

**NOTES ON THE BUDDHIST PATH
TO ENLIGHTENMENT**

Liberation Prison Project

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**PART ONE
THE TEACHINGS**

1. The Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

In order to be qualified to receive an initiation into a tantric practice such as this yoga method, as Lama Yeshe would call it, and then to practice it, one needs to have a heartfelt appreciation for the three principal aspects of the path to enlightenment: renunciation, bodhicitta, and emptiness. An excellent way to accomplish this is to listen to and meditate upon the teachings known in Tibetan as lam-rim, the “graded path” to enlightenment. In the lam-rim – a packaging of Lord Buddha’s teachings, unique to Tibet, based upon the elucidations of the eleventh-century Indian master Atisha – the essential points of Buddha’s extensive explanations of psychology and philosophy are extracted and presented from A to Z in such a way that they can be internalized, experienced as something relevant to one’s life, which is the point. As Lama Tsongkhapa, the fourteenth-century founder of the Gelug tradition, according to whose approach Lama Yeshe’s teachings are given, says in one of his poetic texts on the lam-rim, *Songs of Experience*, “All the teachings are to be taken as sound advice as there is no contradiction between scripture and practice.”

It is easy to be captivated intellectually by Buddha’s ideas about reality but to forget to taste them, as Lama Yeshe would put it. It’s also easy to not know how to taste them. The type of meditation that one uses to internalize these ideas, advocated by Lama Tsongkhapa, is called analytical meditation.

Simply, analytical meditation is a method for familiarizing oneself – the meaning of the Tibetan word for meditation, gom, is “to familiarize” – again and again with the various approaches taught by the Buddha, bringing them from the head to the heart, until they are one’s own experience and no longer merely intellectual.

In other words, by sitting still and thinking about Buddha’s views again and again and from many angles in a clear and intelligent way with a finely focused mind – in other words, by analyzing them – we are compelled to reassess at ever deeper levels the fundamental assumptions that we hold as truths and that Buddha has shown to be completely untrue. Eventually, we undergo a paradigm shift in the way we perceive ourselves and the world. Buddha says that the extent to which these assumptions are out of sync with how things actually are is the extent to which we suffer and the extent to which, therefore, we harm others. Thus, a consequence of practice is the ending of suffering, nirvana – a psychological state, not some place like heaven. The lam-rim is presented according to three levels of practice. The first two scopes, as they are called, are practices shared by the Hinayana teachings of Lord Buddha, and the third scope is the presentation of the Mahayana components of the path to enlightenment.

According to Mahayana Buddhism, just as a bird needs two wings to fly, we need both the wing of wisdom and the wing of compassion. In order to develop the wisdom wing – mainly accomplished in the first two scopes – we work on our own minds; the main beneficiary is oneself, but indirectly others also benefit. In order to develop the compassion wing – accomplished in the third scope – we continue to work on our minds, but the main beneficiary is others.

THE PRELIMINARY CONTEMPLATIONS

Mind The first point to become familiar with – using the approach of Lama Zopa Rinpoche – is the beginninglessness of the mind. And especially for Westerners, this demands that we understand the nature of mind in a conventional sense. “The workshop is in the mind,” as Rinpoche puts it, and as long as we’re not clear about exactly what the mind is and what it is not, we won’t make much progress in our practice.

According to Buddha, “mind” refers to the entire spectrum of our internal experiences: thoughts, feelings, emotions, tendencies, personality characteristics, unconscious, subconscious, intuition, spirit; all of this is known as mind, or consciousness. It is not the brain, it’s not physical. It does not come from anyone else, neither one’s parents nor a superior being.

The only other option is that it comes from previous moments of itself, that it has its own continuity, and thus is beginningless. This present moment of mind has to have come from a previous moment, which itself has come from a previous moment, and so forth. Like the chicken and the egg, we cannot find a first moment. No matter how far back we trace the continuity of our mental moments, whichever moment we get to, that moment can’t simply have begun on its own, out of nowhere; it must necessarily have come from a previous moment of that very continuity of mind. Thus, we can never find a first moment. (And it’s the same with physical energy, the universe itself. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama said in discussion with scientists: Big bang? No problem. Just not the first big bang, that’s all.)

As a starting point for practice, it’s also crucial to understand the ultimate nature of this mind of ours. According to Mahayana Buddhism, every living being possesses innately the potential for perfection, for Buddha hood. The term in Tibetan for sentient being is *sem-chen*, literally, mind possessor; and according to Buddha there is not an atom of space where there are not sentient beings.

Each of these beings is actually a potential Buddha (in Sanskrit, “fully awake”) in the sense that an acorn is a potential oak tree. That is the acorn’s nature, what it really is. We have no choice but to give it the appropriate conditions to enable it to become what it really is, an oak tree. And so with sentient beings: we have no choice but to develop our innate potential for perfection.

