

**MIND AND ITS  
POTENTIAL**

MODULE 1 OF  
FPMT'S

DISCOVERING  
BUDDHISM

**SEPTEMBER 2, 9,  
16 & 23, 2021**

LHAGSAM

TIBETAN

MEDITATION

**ZURICH**



THIS IS LAMA YESHES ALTAR  
CARRIED ALWAYS WITH HIM

**MIND AND ITS POTENTIAL MODULE 1 OF  
FPMT'S DISCOVERING BUDDHISM  
TEACHINGS AND MEDITATIONS  
BY T.Y. ALEXANDER**

**ADDITIONAL TEACHINGS BY HIS  
HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA, LAMA  
THUBTEN YESHE AND LAMA ZOPA  
RINPOCHE**

**PRODUCED FOR THE STUDENTS OF LHAGSAM TIBETAN  
MEDITATION, ZURICH FOR ITS THIRTEEN-MONTH  
SERIES OF TEACHINGS COVERING ALL FOURTEEN  
MODULES OF DISCOVERING BUDDHISM, TAUGHT BY  
VEN. ROBINA COURTIN, SEPTEMBER 2, 2021 UNTIL  
SEPTEMBER 22, 2022**



**LHAGSAM TIBETAN MEDITATION  
ZURICH**



# CONTENTS

## **PART ONE TEACHINGS AND MEDITATIONS BY T.Y. ALEXANDER**

<b>1. Session One</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>2. Meditation: Continuity of Consciousness</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>3. Session Two</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>4. Meditation: Equanimity</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>5. Session Three</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>6. Meditation: Clarity of Consciousness</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>7. Session Four</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>8. Meditation: Shakyamuni Buddha: Touching the Essence</b>	<b>75</b>

## **PART TWO TEACHINGS BY HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA, LAMA THUBTEN YESHE AND LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE**

<b>9. What is the Mind? His Holiness the Dalai Lama</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>10. Happiness, Karma, and the Mind: His Holiness The Dalai Lama</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>11. Everything Comes from the Mind: Lama Thubten Yeshe</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>12. Understanding the Mind: Lama Zopa Rinpoche</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>13. The Wish-Fulfilling Golden Sun: Excerpts: Lama Zopa Rinpoche</b>	<b>140</b>
<b>Further Required and Recommended Readings</b>	<b>154</b>



**PART ONE**  
**TEACHINGS AND MEDITATIONS**  
**BY T.Y. ALEXANDER**

## **1. SESSION ONE**

### **BREATHING MEDITATION AND MOTIVATION**

I will introduce a breathing meditation and a short reflection on your motivation and aspirations, or your focus for this course. This is a traditional way to begin any action, study or meditation in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. I will describe these two practices, then you use the pause button to make the space to do them. These short reflections are not included individually with the recorded meditations.

This breathing meditation clears and settles the mind, creating a focused and receptive inner environment within which there is space for the teachings and where they can take hold.

The motivational reflection is used to set your intention for study and meditation, or any other actions during your day, grounding your work in the reality of your aspirations and goals. It creates a framework within which your study and meditation become meaningful, giving these activities direction and purpose.

I strongly suggest that you use these two techniques each time you begin a new session of study, reflection or meditation – whether you are in a group or studying on your own. Even if you sit down for just a half-hour to read one of the books, do a short breathing meditation and adjust your focus – five minutes or less to create a conducive inner environment. As with any endeavor, the outcome of your spiritual practice will be much more satisfactory if you do the appropriate preparations and groundwork before you start.

### **THE MEDITATION**

Sit comfortably with a straight back, relaxed and settled. The appropriate posture for meditation will be discussed at length in Module 2. For now, pay attention to your back. If you are sitting on a chair, try not to use the back of the chair for support unless, of



course, you have a back problem or illness that requires you to do so. Sit on the front edge of the chair on your sitting bones, with a straight back, hands in your lap (don't use the arm rests), shoulders relaxed. The same goes for those of you who sit on the floor on a cushion or meditation bench. Sit on the front edge of the cushion or bench with straight back, and relaxed. As you might have guessed by the repetition, "straight and relaxed" are essential aspects of your posture. If you are used to meditating with your eyes closed, you may continue to do so, but eyes slightly open is best. There are two ways to do this: with your gaze directed downwards past the tip of your nose to the floor in front of you, close your eyes softly but completely, then open them until you just see a blur of light; alternatively, gazing downwards, gently close the eyes until a soft blur of light is all that remains.

Then, settled in a comfortable posture, just allow your awareness to rest on the in/out cycle of your breathing. Bring your attention to your lower abdomen (just below your navel) where you can feel expansion and contraction as you inhale and exhale. Use this experience of breathing – the rising and falling of the abdomen – to ground your awareness.<sup>1</sup> The advantage of using the lower abdomen as your focal point is that it helps to settle the mind; it brings it down, literally. Breathe naturally and gently without any manipulation of the breath whatsoever. Ground the mind in that gentle rhythmic cycle of inhalation and exhalation – in the rising and falling of the abdomen. Sometimes the breath will be long and deep, sometimes shallow and fast. Sometimes coarse, other times subtle. Just let it be, and watch. That's all.

As thoughts, emotions, feelings and so forth arise as distractions to your awareness of the breath, gently let them go without any

---

<sup>1</sup> For those of you who have previously done Theravadan Vipassana or a similar practice and have focused on the area at the opening of your nostrils where you can feel the sensation of the breath, you can continue to use this method. Don't switch. For the rest of you, use the method described above, for the rest of your life.

consideration or involvement, and softly bring the mind back to the breath. Breathing in, breathing out. Letting go. Breathing in, breathing out. Sitting still. Letting the mind be. Simply watching and returning to the breath each time the mind becomes caught up in the flow of mental events. Maintain a neutral awareness, simply watching the breath, without any involvement whatsoever in the contents of your thoughts. Think of yourself as a cool scientific observer working in your internal laboratory; you are neutral, detached but always vigilant. Do this for five to ten minutes. As you become comfortable with this exercise, you can slowly extend the time up to twenty minutes. And you can use this exercise anytime during the day, even for just 30 seconds, when you feel the need to settle the mind and become focused.

### **MOTIVATION**

Then, with your still, clear mind imagine that you are surrounded by all the people of your life. All your friends and loved ones – those people for whom you care deeply, those with whom you have positive, constructive relationships – spouses, lovers, children, relatives, colleagues and dear friends. Next imagine all those people with whom you have some difficulty – people who are irritating, for whom you feel anger, or those who are angry with you – whoever poses a problem for you, those people in your life you would like to avoid. Finally, imagine all the strangers in your life – the person in the queue in front of you at the supermarket, the bank teller, someone in the car next to you at the traffic lights, and so forth. These people pass through our lives every day, but we don't think about them; we don't know their names, we don't know them, and for the most part we treat them with disregard.

Imagine that all these people of your life – friends, enemies, strangers – are surrounding you, doing this course with you, studying, reflecting and meditating with you.

They are, as Zen master Katagiri Roshi said, “the contents of your life.” Then, reflect on what brought you to this course. Why do you

want to do it? What are your aspirations with regard to doing it? What do you want to take away with you, what are your goals? What do you want?

Consider how the fulfillment of these goals might affect you and those around you. Then, try to expand your aspirations to include not only your own welfare, but also the benefit of all those people of your life.

Beginning to think beyond your own individual desires and wishes, expanding your mind and heart, opening out to others is a way that, in and of itself, begins the transformation process that is at the heart of Indo-Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism. So, make a strong determination to reap the benefits of this course, to achieve your goals, for yourself and for all the people of your life.

Now, before you continue, stop, and do these two short meditations for fifteen to twenty minutes altogether. If necessary, listen to the instructions again or read through them in the transcript of the teachings.

## **THE GOAL OF BUDDHIST PRACTICE**

Before we continue, I want to stress again the value of using these two techniques before each session of study, reflection or discussion, and meditation. It is extremely important to prepare the ground before planting the seeds. It is also excellent to stop for a moment before undertaking any significant action in your life, throughout the day, to still the mind and adjust your motivation, your intent.

*Intention is karma.* So, it is important, whatever we do, to attend to our motives in our actions, in the words we speak, and even in our thinking.

This is a Buddhist course, so I will begin with a short discussion of the goal of Buddhist practice. From the standpoint of a dedicated practitioner, the goal is simple – to become a *buddha*.

Looking at the etymology of the word *buddha* may help us understand exactly what that means. *Buddha* is a Sanskrit word stemming from an Indo-European root, *bheudh* meaning to wake up,

to become conscious or aware. It is a generic title for anyone who has attained perfect spiritual awakening.

The realization that the historical buddha, Shakyamuni Buddha, attained over 2600 years ago was just this, spiritual awakening. Awakening or opening to his own true nature, and the true nature of all around him – not only all other living beings, but the environment and everything in it.

The Tibetan term for buddha, *sang-gye*, means awakened or purified, that is transformed (*sang*), and fully developed (*gye*). Awakening refers to waking from an unconscious state, from the stupor and darkness of confusion and ignorance. It also means awakening to one's full potential. Development refers to the complete realization of pristine awareness, or buddha-mind. So, a buddha is totally awake, open, and free from obscurations. Thus, the positive qualities we associate with spiritual enlightenment – boundless compassion, profound wisdom and infinite spiritual power or energy, are all limitlessly and spontaneously expressed by one who has reached this sublime state of being.

This is the ultimate goal of a Mahayana Buddhist. However, it is attained by each practitioner being aware of where he or she is right now in the spectrum of spiritual development and, with that knowledge, making the strong determination just to take the next small necessary step in the journey towards the ultimate goal. It's an old boring cliché, you know the one – a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. However, that's not a famous old Chinese saying for nothing. It is an important lesson to remember. We often try to attack our spiritual practice as if it were a competition, a sporting event or a battle. But, spiritual practice is a delicate matter, and progress is made carefully, one step at a time. Slowly, slowly.

During the time of the Buddha, his disciples were not called Buddhists. The Buddha called them "insiders", literally inner beings. This means those who look for spiritual awakening within themselves, within their own minds. As we study the nature and function of our own consciousness, we will begin to see clearly the

significance of this awakening. Most of our life is spent in a state akin to sleep walking. We move through our days, doing the things of our life – working, shopping, taking the kids to school, relating to our partner, eating, going to the movies and so forth. Our lives are full of “doing” and busyness. But there is very little “being” and stillness. And very little awareness of what is happening on a deeper inner level underneath the doing, *driving* the doing. Often, we also have little awareness on the surface level, the gross level. And it is in those unconscious moments that we stub our toe, walk into an open door, inadvertently run a red light, get angry with a friend or otherwise find ourselves inexplicably in trouble.

Following the path of the Buddha is a process of uncovering, peeling away layers and making manifest levels of consciousness hidden beneath the surface of our gross day-to-day awareness. It is in these hidden areas of the mind where unconscious intentions are set, causing our life to take us in directions that we did not foresee and do not want. Through our spiritual practice we also become aware of the profound fundamental level of consciousness that underlies all states of mind and all other levels of consciousness where the deepest spiritual transformation happens.

## **WHAT IS THE MIND?**

Consciousness is a multi-layered, multi-function entity. It is defined in Mahayana Buddhist literature as that which is luminous and knowing, or **mere clarity and awareness**. It is the medium through which we are able to know ourselves, others, the world around us; to know both internal and external things. Every state of mind can be defined by these fundamental qualities, clarity and awareness. “Every state of mind” means just that. It includes positive states such as selfless love, as well as negative ones such as anger.

**Clarity** (in Tibetan) has the connotation of arising – the mind gives rise to something. This clarity or luminosity (illumination might be an even better word) is an inner quality experienced as

**awareness** which means knowing the object, holding/grasping the object, engaging with the object, entering into the object; sometimes referred to as “taking the aspect of the object.” **Mere** means nothing else needs to be present or to be going on in order to have mind.

The idea of illumination is useful here because it has a double meaning. On one hand, it means bringing light to something (in this case to the mind); on the other hand, it has the connotation of enlightening both intellectually and spiritually. This illumination, in the definition of mind, is the luminosity of the object itself in its appearance to the awareness factor of the mind; it is that which the awareness can grasp or apprehend. So, there is an important inter-relationship between the mind (sometimes called in Buddhist-talk the “subject”) and the “object” of our awareness.

By this definition we can see that consciousness is not physical. It has neither form nor color. Like the empty space around you, the space between the objects in the room where you are sitting, it is an absence of any obstructing qualities. So, it is clearly not the brain, although, as you will see, it has an intimate relationship with the human brain and the five sense organs – eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body (the tactile sense organ). In a human being the mind depends on the brain and nervous system, the sense organs and awareness for its functions and expression. But the brain itself, our gray matter, is not consciousness.

The awareness aspect of consciousness is not physical and cannot be found in the physical world. You can look for it (and I suggest you do, so you have the experience) but you will never find something in the physical realm that you can point to and say: That’s it, that’s awareness. When you are experiencing an emotion – joy, anger, fear, love, affection – try to locate those feelings and the awareness of them. This also relates to the awareness of sensory objects. When you see a flower, where is the *awareness* of “flower”? In your eye, in the flower itself? In the brain? Where is it? What is it?

Question your perceptions. Question your understanding of how

things exist. Question everything you experience. Well, almost everything. If we really did this practice of questioning everything literally, we wouldn't be able to get out of bed in the morning! So, be reasonable. But take some time each day to examine how you see yourself and the world around you; when you stop to have a break, a cup of tea, check up – ask yourself: What is it that I see? That I hear? Smell? Taste? Touch? What is it that I think? What do I mean, what do I refer to, when I say, “I”? When I say “tree” or “table”? What is it?

In addition to the gross physical aspects of your human body that support the function of the mind, there is also an extremely subtle, but still physical, nervous system of channels and chakras (pathways and energy centers) through which subtle energy flows which supports the mind. This energy is known variously in different cultures as *chi*, *prana*, *pneuma*, and in Tibetan *lung*, often translated as “wind” or “air.” The mind is said to “ride” on this subtle energy, in other words to move through the channels on the flow of energy. There are 72,000 energy channels in the human body. I won't discuss this subtle system in detail; it will be touched upon more in later modules. However, it is good to be aware of its existence. One of the reasons that breathing meditations and yogic breathing exercises have a beneficial effect on the mind is because of the relationship between the air we breathe and the subtle “air” energy, in the subtle nervous system. As the breath becomes more settled and regular when we meditate or do yoga or tai chi, the “air” in the channels becomes more settled so the mind becomes more calm and subdued.

It is essential to distinguish between consciousness itself, and those things upon which it depends in its activities. As you will see, the mind and the body, though related, are totally different phenomena, arising from different causes. In the book *Mind Science: An East-West Dialogue*, His Holiness the Dalai Lama defines mind as “...an entity that has the nature of mere experience, that is “clarity and knowing.” It is the knowing nature or agency,

that is called mind, and this is non-material.”

So, the mind can be understood as an occurrence or happening (‘experience’). That happening is experienced and expressed through the brain, the nervous system, our physical actions and our speech. It is also expressed through the mind itself in thoughts, emotions, attitudes, projections and so forth. For example, human beings have thoughts and opinions, ideas and emotions, generated in the mind and expressed via the human brain, body and voice. But the opinion or emotion is not the brain, not the sense organs or the nervous system. Exactly what the inter-connection is between the brain, the nervous system and consciousness... well, scientific research is continuing, and final conclusions have not, as far as I know, been reached. Again, I urge you to check, to question, to search within yourself and your experience. It is important for you to discover these things for yourself, and not to rely solely on my say-so, on the Buddha’s words, on books or on scientific data.

I have emphasized your *human* body in this discussion for two reasons. Firstly, you need to be clear that consciousness itself does not depend on the physical attributes of human beings, animals or any other physical embodiment. In the various realms of existence described in Buddhism (which will be discussed at length in later modules), there are realms of existence called formless realms in which one is said to exist only as consciousness, but having the karmic potential for a physical body in another lifetime. So, you can see from this that consciousness manifests in a being with a physical body, or without one, dependent on the individual karma of that being. However, you must also be aware that, as human beings, the mind can’t be discussed or understood in isolation from the body. These two, body and mind, are in an intimate and complex relationship.

## **ASPECTS OF THE MIND 1**

This **illumination** and **awareness** has two aspects that I call the two continuities: one is the beginningless continuum from moment



to moment, from life to life – a momentary stream of consciousness; the other is the multi-layered continuum from your gross everyday level of waking consciousness to the most subtle innermost level of consciousness called buddha-nature, or the “fundamental innate mind of clear light.”

The nature of your momentary stream of consciousness is fluid, impermanent and free of any inherent or essential characteristics. It is a ceaseless flow of thoughts, emotions, judgments, feelings and so forth – all the contents of the mind – ever-changing, rarely settling, sometimes happy, sometimes angry or sad, sometimes calm, compassionate and loving.

You may have had a glimpse of this flow of mind moments during the breathing meditation, as you tried to maintain awareness of the breath. Sometimes the thoughts, emotions and other mental events seemed to flood in, stealing your awareness and distracting you from the job at hand. It is said in Buddhist teachings that there are 65 mental events in a single finger snap: by my calculations that's about 11,700 in one minute; 702,000 in an hour... beyond that you can do the mathematics and work it out. It's a lot, going on continuously, almost all the time. But, in that instant of time – a single finger snap – we are lucky if we are aware of just one mental event. If you can do that you are doing well.

Your life may already seem to be incredibly complex and overwhelming, and this idea of 65 mental events in a finger snap may seem to make that complexity even worse. But in fact, if you break up your day into individual mind moments, 1/65th of a finger snap is quite simple and manageable. And, in that instant your life can change for better or for worse. Each mind moment is a moment in which a choice can be made; our direction, attitude, or mood can change in that one micro-moment. But, only if we are aware of what is going on in that moment. In that moment a karmic action is completed; karma is created. In a single finger snap karma is created.

The feeling of being overwhelmed arises when we do not stay

with that present moment, but continuously look to the past, or try to anticipate the future. We look back with regret or with pleasure, we look forward with anxiety or eagerness, but we rarely stay present in this moment, right now. This moment is the only moment that we can do anything about. The past is past. The future hasn't come. Now is where it's at. Now. Just now; in one sense we can say nothing else exists, only the present moment.

Each moment is a discrete instance of consciousness dependent on and arising from the previous moment of consciousness. Remember I said that consciousness is different from the body. The cause of each mind moment – each of our thoughts, emotions, projections and so forth – is the mind moment that went before. Mind causes mind. The physical body has physical causes – two human beings come together, share sperm and ovum, giving rise to a third human body. But, consciousness which is mere clarity and awareness can arise only from a similar, non-physical cause. Just as form cannot arise from what is formless, what is formless cannot arise from form. Think about it.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama (in *Mind Science*) addresses this issue: “If we examine the origins of our inner experiences and of external matter, we find that there is a fundamental uniformity in the nature of their existence in that both are governed by the principle of causality. Just as in the inner world of mental and cognitive events every moment of experience comes from its preceding continuum and so on ad infinitum, similarly in the physical world every object and event must have a preceding continuum that serves as its cause, from which the present moment of external matter comes into existence.”

Each mind moment has a beginning, middle and end; it arises, abides for a split second and disappears. But, it leaves in its wake an impression, an imprint – the beginning of a new, or the extension of an existing, karmic habit pattern. And, that 1/65th of a finger snap gives rise to the next moment, and on, and on. When he was asked about the beginning of consciousness the Buddha said that he could

not see a beginning; therefore, he concluded mind is beginningless.

Because each moment is discrete, it is almost impossible to have more than one mental event occurring at one time. For example, if you have a moment of anger, for all practical purposes, you cannot at the same time have a moment of love. This is a significant fact to remember about the stream of consciousness having great implications for your spiritual growth.

Understanding this moment-to-moment continuity is extremely important in terms of your ability to transform the mind, moving from your present state of dissatisfaction and confusion to the awakened, totally open, enlightened state of a buddha.

Lama Thubten Yeshe has said: “In the Buddhist attitude, every situation is a psychological symptom. In any situation, if there is negative energy and you contest that energy, reverse it, it will be burned like a cloud in the sky is burned by the shining sun. It is enough, I want you to know, it is enough to purify negativity by actualizing positive energy. Work that way. No more. Any kind of negativity is still relative, still transitory, still has an impermanent nature, a changeable nature. So recognize this. You put in the contradictory nature of wisdom power, and eliminate. The negative energy has no space, it burns out. This is the way purification [transformation] works.”

In other words, if you generate and express positive energy, thoughts, attitudes in your mind and life, you create a mental space in which there is no place whatsoever for negativity to be. This is what the transformative practices and techniques of Tibetan Buddhism are all about, creating this constructive transformation – creating the inner conditions in which we can “*actualize the positive.*”

This transformation is possible because the continuity of consciousness is impermanent, nothing is fixed in concrete. Nothing whatsoever! There is no negative action that cannot be purified, no karmic pattern of behavior that cannot be transformed. Don't you forget it!

## ASPECTS OF THE MIND 2

The second aspect of consciousness is its multi-layered quality. You can see some of the various levels of consciousness in your daily life experience. Right now, as you hear this recording or read the transcript, you are using your senses – listening, looking and so forth. At the same time you hear a car go past outside, or a bird call, you recall an event from earlier in the day, you experience sensations in your body. All this is going on, all the time. Your five sense consciousnesses are operating, and your mental consciousness is interpreting, thinking, reacting; working things out, trying to understand or make sense of what you see, hear and so forth. This is the grossest level of consciousness. By “gross” I don’t mean horrible or ugly, I mean not subtle. This is our normal, everyday waking state of consciousness.

In an ordinary day you also experience more subtle levels of consciousness, for instance, when you go to sleep. When you first lie down and close your eyes, you may not drop off to sleep straightaway but instead slip into a state called the *hypnagogic state* (from Greek: *hypnos* – sleep), a kind of drowsiness in which you may sometimes experience both mental and physical hallucinations. Then you drop further down into the dream state with which we are all familiar. Then into the even more subtle space of deep sleep. In deep sleep all five senses virtually shut down, as does your gross conceptual mind, your thinking mind. Obviously the senses do not stop functioning altogether in deep sleep. If they did, you would never wake to the alarm, or to someone’s touch. At this point, in deep sleep, you begin to approach the most subtle levels of consciousness.

In addition, at the time of your death you experience an extremely subtle level of consciousness called the clear light of death. This clear light consciousness also manifests momentarily when you sneeze, faint and at the moment of orgasm.

Normally, we are unable to recognize and utilize these subtle levels of mind. When we go to bed, we’re out for the count. Well, at

least I am; eyes close...total blackness, gone. Then we surface a bit into the dream state, or the alarm rudely awakens us from the quiet of deep sleep. At the time of death, pain and fear are foremost in the mind, and the moment of the clear light of death flashes past so quickly that we are unable to see it and connect with it. But, the subtle levels of consciousness provide valuable space within which trained meditators are able to stay put and meditate in order to further their spiritual development. Using advanced techniques, they utilize these subtle levels through meditation. Then, without fear, at the actual time of their deaths they are able to recognize the clear light of death, and remain in that space until they complete the spiritual work they still need to do in that particular lifetime. Much of our spiritual practice is preparing us for that moment. [The death process will be discussed at length in Module 5.]

### **ASPECTS OF THE MIND 3**

As previously mentioned, the innermost subtle level of consciousness is called buddha-nature. Buddha-nature can perhaps be most clearly understood as what we call “spirit” in Western metaphysical, mystical and contemplative traditions. It is an utterly pure spiritual essence or consciousness present within us from the beginning of every lifetime. It is eternal and uncontaminated by any of the activities of our grosser levels of consciousness; even the most evil thoughts and deeds cannot make an impression on our buddha-nature.

It is often asked if buddha-nature is the “soul’. To some extent the answer to that will depend on your definition of soul. If you understand soul to be a permanent or unchanging thing with a substantial independent existence, then from this perspective, I can say that Buddhism does not accept the existence of a soul (or “self” for that matter) with these characteristics. Mind or consciousness is not seen to be a substantial independent thing at any level; it is an active, dynamic continuous process related in this life to this human body and its physiological states. A buddha’s consciousness is

related to the form and resonance of an enlightened being, and can still be defined as clear and knowing, thus changing from moment to moment, depending on what it knows. It is a little bit like a mirror. The clear nature of the mirror does not change as it reflects images, but on the surface it appears to change as the images change. This does not jibe well with the idea of an unchanging independent entity called soul or self, or any other name.

Soul is just a word. Mind, consciousness, buddha-nature – all words. What's important is that we understand the significance of the words we are dealing with in the context in which they are being used. When we bring in concepts from other philosophical and religious traditions, we muddy the water and make our job of understanding much more difficult. Once we are clear about the Buddhist view of things, then we can debate about ideas and concepts from other traditions. Without understanding, debates may only lead to further confusion and misunderstanding.

So, back to buddha-nature. It is to this buddha-nature that we awaken in our spiritual process. First, we see the momentary continuity of consciousness and understand its mutability; then, as we progress in meditation, actualizing the positive and dissolving obscurations, we recognize our fundamental mind of clear light, eventually merging indistinguishably with it. Total integration, total unity. No separation, no experience of duality.

Buddha-nature is sometimes referred to as *potential* – the seed of buddha, of enlightenment or awakening. In Sanskrit this is called *tathagatagarbha*. *Tathagata* is one of the epithets of a buddha, a generic name for an enlightened being meaning one who has *thus gone*. *Garbha* means “seed” or “nucleus.” In this sense, we can use a mundane analogy and say that if one plants an apple seed, it will not produce a lettuce! If we plant the seed of our own buddha-nature, and nurture it carefully, we will certainly produce only a buddha. Never an apple, a lettuce or a cabbage! Your spiritual evolution (or the gestation and growth of your buddha-nature) is a process of becoming fully connected with your buddha-nature – recognizing it,

acknowledging it, and allowing it to flourish – so that every thought and action becomes a pure expression of that buddha already existing within you.

