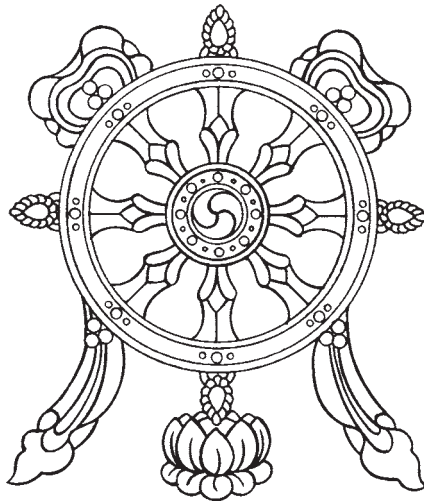


Discovering BUDDHISM *at Home*

*Awakening the limitless potential of your mind,
achieving all peace and happiness*



SUBJECT AREA 8

Establishing a Daily Practice

Readings

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Further required reading includes the following texts:

The Wish-Fulfilling Golden Sun, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche (pp. 10–38, 136–40)

Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand, 1997 gold edition (pp. 129–247 & 307–32) or 2006 blue edition (pp. 103–213 & 270–87)

Making Life Meaningful, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

Practice text:

A Daily Meditation on Shakyamuni Buddha, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

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Advice for Daily Practice

by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

First thing is to generate bodhichitta, or the attitude of reliance, rejoicing and so forth that you didn't die and thinking that you can die any day. Then consider the shortcomings of cherishing oneself, and the advantages of cherishing others, bodhichitta, things like that. Generating the motivation of bodhichitta, the attitude of enlightenment becomes one of the five powers.¹ If you look at the lifetime practices of the five powers, this is the power of the attitude (*determination*). Then, you go and live the life like this.

After getting up set the motivation of bodhichitta, then do prostrations to the Thirty-five Buddhas, reciting the Thirty-five Buddhas' names. I think that would be so good for this to become everybody's normal practice. You can make the prostrations before or after making offerings, before you sit down,. This is up to the individual. I think that's something to make a normal thing for everybody to do. Very powerful. Many cons of negative karma, different negative karmas, get purified by reciting each name one time. It so powerful. Especially followers of Lama Tsongkhapa's teachings should do prostrations every morning. All the Lam-rim lineage lamas, one of the practices that they did every morning is prostrations. Even Lama Atisha, with the holy body shaking with old age, still he did. It is the same thing for all these lineage lamas. They did so much practice.

Then, do one guru yoga, like Shakyamuni Buddha Guru Yoga, or Tara, or *Lama Chöpa*, or Lama Tsongkhapa Guru Yoga, one that includes a Lam-rim prayer. Then, you can read a little bit of Lam-rim from a Lam-rim text, whatever, even for 5 or 10 minutes.

In the evening, if you have time, you can read a little bit. Then, before going to bed, if possible, do prostrations to the Thirty-five Confession Buddhas one more time and then recite Vajrasattva mantra – either the long one 21 times or the short one 28 times minimum – before going to bed with the four remedial powers. Start the Vajrasattva by remembering any negative karma you did today, this life and then all the negative karmas since beginningless rebirth. Purify any actions done with attachment, clinging to this life, as well as ignorance, the ten non-virtuous actions done from beginningless rebirth, broken pratimoksha vows, bodhisattva vows, tantric vows, and the heaviest one – having harmed the holy body of the guru, broken the advice, disturbed the holy mind, or arisen non-devotional thoughts. Purify with strong regret, the useful fear of karma, as much as possible, like brushing away a spark of fire that lands on your body so the negative karmas do not multiply day-by-day.

1. Five powers: (1) *determination* to not be separated from bodhichitta, (2) *familiarity* with the mind of bodhichitta, (3) *white seed* – purification and accumulation, generating bodhichitta, (4) *eradication* of self-cherishing, (5) *prayer* – dedications to never be separated from bodhichitta.

Then go to bed with a very happy mind. Dedicate all the merits in the best way, as I suggest in the teachings or in *A Daily Meditation Practice on Shakyamuni Buddha*. If one can do the *King of Prayers* and other more elaborate dedications, that is excellent.

Continuity of practice is extremely important. Even the practice is short, but it should be done every day continuously. I think that is very important, continuity and having a schedule. You may need to get up earlier to have more time to practice.

A Basic Daily Practice

Throughout the day, watch the mind, and try to keep the mind in virtue: i.e., bodhichitta.

Morning

- Generate the right attitude (bodhichitta, as mentioned above)
- Prostrations to the 35 Buddhas – very good to become a normal practice for everybody, first thing in the morning.
- A guru yoga practice that includes a Lam-rim prayer
- Read a little from a Lam-rim text, even 5–10 minutes

Evening

- If there is time, read more Lam-rim
- Prostrations
- Vajrasattva
- More elaborate dedication. Can do *King of Prayers*; otherwise, can use dedication prayers from *A Daily Meditation Practice*.

Colophon:

Advice given by Lama Zopa Rinpoche for participants of the “Discovering Buddhism” program, October 14, 2001 in Aptos, CA.

Setting Up an Altar

Why Have an Altar?

A proper altar holds images or representations of the Buddha's enlightened body, speech and mind which serve as reminders of the goal of Buddhist practice – to develop these qualities in oneself so as to be able to fully benefit all sentient beings. The reason for setting up an altar is not for fame, for showing off wealth, or to increase pride, but rather it is to reduce one's mental afflictions and to seek the ability to help all sentient beings.

Where to Place the Altar

The best place for an altar is in a separate shrine room, but if you live in a small place and cannot set aside a separate room for worship, any room can be used. The size of the altar is not important, but it should be in a clean and respectful place, higher than the level of your head as you sit facing it. If it is in your bedroom, the altar should be placed near the head of your bed, never at the foot, and it should be higher than the bed. The altar should be either on a separate shelf or on a table set aside for this purpose that does not double as a coffee table or night stand.

The Objects and What They Represent

A proper Buddhist altar holds symbols of enlightened body, speech and mind, traditionally represented by displaying a statue or photo of Buddha Shakyamuni, a scripture, and a stupa. At the very least, the altar should hold an image of Buddha Shakyamuni, the founder and source of the teachings in our time.

Regarding the placement of the images, it is important that Shakyamuni Buddha be the central figure. Other images are not requisite, but if you have them, place them around the central figure in this order: root lamas, yidams (highest yoga tantra deities, performance tantra deities, then action tantra deities), dakinis, and finally protector deities. The order of the arrangement is never by the quality of the material or the artistry. Often it is better to have only a few images, as too many can be distracting.

The scripture representing the speech of the Buddha does not need to be written in Tibetan or Sanskrit. It can be in any language. It can be the *Heart Sutra* if you wish to represent all the teachings of Buddha, or it can be a special scripture related to your practice. If the altar consists of three or more levels, the scripture should be placed highest on the altar, above the Buddha statue. If the altar is on one level, the order should be, from left to right (as you are facing the altar): text, Buddha, stupa.

The mind of the Buddha is traditionally represented by a stupa of enlightenment, but you need not go out and buy a costly silver or gold one. A photograph or a clay model is perfectly acceptable. The stupa should be placed to the left of the Buddha image (as you are facing the altar), or below the Buddha if the altar consists of several levels.

The objects on the altar also represent the Three Jewels of Refuge. If there is only a statue of Buddha Shakyamuni, think that it represents all Three Jewels. If there is also a scripture and a stupa, think that the stupa represents the Buddha Jewel, the scripture represents the Dharma Jewel, and the image of the Buddha represents the Sangha Jewel.

It is important to keep in mind that the objects on the altar serve as a means for directing one's mind to the Buddha and the Buddha's enlightened qualities, which one aspires to emulate for others' benefit. In maintaining an altar one is trying to cultivate the qualities of the Buddha-his enlightened body, his enlightened speech and his enlightened mind. By remembering these qualities and aspiring to develop them, one reduces the negative qualities of attachment, hatred and ignorance, and increases positive qualities like faith, devotion, and rejoicing.

Making Offerings

There are no limitations as to what can be offered, and there are many levels of offering. In general, one may offer any pleasing object, particularly objects pleasing to the five senses: form, sound, smell, taste, and touch. In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition it is customary to offer seven or eight bowls of water which represent (from your left to right): water for drinking, water for washing the feet, flowers, incense, light, perfumes, food, and music. Often there is no water bowl for music as this is represented by one's voice when doing prayers. Flowers, candles or butter lamps, and incense are also commonly offered.

The things to be offered should be clean, new and pleasing. Food should be of only the best part, fresh, and clean – never old, leftover, or spoiled food.

It is best to offer things that you already have or can obtain without difficulty. Don't think that you have to deceive others in order to get offering materials – they should not come from stealing, cheating or hurting others in any way. Rather, they should be honestly obtained. In fact, it is better not to offer things that were obtained in even a slightly negative way.

As you make offerings, think that what you are offering is in nature your own good qualities and your practice, although it appears in the form of external offering objects. These external offerings should not be imagined as limited to the actual objects on the altar, but should be seen as vast in number, as extensive as space. Offer the water imagining it is pure nectar, pleasing to all the senses. It is important to think that the deities accept the offerings, enjoy them, and are pleased.

The purpose of making offerings is to accumulate merit and in particular to develop and increase the mind of generosity and to reduce stinginess and miserliness. By making offerings you also create the causes for the future results of becoming naturally and spontaneously generous.

Placing Offerings on the Altar

If you have the space, place the offerings a little lower than the objects of refuge on your altar. When you awaken in the morning, it is customary to wash at least your face before approaching the altar to offer three prostrations and then offerings – this is a sign of respect for the objects represented there. One is making offerings as if one is accepting a dignitary or a great being into one's home, and it is important to be gracious and respectful.

To offer water on your altar, you should have a minimum of seven bowls. Start with fresh water every day. The bowls should be clean. With a clean nice cloth, wipe the bowls out three times clockwise (to dispel negativities created with body, speech and mind), and three times counter-clockwise (to bring to oneself the blessings of the Buddha's body, speech, and mind). Then pass each bowl over burning incense to purify it.

Pour a little water into each bowl before placing it on the altar. Place the bowls in a straight line, close together but not touching. The distance between the bowls is traditionally measured by the width of a grain of wheat. The bowls should be filled up to the space of a grain's width from the top – neither too little nor too much. Pour water like the shape of a wheat grain-in a thin stream at first, then gradually more, then tapering off at the end. Try not to breathe on the offerings.

If you have a butter lamp, you can place it on your altar between the fourth and fifth water bowls. Lamps or candles symbolize wisdom, eliminating the darkness of ignorance. In Tibetan monasteries hundreds of lamps are lit as offerings. There is really no limit to the quantity of either water bowls or lamps.

Blessing the Offerings

While pouring the water, lighting candles and offering incense, bless the offerings by reciting three times OM AH HUM (the seed syllables of the Buddha's body, speech and mind).

Dedication

Whether external offerings become pure or not, or whether they become a cause for good rebirth in the next life, a cause to achieve liberation, or a cause to achieve enlightenment to benefit all beings depends on one's motivation and dedication. Dedication is crucial. It will not exhaust or limit one's store of merit but will multiply and increase it. It is excellent to dedicate the merit of making offerings to the elimination of suffering and its causes from all beings, to their achievement of lasting happiness, and to world peace.

Removing the Offerings

At the end of the day, empty the bowls one by one, dry them with a clean cloth and stack them upside down or put them away. Never leave empty bowls right side up on the altar. The water is not simply thrown away but offered to the plants in your house or in the garden. Food and flowers should also be put in a clean place outside. Bowls of fruit and food can also be left on the altar for a few days and can then be eaten when they come down – there is no need to put them outside.

Colophon:

Extracted from and based on "Tibetan Altar," Snow Lion Publications website, with alterations according to FPMT ritual tradition by Kendall Magnussen, FPMT Education Department.

Making Life Meaningful

by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

First I would like to say thank you very much to everybody for coming here to study and practise meditation. I think that because you now understand much more about Dharma, listening to the teachings and doing meditation for these few days – or even just two or three hours – has been beneficial for your own peace of mind, as well as that of others. The more teachings you hear, the more study and meditation you do, the deeper your thoughts will become in regard to how to make your life highly meaningful, especially for other sentient beings. Because of this, I think you are very fortunate.

Two years ago at Kopan I met an American scientist who studies atoms. Once a year the top scientists in America do a retreat in a very quiet, well-organized place high in the mountains. Each person spends most of the time in his own room, though sometimes going alone for a walk; but they gather together at meal-times, and occasionally to discuss the answers they have found and to try to negate each other's answers. I think this American was a very knowledgeable scientist, but he said, "So far there is one answer we have not found – we have yet to find how to make life meaningful." All the scientists think they cannot find an answer to that. This made me feel very fortunate to have met Buddhadharmā.

This scientist asked me some questions that were quite silly. He was holding a hat and asked, "Can you tell where I am going to put my hat? Here, or here?" I had a good time with him. I do not know much about Buddhadharmā, but I think he was happy with the short discussion we had. He may even have written down the purpose of human life, which is to develop the good heart towards all living beings.

Yesterday Gen Lam Rimpa taught on the three levels of pure attitude with which you can achieve the three great purposes with this perfect human rebirth. By listening for one or two hours to teachings on the graduated path to enlightenment from Geshe-la, you found answers that the top brains in America could not find, even though for many years they have studied extensively external factors such as the structure of atoms. Achieving the three great purposes is the way to make our life meaningful; this is why we have been born as human beings.

Beings can be classified into four categories. An ordinary being is one who seeks nothing other than the happiness of this life. He has no motivation to achieve the state of omniscient mind for the sake of all sentient beings, liberation, or even happiness in his next life by receiving the body of a happy transmigratory being. An ordinary being does not have any of these attitudes that prepare for the happiness of future lives. Since he is concerned about only the happiness of this life, he makes no preparation – through practising morality, charity and patience, or praying – to receive the body and enjoyments of a happy transmigratory being in his next life; nor does he practise the three higher trainings of morality, concentration and insight in order to achieve liberation; nor the bodhichitta and six paramitas of the Mahayana path in order to achieve enlightenment.

This person's interest involves the happiness of this life – obtaining food and clothing for himself for a few years. He is capable only of protecting himself from hunger, cold, and dangers to his life. If he has accumulated good karma in the past – either in relation to sentient beings, by practising charity or loving kindness, compassion and bodhichitta, or the holy objects of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha – he will succeed in the works of this life. Otherwise, if he has not created good karma in the past he will not succeed even in the works of this life, and he will have many problems, such as we hear about every day in the world. Even if he succeeds in the works of this life, he is still an ordinary being, not an actual capable being.

There are three categories of capable beings: the first prepares for the happiness of future lives by practising moral conduct, charity and patience, and making prayers for the happiness of future lives; the second practises moral conduct, concentration and insight in order to achieve liberation; the third generates bodhichitta and practises the six paramitas in order to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. These are recognized as the real capable human beings.

The most capable human being is the third, who is able to transform his mind from being overwhelmed by self-cherishing thought into cherishing only other sentient beings, with thoughts of loving kindness, compassion and bodhichitta. No matter how hard it is or how long it takes to follow the path and achieve enlightenment for the sake of others, he is able to bear all the hardships involved. Like a very thirsty person drinking water, this person delights in working to benefit other sentient beings. The harder the work, the happier he is.

In regard to working for the Tibetans, His Holiness the Dalai Lama says that the more problems there are, the more difficult and complicated the work, the happier he feels. His Holiness finds it beneficial to bear hardships and often says that the harder the work for sentient beings, the happier he is. This is the attitude of a being of greatest capacity.

You are highly fortunate and should recognize your great fortune. You have a great opportunity not to waste your intelligence, but to use it to make your life worthwhile and highly beneficial for all sentient beings.

This place where you are listening to the teachings, Tushita Retreat Centre, is a holy place. Generally, the whole Dharamsala area is the holy place of a deity called Chakrasamvara. There are many caves here and in the past many pandits and great yogis lived in this area. And this place where you are meditating is particularly holy because His Holiness the Dalai Lama's Junior Tutor, His Holiness Trijang Rinpoche, lived here at Tushita for seven years. Also, before that, this house was used as His Holiness's temple; I was told that His Holiness sat there in the alcove when the monastery monks did puja. This is a holy place, where many holy beings have lived and placed their holy feet.

When you do a meditation retreat, it is generally best to find a holy place where great yogis or your own guru have lived, practised and had attainments. Such places are regarded as the best for retreat. By doing practices, having attainments, and putting their holy feet there, the holy beings bless the place with their realizations. For ordinary people, being in such a holy place blesses the mind. When great yogis go to holy places, they bless the place; ordinary people go to holy places to take the blessings from the place in order to develop their minds. If meditation practice is done in such places, realizations are developed more quickly, with fewer obstacles.

Gen Lam Rimpa, the geshe who has been teaching you, lived here in one of these houses for a long time. He has been living an ascetic life for more than twenty years, even before coming to Dharamsala. He himself is living in the practice, in the experience. To meet such a teacher who is living in the experience of the path and can speak from that experience is extremely rare in this world. It is even very rare to meet someone who can correctly explain the path to which you are going to dedicate your life in order to try to accomplish the works for sentient beings.

If we look at the many other people in the world who are seeking a spiritual path, we can see how many years they spend going round and round, circling the world, seeking something meaningful for their life, something to bring peace of mind and satisfaction in their hearts. They go round and round, in the East and the West, but still do not meet a reliable teaching or a reliable teacher. Or even if they meet a teacher, he is not perfectly qualified to reveal the complete path, but can teach only one meditation technique, which cannot cure all the different chronic diseases of the delusions. They may spend their whole life doing just that one meditation and not reach anywhere. Even if they meet a teacher and receive teachings, the teachings may be wrong and misleading. No matter how much the person devotes his life to practising such teachings, there is no development, no change in the mind. Only more and more wrong conceptions are built up.

So, you should feel very fortunate and rejoice that you had this opportunity to study and practise with Gen Lam Rimpa, a reliable teacher.

The benefits of purification

What is the purpose of Vajrasattva practice? To grow crops in a field, a seed needs to be planted. However, even if there is a seed, without the many other necessary conditions such as good soil, minerals and water, the seed cannot grow. In Buddhist philosophy many different conditions, both causal and co-operative, are explained. Just as with an external crop, the inner crop of realizations of the graduated path to enlightenment needs a seed. The seed, or cause, is training the mind in the graduated path to enlightenment as taught by the guru. You try to transform the mind in this path.

However, in order to generate realizations, merely training in the meaning of the teachings is not sufficient. Simply having this seed is not enough to bring the result of the stems and fruit. Just as a plant requires the necessary conditions of minerals and water, one needs the necessary conditions of accumulation of merit and purification.

The realizations of the graduated path to enlightenment, the development of the good heart, depend upon the necessary condition of the accumulation of extensive merits. You accumulate merit by making charity to sentient beings, generating loving kindness and compassion for them, practising rejoicing, or making offerings to the holy objects of the merit field: guru, Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. All the holy objects are included in these. The seven-limb practice, which includes prostrations and offering mandalas, is an essential method of accumulating extensive merits and purifying inconceivable negative karmas and obscurations.

You need also to purify obstacles, the negative karmas. If you do not stop interferences to the growth of a crop (birds eating the seed, worms eating or disease rotting the plants), the crop cannot grow. Like this, there are obstacles that do not allow us to develop a pure mind. For example, when we try to

practise patience, even though we believe that patience is necessary for peace of mind in our everyday life, we cannot put it into action. What is it that does not allow us to practise patience? What does not allow us to practise loving kindness and compassion towards others, especially when they are badly treating us? Lack of development of the mind. We may have read so many Dharma books and studied for so many years, we may know all the sutras and tantras, but still our mind has not changed. We may study extensively and even become a great professor who can explain everything about Buddhism; however, instead of lessening, our anger, jealousy and pride may become even greater than before. Still there will be problems and confusion; still there will be no peace of mind.

This happens because there has been no purification of obstacles. Obscurations and negative karmas make it difficult to practise Dharma. Even though you understand Dharma, you may not be able to put it into practice in your everyday life. Even though you have done long retreats, there may still be no change in your mind. Even after many years of retreat, if somebody says one or two words that hurt your self-cherishing thought, such as “You are so selfish,” without delay of even a second, great flames of anger arise within you and you retaliate with hurtful words. A little abuse and you cannot control your mind. This means nothing has happened to your mind. Your mind is still solid, like a rocky mountain. You cannot stand even a little criticism. And you also cannot control your mind when somebody praises you, even a little – attachment arises.

Even though you may have heard and studied precious teachings on bodhichitta, profound teachings on emptiness, and even the skilful methods of tantra, you cannot put them into practice to control your own mind. It is the obscurations and negative karmas which do not allow this. How easy or difficult you find it to practise Dharma, to train your mind in the path, depends on how many obstacles you have, and that depends on how much purification you have practised. If you concentrate on purification as your main practice, if you keep this in your heart as the fundamental practice in your daily life, all progress comes.