That is to say, we can develop all our good qualities – such as love, compassion, generosity, wisdom, and so forth – to a state of perfection beyond which we can’t develop them further. This state of perfection, Buddha says, is our natural state.

The Virtuous Friend Recognizing that we have this innate potential, we need to find someone to show us how to develop it. There’s nothing we know that we haven’t learned from others, so it goes without saying that to develop our perfection in the way that Buddha describes it, we need to find a qualified teacher.

Having found the teacher, we need to devote ourselves appropriately in order to get the maximum benefit from the relationship. In short, the heart of this practice is to see the guru as the Buddha.

It is said that the real benefit that comes from a teaching is not so much from the teacher’s knowledge but more from our own confidence, our faith, that the teacher is the Buddha. And we will have this confidence only if we have thoroughly and intelligently checked the teacher before committing ourselves. If we’re half-hearted, or overly sentimental, there will be no stability in the relationship, and we won’t be convinced that the instructions are valid. We are moving into uncharted waters, so we need great confidence. The responsibility is ours.

This precious human rebirth Having found a teacher, we need to energize ourselves to want to develop our innate potential; the desire to do so doesn’t come naturally. Lama Atisha, the eleventh-century Indian master who wrote the text *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* upon which Lama Tsongkhapa’s lam-rim teachings are based, recommends that we contemplate how fortunate we are that as human beings we have such excellent conditions: an intelligent mind, a healthy body, access to valid spiritual paths and teachers, and so forth; and that we are free of the appalling conditions that the vast majority of sentient beings experience.

This human life is a rare thing to have. According to Buddha, human beings represent only the tiniest percentage of all living beings. In *The Tibetan Art of Parenting*, one Tibetan lama was quoted as saying that whenever any human male and female are in sexual union, billions of consciousnesses that have recently passed away (from all realms of existence) are hovering around, desperate to get a human rebirth.

If we were to realize how hard we must have worked in our past lives to have obtained this good-quality, one-in-a-billion human body and mind and this collection of conducive conditions, we would be extremely humbled and would find it unbearable to waste even a single moment of this precious opportunity.

To waste this life is to use it for anything less than the practice of morality – and the minimum level of morality is to refrain from harming others. To use this life even more skillfully, we could remove from our minds the most deeply held wrong assumptions about how things exist; and, even more skillfully still, we could fulfill our innate potential for perfection by attaining Buddha hood, and then be able to work unceasingly for the benefit of others.

THE LOWEST SCOPE OF PRACTICE

Death and impermanence Having primed ourselves for practice, we now contemplate how this precious and rare human life is extremely fragile and can end at any moment. The assumption of permanence is deep within us. The idea that our friend who has cancer is dying and we are not is absurd. As Lama Zopa Rinpoche points out, “Living people die before dying people every day.”

By contemplating that our death is definite, that our time of death is uncertain, and that the only thing of any use to us at death is the accumulation of virtue within our minds, we will radically increase our wish not to waste this life.

The suffering of the lower realms Given that we could die at any moment – “Best to think

that I will die today,” says Rinpoche – and given that there are countless imprints of negativity, the potential causes of future rebirths, on our beginningless minds, it is not unlikely that our next rebirth will be a suffering one. By contemplating the sufferings of such beings as animals, hungry ghosts, and hell beings, we can develop a healthy revulsion for those types of rebirth.

All living beings are experiencing the results of their own past actions. As Lama Yeshe says, It’s not as if someone in a place called Hell built that iron house, lit the blazing fire, and thought, “Aha! I am waiting for Thubten Yeshe. Soon he will die and come here. I’m ready for him!” It is not like that. Hell does not exist in that way. The reality is that at the time of death, the powerful energy of the previous negative actions of that being, existing as imprints on its mind, is awakened, or activated, and creates that being’s experience of intense suffering, which we call Hell. Hell does not exist from its own side; the negative mind makes it up.

Refuge in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha Whom can I turn to give me the methods to prevent such a suffering situation? We can have great appreciation for an excellent doctor, but if we’re not suffering, we won’t go out of our way to consult him. But when we discover that we’re sick, we will eagerly turn to him and his medicine.

Recognizing that we’re suffering, we contemplate the qualities of Buddha, his medicine, and his practitioners, and, based on our wish to get rid of suffering, we turn to them for support. Especially we turn to the Dharma, Buddha’s medicine, the methods he taught that we will apply. The Dharma is the real refuge.

Karma Now we actually begin to practice: we apply Buddha’s instructions on how to avoid suffering. We learn to know what to practice and what to avoid. According to Buddha, everything we say, do, and think is a karma, an action, that will necessarily bring a reaction, a result, in the

future. Every thought, word, and deed plants seeds in our minds that will necessarily ripen as fruit: negative actions ripen as suffering, positive actions ripen as happiness. There is nothing that living beings experience that isn't the result of what they've done before. With karma, there is no one sitting in judgment, punishing or rewarding us. Actions bring their own results; it just naturally happens, according to Buddha.

