, Robina, it's not red". The Buddha would say, using this language, "the cup is empty of being red". It's a fancy way to talk, but we can hear the meaning very simply, can't we? It's just that we don't speak like this. We don't say, "The cup is empty of being red", but the use of the word there is exactly the meaning. The cup is not red.

And why would he tell us it's empty of being red – I mean, it's empty of being lots of things. The point is, he would only tell a person who is colour-blind that it's empty of being red because that person *think* it's red, because their mind is making a mistake, is seeing it wrongly. This is crucial to understand.

## ESTABLISHING WHAT DOES EXIST

Okay. You can see the cup is white, right? Well, you could say, “White exists on this cup”. It’s a quaint way to talk, but you understand the meaning, don’t you? “There is white on this cup”. White is a phenomenon that exists on the cup, which is also a phenomenon that exists.

Now, because of that we can see there’s no red on this cup. So, we can also say, “The absence of red exists on this cup”. Would you agree with that? That on this cup, wouldn’t you agree, there is an absence of red? It’s a weird way to talk, so let’s discuss.

There is a good reason for talking this way. In Buddhist philosophy there are several synonyms for “that which exists” – and Buddha is all about our discovering “that which exists”. That’s his big thing. Because he says we’re in la-la land right now, believing in things that *don’t* exist.

So, whatever *does* exist is necessarily a phenomenon, an object, an existent. The definition of an existent is “that which can be cognized by mind”, a valid state of mind, obviously – and there are precise ways of defining what is valid and what is

not. And what we're attempting to do in this pursuit of wisdom is to eventually cognize all existents precisely as they exist, no more and no less: that's omniscience.

So, you agree, right, that there is an existent, a thing that can be cognized by the mind, called white? And it exists here on this cup, yes? Would you agree with that? White does exist here on this cup, doesn't it? It is something that your mind can cognize.

Okay, how do we know it exists? Well, we have to first establish it conventionally. We need to label it, define it, then check that it fulfills the definition and make sure there are no other valid cognitions of it that contradict this. Then we can all shake on it and agree that this object, this phenomenon called white, exists here on this cup.

## **COGNIZING THE ABSENCE OF SOMETHING**

As I mentioned, let's say I am colour-blind and when I look at white I see red. I'm making a mistake, aren't I? Remember, we've established the existence of this conventional phenomenon called white by defining, etc., etc., and agreeing upon that

– that’s what “conventional” means: by convention it’s called white.

When I see a red cup when you show me a white one, I am making a mistake. I am seeing something that doesn’t exist, but which I totally believe does exist. So you can’t just bully me into believing it; you have to help me see the truth. And how do you do that? You help me correct the mistakes: you check my eyes, my glasses, the lighting, the various dependent arisings. Then I look again at the cup and what will see?

Well, interestingly I will *not* see white, at least not initially. Because I’m so used to seeing red, I’ll get a big shock – “Oh my God, the cup is not red!” In other words, I will cognize the absence of red on that cup. What I see is the vivid phenomenon called “the emptiness of red”. Makes sense, doesn’t it.

When we hear “emptiness”, we tend to think of it as meaning “nothing”. But the “emptiness of red” is a very vivid thing that does exist, isn’t it? But for whom? It’s obvious that this is only relevant to someone who always saw red when white was in front of them. Now, having the fixed the problem, that person will see the

absence of the thing they always thought was there.

## **ABSENCE OF KEYS**

Let me give you another example. Let's say you are running late and you rush to the front door and on the way you open the drawer where you always keep your car keys. You *know* the keys are there, you totally expect the keys in the drawer. But when you open the drawer you get a big shock. "Oh my God! No keys!" What did you just see in the drawer? The absence of keys, the emptiness of keys. It's a very vivid thing, isn't it?

Now, if I look into your drawer and I'm not expecting keys, all I will see is a boring drawer with nothing in it. I see nothing. But you see *something* very vivid – the absence of a thing that you thought was there. And that's the idea about emptiness. And the only person who will see that vivid thing called emptiness of keys is the person who *expects* keys to be there, who *believes* keys are there.

## **ABSENCE OF \$10,000**

An even more vivid example. Let's say you have been saving your dollars: every day

your savings account grows and finally reaches ten thousand dollars. You know it's there with such certainty.

But one day you open up your bank statement online and all there is there is zero. Believe me, you won't see zero dollars! You will vividly, shockingly see the absence of your precious ten thousand dollars! The emptiness of ten thousand dollars is a very vivid thing for you!

## **ABSENCE OF THE INHERENT SELF**

So Buddha is saying, "Robina, you need to cognize the emptiness of the self-existent I". Why? Because for aeons I have been imposing on my self – the conventional self that does exist – a characteristic that doesn't exist there. The mistake we make – our ignorance makes – is seeing an inherently existent self where there isn't one. And we do this with everything. We see an inherently existent cup where there isn't one, an inherently existent dog where there isn't one, an inherently existent everything where there isn't one. We've been decorating on top of what does exist – a conventional I, a conventional cup – the characteristic called inherent existence, which doesn't exist and never

has. So Buddha wants us to see that absence, that emptiness.

And where does that absence of an inherently existent I exist? On the conventional I that does exist. Just like the absence of the red cup exists on the white cup that does exist, and the absence of ten thousand dollars exists right there in the bank account of zero dollars.

## **THE BIG MISTAKE**

Buddha's saying that for aeons we have been believing in this big mistake. Where did you learn this? We didn't. We've believed it since beginningless time. And all of our suffering, all our attachment, all our anger, all our pride, all the wars, all the dramas, all the rebirths – all are the consequence of this misconception. This misconception is the primordial misconception that is the source of all suffering.

But we can't see it, because it's totally assumed as the truth. It's the default mode in our minds. We can't even begin to comprehend the meaning of "I see myself as inherent".

So, "seeing emptiness" is a very meaningful way to say it. It's the

emptiness of the fantasy “I” that you thought was there. And, just like with the keys or the dollars, the person who’d see the absence of the inherent I is, of course, the person who always believed it was there.

You would see the absence of your inherent I only if you had clung to and believed in an inherent I in the first place. It has nothing to do with vacuous space, vague nothingness. It’s a very vivid, vivid thing, when you can get it.

When you see a zero in your bank statement but totally expected \$10,000, you won’t see zero dollars, for sure! That’s nihilism, which we often mistakenly think is the meaning of emptiness: as if we chucked all the dollars and ended up with nothing. No! It’s not like that! You will vividly see the *absence, the emptiness*, of ten thousand dollars.

As His Holiness says, it’s not as if when we search for the inherent I, the I that we think exists, that we throw out everything and end with nothing. Not at all. When we search for the I among the aggregates, our parts, what we find is the massive thing called the *absence, the emptiness* of the I that we always thought existed.

Of course, the emptiness of this inherent I is far more radical than the emptiness of red or ten thousand dollars; red can exist, ten thousand dollars can exist, but that kind of I could *never* exist.