Some years ago you may have found it very difficult to practise patience. When someone gave you a hard time, you could not remember the teachings and meditations on patience and your mind would be overwhelmed by great flames of anger. Your mind would suddenly become completely dark with anger, like a dark room, and your anger would last a long time.

However, after two or three years of intensive purification, such as recitation of Vajrasattva mantra or prostrations to Vajrasattva, even though anger still arises, you find that it arises less often. This aspect of Buddha, Vajrasattva, has the particular function of purifying sentient beings of all the obstacles which interfere with developing their minds and achieving enlightenment. After a few years of this practice, there may still be anger, but it arises less often and less strongly than before. If anger arises, it lasts one or two seconds, then goes away.

The mind can definitely be developed, and anger removed. With purification practice, anger lessens, arising with more difficulty, and patience becomes easier to practise. This is the complete opposite to earlier times when anger arose very easily and it was extremely difficult to practise patience. This small experience is logical proof that anger can be removed completely, never to arise again.

It is similar with self-cherishing. Before you used to think day and night, all the time, about nothing but yourself – how you could be happy, how you could stop your own problems. However, after doing

extensive purification – and even while doing the practice of purification – you become less concerned about yourself and more concerned about other sentient beings. You naturally feel that other sentient beings are close to your heart. Just as you feel with your parents and friends, you feel the kindness of sentient beings in your heart. Before you were concerned about nothing but yourself, and you passed your life unable to obtain happiness for yourself or stop your own problems.

After purification practice, you feel you are nothing compared to other sentient beings, who are uncountable in number. You are just one person – nothing important. Your own happiness and comfort are nothing. Obtaining happiness and comfort for others is the most important thing in your life, and you find there is no work other than this to do. Your sole concern is other sentient beings; there is nothing else to cherish. For you there is no other work than eliminating their true suffering and true cause of suffering and obtaining their temporal and ultimate happiness. You have no other work to do in your life.

Because you are concerned only about others, the actions of your body and speech are naturally done only for other sentient beings. You do everything – wearing clothes, eating food, taking medicine – only so that you can serve other sentient beings and fulfil their wishes. When your mind changes from cherishing the self to cherishing others, you experience incredible happiness in the depths of your heart. You experience incredible peace of mind.

Examine the nature of your present self-cherishing: “I am the most precious. I am more important than others. What I want is more important than the needs of other sentient beings.” This attitude is very uncomfortable and painful, like having a rock inside your heart. But the minute you give yourself up, sacrifice yourself for the sake of even one sentient being, cherishing him and thinking: “He is more important than I am. What he wants is more important than what I want,” you experience relaxation in your heart. As soon as you change your attitude, right in that second, you experience relaxation. That other uncomfortable, solid feeling inside your heart disappears. As soon as you change your attitude from cherishing yourself to cherishing even one other being, there is a big difference. Immediately there is peace of mind and your problems stop. Problems that you were convinced were real problems a minute before are no longer problems.

Even though you may be able to imitate what is written in the texts and recite the correct words about emptiness, the absolute nature of the I and all existence, even though you may be able to debate using the correct words, it may not make much sense in your heart. However, after doing extensive purification with Vajrasattva or the various other purification practices, and even during the times of doing purification, your obscurations become fewer and fewer. Before your heart was like a rock when you heard words such as “non-truly existent,” “existing by itself,” “existing from its own side,” “non-existent by itself.” Now these teachings make sense to you. You feel them in your heart and can talk about them from your own experience.

Before you may have felt very discouraged, thinking, “Oh, this is impossible for me! I have a mind full of anger and other disturbing thoughts – how can I realize this?” But unexpectedly one day, after doing extensive purification, when your mind is ready and you have fewer obstacles, you read just two or three words on emptiness and suddenly you are able to recognize the object of refutation. You don’t have to read the whole Madhyamaka text, just a few pieces of advice from the text, and suddenly you recognize the object to be refuted, the object you have to realize is empty. By relating this to the I,

within seconds, you are able to see the emptiness of the truly existent I. This happens normally to good meditators who do extensive purification.

Whether or not a meditator has listened to extensive teachings on emptiness or studied all the different texts, when he has purified obstacles, with just a few words, with just one meditation technique, he is automatically able to realize emptiness. (However, to gain realizations is the main point of studying.)

The mind can definitely be developed if one knows all the skilful methods, if one trains one's mind skilfully in the path, which means accumulating extensive merits and practising purification. All the experiences of the path explained by Guru Shakyamuni Buddha and great yogis such as Tilopa, Naropa, Marpa, Milarepa, and Lama Tsongkhapa may look impossible for us. Milarepa and his disciple, Rechungpa, expressed their high attainments of the tantric path in incredible poems; reading their biographies is very inspiring. Such things look impossible for us when we read about them, but I think it is a matter of how much we take care of our own mind, how skilfully we practise Dharma. Whether or not you have studied extensively, as long as you have the essential understanding and practise Dharma skilfully, I think that in this life, after a few years, you can have the amazing experiences of the path that we read about in the biographies of Lama Tsongkhapa, Marpa, and Milarepa. These can happen in your own mind, if you are a skilful practitioner.

One Kadampa geshe said that if, while training your mind in the path, you attempt to purify well and accumulate merit, then pray to the guru-deity, you can achieve realizations that you never dreamt were possible. If you try like this, even though you believe that you cannot generate such realizations, not even in a hundred years, the realizations can happen in much less than a hundred years. The realizations can happen within a year.

Why can the mind be developed in this way? Because the mind is a produced phenomenon, dependent on cause and conditions. Therefore, with these practices that train the mind in the path (accumulating extensive merit, purifying, and making strong prayers to the guru-deity), there is no choice – the mind has to change. The mind cannot keep its former selfish, angry, emotional, anxious, fearful character. It definitely has to change. When a seed is planted in perfect conditions and encounters no obstacles, without choice, it has to grow.

We should keep this Kadampa geshe's advice in our hearts. In this way, without discouragement, day by day, month by month, year by year, we can develop the good heart, the pure mind.

Colophon:

This teaching was given by Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche at Tushita Retreat Centre, India, on June 17, 1985. Transcript courtesy of Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive.

The Great Value of Being Human

by Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche

These teachings were originally given in September 1984 at Tushita Retreat Centre, Dharamsala, India.

Motivation

The people doing the Vajrasattva retreat asked me to speak on something. Not being a Dharma practitioner, I have nothing to teach, but one or two of my words may help persuade some people to continue their practice or to make their practice purer.

Your present action of listening to this teaching should become the cause of happiness. However, to have an attitude seeking just the happiness of future lives is not sufficient. Even to listen to this Mahayana thought-training teaching with an attitude seeking self-liberation, the cessation of suffering, is not sufficient. Your aim should be to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings; your action then becomes a cause to achieve enlightenment. Simply listening to a Mahayana teaching is not a sufficient cause to achieve enlightenment. For your present action of listening to this teaching to become a cause of enlightenment, you should have the attitude of a Mahayanist: “At any rate I must achieve the state of omniscient mind for the benefit of all sentient beings; therefore, I am going to listen to this teaching.”

Bodhichitta: the heart practice

Training your mind in bodhichitta, the thought renouncing yourself and cherishing others, is extremely important at all times, under all circumstances. Keep this as your heart practice. Even for a Dharma practitioner in retreat (whether you are reciting mantras, meditating on a deity or training your mind in the Lam-rim), all obstacles – your wishes not being fulfilled, no success in your practice, nothing happening as you planned – come from the selfish attitude, which is the opposite to bodhichitta. The selfish attitude always interferes, not allowing space in your mind for bodhichitta. Even though you may be in retreat, not even one session is done purely for other sentient beings, with a pure attitude of bodhichitta, cherishing only others. There is not one session you can feel satisfied was done purely for others.

Not only during the motivation, but even during the meditation time, hundreds of thoughts arise. More time is spent in the other retreat, the cause of samsara: the retreat from pure view, from bodhichitta, from awareness of emptiness, from one-pointed concentration, from the Vajrasattva mantra. Your meditations become a retreat from seeing all forms as the deity, all sounds as the deity’s mantra and all thoughts as the nature of the deity’s holy mind. Since most of your time is spent in non-virtue, the session becomes a retreat from virtue. Doing Vajrasattva retreat in this way, you do not receive any signs of purification, not even in your dreams.

If you check your everyday life, you find that all obstacles, all undesirable experiences and failures, come from the selfish attitude. Even for people not trying to train their minds in the Lam-rim or practice holy Dharma, all unhappiness and confusion come from each person's selfish attitude. If the selfish attitude is strong, bigger and bigger problems come, one after another. For everyone – those who practice Dharma and those who do not, but do everyday jobs such as working in an office, running a business or farming – the selfish attitude is the greatest interference. It is very clear that with less selfishness, there is more success.

Even if a person does not know what virtue is and how to accumulate it or what non-virtue is and how to avoid it, if he has less selfishness, he automatically has more good heart. Even if he has not met Buddhadharma, through having a good heart, his actions become virtue. Although he has never heard any teaching on karma or refuge, such a person has less selfishness and more thought of cherishing others. His actions of helping others with his body, speech and mind come from a sincere heart, a pure attitude, with no expectation for himself. In return he does not expect to receive a good reputation, or material help such as food or clothing from that person in the future. All his actions to help others are pure virtue because they come from a sincere heart, with no expectations or selfish motives.

The actions of the generous, good-hearted Western people who are called “hippies” may be much purer than those of people with faith in karma and refuge who expect something in return for their help. Such a person may help others, but with the expectation of a good rebirth in their next life: “If I practice charity, I will be wealthy and happy in my next life.” This person does have faith in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, but his action of offering charity to others is done with the selfish attitude of wanting happiness for himself. This action does become virtue, but it is not as pure as that of someone who has not met Dharma but helps others with a pure, sincere heart, without any expectation or selfish attitude.

Whether you practice Dharma or not, whether you are renounced or not, unless there is some change to this selfish attitude, there is no peace. Selfishness doesn't allow any space in the mind for realizations, and is the greatest interference to harmony in the family and in society. It is the greatest obstacle to success in this life and beyond this life, up to enlightenment.

To develop a pure attitude of bodhichitta, you need to practice Mahayana teachings. You should train your mind in bodhichitta all the time. Through the practice of bodhichitta, you will one day become enlightened and be able to guide other sentient beings, like fully enlightened beings such as Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, Manjushri, Maitreya Buddha, Tara, Vajrapani and Vajrasattva, the objects of refuge to whom you now pray for the fulfilment of your temporal and ultimate wishes. As the great pandit Chandrakirti says in *Madhyamakavatara*:

The Hearer-Listeners and the Self-Conquerors are born from the mighty one, Shakyamuni Buddha. The fully purified and developed buddha is born from bodhichitta, and bodhichitta is born from compassion.

The Hearer-Listeners and Self-Conquerors are the arhats of the Lesser Vehicle path. Buddha is born from bodhichitta and non-dual transcendental wisdom. Bodhichitta is born from the compassion that finds it unbearable that sentient beings are obscured, ignorantly thinking that things are permanent and exist from their own side, even though they are impermanent in nature.

Lama Tsongkhapa explains the different levels of practice in his short, middle and great commentaries on the Lam-rim. (The condensed Lam-rim prayer *The Hymns of Experience of the Graduated Path to Enlightenment* is for those of lower intelligence.) Lama Tsongkhapa explains that bodhichitta is the main part of the Mahayana path. Without the main trunk of a tree, branches cannot grow and there can be no flowers or fruit. Foundation of the Mahayana, bodhichitta is the base for the great bodhisattva actions of the six paramitas and the four methods of gathering sentient beings. Bodhichitta is the base for doing extensive works for all sentient beings.

If you have the main trunk of bodhichitta, you can accomplish all the rest of the realizations up to enlightenment, which are like the branches, flowers and fruit. You can accomplish the immeasurable qualities of Buddha's holy body, holy speech and holy mind. Without bodhichitta, there is no way to have the rest of the Mahayana realizations, just as you cannot expect to have branches bringing forth fruit without the main trunk of a tree. If you have bodhichitta, you can achieve all the other great bodhisattva actions.

Bodhichitta is like the alchemy that transforms iron into gold. (There is a meditation technique to transform iron into gold, but it is very dangerous. The great pandit Nagarjuna performed this meditation and used the gold he created to support the monks in many monasteries.) By achieving the ultimate good heart of bodhichitta, not only are you able to transform indifferent actions into virtue, but can even transform non-virtuous actions into virtue. You are able to transform even actions such as killing, stealing, telling lies, gossiping, harsh speech and so forth, which are by nature non-virtuous. You cannot transform these actions into virtue now, but you will be able to later, when you have achieved the ultimate good heart of bodhichitta, and you will be able to do the various great bodhisattva actions to guide other sentient beings.

If you have bodhichitta, you can accumulate the two types of merit: the merit of fortune and of wisdom. By meditating on emptiness, you accumulate the merit of transcendental wisdom. For example, when meditating on either the self-generation or front generation of a deity, if you are aware of the nature of the deity, that it does not exist from its own side except as merely labeled, that it is a dependent arising, you accumulate the merit of transcendental wisdom. Focusing on the pure view of the deity accumulates the merit of fortune, or method.

If you are aware, you can accumulate the two types of merit when giving one rupee to a beggar. If you are only lending one rupee to the person, however, you are not a worthy base to be labeled "giver," since this is not the function performed by your aggregates; there is no thought or action of giving. The act of giving has to have a subject, an action and an object of charity.

The giver, the action of giving and the object of charity are all three dependent on each other. You should be aware that of these three, nothing exists from its own side except what is labeled on each of the bases. If you generate bodhichitta, wishing enlightenment for yourself and all sentient beings, and give one rupee (or even ten paise) to a beggar, with awareness also of the true nature of the self, action and object, you accumulate both merits: the merit of fortune and of wisdom, as you are aware of emptiness.

Lama Tsongkhapa advises that with the ultimate mind of bodhichitta, any merit you accumulate, whether of transcendental wisdom or fortune, becomes the cause of enlightenment. Like alchemy, bodhichitta

transforms all the merit you accumulate into the cause of enlightenment. Otherwise, even though you may have realized emptiness, practicing charity without bodhichitta becomes the cause only of liberation from samsara. If you seal your action with emptiness, it becomes a remedy to cut just the root of samsara; it does not become the cause of enlightenment. Bodhichitta makes a huge difference: without it, the merit you accumulate is like one handful of dust; with it, the merit is like the whole earth.

With bodhichitta, every merit you accumulate, whether of transcendental wisdom or of fortune, brings infinite, incredible results. This is why Lama Tsongkhapa says:

Bodhichitta is the treasure bringing infinite merit. By understanding this, the brave sons of the Victors keep bodhichitta as their heart practice. I, the venerable guru, practiced like this. I am requesting you, the seeker of liberation, also to practice in this way.

This implies that those seeking happiness should keep bodhichitta as their heart practice. Actually the greatest obstacle to happiness, for worldly people and Dharma practitioners, is self-cherishing thought; and the best method to achieve happiness is bodhichitta. Even without thinking about enlightenment, since sentient beings want happiness and success, the most fruitful way to achieve these is through practicing bodhichitta.

The graduated paths of the three scopes

Why bodhichitta should be the heart practice is shown in the graduated paths of the three scopes. The graduated path of the being of small scope includes perfect human rebirth (its usefulness and the difficulty of receiving it again), impermanence and death, the sufferings of the three lower realms, refuge and karma. The Four Noble Truths are revealed in the path of the being of intermediate scope. However, these paths are the preliminaries; the actual body of the path is the essential practice of bodhichitta – and the six paramitas based on that – revealed in the path of the being of great scope.

By training your mind in the graduated paths of the small and intermediate scopes, you generate renunciation of samsara, the cause of liberation. By training your mind in the graduated path of great scope, you generate bodhichitta, the cause of full enlightenment. By practicing the Lam-rim, the graduated paths of these three scopes, you can accomplish all your wishes. If you wish to achieve the body of a god or human being, you can accomplish this by training your mind in the path of small scope. If you wish to be liberated from samsara, you can accomplish this by training your mind in the path of intermediate scope. If you wish to achieve the state of omniscient mind, you can accomplish this by training your mind in the path of great scope, which means training in the six paramitas to complete the practice of bodhichitta.

These three great successes are accomplished by training the mind in the Lam-rim—and other temporal happiness comes by the way. There is nothing missing from the Lam-rim, the graduated path of the three scopes, as taught by the past lineage lamas and the present qualified Tibetan lamas. It is the complete, reliable path to enlightenment. If the Lam-rim had something missing, you could not accomplish the three great successes. If you cannot attain these by training your mind in the Lam-rim, there is something wrong with the Lam-rim teachings of Lama Tsongkhapa. If the teachings of Lama Tsongkhapa are imperfect or unreliable, there is something wrong with Lama Atisha's Lam-rim teachings. (Lama Atisha re-established the practice of Buddhadharma in Tibet after there had been a period

of corruption.)

To trace the teachings back to Guru Shakyamuni Buddha in this way, showing them to be imperfect and not the complete path to enlightenment, would be a mistake and contradict reality. There is no mistake: the teachings of Buddha are perfect and reliable. After being shown the complete path to enlightenment by his guru, Buddha practiced extensive listening, reflection and meditation. Through these he generated the complete path, ceasing all defilements and completing all realizations, and thus achieved the state of omniscient mind. From his complete experience, Buddha then revealed the entire path to enlightenment, giving the teachings of the three vehicles to his followers. Uncountable numbers of yogis analysed the teachings to see whether there were any mistakes and whether they would lead them to the goal of enlightenment. By listening to, reflecting on and putting the teachings into practice, these yogis then achieved the same state as Buddha.

Nothing is missing from the Lam-rim teachings of the three scopes (this comprises not only the Paramitayana, but also the four types of tantra). They include everything necessary for the achievement of temporal and ultimate happiness. Unless you dedicate your life to training your mind in the graduated paths of the three scopes, no matter what other path you try, you cannot generate renunciation of samsara, so you cannot achieve even the nirvana of the Hinayana, let alone that of the Mahayana.

Scientists examine tiny organisms through microscopes, but Kadampa geshees check the development of the mind through their progress in the Lam-rim. They check whether their selfishness, anger, attachment, ignorance and so forth this year are less than last year. The development of the mind is checked through the Lam-rim, not through the ability to perform accurate divination or generate certain experiences of heat in the body, which even Hindus can do. The Kadampa geshees do not regard such clairvoyance and physical experiences as actual proof of development of the mind.

Facing the Lam-rim and simply questioning what it is about is regarded as more important than such experiences. Kadampa Geshe Puchungwa asked Geshe Chen-ngawa: “Which would you prefer to have the eight general siddhis (this includes such attainments as “quick legs” and the ability to fly) and the five psychic powers, or experiences of the graduated path to enlightenment?” Geshe Chen-ngawa answered: “I would much rather face the Lam-rim and just question what it is like than have all the eight siddhis and five psychic powers. We have achieved these powers numberless times in the past, but we have never achieved the graduated path to enlightenment through generating renunciation, bodhichitta and right view.” By practicing bodhichitta, we are able to take the highest essence and make our life the most beneficial for all sentient beings.

Renouncing samsara

To generate renunciation of the entire samsara, we need to stop our clinging to samsaric perfections. Generating renunciation of this life means cutting off clinging to the comforts of this life: food, clothing, reputation. This does not mean we should not have good food, clothing or reputation, but that we should stop clinging to the appearances of the comforts of this life. We have to stop clinging and worldly concern, from which all the confusion and problems of life arise and which do not allow our everyday actions to become holy Dharma.

Establishing renunciation of this life in our mind does not mean wearing ragged clothes and eating poor food. Beggars and street dogs eat poor food, but this does not mean they have renounced this life.

You cannot judge renunciation from the outside, only by understanding the inner mind. You may look renounced because you wear ragged clothes and eat poor food, but your mind may be strongly craving a reputation. You may be living a simple life in order to gain a reputation as an ascetic meditator. Just as worldly people with no intention of practicing Dharma may dress in expensive clothes, eat rich food and live in luxurious houses for the happiness of this life, another person may eat poor food, wear ragged clothes and live in a rundown house or a cave. If you do not watch your mind, you cannot be sure whether you are living a renounced life or not.

One recent Lam-rim lineage lama said:

One who has renounced this life does not return anger when somebody is angry towards him. When somebody insults him, he doesn't return their insult. When somebody beats him, he doesn't beat them in return. The person who is able to practice like this is renounced.

Many of you have met or seen one of the oldest ascetic meditators in Dharamsala, Gen Jampa Wangdu, from whom I received the oral transmission of the "taking the essence" pill retreat. Many years ago Gen Jampa Wangdu lived a simple life, wearing poor, badly coloured robes. He told me: "The reason I wear good robes now is that people complain when I wear them. They say that I'm supposed to be an ascetic, but I'm wearing such rich clothes that I can't be an ascetic. They think I have plenty of money, so they don't come so much to make offerings. This is very good for me."