Given the simple logic that we want happiness and don't want suffering, we learn to abide by the laws of karma – natural laws, not created by anyone. What we are now is the result of what we have done, said, and thought before, and what we will be in the future is thus in our own hands. We are the boss. One might say that for the Buddha, karma is the creation principle. It is not enough, however, merely to refrain from creating negative karma; we need to take care of the karmic seeds already in our minds, planted there since beginningless time. Thus, we begin to “have great respect and esteem for the four opponent powers, which can fully purify us of having to experience the results of our negative karma in the future,” as Lama Tsongkhapa says in his *Songs of Experience*.

Given that we've had countless lives in the past and that many of the karmic seeds in our minds from those past lives are likely to be negative, and given that suffering comes from negative karma and that we don't want suffering, it follows that we would want to remove the negative karmic seeds from our minds before they ripen.

Purification is a psychological process. “We created negativity with our minds,” says Lama Yeshe, “and we purify it by creating positivity.” The four opponent powers are regret, reliance, the antidote, and the promise.

First, we need to regret the harm we've done in the past to others, because we do not want any more suffering in the future; we're fed up with suffering. Second, we need to rely upon the Buddha and his methods; we also rely upon the

sentient beings whom we have harmed by developing compassion for them, aspiring to become a Buddha as quickly as possible, since only then can we really know how to benefit them. Third, we apply the antidote in the form of a purification practice. This is like taking the medicine for our karmic illness – and Buddhism has a medicine cabinet full of medicines. Finally, we make the promise, the determination not to create these negative actions, not to do harm, again.

“We can mold our minds into any shape we like,” Lama Zopa Rinpoche says – and that we are “insane,” not to do this practice every day.

Having a strong appreciation for the logic of karma, based on thinking about death and impermanence and the lower realms and on going for refuge in the Buddha, his Dharma, and Sangha – all based on the preliminary three contemplations – we can be assured that, at the very least, when we die our consciousness will continue to experience an environment conducive to happiness.

Psychologically, this is the basic – but nevertheless amazing – level of practice. A person of this level of capability is a mature human being possessing a healthy self-respect, who recognizes that their actions bring consequences to themselves, and who thus wants to avoid committing any negative actions. At this level of practice, there is not yet any talk of compassion for others – that belongs to the third scope. First, we need to develop compassion for ourselves.

This is the beginning of renunciation, the first principal aspect of the path to enlightenment.

THE MIDDLE SCOPE OF PRACTICE

At this point, we are now subdued enough, and aware enough, to delve more deeply into the way our mind works; to understand in a more sophisticated way Lord Buddha's model of the mind. We now truly become our own therapists, as Lama Yeshe would say. By familiarizing

ourselves with the **four noble truths**, for example, we can fully develop renunciation.

The **third noble truth** is Buddha's assertion that it is possible to be free of suffering. This is another way of stating, according to the Mahayana Buddhist approach, that we all possess the innate potential for buddhahood. So, if it's true that it's possible to be free of suffering – and Buddha is not talking the way most religions talk, that this can only be achieved after we've died, in heaven with God; he's talking psychologically – then we need to discover precisely what suffering is (the **first noble truth**), we need to discover precisely what the causes of suffering are (the **second**), and then we need to know the way to stop suffering and its causes (the **fourth**). It's extremely practical.

This needs a lot of inner investigation: the clarity, precision, and depth of analysis that we use in scientific discovery is what Buddha demands we use to discover the nature of our minds, karma, emptiness, and the rest.

There are **three kinds of suffering**: the suffering of suffering – ordinary, everyday suffering and pain; the suffering of change – what we usually think of as happiness; and all-pervasive suffering – the condition of being propelled into this universe, with this body and mind, all of which are products of desire and the other delusions, and thus are in the nature of suffering.

The **causes of suffering** are two: karma, our past actions that set us up to meet this suffering situation, and the delusions, our present neurotic responses to our situation. The punch in the nose, for example – which is what we normally think of as the cause of our suffering – actually plays only a secondary role, according to Buddha. My past harmful actions are the main reason I'm being punched now, and my angry response to the punch is the main reason I will suffer in the future. Thus, the ball keeps rolling. However, once we establish the actual causes of the problem, we will know how to solve it.

We need, then, to become very familiar with **the way our mind works**. We start by learning to distinguish between **sensory consciousnesses** and the **mental consciousness**. Then, within mental consciousness – our thoughts, feelings, and emotions – we need to distinguish between the **positive** states of mind and the **negative**. And then, crucially, we need to understand how all our emotions are conceptually based. Anger, attachment, jealousy, and the rest are elaborate conceptual constructions. They're stories made up by our minds.

The **root cause of our suffering** is the state of mind called ignorance (often known as self-grasping when it's related to oneself).