Buddha's telling us that we need to cognize the emptiness of the inherent I is not some fancy religious trip he's putting on us; it's not some abstract construct. It's utterly experiential.

And the realization of it is what cuts the root of suffering.

## **WHAT DOES INHERENT MEAN?**

So let's talk about what it means, "inherent I", "intrinsic I", "self-existent I", "I that exists from its own side", "I that exists in and of itself". For the Prasangika-Madhyamakas, they are all synonyms for the mistake our mind makes, for the mistake that this ignorance in the mind makes.

If something existed inherently, it would necessarily not depend on anything else. And this is Buddha's fundamental point. If we think even roughly, we'll see there is nothing that exists that doesn't depend on something for its existence.

## **THE MIDDLE WAY**

In the Buddha's teachings, there's different levels of understanding emptiness, and each of them removes a little bit more of what they think doesn't exist until eventually you get to the highest view, the Middle Way, and within that the view called the Consequentialists, or Prasangika, which is Buddha's actual intent. His Holiness talked about this recently: when we finally have the true view, according to Nagarjuna, who really explained this fifteen hundred years, it sounds so radical, so scary: that there is nothing from the side of the cup, the I, the table, the mala, the flower, there is nothing from the side of a thing that makes it that thing.

We think there is, and we desperately cling to there being something inherent – something in the “thing” that makes it the thing. That's what we think. That's what this ignorance thinks, and we desperately want this. We cling to this, because our deep instinct is to think that there being nothing from the side of the thing means nihilism. And that's why it's so tricky.

The moment we hear that there is nothing from the side of the thing that

gives it its thingness, we immediately hear it as, “Oh, there’s nothing there”.

Nihilistic. We chuck the baby out with the bath water. Instantly, we hear it this way. We can’t help but hear it this way. Buddha says that’s one of the extreme views deep in our minds. We go too far, we chuck too much out.

And then as soon as we hear about dependent arising, that things exist in dependence upon this and that, we don’t hear that properly either. We hear it as, “Ooh, what a relief!” and *grasp*. “Thank goodness there is something there after all!” So we reify it. We put too much onto it.

These are the two extreme views that our mind lunges between like drunken sailors a thousand times a day.

## **DEPENDENT ARISING MEANS EMPTINESS AND EMPTINESS MEANS DEPENDENT ARISING**

What Lama Tsong Khapa says we need to do is every time we hear “emptiness” – that there is nothing from the side of a thing that makes it a thing, there’s nothing in and of itself that is making it that, there is no I from its own side, there is no

intrinsic, inherent me in there that makes me, me – instead of instantly going to the nihilistic view and chucking the baby out with the bath water, we need to consciously bring ourselves toward the Middle Way and say to ourselves – which is counter-intuitive for us – “Aha, Robina. My “I” being empty *means* it is a dependent arising I. There is an I: there is an I that exists in dependence upon this and this”.

And then every time we hear about dependent arising, that there is an I existing in dependence upon this and that, instead of clinging onto it and exaggerating it and reifying it, we will again go towards the Middle Way and say, “Aha, Robina, that means it is empty of existing from its own side”.

So, right now, these are opposite to us. Because what Buddha’s saying and what Tsong Khapa really runs with is that when you think “emptiness”, it should remind you it means “dependent arising”. And when you think “dependent arising”, it should remind us that that means “emptiness”. They in fact are the two sides of the same coin. In fact that’s the true Middle Way. That when you think

“emptiness”, you think “dependent arising”, and when you think “dependent arising”, you think “emptiness”.

## **WE MUST KNOW THE RIGHT WORDS**

We have to practise thinking this, because intuitively we go to the two extremes. And this is very meaningful, this is very tasty, experiential. It's not just intellectual clever stuff. This is why it is crucial to have the right words. Buddha's main gift is his words. If you can't put it into words, then we're just being lazy. We have to practise, because words are how we communicate.

There's an old Danish guy in the Santa Cruz called Age, he's ninety-something now, and he was a friend of Lama Yeshe's, and he is a Taoist. Lama asked him one time, “Tell me what you think, what your philosophy is?” and he said, “Oh, no, it's beyond words. You can't describe it”. And Lama said something like, “Ah, you're just being intellectually lazy. You're cheating. If you can't describe it, then what good are you to sentient beings? How can you help?”

So he took this to heart, and he said he spent twenty years thinking through the

entire philosophy and writing a book, explaining it to people, making it coherent.

Because if you don't have words, how can you hear Buddha's teachings? It's not possible. We have to have words and the words have to be correct. If I just sit here and bliss out to you about how amazing, how special the taste of the cake is, wow, it's beyond words – how mean of me! I have to give you the recipe, don't I? And that's words. *Then* you can get the taste.

Buddha's main gift is his words. Words are deadly serious, because they lead you to the taste. So, get your words right. That's why you need to listen to authentic teachings. Check carefully before you read, there's so much junk around, you know, that's called Buddhism. Be very careful what you listen to, whom you listen to. You should check. You know, we all love the His Holiness, for example; we think, "Oh, isn't he wonderful, he makes me feel good". Well, I'm sorry – Hitler made people feel very good! No logic. So check up on your facts, you know; don't just go by feeling. Have some confidence, have some certainty.

## **ESTABLISH THINGS AS EXISTING CONVENTIONALLY**

So, if things exist in dependence upon various factors, and if they're empty of inherent existence, then we need to think about it, we need to prove that it's true. And to do that, as I said before, we have to start by establishing something in order to discuss how it exists. So how do we do that? Well, we start with the name, and then we have to define it. A definition has two parts.

“Mummy, what's a cup?”

“Well, darling, it's that flat-bottomed clay container with a handle on it”. I can see it, can't I? “But Mummy, what does it do?” “Oh, it holds my tea, sweetheart”.

The first part of the definition tells you its conventional characteristics, its substance, and the second part tells you its job, what it does, its function. “It holds my tea”.

But I'm not confident yet. I can't just believe what you tell me. I now have to check that it does, in fact, fulfill its function. So I pour tea into it and if it holds the tea, then it does the job we said it does. But there's more: we now need to check that there are no other valid

cognitions in the minds of anyone else that contradict that. And if there aren't, then we've established a cup, haven't we? And then we all shake hands on it and agree.

That's conventional reality in general. It's a cup literally "by convention", by agreement. And Buddha says that that's how everything exists.

## **FIRST, THINGS EXIST IN DEPENDENT UPON CAUSES AND CONDITIONS**

Let's look at the different levels of dependent arising, taking it one step at a time, leading us to the subtlest level. The first way in which things exist is in dependence upon causes and conditions; they come into existence in dependence upon countless causes and conditions. And when it comes to the thing called a person, that's called karma, isn't it?

When I first learned this from Khensur Rinpoche Jampa Tegchok, who was the abbot of Sera Je monastery for seven years, he was the abbot of our monastery in France for ten years and my philosophy teacher in England in the late 70s. He used the example of the object called

“Robina”. He said that it can be said that everything in the universe up to the first moment of Robina is validly a cause and condition for the existence of Robina.