Going completely against self-cherishing thought and worldly concern, which wants a good reputation, is a real sign of renunciation. When Gen Jampa Wangdu wears rich robes, people judge him by his external appearance and complain that he is not acting like an ascetic monk; this completely opposes worldly concern and also self-cherishing. He wears rich robes because he finds it very helpful to have people talk about him like this. Renunciation depends on the mind, not on the external appearance.

How to do the meditation session

Each time you do a session, before meditating on the Lam-rim, visualize the merit field, either elaborately or simply, and offer a mandala. The merit field should not be referred to as "the guru tree." This is an incorrect translation and is meaningless, giving you nothing more than an idea of a tree with gurus sitting in it. The Tibetan term *tsog shing* means something quite different. The translator did not understand the meaning of *tsog shing*, but simply translated according to what is depicted in thangkas of the merit field. If you translate the Tibetan term precisely, with understanding of grammar and the meaning of the words, *tsog* is merit and *shing* is field.

People survive and obtain their enjoyments through planting seeds of corn, potatoes and rice in fields. If you are not lazy but plant the field, through your own effort you can then obtain enjoyments. A field is recognized as very precious and to be taken care of because you can use it to plant crops. Similarly, by making offerings and doing prostrations to the merit field of guru, Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, you plant the seed of merit, or good karma, in order to receive all temporal and ultimate happiness and perfections. By planting the seed of merit in this field, you are able to accomplish the three great purposes: a perfect human body in order to practice the holy Dharma in your next life, the cessation of samsara and full enlightenment. All happiness, including these three great purposes, comes from merit.

Receiving enjoyments – even a good harvest – depends on accumulating merit. The guru, Buddha,

Dharma and Sangha are the field in which you plant the seed of merit. You should actually cherish this field as much more precious than any external field. Lama Tsongkhapa says in the *Great Lam-Rim Commentary*:

Worldly people feel it a great loss if they don't plant a field from which they have the opportunity to receive crops once or twice a year. For planting the seed of merit in the merit field of guru, Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, there is no such thing as a season; planting does not depend on the season. Four times each day you can plant the seed of merit in this holy field.

Lama Tsongkhapa is saying that each day you can plant the seed of merit to accomplish the three great purposes, and any other happiness you wish. Four times each day, all the time, you have the opportunity to plant the seed of merit in the supreme holy field of guru, Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Lama Tsongkhapa says that being careless and not taking the opportunity to do this is a much greater loss than being unable to plant crops in an ordinary field.

Not only four times a day, but every hour, every minute, every second, you can plant the seed of merit, the cause of happiness. With an ordinary field, you first plant something, then have to wait until it ripens; you cannot plant again while a crop is already there. Among all fields, the holy field of merit is the supreme field. There is no interference from the side of the object preventing you from accumulating merit. The interference is only from your own side, if you do not accumulate merit and create the cause of happiness in your relationship with these holy objects.

As well as the holy merit field, there is also the field of sentient beings in which you can plant the seed of merit. You can also create the cause of happiness in dependence upon the field of sentient beings. Just as you receive crops by planting seed in a field, by planting the seed of merit in the holy merit field and the field of sentient beings, you receive all temporal and ultimate happiness.

You can visualize either the elaborate merit field, as in *Lama Chöpa*, or simply Guru Shakyamuni Buddha as the embodiment of all objects of refuge. This one aspect of Buddha embodies all gurus, all Buddhas, all Dharma, and all Sangha. This is called the "Jewel Tradition of the All-Encompassing Aspect." You can also visualize Thousand-arm or Four-arm Chenrezig, whichever aspect you prefer. Visualize whichever merit field you wish.

Before doing the Lam-rim meditation, offer a mandala. Following the mandala prayer, offer the whole world and all the other planets, aware of all the precious sense objects that are in this and other worlds. Even scientists say there are many universes. You should especially offer to the merit field all the objects to which you cling very much: your body, possessions and friends. Fill space with the highest quality offerings you can think of—all the sense objects, the planets and so on. By reading and studying the commentaries, you can learn the exact details of the meditations that accord with the mandala offering prayer.

The mandala offering is a method to accumulate extensive merit in a short time. Having intellectual knowledge of the teachings of the path and training your mind in that alone do not help. That is like putting a dry seed on a rock without the necessary conditions of heat, water, minerals and soil – the seed cannot grow. Training your mind in intellectual understanding of the teachings alone does not affect your mind. In order for the teachings of the path to enlightenment to affect your mind, trans-

forming it into the path, you need to purify obstacles and accumulate the cause, which means merit, to generate the realizations in your mind. The mandala offering is one of the most important means to accumulate extensive merit in a short time.

The essential technique is to offer as many best quality mandalas as possible, with visualization according to the prayer. You accumulate more merit by clearly visualizing many offerings. As clearly as you can, think of offering many golden mountains or universes. Right in that moment you accumulate the extensive merit of actually offering that many golden mountains or universes. Even though you do not have even one atom of gold, you accumulate unbelievable merit: the cause to develop your mind and generate the path to enlightenment. There are scriptural references for how you receive the incredible merit of actually offering universes and gold. This meditation technique of visualizing the mandala offering according to the prayer has incredible advantages.

When you finish offering the short mandala, make a strong request to the merit field for all the interferences and obstacles to generating the whole path – from wrong conceptions towards the guru up to subtle dual view – to be pacified. All these obstacles need to be purified. If you are training your mind in the graduated path of the small scope, you need to purify the particular obstacles to realization of the small scope. Also request the merit field to be able to generate all the realizations from guru devotion up to enlightenment, particularly the realizations of the graduated path of the small scope.

White nectar beams are emitted from the merit field, purifying all your obscurations and those of all other sentient beings. Having purified all the interfering obscurations, you then generate all the realizations – particularly those of perfect human rebirth, its usefulness and the difficulty of receiving it again; impermanence and death; and karma. Think that the realizations from beginning to end, from guru devotion up to enlightenment, and especially the realizations of the graduated path of the small scope are generated within your mind and within the minds of all sentient beings.

If your sessions are short, motivate like this in the beginning: “From beginningless rebirths, I and all sentient beings have been experiencing samsaric suffering because we lack the realizations of the graduated path of the small scope: perfect human rebirth, its usefulness, and so on. I must achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings, therefore I am going to meditate on the Lam-rim. Please grant all the Lam-rim realizations, particularly those of the graduated path of the small scope, in my mind and in the minds of all sentient beings.”

To achieve the realization of renunciation of this life, you should train your mind in the graduated path of the small scope, which is the general foundation for the realizations of the graduated paths of the intermediate and great scopes, including the graduated path of tantra. On the basis of correct devotion to the virtuous friend in thought and action, as explained by Guru Shakyamuni Buddha in the sutra and tantra teachings, you train your mind in the beginning of the Lam-rim, the eight freedoms and ten richnesses of this perfect human rebirth.

I thought to speak a little more on the graduated path of the small scope, as it might help you to continue your Dharma practice. I am hoping it might stop the mind that is feeling discouraged and hopeless from becoming more and more depressed by the thought that nothing is happening, that there is no progress. Sometimes you may feel so depressed that you cannot do anything, not even eat. I am hoping that doing these basic meditations might encourage you to continue to practice, and to

practice more purely.

To generate renunciation of this life, you should turn your mind to the fundamental Lam-rim meditations, starting with perfect human rebirth. You should understand how precious this human body qualified with eight freedoms and ten richnesses is.

The eight freedoms

The first freedom: not being born in the hells

Of the eight freedoms, the first is having the chance to practice Dharma because you have not been born in the hells. Among all the six realms, hell beings have the heaviest sufferings. Of the suffering states of hell, there are eight cold and eight hot hells, as well as the neighbouring and occasional hells. When meditating on the hot hell sufferings, think that the hell beings constantly have the vision of the entire ground as red-hot iron, oneness with fire. It is like this in all the hot hells. In the cold hells, the bodies of the hell beings are oneness with ice, with many cracks and blisters. (You may be familiar with these explanations from the Lam-rim teachings, but many people have difficulty believing in the existence of these sufferings.)

All these hell sufferings are due to the power of mind. When the mind is peaceful and virtuous, a person looks very peaceful and pleasant. When the mind has the nature of compassion or loving kindness, even the physical body looks different; it is very pleasing. Seeing such a person gives other people a warm feeling; it even makes them happy. On the other hand, a person with a very tight mind, who is very selfish and angry, looks very ugly. Even though a person may have looked attractive before, he looks very ugly and terrifying when his mind becomes tight and angry. Other people become upset when they look at his face; his face is so unpleasant that other people don't even want to see it. Even the colour of the face changes: some faces turn black, others red, with anger.

Thoughts of loving kindness, patience and bodhichitta make a person look very peaceful. Because you experience a warm feeling when you see such a face, you want to speak to the person and help them. An angry mind, however, changes the aspect of the whole body into a very terrifying one. You are scared to meet or speak to an angry person. This is all due to the power of the mind. The mind has such power that it even physically changes a person. Also, the power of the mind immediately affects the external environment. Your own face and body can disturb everything in the environment. Even alone in your room, if you are angry, the whole environment becomes very black, and it is terrifying for another person to come into the room. This is simply talking about how things can actually change now when your mind becomes negative – I am not talking about having a beautiful or ugly body due to past karma.

All this comes from your mind. Whether your physical appearance and environment are good or bad depends on your mind. The environment of a house depends on the minds of the people living in it. When you approach places where very pure holy beings are living, you receive an incredible blessing that makes your mind very tranquil. Even though you may not see the holy being, just by coming near his house, you become very peaceful and happy. The peaceful environment comes from his living in pure moral conduct.

In a crowded place such as a market or restaurant, hundreds of different people may look at one

person. Some may find him ugly and disturbing to their mind, while others see him as enchanting. There is just one object, one person, but different people see him in different ways and their minds are affected differently by him. If that ugly person existed from his own side, without depending on the minds of the people looking at him, he would appear ugly to everybody who ever saw him.

It is the same with someone who looks attractive. If that attractive person exists from his own side, without depending on the minds of the people looking at him, he should appear attractive to every living being. This person should even appear attractive all the time. If you see someone as very attractive the first time you meet them, if that attractiveness exists from its own side, no matter how many years you live together, he should appear that way all the time. In the same way, if you live for years with someone you found ugly when you first met, that should never change; he should always appear that way to you. However, things do change because how things appear to you depends on how you think.

When you don't remember the kindness of your mother, you think your mother is harming you when she scolds you. You don't think that it is kind of her to advise you to be a good person so that you can have a good life. When you don't recognize her scolding and beating as kind, you may see her as ugly. But as soon as you recognize that her scolding you and showing you your mistakes is a method to help you become a good person, you see your mother as kind. Once you see that what she is doing benefits your mind and your life, even though she still does the same actions, because your attitude has changed, you see how very kind her beating and scolding are – and they don't hurt so much. Even though it may still hurt physically, it doesn't hurt your mind as before. You get a warm feeling.

The way you see your own body, the external environment and other people depends on your present way of thinking. It depends very much on the way you think now – without need to talk of past karma. Past karma determines whether you have a pleasant or unpleasant environment, but even now so much – even this place! – comes from your mind. Some people see this as a good place; others see this same place as terrible. For some the weather here is too cold; for others it is fine. Living in the same house in the same city, some people find the weather unbearably hot, while others find it comfortable. This all comes from the minds of the different people.

In the *Precious Garland*, the great pandit Nagarjuna says:

From non-virtue all suffering arises, as well as the unfortunate realms of the evil transmigratory beings. From virtue all happiness arises, as well as the happy transmigratory beings.

Because hell, preta and animal beings don't have the opportunity to accumulate virtue, they accumulate non-virtue, and so are called evil transmigratory beings. Virtue and non-virtue simply refer to the inner factor of the different types of mind. Gods and humans have lighter sufferings than other beings, with more opportunity to experience happiness, so are called happy transmigratory beings.

Nagarjuna also says: All our happiness and suffering come from our own mind. When we meet a desirable object, a happy feeling arises. When we meet an undesirable object, a suffering feeling arises. When we meet an indifferent object, a feeling of indifference arises. From morning until night our feelings vary like this, according to the different objects we meet. A happy feeling may come, then a suffering feeling, then an indifferent feeling. Even in one day a variety of happy and unhappy feelings arise in dependence upon the different conditions – place, food, clothing, beings – we meet. There are

those you like, those you don't, and those about which you feel indifferent. Suffering feelings arise when you meet a person you dislike, you are in a filthy place or you receive undesirable food. It is the opposite when you meet a friend or are in a good place – a happy feeling arises. These conditions and feelings of happiness and suffering all come from your mind. Feelings of suffering or happiness depend very much on your present way of thinking, whether your present thought is suffering or happy. A practitioner of Mahayana thought-training can change his attitude so that miserable conditions give rise to happy feelings.

Happiness and suffering all come from your mind, from your karma. All these conditions for happiness and suffering are the result of karma you have accumulated in the past. In daily life, all happy and unhappy feelings, and the different conditions come from the mind and karma of each individual sentient being. In the same way, the hells – the heaviest sufferings and undesirable conditions explained in the sutras of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha and in the Lam-rim – come from the evil mind. This is why in *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, Shantideva says:

Who has created the burning iron ground? From where have the multitudes of flames come? It is said by Shakyamuni Buddha: All this comes from the evil mind.

The conclusion is that everything depends on your mind. You can see that the whole key is your attitude. All the secret methods to obtain happiness and eliminate suffering are there in your attitude. Making a decision to change your attitude and develop your mind is extremely important. If you change your mind from evil attitudes such as selfishness and so forth, there is enlightenment; on this mind you will be able to establish peerless happiness, with total cessation of suffering. If you do not change your attitude from self-cherishing and other disturbing thoughts, instead of the peerless happiness of enlightenment, you then experience the heaviest suffering of the hells.

Having fewer problems and more peace of mind depends on your attitude in daily life, on how much you are able to practice the good heart each day, on how much you are able to transform your mind into virtue. As long as you do not protect your mind from disturbing thoughts but allow your mind to be controlled by them, your samsara has no end, the problems and confusion of life have no end. By protecting your mind from disturbing thoughts, you purify previous negative karmas and obscurations, and stop creating new causes of suffering. In this way your samsara has an end.

All our dreams at night also come from our own mind. Frightening dreams of being caught in a fire, drowned, beaten or killed by others are appearances of the hallucinated mind. If, before going to sleep, you talk about an enemy and get angry, or read stories and see pictures that cause attachment to arise, dreams of anger or attachment will come during the night. If you practice much virtue in the daytime, good dreams will come at night. Dreams come from the impressions planted on your mind by the way you spend the day. Depending on these impressions, you dream of fighting, actions of attachment, being in beautiful or terrifying places.

We are living here now at Tushita because of good karma from the past. The impression planted on our minds has now actualized as this good karma. If this house suddenly burst into flames and we were caught with fire all around us, as with a frightening dream, this would be the result of impressions left on our consciousness by previous negative karma, such as harming others out of anger, selfishness and so forth. The impression of this negative karma would be actualized in the fire. There are different

karmas: sometimes we live in a very miserable place, at other times in an incredibly beautiful place. The difference with the hells is simply that the conditions there are much more miserable.

Some years ago, somewhere in America, perhaps New York, there was a plane carrying more than three hundred people. Normally before a plane leaves, the engines and other parts are checked to make sure that the flight will be safe. Nothing faulty was found when this plane was checked. The stewards and stewardesses are trained well in their jobs, which include opening the doors. However, after the plane landed at the airport, somehow they could not open the doors at all. The doors are very hard to open from the outside and the stewardesses could not open them at all from the inside. They were completely stuck.

Suddenly the cockpit burst into flames and the pilot shouted for help. Everything inside the plane was completely burned. The airport emergency crews tried to open the doors but they had become too hot; the doors could not be opened for a long time. When they finally opened them, they saw that all the people had died while trying to escape. All the bodies were piled up on top of each other. For forty minutes the whole thing became the hells even though no one expected such a thing to happen.

Meditate in this way: In extremely hot weather you cannot meditate – to do even ten minutes of meditation is very difficult. You feel so hot and lazy that you cannot even sit up. Or when the small fire of an incense stick touches your body it is so painful that you cannot concentrate. Think of yourself as born now into the sufferings of one of the hot hells, being cooked in a large pot of boiling water, standing on the red-hot burning iron ground, or trapped in the red-hot burning iron house with no way to escape. “If I were born now in the hot hells, it would be unbearable. There would be no opportunity at all to practice Dharma.” Check whether you could practice Dharma with that kind of suffering. If you were there now, could you practice Dharma? You couldn’t! No way!

Think in a similar way about the cold hells. In the winter-time you could not sit outside naked and meditate. Even putting your hand in the freezer of a refrigerator for five minutes is so unbearable that you cannot think of anything except the pain. Think: “If I were in the cold hells now, it would be impossible to practice Dharma. There would be no opportunity at all.” Then return to your present state as a human being: “How fortunate I am to have the freedom to practice Dharma through not being born in the hells!” (The teachings say through not being born, but it does not necessarily relate only to the birth-time; relate it to this present time.)

Also think: “Today, through not being born in the hells and having the freedom to practice Dharma, I can accomplish the three great purposes. Within these twenty-four hours, within this hour, even within this minute, I have the freedom to obtain whichever I wish of the three great purposes. I have the freedom to accomplish as many of the three great purposes as I want, for as long as I want, whenever I want.”

You can now see that this freedom to practice Dharma through not being born in the hells is unbelievably precious. Adding to practice Dharma makes you feel that having this freedom is more precious. “This freedom is much more precious than having diamonds piled up to the size of my body.” Comparing the value of this freedom to material wealth gives you more feeling for how precious it is because you can see the value of material objects much more easily than the value of this freedom. With this freedom you are able to obtain the first great purpose: a good rebirth in your next life. This

present freedom to obtain a good rebirth because you have not been born in the hells and can practice Dharma is much more precious than diamonds piled up to the size of your body.

The second great purpose is to achieve the sorrowless state, nirvana. “This freedom with which I can achieve the sorrowless state is much more precious than diamonds piled up to the size of this Dharamsala mountain. And having the freedom to achieve enlightenment through not being born in the hells is much more precious than diamonds equaling the number of atoms of this earth.” Even if you possess diamonds or dollars equaling the number of atoms of this earth, if you don’t have the freedom to practice Dharma through not being born in the hells, as a preta, or as an animal, what is the use? Even if you have that many diamonds, with that alone you cannot achieve enlightenment; you cannot achieve any of the great purposes. There are many rich pretas and rich nagas with storerooms of jewels under lakes, but they have no opportunity to achieve enlightenment, or even the sorrowless state. Think of these details. “With this freedom I can accomplish any of the three great purposes at any time.” This is an incredible freedom.

We regard even one tiny diamond on a ring as very precious and are very careful not to lose it. But we don’t have as much feeling for the value of this precious human body – not even five rupees worth of feeling. We feel five rupees has some value – we can buy some chocolates or icecream with it – but we don’t feel that this perfect human rebirth has even that much value. Even though we have wasted so much of our perfect human rebirth through not making it meaningful, we don’t feel any loss – not even as much loss as we would feel if we lost five rupees. This is because we have not realized the preciousness of this perfect human rebirth qualified with eight freedoms and ten richnesses.

Compared to diamonds, the perfect human rebirth is unbelievably precious. Having the freedom to practice Dharma through not being born in the hells is itself unbelievably precious. “If I waste this freedom for even one day, there is no question that it is an unbelievably great loss. If I don’t practice Dharma for one day, this is an inexpressibly great loss. Even one hour passed without practicing Dharma, especially bodhichitta, is an unbelievable loss a much greater loss than having lost diamonds equaling the number of atoms of this earth.” If you lost one diamond, you would feel a great loss, so to lose that many diamonds would be unbelievable. One hour of your life passed without making it meaningful by practicing Dharma, especially bodhichitta, is a much greater loss. Make the determination to practice bodhichitta continuously, without wasting your life for even a minute. In this way your life becomes the most meaningful.

Recognize that this human body with the freedom to practice Dharma through not being born in the hells is extremely precious. With this precious human body with eight freedoms and ten richnesses, by studying and understanding Dharma, one has great opportunity to purify all the negative karmas generated in the past, practice virtue and renounce the cause of suffering. Instead of feeling depressed, one should feel happiness at having the opportunity to do all this with this precious human body.

The second freedom: not being born as a preta

The second of the eight freedoms is the freedom to practice the holy Dharma through not being born as a preta. Think of when your stomach is empty and you are very hungry because you didn’t get your lunch at the right time. Even though there is food and you are going to get it, because you are very hungry, you cannot meditate, cannot think of Dharma. Even before the food is ready you have to eat something – you cannot reflect on the holy Dharma. If you did not get food for one month, with that

much suffering of hunger it would be impossible for you to practice holy Dharma. In the same way that when you have great pain, you cannot think of anything except the pain, you could not think of anything except your hunger. Even when you are not in danger of starvation, if your food is delayed a little and you are hungry, you cannot think of anything else. You cannot meditate on the Lam-rim. If with small sufferings of hunger and thirst you cannot meditate or practice Dharma, think of being born as a preta, a suffering being whose life is constantly filled with hunger and thirst. Hunger and thirst are the major sufferings of pretas. For five hundred years they are unable to find one bowl of food – even food as small as a mustard seed. Besides not seeing water for many years, they cannot even find the mark of water for hundreds of years.