There are two aspects to buddha-nature – naturally abiding buddha-nature and consciously nurtured or developed buddha-nature. From the perspective of naturally abiding buddha-nature, it could be argued that we are already a buddha. But clearly this buddha is not yet fully manifest. The way he or she manifests is through our conscious determination to grow and transform to such a level that our buddha within is allowed fully to manifest as a perfect expression of enlightenment wherever living beings are in need.

Spiritual transformation or purification is possible because you have this pure fundamental mind of clear light always with you. And, because the thoughts, feelings, emotions and so forth that arise in your grosser levels of consciousness are adventitious. Add-ons, optional extras. They can be changed, transformed, and you can become free from the influence of your destructive negative attitudes and ancient karmic habit patterns. As with all optional extras, you can take them or leave them. The choice is yours 65 times in each finger snap.

Some of the attitudes and patterns that you carry on your mind stream are valuable and worth cultivating. I'm thinking of compassion, selfless love, patience, a sense of justice, generosity, an ethical attitude and so forth. We rarely lose sleep because we are lying awake worrying about an act of kindness, compassion or generosity that we have made during the day. But we often lose sleep, or find our meditation disturbed, by the argument we had with our partner that day, or the anger we dumped on our child who misbehaved, or a conflict with a colleague at work; or envy, procrastination, clinging and grasping that have arisen in our minds and actions during the course of the day. We lie there thinking: If I could just buy that red Mercedes Benz, I'd be happy! Or: If I had just said "blah, blah, blah" to her when she attacked me, *that* would have

stopped her! The conflicts we have with ourselves also bring us sleepless nights; our low self-esteem or low opinion of ourselves, our indecision, our self-doubt, our guilt and so forth, not only disturb our sleep, but make spiritual growth impossible. Should I do this, or that? Or: I can't take that new job I was offered, I'll never be able to do it...I'm not smart enough... Or: I shouldn't even think about enlightenment, I can never do it; I'm hopeless!

Poor you! Hey, you have buddha-nature. It is there no matter how miserable or hopeless you feel. There is a principle in tantric Buddhism called divine pride. It could be called ultimate self-esteem. It is not a negative pride or arrogance; it is an acknowledgement of our true potential, of the buddha within. Practice divine pride. Let go of debilitating low self-esteem, of your low opinion of yourself and your capabilities. Set your sights on the sky.

So, there are adventitious minds to cultivate and others to be transformed. Some that support you both on your spiritual journey, and in your daily life and relationships. Others that do not.

Learning to discriminate between the things to be cultivated and those that are best dropped is part and parcel of your spiritual journey, and one of the tools you can use to hone your discriminatory skills is meditation. At first glance this may seem easy – to know what's right or wrong, what will make you happy and what will not – but as you begin to examine the mind carefully and honestly you will learn that knowing the difference between what is constructive and what is destructive is actually quite difficult. The mind is a subtle and skillful deceiver, and it takes a wise, careful and patient observer to catch the nuances of its workings.

The last thing I want to note about buddha-nature is this. What separates from the physical body and travels from life to life is this innermost subtle aspect of consciousness – the fundamental mind of clear light. No aspect of mind that is contaminated in any way travels into the next life. However, the karmic imprints that we have generated through our actions, speech, and thoughts remain associated with that mind that is moving into a new life and retain



their ability to influence future thoughts and actions.

## **2. MEDITATION: CONTINUITY OF CONSCIOUSNESS**

Now is the time to take a break from listening, and do the meditation called Reflection on the Continuity of Consciousness. The meditation recordings that accompany this course run for 20 to 30 minutes. After having done the meditation with the recording a few times, if you want to take more time to work with any part of the meditation you are doing, use the printed copy and take your time. The important thing to remember is to enjoy what you are doing. Do it with a relaxed body and mind, with no pressure to achieve anything, and without expectations.

And, before you finish this session of listening, bring your mind back to your initial reflection on your motivation and aspirations for the course. Then, dedicate the energy you have generated listening to this teaching (or reading the transcript), dedicate the insights and understanding that you have gained to achievement of the goals you set in order to progress on your spiritual journey towards awakening for the benefit of yourself and all the people of your life.

This reflection is called “dedicating the merit” – that means dedicating the spiritual energy and creative potential that you have generated in your endeavors. It is a bit like opening a special account in the Enlightenment Bank dedicated to a specific purpose – perfect awakening for oneself, all the people of one’s life and by extension all universal living beings. All the spiritual energy and creative potential that goes into that account can only be used for that special purpose. And, as you will learn when you study karma in Module 6, the energy you “save” in this way is drawing interest in your enlightenment account. In that way you are able to take the next step on your spiritual journey, the path grows shorter and buddha is that much closer.

## **PRELIMINARIES**

Begin with a short period of relaxing physical exercise, yoga or tai chi or a short walk in quiet surroundings. Prepare your altar, or simply light a candle or some incense to help create a sacred space within which to meditate.

After you sit in your meditation space, calm the mind further with a few minutes of breathing meditation. Simply bring your awareness to your breath, to the expansion and contraction of your abdomen as you inhale and exhale. You can also use the breath-counting exercise from the recorded meditation.

When distracting thoughts or emotions arise simply take note of them and let them go without any conversation whatsoever. Do this for three to five minutes, or more if you wish.

Now, imagine that you are surrounded by all the people of your life – friends, enemies and strangers. Bring these people to life in your contemplation; imagine they are really here, in this space with you, doing this meditation with you.

Then, adjust your motivation. Consider your intention for your spiritual practice in general and this meditation in particular. Carefully make the determination to use your study and meditation to increase your understanding and insight, and to take the next step on your spiritual journey for your own sake, for the sake of all the people of your life, and by extension all universal living beings.

## **THE ACTUAL PRACTICE**

Begin to watch the activity in your mind – the flow of thoughts, emotions, sensations, judgments, projections, expectations.

Just watch these mental events without involvement of any kind – no criticism, no attraction, no rejection; watch what is going on like a neutral, scientific observer who has no investment in the objects of observation. Watch the process.

After some time, catch one of these mind moments and from that point begin to journey backwards in time, from one mental event to the previous one.

Briefly scan your mental experiences, traveling backwards through the last hour, through the morning, back to breakfast, back to your waking. Is there a relationship between one moment and the previous one, or the one before that?

Go back to the dreams that you remember. Back to the night before, to the thoughts that you had as you went to sleep. Are there connections, relationships, between these mental events? Go back through yesterday, the day before, last week, last month, last year.

Don't engage with the story that is unfolding. Simply watch without involvement, without judgment, just looking for connections.

Go back as far as possible in your life watching the mental events of your youth, of your childhood, your infancy, perhaps even your birth.

If you can go back to your birth, what happens then? – in the womb? – at the moment of conception? Try to see the possibilities. Does the flow cease? Does it continue?

Relax, and let each mental event arise in its own time and observe the process at work.

When you have gone back as far as possible, gently return to the present moment. Again watch the activity of your mind; observe these arising mental events without involvement of any kind – criticism, attraction, or rejection – looking for the connections.

Now, imagine your mind stream flowing out before you, one thought and then the next...into the future. Imagine the process.

Let your imagination go. Watch the possibilities for the future – your mind flowing out into the rest of the day, into tomorrow...next week, next month, next year...and so on... until death.

Consider the possibilities at that point. Does the flow cease? Does it continue? Does it change?

What happens now? What are the possibilities?

## **DEDICATION**

Once again, settle in the present moment. Bring to mind the motivation that you established at the beginning of the meditation. Dedicate the understanding, the spiritual energy and creative potential that you have generated doing this meditation to the realization of your goals, to taking the next step on your spiritual journey, for your own sake and for the sake of all the people of your life.

NB: Throughout this reflection, watch whatever arises carefully, without expectation or judgment. Stay open to the possibilities, just looking for the connections and relationships between one mind moment and another, between one sequence of thoughts and another. Do not get involved with the content of your thoughts.

This reflection is not a regression exercise. It is an exploration of how consciousness works, from moment to moment.

Understanding the process involved is more important than seeing our birth or past lives; understanding the relationships and links within the stream of consciousness is the key to understanding karma and the cycle of past and future lives. So, as you meditate stay clear and detached, like a cool, neutral scientific observer, watching the process with no investment in the nature of the content.

Enjoy the process and have fun! This is a voyage of discovery.

### **3. SESSION TWO**

#### **BREATHING MEDITATION AND MOTIVATION**

Begin this session of listening with a Breathing Meditation.

Remember to include all the people of your life in your meditation and listening to the teachings. This time, do the breathing as above for two or three minutes. Then bring your attention to the sensations in your body. If there is nothing in particular happening, just stick with the breath and the sensation of the expansion and contraction of your abdomen. But, when a bodily sensation begins to make its presence known bring your awareness to that sensation. Perhaps it will be the pressure of your buttocks on your meditation seat, an itch or tingling, pain in your knees, the touch of your clothes somewhere on your body; whatever it is – comfortable or uncomfortable – just watch it. Don't judge it or analyze it; try to maintain your cool scientific observation. When that sensation disappears, return to the breath until another one arises.

In this breathing meditation, you begin to go more deeply into the constant flow of mental and physical events going on in your mind-body complex. This is an excellent meditation to do on a daily basis, slowly building up to fifteen to twenty minutes. With repeated use you will develop a strong sense of the impermanent ever-changing nature of the flow of mental events, and the experience of the myriad sensations in the body. You can also see that if you leave the contents of your mind alone, if you just let it be, it really isn't much trouble. Stuff arises, and then it disappears.

It is only when you engage with your arising thoughts and emotions that you get into trouble. As long as you observe with total neutrality, neither pushing away nor clinging to whatever arises, each mental event abides momentarily and then disappears, creating no problem from its own side. When you give this mental activity energy that is when it can become problematic. And, it doesn't

matter if that energy is apparently positive or negative, pleasant or unpleasant. For example, a pleasant thought arises. You can follow it with a recollection of the pleasure, and the wish to repeat it. Alternatively, you can try to push it away because you think it is a distraction to your attentive awareness. In both cases, you will be energizing the thought, and it will certainly become a distraction. But, if you simply take mental note of it (without labeling it or conversing with it) and let it be, it will disappear. Like the old saying goes: Let sleeping dogs lie. Let rising thoughts be.

Sensations also are not the uncomfortable monolithic things that we sometimes imagine. Even the most difficult pain never stays the same; it comes and goes, increases and decreases. The only constant is change.

Following the Breathing Meditation, do the Motivational Reflection, carefully setting your intention to use this time of study and reflection to attain your goals, to take the next step on your spiritual journey, for your well-being and for the sake of all the people of your life and, by extension, all universal living beings.

## **INTEGRATING THE TEACHINGS**

Before I return to the subject of the mind, I want to discuss briefly a three-fold methodology for taking in and integrating the teachings that I have referred to during the first session. This is **listening**, **reflecting**, and **meditating**.

First, one encounters the teachings, traditionally in oral cultures, by hearing them delivered in person by one's own spiritual mentor. Nowadays **listening** may have a broader connotation. You may be listening to audio recordings or a CD-ROM, delivered by someone you have never met. You may be reading the teachings in a book or downloading them from the internet or watching a video. In any case, the process is similar; you are taking them in, perhaps for the first time.

Having heard the teachings, you begin to digest them. You reflect on what you have heard or read. This **reflection** is a cognitive

process which can take many forms. You may simply think about the teachings in a contemplative way, working out the meaning in the quiet of your own mental space. You may discuss them with fellow students, your teachers and mentors. Or, you may follow a form of reflective (sometimes called “analytical”) contemplation using the teachings themselves, an outline of the teachings, your own notes, or guided meditations such as the ones used in this course. In the Tibetan monastic tradition, a form of rigorous debate is used to deepen understanding and resolve doubts. This debating technique is a form of reflection or analysis in spite of the fact that it is an active, dynamic process – highly physical, done in large groups with much shouting and laughter.

Finally, you dive deeply into the subject matter utilizing non-conceptual **meditation** techniques such as single-pointed concentration to give rise to an integrated realization of the principles contained in the teachings.

As I have mentioned, it is important to bring an open mind to your listening, not shutting the door on any of the ideas and possibilities that are presented.

During the process of reflection you can bring a healthy skepticism to the investigation of the material. “Healthy” is the operative word here. Again, it is important to keep the doors open to possibility. But also worth noting that the Buddha himself advised his disciples not to take his teachings on board merely out of respect for him and his accomplishments. Not to take them on blind faith. But, rather to question them, examine them, and check if these ideas accord with their own experience of themselves and the world – to reflect, to meditate, and only then decide to accept them or reject them. Buddhism is not a dogmatic religion, telling you how it is, and that’s that. It is an experiential one which gives the student methods and techniques to examine their own experience and learn from it. You have everything you need to reach enlightenment right now. Your own experience can be the key to the wisdom that allows you to do so. The teachings give you the means to use your own



experience skillfully to develop that wisdom.

Each of these methods – listening, reflecting and meditating – is a way for you to bring the teachings into your experience. It is important to be aware of this process and use it to the best of your ability in order to make good use of this time, and to generate the best results – understanding and spiritual transformation.

Now, back to our discussion of the mind.

### **SPACE JUNK 1**

You may have started to see during your breathing meditations how the stream of consciousness throws up an amazing, and seemingly endless, array of mental stuff. The underlying clear nature of the mind is often likened to space. I call this mental stuff space junk. It is like the trash we have left behind that has cluttered up the pristine environment of our solar system in our adventures in space travel. Your personal space junk obstructs your inner space and, therefore, your clear view of your pristine spacious fundamental mind.

Another analogy, which Lama Yeshe used in the quote cited previously, is that of the sky with clouds. In both instances it is important to note that the clouds or even the worst pollution in the sky, or the junk in space, do not in any way alter the pristine quality of their environments. If the clouds burn off or blow away, the same clear blue sky remains. If we send a garbage shuttle into space one day to retrieve the junk we have left behind, once again we will have clean-clear space in our solar system.

It is the same with your mind. As noted before, nothing that arises in your mental continuum can damage your fundamental clear light consciousness. But, like the clouds, it can obscure your view. So, how and why do we create this obscuring stuff?

There are six things which lead to the creation of space junk – (1) **a karmic imprint**, (2) **a related object**, (3) **the influence of misleading friends**, (4) **following false teachings**, (5) **habit**, and (6) **mistaken ideas**. I am going to speak about the first two and the last two, but you can read a short teaching on these six

factors in the book *Wisdom Energy*.<sup>2</sup> Although this is not required reading for this module, I would very strongly suggest that you read at least the one chapter related to this subject [noted in the footnote in the transcript].

(1) **A karmic imprint** is an influence on our thoughts and actions. It can be constructive or destructive in its influential behavior. We will primarily discuss the destructive ones in this teaching on the mind; the constructive ones are those that we are trying to establish in our spiritual practice. The imprint itself is neither form nor consciousness. It is an influence that comes about as a result of previous thoughts and actions and that, given appropriate conditions, gives rise to certain behavior and actions in the present and future.

These imprints grow in strength as we become habituated in certain behaviors and lead us to acting out old (5) **karmic habit patterns**. For example, if we tell a small “white lie” to a friend, and then think: I wish I hadn’t done that; I won’t do it again! – the imprint from that action will be very small and weak. But, if instead of regretting the action we think: Gee, that made life easier; it didn’t hurt anyone; I can use that technique again. – each time we tell another white lie the instinct to lie in similar situations will grow stronger and stronger. The influence of the imprint grows, a habit is established.

(2) The object is called “related” because it has a relationship to a particular karmic imprint, and the presence of that object activates that particular imprint. It can be an object of the senses, a physical object or a mental object – a thought, an idea, any kind of mental construct.

Finally, we have (6) our **mistaken ideas** about the qualities of those objects. We exaggerate both the good and bad aspects of the objects with which we come in contact. As you will see in the

---

<sup>2</sup> Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche, *Wisdom Energy: Basic Buddhist Teachings*. Wisdom Publications, Boston. 2000, 25th Anniversary Edition – Chapter 4, *How Delusions Arise*.

following discussion, this overestimation is the creator of big problems.

So, let's look in a bit more detail at how this works. Basically, consciousness has two functions – perception and conception. Perception is a non-conceptual state of mind.

Conception is a notional state of mind; in other words, an awareness that cognizes an object through the instrument of a mental image and thinks about, reflects on, that image. Mental image would seem to be a bit of a misnomer because it refers not only to visual images (our usual idea about what an “image” is), but also to smells, tastes and so forth – the “images” of all five senses, and mental consciousness. In technical terminology, a mental image is called a “generic image” or a “meaning generality.” Conception tries to make sense of the objects we perceive. As we shall see, it usually distorts our perceptions.

Conception takes place when you mix the object with a subjective projection of the object. You are unable, under normal circumstances, to separate your projection from the object itself. In other words, you cannot discriminate the objective reality from your own subjective opinions and projections made on the basis of an image you have created yourself. So, conception can be described as a deceptive cognition. This does not mean that all conceptions have no validity. Obviously that is not true. What it does mean is that all conceptions are deceptive *with regard to the appearance of the object*, because what we take to be the object is actually the mental image. Conceptions may be correct with regard to how that object exists. And, they may be incorrect with regard to both appearance and existence.

There are two kinds of perception: sense perception and mental perception. Sense perception depends on an object – a sound, a smell, a visual object, a taste or a tactile object, and the physical organ – ear, nose, eye and so forth. In addition, it depends on a prior mental event. That is, it's dependent on the immediately preceding moment of cognition.

These three, called respectively, the object condition, the dominant condition and the immediate condition must all be present for a sense perception to occur. All sense perceptions are non-conceptual, or bare perceptions. Bare here means nothing is added; naked if you will. You experience the object just as it is – for a micro-moment.

Mental cognitions can also be perceptual. Mental perceptions do not require a physical organ, they require only the mind itself – that is, the preceding mental event (perception or conception, either sensory or mental). That prior mind moment is the dominant condition, the mental-organ so to speak, as well as the immediate condition. The object condition for mental perceptions can be physical form, or more subtle objects such as the clairvoyant perception of the mind of another.

Most of the perceptions that a person with normal sense organs has are true perceptions. That is, they see the correct relative (or conventional) reality of the object itself. If there is a defect in the organ, the perception may be false. For example, if you press on your eyeball in a certain way, while looking at the moon, you may see two moons, or a blurry moon. Clearly, the view from planet Earth does not include two moons, so that is a false perception because the eye organ was functioning improperly. Mental perceptions such as dream perceptions are also mistaken or false perceptions because the dream image does not, in fact, have the existence that it appears to have while one is in the dream.

Non-conceptual, in reference to perceptions, means that one perceives the object in a clear and immediate way; barely, without adornment. There is no overlay of judgments or projections, merely the objective relative reality of the thing itself. Unfortunately, under normal conditions those objectively correct moments of perception are gone in a flash. I could go into great detail in this discussion of the mind, but for this course, intended as an introduction, any further elaboration might be more mind boggling than clarifying.

## **SPACE JUNK 2**

So, let's look now at what this means for us practically day-to-day, and in the context of our spiritual journey.

You come into contact with an object and one of the five sense organs or the mental-organ perceives this object. That is the first moment of perception. This first micro-moment is that instance of pure, unadorned bare perception – the naked truth about the object. The very next moment – Danger! Mental consciousness kicks in, bringing with it the entire beginningless array of your experience and karmic habit patterns, with all their superstitions, judgments and projections, and you begin to conceptualize, to think, about this object.

For example, you see a person coming down the street towards you. In that first moment, it is just a person without even the label “person.” Every label is a concept. A nanosecond later we begin to describe this thing we see to ourselves:...ah, man/woman; ...oh, my friend, isn't he lovely, I'm so happy to see him; ...arrghhhh, not her again, how can I avoid her; ...oh, who's that, looks nice, I haven't met him before...and on and on it goes. Tall/short, fat/thin, black/white, nice dresser, looks rich, looks dangerous...and so forth. The list of reactions is infinite, but I'm sure you get the picture.

This is how you get into trouble, projecting on to the objects of your perceptions. You have made a judgment; you've fixed or reified an opinion in your mind about this person before an actual meeting takes place. As a result, you don't go into the meeting even with neutrality, much less an open heart because you have firmly established this concrete opinion. Once established we tend to cling to those opinions and look for things to reinforce them.

Perhaps the woman you wanted to avoid because you had another argument with her yesterday, was coming to apologize, to say that you were right and she was wrong. Because you have already made up our mind and turned the corner to avoid her, you miss the apology. You miss the possibility for reconciliation, for developing a friendship or at least a workable relationship.

We have all had the experience of walking into a roomful of total strangers. Before we have even been introduced to anyone, or spoken to anyone, we begin to make assumptions about them, judgments about them: he looks nice; don't like the look of her; hey that's my kind of person, I can tell by the way she dresses...

These projections arise from our past experience in this life and in beginningless previous lives. You almost never experience anything with a fresh, uncomplicated mind. All your old attitudes and habits come into play, and possibilities for wonderful new experiences go out the window because you prejudge everything.

## 4. MEDITATION: EQUANIMITY

With this understanding, it's time to meditate. The next meditation that I am going to ask you to do is an Equanimity Meditation. I want to say a few words about it before I send you off to your meditation seat.

This is a slightly unusual meditation to find in a course on the mind. It rightly belongs much further along in a series of meditations designed to help us develop love, compassion and altruism. [Module 10]. It is impossible to open our hearts to others fully without having an open mind regarding all others without exception. This meditation helps us arrive at that enviable state of mind.

I also find it very helpful in the process of discovering and acknowledging how our minds work to create concepts about the people in our lives and then, on the basis of these skewed conceptions, develop or destroy relationships. It can help us see exactly how it is that we project onto others from our vast storehouse of karmic residues gathered in this life and beginningless previous lives.

If you do the meditation whole-heartedly, bringing the so-called friend, enemy or stranger to life and honestly delving deeply into the reasons why you apply the labels you do to each of them, it can be very enlightening. It can be challenging too, but as I mentioned at the beginning of this course, merely engaging with these teachings on any level can be a challenge. And, here you have the bonus of coming closer to love, compassion and altruism in all your relationships because having meditated in this way, you can come from the spaciousness of neutrality rather than from an attitude filled with judgment and projection. You come from openness rather than "attitude."

And before you finish this session, remember to dedicate your effort, understanding and insights, as well as your doubts and questions, to the realization of your goals, to taking the next step in your spiritual journey, for your own benefit and that of all the people of your life. This dedication may even begin to make more sense once you have started to work with the Equanimity Meditation.

### **PRELIMINARIES**

Begin with a short period of relaxing physical exercise, yoga or tai chi or a short walk in quiet surroundings. Prepare your altar, or simply light a candle or some incense to help create a sacred space within which to meditate.

After you sit in your meditation space, calm the mind further with a few minutes of breathing meditation. Simply bring your awareness to your breath, to the expansion and contraction of your abdomen as you inhale and exhale. You can also use the breath-counting exercise from the recorded meditation. When distracting thoughts or emotions arise simply take note of them, and let them go without any conversation whatsoever. Do this for three to five minutes, or more if you wish.

Now, imagine that you are surrounded by all the people of your life – friends, enemies and strangers. Bring these people to life in your contemplation; imagine they are really here, in this space with you, doing this meditation with you.

Then, adjust your motivation. Consider your intention for your spiritual practice in general and this meditation in particular. Carefully make the determination to use your study and meditation to increase your understanding and insight, and to take the next step on your spiritual journey for your own sake, for the sake of all the people of your life, and by extension all universal living beings.



## THE ACTUAL PRACTICE

From among all the people of your life, who are surrounding you, select three people and place them in front of you: a close **friend**, relative or lover, someone you hold dearly in your heart; an **enemy**, someone you have a problem with, who causes anger or irritation to arise in your heart; a **stranger**, someone you don't really consider at all, for whom you feel only indifference – uninterested disregard.

Beginning with the friend, reflect in turn on your relationship with each one of these people. We love our friend and can only see the good characteristics that attracted us to this person in the first place. This person we love so deeply can do no wrong, has no negative characteristics.

But there are times when we disagree, have an argument or our friend, in a forgetful moment, treats us badly. Then how do we feel? Where is our love? Where is the wonderful person who we call "friend"? In our moment of anger, we cannot find the good qualities that seemed to be inherent in the personality of our friend.

So, in a single mind moment, the friend becomes the enemy.

We have all had this experience many times in our lives. The marriage made in heaven ends in the divorce court; the love affair in catastrophe. The family that everyone admired as exemplary breaks up in anguish. The friendship of a lifetime breaks down under the least pressure.

Where then is the truly findable, eternal friend?

Reflect on the enemy. We have all had the experience of difficult relationships, fraught with irritation, anger and tension. It is impossible in such situations to find anything likeable in this enemy. But, somewhere there is another who dearly loves this irritating person, who thinks they are the tops. Who is right? Where is the real friend or enemy in this human being's mind-body complex?

And, sometimes these difficult, irritating relationships can turn into close friendships. The irritating person we sought to avoid becomes our supporter in a difficult situation. Then where has the

enemy gone? Where can we find the true, eternal enemy?

Finally, the stranger. Someone to whom we are quite indifferent. Every friend, every enemy has at one time been a stranger.