I’ll never forget it, and at the time it sounded pretty cosmic. But let’s look at the logic of it. It’s scientifically true. You can start anywhere you like. Let’s discuss this cup here. So let’s say Mrs. Smith was the designer of this nice cup. So we can say, obviously, one of the first causes of this cup is Mrs. Smith, isn’t it? Her mind imagining, conjuring up this design. We can say that, can’t we? Very clear. We know it didn’t fall out of a tree like this. A human mind created it. So, Mrs. Smith had a mother, didn’t she? And if Mrs. Smith didn’t have a mother, there could not be Mrs. Smith. So, Mrs. Smith’s mother had a mother, and then you can’t help but say Mrs. Smith’s mother had a mother, and where can you find the first mother? Because as soon as you posit one, you’ve got to posit the previous one, which is the simple logic of cause and effect. That’s the simplest level of dependent arising. As soon as you posit a thing, it has to have a cause.

Then you've got another angle – you think of the clay. Well, clay came from a mountain and that came from previous something and that turned into something else. Then you think of the paint.

Everything you look at about this cup – once you start, you *cannot* do anything but keep going back and back. Of course, we are desperate to find the first cause – but logically, given cause and effect, such a thing cannot exist.

It's fascinating: we always want a first cause. As His Holiness said one time in his conversations with scientists: "Big bang? No problem! Just not the first big bang, that's all!"

This is a result of having in the depths of our mind the view of self-existence. This is the view that is actually manifesting in the philosophies that assert a creator – that there is a "first cause" and it's called "God". Buddha says it's irrational and illogical. If you posit a law of cause and effect you cannot have an effect without a cause. There is nothing we can point to that exists that didn't come from something a moment before. (But you can have a cause without an effect: if you have an egg, you don't have to get a chicken,

you can break the egg any time you like. But of course, if there's a chicken, it has to have come from an egg; and you know that that egg has to have come from a chicken, and so forth.)

So, if there is an effect – and everything that exists at this moment is itself an effect, isn't it? – it assumes a previous cause, so you will never find a first one. But we frantically want there to be a first cause. “But, but, but there *must* be”, we'll say. We ask the question: “When did it begin? When did delusions begin? When did suffering begin? When did karma begin? When did everything begin?”

We've got this view *because* we cling to self-existence, because we have this misconception deep in the bones of our being. We assume there has to be a first cause, because grasping at self-existent me, grasping at “self-existent anything” is the opposite to cause and effect.

So the first level at which things exist interdependently is in terms of their existing in dependence upon causes and conditions.

## **KARMA IS THE FIRST LEVEL OF DEPENDENT ARISING FOR THE OBJECT CALLED ME**

Karma is a marvelous example of this. Let's look at the phenomenon called me or self or I. So, right now, we can see we cling to a sense of self that's very vivid, that's very solid, separate, lonely, bereft, self-pity, self-conscious, angry, depressed, fearful – all the drama. We live in the bubble of this sense of a separate, lonely me, don't we? There's me, and there's everyone else. This is the biggest lie. This is the experiential, emotional consequence of believing in “inherent I”.

Like I said, we don't *think* we believe “in inherent I”, we don't even know what it means. But this is the experiential consequence of it. Fear, drama, anxiety, anger, depression, low self-esteem, loneliness, poor me – these are the experiential consequences of this primordial mistake.

The deepest assumption about this me is that there are no causes coming from me: I didn't ask to get born, it's not my fault, everything is done to me, things seem to happen randomly, unfairly. There's this deepest, pervasive feeling of being an

innocent victim, that whatever happens to me has *nothing* to do with me – including the good things! But we don't mind them, we don't mind if there are no causes: just give me more please!

We don't want the ugly things done to me so we have huge aversion and anger and push it away, and we do crave the lovely things so we have attachment. Attachment and aversion are the consequences of this ignorance, the natural outcropping of ignorance, because we assume an I to have things *for*. We assume an I that doesn't want suffering. It's an assumption deep in the bones of our being. This is the experiential consequence of this mistake that our ignorance makes.

But thinking about how I am the result of past karma, I'm the result of past actions – you hit me because I hit you before, you're generous to me because I must have been generous to you before – it loosens the grip of this lonely, bereft self-pity me. We can begin to realize that I am in fact an interdependent scenario, not some lump of poor me plonked on this earth by someone else. That's why to talk about karma, to think about karma is the

most marvellous way to loosen the grip of the “self-pity me”, to loosen the grip of the ego, of the ignorance. It takes time, of course.

So the first level of dependent arising is that things exist in dependence upon causes and conditions. There is a cup that does exist – in dependence upon countless causes and conditions. But you will not find a cup among any one of those causes and conditions. This is the first level to think about. And what this means is, you think about this and what it brings – this is the point – is the conclusion: “Oh, I see! Therefore there’s no cup from its own side”. You see the absence of the inherent cup: emptiness.

## **HOW TO APPLY THE LOGIC OF DEPENDENT ARISING TO UNDERSTAND THE EMPTINESS OF THE CUP**

So how do we get to realize the emptiness of the cup? Am I supposed to just sit there and think, “The cup is empty, the cup is empty, the cup is empty”, waiting for some vision to come. Ridiculous! In a sense you can say that you don’t sit there thinking about emptiness; you sit there thinking

about dependent arising. And that thinking, that logical analysis, triggers the conclusion, “Oh, I see – therefore, there’s no cup from its own side, therefore the cup is empty of existing from its own side”.

Emptiness is the conclusion you come to, having thought about dependent arising. It’s a very practical thing. It’s not cosmic, because very simply, if you think about how the cup exists interdependently, this proves that it is absent of existing independently. Obvious – they’re the opposite.

If it is empty, if it is interdependent, it is empty of being independent, isn’t it? If it is interdependent, it is empty of being independent. Independent and interdependent are opposite. So if it is interdependent, it lacks being independent. Simple. That’s the simple way of talking.

And here we’re talking about the simplest level of dependent arising: that things are empty of existing independently of causes and conditions. You keep looking for the cup but all you find are the causes and conditions of the cup, which is

what triggers the insight, “therefore there is no cup from its own side”.

## **SECOND, THINGS EXIST IN DEPENDENCE UPON PARTS**

Now, the second way the cup exists in dependence upon various factors is that it exists in dependence upon its parts. There is a cup, but you won't find cup apart from its parts. But we think there is, and our language cheats us. Our language is really tricky. It reinforces self-existence.

Back in the seventh century, Chandrakirti, this Indian great commentator on Nagarjuna's teachings on the Middle Way, which are at the heart of all the teachings on emptiness in Tibet, he talked about using the example of a chariot. “Well”, he said, “in order to look for this inherent chariot that we think is there, let's break it down into its component parts, to search for this inherent chariot”. You won't find anything left over after you have dismantled all the parts, and instinctively we think we will.