Think: “If I were born now as a suffering preta being, it would be impossible to practice holy Dharma. How fortunate I am to have the freedom to practice Dharma through not being born in the preta realm. With this freedom, within these twenty-four hours, within this hour, even within this minute, I have the incredible freedom to obtain whichever of the three great purposes I want. If I wish, I can continuously create the cause to receive a perfect body in my next life. During this whole hour, I have the opportunity to create the cause to obtain the sorrowless state. And, if I wish, I can achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. In this one hour, by practicing bodhichitta, I have the freedom to create the cause of enlightenment.”

As a result of thinking like this, you get a very strong feeling of how precious and important this body with this freedom is. “If I waste for one hour, even for one minute, this freedom of having the opportunity to practice the holy Dharma through not being born in the preta realm, it is an unbelievable waste.” Meditate on this freedom, thinking that with it you can achieve any of the three great purposes, and that this freedom is much more precious than diamonds equaling the number of atoms of this earth. “Wasting one hour, even one minute, by not practicing holy Dharma is a much greater loss than losing diamonds equaling the number of atoms of this earth. Therefore, without wasting even a minute, by practicing bodhichitta, I am going to make my life highly meaningful.”

As you go over each of the freedoms, recognizing the freedoms you have and what you can do with them, you realize that the body with these freedoms is extremely precious. You then determine to make your life highly meaningful by practicing bodhichitta.

The third freedom: not being born as an animal

“If I were now one of the slugs that come out on the road when it rains, or one of the goats that are chased down the road to the butcher by the Indians, what would it be like?” Visualize yourself as one of these animals and then ask yourself whether you would have the opportunity to practice the holy Dharma or not. It would be impossible!

A parrot can repeat mantras. However, as a human being, you can understand if somebody explains the meaning of om mani padme hung, whereas a parrot cannot. There is no way a parrot can understand that mani means method and padme, wisdom. There is no way to make a parrot understand the wisdom of absolute truth. There is no way these pitiful goats, pigs and sheep can understand emptiness, even if you scream in their ears for years.

In some ways, meditating on the eight freedoms and ten richnesses also becomes a meditation on compassion because you have to think about the problems of the other sentient beings who do not

have the opportunity to practice holy Dharma. When you think about the animals and humans who don't have the opportunity to practice Dharma, you feel much compassion for them. Your having the opportunity and incredible freedom they do not have becomes a great cause of generating compassion. There is no choice: compassion has to arise. "If I were like these animals now, I would have no opportunity at all to practice the holy Dharma. Not being born as an animal but as a human with the freedom to practice Dharma, I am very fortunate!" Again, think that with this freedom you can achieve the three great purposes; and come to the conclusion to make your life highly meaningful through practicing bodhichitta.

The fourth freedom: not being born as a barbarian

The fourth freedom is having the freedom to practice Dharma through not being born as a barbarian. Being a barbarian is much worse than being blind because, even if you are blind, you can still understand and have faith in karma and in the refuge of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Tibetan lay people who are blind still do many practices, such as reciting prayers and Chenrezig mantras, and are able to accumulate much merit because they have faith in refuge and karma; they do these practices with faith that mantras can purify negative karmas and that making offerings to the Triple Gem results in happiness. So, even though they may not know the entire Lam-rim, to a certain extent they can make their life meaningful. This makes a big difference. The physical eye cannot see things, but the mind is rich, not poor. Even though they may have perfect senses, barbarians are actually poorer because they have no opportunity to practice Dharma.

"If I were a barbarian now, just as a blind person cannot tell the right road from the wrong one, I would not be able to see." With no understanding at all of the causes of happiness and suffering, your mind would be completely dark. There would be no understanding of karma and refuge, and no faith in them. Your mind would be like a completely dark room. Everything barbarians do to try to obtain happiness is wrong and results only in problems and suffering. Think back to the West, to the people in the cities there – to your own parents and relatives. Even the Indians here in Dharamsala have no understanding of Dharma at all, no faith in refuge and karma. "If I were like them now, what would it be like? There would be no opportunity to practice holy Dharma."

The great pandit Chandragomin uses a very effective example to explain the nature of worldly beings, who work only for this life. A small bunch of grass is growing near a well. Seeing the bunch of grass, a cow thinks: "If I can eat that bunch of grass, I'll be happy." Because of attachment to that small bunch of grass, she runs over to eat it, and falls down the well. Attachment to the bunch of grass, rather than leading to enjoyment, results in the cow falling down the well. Chandragomin says that worldly beings with desire for this life are just like this cow.

Worldly beings cling to the happiness of this life and work for it with their body, speech and mind. Worldly dharma and holy Dharma are quite different. Any action of the body, speech and mind done with worldly concern, clinging to the happiness of this life, is worldly dharma, or non-virtue. Mantras and prayers may be holy Dharma, but if a person recites these out of worldly concern, his action becomes worldly dharma, not holy Dharma. Actions done with renunciation of this life, without worldly concern, are pure, holy Dharma.

Dromtonpa once asked Lama Atisha: "What is the result of actions done with ignorance, anger and attachment? And of actions not done with ignorance, anger and attachment?" Lama Atisha answered:

“Actions done with ignorance, anger and attachment bring rebirth in the lower realms as an evil transmigratory being. Actions done with an attitude not possessed by the three poisonous minds bring the result of rebirth as a happy transmigratory being.”

To understand Lama Atisha’s answer, look at the human beings who have no understanding of Dharma at all, no faith in refuge or karma. Simply think back to the people in your own city in the West. Day and night they think of nothing more than this life. They are concerned about nothing more than the happiness of a few years of life, or a few months. All day and night they keep themselves busy with this motive of worldly concern. You can see that is all non-virtue, and Lama Atisha answered the question as to its result. All activities of body, speech and mind done with an attitude of worldly concern result in rebirth in the lower realms as a suffering transmigratory being.

Because there is no understanding of karma and also no faith in refuge, no thought to purify arises. Such people have no opportunity to purify the obscurations and negative karmas accumulated in the past, no opportunity to practice holy Dharma. You can see this very clearly in the example of the cow wishing to get the grass at the edge of the well. The result is that she falls down the well. Like this, the result of all work done for the happiness of this life, since the method is non-virtue, is to fall down into the lower realms. Even if you show worldly people the teachings of karma and refuge, or give them purification methods such as Vajrasattva, they cannot understand or accept them. Therefore, they have no opportunity to practice Dharma. Put yourself in their place: “If I were like this, what would it be like? There would be no opportunity at all to practice Dharma. How fortunate I am to have the freedom to practice the holy Dharma through not being born as a barbarian.”

Even though you do create negative karma, you have the opportunity to purify it. Because you understand and have faith in karma and refuge, you have the opportunity to practice Dharma; you know there is a solution. Understanding and faith, which means Dharma wisdom, give you the opportunity to practice so that you can accomplish your wish for happiness.

Do the rest of the meditation as before.

The fifth freedom: not being born as a long-life god

The fifth freedom is the freedom to practice Dharma through not being born as a long-life, or worldly, god. “If I were born as a form realm god, such as a long-life god, it would be like a deep sleep. I would have recognition of birth and death but nothing else. There would be no opportunity to practice Dharma if I were now a worldly god.” If you don’t understand the example of a long-life god, think of someone who sleeps all day and night, with no opportunity to practice Dharma. “How fortunate I am to have the opportunity to practice Dharma through not being born as a long-life god.”

Then do the rest of the meditation as before.

The sixth freedom: not being born as a heretic

The sixth freedom is having the freedom to practice Dharma through not being born as a heretic. A heretic is someone who says there are no Four Noble Truths, reincarnation, past and future lives or liberation from the bondage of karma and disturbing thoughts. Heretics may also believe that you can achieve liberation through self-inflicted punishment or that by sacrificing animals or killing people, you

can go to heaven. Heretics recognize the path shown by Buddha as a completely wrong path and the teachings of Buddha as evil. Their practices create only heavy negative karma, which causes them to be reborn in the lower realms. Their completely hallucinated beliefs as to what is the path to liberation, or heaven, cannot even protect them from the lower realms.

Heretics take poison to be medicine, and recognize medicine as poison. Being a heretic is like licking honey on the edge of a sword. The heretic is completely hallucinated, just like a person who is hallucinated due to drugs or spirit harms. Where there is a precipice, they see a beautiful garden. Believing completely in the beautiful garden, they run there and actually fall down from the precipice.

“If I were now a heretic, there would be no opportunity at all to practice Dharma.” If you explain karma, refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, or emptiness to heretics, they cannot accept them and become angry, so they have no opportunity to practice virtue and abandon non-virtue. “How fortunate I am to have the freedom to practice the holy Dharma through not being born as a heretic. I am extremely fortunate not to be a heretic.”

Then do the rest of the meditation.

The seventh freedom: not being born where no buddha has descended

The seventh freedom is having the freedom to practice Dharma through not being born in a place where no buddha has descended. Try to imagine this. In such a place there would be no teachings at all, so no opportunity to practice Dharma. Even if you were born as a human being, it would be useless. What could you do? It would be the same as being born as a dog. There would be no opportunity at all to practice holy Dharma. In such a place there would be no particular advantage in being born as a human. “How fortunate I am to have the opportunity to practice Dharma through not being born in a place where no buddha has descended.”

The eighth freedom: not being born as a fool

The eighth freedom is the freedom to practice Dharma through not being born as a fool. Think of mentally handicapped people; they cannot do anything—not even recite a mantra. They have no opportunity at all to practice Dharma. They know just enough to move their body, but that is about all. Fools have just enough mental capacity to be living beings, but little else. They cannot even offer service to others. “If I were born like this, even if I lived one hundred years, it would be completely useless. There would be no opportunity at all to practice Dharma. How fortunate I am to have the freedom to practice the holy Dharma through not being born as a fool.”

The ten riches

The first richness: being born as a human being

The first of the ten riches is being born as a human being. A human being is generally defined as one who is able to speak and understand. But, from the Dharma point of view, the real human being is the person who prepares for the happiness beyond this life, up to enlightenment. This entails much more than just being able to speak and understand.

Without receiving this richness of being a human, there would be no opportunity to practice the holy Dharma. “How fortunate I am that at this time, as a human being, I have received the freedom to

practice Dharma. With this richness I can accomplish any of the three great purposes I wish, at any time – within these twenty-four hours, within this hour, within this minute. This richness is much more precious than diamonds equalling the number of atoms of this earth. Wasting this by not practicing holy Dharma for an hour, or even a minute, is a greater loss than losing that many precious diamonds.”

The second richness: being born in a religious country

The second richness is being born in a religious, or central, country. There are two ways to think of this: in terms of place and of existence of the teachings. If you had not received this richness of being born in a religious country with all the teachings of Buddhadharma, there would be no opportunity at all to receive teachings. They would not be available, and thus there would be no opportunity to practice Dharma.

This richness involves not being in a country where there are only Hinayana teachings, so that you can achieve the sorrowless state, or where there are Paramitayana teachings, but where there is the quick path of Vajrayana, so that you can achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Thinking in detail of being in a religious country makes you appreciate more and more how precious this richness is. The more you know, the stronger you feel its value, as if you possess diamonds or gold. Meditating in detail is very effective for your mind and makes you feel more fortunate. By recognizing the incredible richness you have through being in a religious country, you become happier and happier

The third richness: being born with perfect organs

The third richness is being born with perfect organs. If you are deaf, you cannot hear the teachings, though in the West there is more possibility of hearing them if you have all the right equipment. In Los Angeles, when a newsman was reading the news on television, I saw on one side a woman giving the news to deaf people with mudras, with sign language. I found this very interesting, and extremely kind. Using the various methods developed in the West such as sign language or braille, a deaf or blind person may be able to understand Dharma to some extent. However, I think the details of very profound subjects may be more difficult for them to understand.

Imperfect organs also include missing limbs. This may be because this is one reason a person may be refused ordination. A person who is deaf, missing a limb and so forth cannot be granted the thirty-six vows or higher ordinations. According to the Theravadins, such a person does not have the requisite body for the pratimoksha vows. Also those having both male and female sexes, or neither, cannot receive ordination.

“How fortunate I am to have received this richness to practice Dharma through not being born with imperfect organs. With this richness, I can accomplish the three great purposes.” Meditate on this as before.

The fourth richness: being free of the five extreme actions

The fourth richness is not having committed the five extreme actions. These are the five uninterrupted negative karmas of killing your mother or father, killing an arhat, causing blood to flow from a buddha, and causing disunity among the sangha. Other negative karmas, even if you have accumulated them in this life, can be interrupted by other negative or positive karma before you experience the ripening aspect result of rebirth in the lower realms. You may have accumulated the negative karma to be

reborn in the preta realm but other karma to be born as an animal or human being may become stronger at the death time, and you then experience that result. In other words, the karma to be reborn as a preta is interrupted by the other karma so that you do not have to experience the preta realm right after the intermediate stage.

These five uninterrupted negative karmas are such heavy negative karmas that if they are not purified before the death of the life in which they were committed, right after the intermediate stage one experiences the ripening aspect result of rebirth in the hells. Other karmas cannot interrupt this so that one experiences other results after the intermediate stage. One cannot take a preta or any other rebirth.

Having committed any of the five uninterrupted negative karmas is also an obstacle to ordination; such a person cannot be granted ordination. This is one of the questions asked at the beginning of the ceremony, before ordination is granted.

Generally speaking, this heavy karma makes it more difficult to generate realizations of the path to enlightenment. Strictly speaking, especially in the Nyingma sect, the definition of an extreme action is accumulating non-virtue. With the stricter definition, you would have this fourth richness only while your actions were indifferent or if you always lived in virtue. In this case, to avoid extreme action you would have to accumulate virtue with every action: sleeping, eating, walking, sitting. This strict definition persuades you to do this.

You should rejoice: “How fortunate I am to have this richness of not having committed these extreme negative karmas.” Then do the rest of the meditation as before.

The fifth richness: having devotion to the teachings

The fifth richness is having devotion to the teachings, particularly to the Lam-rim teachings. With much devotion to the Lam-rim and inspiration to practice it, your mind changes. If you don't have this devotion and inspiration, you become thick-skulled and careless. When you hear different Lam-rim subjects, if you think: “Oh, yes, yes, I know that! I have heard that a hundred times!” no matter how much you listen, the teachings won't move your mind. Your mind will be like a rock under the ocean, which can stay there one billion years but still be the same rock. The outside gets wet, but nothing else happens. Even if you hear the Lam-rim and thought-training teachings a hundred times, your mind will be like this.

You should not let your mind become like a rock under the ocean, or like leather wrapped around butter. In Tibet there is a custom of wrapping salted butter in animal skin, perhaps to stop it going rotten, as butter can be kept like this for many years. The leather becomes very hard and the whole thing looks like a football. There is a Tibetan saying: “Dry leather can be subdued by butter, but butter-leather cannot be subdued by butter.” In Tibet, in order to use dry animal skins to make shoes and the bowls in which tea is mixed into tsampa, they have to be softened. To do this a lot of butter is put on the dry skin and then, in the hot sun, the Tibetans knead it in very strongly with their feet. After some time the leather becomes soft and extremely flexible. It is then cut up and used to make different articles.

This very dry leather can be subdued, or softened, by putting butter on it; however, the leather sack that holds butter stays in contact with butter for years and years but is always dry. The saying means

that an evil being can be subdued by the holy Dharma, but one who is thick-skulled about Dharma cannot be subdued. It is very dangerous to have a mind like this. When other tantra or sutra teachings, such as the *Abhidharmakosha*, do not subdue your mind, the Lam-rim is the only teaching that can change it; the Lam-rim is your last chance. If your mind becomes thick-skulled in relation to even the Lam-rim teachings, it will be very difficult to subdue your mind. There is no other method.

If you have much devotion to the Lam-rim, you have much wish to practice. Because of this practice, your mind changes, realizations come and you are able to make your life highly meaningful. It is very important to have devotion to the Lam-rim teachings.

Again feel great joy as you think: “How fortunate I am to have this richness of having devotion to the Lam-rim teachings.” Then do the rest of the meditation.

The sixth richness: being born when a buddha has descended

The sixth richness is being born in a time when buddha has descended. To remember the four great aeons is very effective here. After this earth and this universe completely disappear, there will be empty space for one great eon. Then the evolution of the whole universe – with the three lower realms, the southern continent, the realm of the worldly gods and so forth – takes one great eon. The universe exists for one great eon, followed by its degeneration, which takes another great eon.

During the period that the length of human life is increasing from ten years to 84,000 years, no buddha descends. This is the dark age, or dark eon. Buddha descends only in the period when the lifespan is decreasing, which is much shorter than the other period. Also, the other human continents (the eastern, western and northern continents), do not experience buddha descending and showing the twelve events.

“How fortunate I am to have this richness of being born in a time when Buddha has descended, with the opportunity to practice the holy Dharma.” Again, do the rest of the meditation.

The seventh richness: being born when the teachings have been revealed

The seventh richness is being born in a time when the teachings have been revealed. Even if a buddha descends, immediately after he becomes enlightened, he may show the aspect of passing away into the sorrowless state, so no teaching would be given. This sometimes happens. If you were born in such a time, there would be no opportunity to practice holy Dharma. Sometimes buddha does not give verbal teachings after achieving enlightenment, but works for other sentient beings by sending beams from his holy body. If this had happened with Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, we would not have our present opportunity to practice Dharma; we have this opportunity now because Buddha did teach and his followers recorded the teachings. A buddha’s descent does not necessarily mean the opportunity to practice Dharma.

At this time, not only has buddha descended but he has also revealed the teachings, so you have this richness. Think: “How fortunate I am !” Remembering the three great purposes, do the rest of the meditation on how precious this richness is.

The eighth richness: being born when the complete teachings exist

The eighth richness is that the teachings still exist. Like just making it onto a plane before it leaves, we have just made it. We haven't arrived too early and we haven't missed it completely. If we were born too late to receive the teachings – when all the Tibetan lamas had passed away and no one could reveal the teachings of the complete path to enlightenment – it would be very difficult on this earth. Even if you were born as a human being, it would be extremely difficult to plant the seed of the entire path to enlightenment. Besides training your mind in the complete teachings, it would be very difficult even to hear the teachings of the complete path.

Even though many other Buddhist countries might exist, this wouldn't mean that you could receive the complete Lam-rim teachings, without mentioning extensive tantric teachings. Some teachings might exist in other countries but, since the complete teaching from guru devotion up to enlightenment would not, even if you trained your mind in the path, you could actualize only part of it, only some of the realizations. You could not achieve enlightenment. We are in the time of flickering, like a candle flame just before it goes out. There is still a little light, though not as much as before. Like just catching a train or plane, we have just caught these teachings.

Seeing how even in the past year so many lamas have passed away one after another, we can understand that we have less opportunity to receive the complete teachings. Before, even if one lama didn't have time to give a teaching, another could give it. There were many choices from amongst those who were holders of the complete teachings of Hinayana, Paramitayana and Vajrayana. There were many perfect, qualified gurus who could reveal the necessary teachings and lead a disciple, according to his capacity, to whatever goal he wished to achieve. Even now both teachings, the infallible understanding of the meaning of the teachings and also the realizations, exist in the holy mind of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and in the minds of many other high lamas and meditators. Experiential understanding and also infallible intellectual understanding of the entire teachings do exist. Many meditators nowadays are experimenting on the Lam-rim and tantric paths and developing realizations. Feel great joy at receiving this richness of the existence of both teachings.

The ninth richness: being able to follow the teachings

The ninth richness is being able to follow the teachings. The actual definition of following, or entering, the teaching is having refuge in the mind. When refuge is actualized in your mind, you have actually entered the teaching of Buddha. Refuge is the door to the teaching of Buddha. The beneficial fear of samsara is one cause of taking refuge; another is devotion to Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. To rely completely upon Buddha, Dharma and Sangha is the definition of refuge. Understanding the qualities of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and how they are able to guide you, you take refuge in them. With these two causes (fear of samsaric suffering – either of the three lower realms or the entire samsara – and devotion to Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, with complete reliance upon them), you have entered the Dharma. This, rather than simply listening to teachings, is the actual meaning of entering the teaching.

In many places on this earth, no matter how much someone may want to receive teachings on Buddhadharma and practice them – perhaps after finding some Dharma books in a shop – there is nobody in their country they can ask for instruction. No matter how desperately they may want to practice, there is nobody who can guide them completely – in bodhichitta, emptiness or the general

path. Even though from his own side the person may have much inspiration to practice, because the teachings do not exist in that country, it is extremely difficult to find such a guide. There is no one with the complete experience and also the infallible understanding of the whole teaching of the path.