Each person in our lives is sometimes the friend, sometimes transformed into the enemy, and sometimes as unknown as the total stranger. Our friend is someone else's enemy; our enemy, someone's beloved. Where can we find a solid, never-changing friend, enemy or stranger? Only our mind's projections create them. There is nothing inherent in the other that we can safely label friendly or difficult.

### **DEDICATION**

Bring to mind the motivation that you established at the beginning of the meditation. Dedicate the understanding, the spiritual energy and creative potential that you have generated doing this meditation to the realization of your goals, to taking the next step on your spiritual journey, for your own sake and for the sake of all the people of your life.

## **5. SESSION THREE**

### **BREATHING MEDITATION AND MOTIVATION**

Remember to begin by including all the people of your life in your reflection and meditation, as well as your listening to the teachings. Begin this session with the Breathing Meditation simply watching the breath – the body breathing in and breathing out – as in the first session.

After watching the breath in this way for a few minutes, bring your awareness to the mental process itself. Simply watch without any involvement in the contents of your mind. Don't judge what arises, don't cling to happy thoughts, don't push away the bad ones; simply watch whatever arises with total neutrality. Watch it arise, abide and disappear. If nothing seems to be happening, return to the breath. When thoughts and emotions begin to arise, stay with them. Meditate in this way for five to ten minutes.

Sometimes when you are meditating in this way something will arise that really begs for your attention – some problem in your life, or some old habit that wants changing. Instead of trying to sort it out in your meditation session, take note of what it is and make a promise to work on it when you have finished. Stay with the practice, whatever arises. This is a non-conceptual practice, and not the appropriate time for analysis and reflection, or any kind of discussion with yourself.

When you are meditating, just meditate. When you are sorting out your life, sort it out. But, don't mix the two together.

Then, do the Motivational Reflection, carefully setting your intention to use this time of study and reflection to attain your goals, to take the next step on your spiritual journey, for your well-being and for the sake of all the people of your life. Even the slightest shift in attitude can have a positive or negative effect on those around us.

From a Buddhist point of view motivation is the most important element in your actions. It is, therefore, essential that you attend carefully to your intentions throughout the day in everything that you do. Bring the mindfulness that you are beginning to develop in these breathing practices to the rest of your life. In doing so the separation between your meditation, your spiritual practice, and life in general begins to disappear. This is one useful way to ground your meditation practice in the activities of your daily life, and when you do this, it will speed up the integration process.

In one of the most ancient Buddhist texts, *The Dhammapada*, it is stated:

Everything is based on mind, is led by mind, is fashioned by mind. If you speak and act with a polluted mind, suffering will follow you, as the wheels of an oxcart follow the footsteps of the ox.

Everything is based on mind, is led by mind, is fashioned by mind. If you speak and act with a pure mind, happiness will follow you, as your shadow follows your body.

Intention is karma.

## **THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE MIND: PRIMARY MINDS AND MENTAL FACTORS 1**

So far, I have defined the mind, and described how it functions through perception and conception. You have had a brief look at how the perceptual/conceptual process leads you into directions that are not always constructive, or even wanted. The mind often seems to have a life of its own, totally out of your control. It runs you, driving your thoughts and actions. Or so it seems. If you really begin to question and look deeply, you can see clearly that you do indeed have many opportunities to make up your own mind and to change direction. You can put yourself back in the driver's seat and take control on an internal level and in your external actions and relationships. You can see how important simple methods, such as the breathing meditations, are in developing awareness of the processes of your mind and creating the possibility for change.

In your meditations and reflections, you have seen the flow of mental events, delved into the momentary continuum to look at the relationships and connections between one mind moment and the next. By now perhaps it is becoming apparent that you are often led in directions by the mind quite unconsciously, so you suddenly find yourself in the midst of a “situation” or a train of thought, and you have no idea how you got there.

Sleepwalking is a good analogy for how we live our lives. In actual sleepwalking, a person is able not only to walk, but sometimes to perform quite complex actions, while one part of the mind is still asleep. When they wake they have no recollection of the nighttime perambulations. This is a most dangerous situation not only for the sleepwalker, but for us every day sleepwalking our way through our so-called waking moments. We engage in what we believe will be fruitful, beneficial actions, and often they go wrong, bringing suffering to us and others. We don't understand why this happens because we are unaware of our true, but most often subliminal, intentions. The mind is a subtle slippery, often devious, thing.

Now, we are going to look at the psychological aspects of the mind that arise from the perceptual/conceptual process. We will examine some of the constructive, destructive and neutral mental factors that arise as a result of our perceptions and conceptions. When it is a destructive mental factor that arises during one of those sleepwalking moments it can lead to disastrous consequences.

In perception and conception there are two types of awareness or cognition – primary minds and mental factors. A primary mind is “a primary cognition established by means of its apprehension of the fundamental presence of the object.” It is simply conscious of whatever is presented to it. It doesn't try to understand it, make sense of it or process it in any way. That is the job of mental factors.

A mental factor is a cognition that deals with a specific quality of the object apprehended by the primary mind with which it has five similarities – basis, duration, aspect, referent, substance. Basis

refers to the organ upon which these two types of awareness depend; for example, a visual object depends on the eye organ. Duration refers to the simultaneity of time; that is, they arise, abide and disappear simultaneously. They both share the same aspect of the object, say the color of a visual object. They both refer to the same object. Their substance is the same in that both are either perceptual or conceptual, mistaken or unmistaken.

These mental factors rule our lives and condition our experience of ourselves and the world around us. The destructive mental factors are the clouds and space junk that obscure our view of our own pristine buddha-nature, our pure, clean-clear inner space. They are also at the very root of our pain, dissatisfaction and frustration. So, it is important to be aware of these mental factors, to know how they arise and how they affect us.

## **PRIMARY MINDS AND MENTAL FACTORS 2**

Again, since this is a short introductory course there will not be an opportunity to discuss all the mental factors in detail. Some Buddhist texts on the mind refer to 51 principal mental factors, others 46 – in reality they are probably infinite in number. I will use the classification of 51 mental factors which are grouped into several categories: the ever-present, object-ascertaining and variable mental factors; the constructive mental factors; and two categories of destructive mental factors – the root delusions and the derivative delusions (those that are derived from the three root delusions: attraction, aversion and confusion).

The first group – the ever-present, object-ascertaining and variable mental factors – are functions of the mind and are not in and of themselves either constructive or destructive; they can be either, or completely neutral.

The five ever-present mental factors are **feeling, discernment, intention, contact** and **attention**. They accompany every primary mind without exception.

The five object-ascertaining mental factors are **aspiration**, **appreciation**, **mindfulness** (recollection), **meditative concentration** and **sublime awareness** (wisdom, intelligence). These mental factors “ascertain” the object through discrimination of the various aspects of the object.

These two groups of mental factors are the fundamental mechanics of the mind which will, depending on how we use them, determine either constructive thoughts and actions or destructive ones. Because of this function, they are extremely important factors to understand and use in profitable ways. Through their control and direction, we can generate positive states of mind that will make progress in our spiritual journey possible.

So, let’s look at them in a little more detail: first, the five ever-present mental factors.

**Feeling** is the experience of pleasure, displeasure or neutrality; it is the experience of the results of previous actions - that is, the pleasure or pain that is called feeling is the ripened effect of previous karma. The specific feeling that arises leads one to react with one of the three root delusions – attraction, aversion or confusion.

**Discernment** differentiates between one object and another. It can be found in both concepts (where we discern by attributing names and qualities to objects) and perceptions (where we discern merely by distinguishing between one thing and another – a table and a chair, for example).

**Intention** directs the primary mind and associated mental factors to the object. Geshe Rabten describes it as the “actual principle of activity.” Therefore, he says, “Intention is karma itself.”

**Contact** connects the object, the organ (one of the five sense organs or mental consciousness) and the primary mind. In other words, the mind and object meet. As a result of the meeting the organ is said to have been “activated” because it becomes the basis for the experience of pleasure, displeasure or neutrality.

**Attention** directs the primary mind and mental factors to the object and actually grasps it. It focuses the mind on the object and

keeps it there without allowing it to drift off somewhere else. Attention is more specific than intention which merely brings the mind in a general way to the object. For example, intention might focus on a group of people, but attention would zero in on a specific individual.

If any one of these five is missing, perception or conception cannot occur. We could not recognize or experience the object.

Now, the five object-ascertaining mental factors.

**Aspiration** focuses on the object and takes a strong interest in it.

**Appreciation**, occurring when the object's qualities are seen to be of value, stabilizes this mind that "appreciates" the object and does not allow it to wander or be distracted.

**Mindfulness** is the factor that brings the mind back to the object, again and again, without forgetting it. It doesn't allow the mind to wander.

**Meditative concentration** is the ability to remain single-pointedly for a sustained period of time on a single specific object.

**Sublime awareness** is a mind of super-fine sharpness and a refined ability to discriminate – to examine and understand an object, an idea, whatever it wishes to illuminate.

**Mindfulness** is the basis for **concentration**; concentration is the basis for **sublime awareness**.

The variable mental factors are **sleep, regret, general examination** and **precise analysis**. Their constructive or destructive qualities depend both on motivation and circumstances.

**Sleep** makes the mind dull and lacking in clarity; it draws the senses inward and the mind loses awareness of the body. It is variable depending on the state of mind of the sleeper – a healthy, happy mind brings restful sleep; an unhappy mind, filled with craving or aversion brings fitful sleep and probably disturbing dreams.

**Regret** is a factor that gives rise to unhappiness with regard to past actions. If we regret a destructive action, the regret is constructive leading us to purify past misdeeds. Don't mistake guilt



regarding past deeds for regret. Guilt, as it is experienced by most of us, is a debilitating state of mind that only has the effect of bringing us down. Regret is a mind conditioned by some degree of intelligence that can see the disadvantages of negative actions and seeks to redress them. If our regret is directed towards positive actions, the regret itself is destructive leading us away from constructive activities.

**General examination** roughly investigates a designated object. It is based on intention or sublime awareness.

**Precise analysis** looks at the object in depth and differs from general examination in terms of the degree of precision.

### **PRIMARY MINDS AND MENTAL FACTORS 3: DESTRUCTIVE MENTAL FACTORS, THE THREE ROOT DELUSIONS**

Destructive, or negative (non-virtuous) mental factors, produce dissonance and disturbance in oneself and others. As I mentioned earlier, there are two groupings of destructive mental factors, the root delusions and the derivative delusions. And, there are two main ways of enumerating the root delusions, by division into three or six. In this teaching I will concentrate on the division into three. Life is complicated enough as it is. The three root delusions are attraction (often called attachment), aversion (anger) and confusion. Just for your information, the division into six is: attraction, aversion, pride, ignorance, disturbing views, and disturbing doubt.

The derivative delusions are derived from the root delusions. There are 20 derivative delusions according to the system that I am using here.

Sometimes you will come across teachings in which the names in English or the groupings are slightly different. Whatever they are called, and however they are grouped, they have the same effect. They create conflict and distress in your mind, and in the minds of others around you as you interact with them and as your psychological processes affect them. These destructive mind-states

could also be called the sleep-disturbing mental factors! These are the ones that keep you up pacing the floor or tossing and turning at night. And, they are the ones that most often seriously disturb your meditations. They are the source of all your discomfort and misery. And, they are yours, yours alone! They do not come from anywhere but within your own mind. In other words, the object is never the source of your problems.

The good news is, as I mentioned before, they are optional extras. Remember that! Like all options, you don't have to accept them; they are not automatically part of the package that is your mind-body complex. The choice to accept them or transform them is yours, too. Nobody can do it for you.

As you have seen, you cannot leave your bare perceptions alone. We are all compelled by past experiences and the mental impressions they leave, to judge, to project, to filter and to color every encounter and event. After that first instance of bare perception every experience that you have is veiled with your karmic obscurations.

Let's look at the three root destructive mental factors: **attraction, aversion, and confusion.** These three arise from the conceptual framework that you throw up around your perceptions. As you begin to project onto the object, your old karmic freight comes into play, and produces a feeling of pleasure, displeasure or neutrality.

The sense of pleasure or displeasure in turn gives rise to attraction or aversion. What is happening is that, having merely perceived the object, you then begin to gauge its qualities and overestimate the value (or lack of value to you) of the object. The object may be a person, a material thing, an idea or belief system, a piece of music, nature, something to eat, philosophy, a religion or a political party...you name it. Whatever you encounter. The process starts when you wake from deep sleep and stops when you return to deep sleep. Your entire waking day (and even some of your sleep) is spent in this process of evaluation and senseless, destructive discrimination.

The evaluation of the object, that gives rise to attraction or aversion, itself arises from the grandmother of all destructive tendencies – confusion. This is not your ordinary garden variety muddle, this is confusion regarding the very nature of reality – of yourself, others, your environment and everything in it; the reality of how you, and all other phenomena, truly exist. It is fundamental confusion about fundamental truths.

We believe the object we perceive or consider has a substantial, solid, unchanging nature, with particular qualities that will go on forever. In fact, whatever it is that we perceive (or think about) is everchanging, with no ultimate, concrete substance or nature that you can grasp. We have all fallen head over heels in love. And, we have all had the experience of a breakdown in a relationship that was initially loving and passionate. When you fell in love, you could not see a single fault in your beloved. But, when the relationship broke down it was difficult to find any of those wonderful qualities. In fact, all you could see at that point were the bad qualities that had suddenly made you totally averse to this person with whom you were once so in love. So, where is the truly existing, everlasting lover, this person from whom you wished never to be separated? What happened to the good qualities, where did the bad ones come from?

As you have seen in the Equanimity Meditation in an instant, the friend can become an enemy and the enemy can become a friend. They have all been strangers. There is nothing, no thing and no person, that is not in this state of flux. We live in a world of utter insecurity, but we crave security and certainty; therein lies the problem.

Because each mental event conditions the next, each 1/65th of a finger snap can lead one towards a positive and fulfilling result, or towards disaster. The result does not depend on the external object that you are cognizing or the idea that you are assessing; it depends on your overestimation of the nature and qualities – good or bad – of that object.

Your personal experience is the best teacher you have. Looking into your own mind and its workings, looking at the way you view yourself, others and everything you encounter can give you all the lessons you need to free you from this ignorant way of life. The understanding and experience you need to be free cannot come from books. It comes only from close and continuous observation of your own mind, its workings and the reactions that it sets up.

Free from grasping attraction and rejecting aversion, you become able to enjoy your world without the stress brought about by fear of physical and emotional pain, loss and separation, or blame and criticism, and all the other myriad unpleasant happenings in your life.

You cannot control the external environment or others, but you can begin to redirect your own mind so that you are less and less at the mercy of outside influences. Thus, you take charge of your life. You call the shots; you become the director, the creator of your own reality. These three mental factors – attraction, aversion and confusion give rise to all the other destructive mental states. This is the meaning of the three *root* delusions. So, let's look at them a bit more closely.

**Attraction** (attachment) is a mental factor that overestimates the pleasant qualities of an object and as a result begins to take an immoderate interest in it – wants to have it, to possess it, to keep it close. Because we cannot always have it (and even if we do get it, we can't keep it forever for one reason or another) our attraction is a continuous source of dissatisfaction. The attachment that arises when we see the object of our dreams is not a healthy love or affection. True love and compassion that we seek to cultivate in our spiritual practice are founded on wisdom; attraction and its attendant attachment and clinging, arise from confusion – the mind that can't see the reality of the object. In addition, it is a hopelessly selfish state of mind, seeking only one's own pleasure and welfare, whatever the expense to others.

**Aversion** (anger) is unable to tolerate the object, the situation,

the person, or seeks to harm the source of displeasure. This is an extremely distressing state of mind which can bring us not only mental anguish, but physical illness. It can also bring great harm, when we act out our anger in violence or other negative ways, towards those who we believe are the source of our displeasure. Aversion colors our view of everything and everyone we encounter, even those things or beings which are not directly the object of our anger.

These two states of mind are like two sides of the coin of confusion. If there is attraction, there is necessarily aversion. Every conflict – from two children fighting over a toy, a couple having it out in the divorce court or two nations slaughtering one another’s citizens – arises from these two mental factors. Think of a small child in the supermarket who sees a brightly colored packet of sweets on the shelf. When his mother says: No! – the child throws a tantrum. As adults, we can see that his response is totally out of proportion. But, our adult responses, though often more sophisticated and complex, are really no different. “I want that!” “You can’t have it, it’s mine!” “Okay then, I’ll take it by force.” “Fine, just try it. I’ll resist with everything I have, to my last breath.” We see it in our life, at work, at home, all around us. We read the morning papers, and there it is. We watch the evening news, and there it is. We read history, and there it is, exactly the same as it is today...on and on for millennia – beginningless mind acting out.

**Confusion** (delusion, closed-mindedness), in Tibetan is *ti-mug* which has the connotation of gloom or darkness. It refers to the confusion that arises from fundamental ignorance, thus it is truly an existential confusion with regard to the nature of reality itself. There are different ways of explaining this basic confusion; it all comes down to our view of ourselves, others, our environment and everything in it.

You do have a view, and from a Buddhist perspective it is badly skewed. One of the best ways to begin to understand how you view the world is simply to begin now by questioning your perspectives.

When you say: I am doing this or that – who or what is this “I”? Check up. Try to find it; try to discover how you believe it to exist.

Confusion is a mind that obscures. Lama Yeshe often used the phrase “darkness-shadow.” Darkness-shadow is confusion, obscuring the mind, making it impossible to “see” things clearly. Because we do not see clearly we are attached to things, ideas and people, all of which will eventually, in some way, let us down. When we are let down, like the small child denied his sweets, aversion rises; we react with anger, rage or violence, and things go from bad to worse.

Fundamental ignorance, which gives rise to confusion, not only relates to our view of existence, but also to our lack of knowledge and understanding regarding things like karma – the law of cause and effect [Module 6 – **All About Karma**], the Sublime Precious Three – Buddha, Dharma and Sangha [Module 7 – **Refuge in the Three Jewels**], and so forth.

#### **PRIMARY MINDS AND MENTAL FACTORS 4: DESTRUCTIVE MENTAL FACTORS, THE DERIVATIVE DELUSIONS**

Finally, I will touch quickly on the 20 derivative delusions.

##### ***From attraction come:***

**avarice** – is clinging to one’s possessions, not wishing to be separated from them, not wishing to share them;

**self-satisfaction** – is a false sense of superiority arising from a pleasurable feeling regarding one’s own good fortune;

**excitement** – is a distracted mind, unable to focus on a virtuous object because of the force of attachment.

##### ***From aversion come:***

**wrath** – is the wish to cause harm, arising through increasing anger;

**vengeance** – is the wish for revenge arising from strongly

holding on to past harm;

**spite** – following on from wrath or vengeance, is the intention to use harsh speech against someone;

**envy** – stemming from attachment to respect and possessions, is intolerance of the things that others have;

**cruelty** – is the wish to denigrate and slight others arising from malice.

***From confusion come:***

**concealment** – is the wish to hide one’s negative qualities, especially from someone who, with good intentions, points out our fault;

**dullness** – is a dark, listless mind;

**faithlessness** – is the opposite of faith, bringing about a lack of belief and respect for those things that are valid, such as karma;

**laziness** – occurs when strongly holding an object of attachment, one loses the wish to engage in constructive activities;

**forgetfulness** – is the opposite of mindfulness, distracting the mind from constructive activity or a virtuous object, and leading it instead to a destructive or disturbing one;

**inattention** – is lack of awareness of one’s own body, speech and mind, leading to a state of carelessness in actions, words and thoughts.

***From attraction and confusion come:***

**pretension** – arises from attachment to respect and prosperity, and invents an admirable quality about oneself and seeks to make it apparent to others;

**dishonesty** – arises from attachment to respect and prosperity; confuses others by hiding one’s faults.

***From all three root delusions:***

**shamelessness** – without conscience or care for Dharma, one does not try to avoid destructive activities and thoughts;

**lack of consideration** – with disregard for others or for one’s spiritual tradition, one behaves in a careless or destructive way;

**lack of conscientiousness** – out of laziness, one is out of control and does not guard against nonvirtue or practice virtue;

**distraction** – unable to maintain attention on a constructive task or object, and the mind becomes scattered latching on to many different objects.

This is a very brief enumeration of these twenty mental factors, but I hope it is enough to give you an idea of how destructive they can be.

It is enough for the moment to say that the three root delusions, and the 20 derivative delusions not only make our daily life and relationships a misery, but they are also a serious disruption to our spiritual practice.

## **PRIMARY MINDS AND MENTAL FACTORS 5: CONSTRUCTIVE MENTAL FACTORS**

Constructive, or positive (virtuous), mental factors produce a sense of well-being and contentment for oneself and others. In the divisions of 51 mental factors there are eleven constructive qualities: **faith, self-respect, consideration** (for others), **detachment, non-hatred, non-confusion, enthusiasm, suppleness, conscientiousness, equanimity, and non-violence.**

**Faith** is a joyful state of mind that arises when we consider the Buddha and his teachings, the law of Karma and so forth. It is the basis for our desire to cultivate virtuous qualities, and to strengthen that desire. It is a mind that is confident in the validity and virtue of the teachings. Don’t mistake this confidence for blind faith. The faith that is referred to here arises from intelligently engaging with the teachings and practices, thus generating certainty regarding their validity.

**Self-respect** is our conscience that holds us back from destructive behavior. It is the basis for ethical actions.

**Consideration** restrains us from destructive actions because of



our concern for others. It is our conscience with regard to the effect of our actions on other people, and other sentient beings in general.

**Detachment** is a state of mind that is able to step back from an object of attachment and is, therefore, an antidote to attachment. It helps us to be able to see through our compulsions and addictions making it possible for us to direct our energy to fruitful pursuits.

**Non-hatred** is the antidote to hatred and is characterized as loving kindness directed at specific objects. Loving kindness is the wish that others have happiness. In this case, the objects are someone who is harming us, the inflicted harm and the cause or instrument of harm, for example weapons.

**Non-confusion** is the antidote to confusion and ignorance; it arises from listening, reflection, and meditation. It can also arise from a predisposition to intelligence and wisdom that understands something about the true nature of reality. It is an incisive and bright mind that, while not being wisdom itself, has the ability to clear away the darkness of confusion.

**Enthusiasm** is the remedy for laziness and procrastination; it is a joyful diligence regarding virtuous activity. It is essential for making progress in our spiritual endeavors.

**Suppleness** counteracts both physical and mental rigidity, allowing the mind to fully engage in virtuous activities. It is the basis for the meditations that lead to meditative concentration and sublime awareness.

**Conscientiousness** loves whatever is virtuous and protects the mind from delusions and destructive actions.

**Equanimity** is the antidote to mental dullness and excitement, supporting the mind to settle and remain focused on a virtuous object. This is not the same as the equanimity that we seek to develop in the Equanimity Meditation which is a state of mind free from attraction and aversion.

**Non-violence** is free from any inclination to harm others. With a non-violent mind we can't bear the suffering that others experience. It is akin to compassion, the wish that others be free

from suffering.

Compassion and loving kindness form the basis for the altruistic aspiration to attain enlightenment solely for the sake of others.

As I said before there are many other mental factors, shades of meaning on the 51 that we have discussed. It might even be possible to say that there is a different mental factor arising in every encounter. But, even if you only consider the three root delusions – attraction, aversion, and confusion – you will go a long way down the track of understanding your mind and the difficulties that it gets you into.

## **CHASING HAPPINESS**

Our natural inclination is to gravitate towards whatever gives us pleasure, and to reject and move away from that which brings us displeasure. All living beings seek happiness and attempt to avoid suffering. This is a fundamental assumption of Buddhism the truth of which you can see clearly if you look into your mind and at the world around you. Even the smallest insect gravitates towards what he needs, what supports his life, and avoids or flees from what is not pleasant or helpful.

We spend huge amounts of time, effort and money to achieve these ends. Our whole lives are enthusiastically devoted to fulfilling our goal of being happy, satisfied, content, and successful. We are single-pointed in our endeavors.

Sadly, the end result is all too often anguish, grief, and pain. We are looking for contentment amongst things that, by their very nature (that is impermanent and lacking any inherent satisfactory qualities) cannot give ever-lasting happiness. The ice cream always melts. Every meeting ends in parting. Every birth in death. Every loving relationship in separation.

This is not to say that all of life is miserable. Clearly that is not the case. We have many good times, good friends, loving relations that last a long time. We experience success in our businesses or working life, in our education and so forth. The problem lies in our

overestimation of this pleasure, and our dependence on unreliable external sources for our continuing pleasure. We always look outside ourselves and expect the pleasure we experience to go on and on. We live in denial of impermanence, death and the deluded mind.

We are addicted to the experience of this perceived pleasure. When a relationship breaks down, we immediately start looking for another one. We all have friends who have gone through multiple marriages or partnerships, who go from one workplace to another looking for the perfect job. And, maybe this applies to us as well. We buy a new car, and the next day see an even better one, and start saving for that one, not content until we have it. But no matter how much wealth we accumulate, how many possessions we have, how “perfect” our marriage, the pleasure and contentment we have with each new acquisition will never last. Our suffering is that we continue the search for lasting pleasure where it is impossible to find it.

You have studied the nature of your mind and learned that at the core of your being you have an inexhaustible source of goodness and satisfaction; it’s called buddha-nature. Yet still perhaps you rarely think to look to that source for sustenance and contentment, but it is always there, ready and waiting for you to tap into it. When you connect with it and stay with it, it will never let you down. When that connection is never broken, and your life becomes the pure expression of that clean-clear spiritual essence, you will have become a buddha – perfectly awakened, perfectly enlightened, perfectly content.