Of course, the very tasty example is the self, the I. So, we can do this little meditation. First, remember, you have to establish the existence of the self,

conventionally: label it, define it, check that it fits its definition, that's there's no valid cognition that contradicts it. Then you'd do an analysis in your mind, you'd do it very rigorously. You would start to break down the component parts of your own self – just like with the chariot – and you'd put them all out there in little piles. All the hard bits and the soft bits and the mucky bits and all the bits of your mind – the negative states, the positive ones – as many piles as you want. Keep stripping it away, deconstructing this I into its component parts in this rigorous search among the parts of the self for the inherent self, which we're so convinced is in there somewhere.

We believe *totally* that we'll end up with this naked self-conscious little I that's now been exposed, that's the owner of all the parts. We talk like this: "I did not do this". "I am a special person". "I am so fat and ugly". "I am not this". "How dare you say that about me!" We really believe there's a component in there called I or self that is, as my friend Pende puts it, walking hand in hand with the other components, the parts, the mind, the body, etc., etc. We believe there is this me in there that kind

of runs the show, a mini-me, a landlord, the boss.

Even conventionally, the Consequentialist Middle Way view says you won't find that one. Let's do an exercise to prove it. Okay. My table has a cup, a clock and a vase. Can you see this? So, how many phenomena did I mention? Four. My table, the cup, the clock, the vase, right? Four phenomena. We're talking conventionally here, nothing tricky. If it's a true statement that I just made, you must point out four separate, distinct phenomena: you have to point out a table that is not a cup, not a vase, and not a clock, right? A clock that is not the table, the cup, the vase. Etc. You have to point out four separate phenomena. There's a table, there's a cup, there's a clock, there's a vase. You agree, don't you? And we can do that, can't we? Easy enough.

Okay then. Another statement: I have a nose. You agree? And I have a foot. And I have a hand. How many phenomena? Three? No. There are four phenomena, aren't there: I, nose, foot, hand. Do you agree? So, same discussion. If those four phenomena do exist conventionally, you

have to find four separate, distinct phenomena, each of which is distinct, is not the other, don't you agree? Same as before.

Well, there's my foot – cut it off! There's my nose – you can have it! There's my hand. Now, where's the I? Where is the I that is not the nose, not the hand, and not the foot. Oh dear. . . Most annoying, isn't it? You can't find a separate I.

It's just the same with the cup. Cup has a handle and a base – there's the base, there's the handle. Where's the cup that *isn't* the base, that *isn't* the handle? Where's the I that *isn't* the nose, the foot?

### **THREE LEVELS OF DEPENDENT ARISING**

The grossest level of no-self that Buddha initially argues with is the view that there is a permanent, partless self separate from everything else: unchanging and unitary. The lower Buddhist schools of thought take this view as gross selflessness.

The next level of selflessness, which is subtle selflessness for all the lower schools, is that there is no substantial, self-sufficient self. But they all end up positing that there has to be *something*

there among the parts that is called I, each of them positing something different.

The Consequentialist Middle Way view says no, there isn't; there doesn't need to be. For them, the truth is that there is no inherent I; that from the side of the parts – because there is nowhere else there could be an I – there is not an iota of anything that makes it that self. Everything exists like that, they say.

This is the most radical, the scariest view! And it's what leads to the subtlest level of dependent arising, that the self is merely labelled. And it's said that you don't realize this subtle dependent arising until you have realized the complete lack, the total absence, the emptiness of an inherent I among the parts.

### **THIRD, THINGS EXIST IN DEPENDENCE UPON THE MIND THAT LABELS THEM**

Cup is merely a name the mind imputes upon the parts, which is the valid base for that label: the handle, the base, the clay, the this, the that.

“Robina” is a name we impute upon the parts of Robina: the aggregates: the body and mind.

Our instinct is almost to then think, “Oh, good there are the parts, there is something!” No. Body is a name imputed by the mind upon its parts; mind is a name imputed upon its parts. Same discussion – you can’t find a handle among the parts of the handle, because “handle” is merely a name imputed on its parts. You can’t find a hand among the parts; it is a hand, it does hold a cup, but it’s merely a name imputed by mind upon the valid base, which is the fingers and the thumb and the palm and the wrist, etc.

Everything exists like this. Prison is made up by our mind; love, anger, jealousy, hell, enlightenment: they all exist in dependence upon the mind calling them that, buying into their being that.

But nevertheless they do function as that: as prison, a cup, a self, anger. They *must* in order to establish them as conventions. You can’t call a cup a knife just because you feel like it. You have to establish it conventionally, and it has to function, and we have to agree to it. But ultimately you can’t find it. But these two together is the tricky job to be done.

As Lama Zopa Rinpoche says, “When we have realized emptiness, realized how

things actually exist, it's as if there is nothing there, but there is. But what exists is so subtle it's *as if* it's an illusion, it's *as if* it doesn't exist". Or, as we'd say in the West, "It's all smoke and mirrors".

## **WHEN WE KNOW EMPTINESS, THERE IS NO FEAR**

When we have realized the emptiness of that fantasy I, as Lama Zopa says, "Then there is no fear". Fear is finished, because fear is the main emotion of all the delusions, in particular ego-grasping. This ignorance is known colloquially as ego-grasping, and its main job is fear. Fear and panic.

Rinpoche is a Sherpa and was recognized when he was very small as the reincarnation of a previous yogi called Kunsang Yeshe up in the mountains in the Mount Everest region of Nepal. He was a lay meditator called Kunsang Yeshe. Eventually he left home and went to this little hole-in-the-wall in the mountains, which is now known as Lawudo. I think it was where they stored the radishes or the onions; "Lawudo" means "radish" or "onion", I can't remember which. Anyway, he pulled out the radishes and moved in,

and that became his little home for the last twenty-five or whatever years of his life. He got to be known as the “Lawudo Lama”. And so when he died, like all the great yogis he had complete control over the process and could choose his rebirth.

From the time Rinpoche was a tiny boy, apparently, when his mother would go outside to chop the wood, little Zopa (he wasn't called that then; I can't remember his name) would be *gone*, you know. He's crawling up the hill towards the cave. And from the time he could talk, he'd always be going up that hill, always. He's relentless, very determined. And his mother would say, “Come home!” He'd say, “No! *That* is my home”, pointing up to the cave.

From the time he could play games, his sister said, he'd always play the role of being a lama, sitting on a throne and having a pretend bell and dorje, and leading pujas and making mud pie *torma* offerings. He'd say, “All my benefactors are coming” and he'd mention the names of his benefactors from his past life!

His mother, of course, decided she'd better check with the local lamas, who decided, yes, he seems to be the reincarnation of Kunsang Yeshe. Then he

became known as a Rinpoche, “Precious One”.