Effectively, however, attachment is the main source of our problems in day-to-day life. It's the default mode of the mind. Yet, when we hear Buddha say that we can't be happy unless we give up attachment, we panic and think, as Lama Zopa Rinpoche puts it, "You mean, I have to give up my heart, my happiness?" This is because we confuse attachment with love, happiness, pleasure, and so forth.

The main cause of the second kind of suffering, the suffering of change, is **attachment**. The experience of pleasure I get when I eat chocolate cake is, in fact, nothing other than suffering. Why?

First, the pleasure doesn't last: Attachment is completely convinced that it will, but the pleasure inexorably turns into suffering – the more cake I eat, the more disgusting it becomes.

Second, the pleasure I experience is nothing other than suffering because it's adulterated, not pure. The pleasure is dependent upon delusions: I need to get something in order to be happy. And third, the pleasure is actually suffering because, as our mothers told us, "The more you get, the more you want." I don't actually get satisfaction when I eat the cake, which is what my attachment expects. In fact, I get

dissatisfaction instead, as my yearning to eat cake is even greater next time.

Attachment goes to extremely subtle levels. It's insidious. As Lama Yeshe says, he could tell us about attachment "for one whole year," but we'll never begin to understand it until we've looked deeply and carefully into our own minds and discovered the intricacies of it for ourselves. Attachment is a honey-covered razor blade: we are convinced it's the prelude to pleasure, but in fact, it leads to nothing other than pain.

The pleasure we get by following attachment is the pleasure of the junkie: it doesn't last, it is contaminated, and it leads only to more craving. In our culture, it's the junkie who is said to have a problem with attachment while the rest of us are "normal." According to Buddha's model of the mind, attachment and addiction are synonymous. Due to our attachment, in other words, we're all addicts – it is simply a question of degree.

Buddha says that real pleasure, or happiness, is the state of our minds once we've given up attachment. It's our natural state (attachment, anger, jealousy, and the rest are thoroughly unnatural, according to Buddha), it lasts, and it isn't dependent upon something outside of ourselves. Who wouldn't want that?

Contemplating the four noble truths again and again will eventually bring us to a genuine renunciation of suffering and its causes. As Lama Zopa Rinpoche says, we will have achieved renunciation when "just the thought of another moment of attachment is so disgusting, it's like being in a septic tank."

The person at this level of capability is an extremely wise, joyful, loving person, and utterly content, regardless of whatever happens in their life. This renunciation, the first of the three principal aspects of the path, is the culmination of practice of the first two scopes.

THE GREAT SCOPE OF PRACTICE

The accomplishment of renunciation is the sound basis for the development of love,

compassion, and eventually, bodhichitta, the second principal aspect of the path. Without being fed up with my own suffering (renunciation), based on the understanding of why I'm suffering (my past karma and present delusions), I cannot develop empathy for the suffering of others (compassion) based on the understanding of why they're suffering (their past karma and present delusions).

The culmination of this scope of practice is bodhichitta: the spontaneous and heartfelt wish to become a Buddha as quickly as possible because the suffering of others is unbearable, knowing that only as a Buddha can one be effective in eliminating the suffering of others.

Bodhichitta comes from the development of great compassion: not only is the suffering of others unbearable, but one feels the responsibility to remove it, just as a mother knows that it is her job to relieve the suffering of her child. His Holiness the Dalai Lama calls this great compassion "universal responsibility."

Great compassion comes from compassion: the finding of the suffering of others unbearable.

Compassion is developed after love, which is the wish that others be happy. (Khensur Rinpoche Jampa Tegchog has pointed out that, depending on the person, sometimes compassion is developed before love.)

The foundation of all these is equanimity, the awareness that friend, enemy, and stranger are actually equal, from the point of view of their each wanting to be happy.

Of the various meditation techniques used to develop these amazing states of mind, the series known as exchanging self with others is considered to be the most powerful. Lama Atisha received these instructions of exchanging self with others from his guru Serlingpa in Indonesia. As Pabongkha Rinpoche points out in *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, after Lama Atisha received these teachings, they were kept secret, as they were considered to be so far beyond the capability of most ordinary people.

Another way of developing bodhichitta, which comes from Lama Tsongkhapa, combines the techniques taught in exchanging self with others with those of the sevenfold cause and effect instruction, eleven altogether.

Equanimity Friend, enemy, and stranger are labels invented by the ego. A friend is necessarily a person who helps me – not my next door neighbor, me. An enemy is someone who harms me, and a stranger is a person who neither harms nor helps me. Consequently, we feel attachment for the friend, aversion for the enemy, and indifference toward the stranger. We are blinded by these views.

Until we can go beyond these deluded interpretations and come to see our enemies, friends, and strangers as equal, our hearts can't grow genuine love and compassion. As Lama Zopa Rinpoche says, the love we feel now (for our friends) is indeed love, but it's unstable because of being based on attachment. There are strings attached: as long as you help me, of course I will love you, that is to say, want you to be happy.

We need to argue with our ego's views, gradually seeing the illogic of them, discovering that in actual fact our friends, enemies, and strangers, from their point of view, are completely equal in wanting to be happy.