The problem is that even when we have this information, when the possibility has been presented to us, we continue to look outside ourselves for affirmation of who we are, for the pleasure and contentment that we seek; we never imagine that these perceived needs are so easily met simply by looking within and relying on what we already have there. It’s free; it’s ever-lasting; connecting with it can bring true satisfaction.

## 6. MEDITATION: CLARITY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

### MEDITATION AND DEDICATION

Now, it is time for you to do the Meditation on the Clarity of Consciousness.

Through this type of meditation, you can begin to taste the sweet experience of connecting with the fundamental clear light nature of your mind. As with all meditations, experience and insight come only with practice. It is up to each one of you to make the decision to pursue these meditations until experience is gained. Meditating on the mind on a daily basis is the first step towards developing awareness moment-to-moment. The time you spend in meditation is the most important aspect of your attempt to transform your destructive karmic habit patterns. That time spent in reflection and meditation prepares you to bring the positive states of mind cultivated in your practice into every moment of your life.

The Tibetan word *gom*, often translated as meditation, actually means *to become familiar* with something. We sit in meditation to become familiar with our buddha-nature and the wonderful qualities that are its natural expression. So, use this time carefully and it will serve you well.

And before you finish this session, remember to dedicate the effort, understanding and insights, as well as the doubts and questions, which you have generated to the realization of your goals, to taking the next step in your spiritual journey, for your own benefit and that of all the people of your life, and by extension all universal living beings.

Begin with a short period of relaxing physical exercise, yoga or tai chi or a short walk in quiet surroundings. Prepare your altar, or simply light a candle or some incense to help create a sacred space within which to meditate.

After you sit in your meditation space, calm the mind further with a few minutes of breathing meditation. Simply bring your awareness to your breath, to the expansion and contraction of your abdomen as you inhale and exhale. You can also use the breath-counting exercise from the recorded meditation.

When distracting thoughts or emotions arise simply take note of them and let them go without any conversation whatsoever.

Do this for three to five minutes, or more if you wish.

Now, imagine that you are surrounded by all the people of your life – friends, enemies and strangers.

Bring these people to life in your contemplation; imagine they are really here, in this space with you, doing this meditation with you.

Then, adjust your motivation. Consider your intention for your spiritual practice in general and this meditation in particular. Carefully make the determination to use your study and meditation to increase your understanding and insight, and to take the next step on your spiritual journey for your own sake, for the sake of all the people of your life, and by extension all universal living beings.

### **THE ACTUAL PRACTICE**

Generate an image of spacious clarity – for example, imagine you are lying on top of a hill with an unobstructed view – no trees, no buildings – you are gazing up into a clear blue sky, without clouds or pollution of any kind.

Focus your awareness on this luminous spaciousness. Allow yourself to merge with this clear, luminous space.

Imagine your body and mind, as well as the surrounding environment, becoming one with this pure empty space; becoming empty, luminous and clear. Without any sense of separation or duality.

Hold your awareness in the experience of this empty luminosity. Just that. Without thinking this and that, without judgments or discrimination.

This is the clear pure nature of your mind. Just rest in this space

with intense, but relaxed, awareness.

When thoughts and emotions arise from this space, do not engage with them. Do not gravitate towards them with attraction or push them away with aversion. Simply watch them arise, abide and dissolve back into empty spaciousness.

Don't analyze the thoughts and emotions that arise, or the mind, or your experience. Just observe whatever arises with perfect neutrality, and as the thoughts pass, bring your awareness back to the clarity of your own mind.

Everything that arises – thoughts, emotions, feelings and sensations, the experience of sound, smells and so forth – has the nature of spacious, luminous clarity. Formless, space-like clear awareness. This is the pure nature of your consciousness.

Totally relaxed, stay with this experience with intense awareness. Just that. That's all.

## **DEDICATION**

Bring to mind the motivation that you established at the beginning of the meditation. Dedicate the understanding, the spiritual energy and creative potential that you have generated doing this meditation to the realization of your goals, to taking the next step on your spiritual journey, for your own sake and for the sake of all the people of your life.

## **7. SESSION FOUR**

### **BREATHING MEDITATION AND MOTIVATION**

Remember to include all the people of your life in your meditation and listening to the teachings. In the previous three sessions we have focused our awareness first on the breath in the rising and falling of the abdomen, then generally on sensations in the body. In the third session we brought our attention to the flow of thoughts.

Begin this session with the Breathing Meditation simply watching the breath – the body breathing in and breathing out – as in the first session. After a few minutes, open up your awareness to embrace whatever arises: sensations in the body, the content of the mind and all other phenomena – sounds, smells and so forth. Whatever arises is the object of your mindful awareness in the moment or moments that it is present. But, remember, just observe. Don't engage with anything that comes to mind, anything you hear or feel or smell. This is an exercise in neutral observation.

Then, do the Motivational Reflection, carefully setting your intention to use this time of study and reflection to attain your goals, to take the next step on your spiritual journey, for your well-being and for the sake of all the people of your life. Even the slightest shift in attitude can have a positive or negative effect on those around us. From a Buddhist point of view our motivation is the most important element in our actions. It is, therefore, essential that we attend carefully to our intentions throughout the day in everything that we do. Make up your mind now to do that.

### **SUTRA AND TANTRA: A COMPLETE PATH TO ENLIGHTENMENT 1**

Remember Lama Yeshe said in the quote I cited near the beginning of this teaching that the process of purification, or transformation, was simply to actualize the positive in your mind. This is enough to

dissolve or burn up the negative energy, the old destructive patterns. “Actualize the positive” is the essence of spiritual transformation in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition.

There are two practice streams, or lineages, in the Buddha’s teachings – sutra and tantra.<sup>3</sup> I will discuss these briefly to begin to give you an idea of the scope of practices available on the Buddhist path.

All the methods and techniques found in Buddhism are transformative, eventually bringing the practitioner to a fully connected or unified state of being – perfect awakening or enlightenment. Even merely listening to the teachings with an enquiring and open mind can bring about transformation, on the spot. There are many stories of Buddha’s disciples listening to his teachings and there, in that moment, gaining high realizations and even nirvana. The main difference in the sutra and tantra lineages is the approach to transformation that is taken in each.

Sutra refers to the lineage of teachings taught directly by Shakyamuni Buddha, the founder of the Buddhist teachings in our world age. These teachings were given in the three turnings of the wheel of Dharma, or wheel of the teachings – the Dharmachakra. The first turning included the teachings on the four Noble Truths, the three higher trainings, and the thirty-seven aspects of the path to enlightenment.

The second turning included the *Prajnaparamita Sutra* and other related sutras revealing the teachings on transparency or

---

<sup>3</sup> The first twelve modules of *Discovering Buddhism* deal with the sutra tradition; Module 13 introduces the tradition of Indo-Tibetan Buddhist tantra. So, by the end of this series you will have completed a survey of the entire path to liberation and enlightenment. One value of completing the series is that whatever teaching you receive in the future, you will know how and where it fits into the system called the “graduated path to enlightenment” (*lam-rim* in Tibetan). This is important because it removes the confusion generated when we collect many apparently unrelated teachings and don’t know where to put them in our study or how to use them in our practice. It will answer many of the “whys” as well, demonstrating the reasons why the various aspects of the teachings are important.



emptiness – the so-called wisdom sutras. The third turning deals with buddha-nature and the nature of enlightenment in such sutras as the *Tathagatagarbha Sutra*.

The Sanskrit word *sutra* means “thread” and is related to another Sanskrit word meaning “to bind” or “to sew.” It is related to the word *suture*. So, perhaps we can think of the sutras as that which binds us in the cloth of virtue or goodness. Our good “threads.” If you don’t mind some old “60s slang, the idea of cool threads takes on a whole new meaning.

Our work within the sutra tradition begins from the premise that we find ourselves in a destructive psychological situation, and by slowly working to replace the destructive in the mind with a constructive psychology we can actualize the positive qualities that exist within us as potencies right now. It works from a psychological basis, slowly bringing us to the realization and expression of our spiritual essence – buddha-nature. The practices of the sutra tradition are known as the “causal” methods. In using these methods of practice, we create the causes for enlightenment – we start from a state of ignorance and step by step we progress to wisdom and enlightenment.

We study and reflect on the mind, coming to an understanding of its function and the negative situations that we create with it. We see those destructive patterns in our mind in meditation and in action. Then through the systematic use of the many and varied trainings and techniques of the sutra path, we awaken our constructive qualities and, through repetition and familiarization they become integrated parts of our being. All of these techniques lead us inevitably to the highest level of motivation for our life and spiritual practice – the intention to attain the realization of a buddha for the sake, not only of ourselves, but of all others as well. This altruistic aspiration is called *bodhichitta* – the awakening heart; it is the mind intent on attaining awakening for the sake of all universal living beings [Module 10]. We are also led to a perfect understanding of the way things exist, eventually generating the inner realization of

the wisdom that sees the Truth in everything we encounter, the sublime awareness (wisdom) that realizes the transparent (empty) nature of all phenomena. The person who attains these realizations, through the practice of the six perfections (generosity, ethics, patience, enthusiasm, meditative concentration, and sublime awareness) is called a *bodhisattva* – a being intent on awakening.

Ever so slowly, through these practices, we approach the pure expression of our buddha-nature. Wisdom, compassion, and boundless spiritual strength become what and how we are. It is a slow process, but in time will lead the practitioner to high states of spiritual evolution.

These techniques are found in the Theravadan tradition of vipassana meditation, in the Graduated Path to Enlightenment and mind-transformation practices in the Indo-Tibetan Mahayana tradition, and in the koan and meditation techniques of Zen Buddhism. Actualizing the positive is accomplished through the use of techniques such as concentration and meditation, generating compassion, generosity, morality, discipline, and so forth.

## **SUTRA AND TANTRA 2**

There also exists a tradition of Tantric Buddhism. According to Mahayana Buddhist teachings, the tantras were also taught by Shakyamuni Buddha appearing in the form of Vajradhara Buddha and various other buddha figures related to tantric practice. Tantra was first practiced in India; then, with the movement of Buddhism throughout Asia, it was established in other countries – most notably Tibet and surrounding areas like Bhutan and Ladakh, also Japan and some areas of China.

*Tantra* is also a Sanskrit word literally meaning “warp” (a term from weaving that refers to the basis or foundation of woven cloth), derived from an Indo-European root *tanoti*, meaning “to weave.” It has the connotation of continuum; in our case a continuum from ignorance to enlightenment. Of course, what else could it be?

Unlike the sutra tradition, Buddhist tantra begins from the perspective that we have buddha-nature and that, right now we can actualize it in every moment. If we actualize that pure essence from moment to moment, all the positive qualities that we associate with enlightened being will shine through. In other words, we begin tantric practice by recognizing, acknowledging, and tapping into the enlightened end of our gross-to-subtle continuum, and by continuously making that our reference point we actualize the positive in each moment. There is no need to do anything else, because as long as that positive mind moment is present, there is no place for the destructive to reside. The sutra path is long and difficult; tantric methodology is quick and immediate.

Sounds simple. Not quite. There is a fairly arduous set of prerequisites from the sutra stream, which one must work with prior to embarking on a tantric career. Most important is our motivation for engaging in the practice of tantra. If there is any residual ego-based intent in our practice, tantra will not take us to enlightenment. The altruistic aspiration – bodhichitta – must be the one and only motivation for tantric practice. The meditations of the sutra tradition are designed specifically to lead us to the development of this sublime intention making it possible for us to engage in tantric practice. On the other hand, we practice tantra to quickly become bodhisattvas working for the benefit of others.

Not only is it difficult to actualize the prerequisites for tantra, tantric practice itself is not easy. There are four classes of tantra related to the abilities of the practitioner. In the highest class, practice comes in two stages – the creation, or generation, stage and the completion stage. Creation stage utilizes meditation techniques in which the practitioner identifies with the sublime form, resonance, and consciousness of the meditational buddha figure in a process called self-generation. These techniques include the use of elaborate visualizations and recitation of mantra. This is preparation for the completion stage.

In the completion stage, having done the self-generation, the meditator begins to work with his or her own subtle nervous system (mentioned in session 1 of this teaching), in order to bring about the perfect realization of one's own buddha-nature. This is a greatly simplified version of both creation and completion stage tantra. You'll have to wait for Module 13 for a more complete discussion of these practices, and the required prerequisites. In fact, you'll have to wait until you have had a highest yoga tantra empowerment (initiation) before you can receive anything more than a survey of tantric practice.

So, given the right internal environment, tantra is lightning fast, but it is also not for the faint-hearted. It is difficult, and if misused, it can be dangerous to oneself, or at the very least a useless waste of time. Maybe the "warp" that is alluded to in the word tantra is actually the faster than lightning warp drive made famous in the twentieth-century Star Trek space ships.

But seriously, these two traditions – sutra and tantra – provide the dedicated practitioner with a wonderful, holistic system of spiritual development (a practice engaging body, mind and spirit), leading to the ultimate result of pure, perfect awakening or enlightenment. According to Lama Thubten Yeshe, ideally sutra and tantra are practiced together. Together they form a symbiotic partnership, each supporting the increase in insight and realization in the other level of practice, thereby leading the meditator quickly to the highest goal. In the past, many teachers have insisted on their disciples actualizing the realizations of the sutra level before beginning tantric practice. According to Lama Yeshe, it was the intent of Lama Tsongkhapa (the great Tibetan yogi and author of the Graduated Path to Enlightenment), that they should be practiced in tandem.

This completes my introduction to the mind in Tibetan Buddhism, but I would like to add some remarks about daily meditation practice.

## **DAILY MEDITATION**

None of the wonderful results that I have mentioned during these talks are possible without meditation. That means a consistent daily practice that one treats with at least as much reverence as one does eating three square meals a day, and sleeping! A goal to be worked for as diligently as one is willing to work for a most highly prized possession or the most powerful position. Meditation will take less time, cost much less, and has many more far-reaching benefits than any flashy car or the most sumptuous feast of gourmet food, the most passionate love affair or the most prestigious and powerful job in the world. Outside of the fruits of our spiritual practice, satisfaction is fleeting at best and often nonexistent no matter how much time and money we expend trying to find it, possess it and keep it. If you meditate daily with dedication and perseverance, satisfaction is guaranteed.

Some of you probably already have some sort of daily spiritual practice. That's great. These remarks will assume that you do not, but if you do, simply add to your present practice some or all of the meditations that we have been working with during this course.

The first thing to consider when you begin to meditate regularly at home is where to do it. It is good (best really) if you can set aside a space that is solely for the purpose of meditation. Nothing else goes on there. It may be an entire small room that has no other function, or simply a corner in a room that is used for other purposes – a bedroom, guest room or living room, for example. It should be clear to you, and to others living in the house, that this space is, literally, sacred. And, you know when you go into it what you are there for. The entire energy of the space supports meditation. That's all.

In your space you might create a small altar with a picture or image of the Buddha, or another spiritual figure who touches your heart; you might burn a candle and light some incense. Whatever rituals help you create the internal energy to engage in spiritual work, you do.

You will also have a meditation seat in this space. It is helpful if it is a seat that stays there all the time and is used only for meditation. It can be a meditation cushion and mat on the floor, a kneeling bench, a straight-backed chair or a stool without arms or backrest. Whichever is most comfortable for you. (Lying down is the one posture that is never recommended as long as you are in good health.) It is essential that you can sit easily, with a straight back for extended periods of time. This is much more important than looking like a yogi! So choose a seat that works for you, not one that fits someone's image of a meditator.

There are many complete descriptions of the meditation posture available in books. Among the best are Kathleen McDonald's *How to Meditate*, published by Wisdom Publications<sup>4</sup> and Will Johnson's *The Posture of Meditation*, published by Shambhala. I will just say again that, from the beginning, the most important aspect of one's posture is that it be relaxed, comfortable, and with a straight back, preferably unsupported by a wall or chair back. However, I repeat, if you have a back injury or other problem that prevents you from sitting unsupported by all means use what you need.

It is useful to do something physically relaxing before you begin to sit in meditation. Tai chi or yoga, and other similar exercises, are excellent. But even a gentle walk in quiet surroundings can serve the purpose. Then, light your candle, sit down and begin with your motivation, surrounding yourself by all the people of your life, and surrounding those people you know, with all universal living beings, imagined in human form. Follow that with a simple breathing meditation for five to ten or even up to 20 minutes to further relax your body and calm the mind.

Then you can begin to work in depth with the meditations from

---

<sup>4</sup> Kathleen McDonald (also known as Ven. Sangye Khadro) is the teacher of Module 2, also called **How to Meditate**. This excellent book is a complete survey of meditation techniques from the Tibetan tradition, with guidance on dealing with difficulties encountered during meditation and other useful information. Highly recommended.

this course. Beginning with the Meditation on the Buddha: Touching the Essence (which you are about to do for the first time). Into this you can incorporate the other meditations, using a different one each day.

If you refer to the printed copy of the Meditation on the Buddha, you will note that it begins with a reflective meditation called Equalizing Oneself and Others. You can use that or the Equanimity Meditation at that point. And, following the absorption of the Buddha into yourself and your recognition of yourself as the Buddha, you can insert the meditations on the mind that you have been using. Then dedicate the positive energy and potential that you have generated to your own spiritual evolution, for the sake of yourself and all other living beings.

Lama Yeshe once said that we should meditate on the mind every day for at least fifteen minutes. If you use the continuity of consciousness and clarity meditations, you will fulfill that advice. In addition, if you use the expanded breathing meditations that have been offered in this course, you will be gaining skills that will make this easier and more fruitful.

The mindfulness of breathing meditations are loosely based on the *four foundations of mindfulness*: body, sensations, mind, and phenomena; these practices are part of the first turning of the wheel of Dharma, the first four of the thirty-seven aspects of the path to enlightenment. So, while mindfulness of the breath, sensations, the mind, and all that arises may seem like pre-beginner Buddhism, it is actually part of a set of quite profound practices and the main practices for certain Buddhist traditions.

I recommend meditating first thing in the morning, but I know this is not always possible for everyone. So at least when you first wake in the morning while you are still in bed, sit up and set the intention for your day. Generate a positive focus, dedicated to remaining connected with your own essential spiritual nature, and becoming an expression of that spiritual essence in everything you

do. Make the decision to try to bring this connected attitude into every encounter.

Then at night, before going to sleep, briefly review your day, acknowledging what you did well and checking for what still needs some work. Dedicate the positive energy and make a determination to use that positive energy to improve whatever needs attention. Congratulate yourself for all you have done well and make no recriminations for your shortcomings. We all have them; they can teach us something about what we need to work on. Use them well. Enjoy and honor them, they are your best spiritual mentors.

Regarding the meditations from this and subsequent Discovering Buddhism courses, I recommend that you memorize the meditations as quickly as possible. Don't worry about memorizing the actual words on the page; memorize the sequence of the meditations, memorize what you actually do from one stage of the meditation to the next. For example, first you calm the mind with breathing, then imagine all the people of your life and set your motivation. Following these preliminaries, you will do the main meditation, whichever one it is. Memorize the way to do that, too. I suggest this because it is good if you can wean yourself off the recordings as soon as possible. Don't become dependent on them. It will only make the development of your meditation practice more difficult.

The most important thing about your daily meditation is that it is, indeed, daily! *Sit every day*. Consistency is imperative. So, in the beginning, the middle and the end of your spiritual journey discipline will be necessary. Once you begin to taste the fruits of your labors, it will become easier. But still some mornings you will just want to shut off the alarm and go back to sleep. Don't. WAKE UP! It is the essence of the path to enlightenment. Buddha does not go back to sleep!

It is better to sit for fifteen or twenty minutes without fail every day, than to sit for an hour or two occasionally. So, start modestly with short sessions, whatever you can manage, and build up slowly as your energy for meditation increases. *Just do it*. There is no



substitute for meditation if you take your spiritual practice seriously. No amount of study, reading or discussion can take the place of meditation. It is almost the only way to gain integrated realizations.

## **DEDICATION AND MEDITATION**

Now, please dedicate the positive energy of this session and the entire course even though you are not quite finished. [When you have actually completed all the required elements of the course, take a few minutes to dedicate carefully all the energy that you have put into completing it. Dedication is as important as adjusting your motivation; it directs the energy you have created and keeps you on track. Don't neglect these two precious practices.]

And, when you have finished listening to this track, take a short break, then do the Meditation on the Buddha to connect with Buddha/your own buddha-nature and to have a taste of your own potential and the power of this transformative path. If you do this meditation daily, soon it will become automatic to bring it to mind during the day to help renew the connection with Buddha/your own buddha-nature and your heart connection with others.

Enjoy all that you do. Stay mindful, watching the workings of your own mind in every moment. Dedicate it all to your own enlightenment for the sake of yourself, all the people of your life and all universal living beings, and your life will change before your very eyes.

## **FINALLY, THE END**

Thank you for giving me the opportunity of presenting these teachings to you.

My name is Thubten Yeshe (T.Y. Alexander). At the time of this recording [early 2000s], I have been a student of Lama Thubten Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche (and many other teachers) for nearly 30 years. It is your karma to have me presenting the teachings instead of the real McCoy – the genuine Lama Thubten Yeshe. We may share the same name (minus “lama”), but I still have

(in the immortal words of Lama Yeshe) “a long way to go, baby!”  
Nonetheless, I sincerely hope that in spite of my shortcomings as a teacher this has been useful for you and that it stimulates further spiritual exploration, insights, and profound realizations. Enjoy the journey. And, when you reach enlightenment, please come back for me.

## **8. MEDITATION: SHAKYAMUNI BUDDHA: TOUCHING THE ESSENCE**

### **PRELIMINARIES**

Begin with a short period of relaxing physical exercise, yoga or tai chi or a short walk in quiet surroundings. Prepare your altar, or simply light a candle or some incense to help create a sacred space within which to meditate.

After you sit in your meditation space, calm the mind further with a few minutes of breathing meditation. Simply bring your awareness to your breath, to the expansion and contraction of your abdomen as you inhale and exhale. You can also use the breath-counting exercise from the recorded meditation.

When distracting thoughts or emotions arise simply take note of them and let them go without any conversation whatsoever.

Do this for three to five minutes, or more if you wish.

Now, imagine that you are surrounded by all the people of your life – friends, enemies and strangers. Bring these people to life in your contemplation; imagine they are really here, in this space with you, doing this meditation with you.

Then, adjust your motivation. Consider your intention for your spiritual practice in general and this meditation in particular. Carefully make the determination to use your study and meditation to increase your understanding and insight, and to take the next step on your spiritual journey for your own sake, for the sake of all the people of your life, and by extension all universal living beings.

### **THE ACTUAL PRACTICE: EQUILIBRIUM MEDITATION**

Bring to mind all the surrounding people of your life. Think of those you love, your relatives, lovers, friends and partners. Using your own experience as a template, see how your lives are similar. See how those you love have the same desire for happiness and

satisfaction that you have. See how they have the same wish to avoid pain and discontent.

Contemplate their lives. Consider their dissatisfaction, their aspirations, their hopes and dreams for themselves and their loved ones. Consider their pain – both physical and emotional. Consider their joys– their delights and fulfillment. There is not much difference between you. Each one of us seeks satisfaction and attempts to avoid unhappiness.

Now, consider the people of your life with whom you have a problem – people you don't like or who cause you pain, difficult or irritating people – the ones you try to avoid. Using your own experience as a template, see how your lives are similar. See how those you find difficult have the same desire for happiness and satisfaction that you have. See how they have the same wish to avoid pain.

Contemplate their lives. Consider their dissatisfaction, their aspirations, their hopes and dreams for themselves and their loved ones. Consider their pain – both physical and emotional. Consider their joys – their delights and fulfillment. There is really not much difference between you. Each one of us seeks satisfaction and attempts to avoid unhappiness.

Finally, consider all the strangers of your life. All the people you encounter on a daily basis whose names you don't know, who merely walk through some part of your life without really connecting – people in the supermarket, the bank, sitting in the doctor's waiting room, walking along the same street as you...

Using your own experience as a template, see how your lives are similar. See how those strangers have the same desire for happiness and satisfaction that you have. See how they have the same wish to avoid pain.

Contemplate their lives. Consider their dissatisfaction, their aspirations, their hopes and dreams for themselves and their loved ones. Consider their pain – both physical and emotional. Consider their joys – their delights and fulfillment. There is not much

difference between you. Each one of us seeks satisfaction and attempts to avoid unhappiness.

We all, each one without exception, seek happiness and fulfillment; each one of us, without exception, attempts to avoid distress and pain. This is natural; it is the way we are – all beings share the desire to be happy and to avoid suffering.

Let the experience of your shared human nature grow within you. Feel this connection and let your heart open to each and every one of these people of your life. Let a wish for their happiness begin to grow within you – reach out to each and every one without exception.

Just sit quietly within this experience for a few minutes. Let it sink in. Let it become a part of your inner reality.

## **VISUALIZATION**

Now, continuing your meditation together with all these people of your life, imagine in the space just above your head (about 8 inches/20 centimeters), facing the same way that you are, an image of Buddha.

His form is non-obstructing glorious golden light, luminous and vibrant. His essence, the energy of pure unconditionally compassionate and loving wisdom.

His face is peaceful and smiling; he radiates love to you, to all the surrounding people of your life, and beyond to all the myriad living beings of the universe, human and non-human.

Buddha is seated on a lotus topped with two radiant disks representing the sun and the moon. The lotus rests on a golden throne adorned with jewels and supported by snow lions. He wears the saffron robes of a monk and sits in the crossed-leg vajra posture. The palm of his right hand rests on his right knee, his left hand rests in his lap in meditation gesture, holding a bowl filled with nectar – the medicine to heal all conflict.

His face is radiant, smiling compassionately on you and all living beings, each and every one without exception. Pure light shines

from every pore of his body, reaching the limits of the universe, filling all space, dispelling all darkness.