Anyway, years later Rinpoche told the story about when he was eight years old and up in the mountains with his manager at a monastery. There was this big river and on the other side of the river he could see these “strange, pale-faced people with straw-coloured hair” – Anglo-Saxons! He really wanted to meet these people. There was this little rickety bridge, it seems, and his manager kept saying, “No”, but he insisted. So there he was, holding a little bowl of potatoes – being a Sherpa, you know, you bring your gift of potatoes – and when he was halfway across the bridge he fell in the water – they don’t learn to swim up there!

In retelling the story Rinpoche said, “The head was bobbing up and down”. Not even “*My* head” – “*The* head”: a very objective statement. He said he noticed his manager running along the river bank, shouting and yelling. Then, Rinpoche said, “Hm, the thought occurred to me, ‘the person known as the Lawudo Lama is about to die’” – this very clear, rational observation as he’s going up and down for air. And then he told us, “I didn’t know

anything about emptiness, but there was no fear”.

What we can deduce from this, in my opinion, is that he already had in his mindstream the realization of emptiness: that’s why there was no fear, that’s why he would think, “the person known as the Lawudo Lama. . .” instead of the huge massive panic-stricken thought of “I!!!” that normal people have.

Of course, in our culture, we would find this utterly inconceivable. You’d be called mentally ill if you proposed this possibility to Western psychologists! Because Western psychology is based – like I said, not just the religious teachings but the materialist teachings as well – based on the assumption of a self-existent I. We say it is natural to have fear. We call it “instinct for survival”. We assume fear, jealousy, anger, paranoia, upset, depression, all the rest are normal behavior. Animals have it. Humans have it. So everything is based upon the assumption of this as reasonable mental health.

To hear that Buddha says you can remove all these neuroses from your mind and go beyond all fear, and develop

infinite wisdom and infinite compassion for all sentient beings: there's no concept like this in our contemporary views of the mind and what's possible to achieve.

So, for someone to be drowning and to observe what's going on with a clear mind, and for the thought to occur that he was about to die, and to have no fear: all this fits the behaviour of a person who has seen the truth of emptiness; who knows there is no self to cling to.

It's easy for us to say these things in nice religious terms – nirvana, Buddhahood – but we need to hear it as real, doable, actual psychological possibility.

So this ignorance, this ego-grasping – this deep, deep primordial delusion – this default mode, this ancient, aeons-old habit that we come programmed with from countless lives, along with its branches called attachment and anger and all the rest – this is what we call normal in the world. But Buddha says we're all mentally ill. We're all living in a mental asylum in our own head.

All the delusions see something that isn't there. Attachment projects a delicious, divine cup – the mistake called “attachment”, the delusion, the lie;

aversion – another lie – projects “ugly, revolting cup”. Ignorance informs both and it projects a self-existent beautiful cup, a self-existent ugly cup on the dependent-arising cup. In other words, ignorance underpins all the other delusions. It’s the deepest assumption underneath attachment, aversion, depression, jealousy and all the rest. Once you remove that underpinning, all the other samsaric views collapse in a heap of nothingness.

So the deepest assumption, the deepest mistake is this belief in the “inherent me”. Like I said, it’s so subtle, we don’t realize we think it. No one taught us this. It’s just the default mode. We were born with it. It’s in fact the motor that propels us to even take a rebirth in the first place. So, it’s pretty primordial.

Once we understand the branch delusions – how they misconceive, how they exaggerate – then we can begin to understand the root delusion, the ignorance that clings to the self-existent I, the ego-grasping.

Once we’ve seen the emptiness of the fantasy I, we’ve pulled out the root and then, of course, the others collapse, the

branches die. There's no longer anything to be attached to, or to be angry about, or to be depressed about.

And then we're well and truly on the road to enlightenment!

## **ANY INHERENTLY EXISTING PHENOMENA?**

Q: Is there any phenomenon that has inherent existence?

Ven: No. Buddha says it's a contradiction in terms. You cannot have such a thing. If something were inherent, it would mean it existed without depending on anything. And that is simply an impossibility. Everything that exists, necessarily exists interdependently. By definition, all existents are dependent arisings.

This is where Buddha disagrees with the eternalistic view of "creator" and "soul". They're unnecessary. But there's we have instinctive need to hold onto *something*, as if somehow "inherent" is above everything else. And that's very much the feeling. I remember talking to a friend of mine – she's a Buddhist now, but she was a Christian, and very sincere Christian – and she said she had a real struggle when

she heard that a Buddha was ordinary first, and then *became* Buddha. That seemed to diminish Buddhahood.

Whereas she was more comfortable with the idea, which is the Christian one, which is that God is always above everything.

And has always *been*. And doesn't exist in dependence upon anything. It sounds like it's diminishing God

But Buddha would say if you analyze very carefully, you'll see something that is inherent can't exist. It's the opposite to existence.

In fact, things exist *because* they are empty of existing from their own side. Because they're empty, they can exist.

Q: You just blew my mind...

A: Okay, good! You see, our instinct is to think "empty " means "nihilistic", so we hear the opposite. It kind of splits our head open! So we've got to keep remembering, emptiness *means* dependent arising, dependent arising *means* emptiness.

## **HOW TO MOVE FROM INTELLECTUAL UNDERSTANDING TO EXPERIENTIAL**

Q: I was wondering, do you have any advice for taking our understanding of emptiness from the intellectual to the experiential.

A: Yes, let me tell you how. It's not difficult. Have you ever learned anything you didn't know before? A certain science or a skill? Give an example. What is it? What have you learned? Okay, you've learned piano. Okay. When you first began, it was merely intellectual knowledge, don't you agree? Wasn't it? And even then, when you looked at those weird looking notes on the sheets of music, you thought, "What is this stuff?" You couldn't get head around it, even intellectually, could you?. Then you started learning the theory, didn't you? And then slowly you started putting your hands on the piano and you could gradually translate that boring intellectual stuff into something experiential. So what was the main that thing you did every day?

Q: Practice.

A: And then guess what happened? It became experiential, didn't it? That's how we learn everything. Nothing special. Well, this is how you get enlightened. There's *nothing special*. You just have to

do it: start with the words, the theories, then through thinking and meditating, they eventually become your experience.

If you had the wrong ideas about Bach's music, this theories, you'd never play it right. So you got to have the right words, and then you just think about them every day, you analyze, you meditate on it, you think about it, and gradually, slowly, over years, months, years, the penny begins to drop, until eventually it becomes your direct experience. *It's exactly the same process.* You just have to be patient and persistent. Do you see what I'm saying? That's the answer.

Then, of course, in Buddhism, especially in Tibetan Buddhism, you've got all these kit of tools that hugely help this process happen. Which seem to be the more religious side of things. The delusions, in our mind, the misconceptions, the obstacles are so strong, so huge, that without these extra tools we can't get far.

My analogy is this: Let's say you see Michael Jordan getting all these balls in the hoop. (I'm probably twenty years out of date, but I always think of Michael Jordan.) And you go, wow, I'd like to do that. You go to him and you say, "Hey,

man, please show me how to get the ball in the hoop”. Right? Looks easy, doesn’t it? You go boom, boom, boom, you get the ball in the hoop. Because you can see, with basketball, the essence of it is getting the ball in the hoop.