This equanimity is the stable foundation on which to build genuine love, compassion, great compassion, and bodhichitta.

We now meditate on the eleven techniques for developing bodhichitta.

All sentient beings have been my mother Recognizing that our mind is beginningless, it follows that we've had countless previous lives in which we have been connected to all beings countless times. It's a matter of numbers. This contemplation is a practical way to expand our mind to encompass all others. In order to open my heart to these countless faceless beings, it helps to think about how they've all been my mother in the past. In the West, we

might think this is meant to make us miserable, as we tend to think that our mothers are a main cause of our suffering. It's helpful, then, to contemplate the many ways in which our mother has been kind.

Contemplating the kindness of the mother At the moment, with our deeply held wrong assumptions – that I didn't ask to get born, that who I am has nothing to do with me, that my mother and father made me, and so forth – it seems reasonable to blame our parents for our problems. Also, even our view of kindness is mistaken: we think of someone as kind only if they do what we want. However, if we understand that a person is kind when they make the effort to help us, then it's clear our mother has been kind in a myriad of ways. Even if she gave me away at birth, her kindness in not aborting me is extraordinary.

If all beings have been my mother, then they have all been kind to me in a vast number of ways.

Contemplating the kindness of all beings An even more profound way to expand our hearts to encompass others is to contemplate the ways in which all beings are kind to me. There's nothing that I've used in my life that hasn't come from the work of countless living beings. I can't find the beginning of the number of beings involved in the making of this book I'm holding: the trees the paper came from, the people who cut down the trees, the creatures who died, the people who shipped the trees, the driver of the truck, the people who made the truck; those who made the paper, who cut the paper, wrapped it, those who made the wrapping; those who built the store where I bought the book... If it were not for every one of them, I would not have a book, clothes, food, even a body.

Repaying their kindness I have no choice, then, but to try to repay the endless kindness of these countless mother sentient beings, but for whom I would have nothing. I would not even exist.

Seeing others and myself as equal

Because of my delusions, instinctively I see my views, my needs, as more important than the views and needs of others. But there is no logic to this at all. In reality, there is not a fraction of difference between me and others, in just the same way as there is no difference between friend, enemy, and stranger. Everyone else wants to be happy and doesn't want to suffer, just like me. Just ask them; this fact is not hard to prove. Even if I have low self-esteem, I don't really see others as more important than me; actually, I resent them. Always, I'm full of an overriding sense of self.

The disadvantages of cherishing myself more than others From the point of view of the wisdom wing, the main cause of our suffering is self-grasping, the instinctive clinging to an inherent sense of self. From the point of view of the compassion wing, the instinctive wish to take care of myself more than others – the attitude of self-cherishing – is the problem.

All my problems with others, in my personal relationships or at work, are because of putting myself first. Even in a relationship with another person in 12 Becoming the Compassion Buddha which I feel like the victim, this too is due to my past negative karma toward that person, which I created out of self-cherishing.

The advantages of cherishing others more than myself Everything good in my life comes from having put others first in the past: I have money because of my past generosity, people like me because I've been kind in the past, they trust me because I've spoken the truth. Putting others first is why I feel good right now.

If putting others first is what will make me happy, then how illogical of me not to do so. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said, "If you are going to be selfish, be wisely selfish: cherish others."

Taking upon myself the suffering of others: Developing compassion Using the meditation technique called *tong-len* (giving and

taking), we visualize a suffering person or group of people in front of us. This technique can be done conjoined with the breath: when we breathe in, we imagine taking into ourselves the sufferings of others.

Pabongkha Rinpoche recommends that we start in the morning: after we rise, we visualize taking upon ourselves our own afternoon headache. Then we move on to taking on the sufferings of our dearest friends, then those of our enemies. Eventually, we take on the sufferings of all living beings in the various realms. We imagine that this suffering comes into us and smashes the rock of self-cherishing at our heart; as a result, we imagine that all others are now free of their suffering.

Giving my happiness and good qualities to others: Developing love When we breathe out, we imagine giving our happiness, wealth, health, good qualities, and merits to our friends, then to our enemies, and then to all living beings. How marvelous that they are now happy!

Great compassion On the basis of these meditations, we gradually become convinced that it's our job actually to take away the suffering of others. If not me, then who will do this? Contemplating in this way will eventually lead to the profound attitude of bodhichitta.

Bodhichitta Bodhichitta is the spontaneous and heartfelt wish to become a Buddha as quickly as possible because only when we are enlightened will we be qualified to do the job of perfectly guiding others away from their suffering and to the perfection of their own buddhahood. One who has completely accomplished this sublime state of mind is a bodhisattva. One of the indications of having accomplished bodhichitta, of having become a bodhisattva, is that the thought of "I" no longer arises in the mind; thus, one exists only for the sake of others. It is said that even the breath of a bodhisattva is for the sake of others. With this realization of bodhichitta, we will have

accomplished the second of the three principal aspects of the path.