Gently hold this mental image until it is stable. Stay relaxed and comfortable, and open your heart to the Buddha's serene, compassionate energy which radiates out from his luminous form filling the universe with light.

This light, from the heart of the Buddha, flows into your heart and the hearts of all the surrounding people of your life. As the light touches your heart, the light of your own spiritual essence is ignited, and you are filled completely with the light of your buddha-nature. Your physical body is transformed into light; your very thoughts become an expression of your spiritual being.

Filled completely with light, having become an expression of your own inner light, this light begins to flow out from your heart into the hearts of each and every one of the surrounding people of your life. And, meditating with you, their light flows into you.

Sit quietly in the experience of this exchange of pure luminous wisdom light energy – from the Buddha to you and all the others surrounding you, and between you and all the people of your life. You connect with one another within the energy of your shared spiritual essence – heart to heart, spirit to spirit, buddha-nature to buddha-nature.

From your heart, make a strong decision to sustain these healing spiritual connections in every moment of your life.

Delighted and moved by your heartfelt determination, the Buddha sends an even stronger radiant light into your heart and the hearts of those around you.

This light completely transforms your negative habit patterns, your dissatisfaction and pain. It dissolves any sense of separation and dualistic thought. You become the perfect expression of your own compassionate buddha-nature. You are light, blissful, and filled with a sense of peace and clarity.

Staying with this experience of your own spiritual being and your connection with others, chant the mantra of the Buddha:

TAYATA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SVAHA

*Recite at least seven times, more if you wish.*

### **ABSORPTION**

Following recitation of the mantra, bring the light that you have been sending out back into your own heart. Imagine that the Buddha dissolves into light, which flows into you through the crown of your head.

Your being becomes utterly one with the form, resonance, and consciousness of the Buddha, and you experience perfect tranquility and peace; and, the clarity and luminosity of your own being. Total unification without any sense of separation or duality.

Stay with this experience single-pointedly for as long as possible.

When thoughts begin to impinge on your experience – I'm bored, sleepy, this is silly, my knees ache – each time a thought arises, simply let it go, gently bring your awareness back to the sense of luminosity, unity, and peace.

Gently bring the mind back into the awareness of who you really are. Think: I am the Buddha.

### **DEDICATION**

Dedicate the spiritual energy and creative potential that you have generated doing this meditation to maintaining these two precious connections – Buddha/your own buddha-nature and your heart-to-heart connection with all the people of your life – in order to realize your aspirations and take the next step on your spiritual journey, for your own sake and for the sake of all the people of your life.





**PART TWO**  
**TEACHINGS BY HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI**  
**LAMA, LAMA THUBTEN YESHE AND LAMA**  
**ZOPA RINPOCHE**

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

*There is little agreement among Western scientists about the nature and function of mind, consciousness. Buddhism's extensive explanations, however, stand firm after twenty-five centuries of philosophical debate and experiential validation. Here His Holiness the Dalai Lama explains the Buddhist concept of mind to the participants of a Mind Science symposium at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA.*

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

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

The fact that our inner experiences of pleasure and pain are in the nature of subjective mental and cognitive states is very obvious to us. But how those inner subjective events relate to external circumstances and the material world poses a critical problem. The question of whether there is an external physical reality independent

of sentient beings' consciousness and mind has been extensively discussed by Buddhist thinkers.

Naturally, there are divergent views on this issue among the various philosophical schools of thought. One such school [Chittamatra] asserts that there is no external reality, not even external objects, and that the material world we perceive is in essence merely a projection of our minds. From many points of view, this conclusion is rather extreme. Philosophically, and for that matter conceptually, it seems more coherent to maintain a position that accepts the reality not only of the subjective world of the mind, but also of the external objects of the physical world.

Now, if we examine the origins of our inner experiences and of external matter, we find that there is a fundamental uniformity in the nature of their existence in that both are governed by the principle of causality. Just as in the inner world of mental and cognitive events, every moment of experience comes from its preceding continuum and so on *ad infinitum*. Similarly, in the physical world every object and event must have a preceding continuum that serves as its cause, from which the present moment of external matter comes into existence.

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

The invisible workings of actions, or karmic force (*karma* means action), are intimately linked to the motivation in the human mind

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

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

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

According to tantra, the ultimate nature of mind is essentially pure. This pristine nature is technically called “clear light.” The

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

Hence, from the Buddhist point of view, both bondage and true freedom depend on the varying states of this clear light mind, and the resultant state that meditators try to attain through the application of various meditative techniques is one in which this ultimate nature of mind fully manifests all its positive potential, enlightenment, or Buddhahood. An understanding of the clear light mind therefore becomes crucial in the context of spiritual endeavor.

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

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

Now a crucial question arises: How is it that these various types of cognitive events—the sensory perceptions, mental states and so forth—can exist and possess this nature of knowing, luminosity and clarity? According to the Buddhist science of mind, these cognitive events possess the nature of knowing because of the fundamental

nature of clarity that underlies all cognitive events. This is what I described earlier as the mind's fundamental nature, the clear light nature of mind. Therefore, when various mental states are described in Buddhist literature, you will find discussions of the different types of conditions that give rise to cognitive events. For example, in the case of sensory perceptions, external objects serve as the objective, or causal condition; the immediately preceding moment of consciousness is the immediate condition; and the sense organ is the physiological or dominant condition. It is on the basis of the aggregation of these three conditions—causal, immediate and physiological—that experiences such as sensory perceptions occur. Another distinctive feature of mind is that it has the capacity to observe itself. The issue of mind's ability to observe and examine itself has long been an important philosophical question. In general, there are different ways in which mind can observe itself. For instance, in the case of examining a past experience, such as things that happened yesterday you recall that experience and examine your memory of it, so the problem does not arise. But we also have experiences during which the observing mind becomes aware of itself while still engaged in its observed experience. Here, because both observing mind and observed mental states are present at the same time, we cannot explain the phenomenon of the mind becoming self-aware, being subject and object simultaneously, through appealing to the factor of time lapse.

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

you are distracted and so forth. In this situation you are applying various mental factors and it is not as if a single mind were examining itself. Rather, you are applying various different types of mental factor to examine your mind.

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

In our own day-to-day experiences, we can observe that, especially on the gross level, our mind is interrelated with and dependent upon the physiological states of the body. Just as our state of mind, be it depressed or joyful, affects our physical health, so too does our physical state affect our mind.

As I mentioned earlier, Buddhist tantric literature mentions specific energy centers within the body that may, I think, have some connection with what some neurobiologists call the second brain, the immune system. These energy centers play a crucial role in increasing or decreasing the various emotional states within our mind. It is because of the intimate relationship between mind and body and the existence of these special physiological centers within our body that physical yoga exercises and the application of special meditative techniques aimed at training the mind can have positive effects on health. It has been shown, for example, that by applying

appropriate meditative techniques, we can control our respiration and increase or decrease our body temperature.

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

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

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

## **COLOPHON**

*From MindScience, edited by Daniel Goleman and Robert F. Thurman, published in 1991 by Wisdom Publications, Boston, USA.*



*Previously reprinted in the November-December 1995 issue of  
Mandala, the newsmagazine of FPMT.*

## **10. HAPPINESS, KARMA, AND THE MIND: HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA**

Many billions of years elapsed between the origin of this world and the first appearance of living beings upon its surface. Thereafter it took an immense time for living creatures to become mature in thought—in the development and perfection of their intellectual faculties; and even from the time men attained maturity up to the present many thousands of years have passed. Through all these vast periods of time the world has undergone constant changes, for it is in a continual state of flux. Even now, many comparatively recent occurrences which appeared for a little while to remain static are seen to have been undergoing changes from moment to moment. One may wonder what it is that remains immutable when every sort of material and mental phenomenon seems to be invariably subject to the process of change, of mutability. All of them are forever arising, developing and passing away. In the vortex of all these changes it is Truth alone which remains constant and unalterable—in other words, the truth of righteousness (Dharma) and its accompanying beneficial results, and the truth of evil action and its accompanying harmful results. A good cause produces a good result, a bad cause a bad result. Good or bad, beneficial or harmful, every result necessarily has a cause. This principle alone is abiding, immutable and constant. It was so before man entered the world, in the early period of his existence, in the present age, and it will be so in all ages to come.

All of us desire happiness and the avoidance of suffering and of everything else that is unpleasant. Pleasure and pain arise from a cause, as we all know. Whether certain consequences are due to a single cause or to a group of causes is determined by the nature of those consequences. In some cases, even if the cause factors are neither powerful nor numerous, it is still possible for the effect factors to occur. Whatever the quality of the result factors, whether

they are good or bad, their magnitude and intensity directly correspond to the quantity and strength of the cause factors. Therefore, for success in avoiding unwished for pains and in acquiring desired pleasures, which is in itself no small matter, the relinquishment of a great number of collective cause factors is required.

In analyzing the nature and state of happiness, it will be apparent that it has two aspects. One is immediate joy (temporary); the other is future joy (ultimate). Temporary pleasures comprise the comforts and enjoyments which people crave, such as good dwellings, lovely furniture, delicious food, good company, pleasant conversation and so on. In other words, temporary pleasures are what man enjoys in this life. The question as to whether the enjoyment of these pleasures and satisfactions derives purely from external factors needs to be examined in the light of clear logic. If external factors were alone responsible for giving rise to such pleasures a person would be happy when these were present and, conversely, unhappy in their absence. However, this is not so. For, even in the absence of external conditions leading to pleasure, a man can still be happy and at peace. This demonstrates that external factors are not alone responsible for stimulating man's happiness. Were it true that external factors were solely responsible for, or that they wholly conditioned the arising of, pleasure and happiness, a person possessing an abundance of these factors would have illimitable joy, which is by no means always so. It is true that these external factors do make partial contribution to the creation of pleasure in a man's lifetime. However, to state that the external factors are all that is needed and therefore the exclusive cause of happiness in a man's span of life is an obtuse and illogical proposition. It is by no means sure that the presence of such external factors will beget joy. On the contrary, factual happenings such as the experiencing of inner beatitude and happiness despite the total absence of such pleasure-causing external factors, and the frequent absence of joy despite their presence, clearly show the

cause of happiness to depend upon a different set of conditioning factors.

If one were to be misled by the argument that the abovementioned conditioning factors constitute the sole cause of happiness to the preclusion of any other conditioning causes, that would imply that (resulting) happiness is inseparably bound to external causal factors, its presence or absence being exclusively determined by them. The fact that this is obviously not so is a sufficient proof that external causal factors are not necessarily or wholly responsible for the effect phenomena of happiness.

Now what is that other internal set of causes? How are they to be explained? As Buddhists, we all believe in the Law of Karma—the natural law of cause and effect. Whatever external causal conditions someone comes across in subsequent lives result from the accumulation of that individual's actions in previous lives. When the karmic force of past deeds reaches maturity a person experiences pleasurable and unpleasurable mental states. They are but a natural sequence of his own previous actions. The most important thing to understand is that, when suitable (karmic) conditions resulting from the totality of past actions are there, one's external factors are bound to be favorable. The coming into contact of conditions due to (karmic) action and external causal factors will produce a pleasurable mental state. If the requisite causal conditions for experiencing interior joy are lacking there will be no opportunity for the occurrence of suitable external conditioning factors or, even if these external conditioning factors are present, it will not be possible for the person to experience the joy that would otherwise be his. This shows that inner causal conditions are essential in that these are what principally determine the realization of happiness (and its opposite). Therefore, in order to achieve the desired results it is imperative for us to accumulate both the cause-creating external factors and the cause-creating internal (karmic) conditioning factors at the same time.

To state the matter in simple terms, for the accrual of good inner (karmic) conditioning factors, what are principally needed are such qualities as having few wants, contentment, humility, simplicity and other noble qualities. Practice of these inner causal conditions will even facilitate changes in the aforementioned external conditioning factors that will convert them into characteristics conducive to the arising of happiness. The absence of suitable inner causal conditions, such as having few wants, contentment, patience, forgiveness and so on, will prevent one from enjoying pleasure even if all the right external conditioning factors are present. Besides this, one must have to one's credit the force of merits and virtues accumulated in past lives. Otherwise, the seeds of happiness will not bear fruit.

The matter can be put in another way. The pleasures and frustrations, the happiness and suffering experienced by each individual are the inevitable fruits of beneficial and evil actions he has perpetrated, thus adding to his store. If at a particular moment in this present life the fruits of a person's good actions ripen, he will recognize, if he is a wise man, that they are the fruits of (past) meritorious deeds. This will gratify him and encourage him to achieve more merits. Similarly, when a person happens to experience pain and dissatisfaction, he will be able to bear them calmly if he maintains an unshakable conviction that, whether he wishes it or not, he must suffer and bear the consequences of his own (past) deeds, notwithstanding the fact that normally he will often find the intensity and extent of his frustration hard to bear. Besides, the realization that they are nothing but the fruits of unskilled action in the past will make him wise enough to desist from unskilled deeds henceforth. Likewise, the satisfying thought that, with the ripening of past (evil) karma, a certain part of the evil fruit accrued by former unskilled action has been worked off will be a source of immense relief to him.

A proper appreciation of this wisdom will contribute to grasping the essentials for achieving peace of mind and body. For instance,

suppose a person is suddenly afflicted with critical physical suffering due to certain external factors. If, by the force of sheer will power (based on the conviction that he is himself responsible for his present misery and sufferings), he can neutralize the extent of his suffering then his mind will be much comforted and at peace.

Now let me explain this at a rather higher level. This concerns the strivings and efforts that can be made for the systematic destruction of dissatisfaction and its causes.

As stated before, pleasure and pain, happiness and dissatisfaction are the effects of one's own good and bad, skilled and unskilled actions. Skillful and unskillful (karmic) actions are not external phenomena. They belong essentially to the realm of mind. Making strenuous efforts to build up every possible kind of skillful karma and to put every vestige of unskillful karma away from us is the path to creating happiness and avoiding the creation of pain and suffering. For it is inevitable that a happy result follows a skillful cause and that the consequence of building up unskillful causes is suffering.

Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that we strive by every possible means to increase the quality and quantity of skillful actions and to make a corresponding paring down of our unskillful actions.

How is this to be accomplished? Meritorious and unmeritorious causes which result in pleasure and pain do not resemble external objects. For instance, in the human bodily system, different parts such as lungs, heart and other organs can be replaced with new ones. But this is not so in the case of karmic actions, which are purely of the mind. The earning of fresh merits and the eradicating of bad causes are purely mental processes. They cannot be achieved with outside help of any kind. The only way to accomplish them is by controlling and disciplining the hitherto untamed mind. For this, we require a fuller comprehension of the element called mind.

Through the gates of the five sense organs, a being sees, hears,

smells, tastes and comes into contact with a host of external forms, objects and impressions. Let the form, sound, smell, taste, touch and mental events which are the relations of the six senses be shut off. When this is done the recollection of past events on which the mind tends to dwell will be completely discontinued and the flow of memory cut off. Similarly, plans for the future and contemplation of future action must not be allowed to arise. It is necessary to create a space in place of all such processes of thought if one is to empty the mind of all such processes of thought. Freed from all these processes there will remain a pure, clean, distinct and quiescent mind. Now let us examine what sort of characteristics constitute the mind when it has attained this stage. We surely do possess some thing called mind, but how are we to recognize its existence? The real and essential mind is what is to be found when the entire load of gross obstructions and aberrations (i.e. sense impressions, memories, etc.) has been cleared away. Discerning this aspect of real mind, we shall discover that, unlike external objects, its true nature is devoid of form or color; nor can we find any basis of truth for such false and deceptive notions as that mind originated from this or that, or that it will move from here to there, or that it is located in such-and-such a place. When it comes into contact with no object, mind is like a vast, boundless void, or like a serene, limitless ocean. When it encounters an object it at once has cognizance of it, like a mirror instantly reflecting a person who stands in front of it. The true nature of mind consists not only in taking clear cognizance of the object but also in communicating a concrete experience of that object to the one experiencing it.<sup>5</sup>

Normally, our forms of sense cognition, such as eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, etc., perform their functions on external phenomena in a manner involving gross distortion. Knowledge

---

<sup>5</sup> *These two aspects, "taking cognition" and "communicating experience" refer to knowing what the object is and how it feels, tastes, looks, etc.*

resulting from sense cognition, being based on gross external phenomena, is also of a gross nature. When this type of gross stimulation is shut out, and when concrete experiences and clear cognizance arise from within, mind assumes the characteristics of infinite void similar to the infinitude of space. But this void is not to be taken as the true nature of mind. We have become so habituated to consciousness of the form and color of gross objects that, when we make concentrated introspection into the nature of mind, it is, as I have said, found to be a vast, limitless void free from any gross obscurity or other hindrances. Nevertheless, this does not mean that we have discerned the subtle, true nature of the mind. What has been explained above concerns the state of mind in relation to the concrete experience and clear cognizance by the mind which are its function, but it describes only the relative nature of mind.

There are in addition several other aspects and states of mind. In other words, taking mind as the supreme basis, there are many attributes related to it. Just as an onion consists of layer upon layer that can be peeled away, so does every sort of object have a number of layers; and this is no less true of the nature of mind as explained here; it, too, has layer within layer, state within state.

All compounded things are subject to disintegration. Since experience and knowledge are impermanent and subject to disintegration, the mind, of which they are functions (nature), is not something that remains constant and eternal. From moment to moment it undergoes change and disintegration. This transience of mind is one aspect of its nature. However, as we have observed, its true nature has many aspects, including consciousness of concrete experience and cognizance of objects. Now let us make a further examination in order to grasp the meaning of the subtle essence of such a mind. Mind came into existence because of its own cause. To deny that the origination of mind is dependent on a cause, or to say that it is a designation given as a means of recognizing the nature of mind aggregates, is not correct. With our superficial observance,



mind, which has concrete experience and clear cognizance as its nature, appears to be a powerful, independent, subjective, completely ruling entity. However, deeper analysis will reveal that this mind, possessing as it does the function of experience and cognizance, is not a self-created entity but is dependent on other factors for its existence. Hence it depends on something other than itself. This non-independent quality of the mind substance is its true nature which in turn is the ultimate reality of the self.

Of these two aspects, viz. the ultimate true nature of mind and a knowledge of that ultimate true nature, the former is the base, the latter an attribute. Mind (self) is the basis and all its different states are attributes. However, the basis and its attributes have from the first pertained to the same single essence. The non-self-created (depending on a cause other than itself) mind entity (basis) and its essence, *sunyata*, have unceasingly existed as the one, same, inseparable essence from beginningless beginning. The nature of *sunyata* pervades all elements. As we are now and since we cannot grasp or comprehend the indestructible, natural, ultimate reality (*sunyata*) of our own minds, we continue to commit errors and our defects persist.

Taking mind as the subject and mind's ultimate reality as its object, one will arrive at a proper comprehension of the true essence of mind, i.e. its ultimate reality. And when, after prolonged patient meditation, one comes to perceive and grasp at the knowledge of mind's ultimate reality which is devoid of dual characteristics, one will gradually be able to exhaust the delusions and defects of the central and secondary minds such as wrath, love of ostentation, jealousy, envy and so on.

Failure to identify the true nature of mind will be overcome through acquisition of the power to comprehend its ultimate reality. This will in turn eradicate lust and hatred and all other secondary delusions emanating from the basic ones. Consequently, there will be no occasion for accumulating demeritorious karma. By this means, the creation of (evil) karma affecting future lives will be

eliminated; one will be able to increase the quality and quantity of meritorious causal conditioning and to eradicate the creation of harmful causal conditioning affecting future lives—apart from the bad karma accumulated earlier.

In the practice of gaining a perfect knowledge of the true nature of mind, strenuous and concentrated mental efforts are required for comprehending the object. In our normal condition as it is at present, when our mind comes into contact with something it is immediately drawn to it. This makes comprehension impossible. Therefore, in order to acquire great dynamic mental power, the very maximum exertion is the first imperative. For example, a big river flowing over a wide expanse of shallows will have very little force, but when it passes through a steep gorge all the water is concentrated in a narrow space and therefore flows with great force. For a similar reason all the mental distractions which draw the mind away from the object of contemplation are to be avoided and the mind kept steadily fixed upon it. Unless this is done, the practice for gaining a proper understanding of the true nature of mind will be a total failure.

To make the mind docile, it is essential for us to discipline and control it well. Speech and bodily activities which accompany mental processes, must not be allowed to run on in an indiscreet, unbridled, random way. Just as a trainer disciplines and calms a wild and willful steed by subjecting it to skillful and prolonged training, so must the wild, wandering, random activities of body and speech be tamed to make them docile, righteous and skillful. Therefore the teachings of the Lord Buddha comprise three graded categories, that is *sila* (training in higher conduct), *samadhi* (training in higher meditation) and *prajna* (training in higher wisdom), all of them for disciplining the mind.

By studying, meditating, and practicing the three grades of *trisiksa* in this way, one accomplishes progressive realization. A person so trained will be endowed with the wonderful quality of being able to bear patiently the miseries and suffering which are the

fruit of his past karma. He will regard his misfortunes as blessings in disguise, for they will enlighten him as to the meaning of nemesis (karma) and convince him of the need to concentrate on performing only meritorious deeds. If his past (evil) karma has not as yet borne fruit, it will still be possible for him to obliterate this unripe karma by utilizing the strength of the four powers, namely: determination to attain the status of buddhahood; determination to eschew demeritorious deeds, even at the cost of one's life; the performance of meritorious deeds; repentance.

Such is the way to attain immediate happiness, to pave the way for attaining liberation in future and to help avoid the accumulation of further demerits.

### **COLOPHON**

*With kind permission of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Dharamsala. From Second Dharma Celebration, November 5–8, 1982, New Delhi, India. Translated by Alex Berzin, clarified by Lama Zopa Rinpoche, edited by Nicholas Ribush. First published by Tushita Mahayana Meditation Centre, New Delhi, 1982.*

## **11. EVERYTHING COMES FROM THE MIND: LAMA THUBTEN YESHE**

Buddhism can be understood on many different levels, and people who actualize the Buddhist path do so gradually. Just as you pass slowly through school and university, graduating from one year to the next, so do Buddhist practitioners proceed step by step along the path to enlightenment. In Buddhism, however, we're talking about different levels of mind; here, higher and lower depend upon how much spiritual progress you have made.

Also, in the West, there's a tendency to consider Buddhism as a religion in the Western sense of the term. This is a misconception. Buddhism is completely open; you can talk about anything – the evolution of both the external and the internal worlds. Buddhism has its doctrine and philosophy but it also encourages scientific experimentation, both inner and outer. Therefore, please don't think of Buddhism as being some kind of narrow, closed-minded belief system. It isn't. And also, Buddhist doctrine today is not an historical fabrication derived through imagination and mental speculation. Rather, it is a true psychological explanation of the actual nature of the mind.

When you look at the outside world you have a very strong impression of its substantiality. You probably don't realize that that strong impression is merely your own mind's interpretation of what it sees. You think that the strong, solid reality really exists outside, and when you look within, perhaps you feel empty. This is also a misconception, the wrong mental attitude that fails to realize that the strong impression that appears to truly exist outside of you is actually projected by your own mind. Everything you experience – feelings, sensations, shapes and colors – comes from your mind.

If you get up one morning with a foggy mind and the world around you also appears to be dark and foggy, or when the world

seems beautiful and light, you should understand that basically, those impressions are coming from your own mind rather than from changes in the external environment. Therefore, instead of misinterpreting whatever you experience in life through judgmental wrong conceptions, you should realize that it's not outer reality but only mind.

For example, when everybody in this auditorium looks at a single object, me, Lama Yeshe, each of you has a distinctly different experience, even though simultaneously you are all looking at the one thing. These different experiences don't come from me; they come from your own minds. You are probably thinking, "Oh, how can he say that? We all see the same face, the same body, the same clothes," but that's just a superficial interpretation. If you check deeper you'll see that the way you perceive me, the way you feel, is individual, and that at that level, you're all different. These various perceptions do not come from me but from your own minds. That's the point I'm making.

So then perhaps you think, "Oh, he's just a lama; all he knows about is mind. He doesn't know about powerful scientific advances like satellites and other sophisticated technology. There's no way you can say that those things come from mind." But you check up. When I say "satellite," you have a mental image of the object that you've been told is a satellite. When the first satellite was made, its inventor said, "I've made this thing that orbits the earth; it's called a "satellite." Then when everybody else saw it, they thought, "Ah, that's a satellite." But "satellite" is just a name, isn't it?

Before the inventor of the satellite actually made it, he speculated and visualized it in his mind. Then, on the basis of this image, he acted to materialize his creation. Then he told everyone, "This is a satellite," so everyone thought, "Wow, a satellite; how beautiful, how wonderful." So that shows how ridiculous we are. People give things names and we grasp at the name, believing it to be the real thing. It's the same thing no matter what colors and forms we grasp at. You check up.

If you can understand what I'm explaining here, you'll see that indeed, satellites and so forth do come from the mind, and that without mind, there is not a single manifest material existence in the entire sense world. What exists without mind? Look at all the stuff you find in supermarkets: so many names, so many foods, so many different things. First people made it all up – this name, that name, this, this, this – so then, this, that, this, this and this all appear to you. So if all these thousands of supermarket items as well as jets, rockets and satellites are manifestations of mind, what then does not come from mind? That's why it is so very important to know the way your own mind works.

Thus, if you check really deeply into how your mind expresses itself, your various views and feelings, your imagination, you will realize that all your emotions, the way you live your life, the way you relate with others, all come from your own mind. If you don't understand how your mind works, you're going to continue having negative experiences like anger and depression. Why do I call a depressed mind negative? Because a depressed mind doesn't understand how it works. A mind without understanding is negative. A negative mind functions to bring you down, because all its reactions are polluted. A mind with understanding functions clearly. A clear mind is a positive mind.