I find it very useful to meditate in the following way. You Western people first work in a job in the West for many years in order to save a lot of money. At considerable expense, you then come here to Dharamsala. After making it here to Dharamsala, you meet many obstacles and problems. You are often unhealthy, run out of money, have problems with your family or sometimes can't live here very long because of passport and visa problems. Even after coming all the way here, you encounter so many other obstacles. Sometimes you come here by accident, but many times you come purposely to receive teachings and learn how to have a better life. Even though there are many problems, without wasting time, you try to practice, receiving teachings and doing retreat. While you are here in the East where you have all the opportunities, you try as much as possible to practice Dharma.

The Tibetan Government opened the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamsala, India, not in the West, yet it is Westerners who study there, not the many Indians who live just here. They don't have to spend thousands of dollars to come to Dharamsala; they live so close that it would be easy for them to come to the Library. Here in Dharamsala, they are living near to His Holiness the Dalai Lama and many other high lamas, who came here to India more than twenty years ago. They are not living in the West, but in India. In each year, however, perhaps one or two Indians study for a few days at the Library; the rest of the people are from the West. You can see the different karma; this itself is an example of good and bad karma.

All the Buddhist teachings that made the land of Tibet holy, and through which so many Tibetan practitioners have achieved enlightenment in one brief lifetime, originated in India. And there are now many monasteries and geshe here. In the West, you have to invite geshe from India, which can be very difficult. There are unbelievable problems in getting a passport; it can take years and years. But there are plenty of geshe here in India – as many as you want. The entire teaching exists here. But how many Indians study Buddhadharma or come to the monasteries? How many become nuns or monks? You don't see any. Even though the teaching exists in this country, the Indians do not follow it. Because they do not try to meet the teachings, because they have not received the richness of following the teachings, they have no understanding and their minds do not develop from stage to stage, higher and higher.

You were not born in India, but somewhere completely different an unexpected, amazing place that is like something from another planet! Actually I was very surprised when I went to the West for the first time. I had been in Nepal during the time there were many hippies. Lama Yeshe and I arrived in Nepal during an interesting time. Wherever you went in Kathmandu, on every corner, you saw people with pale skins, as if they had dust on their bodies, dressed in all kinds of things. They were everywhere. Sometimes there were more hippies than Nepalese people. After some time, I think some Western countries told the Nepalese Government not to allow the hippies to stay. The Nepalese visa law was changed and there were then fewer and fewer of them.

At the beginning I didn't feel very much surprise that Westerners were coming to stay at Kopan and take teachings. Their trying something like this was not much of a surprise. However, when I went to the West and saw the houses in the cities (in Nepal the hippies lived in broken-down, smokey houses)

and the general conditions in Western countries, it seemed impossible that Westerners would think of Dharma. It seemed impossible that the thought to do something else, such as meet Dharma, could ever arise.

First of all, in the West there is such a great development of sense pleasures and, second, the customs and the environment are quite different. I was very shocked. Actually, in terms of Western living standards, culture and way of thinking, it seemed an impossible thing to have happened: for Westerners to think to live such a new life. It is an impossible thing, like a dream – but it happened!

Seeing the West made me feel greater joy and surprise that Dharma was spreading there, that changes were happening. You should rejoice at having this richness of being able to follow the teachings. In some ways, thinking back to your own country, you have much more cause for joy than Tibetans, for whom it is normal from birth always to have lamas nearby or to be near His Holiness the Dalai Lama. This is nothing unusual. In this sense it is more like a dream for Westerners. If you think back to your own country, the majority of the people there have never met Buddhadharma and their way of thinking opposes it completely. This should make you rejoice more and appreciate how precious the richness of following the teachings is.

Then do the rest of the meditation.

The tenth richness: having the necessary conditions to practice Dharma

The final richness is having others, out of compassion, help you to practice Dharma through providing the necessary conditions; and having a virtuous friend, out of compassion, reveal the teachings to you. You can relate this to both past and present teachings of the three vehicles. “In the past the virtuous friend, out of compassion, revealed to me whatever sutra teachings, tantric initiations and commentaries I wished.” It is good to remember both the present and the past. Feel great joy at having met the virtuous friend who, out of compassion, is revealing the teachings. “With this richness I can achieve the three great purposes.” Make the decision not to waste this precious human body qualified with eight freedoms and ten richnesses, but make it highly meaningful by constantly practicing bodhichitta.

When you meditate in detail on having met a compassionate guru to guide you, you should not think it sufficient to have met a guru revealing the graduated path of the small scope, so that you can receive a good rebirth in your next life. However, simply meeting a virtuous friend who can teach the infallible method by which you, the disciple, can definitely accomplish your wish to receive a perfect human rebirth in your next life is unbelievably fortunate. Even if you do not complete the path in this life, you can take a human rebirth again and continue to follow the path.

Remember that at this time there are many people in the world who want happiness now and in the future. However, even though they want to follow a spiritual path for peace of mind now and for future happiness, they meet a guru who is a non-virtuous friend.

Unless you create good karma, the cause of happiness – whether in this life or future lives – there is no way to experience happiness at all. For example, a person who lives by robbing banks or killing people may make money and become rich. To ordinary people in the world, who do not understand Dharma or karma, it looks as if that happiness has come from his profession of stealing or killing. Or if someone is a very successful butcher who makes a lot of money and has every comfort, to ordinary

people who do not understand the inner evolution, it looks as if his happiness comes from killing. It is the same with a successful businessman: for ordinary people who do not understand karma, it looks as if business is the principal cause of his happiness.

If it were true that happiness resulted from external factors such as these non-virtuous actions, the more negative karma you created, the more happiness and peace of mind you should experience. This is contradictory because peace of mind comes only by diminishing selfishness, desire, ignorance and anger. The more negative karma created out of selfish attitude and the three poisonous minds, the more selfishness, ignorance, anger and attachment develop. From beginningless rebirths until now, you have been suffering in samsara because you have always followed disturbing thoughts and created negative karma through these disturbing thoughts. The disturbing thoughts have not lessened and have continued until now.

For anyone to expect peace of mind and happiness when their actions follow disturbing thoughts and the dissatisfied mind is completely contradictory. Lama Tsongkhapa says in the *Great Lam-Rim Commentary*:

Following desire in the hope of gaining complete satisfaction is the most painful suffering of samsara. No matter how much you follow desire, the result is always greater suffering. As long as you follow desire, suffering has no end.

You try something, but don't get satisfaction. You try again, but don't get satisfaction. You try something else, but again don't get satisfaction. Your hope is to get full satisfaction, but as Lama Tsongkhapa says, as long as you follow desire, suffering has no end. This is the nature of life for everyone on this earth, non-human and even human. As soon as you stop following desire, however, confusion and suffering end. As long as you continue hoping for satisfaction, more and more problems come.

If peace of mind did increase and disturbing thoughts decrease as a person became more and more wealthy, millionaires would be the ones with realizations of renunciation, bodhichitta and emptiness. Only wealthy people would have these realizations. Since beggars are not wealthy, they could not be happy and would not have the opportunity to gain greater peace of mind through these realizations.

Ordinary people who do not understand karma may think that happiness comes from success in business or from other external conditions. Being a butcher by profession could be the condition for someone to be happy, since he obtains money from this, but it is not the principal cause. The principal cause of his having comfort and wealth is his good karma; the other factors are conditions. This is why someone with a very good education may have difficulty finding a job, while someone without much education may have a very happy life with a good job earning good money. It is not necessarily the person who is very smart, with many thousands of ideas, who succeeds.

For example, other people – and the person himself – might believe that a person's business will succeed because he is very smart and has many, many ideas as to what can be done. However, if he has not created the good karma to experience the result of happiness or success at that time, no matter how smart he is or how much education he has, there is no way he can succeed. Without dependence upon karma, there is no way to have success. This is why so many educated people who are intellectually clever and who, according to their own plan, should be more successful than others, in practice do

not succeed. For other people who are not brilliant, things may work out very well. Without creation of good karma, there is no way at all to gain happiness.

If it were dependent solely on education and intelligence, all smart, educated people should have happiness and success. However, there are many people, especially in the East, with no education at all, who cannot even sign their names, but who lead very successful lives. It is completely wrong and unreliable to believe that happiness comes from business, that the conditions for happiness are its principal cause. If you create good karma, you will definitely experience happiness as the result. As long as you do not destroy the good karma, it is one hundred percent reliable that you will experience the resultant happiness from that particular good karma.

Without dependence on the creation of good karma, there is no way to experience happiness in this life, or in future lives. Without the practice of moral conduct, there is no way to receive a good rebirth, the body of a happy transmigratory being, in your next life. If you as a disciple meet a non-virtuous friend who says that you don't need to practice moral conduct, since he does not reveal the infallible method, you will have no opportunity to receive the body of a happy transmigratory being in your next life. If you meet a non-virtuous friend who teaches his disciples that non-virtue, what is opposite to the moral conduct of the ten virtuous actions, should be practiced, that guru cannot save you even from the lower realms. He simply leads you to the lower realms.

Many people practice a spiritual path because they want to find peace of mind but when they try to find a guru, meet a non-virtuous friend. They then have no opportunity to receive even the body of a happy transmigratory being in their next life. You should feel very fortunate to have met a virtuous friend who can show even the infallible method to receive the body of a happy transmigratory being in your next life. So many gurus talk only about the happiness of this life, never about preparing for the happiness of future lives. If the practice the guru reveals results in good karma, there is a hope of creating the cause of happiness through that practice.

Many spiritual seekers on this earth have met a guru, but one who has no understanding of the Four Noble Truths, so is not qualified to teach them. Or who has no understanding of the cause of suffering, and not even the correct intellectual understanding of the infallible right view, or emptiness. Since what he believes is emptiness is wrong view, there is no way his disciple can have the correct realization of emptiness, nor even an intellectual understanding of it. As there is no remedy to samsara, it is impossible for the disciple to cut the root of samsara and achieve the sorrowless state.

Think of all the people who have met a non-virtuous friend who cannot lead them to the sorrowless state. "How fortunate I am to have met a virtuous friend qualified to show the entire path to the sorrowless state." Think of the many others who have not met a Mahayana virtuous friend who can show them the complete path to enlightenment. "How fortunate I am to have met a Mahayana virtuous friend."

Since it is uncertain when your death will happen, before your death, while you have all these opportunities through having a perfect human rebirth, you should practice as skillfully as possible. Of the ten richnesses, five come from your own side and five from the side of the place: being born in a religious country, when a buddha has descended and given teachings, when the complete teachings exist, and when there are qualified vajra gurus. During this short time that you have all these opportunities, you

should use every capability you have. You should be careful with your life and practice Dharma as carefully and skillfully as possible in order to make your life meaningful and of benefit to all sentient beings.

The perfect human body

If you check in detail like this, you will feel more and more fortunate. You will see that this body with these freedoms and riches is unbelievably precious. Each of these freedoms and riches is very difficult to receive. At this time you have a human body qualified with eight very rare freedoms and ten very rare riches. Think: “This is like a dream.” Until now, these eight freedoms and ten riches have always been missing. You have been born as a human being many times, but as a fool, a heretic, deaf and so forth, without all eight freedoms and ten riches. Even if you received some of the freedoms and riches, something has always been missing. “How fortunate I am to have received this precious human body qualified with all eight very rare freedoms and ten very rare riches. With these I can accomplish whichever I wish of the three great purposes.” Meditate on this.

“This perfect human rebirth is millions of times more precious than diamonds equalling the number of atoms of this earth.” When you compare, this perfect human rebirth is much more precious. Also think how wasting this perfect human rebirth is a much greater loss than losing that many diamonds. Make the decision: “I will practice bodhichitta continuously, without wasting this perfect human rebirth for an hour, or even a minute.”

Then meditate on its usefulness: With this perfect human rebirth you can achieve the three great purposes. If you wish to receive the body of a deva or human, you can accomplish this because you can create the cause by practicing moral conduct with this perfect human body. If you wish to have perfect enjoyments and comfort, you can obtain these because with this perfect human body you can practice charity. If you wish to have perfect helpers in your next life, you can achieve this because with this perfect human body you can create the cause by practicing patience.

Each time, think how incredibly meaningful this perfect human body is. If you wish to achieve the ultimate happiness of the sorrowless state, you can achieve it. Why? Because with this perfect human body you can practice the path of the three higher trainings (moral conduct, concentration and wisdom) and achieve the sorrowless state in your future lives – or even in this life. You can even achieve enlightenment if you wish, because with this body you can follow the Mahayana path by practicing bodhichitta and the six paramitas. “If I wish, I can achieve enlightenment quickly, within sixteen lifetimes, or even within this life.”

You have met the qualified vajra guru who can reveal the whole path, and the complete teaching that never betrays. Many of the secret teachings of the profound quickest path practiced by such great yogis as Milarepa and Lama Tsongkhapa in order to achieve enlightenment have already been revealed to you. You have already received Vajrayana teachings many times, especially those of highest yoga tantra, which show the quickest, most secret path by which many yogis were enlightened in one brief lifetime.

If, from your side, you don't practice correctly, that is one thing. Otherwise, you can definitely achieve enlightenment within sixteen lifetimes, in your next life, or even in this life. The only question is whether

from your side you practice correctly. You have the opportunity to achieve this because, through generating the preliminary of the three principles of the path with this perfect human rebirth, you can train your mind in the generation and completion stages of the tantric path.

In the *Great Lam-Rim Commentary* Lama Tsongkhapa mentions that it is much easier to generate bodhichitta in this particular world, with a human body from the southern continent, and that the bodhichitta generated is much more powerful. Human beings from the southern continent have various karmas, while humans from the other continents have similar karmas. All the human beings from the eastern continent, for example, have great and varied enjoyments. They are similar to the many people who say: “Oh, I have everything: many cars, an apartment, many friends, a swimming-pool, many televisions, a good job, a big family. I have everything, so why do I need Dharma? Why do I need to meditate? I’m not suffering.” This way of thinking stops them from practicing Dharma, from developing their minds and freeing themselves from samsara. I think it is like this in the eastern, western and northern continents. Because it is much more difficult to generate renunciation of samsara, it is very difficult for the humans from these continents to generate compassion for others and bodhichitta. And even if bodhichitta is generated, it is not as powerful as that generated by human beings in this southern continent.

As the mandala prayer says, the main enjoyment of the human beings from the western continent is the wish-granting cow and from the northern continent, uncultivated harvests. In these continents everyone is of the same class, with no rich and poor. (It is like certain parts of America, such as Florida, where all the families are rich.) Everything is fixed, with everybody having exactly the same length of life and so forth. Here in the southern continent, human beings have various karmas and various natures. Some have a very good heart and are incredibly generous; others are so miserly that they think about nothing except possessions and money. Some are so unbelievably impatient that almost everything they see makes them angry. While some are ignorant and unbelievably foolish, at the same time there are many who are very intelligent. In the southern continent there are many kinds of human beings.

Also, the length of life is not fixed, and there are different styles of living, rich and poor. Humans from the southern continent are able to experience in later life the result of good karma created earlier in that life. After some years or months, if it is powerful, one is able to experience the positive or negative karma one has accumulated. The humans from the other continents do not have a variety of characteristics as humans here do. Therefore, since in this continent it is much easier to see suffering, renunciation is generated more strongly and compassion arises very easily, and also bodhichitta. It is easiest to generate bodhichitta with this present human rebirth.

During the recent teachings His Holiness the Dalai Lama also mentioned that the requisite body to practice tantra is that of a human being from the southern continent as such a body is constituted of the six elements. Sperm, bone and marrow are the three substances received from the father; flesh, skin and blood are the three received from the mother. Such a body is needed for the practice of highest yoga tantra. While it is generally possible to generate bodhichitta in all six realms, the achievement of enlightenment in one lifetime through Vajrayana practice happens only with human beings from this southern continent, who have a body constituted of these six elements. Therefore, we should make highly meaningful our having such a perfect human body.

Meditating on the Lam-rim combines very well with reciting the Chenrezig mantra. His Holiness the Dalai Lama said that when your mind is very bored or distracted and you cannot focus your mind one-pointedly on yourself as the deity, you should do Lam-rim meditation. This stops superstition arising. If you simply continue reciting the mantra with a distracted mind, various delusions such as ignorance, anger, jealousy, pride and so forth will arise. Within that one-and-a-half-hour session on the meditation cushion, you may have recited mantra with your mouth while holding a mala in your hand, but in that one-and-a-half hours you will have created many negative karmas. Instead of purifying delusions or retreating from them, if you do not watch your mind, you retreat from virtue.

Anger may arise when you remember someone of whom you feel jealous, or the way some person you dislike spoke or acted badly towards you. When you remember his hurtful words and behaviour, anger may arise for several minutes, or even half an hour. Heresy towards holy objects might also arise, and you then create much heavy negative karma while sitting on your meditation cushion doing the session.

The commentary on the Chenrezig sadhana also explains that you should meditate on the Lam-rim while reciting the Chenrezig mantra. For example, you can meditate on bodhichitta. Generate compassion by thinking of the sufferings of other sentient beings, practice *tong-len* and so forth. His Holiness the Dalai Lama said that meditating on the Lam-rim protects the mind from delusions and negative karmas. It helps to control the mind and stop disturbing thoughts arising continuously. Having fewer disturbing thoughts arise allows you to focus longer with stable one-pointed concentration on the deity or seed syllable.

Recite the Chenrezig mantra while going over the eight freedoms and ten riches one by one. Be aware of each freedom and richness that allows you to practice the holy Dharma and remember the other people who do not have the freedom to practice Dharma. Recognize your own freedom and be aware of the three great purposes you can accomplish with it. Be aware of the great advantages of each of these freedoms and riches. After remembering each of them, conclude: “This human body is extremely precious. Without wasting time I must practice bodhichitta.”

After analytical meditation, do fixed meditation on the eight freedoms and ten riches. Going over them one by one, generate the feeling of how precious each is. Then do analytical and fixed meditation on the whole eighteen. “This body is qualified with eighteen very rare characteristics, the eight freedoms and ten riches. It has been extremely difficult to gather all eighteen. Previously some have always been missing. Now, just this once, all these eighteen extremely rare characteristics are gathered in this present body. It is unbelievably precious and like a dream.

“With this body, within twenty-four hours, I can accomplish whichever I wish of the three great purposes: the body of a happy transmigratory being in my next life, the sorrowless state or the peerless happiness of enlightenment. This perfect human body has the opportunity to accomplish whichever of these great purposes I want, whenever I want, as often as I want. With this perfect human body I can accomplish the three great purposes for the sake of all sentient beings. How precious it is!”

Think of all the material wealth that exists on this earth – all the dollars, jewels, silver, gold – and then compare it to your present perfect human body. “All other possessions on this earth, even wish-granting gems, are nothing.” Remember all the possessions in rich department stores and banks. Compared to the preciousness of this perfect human body, all other possessions are completely valueless, like

garbage. There is nothing more precious than this perfect human rebirth. Worldly people may use their human rebirth as a slave to material possessions, but a perfect human rebirth is much more precious than diamonds equaling the number of atoms of this earth. Wasting it by not practicing Dharma for one hour, or even one minute, is an unbelievable loss – a greater loss than losing that many diamonds. “Therefore I am going to practice bodhichitta continuously and make my life highly meaningful.” One-pointedly concentrate on how precious this perfect human rebirth is, with the awareness that with it you can accomplish the three great purposes. There is nothing more important than this perfect human body. While doing this one-pointed concentration, recite the Chenrezig mantra.

Think how extremely foolish it is, and what a great waste, that other people are using the perfect human rebirth they have received to create the cause of problems, in this life and in future lives. There is nothing crazier than wasting even a human rebirth, but especially a perfect human rebirth. “Others are foolish to do this. However, it is the same if I don’t practice Dharma, but use my perfect human rebirth to create negative karma, the cause of problems in this life and in future lives.”

After doing the fixed meditation, make the determination not to waste this opportunity, but to practice bodhichitta. A perfect human rebirth is highly meaningful because with it you can obtain whichever of the three great purposes you wish. If you wish to achieve the good body of a happy transmigratory being, with this perfect human rebirth you can create the cause by practicing moral conduct and charity, and praying. To receive a perfect human rebirth next life, you need especially to create all the eighteen causes through these practices. You can make the dedication to join the perfect human rebirth of your next life at the end of this life.

If you wish to achieve the sorrowless state, you can accomplish this because, with this perfect human rebirth, you can generate the fundamental path of the three higher trainings. If you wish to achieve enlightenment, you can accomplish this because, with this perfect human rebirth, you can create the cause by generating bodhichitta and training your mind in the Paramitayana. If you wish, you can even achieve enlightenment within sixteen lifetimes, three lifetimes, or even within this life, because with this perfect human body of the southern continent, composed of the six elements, you have the opportunity to follow the highest yoga tantra path.