Now, he will tell you, “Okay, good. First I want you to go off for ten years, study basketball theory, go on a special diet, do lots of jogging, build up muscles, train in this and train in that. . .”.

And you say, “No, no, no – you didn’t hear me. How do I get the ball in the hoop?” And he’ll repeat his answer. Why? Because obviously, even though getting the ball in the hoop looks so easy, you have to have amazing skills and training and years of practicing other things that don’t seem directly related to getting balls in hoops before you can do it effortlessly.

Same with your mind. The idea of familiarizing our minds with these new ideas until they’re our own direct experience is the job, but we need to do many other practices to prime our minds to be able to do it.

The Tibetan Buddhist call them “preliminary practices”. You’ve got to purify your mind. You’ve got to create

masses and masses of virtuous karma that prepares your mind to do the actual job of being your own therapist every day and getting the realization of emptiness. All the prostrations, all the water bowls, all those different things that seem so abstract and so disconnected from practice, that seem so un-psychological, so “religious”.

But when we understand their function – and we have to think about this carefully – they’re the ones that prime our minds, that enable us easily to get the realizations. Then we can realize emptiness.

## **THE BEHAVIORAL IMPLICATIONS OF WORKING WITH THE CONCEPT OF EMPTINESS**

Q: Say I’ve learned to understand the concept of emptiness. How does that next make the leap to feeling less fear, guilt...

A: I understand. Initially, it doesn’t seem evident to us, doesn’t it? This is why you’re asking the question. That’s why another way to put emptiness is to see things as interdependent.

Remember the example of the young Tibetan nuns who were tortured (see page

35). Now, if with the usual view that we have of “I didn’t ask to get born, it’s not my fault, I don’t deserve this. . . . we experienced what they experienced, we would literally have a mental breakdown, wouldn’t we? And we’d be angry, we’d be freaking out, we’d be raging, we’d want to blame, we’d want to sue – look at the mental torture we’d have in relation to those kinds of things.

But they said, “Of course, we had compassion for our torturers because we knew that we must have harmed them in the past”. This is essentially the view of the first level of dependent arising of the self: that we created the causes for our own reality; that this self is nothing other than the coming together of all the past causes. That there can’t be such a thing as a self that experiences things that the self didn’t cause in the past. Karma is dependent arising, and dependent arising is the flipside of emptiness.

Because, if you look at the normal ego response, the way we have ego now, – Lama Yeshe calls it “the self-pity me” – and I’m not trying to be cruel, now. But it is the way we suffer. And if we analyze, if we unpack self-pity, unpack anger, you see

it is “poor me, I didn’t do this, I don’t deserve this, why is this happening, there is no cause, I don’t understand it, why me, what did I do to deserve it”. Would you agree this is the way we think about suffering now? That is coming from the philosophy of “I didn’t ask to get born”. That’s coming from the philosophy of “no cause and effect”, of “no karma”, of being an “innocent victim”. That’s the philosophy of the world. That’s why we suffer so terribly in the face of bad things happening.

If you have the view of karma, it causes you to own responsibility for this thing that’s happening: you’ve made your bed and now you’re lying on it; which means there’s no fear, which means you’re confronting it, which means you’re accepting it, and then it even means you can have compassion, like those nuns.

So that’s a very different way of interpreting a situation, isn’t it? And all of this is implying: therefore this is not existing from its own side, therefore it isn’t *causeless*. Because the way we have ego now, it’s all causeless. “Why is this happening?” and panic and fear. And that’s because we are grasping

primordially at “innocent victim me” who didn’t ask to get born.

That’s a way of expressing emotionally how it feels to have ego; whereas if you have this other one, it’s more spacious. You recognize why. You know you did it. It’s more spacious and it’s linked to interdependence, which is the flipside of emptiness. One has to think about it again and again and again. It’s a practical thing, you know. It sounds so abstract, to hear about “understand emptiness”. It really means to see interdependence, and karma is a perfect example of how things exist in dependence upon various causes and factors and things, you know. It makes us so brave, so fearless.

Does it make sense a little bit? So, thinking about interdependence is the way to put it.

Saying “emptiness” seems a bit abstract, because interdependence is the flip side of emptiness, because the way ego is, “grasping at the self-existent me” – this is the label for it – is the one of thinking there’s no cause, thinking it’s not my fault, thinking “poor me” and therefore the panic and the fear and the rage and the guilt and the shame and all the junk that

arises when bad things happen. Does it make sense a bit?

And so finally, after years and years of much analysis and logic and thinking and meditating, one finally gets the direct insight into emptiness. That's when we finally have seen directly the absence of this fantasy "I" that we've been clinging to for so long. That's when you cut the root of delusions. Because there's no longer the misconception of the I. Therefore there's no longer fear, no longer anger, no longer attachment. We have a way to go before we completely finish it all and become a buddha, but we've made this major shift when we've realized emptiness.

That's the real purification. That's when we cut the root of suffering and its causes.

***These teachings were given at Osel Shen Phen Ling in Missoula, Montana, in 2011.***

## **9. PURIFICATION: THE PRACTICE OF VAJRASATTVA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE FOUR OPPONENT POWERS**

There is no negativity that cannot be purified. The purification process is basically a psychological one. As Lama Yeshe says, it is our mind (and on the basis of that our actions) that create the negativity and it is our mind that transforms it by creating positive energy. Although we rely on Buddha's methods for the purification, it is not as if it is Buddha purifying us or forgiving us; we ourselves do the purifying.

We purify by applying, the Four Opponent Powers.

### **THE PRACTICE**

Prostrate three times then sit. Bring your mind to a quiet state.

#### **1. THE POWER OF REGRET**

Sincerely regret, from the depths of your heart, anything you have done to harm

any living being, on this day, in this life, in all past lives.

As Lama Zopa Rinpoche says, “Not only that, but continuously I have also been breaking my pratimoksha, bodhisattva, and tantric vows. Worst of all, I have created the heaviest of negative karmas in relation to my virtuous friends – getting angry at them, generating wrong views, having non-devotional thoughts towards them, harming their holy body, and disobeying their advice.

“Having these negative imprints on my mental continuum is unbearable. It’s as if I’ve swallowed a lethal poison. I must practice the antidote right away and purify all this negative karma immediately, without a second’s delay”.

The reason to regret is based on the logic of karma: We experience everything due to our past karma, our past actions; so having harmed others we ourselves will necessarily experience suffering in the future. Thus we cannot bear the thought of the future suffering that we ourselves will experience. And who wants that? We know from the present suffering that we do not want it, so the logic is, therefore, to

remove the karmic seeds before they ripen as future suffering.

Go through the three non-virtuous action of the body and four of the speech, regretting those we remember and those we don't, in other words all the harm we have ever done to any sentient being since beginningless time.

If we have taken vows, then we must regret having broken them specifically: pratimoksha vows, bodhisattva vows, tantric vows.