Therefore, any emotional problem you experience arises because of the way your mind functions, and your basic problem lies in the way you misidentify yourself. You normally hold yourself in low esteem; you see yourself as a poor quality human being, while what you really want is for your life to be of the highest quality, perfect. You don't want to be a poor quality human being, do you? So, in order to correct your view and become a much better person, you don't need to squeeze yourself or to jump from your own culture into another. That's not the solution. All you need to do is to understand your true nature, the way you already are. That's all. It's so simple.

## **COLOPHON**

*Reprinted with the permission of Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive.*

## **12. UNDERSTANDING THE MIND: LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE**

Before the discourse, we are going to recite and meditate on the *Heart Sutra*, the essential teaching of the Buddha which cuts off the root of all sufferings. Contemplate on the words that you hear. Even if you do not understand the meaning, simply following the words is sufficient. Meditating on emptiness is the essential method to pacify all the general confusion of life, and particularly the obstacles to your success in listening, reflecting and meditating.

### **THE PURE NATURE OF THE MIND**

The nature of the mind is pure; the nature of the mind is clear light, not mixed with ignorance. Even though we have ignorance, our mind is not mixed with ignorance. Even though we have attachment and anger, our mind is not oneness with attachment and anger. The nature of our mind is pure. The problem is that we obscure this pure nature by following selfish attitudes and wrong conceptions. These pollute our mind, not allowing us to develop its full potential, interfering in the awakening of the mind. Wrong conceptions stop our developing the mental capacity to have continual temporal and ultimate happiness ourselves and, especially, stop our causing all sentient beings to have temporal and ultimate happiness.

The longer we leave a mirror out in the dust, the more obscured it becomes. Even though the mirror has the potential to reflect, if we leave it to collect dust and do not clean it, the dust does not allow the mirror to reflect anything. Like this, wrong conceptions continuously obscure the mind. If we do not meditate on the right path, which can remove these mental stains, even though our mind is completely pure in nature and not oneness with the obscurations, our obscurations get thicker and thicker. It then becomes very difficult to develop the potential of our mind.

We have the possibility to develop fully the wonderful capacity of our mind. We can achieve any happiness, even ultimate happiness, for ourselves, and end completely all problems and sufferings. We can also accomplish extensive works for all sentient beings, bringing every suffering being to the happiness of ultimate liberation. We have this incredible potential to benefit ourselves, as well all other sentient beings, who equal the extent of infinite space. We have this potential to offer so much to uncountable numbers of other beings.

However, we lack understanding of the path that can actually make our mental continuum pure by separating it from all obscurations and stains. We lack understanding of the cessation of suffering and the methods to achieve it. Also, we do not understand the different levels of suffering and their inner causes. Basically, we lack understanding of the nature of our own mind. If we understood our mind well, there would be no problem. The basic problem in the world is this lack of understanding of the nature of the mind. The basic reason for such problems as religious wars is lack of understanding of the mind. Or if there is a little understanding, no effort has been put into developing this understanding. If we think widely, all world problems come from this.

At present our mind is like a dirty cloth or a mirror covered with dust. Because a dirty cloth is not oneness with its dirt, it is possible to wash it and separate the cloth from the dirt. If the cloth were oneness with the dirt, there would be no way to clean it. The definition of a cloth being clean is its being separated from dirt. It is the same with a mirror: the dust covering a mirror can be wiped off. If the mirror were oneness with the dirt, there would be no way to wipe off the dirt – except by wiping off the mirror itself! Our mind is not oneness with, but temporarily obscured by, obscurations, just as a dirty cloth is temporarily obscured by dirt.

It is obvious that you can clean houses by depending on such things as water, soap and vacuum cleaners. You clean the mind by depending on the mind. You can remove all the mental stains that



block the development of inner peace and ultimate happiness, that bring so much confusion and problems in your life. With the right skillful thoughts, with the right realizations, you can stop the wrong conceptions that obscure your mind. Not only can you stop these wrong conceptions from arising and polluting your mental continuum, but you can also purify the stains from the past.

We always have this possibility, this freedom. It is only a question of whether we put effort into removing these mental stains through listening, reflecting and meditating. Our own inner peace and ultimate happiness completely depend on ourselves.

Even when we do not meditate, do not practice Dharma, but instead follow wrong conceptions and create negative karmas, which pollute our mental continuum, the nature of our mind is pure. This great potential is still there. So there is no question that when we do practice Dharma, the nature of our mind is pure.

With even a little understanding of this, we can see how it is possible to develop the mind. At the moment we may see our mind as completely overwhelmed by selfish attitudes, with no thought of cherishing and benefiting others, or anger. Anger may arise every time you see somebody or somebody talks to you. However, even though your mind may be like this now, if you understand the nature of the mind, you do not need to feel depressed or hopeless. You do not need to think that it is impossible for you to change, that your life will always be confused. This is not true. By knowing the nature of mind, you see that there is great hope. You have the potential to change so that you have peace of mind and a better life.

### **OMNISCIENT MIND**

Buddhist teachings explain that the mental continuum can be separated completely from all mental stains, or obscurations. When purified of all stains, this mental continuum becomes omniscient mind. When you clean a dirty cloth, first the gross dirt is cleaned away, but there is still some stain left. When even that is cleaned away, the cloth is completely clean. Like this, generating

the remedy of the path within your mind completely removes the gross disturbing thought obscurations and also the subtle obscurations. At that time, the continuum of this present mental continuum becomes omniscient mind.

This fully-awakened mind sees conventional truth and absolute truth, or emptiness, which is the reality of all existence. Like looking at an apple in the hand, omniscient mind sees directly and clearly the past, present and future of every single existent. At the same time, this mind sees all the existents of the three times. While seeing the past, this mind can also see the present and the future. By accomplishing the ultimate mental development of this omniscient mind, one has the perfect power to see all the different levels of mind and characteristics of each and every sentient being, and to reveal the various skillful means to them. One works for sentient beings unceasingly and naturally, guiding them without the slightest effort.

Only one moon rises but its reflections are uncountable because there is so much water on this earth – lakes, pools, and even dew. As soon as the moon rises, wherever there is clear water, this is immediately, naturally, a reflection of it. In all the different collections of water, including the dew, a reflection appears even though when the moon rises, it does not have the motivation: “Now I’m going to reflect in all this water.” All the reflections automatically appear.

It is the same with the ultimate development of omniscient mind. Like the arising of the reflections, unceasingly, effortlessly, one is able to work for sentient beings. Until all sentient beings become enlightened, without any partiality of mind, one benefits them. There is no thought to benefit those who love you or make offerings to you and not those who criticize or complain about you and do not make offerings to you. Why is there no danger of this? Because the perfect power of omniscient mind is achieved through training the mind in compassion towards every sentient being. At this time, the mindtraining in compassion is completed.

In the world it often happens that even though someone has the capacity to help others, he only helps those who love him; he doesn't help anybody who criticizes him. This happens because the compassion for others is not equal. You have compassion for anybody who likes and helps you, but not for somebody who harms or criticizes you. When you benefit others with your body, speech and mind, you benefit only those who like you. You do not feel compassion for those who do not benefit you; anger arises towards them. Because you have not trained your mind to generate compassion for those who harm or criticize you, anger and dislike arise and stop you from benefiting them. In addition, these thoughts cause you to harm those sentient beings.

## **THE ESSENCE OF BUDDHA'S TEACHINGS**

Do not commit any evil deeds;  
Enjoy perfect virtue;  
Subdue one's own mind:  
This is the teaching of the Buddha.

This advice is the essence of Buddha's teaching. All the ignorance and obscurations giving rise to confusion in life come from the mind. Liberation, which means purification of all these obscurations, and omniscient mind, which has infinite capacity to benefit uncountable numbers of sentient beings, is also created by the mind. Everything has to do with your mind. All the suffering and happiness in your life come from your own mind.

The only reason Guru Shakyamuni Buddha descended on this earth was to lead sentient beings to liberation, the cessation of suffering, and great liberation, the state of omniscient mind. His only purpose was to lead sentient beings to happiness. How does Buddha guide sentient beings to liberation? As explained in the teachings: "The Mighty Ones do not wash away negative karmas with water; they do not eliminate sufferings with their hands; nor

do they transplant their own realizations in others. Sentient beings are liberated by being shown reality.”

The negative karmas are the non-virtuous actions that have been accumulated and bring problems.

The buddhas do not liberate sentient beings by arriving with thousands of trucks filled with water and washing them all with fire-hoses. They do not eliminate sufferings with their hands means that the buddhas do not remove sufferings like taking a thorn out of flesh. Since these first two methods are not correct, someone might wonder, “Maybe the buddhas transplant their realizations into sentient beings?” Not even by doing that.

How does Buddha liberate sentient beings from suffering? By revealing the teachings. Buddha revealed the teachings on suffering and the cause of suffering, and the path to liberation, the cessation of suffering, and great liberation, or enlightenment, the cessation of even subtle obscurations. Having realized these himself, Buddha then explained his experiences to other sentient beings. Like this, he allowed other sentient beings to practice and led them in the path to liberation and enlightenment.

In this verse, reality, or truth, means in particular the teaching on emptiness. Buddha explained emptiness particularly to eradicate the root of samsara, the root of all suffering. To achieve enlightenment there are two paths: the path of wisdom and the path of method. Buddha taught 84,000 teachings as remedies for the 84,000 disturbing thoughts that sentient beings have. The fundamental teaching of the 84,000 teachings is the Four Noble Truths.

After Buddha showed the action of becoming enlightened, he turned the first Dharma wheel with the teaching of the Four Noble Truths at Sarnath, the holy place in India. All the other teachings explaining the path of method were given as a means to help actualize the path of wisdom, which means emptiness. The teachings on emptiness are the main ones that liberate sentient beings from suffering.

## TRUE SUFFERING, TRUE CAUSE

The disease is to be understood,  
The cause is to be renounced,  
The medicine is to be relied upon,  
And the cure is to be achieved.

As Maitreya Buddha explains in *Ornament of Sutras*, suffering is to be known, its cause abandoned, the path followed, and cessation actualized.

Just to be careful, a person may go to a doctor for a check-up. The doctor examines him and then explains: “You have cancer.” The person did not know this before the check-up and this news makes him check for the cause of his disease. If the patient wants to know the cause and the doctor can explain it, he does. After this, the patient knows how to free himself from the cause of whatever disease he has; he knows how to achieve a cure. After discovering the disease, he finds out the cause of the disease, which has to be abandoned. To remove the cause and the disease, the patient relies upon the medicine and achieves the happiness of the cure.

In the same way, in order to liberate sentient beings from suffering, Buddha first introduces them to the meaning of true suffering, which he knows but they do not. Sentient beings experience true suffering but are not always aware of it. When a patient is not aware of all his diseases, his doctor explains them to him so that he will take the medicine and be cured. Otherwise, if the medicine were given without any explanation, the patient would not see any purpose in taking it. Like this, Buddha introduces sentient beings to the sufferings and problems of which he is aware but they are not. As sentient beings then check whether suffering has a cause, Buddha explains the true cause of suffering. And when sentient beings see that cessation of the true cause of suffering is ultimate happiness and check whether there is a method to achieve this, Buddha reveals the true path.

Many of you are familiar with the teachings of Lama Tsongkhapa, who says: “If you do not reflect on the shortcomings of samsara, you will have no wish to achieve liberation. If you do not reflect on the all-arising graduated entering into samsara, you will not know how to cut off the root of samsara.”

Samsara does not mean this house, this area or this country; it means these aggregates. This association of body and mind that you have here now, which is the foundation of many problems, is samsara.

It is this body-mind which experiences birth, old age, sickness and death, plus many other problems such as heat and cold, hunger and thirst. As long as you do not break the continual circling of these aggregates in samsara, from one life to another, you will continuously have to experience suffering. Besides experiencing the eight types of suffering with these samsaric aggregates from birth until death, even the pleasurable times depend on external sense objects, which are only in the nature of suffering. If you analyze them, you will understand this. This is the suffering of change. Even the feeling experienced as pleasure by these aggregates does not last; if you continue the experience, the pleasure becomes less and less, and transforms into suffering. There is less and less pleasure and more and more suffering – the suffering of suffering. This is the nature of samsara.

For example, if you are hungry, when you take that very first mouthful of food, the suffering of hunger starts to decrease. But immediately after one or two mouthfuls of food enter your stomach, a very subtle discomfort starts in your stomach. Your previous problem of hunger starts to decrease from great to small, but this second problem of stomach discomfort starts to increase from small to great. Those few minutes when the problem of hunger starts to decrease are labeled “pleasure,” because when compared to the previous hunger, this change of feeling is pleasant.

Another example: You may still have a headache today, but it is less painful than yesterday, so today you feel “better.” This does not

mean that today you have completely recovered and are happy. It is just that today the headache is less than yesterday, so you label “I am better” on that feeling.

It is the same with the example of eating. Because the previous discomfort of hunger has become smaller, you label that feeling “pleasure.” However, you can see that the base on which you label “pleasure” is only suffering. Because it is only suffering, if you continue eating, sooner or later, the previously pleasant feeling will become less and less, and the discomfort of having food in your stomach will become greater.

This second problem of stomach discomfort starts immediately after you change your action from not eating to eating and builds up as you continue to eat. This second problem then becomes greater than the first. Because the base on which you label “pleasure” is only suffering, the pleasure does not last as you eat more and more. If the base on which you label “pleasure” were not suffering, the more you ate, the more pleasure you would feel. You would eat all day and all night for days, a week, a month, a year! Even by the first night you would feel unbelievable bliss, and there would be even more pleasure after one week, one month, one year of eating without a break. But we know that this does not happen. Just from this example we can understand the suffering of change.

Not eating is a problem; eating is a problem. Both are problems. It is the same with all samsaric activities: Sitting is a problem; not sitting is a problem. Sleeping is a problem; not sleeping is a problem. As long as we are not free from samsara, every activity we do or do not do with these aggregates is suffering. Even a pleasant feeling is only suffering. Because these aggregates are contaminated by the seed of karma and delusions, even a feeling of indifference is suffering. Until we are liberated from samsara, we continuously experience one of these sufferings, without a break of even one second.

If this body-mind did not experience the suffering of suffering: birth, old age, sickness, death, and all the other problems of heat

and cold, hunger and thirst; if this body-mind did not experience the suffering of change, with feelings appearing as pleasant but becoming the suffering of suffering when continued; and third, if this body-mind did not experience pervasive suffering, being under the control of ignorance, anger, attachment, and karma, this would not be samsara. If this body-mind did not experience any of these problems, this would not be samsara. If this body-mind is experiencing any of these three, this is samsara.

## **THE WISH FOR ULTIMATE LIBERATION**

If you do not reflect on the all-arising graduated entering into  
samsara,  
You will not know how to cut off the root of samsara.  
Understanding what binds you to samsara, cherish renunciation  
of samsara.  
I, the yogi, have practiced in this way.  
You, who seek liberation, I beg you to practice in the same way.

This is very important. Lama Tsongkhapa himself achieved liberation by practicing in this way and he is begging us to practice in the same way.

Since we do not want to experience problems, Lama Tsongkhapa's essential advice is that we should develop aversion to samsara through understanding what causes us to be caught in samsara like a fish on a hook. What ties you to this hook? It is easy to understand why a fish gets caught on a hook. Actually, if the fish is smart enough and does not come to take the bait, if it does not cling to the bait hanging on the hook, it will not have a problem. I am not saying that we will not have a problem! I am saying that if the fish, understanding that this is a hook and that it is dangerous to follow its grasping mind, does not follow its craving, it will be liberated from the danger of being hooked and killed.

We are caught in samsara in exactly the same way and, as Lama



Tsongkhapa says, understanding what ties us to samsara is very important. Not understanding why we are caught in samsara is exactly like a fish being caught because it does not know what causes him to get caught on the hook. Through not knowing this, every time he is born as a fish, by following craving and desire, he will get caught with a hook. As long as he follows his desire, this will happen every time. Similarly, we are caught again and again. If we do not know what ties us to samsara and do not practice renunciation of samsara, like the fish, again and again, we will be caught in samsara. We will then experience all the problems of that samsara, one after another.

If the only sufferings a person understood were those of meeting undesirable objects and separating from desirable ones, birth, old age, sickness, death, heat and cold, hunger and thirst, his understanding of liberation and his wish for it would be limited. He would not wish for ultimate liberation – only for freedom from these problems. Without any understanding of the other two sufferings, just understanding the suffering of suffering, he would not have any way of achieving the everlasting happiness of ultimate liberation.

There are three samsaric realms: the desire realm (which we are in), the form realm and the formless realm. In the formless realm there is no suffering of suffering: none of these sufferings from birth up to death. Even without meditating, without studying Dharma, ordinary people in the world recognize and want to be free of the suffering of suffering. To people with no understanding of the other two more subtle sufferings, the formless realm where there is no suffering of suffering would be ultimate liberation. Even though it is not, such people would believe this state to be ultimate liberation, so their wish for liberation would not be exact.

The second, more subtle suffering of samsara is the suffering of change. The longer you continue samsaric pleasures, the more the pleasure decreases and the more it becomes the suffering of suffering. On the other hand, Dharma happiness can be developed,

and completed. The happiness derived from samatha meditation or tantric practices can be developed. The more you meditate, the more mindpeace and bliss develops; it does not become less and less. And this can reach completion. The practice of Dharma does have an end, but not samsaric pleasures. No matter how many times samsaric pleasures are tried, again and again, there is never an end to them. If the desire clinging to samsaric pleasures continues, the work to achieve these has no end.

With any samsaric pleasure, at some point the pleasure decreases and then stops. So you try again – but that pleasure disappears. You try again, again and again, but that pleasure has gone. Each time you try with the expectation of gaining satisfaction, but in your heart there is always something missing. All the time you have a kind of hole inside. Even while you are experiencing pleasure due to some external conditions, if you are aware and check your mind, “Am I really happy or not?” – you are not completely satisfied. There is something missing. You have an empty feeling inside.

With desire clinging to samsaric pleasures, each time with the expectation of gaining satisfaction, you try again and again, again and again, again and again. Until you renounce this desire, there is no end to your experience of the suffering of change, and the suffering of suffering that comes from that. When the pleasure stops, worry and discomfort (the suffering of suffering) start. As long as you are under the control of desire and karma, it will always be like this. With that desire, under the control of karma and delusion, you again repeat the action. Being under the control of karma and delusions is the third suffering: pervasive, compounded suffering. Just from this you can see how you experience the three types of suffering.

As long as the desire clinging to samsaric pleasures is not renounced, samsaric work has no end. There is no way to finish it. And the result is the three types of suffering – you experience problems and sufferings constantly. Each time you try to get

satisfaction, because you are following desire, instead of receiving satisfaction, you receive dissatisfaction. This is the result that makes you circle continuously. Now you can understand the example of the fish. Craving and desire make you continuously create the cause of samsara, the compounded action. Each time there is the craving and compounded action, you create the future samsara – again and again.

Lama Tsongkhapa explains that this is the worst suffering. You try to get satisfaction but because you are following desire, there is no way to get satisfaction. As long as you follow craving, desire, you will never gain satisfaction. The proof is that you have been trying to do this since beginningless time, but still you have not gained satisfaction.

However, enjoyment of sense objects alone does not mean there is desire clinging to those objects. Arhats and very high tantric yogis with achievement of the illusory body and clear light have unbelievable satisfaction; they experience everything as bliss. They experience happiness thousands of times greater than ordinary pleasure, but merely experiencing pleasure does not mean that they have samsaric desire. Buddhas, who have ceased all obscurations and mental stains and accomplished all realizations, have the greatest enjoyment. Their bliss is complete; they experience ultimate happiness. Constantly, without a break of even a second, they abide in peerless happiness.

From beginningless rebirths until now, we have followed desire but never gained satisfaction. This itself shows how there is no end to following desire, and is a prediction of the future: at no time will we gain satisfaction by following desire. Lama Tsongkhapa explains that not only do we not receive satisfaction, but following desire brings many other problems, hundreds of other problems. However, when desire for samsaric pleasure is renounced, there is immediate satisfaction. When that one act of renunciation is done, immediately there is satisfaction. That ends the work, and all the three types of suffering and the various problems that arise from them. All these

cease.

Lama Tsongkhapa says that it is important to understand what ties us to samsara and to cherish renunciation of samsara. A person may recognize the suffering of change, that normal pleasures dependent on external sense objects are in the nature of suffering; but if he does not see the third suffering, pervasive compounded suffering, his wish for liberation will be limited. If he does not know about the fundamental suffering of being under the control of karma and disturbing thoughts, his wish will not be for ultimate liberation, only for liberation from suffering of suffering and suffering of change.

This third suffering, pervasive suffering, is the foundation of the other two sufferings. Knowing of this third suffering, a person would wish for the cessation of all karma and disturbing thoughts. A person who understands the three types of sufferings has the correct and complete connotation of liberation, of ultimate liberation. Realizing that liberation is the cessation of karma and disturbing thoughts, he would then check whether there is a path to achieve this. Finding such a path he would then practice it and achieve ultimate liberation. Once karma and disturbing thoughts have completely ceased, it is impossible for the cause of suffering to return.

### **KARMA AND DISTURBING THOUGHTS**

Because you were not liberated in your past life, because you did not cease karma and disturbing thoughts, you were born in this life under the control of karma and disturbing thoughts. Even from your birth, you have been under their control. Not only do you experience the result of past karma but, under the control of disturbing thoughts, you again accumulate karma.

What makes disturbing thoughts such as anger and attachment arise within you even today? You may decide now to do a meditation session on patience, so you recall all the meditation techniques related to patience and do the visualizations. After you finish the session, however, if an undesirable object appears or

somebody shows you disrespect, says some bad words to you, even though there was no anger during the session, your mind is suddenly overwhelmed by anger.

When you meet a particular object, due to previous karma, anger arises because the imprint, or seed, of anger within your mind has not been removed. Even your best friend, from whom you cannot bear to be separated for even a minute, if he changes his manner towards you, right in that minute he can become the object of your anger. Before you may have believed, “I could never get angry with my best friend. How could I get angry with him?” Previously his appearance to you, which came from your own karma, was beautiful, but your karmic appearance changes into an undesirable one. The basic point is that the imprint of anger is there; it has not been removed. The second point is that this undesirable appearance comes from your own karma. And third, because at that time you do not practice lam-rim – patience, loving kindness, compassion – your mind is overwhelmed by anger. This also applies to attachment and other disturbing thoughts.

The main point is that the imprint has not been removed. Anger, ignorance and attachment are dependent arisings; they arise in dependence upon imprints. In addition to removing the delusions, if even the imprints left on the mental continuum by delusions are completely removed, it is impossible for anger, or any other delusion, to arise. This is one-time work.

There are no delusions so there is no karma accumulated out of them, and no suffering. You do not experience true suffering, problems. If you have no imprints of anger, attachment and other disturbing thoughts, even if every creature on this earth were angry with you and harming you, there would be no way for anger or the wish to harm them to arise in you.

The way an object appears to you depends solely on your own mind. On the basis of past karma your own mind discriminates whether or not you like something. You can see that the arising of disturbing thoughts and the actions resulting from them depend on

causes and conditions. This is how samsara is created.

If you understand well how suffering and the cause of suffering are dependent arisings, you can see very clearly that once you have achieved ultimate liberation, with cessation of karma and disturbing thoughts, it is impossible for the cause of suffering to arise again, and for you to experience suffering. At that time there is no cause from which suffering can arise. The main cause, the imprint, has been completely removed.

If you do not reflect on the all-arising graduated entering into samsara, you will not know how to cut off the root of samsara.

All-arising refers to karma and disturbing thoughts and may mean that all suffering and problems arise from these two.

You, under the control of karma and disturbing thoughts, joined from your previous life to this life. If you do not cease karma and disturbing thoughts in this life, still under the control of karma and disturbing thoughts, you will join from this life to your next life. This gross physical body of bones and flesh does not go to your next life and did not come from your past life. Your consciousness joins your past life to this life and will join this life to your next. Of the six consciousnesses, it is the mental consciousness, or mind, which goes from one life to another. Separated from the gross aggregates of the body, the mental continuum continued from your past life to this life and will continue to your next life. As long as you do not cease karma and disturbing thoughts, these aggregates will continuously circle from one life to another.

This is how the I, which is labelled on the aggregates, circles. Because the base, the aggregate of consciousness, joins one life to another under the control of karma and disturbing thoughts, the I labelled on these aggregates circles in samsara. Because these aggregates are under the control of karma and delusion, they circle constantly from one life to another. This association of body and mind is called “samsara,” but it is the consciousness that actually circles from one life to another.

## THE EVOLUTION OF SAMBARA

Guru Shakyamuni Buddha has explained the evolution of samsara, this all-arising graduated entering into samsara, through the twelve dependent arisings, or links. Buddha has also explained how this circling in samsara can be stopped. Reversing the cycle means that by ceasing ignorance, you cease karma; you then cease craving and grasping; then becoming; you then cease the seven results, and do not experience the stages from birth through to death.

In the *Rice Seedling Sutra* Buddha explains external and internal dependent arisings. Holding a rice seedling in his hand, Buddha told his followers:

The bhikshus who see dependent arising will see the Dharma. Those who see the Dharma will see the Buddha.

This has great meaning. Whoever sees dependent arising will see the Dharma, which means emptiness, absolute truth. And whoever sees the Dharma will see Buddha. This means that the wisdom realizing emptiness is the direct remedy that removes all obscurations. It is only by removing the obscurations that one can achieve omniscient mind, become a Buddha.