You can follow the three general paths of renunciation, bodhichitta and right view, then the tantric path, particularly the highest yoga tantra path. Unless you do not practice correctly from your own side, there is no reason why you cannot achieve bodhichitta, and even enlightenment, in this very brief lifetime. There is a qualified vajra guru who can show you the complete general path and the particular path of highest yoga tantra, which can bring enlightenment in one very brief lifetime in such a degenerate time as this. Also, as well as the infallible intellectual understanding, the complete experiential understanding of the teaching exists.

Living with bodhichitta

The statues in Bodhgaya advised Lama Atisha that the quick way to achieve enlightenment is to practice bodhichitta. To train the mind in the ultimate good heart, bodhichitta, is also the best method for quick and extensive purification of negative karmas and extensive accumulation of merit in order to achieve enlightenment. Even if you know by heart all the secret, profound teachings of the first and second stages of tantra and can explain them extensively, and even if you practice them, without

bodhichitta this does not become the cause of enlightenment. You may be able to generate heat and bring the drop down, but these are general attainments, experienced even by Hindus, who do not have refuge in their minds. Without bodhichitta, nothing in tantric practice becomes the cause of enlightenment.

There are many stories of meditators who spent their lives meditating on tantra, generating themselves as deities such as Yamantaka, and were then born as pretas similar in aspect to their visualized deity. This happened due to their unskillful tantric practice. They focused only on tantra and forgot the Lam-rim practices of renunciation, bodhichitta and emptiness. Without Lam-rim practice or realizations, they practiced deity meditation and were born as very powerful, terrifying pretas. Lama Atisha told the story of one meditator who practiced the Hevajra tantra. He meditated on the generation stage, which is supposed to make it quicker to achieve enlightenment, but instead fell into the Hinayana path.

The way to make extremely meaningful this precious human body qualified with eight freedoms and ten riches, with which you can achieve the three great purposes, is by training your mind in bodhichitta. To make this precious human body most meaningful and most beneficial for yourself and all other sentient beings, train your mind in bodhichitta. You should not think that by doing some practice other than bodhichitta, you can achieve enlightenment quicker and complete the works for yourself and others.

After meditating on the three great purposes you can accomplish with this perfect human rebirth, meditate like this: “Every day from my birth until now, all the actions of my body, speech and mind have been done out of the selfish attitude, following worldly concern. None of these actions will become the cause of enlightenment, so I have wasted them. I have wasted so much of this highly meaningful perfect human rebirth.”

Again, try to feel that this is a greater loss than losing diamonds equaling the number of atoms of this earth. Try to feel an incredible loss. “So far, all the actions of my body, speech and mind have not become even the cause of liberation, because they have been done out of attachment and the dissatisfied mind. I have wasted so much of my highly meaningful perfect human rebirth. So far, none of my everyday actions have even become holy Dharma, the cause of happiness in future lives. My actions haven’t even become the cause of happiness. I have wasted so much of my meaningful perfect human rebirth.”

Even though we are trying to practice Dharma, it is very difficult for our actions to become holy Dharma. Most of our normal actions of sitting, walking, eating and sleeping do not become Dharma. Meditate like this on how much of our life has been wasted, how our actions have not even become Dharma. “If I had been practicing correctly and continuously from the time I met the virtuous friend and received Lam-rim teachings up to now, after so many years I would have generated bodhichitta, or at least renunciation of samsara. By now I would have reached the first, if not the second, stage of tantra.”

Thinking of how we have wasted our time and not made any progress makes us more aware of how we live our life. We should be sure to make our life meaningful through practicing Dharma and thus have accomplishment in this life. As Kuntu Lama Rinpoche explains in *Admiring Bodhichitta*:

When you eat, eat with bodhichitta. When you stand, stand with bodhichitta. When you sit, sit with bodhichitta. When you sleep, sleep with bodhichitta. When you look, look with bodhichitta. When you speak, speak with bodhichitta.

During the entire twenty-four hours, every action you do should be done out of bodhichitta, not for yourself but for others. Do every action—meditating or whatever—out of bodhichitta. As much as possible, try to make every action become a remedy to self-cherishing thought. If your daily actions oppose self-cherishing thought, they become the cause of a good rebirth and whatever happiness you wish in your next life, the cause of liberation from samsara, and the cause of enlightenment, which is the greatest advantage. All your actions then become Dharma. If your actions are against self-cherishing thought, they become the method to achieve all success. As long as your actions do not oppose self-cherishing thought, even if they are not done out of worldly concern and become holy Dharma, they are of limited advantage and bring limited happiness.

We should focus our whole life on this point. We should plan to live our life with this attitude, then all temporal and ultimate success will follow. All your wishes and those of others succeed because of this attitude. Whether you wish to have quick realization of the path or peace of mind and fewer problems in your everyday life, doing all your actions out of bodhichitta (which means opposing self-cherishing thought) is the most important and skillful practice. This one solution cuts off so many problems, both for you and for others.

Making your life meaningful

To make your life most meaningful and beneficial, live your life with bodhichitta, the ultimate good heart. Try to do every action during the entire day with the ultimate good heart of bodhichitta. Even if you cannot practice bodhichitta, the altruistic mind wishing to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings, as much as possible try to live your life with a generous, good heart. The ultimate good heart is the thought seeking enlightenment in order to work for other sentient beings. Even if you are not doing the profound practice of the ultimate good heart, it is important if you have a job not simply to think: “I’m doing this work to survive. I need the money for food I have to eat.” If you live your life with this attitude, you are thinking about nothing other than yourself; it shows no concern for others. Among all the sentient beings, you are thinking about nothing except this one sentient being – and that is not even another person, but yourself!

With the attitude that you are working just to survive, your mind is not happy or relaxed. If you look at it, it’s not a comfortable attitude, but painful and sad. Being concerned only about yourself, doing everything for your own happiness, is the principal cause of depression. All the problems of depression and aggression that lead you to depend on a psychiatrist or psychologist, making your life expensive, come from the selfish attitude. The selfish attitude also makes you busier, because you then have to earn the money to pay for the psychiatrist and so forth.

At this time you have a human body, not the body of an animal such as a pig or a horse. You have taken a superior rebirth with an incredible capacity to think and to perform superior actions, which animals and lower beings cannot do. You have much potential to think in a better way, and have the opportunity to benefit all sentient beings. It is not simply a matter of attitude; a precious human body actually

can benefit all sentient beings. To have taken such a precious body that, unlike the bodies of other beings, can offer incredible benefit to others, and have an attitude that is not even superior to an animal's is very sad. With such a poor attitude, your life is not happy.

Even if you cannot generate compassion for all beings, when you get out of bed, dress, and get ready to go to work, at least think in this way: "My survival today comes from my employers. Because they have given me a job and money, I have all these comforts and enjoyments. My ability to survive as a human being and benefit others comes from the kindness of my employers. Even though I have an education, if they hadn't given me this job, I would have been in trouble. They are extremely kind."

Then think to repay their kindness: "I want happiness and don't want suffering, as do my employers. We are the same. As they want my help, I want their help. As I am dependent on their help, they are dependent on my help. Their happiness depends on me. If I need their help, they should help me. So why shouldn't I help them? They work for me, so why don't I work for them?"

Think: "I am going to do this job because I need to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. Because I need the necessary conditions to practice Dharma, I am going to do this job." The work itself is then done completely for other sentient beings. Even if you cannot think of the highest goal of enlightenment, of working for all sentient beings, at least think: "I am going to do this work to obtain happiness for these particular sentient beings, who want happiness and don't want suffering, exactly like me. I am going to work to bring them happiness."

Then feel happy and rejoice: "How wonderful it is that these sentient beings find my life and body useful in stopping their problems and obtaining their happiness." Generate happiness, rather than being so concerned about yourself, always thinking: "I don't have this, I don't have that – I should have it!" By thinking like this, you create your own depression and aggression. This unskillful way of thinking unnecessarily fills your mind with aggression and depression instead of happiness. Passing your life with constant problems and unhappiness for one day, two days, three days, one week, one month, one year, comes from your way of thinking. The whole thing depends on your attitude.

Instead of beginning the day with worry and self-concern, with the thought that if you don't go to work you won't get any money, get up happily. Think: "I am going to work to obtain happiness for these sentient beings and to prevent their problems. They want happiness and don't want suffering, just as I do. How wonderful it is that I can benefit at least some sentient beings. Even though I can't benefit all sentient beings, who equal the infinite sky, my life and limbs at least benefit some sentient beings. How wonderful it is that I am able to make them happy!"

Constantly practice awareness of this when you are getting up at home, driving to the office and while you are working there. Of course if you work for a large group of people, there is no question that you should feel happier because you are working for more sentient beings. But even if you are working for just one sentient being, you can still rejoice: "This human body is not useless. It is benefiting one sentient being, helping him to achieve happiness. This is great!"

By remembering the kindness of others, you are very happy and relaxed, and there is no depression. Because you are happy when you are at home, and even when you come to the office, you help create a very happy environment. Because you have a very peaceful mind, with loving kindness and concern

for others, when you come to the office, other people who are depressed become happy when they see you. It is no help at all when they are depressed if you are also depressed. It simply makes everyone more depressed. Your being happy and relaxed makes others feel good and changes their minds. At least, this is how it should be with the people with whom you work.

Even though the work is the same, one unskillful way of thinking brings unbelievable problems into your life, making your life into a hell; another skillful way of thinking brings many different levels of happiness. You can create this happiness with the wisdom understanding Dharma. If you have an attitude of loving kindness towards a group of people – or at least one person – because you are more concerned about them and not so concerned about yourself, jealousy, anger and so forth and all other problems are lessened.

In regard to doing every activity with bodhichitta, there is another story about Gen Jampa Wangdu, who is a heart son, a very close disciple, of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and who is also my teacher. One day Gen Jampa Wangdu came here to Tushita to see Lama Yeshe and me. Gen Rinpoche told us that one day in his room he checked up to see how many years it had been since he had asked other people for anything for himself – it had been ten years. When he went to other people, it never concerned himself, always someone else. Isn't that amazing? I think it is incredible!

Whenever he would meet Gen Jampa Wangdu, most of the time Lama Yeshe would make jokes and put down him and any of their other friends who were ascetic lamas. Lama would always joke: "You people live in a cave with nothing – how can that be ascetic? How can that alone be an ascetic life? The whole world comes to me. I enjoy everything; I have everything." Lama was always joking about and putting down the ascetic meditators.

In the general view, in terms of the Dharma, and particularly the tantric, texts that Lama read, the advice he gave in everyday life, his actions, and his hidden practices that nobody outside knew about, Lama Yeshe's practice and realizations were not lower than those of ascetic meditators who have lived many years in mountain caves with no possessions – perhaps they were even higher. In terms of external appearance, it might seem that Lama Yeshe did not live an ascetic life and did not practice Dharma. Those who didn't know Lama well, who didn't live with him and know his daily life, might have thought such things. Older students who received many tantric teachings from Lama can understand the high level of his realizations of second stage tantra. They can figure it out from how effective his teachings were.

When Gen Jampa Wangdu said this about working only for others, Lama simply said: "Oh, that is good." He didn't rate it very highly, just said: "That is good." But from the heart, Lama Yeshe liked Gen Jampa Wangdu very, very much and Gen Jampa Wangdu also had incredible heartfelt respect and admiration for Lama Yeshe, even more so during the last few years of Lama's life. Gen Jampa Wangdu himself was a great practitioner of tantra, with the perfect base of experiences to be labeled "yogi of Vajrayana." He had reached a very high level of the tantric path.

What Gen Jampa Wangdu said is very inspiring and you should use it as an example for your own life. If it is possible for ascetic meditators such as Gen Jampa Wangdu to generate bodhichitta, to change their attitude from self-cherishing to cherishing others, and to generate first and second stage tantric realizations, why not you? You are a human being; so are they. You have the same gurus and have

received the same teachings. The only difference is if, from your side, you don't practice – that's all.

Even if you do not know about or meditate on the Lam-rim, even if you do not think of the actual way of training your mind in bodhichitta with the preliminary renunciation of samsara, do everything in your daily life with the thought of loving kindness. Even if you are living in a city like everybody else, take care of your family or work in your job with the thought of loving kindness. Like you, your family are also sentient beings wanting happiness and not wanting suffering. The actual purpose of your life is to eliminate the sufferings of other sentient beings and bring them happiness. Your being alive as a human being is not for yourself but for others.

What you should do, in fact, is purify obscurations and accumulate merit for three countless great aeons by following the path, as Guru Shakyamuni Buddha did. In his lives as a bodhisattva, Buddha offered his holy body, eyes and limbs as charity to other sentient beings, numberless times and in many different places.

One recent Lam-rim lineage lama, Je Drubkhangpa, who had a cave above Sera Monastery in Tibet, had several gurus, but from one particular guru he received many teachings on bodhichitta; I am not sure whether this was the first guru from whom he received teachings on bodhichitta. It seems that this guru was not a monk, but had long hair rolled up on top of his head and lived in the forest. He wasn't sleek or well dressed and didn't live in a good house.

One day, from a short distance, Je Drubkhangpa saw his lama in the forest, crying. He was reading a scripture and crying very much. And even though he was alone there in the forest, he was giving the "thumbs up" sign a lot, which means "very good." In Tibet, this sign is also used for begging, where it means: "Please give!" or "Please help!" However, it also means "very good."

Not immediately but after some time, Je Drubkhangpa asked his guru: "Before, when I saw you crying very much in the forest and giving the "thumbs up" sign, what were you doing? What made you cry?" The lama explained: "The reason I cried was that I was reading Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's lifestories as a bodhisattva."

There are about thirty-four stories of Buddha as a bodhisattva, the *Jataka Tales*, which tell of how he offered charity to, guided and benefited other sentient beings in many different ways. For example, once there were five hundred traders on a ship that was about to sink. Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, who was then still a bodhisattva who had taken the form of a huge turtle in that life; the turtle lifted up the ship and saved the traders from drowning.

At another time, when thousands and thousands of fish were about to die because they were stranded on a beach, Buddha recited the holy name of the Buddha Having a Jewel Ushnisha (Chom-dän-dä de-zhin-sheg-pa rin-chen tsug-tor chän). If you recite this Buddha's name in the ear of an animal or human, particularly at the time of death, they cannot be born in the realm of the suffering transmigratory beings; it causes them to receive the body of a happy transmigratory being in their next life. When the Buddha Having a Jewel Ushnisha was a bodhisattva, he prayed that simply the recitation of his name would be able to benefit sentient beings and guide them from suffering. By reciting this Buddha's name to the thousands of fish, Guru Shakyamuni Buddha as a bodhisattva saved them from the lower realms.

In another story Buddha offered charity to others of all his limbs, so that only the trunk of his holy body was left. The village people then thought: “Now he doesn’t have any limbs, what is the use of him?” – and threw the remaining part of his holy body on the refuse heap. However, even on the refuse heap Buddha did great work for other sentient beings by offering what was left of his body to ants, worms and other creatures. There are many incredible stories of how Shakyamuni Buddha guided sentient beings, even when he was a bodhisattva.

Reading the Jataka tales, Je Drubkhangpa’s guru thought, “This Guru Shakyamuni is a mother’s son; he was born from a mother – I am also a mother’s son. But there is a big difference. He was able to sacrifice himself for the mother sentient beings, and I haven’t done anything. We are the same in being mothers’ sons, but Guru Shakyamuni has been a very worthy son. He has saved so many sentient beings from suffering, offered much charity and borne much hardships for others. I am also a mother’s son, but I haven’t done anything worthwhile.”

So, reading the stories, Je Drubkhangpa’s guru was crying very much and making the “thumbs up” sign. He was giving Buddha the “thumbs up” sign to say: “Very good. Very worthy son.” He cried very much on seeing the unbelievable dedication Guru Shakyamuni Buddha had for sentient beings and his practice of bodhichitta.

On one of the last times they parted, when Je Drubkhangpa was going away to another place, his lama accompanied him a short distance. Je Drubkhangpa had already spent years studying in a monastery and had become a geshe, but he had been told by one of his gurus to do retreat and experiment on the path. As they parted, Je Drubkhangpa’s guru again emphasized: “Don’t forget bodhichitta practice. Unless you practice bodhichitta, other paths won’t come to anything. Even if they are called ‘secret’ or the ‘quick path to enlightenment,’ they won’t fulfill your wishes completely.” He was saying that without bodhichitta, one cannot achieve the sublime, peerless happiness of enlightenment.

Je Drubkhangpa, with some confidence in his own practice and experience of bodhichitta, showed a little of his experience to his guru by saying: “Bodhichitta is a causative phenomenon. I am also a causative phenomenon.” For example, with dough mixed from flour and water, you can make many different kinds of food: noodles, chapatis, cakes and so forth. Because it is a causative phenomenon, a dependent arising, you can change the dough into many different types of food. In a similar way, Je Drubkhangpa is saying, it is possible to change the mind. By creating the cause, one is able to generate the result of bodhichitta within one’s heart, just as Guru Shakyamuni Buddha did as a bodhisattva. For three countless great aeons he accumulated extensive merit, then achieved enlightenment and revealed the path in order to liberate sentient beings from all obscurations and lead them to enlightenment.

And this is exactly what we should do. The purpose of our life is to benefit every sentient being. Think: “Even if I cannot sacrifice myself for every sentient being as Guru Shakyamuni Buddha did, how wonderful it is that at least I am able to use my body, speech and mind to benefit my family and make them happy. How fortunate I am! I should actually offer my body as charity to other sentient beings, but at least I am serving this small number of sentient beings and bringing them happiness.” You should rejoice from your heart. Whether working in a family, at a Dharma centre, in a hospital, or in the community, you should offer service to others with a sincere attitude and good heart, remembering their kindness. In this way your mind will be very happy all the time. Because all your activities will be done with loving kindness and the thought of cherishing others, depression won’t arise.

Even if you working for just three people in your family, or even one person, since your work is done with a sincere attitude, with the thought of loving kindness cherishing others, even if you do not know how to transform your actions into virtue, your everyday activities will naturally become virtue. Even if a person has never heard of the Lam-rim, his everyday activities done with this sincere attitude become pure Dharma. Because they are unstained by self-cherishing thought, these activities are the most difficult to do, but the purest holy Dharma.

Dharma means protecting oneself from suffering, from samsara. If someone is in danger of falling down a precipice, you can save him with ropes. Dharma is the rope that stops a person falling down into the sufferings of the lower realms. Your own virtuous actions, Dharma, protect you from true suffering and true cause of suffering.

Even if someone doesn't know about Buddhadharma or the Lam-rim teachings, if their everyday life is lived with the thought of cherishing others, it becomes the purest holy Dharma. It is the best protection and the best cause of happiness in this life, and in the lives after this. Otherwise, if all our activities are done with non-virtuous motives, out of selfishness and worldly concern, only for the happiness of ourself and of this life, every activity in the day becomes the cause of suffering, since non-virtue is the cause of suffering and confusion in this life, and in future lives.

Instead of creating the cause of happiness, it sometimes looks as if all our education is used to create negative karma. After he gains a degree, a person may go to an office and work there until he retires. But no matter how many years – even forty! – the person does the job, if his attitude is one of worldly concern, all those years of work become negative karma. Because of the selfish attitude, worldly concern clinging to the happiness of the self and this life arises. If there were no selfish attitude, there would be no space in the mind for worldly concern, as well as the many other disturbing thoughts such as anger.

If the selfish attitude is replaced by loving kindness and bodhichitta, the thought of cherishing others, these other confused minds don't arise. In this way there is much peace and happiness in the person's life. And much happiness and harmony for his family and the other people around him. As a result of his good heart in this life, the person will experience much peace of mind and happiness not only in this life, but in his next life.

If you do your everyday actions with bodhichitta, practicing taking others' sufferings and dedicating your body, possessions and merit to them, you accumulate much merit all the time. Each time you meditate on bodhichitta, or even generate the motivation of bodhichitta, you collect merit equalling the infinite sky. In that minute, by generating the motivation of bodhichitta, even if you don't have the actual realization of bodhichitta, you accumulate infinite merit.

Realizing emptiness quickly

Practicing bodhichitta is also the quick way to realize emptiness. If you wish to realize emptiness, understand Madhyamika philosophy, really experience Nagarjuna's teachings, and realize the meaning of *The Heart Sutra*, heart of the whole Buddhadharma, the best method is to practice bodhichitta. To realize emptiness, the absolute nature of the self, one has to be extremely fortunate; it is not enough just to be smart or be able to debate well. You can study the teachings, take refuge in the explanations

of Lama Tsongkhapa, Nagarjuna or Guru Shakyamuni Buddha and parrot what the texts say, but repeating the words of a text is not enough.