For all of these, think like this: “I regret from the depths of my heart having harmed others, broken my vows, etc., because I do not want the future suffering. I am sick of suffering”.

Then think, “What can I do about it? Whom can I turn to?”

## **2. THE POWER OF RELIANCE**

### **Refuge**

We rely upon, turn to, the Buddha, the doctor, who has the methods that we can use to purify. It's not that we need Buddha to forgive us; we purify ourselves by relying upon his methods..

Visualize Vajrasattva above the crown of your head. He is your guru manifesting in this aspect for your benefit.

He is in the bodhisattva aspect, radiant, blissful white light. He is adorned with jewels and silken clothes. He's sitting cross-legged on a white lotus, which although born out of mud is untainted by mud, just like our enlightened potential, which is born out of our delusions but is untainted by them. His face is radiant and beautiful. His eyes are long (horizontally) and peaceful and full of love and compassion for you. His mouth is red and very sweet. His hair is black and held up in a top knot.

Guru Vajrasattva's right hand, holding a vajra, which represents compassion and bliss, is at his heart; his left, holding a bell, which represents the wisdom realizing emptiness, is resting in his lap.

On a moon disk at Guru Vajrasattva's heart stands a HUM encircled by a garland of the hundred-syllable mantra.

Think: "Vajrasattva is my root guru, the holy mind of all the buddhas, the dharmakaya, who out of his unbearable compassion, which embraces me and all other sentient beings, appears in this form

to purify me and all others”.

Now invite the wisdom beings to merge with your visualization, the commitment being: imagine light goes out of from the HUM at Guru Vajrasattva’s heart to all the ten directions and hooks the energy of the body, speech and mind of all the enlightened beings of the universe. This light comes back and dissolves into the heart of Guru Vajrasattva, who now embodies all their energy. He is even more brilliant and blissful than before.

Now, say a prayer of refuge:

To the Buddha, the Dharma and the  
Sangha

I go for refuge until I am enlightened.

By this practice of meditating on Guru  
Vajrasattva

May I reach Buddhahood so as to benefit  
all sentient beings!

**b. Compassion** In order to develop compassion, we need to rely upon other beings, the very beings we have harmed and who have harmed us, by developing compassion for them.

Think in particular of people you have harmed recently; and in the past; and

then, in general, all beings we have ever harmed since beginningless time.

Then remember those who have harmed you: have compassion for them because they will suffer as a result of the harm they have done to you.

Make the strong aspiration to do this practice of purification for the sake of all these sentient beings. “I must purify for their sake”.

### **3. THE POWER OF THE REMEDY**

This is the actual medicine, the doing of the actual practice of purification. There are three stages to the meditation, and it consists of visualization and recitation of mantra.

#### ***a. Purification of body***

Guru Vajrasattva very compassionately sends powerful white nectar, like coming out of a hose very forcefully, from his heart. It arcs around and enters your crown and pours into your entire body, filling you completely. It keeps coming and it forces out of your lower orifices all the harm you have ever done to any living being with your body in the form of inky liquid, which pours out of you and

disappears into space, not one atom left.  
Feel completely purified.

Recite the mantra as you visualize (3 or 7 or as many as you wish):

OM VAJRASATTVA SAMAYA MANU PALAYA /  
VAJRASATTVA DENO PATITA / DIDO MAY  
BHAWA / SUTO SHAYO MAY BHAWA / SUPO  
SHAYO MAY BHAWA / ANU RAKTO MAY  
BHAWA / SARWA SIDDHI MEMPAR YATSA /  
SARWA KARMA SU TSA MAY / TSITAM  
SHRIYAM KURU HUM / HA HA HA HA HO /  
BHAGAWAN / SARVA TATHAGATA / VAJRA  
MA MAY MU TSA / VAJRA BHAWA MAHA  
SAMAYA SATTVA / AH HUM PHAT!

Then be delighted that all the harm you have ever done to any sentient being with your body is completely purified. And think that there is no way you could do anything but benefit others now with your body.

### ***b. Purification of speech***

Again, Guru Vajrasattva very happily sends powerful nectar from his heart chakra. It arcs around and forcefully enters your crown, filling your entire body, this time forcing up to the top of your

body all the negativity of your speech, which overflows and disappears into space, not one atom left – just like, as Lama Yeshe says, when you turn on the tap in the sink and fill the dirty glass, all the junk in glass comes to the top and overflows.

So imagine that all the gossip and harsh speech and useless speech and lying and talking badly about others behind their backs – all this is purified by the powerful nectar filling you.

Recite the mantra as you visualize this.

OM VAJRASATTVA SAMAYA MANU PALAYA /  
VAJRASATTVA DENO PATITA / DIDO MAY  
BHAWA / SUTO SHAYO MAY BHAWA / SUPO  
SHAYO MAY BHAWA / ANU RAKTO MAY BHAWA  
/ SARWA SIDDHI MEMPAR YATSA / SARWA  
KARMA SU TSA MAY / TSITAM SHRIYAM KURU  
HUM / HA HA HA HA HO / BHAGAWAN / SARVA  
TATHAGATA / VAJRA MA MAY MU TSA / VAJRA  
BHAWA MAHA SAMAYA SATTVA / AH HUM  
PHAT!

Again, feel so happy that your speech is now completely purified. And imagine that it's not possible that you could do

anything but benefit others with your speech.

### ***c. Purification of mind***

Third, Guru Vajrasattva now very compassionately sends powerful beams of laser light from his heart chakra, which arcs around and enters your crown chakra and fills your entire being – just like, as Lama Yeshe says, when you turn on a light in a room the darkness is instantly dispelled. So, just as the light hits your heart chakra, the darkness of the negativity of your mind – all the attachment and neediness, the anger and violence, the depression and resentment and jealousy and bitterness, etc. – all instantly dispelled, not one atom left.

Recite the mantra as you visualize this.

OM VAJRASATTVA SAMAYA MANU PALAYA /  
VAJRASATTVA DENO PATITA / DIDO MAY  
BHAWA / SUTO SHAYO MAY BHAWA / SUPO  
SHAYO MAY BHAWA / ANU RAKTO MAY  
BHAWA / SARWA SIDDHI MEMPAR YATSA /  
SARWA KARMA SU TSA MAY / TSITAM  
SHRIYAM KURU HUM / HA HA HA HA HO /  
BHAGAWAN / SARVA TATHAGATA / VAJRA

MA MAY MU TSA / VAJRA BHAWA MAHA  
SAMAYA SATTVA / AH HUM PHAT!

Again, be delighted that all your delusions, which are the source of our own suffering and the cause for why we harm others with our body and speech, are totally purified, gone, finished.

Think: there is no space in your heart now for anything but love and kindness and forgiveness and wisdom and bliss and compassion.

***d. Purification of even the imprints of negativity of body, speech and mind***

This time imagine that Guru Vajrasattva sends light again and it fills you completely and eradicates even the subtlest imprint of negative energy from your mind. (It's like once you removed the garlic from a jar, you still need to remove the smell.) Again recite the mantra.