The body is not the I. The liquids, heat and air inside the body are not the I. It may be quite easy to think that the body is not the I, but it is also very easy to think that the consciousness is the I – but it is not. None of what is here, from the top of the head down to the toes, is the I.

Yet the I does not exist separately from these aggregates. This is very simple to understand. If the I existed separately, there would be no need to buy tickets when travelling. You could completely relax. You wouldn't need jobs, banks, shops, kitchens, bathrooms – you wouldn't need any of these things! You would not need summer or winter clothes. However, when you buy a dress, the one who wears the dress is this I. There is not some other I who wears the dress. When these aggregates are eating ice-cream, this I is not fasting and some other I eats the ice-cream. These aggregates do not sit

comfortably in the bedroom while another I eats the ice-cream in the dining room. This is not our experience. The I is dependent on these aggregates. When you say, “I want to eat that steak!” it is these aggregates that will eat it – not some other I. There is not some other I, some other self, which will eat that steak. This is very clear.

Everything is to do with these aggregates. Every time you say “I am doing this” or “I want this,” it is to do with these aggregates, this body and this mind. This means that the I does not exist separately from these aggregates. Yet none of these is the I; all of these is not the I; and the I does not even exist separately from these. But it does exist! It exists on these. There is nothing apart from the I you have labeled on these aggregates. There is not some other I that does the activities of meditating, listening to teachings, eating, sleeping, walking. There is no I other than what is merely imputed on these aggregates. This gives you a rough idea of how there is no I existing from its own side.

Even though the I exists by being merely imputed by thought on the base, the aggregates, ignorance believes that I exists from its own side, not as merely labeled. However, this completely contradicts reality. The I from its own side that appears to this ignorance is a complete hallucination.

This ignorance not knowing the nature of the I is like the farmer. The karma, or action, done out of this ignorance is like the field, and the consciousness is like the seed. Craving and grasping are like the minerals, heat and water. Rebirth is like the sprout growing.

Ignorance, the farmer, motivates the action, which is like the field. The main point to understand is that the consciousness is like the seed because it holds the potential to bring forth the stem, flowers, leaves and fruit. One tiny seed can hold the potential for billions of branches, flowers and fruit, for a huge tree with branches that can cover many thousands of people. Exactly like the seed, the consciousness holds all the imprints, or potentials, left by karma. A good or bad plant grows depending on the potential of the seed. Similarly, all the imprints for various samsaric happiness and



suffering are contained in the consciousness, or mental continuum. The consciousness holds all the imprints for happy rebirths as a deva or human, and for suffering rebirths as an animal, with little opportunity for temporal happiness; as a spirit experiencing the heaviest sufferings of hunger and thirst; or as a hell being experiencing the heaviest sufferings of heat and cold.

Craving and grasping are like the heat and water which germinate the seed, the imprint, planted by the farmer, ignorance, in the field of karma. The imprint then becomes ready to be experienced, and the consciousness joins to the next life. If the next rebirth is as a human being, the consciousness enters the womb.

This body, from your head to your toes, has come from your own consciousness. There were outside co-operative causes, such as your parents, but your body actually came from your mental continuum, which carries the imprints. Your body came from your own mind. Also, the desirable people and objects you meet every day come from your own mind, as do the undesirable people and objects, and the indifferent objects. All these come from your own mind.

It is exactly like projecting a film. With both electricity and a projector, a film can be projected onto a screen. What is projected is completely dependent on the film negative. It is similar with imprints on the consciousness. All these imprints have been left on the consciousness by you, the farmer. Just as the electricity and projector together project the film, when karma ripens, an appearance is actualized from this imprint left on the consciousness. From the seed and the karmic field, the appearance comes, just as you see a picture on a screen.

Karma is a thought. A thought comes from the principal consciousness and persuades the body and speech to act. Everything – all the various worlds – is born from karma. All the bad and good appearances from birth until death, including your own body, come from the field of karma, from your thoughts. Generally, everything comes from the mind; specifically, everything comes from your present consciousness and thoughts. All your appearances come

from your own mind.

Since the whole thing comes from your mind, there is nothing and no one to blame. No matter what problem happens, there is no one to blame but yourself. By following wrong conceptions, you accumulated this karma, so there is nobody to blame. If somebody criticizes, harms or even kills you, there is no one to blame except yourself. The appearance of this person criticizing you comes from your own bad thoughts, or bad karma. (Also, the people who respect you and help you come from your own mind – from your good thoughts, or good karma.)

Therefore, there is no reason at all to get angry at anybody or to cling to anything. The appearance you see comes from your mind; it is your own creation. There is no point in clinging to your own creation. You make it up and then cling to it, creating so many problems. There is no reason at all to cling. Similarly, there is no reason to be jealous or proud. You can relate this to all other disturbing thoughts.

If, out of ignorance, you had not created the karma which left this imprint, you would not now have all these problems: relationship problems, criticism, other people harming you. Someone beating, criticizing or badly treating you simply means that you are experiencing the result of karma you created in the past. So, there is no reason at all to become angry about this.

By being aware all the time of this meditation on the twelve dependent arisings, on how everything comes from your mind, you do not find any other object to blame for your problems. This brings harmony and peace to you and to others. This allows you to practice patience, to control anger and also the dissatisfied mind of strong attachment, which bring many problems. This awareness stops many problems.

When you travel by air, each time you see a different country, all the appearances, whether ugly or beautiful, come from your own mind. When you pass through cities, villages and mountains in a car, every minute you see different things: trees, flowers, mountains. In

each minute as you drive, every single appearance, or view, comes from your own mind. Even the word “view” refers to your own mind, your own way of thinking. Looking at the same place at the same time, some people see it as incredibly beautiful, others as terribly ugly. If a hundred people look at a country, each person will see it differently. Relating this to yourself, all these different appearances – the way you see a country – come from your own mind.

It is very useful to do walking meditation with this awareness. You have always been looking, but now look with this new awareness. Be aware of the objects of your six senses. Concentrate on how every single thing wherever you go – sky, people, flowers, earth – comes from your own karma, your own thoughts.

This meditation on how you are the creator of all your own happiness and suffering is a basic Buddhist principle. No one else is the creator of your happiness and suffering. From this meditation you conclude that every day, every hour, every minute, you have to watch your own mind. Since everything comes from your mind, you have to be careful with your mind. You have to watch your mind continuously and not allow negative thoughts to arise. As much as possible, keep your mind in virtue, with a positive attitude. The essential point is to have a good heart: not harm others and, on top of that, benefit them.

## **THE NATURE OF KARMIC IMPRINTS**

*Student:* What is the nature of the imprint left on the consciousness by karma? And how is the imprint carried by the consciousness?

***Rinpoche:*** The imprint, or impression, is not substantial; it is not mind; it is not a mental factor. It is neither a mental factor nor physical substance. It is not permanent. It is a produced phenomenon. That’s all.

Let’s say that yesterday you saw something nice in a shop; today you remember that and go to buy it. You saw that object yesterday but you still remember it today, which gives you the chance to go and buy it. I think consciousness carries the imprints left by past

actions in a similar way.

When a seed planted in the ground meets perfect conditions of heat, minerals and water, it produces a sprout. Imprints function in a similar way. When karmic imprints are actualized you see different appearances. With one object you experience an indifferent feeling; with another, a pleasant feeling; with another, a suffering feeling.

Things that you have learnt or seen, you can remember and can also forget. You can forget things without conscious effort. But imprints left on the consciousness by negative karma do not disappear unless you put effort into making them non-existent. You have to put effort to change, decrease or cease these imprints; they do not just disappear by themselves after some time, hundreds or thousands of years, or eons. Without personal effort, you cannot decrease or cease them. It is by putting effort into generating the remedy of the path, particularly through the development of the wisdom realizing emptiness, that karmic imprints left by disturbing thoughts can be removed.

As long as there are imprints left by disturbing thoughts on your mental continuum, you cannot become omniscient. If your mind cannot become omniscient, you cannot see the level of mind and characteristics of every single sentient being and cannot see the different means that fits each of them. So, you cannot perfectly guide other sentient beings. This is the problem.

*Student:* How can imprints, which do not have form, determine something physical such as our bodies?

**Rinpoche:** This is very simple. Your own daily experiences give the answer to this question. Think about what happens when you are angry: there are physical effects and changes because of that anger. It is the same when you have strong attachment or strong pride. These experiences are themselves the answer. Particularly when there is strong anger or attachment, the body completely changes, and even others are affected. It is simply the power of the mind.

All the desirable things in this world, and all the undesirable,

come from the power of the mind. By developing a good heart and wisdom, one person can benefit many millions of people on this earth. Uncountable numbers of sentient beings can be led to temporal and ultimate happiness through the power of one person's positive mind. On the other hand, millions of people can be killed and a whole country destroyed from the power of one person's negative mind, which is formless. All good things come from the power of the positive mind; all bad things from the negative mind.

A person can travel all over the world because of the power of his mind. The mind is very powerful. If the mind is not taken care of, it can be incredibly dangerous, not only for the self, but for numberless other living beings. However, if the mind is taken care of, if it is trained well in loving kindness and compassion, it can offer inconceivable benefits to uncountable numbers of sentient beings.

This question of how form can come from the formless is actually answered in the twelve links, which explains how everything comes from the mind. The consciousness carries imprints, just as a chairlift carries people. This is how form comes from the formless. All impure and pure things come from the mind in basically the same way: karma leaves imprints on the mental continuum. When you think of this question of how form can come from the formless, it looks difficult, but it is not. If you try to think of some explanation other than the twelve links, there is no answer. There is no other way to explain form coming from formless mental factors. If you think of karma, it is very easy to understand.

Remember all the ups and downs in your life, all the relationship problems and unhappy situations. Then remember all the happy situations and happiness in your life. All these things you have gone through in this life, just from birth until now, have come from your own mind. From your birth until your death, everything – all the objects of your anger, attachment and ignorance; all the unpleasant, pleasant and indifferent feelings; and even your body – has come from your consciousness, which is like a seed, and from your karma, which is like a field. Karma is defined as a thought, which comes

from the consciousness.

Everything comes from the consciousness, which holds the imprints, and from the karma (or thought), which leaves the imprints. This is the answer to how form comes from the formless.

### **CONTINUATION OF CONSCIOUSNESS**

Let's say that a family has five children, and one child has been born with deformities. The immediate answer to why this happened is that there was some imperfection in the fertilized egg because the chromosomes from the mother or father were imperfect. This answer explains the physical condition, the co-operative cause, but not the inner factor, the actual cause.

Of the five children, why was this particular child conceived at the time of this imperfect egg? No one forced this conception to happen; no one obliged this person's consciousness to take place on that imperfect fertilized egg. When we ask the question, why was this being conceived when there was an imperfect fertilized egg? The answer is given, because conception happened at that time. But why did conception happen at that time? This is the important question. This is the interesting part. For this person to be conceived at that time there had to be a fertilized egg: Why was the fertilized egg at that time imperfect?

I have asked these questions many times and so far, apart from one or two answers concerning the time, I have not received any answer. The important point is the time: Why is this particular being conceived at this particular time? Explaining that the mother took drugs during pregnancy is just repeating that the baby is imperfect.

The basic question is still unanswered. This question has to have a deeper answer.

Through the twelve links, the evolution of how everything comes from the mind, it is very clear why the being was conceived at that time. Just before this life, craving and grasping made the imprint left by karma on his mental continuum strong and ready to be

experienced. No matter what the past life, at the time of the death prior to this rebirth, the craving and grasping from the twelve links to be actualized in this human life caused him to be conceived at the time there was an imperfect fertilized egg. This is very clear.

If you do not reason from the point of view of the being's mind, if you reason only from the external evolution, from what you can physically see with your eyes, the answer comes down to the time – and that is that. There is no mention of the continuation of the mind before and after this life. This view is completely ignored if you consider only the external evolution.

Now, if it were true that there is just one life, with no continuation of consciousness before or after this life, everything would be extremely easy. You would not need to keep busy with all these problems and depressions. You would not need hospitals, doctors, psychologists, psychiatrists – or meditation centers. Why would you need religions?

If it were the case that there was no continuation of consciousness, the longer you lived, the longer you would have problems. The quickest way to stop all your problems would be to die as soon as possible. All your problems would then be solved – no family or relationship problems, no fears of not getting a degree. Since life would only last a few years, why would you go through so much worry and fear? You would not need any spiritual life. It would be very simple. Since life would not last forever and there would be no continuation of consciousness after this life, the simplest and best solution would be to take your own life as quickly as possible. While there is such a simple way to stop completely all these problems so that they never happen again, why would you be worried and depressed? Why would you work so hard to have happiness and stop problems? The conclusion would also be that your having this body is a big problem for others. You can see that this line of reasoning becomes kind of nonsense.

Simply pressing this body brings pain. This itself demonstrates reincarnation, the continuation of this consciousness from a

previous life. Otherwise there is no reason why these aggregates should be in the nature of suffering. Why are we born like this? Why aren't we born without these sufferings of hunger and thirst, heat and cold, and all the other problems? Perhaps you might answer, Because there is a mind. But why can't we have mind without having pain, suffering? Why can't we be born and not experience problems?

The answer is in the evolution of the twelve links. There is pain, this body is in the nature of suffering, because it came from the impure causes of karma and disturbing thoughts, which are motivated by ignorance not realizing the nature of the I. If these aggregates were not formed by karma and disturbing thoughts, they would not be in the nature of suffering. We would not experience all these sufferings of pain, hunger, thirst, and so on. And these aggregates would not experience the sufferings of birth, old age, sickness and death. Experiencing these without freedom, without choice, would not happen.

Our daily experiences, whether happy or unhappy, prove the existence of karma, and of past and future lives. On top of the explanation of the twelve links, there are people who can see the past and future lives of themselves and others. A person may not believe in past and future lives because he cannot remember or see them, but this implies that anything he does not remember does not exist. Saying that there are no past and future lives because he does not see them implies that if they existed, he would know about them. In other words, anything he does not know, does not exist. This is very funny reasoning. This means there is nothing left for him to learn; according to this reasoning, since he knows everything that exists, there would be no purpose in learning anything.

Another factor may be that your culture does not believe in reincarnation. You have to choose: Do you believe your culture, or the reality of the experiences of those people who can see past and future lives? Can other people have more knowledge than you or not? The whole point comes to this: If a person does not know



himself, he has to choose whether or not to hold the beliefs of his culture, even if it is contradicted by the experiences of those people who can see past and future lives.

## **GENERATING LOVING KINDNESS AND COMPASSION**

If there is no loving kindness and compassion in your heart for other sentient beings, your human life is empty, like an empty pot. If there is some compassion and good heart for other sentient beings, even if not for every sentient being, the thought to serve and benefit them naturally comes. And your attitude of mind, your thought to benefit others, shows in your actions.

Generating loving kindness and compassion is the responsibility of each of us. It is our own responsibility to generate these within us, even for our own peace of mind and happiness from day to day and life to life, and especially for ultimate happiness. But our own happiness is nothing – though it is better to be concerned about this than not to practice any proper means to achieve happiness for ourselves.

Think of the numberless other sentient beings who are devoid of temporal happiness, and especially of ultimate happiness. Think of their constant suffering. Each of them needs our compassion. They need us to help them and not to harm them. This is completely our responsibility. Because of the needs and wishes of others, we have to generate loving kindness and compassion. We need to practice compassion for the sake of others and for our own sake.

Just as you are dependent upon all sentient beings, they are dependent upon you. Eliminating their suffering and obtaining their happiness depend upon you. If your motivation to meditate and practice Dharma is for your own peace of mind and happiness, this is very poor. Especially since you have a precious human body with all the opportunities to develop your mind, you should generate compassion. You have every opportunity to develop understanding, compassion and capacity in order to help sentient beings. You need

to stop harming other sentient beings and you need to benefit them.

When you have developed compassion, the question then comes, “How should I help other sentient beings? What is the best way to benefit them?” The best way is to liberate them from all suffering and true cause of suffering, and then from every mental stain. In this way they have perfect realizations, peerless ultimate happiness. There is no way to offer this greatest benefit to other beings other than by revealing the path to enlightenment to them; they can then practice this path and achieve peerless happiness. There is no other way. And in order to reveal the complete path to others, you yourself need to experience it. So, you can see how important it is to practice Dharma, to develop method, the good heart, and wisdom, particularly the wisdom realizing emptiness.

### **GENERATING BODHICHITTA**

With whatever capacity you have, you should try to benefit other sentient beings as much as possible. The best way is to practice bodhichitta. If bodhichitta is your heart practice in everyday life, all success comes, and all problems are pacified. This brings every happiness to you and to other sentient beings. With this as your main practice day and night, everything succeeds.

The selfish mind is the greatest obstacle for you and for every sentient being. By abandoning this selfish mind, which is the root of all problems, you practice bodhichitta, renouncing yourself and cherishing others. This one practice of bodhichitta completely stops all the obstacles to the works and happiness of this life, and of future lives. If there is no selfish mind, you do not create obstacles.

Even if you do not have the actual realizations of loving kindness, compassion and bodhichitta, if you are familiar with these and have a very generous mind, so many of your normal everyday activities, whether living in a family or working in the city, become Dharma, the cause of happiness. Depending on how much good heart people have, they have that much chance for their actions to become the cause of happiness. Actions unstained by selfishness are

the purest Dharma.

This loving, compassionate thought of bodhichitta brings all temporal and ultimate happiness, every success up to enlightenment. By achieving the peerless happiness of the state of omniscient mind, one can then lead every sentient being to this peerless happiness. The root of all success is this ultimate good heart of bodhichitta. To develop your mind in this way in order to offer the greatest benefit to every sentient being, you should study the teachings that explain how to meditate and train your mind in the graduated path to enlightenment. By listening and studying, you become familiar with the meditation subjects, and then try to transform your mind into whatever understanding you have of the meaning of the path.

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF MOTIVATION**

In everyday life, your motivation is very important. Even for normal daily activities such as working in the home or office, sleeping, walking, doing prayers, reciting mantras or meditating, your motivation is the first thing to examine and to change from negative to positive. You should have the greatest thought to benefit others that is possible. The beings for whom you work or meditate should be as many as possible. Even if you cannot cover every sentient being, your work or meditation should at least be for the benefit of as many as possible.

Motivation can change everything. If the motivation is wrong, the action and the result will be wrong.

If the motivation is stained by one of the three poisonous minds (anger, attachment or ignorance), both the action and motivation become the cause of suffering. If the motivation is not stained by these three poisonous minds, the action becomes virtue and both the motivation and action are the cause of happiness. If the root of a tree is poisonous, every part of that tree is poisonous. If the root is medicinal, every part is medicinal. It cannot harm; it can only benefit. It is the same with motivation. In your everyday life, your

motivation is the most important thing. The greatest problems and unhappiness and the greatest benefit and happiness come from your motivation, your attitude of mind, in every day, in every hour.

Two beggars went to beg food from a monastery. One beggar went at the right time, while the monks were eating, so he got plenty of food. He was so happy that he generated the wish to build monasteries and offer service to the monks. The other beggar went to the monastery at the wrong time, when the monks were not eating, so he did not get anything. He got very angry and thought, “I will cut off the monks’ heads and watch them drop to the ground!”

Later this beggar was lying beside a road. A carriage came past and cut off his head with its wheel. The other beggar, who had been very happy and generated the positive wish, was sleeping under a tree in a park. Due to the power of this beggar’s merit, even though he slept many hours there under the tree, the shadow of the tree never moved away from him. During this time the local people were looking for somebody special to become their leader. Seeing this unmoving shadow and thinking it must indicate a very special quality in the beggar, the people asked him to become their king. Then, because he was wealthy, he was able to offer service to the sangha.

In Italy, there was one butcher whose mother went every morning to kill pigs. I think they had huge machines to do this. All the pigs were lined up (I think it must be like the long walkway in London airport), then went down to a huge, revolving machine. Everything immediately came out the other side in pieces.

One day the mother slipped. She went through the machine and was cut into pieces. This is amazing! This proves the existence of karma extremely clearly. You experience the same as you do to others. It was just a question of time. Because she collected many very powerful negative karmas, this woman experienced the result quickly, in that same life.

There is another quite interesting example that perhaps you saw in the newspaper. Somewhere in India – in West Bengal, I think –

there was one huge, very long snake across a road. Many trucks were stuck there because this snake was blocking the whole road and would not go away. So, one truck driver went and killed the snake. After that he married. His first child was fine, but then every second child had scales like snakeskin all over the body. The third and fifth children were fine; the fourth and sixth had the skin of a snake. The truck driver had nine children all together and every second one had skin like snake scales. The father took the eldest one, who is now eighteen, around to many hospitals looking for a cure, but could not find any. Karmas like this, which you start to experience in the same life, are very powerful ones.

These problems happening every day to other people in the world are teachings and meditations on karma for us. Relate them to yourself. You have accumulated various karmas in this and other lives, from beginningless time. You have accumulated karmas, positive and negative, that you know about, and many others that you do not know about. You cannot remember all the karmas you have accumulated in the past, from beginningless time. You have already finished experiencing much of this karma, but there is so much more yet to be experienced, that you have not yet finished experiencing. The happiness or suffering resulting from one action done in one second may be experienced for many hundreds of lifetimes, for many eons. Just from one karma done in one second.

The conclusion is that you should purify your previous negative karmas and, as much as possible, abstain from negative karmas and practice virtuous actions, small and great. Since you desire the smallest pleasure, even in a dream, you should try to accumulate even small merits by benefiting other sentient beings. You should perform even small actions such as trying to protect tiny insects such as ants when they are in danger of being attacked by other animals. You should not ignore even such small benefits you can offer other sentient beings, whether animals or humans, with whatever capability you have.

If you desire even the smallest comfort, there is no question that

you want ultimate happiness. This is why you need to create the cause, which is great merit. Since you do not desire even the smallest discomfort or harm from others, you should abandon as much as possible even the smallest harms to others. Protecting karma in this way is the real protection of your own life.

### **THE POWER OF THE OBJECT**

The karmas you accumulate in relation to your parents are powerful because your parents are more powerful objects than other people. Serving your present-life parents and creating good karma in relation to them are very powerful. Creating even a small good karma or small negative karma is very powerful because of the power of the object. You can start to experience the result in this life.

The Sangha are more powerful objects than your parents. By “Sangha” I mean those who are living in the vows of ordination. Next come arya beings, whether animal, human being or whatever. Bodhisattvas, those who have bodhichitta, are very powerful objects – more powerful than any of the previous objects. The lam-rim teachings explain how powerful an object a bodhisattva is: Looking disrespectfully or glaring at a bodhisattva, out of anger, disgust or some other disturbed mind is much heavier negative karma than taking out the eyes of all the living beings on this earth. And the merit from looking at a bodhisattva with a devoted or calm mind is much greater than making charity of your own eyes to all the beings on this earth. There is this unbelievable difference because a bodhisattva is a very powerful object.

In the categories of powerful objects, after a bodhisattva comes Buddha; after Buddha comes your guru. Doing small good things in relation to these objects results in unbelievable, inconceivable happiness; and making small mistakes in relation to these objects results in so much undesirable suffering.

This is quite clear to me just from checking my own family and relatives. My younger brother has offered much service to our

mother. I am not sure when my father died, but I do not remember him at all, so my brother could not have seen him. Anyway, my younger brother offered much service to our mother when he was young, always taking care of her. Now he lives a long way from her but he continues to take care of her as much as he can, even though he has many children and many responsibilities. He has a very good heart. I think he practices Dharma more than I do, even though he has not received many teachings or read much. Somehow there is no big confusion in his life, which is very easy-going and harmonious. He has a good way of living – the result of his good heart. Everybody respects him and things go very easily for him.

Some of my relatives do not have this type of mind, but are the opposite, very selfish and negative. And they have many problems, one after another. Even if they have some success, some relaxed life, it lasts for only a short time before some other problem comes and their life changes. Even among my relatives, it is like this.

The conclusion is that you will definitely start to experience in this life the negative or positive karmas done with these powerful objects. There is karma like this that you see in this life. Or you may experience it in your next life, or after many hundreds of eons.

Since you cannot see the realizations of other people, you cannot say who is or is not a bodhisattva or Buddha. Since this is difficult to see, you should be careful in regard to your actions towards other beings. It is of great profit not to create heavy negative karmas. As explained by great bodhisattva Shantideva in *Guide to a Bodhisattva's Way of Life*: If you are not a bodhisattva, merits that you have accumulated by making charity, offerings to the buddhas and so forth for one thousand eons are destroyed by getting angry for one second with a bodhisattva. Not only are you born in the heaviest suffering of the hells for one thousand eons, your realizations are also postponed for that many eons.

Not only do you experience suffering, but the attainments you were to achieve tomorrow, this month, next year, are put off for one thousand eons if you, who are not a bodhisattva, become angry with

a bodhisattva. You will not be in danger of destroying merits in this way if you try to practice a good heart and control your mind in relation to other beings.

### **CONTROLLING THE THREE POISONOUS MINDS**

Anger is unbelievably harmful. It causes not only day-to-day problems of disharmony in the family and unhappiness for yourself, but many lifetimes of problems. Because you do not have clairvoyance or omniscience, you cannot see this long-term harm with your present mind – but you will have to experience it. It is extremely important to put all your effort and skill into avoiding anger. For the works of this life, such as a business, you put every single effort and skillful means you can think of into getting the greatest profit you can. That is nothing! Depending on your attitude, with your mind you can achieve something far greater in every hour, in every minute.