To realize emptiness, a person needs to create the cause, which means much purification and the accumulation of much merit. By doing powerful purification with prostrations or Vajrasattva practice, and meditating, you develop the devotion to see the guru as buddha and correctly devote yourself to him in thought and action as Buddha taught. When your guru devotion is deep and strong, you then use powerful methods to purify your obscurations and mental defilements. As these become thinner, any Lam-rim meditation you do—the graduated paths of the small, intermediate and great scopes; renunciation of samsara, emptiness, bodhichitta—makes much more sense. Your mind becomes extremely soft and pliable, rather than solid as a rock. When you meditate you feel confident that if really tried for some weeks or some months, you could definitely generate the realization of the meditation. You feel this strongly from your heart with every meditation you do. Ideas that were mere words in the beginning, you now feel strongly from your heart.

At this time, even seeing a few words such as “on the vase there is a vase existing from its own side” has an incredible effect, like waking from sleep. At the moment our problem is that we haven’t recognized the object to be refuted. If we purify our obscurations, accumulate much merit and develop our guru devotion, even though we haven’t studied all the extensive scriptures by Nagarjuna and Chandrakirti, and we don’t understand everything, just two or three pages of a teaching on emptiness, or even the words “on the vase there is a vase existing from its own side” are like waking from sleep. We are able to recognize the object to be refuted. Suddenly, after seeing just two or three words, you look at external objects and recognize clearly how things appear to be truly existent. And when you look at the I, you immediately recognize the object to be refuted, that on the I, there is an I that appears to exist from its own side.

In this way it doesn’t take long to realize emptiness. Once you have recognized the I existing from its own side, like pressing a button in an elevator, everything lights up and works. Once you have recognized the object to be refuted, the I that doesn’t exist, even if you don’t use the four analyses and all the many logical explanations from Madhyamika philosophy, just concentrate one-pointedly on the I. You see an I existing from its own side, but at the same time you are aware that this is what is actually empty. The object to be refuted, the I existing from its own side, has no choice—it cannot abide. One-pointedly focus right on the I existing from its own side and recognize that this is what the teachings call “the object to be refuted.”

Simply remember that the I is a dependent arising. While focusing on this truly existent I, which seems to exist from its own side, be aware that it is empty. Actually, there is no choice you realize that it is completely empty. Even though ignorance clings to the object to be refuted, if you can see that not even an atom of it exists from its own side, you experience the I to be completely empty. From your own experience, you actually come to know how the I exists. Through realizing unmistakably that the truly existent I in which you believe doesn’t exist, without need to push, you experience how the I actually exists.

You are then able to realize the subtle dependent arising of the I—that the I exists under the control of name, being merely labeled on the aggregates by thought and name. This becomes your own experience, not just words. Before, you were simply imitating the teachings, but when you realize the subtle

dependent arising of the I, it is no longer mere words. When you speak of these things, you are talking from your own experience.

Guru devotion: the root of the path

It may seem a little strange to hear that you need guru devotion in order to have these realizations. To the ear of someone with a certain type of mind, who has not accumulated much merit or planted many seeds of the teachings, this may sound a little funny. When the guru tells you that you need guru devotion to achieve realizations of the path to enlightenment, it may look as if he is taking advantage of you, as if he is praising himself and asking the disciples to see him as buddha and make offerings to him. It is very easy to think it strange when you hear this. It looks like worldly politics.

The first time you hear this, especially before you begin to practice Dharma, it seems very strange and almost like some kind of trick. The proof of how realizations, development of the mind and experience of the path depend on the very root of strong, stable guru devotion comes when a person actually practices. A person's own experience answers his questions as to the importance of guru devotion. In his everyday life he can see the difference between the times when he sees the guru as buddha and devotes himself correctly to him in thought and action, and the times when he does not. When there is no devotion, the mind is like an arid desert, where nothing grows.

When the mind is like this, the very root of the whole path does not exist, or is like very thin clouds about to disappear in the sky. Then, no matter how many times you repeat the words, no matter how many different Lam-rim or tantric teachings you read or meditations you do, you feel nothing from your heart. Even meditating on impermanence and death becomes just words. Even meditating on renunciation or bodhichitta, you feel nothing from the heart. And with emptiness, your mind is like a rock.

Your own experience gives you the answer. You can understand guru devotion from the lifestories of the Lam-rim lineage lamas, which describe how they practiced guru devotion and had incredible realizations, but the actual proof comes from your own experience when meditating on the path.

Relating to the Lam-rim, Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo explains that if you meditate and achieve realizations of the perfect human rebirth, its usefulness and the difficulty of receiving it again, impermanence and death and karma, all other realizations will come very easily, like rainfall, or pouring rice from a basket. The rest come very easily once you have these fundamental realizations.

If you find even the meditations from perfect human rebirth up to karma very difficult, with no progress happening in your mind, there is something wrong with the first step, guru devotion. You have to examine what is missing or what mistake you have made in your guru practice. When changing your mind through these basic meditations is very difficult, something is wrong in your practice of the root of the path. You have to examine for mistakes. After recognizing the mistake and correcting your practice, you then need very strong practice of purification.

Many of you may have heard the story of Je Drubkhangpa's guru practice. In the beginning, even though he meditated on the Lam-rim for many years, no progress happened. So he asked one of his gurus: "Why have I been meditating on the Lam-rim for such a long time with nothing happening?"

His guru asked him: “When you visualize the merit field, have you missed any gurus with whom you have had Dharma contact? Have you forgotten anyone in the merit field?” Je Drubkhangpa said: “Yes. I have many bad thoughts towards the guru who taught me the alphabet, because he is a disrobed monk. He is the only one I don’t visualize.” Je Drubkhangpa discovered that this guru was missing from his visualization of the merit field. He was then advised by his guru: “You should now visualize that one as the principal guru of the whole merit field. He is Lama Lobsang Tubwang Dorje Chang in the centre and the entire merit field is an embodiment of him. Until you develop devotion, keep him as the principal figure of the merit field.” After doing this meditation, Je Drubkhangpa had no difficulty in generating realizations; they came very easily, one after the other.

Guru devotion as the root of the whole path is like the electricity supply to a city. When no electricity comes from the main power-station, there are no lights in any of the rooms in the whole city. All the elevators, televisions and other enjoyments that depend on electricity are completely stopped. It is easy to understand that all the various enjoyments in the city have come from building that powerstation. All these depend on the power-station. A meditator’s experience of guru devotion is similar; and this is your own experience, but you don’t recognize it. Even though you have met Buddhadharma, you don’t remember having met the guru in the past. Even though you are experiencing the result, whether of correct or incorrect devotion to the guru, you are not aware of the past karmas. However, experienced Lam-rim meditators are able to recognize and remember these. Just as you can see how all the enjoyments depend on the power-station, meditators with experience of the path to enlightenment see how important it is to practice correct devotion to the guru in thought and action.

Tara advised one Tibetan lama: “Do the bodhichitta practice of *tong-len*, taking and giving, to develop merit and you will be able to actualize the Middle Way, devoid of the two extremes. Without delay you can then become enlightened.” With bodhichitta as the fundamental practice, you are also quickly able to realize emptiness. In order to complete the Lam-rim realizations, the skillful way to meditate on the Lam-rim is to realize guru devotion. This realization is the most difficult one for most people to generate, so you should train your mind in it once every day.

Daily practice

Every day, first thing in the morning, you should do one meditation on guru devotion, followed by one meditation on different sections of the graduated path of the small scope: perfect human rebirth, impermanence and death and so forth. Also, each day do one short meditation on emptiness in order to plant the seed of this realization; and one meditation related to tantric practice to train your mind in calm abiding, visualizing the seed syllable, as His Holiness the Dalai Lama mentioned, the fire of the *tum-mo* meditation, or yourself as a deity in the generation stage of tantra.

Meditating on the tum-mo fire at the navel has many advantages. Even if you don’t achieve calm abiding through one-pointedly concentrating on the tum-mo fire, you achieve a certain experience of the tantric path and are able to make the chakras and drops serviceable. Tum-mo meditation helps you to accomplish the very essence of the highest yoga tantra path; it gives you some experience of the second stage, the completion stage. If you are able to make the chakras and drops function, you can quickly reach the clear light of example. Tum-mo meditation helps very much for the generation stage to be stable and perfect, as well as helping you either to achieve calm abiding or have a certain experience of completion stage, which is extremely important.

If you train your mind every day in several Lam-rim meditations, if you live for ten years, you will have realizations of guru devotion, impermanence and death, or emptiness. Before your death you will have achieved all these realizations – or if not all, at least one or two. In this way your life will not be completely empty. Instead of spending your whole life training your mind in just one meditation – and not being sure of realizing even that before your death – every day do direct meditation on the entire path to enlightenment. Plant the seed of the path to enlightenment in your mind in this way and make your everyday life highly meaningful.

Colophon:

The above teaching is an excerpt from *Perfect Freedom: The Great Value of Being Human*, A Wisdom Intermediate Transcript (*out of print*). Reprinted here for the “Discovering Buddhism” program with permission from Wisdom Publications. Originally transcribed by Ingeborg Sandberg. Transcript checked and edited by Ailsa Cameron.

How to Meditate on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

**A Teaching With Special Emphasis on the Methods of an Experiential Instruction,
Expressed Openly And in Plain Words as if Pointing With a Finger to
Each Element of Practice**

by Pabongkha Rinpoche

In response to a written request from Dragom Choktrul Rinpoche of the Shodo Monastery in Kham, the incomparably beneficent, glorious and kindhearted one, the Supreme Savior Dorjechang Pabongkhabapa Dechen Nyingpo, composed the following work unexpectedly and at a time when he was extremely busy and faced with many responsibilities. What is included here are the instructions on how to gain the realizations from Relying on a Spiritual Friend through Refuge.

PART ONE: INSTRUCTION ON THE IMPORTANCE OF ANALYTIC MEDITATION AND ON THE KEY ELEMENTS OF HOW TO PRACTICE IT

I pray that my mind and those of all lineage disciples
Become steeped in dharma through the power and blessings
Of the father, Lama Losang Tubwang Dorjechang,
And those of his lineage of spiritual sons.

Having found a form that is valuable and hard to find,
And having perceived the eight worldly dharmas¹ to be the play of fools,
Those friends who strive single-mindedly in their pursuit of an ultimate goal are marvelous
indeed!

When we are proud of our wide learning, our efforts at teaching and studying,
And we are even sure that we could explain a hundred scriptures,
Though our minds have not improved the least bit spiritually,
It is because we lack the analytic meditation that combines understanding with experience.

A mere semblance of listening, study, and understanding
Can generate both strong faith and listening wisdom² about the topics of leisure and fortune,

-
1. Concern with experiencing pleasure and pain, concern with material gain or not getting, concern with receiving praise or blame, concern with experiencing agreeable sounds, etc. and disagreeable.
 2. This is a reference to the first of three levels of wisdom – derived from listening. The other two are wisdom derived from reflection and wisdom derived from meditation. Wisdom derived from listening only represents correct judgment; therefore, it is not knowledge in the epistemological sense. Moreover, as the text notes later on in this section, the main purpose of analytic meditation is precisely to generate the second type of wisdom, that which is born of reflection, because this does represent knowledge – more specifically, inferential knowledge.

Impermanence, aversion,³ and so on; but they have not arisen through analytic meditation. Such wisdom is nothing more than right judgment⁴ and so eventually it fades away.

You run a risk by failing to generate soon after this wisdom
The genuine experience that comes from reflection.
Many persons become insensitive to dharma⁵ when they allow
The former awareness to fade away before they can generate the latter.⁶

Once you are overcome by insensitivity to dharma, your mind stream
Becomes ruined and you are incapable of being tamed,
Even by the Lam-rim or the blessed words of your guru.
So apply yourself to the profound method for avoiding insensitivity to dharma.

This is achieved through the blessings of your guru's speech,
Along with your own efforts to listen to dharma properly.
So, however much understanding you gain through hearing dharma, it's vital
To generate soon afterward the understanding which comes from reflection.

How, then, do you generate the understanding which comes from reflection?
Analytic meditation is the exercise of eliciting experiential realizations
By contemplating a particular meditation topic from every standpoint
And in every way, using scriptural citations and sharp reasoning.

For instance, if you set forth as the object to be established that your guru is a Buddha,
Advance again and again those cogent arguments that will prove he is a Buddha;
For this is the means of eliciting the conviction that he is a Buddha.
Practicing this strenuously and repeatedly is what we refer to as analytic meditation.

Indeed, the primary aim for all the meditation topics—such as leisure and fortune,
Impermanence, renunciation, generating enlightenment mind, and the correct view—
Is to elicit sure understandings of them by engaging in sharp analytic meditation.

Even though this analysis only brings you the first elements
Of the experiential awareness that derives from reflection,
You will never be overcome by insensitivity to dharma
And you will have firmly planted the roots of your spiritual experience.
So train yourself skillfully in the ways of analytic meditation.

Moreover, analytic meditation is a unique quality of our system.

3. That is, aversion for the defects of samsaric existence.

4. Traditional Buddhist epistemology defines seven types of cognitive awareness. Only two of these – inference and direct perception – have the capacity to represent knowledge. The other five, including right judgment, do not.

5. This is a condition which occurs when a person gains some learning of the dharma but fails to put it into practice. As a result, his mind becomes hardened to the dharma and he fails to achieve any spiritual self-discipline.

6. The “former awareness” is the wisdom which derives from listening; the “latter” is the wisdom which derives from reflection.

It is not recognized even partially in any tradition that stands
Outside the range of our Jamgon Lama's⁷ enlightened speech.

The need for analytic meditation, how to practice it, and so on
Are taught in the *Great Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*.
By careful study and reflection on these points you'll realize
That they represent an extraordinary quality of our teaching system.

To merely review a series of topics in your mind is reflective meditation;⁸
This is not what we call cultivating analytic meditation.
Neither is it analytic meditation to memorize the words of a teaching
And then rehearse their meaning in your mind.

To memorize the essence of every one of the path's stages, as well as their order, number,
and so on,
And then to recall each essence, order, and number individually
Is also just reflective meditation, not analytic meditation.

Therefore, as I said earlier, analytic meditation consists of
Setting forth a single topic as the object to be established,
And then repeatedly analyzing it with scripture and profound reasoning
As the means of generating a sure understanding.

For instance, when we reflect again and again on the reasons
Why we think that a particular object is attractive,
We develop strong desire. This is "analytic meditation" toward
An object of attachment, and it increases our active desire.

Likewise, when we recall again and again how a terrible enemy
Has harmed us, our hatred great increases.
This represents analysis toward an object of hatred,
And it ignites our "experiential awareness" of hatred.

Let's shift now to the spiritual domain, where the aim it is to increase
An experiential awareness of different virtuous minds by repeatedly contemplating
The various reasons that will elicit them, as I just described with desire and hatred.

What you must do here is contemplate over and over again
The most penetrating of scriptural citations and arguments,
And in particular those arguments which are the most effective
For eliciting a spiritual transformation within your mind.

7. Je Tsongkapa.

8. *sbar gom*. While reflective meditation represents a valid form of practice, it is important to distinguish it from analytic meditation. The point being made here is that only analytic meditation represents the true method for generating uncontrived experiential realizations.

If the repeated contemplation of just a single argument
Evokes a sense of ever-growing anguish in your mind,
Such as you might feel on hearing of your mother's death,
This is a sign that you are succeeding; so continue striving.

But if repeated contemplation of a single argument grows stale
And your mind remains unmoved, this means your practice is not succeeding.
It's also a forewarning against becoming insensitive to dharma.
So combine supplications to your guru with fervent acts that accumulate merit
And remove obstacles.⁹ Then try again to cultivate the meditation topics effectively.

Some persons at this point¹⁰ develop sudden and powerful feelings of faith,
Impermanence, renunciation, and so on, even without having practiced meditation.
They become joyously enthusiastic, thinking these are true spiritual realizations.
But soon after, when the intensity of such feelings completely disappears,
We see that they become saddened at the loss of these sentiments.
However, these are nothing but limited sensations that arise on the basis
Of transitory perceptions; they aren't true spiritual realizations.
There is no need whatsoever for you to become proud
When such feelings arise or become dejected when they fade.
Still, because they are a sign that you have received blessings
From your guru and tutelary deity, you should strive to make them firm.

True realizations are the experiential awarenesses of faith, impermanence, and so on,
Which come forth in succession after meditating continuously with wisdom's discerning power.
These represent inferential knowledge and, unlike the feelings mentioned earlier, they never
fade away.

Moreover, you must learn the skillful technique for eliciting realizations.
Begin by meditating on all the points contained in the individual topics,
From serving a spiritual teacher to generating enlightenment mind.
Do so just long enough to become proficient in each of them.
Then meditate again on serving a spiritual teacher up through generating
Enlightenment mind, in order to elicit contrived experiential realizations.
Then do the same again, in order to elicit uncontrived experiential realizations.

When you have become familiar with these topics to the point of feeling sure
That you know how to meditate on them and that you are able to generate the realizations,
we call this becoming proficient.

A spiritual awareness which arises after continuous reflection

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9. Examples of acts that accumulate merit are making offerings, rejoicing at one's own virtue and that of others, and so forth. Two practices that remove obstacles are confession and making prostrations.
10. That is, after having listened to Lam-rim teachings and studied related texts, but without having practiced analytic meditation.

On many scriptural citations and reasonings, but which fails to arise
Without such reflection, is called a contrived experiential realization.

An uncontrived experiential realization is one which arises distinctly,
As soon as you bring a subject to mind and irrespective
Of any prolonged reflection, like the desire for sense objects
That arises in your mind without any need of prolonged contemplation.

When understanding and experience combine thus in your mind,
This marks the first dawning of spiritual realization.
Moreover, for some meditation topics the realizations arise easily;
They can be generated even after practicing for only seven days or so.
For other topics, the realizations arise after several days or weeks.
For still others, they are difficult to generate even after a year or more.

For instance, it's easy to realize the certainty of death;
But the uncertainty of the time of death is very hard to realize.
It's extremely easy to realize how nothing except dharma can help
At the time of death. Such differences hold true for the other topics as well.

Therefore, don't continue meditating obstinately on those topics
For which realizations come easily; instead, move on to the next point.
Likewise, don't think that the topics which are difficult to realize
Are taking too long. No matter how long they take, even months or years,
Continue meditating until you generate the appropriate realizations.

Finally, you need only practice reflective meditation toward
Those earlier topics which you have already mastered
And those later ones for which you have yet to gain realizations.
So focus single-mindedly as you analyze and contemplate the one topic you are currently
practicing.

PART TWO: INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO DEVELOP THE SPIRITUAL REALIZATIONS ASSOCIATED WITH PROPERLY SERVING A SPIRITUAL TEACHER

Now that I've instructed you on how to carry out properly
The key elements involved in practicing analytic meditation,
What is the first topic to which you should apply analytic meditation
And how should you apply analytic meditation to it?

Analytic meditation need not be applied to the three introductory topics,¹¹

11. These are the first three divisions of the Lam-rim teaching: (1) the greatness of the originator of the dharma teaching, (2) the greatness of the dharma teaching itself, and (3) the correct method of listening to, and teaching, the dharma.

The preliminary practices,¹² and so on. Therefore, the practice
Of analytic meditation should begin with the topic of how to serve a spiritual teacher.

If you contemplate skillfully for about seven days the benefits
Of serving a teacher and for about seven days also the faults
Of failing to serve a teacher, you will produce a mental transformation.¹³

The next topic is the root practice of cultivating faith,
Which is extremely important but also difficult to realize.
Yet no matter how many months or years it takes to complete,
Don't think that it's taking too long. Practice it one-pointedly
Until you succeed in eliciting a mental transformation.

Moreover, if you contemplate too many points during a single period,
Your practice will become reflective meditation, not analytic meditation.
Therefore, during each period contemplate just one topic.
For instance, make the topic "Vajradhara affirmed that our guru is a Buddha"—
The first of the four in this section¹⁴—the only one you wish to verify.
Then, with scripture and sharp reasonings as proof, apply yourself and contemplate
This very topic for the entire period until you generate a sure understanding.

Just as on the first day, cultivate this topic the next day and the next day after that.
Cultivate it for a month and for a second month as well.
Continue practicing this way until you elicit the true experiential awareness.
When the experiential awareness emerges, switch to the next topic.

After you have realized a topic, contemplate it with reflective meditation alone.
However, don't move on to a later topic before you have gained realizations of those which
precede it;
The later topics cannot be realized before the earlier ones.
Therefore, strive vigorously to elicit a realization of the initial topic.¹⁵
After eliciting an experiential realization of this topic,
Undertake to practice in a similar way the second one—
That a guru is the agent for all the Buddhas' activities.

After gaining a realization of that topic, go to the next one—
That even nowadays all Buddhas act on behalf of sentient beings.
Meditate by applying the intense analysis of scripture, reasoning, and your guru's instruction.
Just as you cultivate this topic the first day, continue doing so

12. The six preliminary practices are: (1) cleaning the place and setting up the altar, (2) arranging well-obtained offerings, (3) positioning oneself and generating refuge and bodhichitta, (4) visualizing the field of merit, (5) offering a seven-limb prayer and mandala, and (6) making requests.