OM VAJRASATTVA SAMAYA MANU PALAYA /  
VAJRASATTVA DENO PATITA / DIDO MAY  
BHAWA / SUTO SHAYO MAY BHAWA / SUPO  
SHAYO MAY BHAWA / ANU RAKTO MAY  
BHAWA / SARWA SIDDHI MEMPAR YATSA /

SARWA KARMA SU TSA MAY / TSITAM  
SHRIYAM KURU HUM / HA HA HA HA HO /  
BHAGAWAN / SARVA TATHAGATA / VAJRA  
MA MAY MU TSA / VAJRA BHAWA MAHA  
SAMAYA SATTVA / AH HUM PHAT!

Now feel you are completely purified, not one atom of negativity left in your mindstream; even the subtlest obscurations to omniscience have been removed.

#### **4. THE POWER OF RESOLVE**

The fourth step in the purification process, and such a crucial one, is the determination not to harm with our body, speech and mind again. Without this, we keep doing the same old things. The determination, the aspiration, to not harm again is like a beacon that guides our body, speech and mind in new directions. Remember, as Lama Zopa Rinpoche says, “Everything exists on the tip of the wish, the aspiration”.

If you have taken vows, then think, “I will never break my pratimoksha vows. I will never break my bodhisattva vows. I will never break my tantric vows and commitments”.

As for our other old habits, if we can't commit to never do them again, then don't lie to ourselves, as Lama Zopa Rinpoche says. So think carefully and then decide to refrain from them for a year, a month, a day, even a minute – whatever is realistic. Then in general vow to make the effort to avoid the others.

This determination not to do again is what gives us the strength to change.

## **CONCLUSION**

Guru Vajrasattva is delighted with us. Wanting to merge with your mind, he melts into white light and absorbs into you through your crown. Think: “My guru's body, speech and mind, Vajrasattva's body, speech and mind, my own body, speech and mind: same thing”. “Union-ness”, as Lama Yeshe would say. Meditate on this.

Next, as Lama Zopa Rinpoche recommends, meditate on the emptiness of the three circles: “In emptiness, there is no I, creator of negative karma; there is no action of creating negative karma; there is no negative karma created”. Place your mind in that emptiness for a little while.

In this way, look at all phenomena as empty – they do not exist from their own side.

## **DEDICATION**

Finally, dedicate all the merit, the positive energy, you have created by doing this purification to all living beings: see chapter 10.

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## **THE FOUR TYPES OF KARMIC RESULTS THAT THE FOUR OPPONENT POWERS PURIFY**

**1. The power of regret** purifies the *experience similar to the cause*, which, let's say for killing, is to get killed, to die young or to get sick.

**2. The power of reliance**, *Refuge and bodhichitta* purify the *environment result*, which for killing is living in a place where the food and medicine are not conducive to good health.

**3. The power of the remedy**, in this case the *visualization and recitation of*

*mantras* – or whatever action one does as the actual antidote – purifies the *throwing karma* that causes birth in the lower realms.

**4. The power of the resolve or determination not to do** again purifies the *action similar to the cause*, which in a sense is the worst result: it's the habit to keep killing, which propels one back into the lower realms.

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**THE MEANING OF THE MANTRA**  
OM the qualities of Buddha's holy body, speech, and mind; all that is auspicious and of great value

**VAJRASATTVA** the being who has the wisdom of inseparable bliss and emptiness  
**SAMAYA** a pledge that must not be transgressed

**MANU PALAYA** lead me along the path you took to enlightenment

**VAJRASATTVA DENO PATITA** make me abide closer Vajrasattva's vajra holy mind

**DIDO MAY BHAWA** please grant me a firm and stable realization of the ultimate nature of phenomena

**SUTO SHAYO MAY BHAWA** please grant me the blessing of being extremely pleased with me

**SUPO SHAYO MAY BHAWA** bless me with the nature of well developed great bliss

**ANU RAKTO MAY BHAWA** bless me with the nature of the love that leads me to your state

**SARWA SIDDHI MEMPAR YATSA** please grant all powerful attainments

**SARWA KARMA SU TSA MAY** please grant all virtuous actions

**TSITAM SHRIYAM KURU** please grant your glorious qualities

**HUM** the vajra holy mind

**A HA HA HA HO** the five transcendental wisdoms

**BHAGAWAN** one who has destroyed every obscuration, attained all realizations, and passed beyond suffering

**SARVA TATHAGATA** all those who have realized emptiness, knowing things just as they are

**VAJRA MA MAY MUTSA** do not abandon me

**VAJRA BHAWA** the nature of indestructible inseparability

**MAHA SAMAYA SATTVA** the great pledge being; the great being who has the pledge, the vajra holy mind

**AH** the vajra holy speech

**HUM** the transcendental wisdom of great bliss

**PHAT!** clarifying the transcendental wisdom of inseparable bliss and emptiness and destroying the dualistic mind that obstructs it

## **COLOPHON**

*By Ven. Robina Courtin, based on the teachings of her lamas, Lama Thubten Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche.*

## **10. DEDICATION PRAYERS RECOMMENDED BY LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE**

As a result of the three-times' merits of  
myself and others,

May bodhichitta – from which the  
happiness of all sentient beings  
comes –

Be generated in the minds of self and  
other sentient beings without delay,  
even for one second.

And that which has been generated, may it  
increase.

As a result of the three-times' merits of  
myself and others,

May emptiness be generated in the minds  
of self and others sentient beings,  
without delay, even for one second.

And that which has been generated, may it  
increase.

As a result of the three-times' merits of  
myself and others,

May I, who am empty form my own side,

Achieve Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's  
enlightenment, which is empty from its  
own side.

And lead all sentient beings, who are  
empty from their own side,  
To that enlightenment, which is empty  
from its own side,  
As quickly as possible, by myself, alone.

Whatever dedication the Victorious Ones  
Gone to Bliss

Of the three times have admired as best,  
I shall also perfectly dedicate in the same  
way all these roots of virtue  
So that I may perform good works.

Because of the past, present, and future  
merit created by me and by the  
Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and sentient  
beings,

May I, my family, students, and all  
sentient beings

Be able to actualize completely in this very  
lifetime

Lama Tsong Khapa's path of unified sutra  
and tantra,

Which is pure like refined gold.

May this pure teaching of Lama Tsong  
Khapa

Spread in all directions and flourish  
forever.

## **DEDICATE IN EMPTINESS**

Due to all the past, present and future  
merits collected by me, buddhas,  
bodhisattvas and all other sentient  
beings –

Which are totally non-existent from their  
own side –

May the I –

Which is also totally nonexistent from its  
own side –

Achieve Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's  
enlightenment –

Which is also totally non-existent from its  
own side –

And lead all sentient beings –

Who are also totally non-existent from  
their own side –

To that enlightenment –

Which is also totally non-existent from its  
own side –

By myself alone –

Which is also totally non-existent from its  
own side.