A teaching advises: Stop attachment which opens the unclean body, and cheats you greatly. Here, unclean is not a question of external dirt. The body contains thirty-six internal impurities: such dirty things as bile, saliva, blood, pus. If everything contained within the body were clean, there would be no reason for what comes out of the body to be dirty. This proves the body is unclean. Otherwise, the substances would be clean while inside the body and only dirty when they come out. I think which opens refers to the upper and lower doors: attachment opens the doors of the dirty body.

This advice is talking about the shortcomings of attachment, which opens the dirty body and cheats you greatly, or causes you great loss. Following desire, seeking a small temporary happiness of a few minutes, cheats you by interfering with your achievement of long-term ultimate happiness. You are cheated because, while you are caught by desire and cling to that small temporary happiness, you do not think about ultimate happiness.

Stop anger by seeing the mothers tormented by karma and disturbing thoughts as crazy. Crazy means completely



overwhelmed, with no freedom at all. Without control, a person may become wild, harm many people and do all kinds of things. This happens because he has no control over his mind; he may be possessed by spirits and so forth. In the same way, all sentient beings, who have been our mothers, are completely overwhelmed by karma and disturbing thoughts. Possessed by disturbing thoughts, they become completely crazy. Since their minds are completely hallucinated with wrong conceptions, what they do with their body, speech and mind is completely wrong, preventing happiness and causing only problems for themselves. It is like a crazy person with an uncontrolled mind: he does only things that harm himself. By looking at sentient beings as crazy, stop anger.

Think that the person has no freedom, no control at all. He is possessed by disturbing thoughts. He is a complete slave to disturbing thoughts; he is completely used by anger, attachment and ignorance. If you think in this way, it is impossible to become angry. Instead of anger arising, only compassion arises. This is the main point of this verse. Looking at them as crazy does not mean that you should not help them because they are crazy. By thinking in this way, you stop anger.

Stop ignorance by thinking of the subtle connotations of cause and result. This means karma and particularly awareness of dependent arising and emptiness. Look at how everything – self, action, object – is a dependent arising. Being a dependent arising, everything is empty; and being empty of existing from its own side, everything is a dependent arising. Awareness of dependent arising and emptiness stops ignorance.

Enemies and friends meet and separate. On the basis of a facial expression, you cling to someone as a friend. The enemies and friends who meet and separate, change. When you see a face, just this small part of a body, with peaceful eyes and the wrinkles of a smile around the mouth, you grab that as a friend. The main thing is the face, not so much the rest of the body or what the person says. The mouth smiles and you grab that person as a friend.

However, with another movement of the face, this friend can become your enemy; then anger and aversion arise. One facial expression you call “enemy”; the other smiling face you call “friend.” This discrimination is not valid because the reason is so small and such nonsense. On such changes of facial expression, you cling to someone as a friend or an enemy, and then experience the sufferings of meeting the undesirable and separating from the desirable.

Carrying the burden of negative karma collected in this way, you scream in the lower realms. After death, when this body has become a corpse, carrying this burden of negative karma, you go to scream in the lower realms.

This whole verse describes the shortcomings of the three poisonous minds, the long-term problems of not controlling your mind, and also how to stop the three poisonous minds. By being aware of the nature of problems, by meditating, you can control your mind.

## **PROTECTING THE MIND**

When your mind is in danger, use every single means to protect it, as if your life were in danger. If you succeed, there is inconceivable profit; if you fail, there is unbelievable loss – more than any material loss. Of course, even before you meet Dharma, since you are a human being with all the possibilities for development, each hour that you do not practice mind-control is a great loss; but especially after you have met Buddhadharma, each hour that you do not practice controlling your mind is even more of a loss. Each hour that you do not practice bodhichitta, or patience when there is danger of anger, is a greater loss than losing dollars equaling the number of atoms of this earth. Your mind can create that much wealth through accumulating merit by making charity to sentient beings or offerings to holy objects. You can see that if your mind is not transformed into virtue for an hour, or even a minute, this is the greatest loss. This is the greatest loss in life.

As Shantideva explains in *Guide to a Bodhisattva's Way of Life*: What is the use of any conduct other than the conduct of protecting your mind? What is the use of any other practice, if you do not protect your mind?

In other words, if you do not protect your mind, doing many external practices with your body and speech does not help. If you do not protect your mind, there is no happiness or success. Every single teaching of Buddha, both sutra and tantra, is taught only in order to subdue the mind. To stop the continuation of samsara, you must cease karma and disturbing thoughts. If you control the three poisonous minds at the very beginning, you do not accumulate karma.

When you do not watch your mind and do not use the meditations and teachings, your mind becomes the creator of suffering. You become the creator of your own unhappiness, your own samsara. When you watch your mind, use the meditations, and practice the teachings, your mind becomes the creator of enlightenment. Sometimes your mind becomes the creator of the heaviest suffering of hell; at other times, when you take care to practice, your mind becomes the creator of the highest happiness.

## **COLOPHON**

*This teaching was given by Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche at Atisha Centre, Australia, on August 22–23, 1987.*

### **13. THE WISH-FULFILLING GOLDEN SUN: LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE**

#### **THE MIND IS BEGINNINGLESS**

If the mind had its beginning with the birth of the being, then there would be no purpose to life nor any reason for the mind to exist. If then there were no reason for birth or rebirth and death, then there would be no continuity of lives nor existence of different beings, and there would certainly be no reason for seeking the Truth (inner method), nor for eagerly running after external possessions.

If there were no continuity of mind there would be no logical reason for the suffering of life to exist in spite of all human attempts to find happiness in, for example, material comfort and scientific progress. However, the present world is becoming more unsatisfactory, aggressive and unsubdued.

No worldly educated physicians have been able to preserve life indefinitely for themselves or others, nor have they been able to overcome undesirable physical decay; this situation proves that external conditions are not the principal cause of suffering and happiness. Neither do the same external material enjoyments always give the same pleasure to all living beings. As this shows, the principal cause of suffering is to be found nowhere but within the person's mind.

In the same way, the sperm and the egg of the parents are not the principal cause of the mind but only the co-operative cause. The principal cause of a baby's mind exists before the relationship of its parents; therefore, the principal cause of most present suffering and happiness was created in the continuity of past lives.

As is explained by the fully Enlightened Ones, the nature of the mind is clear light and formless, and the mind has the ability to perceive objects. If the fertilized egg were the principal cause of the mind then this also should have a formless nature. Something whose

nature is formless, e.g., space, cannot become a principal cause of something whose nature is form, e.g., earth. Thus, the sperm and the egg are the seeds of the brain and the other parts of the body but not of the mind. No logic or experience can prove or find that the mind began to exist at the same time that the sperm and the egg conjoined.

Another wrong conception is to think that nothing of the physical part is mind but that the baby's mind comes from its parents' minds, in which case all of that generation of children should have the same understanding and experience as all the previous parents back to and including the original. Thus, if one boy's father was suffering and strongly angry and his mother happy and strongly patient then he would have to be suffering and happy, angry and patient with the same object at the same time. But anyway, two ignorant minds cannot become oneness while they remain uncontrolled.

In reality the mind is beginningless. Ten children of the same family, who are all brought up in the same way and educated in the same manner, never have exactly the same interests or level of Wisdom. These children's minds are all affected by different pasts.

Another example demonstrating mental continuity is that of children born with imperfect bodies from parents whose bodies are perfect. Some may think that this is due to external and environmental factors such as drugs, irradiation and so forth; but while this may explain how the situation arises, it doesn't explain why it should occur to the particular beings involved. Furthermore, no matter how much parents want their baby to have a beautiful shape, without choice it is born resembling one or the other parent or looking completely different from either. What causes this whole evolution of external conditions and results? Despite the eagerness of parents to implant their levels of knowledge in the minds of their children, they are not free to do so and find it difficult. All this shows that a baby's mind comes from no other source than its own previous mind, and not from the mind of any other being.

A split second of mind causes the next split second; today's mind

causes the future life's mind. That is why the mind is impermanent and continual. The mind is created by impulse and depends on many conditions; because the mind is dependent it is not self-existent. Hence, the ignorant mind is beginningless. If beings' minds began with their birth, then what created the original being's mind?

In addition, there are many factual stories of children from both East and West who do remember their previous lives; therefore, it is greatly worthwhile to believe and try to realize such a logical evolution of the mind. If we can believe in the scientific explanation of the evolution of mind merely because it has been written by scientists in scientific books, not even doubting that the scientific mind is fully understanding and without error, then we are extremely ignorant to discredit such a realistic evolution of the mind that truly exists, and to have complete trust instead in the non-existence of our past and future lives. We dare not say that the true nature of our mind and the experiences of other living beings do not exist just because they are not perceived by our limited wisdom.

We people, whose minds are full of wrong conceptions negating the logical objects of the logical pure mind, and who believe in the non-existent wrong objects of wrong conceptions, only close the door to infinite Dharma Wisdom and to realizations such as perception of our own and other beings' past and future lives. All Wisdom and realizations of outer and inner subjects are blocked by ignorance. The thousands of deluded ignorant minds can all be cleaned away by the achievement of different levels of Wisdom through methods based on the understanding of the evolution of reincarnation. The perfected Being is never overwhelmed by ignorance; he has not even the slightest mental problem once his mind has been completely cleaned. Such ignorance is the source of all the various sufferings that we uncontrollably experience. Since we do not desire such physical and mental sufferings, but wish to achieve the supreme happiness of these perfected Beings, it is extremely necessary that we utterly extinguish ignorance and subtle wrong conceptions. Thereby we extinguish the resulting sufferings

and completely achieve fully purified Enlightenment, the Omniscient Mind of the Buddha, completing our purpose of leading all other sentient beings into the most supreme happiness of Enlightenment, and away from sufferings. But trying to achieve Enlightenment without feeling the necessity of utterly extinguishing ignorance and subtle wrong conceptions is just dreaming.

### **BUT HOW IS IT POSSIBLE TO RECEIVE ENLIGHTENMENT?**

There exists a state of mind completely free of gross ignorance (the delusions) and subtle ignorance (the impressions of delusion). This is the Svabhavakaya (Tib., Ngo.wo nyid.ku)—the pure, clear light nature of the Omniscient Mind. To experience this is Enlightenment, and the Enlightened Being is also called a Buddha.

Why have we not experienced Enlightenment yet?

Because in us the pure nature of mind has always been obscured by the pollution of ignorance.

The potentially pure mind obscured by ignorance is like a mirror covered with slime. The mirror can be made clear because it is not inextricably mixed with the slime, and, similarly, the mind can be purified of ignorance because the two are not inseparable. And just as there are many ways to clear the mirror, yet all involve removal of the slime, so too are there many ways to reach Enlightenment, but all require destruction of ignorance.

Not only the minds of humans, but those of all sentient beings contain this potential purity that is not one with the ignorance that obscures it. However, it is only when this impermanent obscuration has been completely removed, and not before, that the being can be said to be Enlightened.

Ignorance can be permanently eradicated by following the perfect path of Method and Wisdom, experienced by Guru Shakyamuni Buddha and taught in his Tripitaka (Tib., De.nö sum)—the “Three Baskets” of Teachings on Conduct, Concentration and Wisdom.

It was because of his infinitely Great Compassion for all sentient

beings that Guru Shakyamuni Buddha showed this perfect Teaching, and if we aspire to his Enlightened State we must train our minds to become One with the Dharma, as he himself did.

## **THE LINEAGE OF THESE MAHAYANA TEACHINGS**

The Lineage of the Graduated Path began with Guru Shakyamuni, the Founder of this period of Buddhhadharma (Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana). The whole subject matter of the Teachings is included in two divisions—Profound Wisdom and Extensive Method.

The Method of the Graduated Path was handed down by Maitreya to Asanga (P'ag.pa.tog.me) in about 400 A.D. He was the main Teacher of the Yogacara Philosophy, or Vijnyanavada. From Asanga the Teachings were gradually handed down through the great Indian Pandits. The first of these was Jik.nyen, one of the most learned beings in the world at that time; then came P'ag.pa Nam.dr'ol.de, the finder of the middle way; Tzun.pa Nam.dr'ol.de, the faithful; Ch'o.kyi.de, the subdued in Wisdom; Dr'ol.wa.de; Na.nam.tze; Seng.ge Zang.po, who developed the Paramita path; Ku.sa.li, the holder of all the techniques of Buddha; Ge.wa.chan; Dharmakirti.

## **MEDITATION ONE: PART 1: THE PERFECT HUMAN REBIRTH**

From time without beginning until the present, in all my numberless previous lives, I have been dying and being reborn in the cycle of samsara, the six realms of suffering. Now I have received a perfect human rebirth which has eighteen attributes: the eight freedoms and the ten receptacles.

### **WHAT IS THE PERFECT HUMAN REBIRTH?**

#### **The eight freedoms**

These are conditions of existence out of the eight unfree states in which beings do not have the chance to practice Dharma.

Freedom from birth:



- in the hells
- as a hungry spirit
- as an animal
- as a long-life god

Although born human, freedom from being:

- a barbarian in an irreligious country
- deaf
- a heretic
- born during a time with no orders of Buddha, when Buddha has not descended

If I am born in the three lower realms—narak, preta and animal—I have no freedom to practice Dharma because of the unimaginable suffering and deep ignorance that I continuously experience.

In the realm of the long-life gods I have no freedom to practice Dharma because I am constantly distracted by objects of the senses and higher samsaric pleasures, or because of rebirth as a cognitionless god, unconscious from birth until death.

If a barbarian, I have no opportunity to meet the Dharma. If deaf, I cannot communicate with others properly, cannot hear the Teachings and cannot be ordained. If a heretic, I have no belief in the Dharma—the existence of past and future lives, of karma, of Absolute and relative truth—and no faith in the three Jewels: these wrong views give no freedom to practice Dharma.

If born in a period without the Buddha or his Teachings, there is no freedom to practice Dharma because I cannot find it.

### **THE TEN RECEPTACLES (ENDOWMENTS)**

These are the chances I have received that give me the opportunity to practice the Dharma perfectly.

- Birth as a human being.
- Birth in the center of a religious country.

- Birth with perfect organs.
- Avoidance of creating or having others create the five extreme negative actions: killing my mother, killing my father, killing an Arhat, wounding a Tathagata or causing disunity amongst the Sangha.
- Belief in the practice of Dharma, the three divisions of the Teachings: The Vinaya, Sutra and Abhidharma.
- Birth during a non-dark period.
- Being shown the Teachings of the Buddha or his followers.
- The existence of experienced Teachings—the still living realizations of the Buddha himself.
- Following the path of the Buddha's Teachings.
- Receiving the kindness and compassion of others, i.e., help for my Dharma practice: with temporal needs such as food or robes from a benefactor, and with Teachings from a compassionate Guru.

### **HOW IS THIS PERFECT HUMAN REBIRTH USEFUL?**

This perfect human rebirth is extremely useful because it gives me the chance to achieve both ultimate and temporal goals, and allows me to create much merit, in a very short time. Thus:

- This is the perfect chance definitely to end the continuous, beginningless suffering of bondage to the wheel of life, and to achieve Enlightenment. The perfect human rebirth makes Enlightenment possible by completing the collection of merits
  - in three countless great aeons,
  - in eight great aeons,
  - in this lifetime, by increasing its length through the co-operative practice of Sutra and Tantra<sup>6</sup>,

---

<sup>6</sup> The Sutra Teachings demand a gradual practice without initiation, involving ten grounds, following the Bodhisattva's Path of Perfection. The Tantric Teachings are a shortcut, enabling one to reach Enlightenment without passing through the ten Sutra Grounds, but still requiring true understanding and pure practice of the basic Sutra Teachings.

- in this lifetime, even if short, through the practice of Tantra,
  - in twelve or even three years.
- I can become a great Bodhisattva, having achieved infinite Knowledge.
- I can become an Arhat, a supreme Being who has attained the complete cessation of suffering.
- I can receive the Bodhicitta, the will to become Buddha for the sake of others.
- I can achieve other realizations, such as true compassion, or fully renounced mind.
- I could become the king of many universes through realizations.
- As distinct from the above Dharma benefits, even worldly benefits can result, such as becoming the richest man in the world through having created good karma by being generous and giving lavishly to others.

This perfect human rebirth also gives many other possibilities, according to my interest. I could become a minister, scholar, doctor, judge, commercial artist, ski-instructor, barman, hotel porter, secretary, etc. We could lead a free and happy life without one single possession, which is impossible for those people who believe that all pleasure is derived solely from material conditions and external phenomena. Actually, some of those deeply ignorant and confused beings really believe what they did in dreams or under the effect of drugs to be real.

Wasting this very precious human rebirth is many millions of times worse than losing universes full of precious jewels because:

- It wastes the numberless lives spent trying to gain this precious rebirth, which has resulted from good karma, created by morality and charity. These virtues have been practiced mainly in the human realms during several previous lives, each of which was the result of many others.

- It wastes the present opportunity of gaining Enlightenment and achieving all other realizations.
- It wastes the possibility of better future lives, in which I could have achieved realizations and attained Enlightenment, stopping all suffering.

Numberless jewels, as many as could fill numberless universes, could never have the value of this present perfect rebirth. If all the jewels I have possessed in all my past lives could fill an infinite space, what good would that do? If I really think deeply about it I can see that no real happiness would come from that because it is of no use in controlling this negative mind.

We must check up on our own past experiences or put ourselves in the position of a wealthy man to see how material possessions cannot help us put an end to suffering. It is important to deeply see and feel our own experience of such situations.

There are spirits called nagas, inhabiting the animal realm, who are very rich and possess many stores of jewels. (The naga spirits have bodies half-human and half-animal, or of other shapes; they can see humans but most humans cannot see them.) We ourselves have had the experience of possessing such stores of jewels numberless times; we have possessed enough jewels to fill an endless space, yet no suffering has been cured. In the narak there are similar experienced beings, in great suffering.

### **THE EIGHT WORLDLY DHARMAS**

1. Craving for pleasures of the six senses.
2. Craving to be free of the unpleasant.
3. Craving to hear sweet, ego-pleasing words or sounds.
4. Craving to not hear ugly, displeasing words or sounds.
5. Craving to acquire material things.
6. Craving to avoid losing or not obtaining material things.
7. Craving for personal praise and admiration.
8. Craving to avoid personal slander, blame and criticism.

If I use this precious human rebirth only to gain the eight worldly dharmas or higher samsaric pleasures with self-cherishing thought, I shall circle continuously in the six samsaric realms of unimaginable suffering, as I have circled since beginningless time in all my previous lives. The beginning of these lives is not even seen by the Buddha's Omniscient Mind let alone by the minds of ordinary beings, and if I continue to work for these things I shall continue to suffer in the circle of samsara.

Usually I am afraid of the slightest temporary physical sicknesses such as colds or headaches, of suffering from heat or cold, or of the pain of a too-full or empty stomach; I find these things really unbearable and try to stop them by all kinds of temporal means.

On the other hand, I am not at all afraid of the greater sufferings I have experienced in past lives—those of rebirth and death and the many other unspeakable sufferings of the six samsaric realms that are caused by greed, ignorance and hatred. Neither to think or worry about these sufferings, merely trying to stop those of the moment, only creates the cause for more future suffering. Such actions are extremely foolish and nonsensical—like those of a crazy person. I can have human thoughts and actions, yet I behave as a dumb animal.

Shantideva said: “The perfect human rebirth, the most difficult to find and a greatly beneficial foundation is, however, received by opportunity. If, while having the wisdom to know practice and avoidance, one again leads oneself to the narak, one is purposely making oneself ignorant.”

If I care so much about any momentary sufferings and sicknesses, why do I not care about the tremendous, continuous suffering of my future lives; why do I not worry about and try to eliminate the true cause of suffering?

Spending this perfect human rebirth desiring only the eight worldly dharmas and working for the enjoyment of samsaric pleasures is like trading universes full of jewels for ka-ka. But even this very dirty thing is much more useful than attachment—it can be

used by both people and animals.

The more I desire and enjoy the eight worldly dharmas and higher samsaric pleasures, the more I create confusion and remain ignorant.

## **IS IT EASY TO RECEIVE THE PERFECT HUMAN REBIRTH?**

### **The cause of the perfect human rebirth**

This perfect human rebirth is extremely difficult to acquire because the cause that brings this result—the practice of morality and charity—is extremely difficult to create.

It is almost impossible to practice these virtuous actions if I am not human, and even then, it is not easy. Firstly, I should be born in the southern rather than the other human worlds because the humans here are more sensitive and therefore see suffering more easily. They also have the advantage of being able to practice Tantra, being endowed with the six physical prerequisites for such practice: three of these come from the father—bone, marrow and sperm; and three from the mother—skin, flesh and blood.

There are many other factors involved in the creation of morality and charity.

For instance, if I am a heretic and believe that there is no such thing as the law of karma, I make no effort to collect merits. If I am physically handicapped by, for example, a missing limb or am deaf-mute, or am mentally retarded, I am unable to practice these two virtuous actions perfectly.

To effectively bring the result of the perfect human rebirth I should understand that it is causative and what the cause of it is: I must understand karma and its results. Many people talk about this but, not recognizing the true nature of the mind, have gross misconceptions about the practice of morality and charity. Even those who have correct knowledge of karma find these practices difficult to follow properly.

So I must know how to practice them correctly. Many people

think that sacrificing other sentient beings to the gods is the right way to relieve their own suffering and find self-happiness by being reborn in heaven. In fact, the result of such actions is rebirth in the lowest narak stages in as short a time as possible.

It is essential that both morality and charity are created. Since rebirth in the upper realms mainly depends on moral conduct, practicing charity alone cannot bring me this result.

The highly-controlled Guru Shakyamuni said: “The being who has a missing leg cannot follow the road. Similarly, one cannot attain Liberation without practicing morality.”

Chandrakirti said: “One who breaks the leg of the precepts and is reborn as an animal never receives enjoyments once the result of charity has finished.”

Likewise, it is insufficient to practice morality alone. The resultant poverty and difficulty in satisfying temporal needs can hinder my Dharma practice greatly. If I lack material enjoyments now it is because of my previously imperfect practice of charity. Although rich and famous, if I am very avaricious and unable to create charity, I cannot receive a perfect human rebirth despite keeping pure morality. Also, a lower being can enjoy the results of charity but never practices charity because he is too ignorant.

### **THE RARITY OF THE PERFECT HUMAN REBIRTH**

I can understand how the perfect human rebirth is difficult to receive by considering the way the sentient beings are distributed throughout the six samsaric realms.

The vast majority of sentient beings are in the narak. thus, the number of upper rebirths is smaller than the number of lower rebirths, and the number of perfect human rebirths is the smallest of all.

### **ANALOGIES ILLUSTRATING THE DIFFICULTY OF RECEIVING THE PERFECT HUMAN REBIRTH**

The chance of gaining the precious perfect human rebirth is that

of a blind tortoise, swimming in a vast ocean and surfacing only once each one hundred years, putting its head through a small golden ring floating somewhere on the surface.

It is more difficult than throwing grain so that it sticks to a glass wall or lands on the point of a needle.

### **HOW SHOULD WE MAKE OUR PERFECT HUMAN REBIRTH HIGHLY MEANINGFUL?**

We should use this rebirth to free ourselves from samsara by receiving Enlightenment or by becoming a noble Bodhisattva or Arhat. At least we should be fully confident of avoiding a lower rebirth.

However, these results cannot be achieved without surmounting much hardship of body and mind. To obtain all the realizations we must purify all negativity: this is not easy, yet it is extremely worthwhile.

Most of us spend our whole life in the pursuit of temporal comfort, working hard at great cost. Consider presidents, soldiers and mercenaries, those on expeditions and scientific missions, for example, astronauts, many poor-living people and so on. They all spend and risk their lives for nothing. All their actions result in great and continual suffering in future lives. Their whole life is empty and finishes so.

Especially if we check how much suffering and its cause we have experienced since beginningless time, we can see that we are capable of giving up attachment to the momentary comforts of the temporal life, and that it is necessary and of great value for the achievement of the very precious Dharma practice, which ceases all problems.

### **MEDITATION ONE: PART 2: IMPERMANENCE AND DEATH: HOW LONG IS THE LIFE SPAN?**

Life is so fragile, its nature is transitory. It is easy to see how it changes in only one year, a month, a week, a day, an hour, a minute, and second by second.



There are sixty-five of the shortest instants in the time it takes to snap my fingers, and even in those short split seconds life is changing.

“Why should I be surprised that life changes so much? That’s natural; let it happen!” To think in this way is very foolish and ignorant because as life is changing so quickly in those very short instants, I am becoming older.

Some may say, “That’s natural, I become older; let it happen!” This is another wrong attitude, not caring about becoming old. Still others, for example many New York people, want to deny the impermanent nature of their lives; they do not want to see the true nature of it at all. They try to disguise their appearance in the eyes of others who also play the same game. This is an absolutely vain attempt, and such actions are not of the potential knowledge level of the human mind, and their creation is certainly not the purpose of the human rebirth from the Dharma point of view. No artificial effort can change eighty years into sixteen years. Age can never decrease in the view of the truly Enlightened Mind, which fully realizes the samsaric body’s suffering because of its impermanent nature.

### **FURTHER REQUIRED READING**

*Make Your Mind an Ocean*, by Lama Thubten Yeshe, Lama Yeshe  
Wisdom Archive

*Becoming Your Own Therapist*, by Lama Thubten Yeshe, Lama  
Yeshe Wisdom Archive

### **SUGGESTED READING**

*Spiritual Friends: Meditations by Monks and Nuns of the  
International Mahayana Institute*, Wisdom Publications  
*Buddhist Psychology*, by Geshe Tashi, Wisdom Publications