We now practice the six perfections of the bodhisattva: generosity, morality, patience, enthusiastic perseverance, meditation, and wisdom. The first four are accomplished in relation to sentient beings, the last two in one's meditation.

Generosity We practice this by giving things to those who need them, even as small as a mouthful of food to a dog; giving advice to help people's minds; giving what is called fearlessness by rescuing creatures from imminent death, for example, or by liberating people from prison, as Pabongkha Rinpoche suggests.

Sometimes it's easier to give advice than to give money to a homeless person, for example. We should learn to give what's difficult to give – and perhaps we could give five dollars, not fifty cents.

A sign of having perfected generosity is, for example, the ability to effortlessly give our body to a starving animal (assuming, of course, that there's no other supply of food available - bodhisattvas aren't trying to prove anything). In one of his previous lives, Lord Buddha happily gave his body to a starving mother tiger who was about to eat her babies. Right now, we're not even capable of giving, as Lama Zopa Rinpoche has said, "one tiny, tiny drop of blood to a mosquito."

Morality In our practice of the wisdom wing (the first and second scopes), we focus on the morality of refraining from harming others. In the practice of the third scope, the compassion wing, we focus on actively benefiting others as well: we work to help the homeless, the suffering, the sick, the poor, the dying – whoever crosses our path needing help.

Patience Patience is not merely gritting our teeth and waiting for unwanted things to go away. Patience is a courageous state of mind that happily welcomes the difficulty.

There are three types of patience. First, there's the patience of accepting the harm that people do to us. The main reason we get so upset is because of our deeply held wrong assumptions that it is unfair for others to harm me, that I don't deserve it, that it has nothing to do with me, and so forth – Lama Yeshe calls ego "the self-pity me." Buddha says it has everything to do with me: I created the cause to experience it, so I have no choice but to accept it. By thinking in this way, I purify my negative karma as well as develop a brave and happy mind.

There is also the patience of accepting sickness, problems, and so forth that come to us, for the same reasons as above. Lama Zopa Rinpoche says that "the thought of liking problems should arise naturally, like the thought of liking ice cream."

And finally, there is the patience of gaining assurance in the Dharma, as Pabongkha Rinpoche calls it.

Enthusiastic perseverance, or joyful effort Without enthusiasm, we can't succeed at anything in our lives, especially buddhahood. The main obstacles are the three kinds of laziness.

The first is the ordinary laziness of being too tired. We assume sleep is a necessity, but there are countless great practitioners who have gone beyond the need for it.

The second kind of laziness is what we usually call being too busy: putting off doing what we need to do. It feels like a virtue, but is, in fact, one of our biggest obstacles to success.

The third kind of laziness is the deeply held belief that I'm not capable. It, too, feels like a virtue; it seems as if we are being humble. But as long as we think that we can't achieve our potential, we will remain stuck in our comfort zone, never moving forward. In any case, it's simply not true: we all possess the potential to be a Buddha. It's our nature.

Meditation Calm abiding, or mental quiescence, is the state of mind of a person who has achieved single-pointed concentration in

meditation. There are two kinds of meditation, and this is the accomplishment of the first kind: concentration meditation.

Single-pointed concentration is a subtle level of conscious awareness, during which the grosser levels of conceptual and sensory awareness have necessarily ceased. It is a state of mind not even recognized in Western models of the mind, but one that Buddha says we can all access.

The main obstacles to our achieving calm abiding are the two extreme states of mind that we gravitate between during meditation: over-excitement and dullness. The person who has accomplished calm abiding has gone beyond even the subtlest levels of these two states. The mind when it's single-pointedly concentrated is extremely refined, very sharp and clear, and utterly still. Sensory awareness and gross conceptuality have completely ceased. The meditator can effortlessly access and stay in that state of mind as often and as long as they like. The experience of mental quiescence is also an extremely joyful one – far more blissful, according to Lord Buddha, than the best sensory pleasure we've ever had.

Wisdom The essence of the perfection of wisdom is the development of special insight into emptiness. With the subtler level of conscious awareness gained in calm abiding meditation, we can identify and counteract the primordial misconception, the wrong assumption held deep in the bones of our being, about the way we ourselves and the world around us exist. This misconception is called ignorance, and keeps us locked into the cycle of suffering.

This ignorance is not merely unawareness of what's actually happening but a state of mind that actively makes up its own fantasies. It is impossible to see through the elaborate projections of ignorance with our usual gross conceptual level of mind; we need to access the microscope of our mind to do that, using the techniques of calm abiding.

As mentioned above, the extent to which we are not in touch with the way things are is the extent to which we suffer and, in turn, the extent to which we harm others. Ignorance, ego-grasping, is the root neurosis, the primordial root cause of this suffering. Its main function is to cling to a separate, limited, and fearful sense of self, and its voices are attachment, jealousy, anger, pride, depression, and the rest. As long as we follow these, we are acting completely against our nature, Buddha says; we will always suffer, and we will cause suffering to others.