13. This phrase is equivalent in meaning to "eliciting an experiential realization."

14. The section of the Lam-rim outline entitled "How to regard our guru as a Buddha."

15. In this context, the initial topic is the one entitled "Vajradhara affirmed that our guru is a Buddha."

The next day and the one after that—for days, months, or even years
Until you succeed in eliciting the proper experiential realization.

You must bring forth the realization which perceives that your guru
Is truly a Buddha. And since this very topic is much more crucial
Than all the others, devote yourself to it with great effort.

After gaining this realization, then go to the next topic,
The one that is called “Our perceptions are unreliable.”
Cultivate it by intensely applying the technique of analytic meditation.
When you have practiced this way arid truly perceive
That your guru embodies the actual nature of all the Buddhas,
And when all the Buddhas and your guru appear to merge as one,
You have generated the realization that relates to serving a spiritual teacher.

Once you have elicited realizations of the four points that comprise
“The root practice of cultivating faith,” then also generate successive realizations
Of the four that comprise “recalling the spiritual teacher’s kindness.”
You should briefly contemplate as well the topic of pleasing your guru through action.

PART THREE: INSTRUCTION ON AN EXTRAORDINARY MEDITATION TECHNIQUE THAT WILL BRING YOU GREAT PROGRESS

After properly gaining, in the manner described, the spiritual realizations
That relate to generating faith and respect toward your spiritual teacher,
You should set out to elicit in succession the realizations for the topics
Ranging from leisure and fortune to generating precious enlightenment mind.

However, the realizations that relate to serving a spiritual teacher,
In which you cultivate a faith which perceives your guru as a Buddha,
Are difficult to generate without practicing for months or even years.
Therefore, carry out this extraordinary meditation instruction,
So that you can make progress quickly in gaining experiential realizations.

Devote one period of each day to the subject of serving a spiritual teacher.
Meditate on the topics in the manner that was described above.
Devote one period to eliciting realizations of those topics beginning with
Leisure and fortune, by analyzing them according to the established order.

First, this will further your realizations about serving a teacher.
Second, through gradually improving your understanding of the topics
That relate to persons of lesser and moderate capacity—
Namely, leisure and fortune, impermanence, suffering, and so on—
These lesser and moderate realizations will reach an advanced level
By the time you complete the subject of serving a spiritual teacher.

And if you also pursue the first stages of analyzing the correct view,¹⁶
You will make swift progress, simultaneously developing and completing
Experiential realizations of the three principal elements of the path.¹⁷
For instance, if you plant walnut, peach, and grape seeds together,
Their trunks and branches and flowers will develop simultaneously
And you can enjoy the fruit of all three at the same time.

Therefore, divide each day's meditation periods into three parts.
During one part, meditate only on serving your spiritual teacher;
During one part elicit successively the realizations for the topics
Ranging from leisure and fortune to precious enlightenment mind;
And during one part apply analytic meditation to the profound view.

PART FOUR: INSTRUCTION ON DEVELOPING THE SPIRITUAL REALIZATIONS THAT RELATE TO LEISURE AND FORTUNE

So when you divide your meditation into these three periods,
The way to contemplate serving a spiritual teacher is as I explained before.
And the way to gain the realizations starting with leisure and fortune
Is first to identify what the essence of leisure and fortune is.

Reflect on what it would be like if you had been born into any of the inopportune
conditions¹⁸
And how fortunate you are not to have been born there in this life.
Don't consider the qualities of leisure and fortune in a shallow or detached manner;
Reflect again and again, applying sharp analytic meditation
So that you will imbue yourself with a deep awareness of how you currently possess them all.
When you are overcome with joy, like a pauper who has found a treasure,
Then you have generated the realization of identifying leisure and fortune.

Next switch to the topic of viewing leisure and fortune as having great value,
And repeatedly scrutinize it with the subtle analysis of scripture and reasoning.
You will have realized the great value of leisure and fortune
When you become distressed if even an instant of time is vainly spent.

Then go on to the next meditation topic, the difficulty of finding
Leisure and fortune, and reflect on it with powerful analytic meditation.
When you become as upset about being idle for even an instant
As another person would if he spilled a bag of gold dust into a river,
Then you have realized the difficulty of finding leisure and fortune.

16. This topic should be pursued in a third period of each day. See next paragraph.

17. Renunciation, enlightenment mind, and the correct view.

18. The eight inopportune conditions are: being born as a hell-being, craving spirit, animal, in a barbaric country, as a long-living god, with imperfect senses, having wrong views, or when a Buddha has not come into the world.

PART FIVE: DEVELOPING THE SPIRITUAL REALIZATIONS THAT RELATE TO IMPERMANENCE

Turn now to the meditation topics that relate to impermanence.
You are sure to develop mental transformations by first meditating
For about a week on the six disadvantages of failing to recall death
And then for another week or so on the six advantages of recalling death.

After that, practice the three reasons that death is certain.
The first reason is that the Lord of Death is certain to appear
And cannot be turned back by any means. With great determination,
Apply analytic meditation to this topic no matter how many days or months it takes.

After achieving that experiential awareness, the next topic to verify
Is that your life span does not increase and is constantly growing shorter.
Cultivate it by practicing analytic meditation forcefully.

After achieving that experiential awareness, apply analytic meditation
To the next topic—that there is little opportunity
To practice dharma even during the time you remain alive.

But the truly extraordinary and unequalled instruction for recalling death
Is contained in the topic called “Meditating on the nature of death.”¹⁹
Through it, recollection of impermanence can be generated easily.
In the outline that gives the order in which to present the teachings,
This topic is placed after the set of nine points²⁰ for meditating on death.
But a key instruction for how to put the teachings into practice is that you should meditate
on it here.²¹

So when you’ve used the three reasons to determine that death is certain,
Consider what the various stages in the dying process will be like.
By meditating on this, you will feel a sense of overwhelming terror.

When you contemplate again and again the experiences that will befall you,
Applying analytic meditation to the meanings contained in writings
Like the one that I composed urging recollection of impermanence,²²
You will be so dismayed that you cannot stay on your meditation seat.

If after meditating in this way you feel great terror,
As though you were experiencing your actual death now,

19. FIND THIS: *Liberation*, pp. 133–8.

20. The nine reasons that are included in the three root categories.

21. That is, after contemplating the three reasons associated with the certainty of death.

22. This poem is called *Heart Spoon: Encouragement through Recollecting Impermanence*, available from the FPMT Education Department or Wisdom Publications.

And if your reflection on the stages of death is so vivid
That they seem real and cause your heart to jump suddenly in fear,
This is the measure that you have realized the certainty of death.

After that, practice analytic meditation with total concentration,
Applying it to the sole topic that your life span is uncertain—
The first reason²³ in the root category called “The uncertainty of the time of death.”
There is no certainty that your death will not come this very moment.
You should contemplate this fact by applying analytic meditation
From every standpoint and in every way.

Here is a key instruction that is both secret and profound,
About how to recollect that the time of death is uncertain.
You see and hear directly about the uncertainty of other persons’ lives.
Death strikes by means of many causes, suddenly and unexpectedly.
Some persons die while they are walking.
Some die while they are eating, others while talking.
Some persons die while laughing, others while they are running.
Some who are strong and agile die performing athletic feats.
One moment they are persons; the next they are corpses.
One moment they are alive; the next they are gone.
As you contemplate again and again the nature of these occurrences,
Analyze yourself as well, using sharp reasonings such as these:
“I have exactly the same nature as these persons.”
“How can I be sure that I won’t die this very moment?”
“How can I be sure that I won’t be a corpse this very night?”
“How can I be sure my funeral rites won’t be performed tonight?”
“How can I be sure I won’t be laid to rest in a cemetery tonight?”

You will generate the proper realization by recalling
That you can never be sure when Yama, The Lord of Death,
Will grip you in his jaws and then crush you with his fangs.
Recall how you are locked in the throes of battle with this arch enemy
And that you can’t be sure he won’t kill you right now.

After that, meditate on the next topic, how the factors that bring death
Are many while the factors that sustain life are few.
After gaining this experiential awareness, go on to the next reason
And apply analytic meditation intensely to the topic which addresses
How your body and life force are as fragile as a water bubble.

When you have forcefully applied these techniques for contemplating

23. Like the first root category, the second is also comprised of three reasons: (1) the life span of a person in the Jambudvīpa is uncertain. (2) the factors that contribute to death are many and those that sustain life are few, (3) our bodies are extremely fragile.

The three reasons that relate to the uncertainty of the time of death,
You'll think. "I can't be sure I won't die this very minute."
As you lie down, you'll wonder, "Will I wake up tomorrow morning?"
When you get up, you'll wonder, "Will I go to bed tonight?"
While going somewhere, you'll wonder, "Will I come home again?"
As you return, you'll wonder, "Will I ever go back there again?"
You'll wonder, "Which will come first, tomorrow or my next life?"
"Will death arrive before I can finish eating my bag of *tsamba*?"²⁴
"Which will come first, the end of this pot of tea or death?"
You'll think, "There's no certainty I won't depart this very moment."
When you develop an impatience which thinks, "I have no time, I have no time,"
Then you've generated the realization of the uncertainty of death.

Realization of the certainty of death comes with relative ease.
However, it's more difficult to realize the uncertainty of the time of death.
So don't think to yourself that the latter topic is taking too long.
Continue with your practice for days, months, or even years.
Meditate with single-minded resolve until you produce a mental transformation.
After generating this realization, go on to the next topic—
That nothing except holy dharma can benefit you at the time of death.

For as many days and months as are needed, contemplate these three reasons:
That neither friends, nor wealth, nor body are of any help.

But once you perceive that nothing except dharma benefits you at death,
No further practice is needed; for this very understanding is the measure of realization.
Because this topic is easy to realize and need not be practiced long,
A key point is to go on to the next subject after you have gained the proper awareness.

PART SIX: HOW TO DEVELOP THE SPIRITUAL REALIZATIONS THAT RELATE TO THE SUFFERING OF THE LOWER STATES

Although the topic of meditating on the suffering of the lower states
Is taught separately from how to perform the act of taking refuge,
The ideal way in which to practice them is to take refuge
Right after reflecting on each aspect of the lower states.

Still, a powerful and effective instruction for the novice practitioner
Is to meditate initially on the suffering of the lower states alone,
Separately from the act of taking refuge.
Then, after gaining the first stages

24. Roasted barley flour, a common staple food in Tibet.

Of experiential realization, you should cultivate the two practices jointly.

Among the areas of the three lower states, begin by meditating on
The suffering of “Revivals,” which is the first of the hot hells.
After generating the perception that you have actually taken birth there,
Contemplate its sufferings as though you are really experiencing them.

You may think, “It would be agonizing to take birth in such a place;
But I am only imagining this. It is not a real experience.”
Though it is just your imagination and not a real experience,
Your mind contains the seeds of accumulated and undiminished karma
That have the power to hurl you into the Revivals hell.

So have no doubt; when these seeds are activated and rendered potent
In the limb called “being,”²⁵ you will definitely fall into that place.

If it frightens you now merely to contemplate such a place,
What will you do when you are actually born there?

Contemplate how you will manage to endure suffering like that.
Contemplate how you will manage to bear such a long life span.

Meditate alternately and with conviction, then, on these two ideas:
That you have actually been born there and that you are certain to be born there.

When you develop an intense desire to seek immediately
A means of liberation and a refuge that can save you from this peril,
And this brings on such great apprehension that you even
Lose your appetite for food, this is the measure of having generated
An experiential awareness of the suffering in the lower states.

Likewise, strive to meditate in the manner that was just described,
Intensely and with single-minded determination, until you generate
The realizations that relate to the individual sufferings experienced
In Black Lines, Compression, Screams, Great Screams,
Conflagration, Great Conflagration, and Unrelenting Torment.²⁶

After that, apply this same method of contemplation
To the four great adjacent hell regions and the eight cold hells.
Don’t reflect as though you were watching some remote spectacle.
Reflect instead that you have actually been born in these places
And that you are certain to be born there. After meditating intensely
On what you experience there and how you will have to undergo terrible

25. This is the tenth limb of the twelve-part teaching on dependent origination also commonly referred to as “becoming.”

26. These are the seven remaining hot hells.

And intense suffering for a very long time, an unbearably strong pain
Will penetrate your heart as before, and cause you to lose all contentment.

When you develop an intense desire to seek a means of liberation and a refuge
That can save you, this is the mark that you have generated the proper realization.

To enhance your practice when meditating on the suffering of the hells,
Read their descriptions in the *Sutra on Well-Composed Recollection*
And examine carefully the specific sufferings of these regions
As they are depicted in drawings. After doing this, reflect:
“As soon as I cast off this physical form, I, too, will become
A victim of these very same conditions. What shall I do then?”
Recalling this again and again is the best way to improve your practice.

After that, generate a state of awareness in which you imagine
That you have actually become each type of hungry ghost and animal.
Though at this time you haven’t really become these beings,
Your mind is a storehouse filled with myriad forms of projecting karma
That will surely cause you to be born there before very long.

So reflect: “When that happens, these are the experiences I will undergo.”
Then ponder all the activities you will engage in—both while walking and at rest—
When you actually take birth as different types of hungry ghosts
Or as a dog, a donkey, a worm, a bird, a deer, and so forth.
Also ask yourself: “How will I be able to endure all this?”
To enhance this practice, read as well about the suffering of hungry ghosts
And animals as described in the *Sutra on Well-Composed Recollection*.

Meditate this way until you think,
“I wish I could close the door to the lower states this very moment,”
Or “How wonderful it would be to find a means of closing it right now.”

When you also take up, ever so quickly, strenuous forms of practice,
These are the signs that you have generated the appropriate realization,
As the scriptures describe in the story of Ananda’s two nephews.²⁷

PART SEVEN: TRAINING YOURSELF IN THE PRACTICE OF TAKING REFUGE

After generating, as described, the realizations that relate to the suffering in the three lower states,
“You will also develop the desire to find a refuge that can save you from this plight.
When this occurs, you are ready to contemplate how the Triple Gem
Is the only true refuge and to reflect on their various qualities.

27. See *Liberation in Our Hands*, p. 177 (Mahayana Sutra and Tantra Press).

You will elicit a mental transformation by reflecting for about seven days
On the four reasons that explain why they are a worthy object of refuge.
After that, meditate on a Buddha's physical, verbal, and mental qualities, and on the qualities
of his activities.

Do this in accord with your intellectual powers, either in brief
By following the explanations that appear in the Lamrim writings
Or in detail by following those presented in major philosophical treatises,
Such as the two *Ornaments*, the *Higher Science*,²⁸ and the like.

The measure for having generated the proper experiential realization is to develop an intense
faith that cannot be reversed.

Meditate similarly on the qualities of the dharma and the sangha—
Either in brief as taught in the Lam-rim or in detail as taught
In the major treatises. The measure for having generated this realization
Is again to develop a strong faith which cannot be overcome,
Through having recognized the qualities of this system's Triple Gem—
That is, our teacher, his teaching, and those who practice the teaching.

After eliciting a realization of this topic, do the same for each of those
In the section called "learning the distinctions."

The measure for having generated
This realization is to be able to apprehend clearly the distinctions
Associated with each aspect of the Triple Gem.

After eliciting that realization, go to the next topic, which addresses
How to take refuge by professing faith in the Triple Gem.
Reflect: "I accept my guru and the Buddha as the ones who teach me how to find refuge;
I accept the holy dharma gem as the actual refuge;
And I accept the sangha as the companions who help me to find refuge."
The measure of this experiential realization is to gain the conviction
That you could accept only the Triple Gem with such strong faith, Because no other teacher,
refuge, or followers are their equal.

After generating this experiential realization, the next topic
Is to take refuge by disavowing faith in any other tradition.
Reflect carefully how our teacher, the Buddha, and his teaching
Are the sole point of entry for those who seek liberation,
And how they are superior by virtue of possessing six distinctions.²⁹
Reflect as well how other teachers and their teachings—

28. *Ornament of Realizations (Abhisamayalamkara)*, *Ornament of Mahayana Sutras (Mahayanasutralamkara)*, and *Treatise on the Higher Science of the Mahayana (Mahayanottaratantrasastram)*.

29. The six are (1) a Buddha is without faults and has fulfilled all virtuous qualities; (2) a Buddha's teaching bestows the fruit of happiness through a path that is easy to traverse; (3) the teaching enables you to move against the flow of samsara's current; (4) the teaching removes the mental afflictions; (5) the teaching does not deceive those who seek liberation; and (6) the teaching is singularly virtuous and enables you to eliminate faults. See *Great Stages of the Path*, by Lama Tsongkhapa.

Such as the doctrines of Bon, the *tirthikas*,³⁰ great worldly gods,
And all those teachings and teachers different from this dharma—
Are inferior in that they possess six opposite distinctions.
Through reflecting thus, bring forth a heartfelt conviction of how
Our supreme teacher, his teaching and those who follow it are the sole refuge,
And how no other tradition whatsoever is a true refuge.

The measure of realization is reached when this keeps you from generating
Even the slightest thought of wanting to take refuge in someone else.

After that, you will elicit a mental transformation by meditating
For about seven days on the benefits of taking refuge and also for about a week
On the precepts to be observed. So exert yourself with heartfelt conviction.

Because it does not take very long to generate realizations
Of the meditation topics associated with taking refuge,
Study and reflect on the explanations found in the major scriptures.
Learn as well to meditate on them with single-minded determination;
For the virtuous qualities of the Triple Gem are as vast as space,
As numerous as the grains of sand in the Ganges, and as deep as the ocean.
Moreover, the three realms are too small to hold the merit that is gained
By recognizing and developing faith toward even a portion of them.
So devote yourself to this practice earnestly and vigorously.

PART EIGHT: HOW TO COMBINE THE ELEMENTS OF TAKING REFUGE AND REFLECTING ON THE SUFFERING OF THE LOWER STATES IN ORDER TO MEDITATE ON THEM JOINTLY

After properly eliciting separate realizations as described above,
For the topics of reflecting on the suffering in the lower states
And recalling extensively the virtuous qualities of the Triple Gem,
You should practice taking refuge in a way that combines the two subjects.

The two causes which form the basis for the act of taking refuge
Are the fear of being tormented by the suffering in the lower states
And the faith which believes that the Triple Gem alone have the power to save you.
The actual essence of taking refuge is the mental act in which,
Based on these causes, you entrust yourself from your heart
To the Triple Gem as the object which can save and protect you.

If you were to fall into the lower states, you would not be able
To find a refuge, nor would you even know how to take refuge.
Thus, it's crucial that you begin right now to practice taking refuge.

30. A particular group of religious practitioners.

You should do this by reflecting carefully on the words
Composed by the Lord Shantideva, which begin at the phrase
“With eyes that peer about in terror” and continue up to
The line “Please free me quickly from this source of fear.”³¹

Furthermore, the way of devoting yourself fully to these points
And meditating on them extensively is to carry out the following practice:
First emanate from the heart of the guru on the crown of your head
A complete object of refuge, which becomes seated in front of you.
Then visualize all sentient beings of the six classes surrounding you.
After that, begin by meditating on the suffering of Revivals.

Imagine you are actually there, so vividly that it fills you with terror.
Then reflect that you need not be afraid, because the saving refuge
Of the Guru and Triple Gem—who are sitting in the space before you—
Possess the power that can save you from this plight.
Finally, hold in your mind the thought that you beseech this object of refuge
From the bottom of your heart to save you and all sentient beings
Right now from this suffering of Revivals, while you diligently repeat
The refuge formula aloud many times over.

Do the same for the other hot hells—
Black Lines, Compression, Screams, and the rest—
As well as for the four adjacent hell regions,
The eight cold hells, the hungry ghosts, animals, and so on.
Meditate on all their various sufferings, taking each one separately.
Then recite the refuge formula aloud, after you have contemplated each topic.
These key points make for a practice that is truly wonderful.
Nowadays, many persons recite the refuge formula a prescribed number of times.
But they repeat the formula without having gained any knowledge

Of the topics just described, such as the causes and essence of taking refuge,
Its virtuous qualities, distinctions, or the professing of faith and dis-avowal of other religions.
Such practice is mere verbal striving, mere words, mere counting.
How could this ever represent a genuine form of taking refuge?
What can you accomplish by a refuge practice which fails to enter the door
To the inner faith of Buddhism and which is performed as though it were a form of
punishment?

So if you want to undertake a prescribed number of refuge recitations,
Perform them here,³² while reflecting extensively on the various topics;
This will ensure that your efforts are carried out most effectively.

31. *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, chapter 2, verses 45–53.

32. That is, the appropriate occasion for carrying out such a practice is when you have reached this stage in the Lam-rim teachings.

Colophon:

Taken from *Liberation in Our Hands*, “Appendix F: How to Meditate on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment,” by Pabongkha Rinpoche pp. 323–44. Original translation by Art Engle. Reprinted here with permission from Mahayana Sutra and Tantra Press.



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