First, we need to comprehend the Buddha's explanations about the way ignorance and the other deluded emotions function and about the way the self and other things actually exist. Then, using the microscope of our mind, accessed in single-pointed meditation, we probe and analyze again and again in the second mode of meditation, called insight meditation, how this ignorance is a liar and a cheat: that it's been hallucinating the fantasy self all along. In the subtlety of concentrated meditation we deconstruct ignorance's fantasies, eventually discovering, experientially and irreversibly, the absence of the fantasy self. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said, it's not as if we find the ego and then throw it out - it was never there in the first place. What we find is its absence. The discovery of this absence is the experience of emptiness.

With this, we will have accomplished the third principal aspect of the path, the view of emptiness.

So unbearable is the suffering of others, we will now happily embark upon the skillful practices of the Tantrayana, which will enable us to very quickly become our real self – a Buddha .

By Ven. Robina Courtin (The Editor's Introduction from Lama Yeshe's Becoming the Compassion Buddha, Wisdom Publications.

2. *What is Meditation?*

The Tibetan word for meditation is *gom*, which translates as “to familiarize,” or “to habituate.” In this sense, meditation is a psychological process of familiarizing, habituating, oneself with the positive and with what is real. Right now, according to Buddha, our minds are thoroughly habituated with the negative, all the nonsense made up by the ego, by attachment, anger, jealousy, pride and the rest, which causes us suffering, to experience life in a deluded, distorted, fearful way, and to harm others.

Our finding it hard to change from the negative to the positive shows what our minds are familiar with at the moment.

A person using Buddha’s methods is, essentially, attempting to develop their positive potential and lessen the negative. Buddha says this potential is innate; that love, wisdom, kindness, generosity, etc. are at the core of our being and, in fact, define us; and that negativity, although present in our minds and lives, does not define us, is not innate, and thus can be removed.

Given this, we need to train in two kinds of meditation, two ways of using our mind in meditation. Buddha’s expertise is the mind.

The first is called **stabilization** or **concentration** meditation; the second is called **insight** meditation. It’s a practical, doable process.

Stabilization meditation is a method for concentrating the mind. The short-term benefits of even moderate success are enormous – we become calm, relaxed, clear, controlled, less neurotic. But the longterm goal is the point: the development of a very refined, focused level of awareness, bringing it to a degree of clarity and wisdom and joy that we can’t even imagine as possible according to the prevalent materialist views of the mind. It’s a tried and tested method

that has been around for thousands of years and is doable by anyone.

Even though the benefits of single-pointed concentration are huge, it’s just the beginning. We can now begin the work of developing insight.

Insight into what? According to Buddha, because our mind is full of misconceptions about reality – that things are permanent, whereas they’re impermanent; that things happen to us without cause from our side, whereas they happen according to our past actions; that our own self and all other phenomena have an inherent nature, whereas they don’t; and so on – then we need to develop insight into how things actually are. Because these delusions, these misconceptions are so deep, so intuitive, we need to develop very refined concentration and thus a very refined level of mental ability to cut through them.

Essentially, this is a cognitive process. We take whatever topic we want to develop insight into – karma, emptiness, impermanence, whatever – and analyze it, deconstruct it, arguing with ego’s deluded view. Put simply, we think about it. But because the mind is more refined, more focused, it’s more capable. The analysis will trigger an insight, which we then hold with our concentration.

In this way we gradually familiarize ourselves – develop insight into – the way things actually are, ceasing our own suffering and, on the basis of developing compassion, benefiting others.

These same tools, of concentration and analysis, are also used in visualization meditation; instead of thinking, however, one visualizes the Buddha and then focuses on that internal image as a method for developing within ourselves the perfect qualities embodied by the Buddha, our own innate potential.

By Ven. Robina Courtin

3. *What is the Mind?*

The words “mind” and “consciousness” are used synonymously by Buddhists. Mind, in fact, is at the very heart of Buddhism. and it has several characteristics.

First, it refers not just to the gross level of our conceptual thinking, say, which is the way the word’s used in our culture, but to the entire spectrum of our internal experiences: concepts, emotions, sensory experiences, the unconscious, subconscious, spirit, whatever.

Second, there is not one atom of our mind or consciousness that is physical. The brain is not the mind, according to Buddhism. Sure, we need a decent working brain and nervous system for our mind – our gross, conceptual, emotional and sensory levels of mind – to function well; that’s for sure. But just because they have an interdependent relationship doesn’t mean they are the same thing.

Third, there is not one atom of our mind or consciousness that comes from outside us: not from some superior being called God or Buddha, nor from parents – which are the two usual options people think about, aren’t they? Our body, no problem: that comes from the egg and sperm of the mother and father. But not our thoughts and feelings and characteristics and habits and personalities and the rest. None of this comes from parents. Sure, we can learn from them, but Buddhism says the seed of that propensity has to be within our mind in the first place. And none of this is “created” by some superior being.

Usually we say that if my father beat me, he put anger into me. No. If what he did brought up anger within my mind, the seed of anger has to have been within me in the first place. The beating comes from the father – literally – but the anger does not. That’s mine.

This is fundamental to Buddhist philosophy, psychology and practice. Our mind is our own.

Mind is the brain?

If the brain is the mind, then I’m wondering why we can’t just cut out the bits that are suffering or angry or jealous, just like we can cut out a cancer? They tried this, and look at the disastrous results!

And I wonder why I can choose to think different things without actively doing something to my brain?

And why does someone have the tendency to kill or lie or steal? And do those brains all show similar characteristics.

Would a person skilled in brains know just by looking at the brains of people what the people are like? Would they be able to “read” brains?

And if the mind is the brain, why can I know something about my mind by meditating and reflecting, yet I don’t know the first thing about my physical brain?

I remember reading Stephen Hawkins’s book *A Brief History of Time* and in it he said something like, “We’ve almost discovered the mind of God, but it hasn’t helped us learn much at all about human behavior.” This for me is most significant. Because Buddhism says you can learn all you like about the physical universe, including brains, but until you start looking into your own mind, your own thoughts and feelings and emotions, it’s useless knowledge. This is certainly my own experience.

According to Buddha the gross level of our conscious awareness – conceptual and sensory – for sure depends upon the brain. That is evident. If the brain and our nervous system are not functioning properly, then everything comes out confused, doesn’t it? But Buddha’s point is that there are subtler levels of consciousness that do not depend upon the brain, upon any part of the physical body at all. We experience glimpses of this subtler level during our dreams, for example. Yogis and yoginis are able to access this subtler

level in single-pointed meditation. And it's this level of consciousness, when accessed clearly and with control, that can see past and future, others' thoughts, etc.

The perfection that Buddha talks about – buddhahood – is necessarily a function of the subtler consciousness, not of the conceptual or the sensory. These are deluded, according to Buddha, and do not perceive reality as it exists.

A person like the Dalai Lama, for example, whom other lamas assert has achieved this buddhahood (although he himself says he's "an ordinary Buddhist monk."), has a body and a brain, etc., because that's the form he's chosen to be born in for the benefit of humans. Consciousness/mind in general is not physical, but right now, because we're caught up in the conceptual and sensory world, our minds are polluted, limited. The consciousness of an enlightened being, having de-polluted their mind and discovered reality, necessarily pervades the universe, that is, knows everything. They abide naturally in this non-physical state of bliss, but it's not much use to others, so they manifest in human or other forms for others' sake.

Their brains, therefore, might not look any different to any ordinary person's, because that's just the form they've chosen. They could, for example, if it were beneficial, manifest as a dog or a mouse, with the brain of a dog or a mouse. But it's like they're play-acting.

Gross consciousness, subtle consciousness, very subtle consciousness

There are many ways to talk about the mind, according to Buddhism.

There is gross consciousness, subtle consciousness, and very subtle consciousness. Gross consciousness refers to all our experiences from day to day as ordinary humans, that is, emotions, feelings, thoughts, sensory experiences etc. All of this gross level depends upon the brain, the nervous system, the human body, but is not the brain.

Then the subtle consciousness and the very subtle, these do not depend upon the gross body for their existence – which is why Buddhism talks about reincarnation, etc. We virtually never experience the very subtle level of consciousness, but we do experience the subtle: in dreams, for example. We have not much control at this level, we can see that, but according to the advanced practices in Buddhism, one can learn to access these subtler levels through meditation and eventually use them at will – to leave the body, go here and there, etc. (all done, of course, in conjunction with the compassionate wish to benefit others).

The very subtle consciousness is the subtlest part of our being, beyond which we cannot be subtler. They say that it's the very subtle consciousness – called the indestructible consciousness – that goes from life to life. And it is something beginningless and endless – hence "indestructible." In other words, it's not created by anyone.

This is what goes from life to life, bearing all the imprints from every action (that is, literally, karma) of body, speech and mind created by that being since beginningless time (except, of course, the actions, karmas, that have actually ripened as experiences). This very subtle consciousness is what goes into the egg and sperm and makes them join together and develop into the fetus.

The idea of beginningless mind fits into the concept of time. Everything is cause and effect: we can see that in our universe, and the mind is part of that universe. So it too abides by the law of cause and effect. Everything that exists is a dynamic process, isn't it? This paper in your hand exists, and you can comfortably talk about it terms of moments of existence. This moment of the paper comes from the previous moment, which comes from the previous moment, and so on. You trace it back in time. You can, conventionally speaking, trace it back even to its first moment as this piece of paper – when it got cut in the paper factory. But it has to have come

from a previous continuity of paper, doesn't it? And that paper has to have come from a previous continuity of trees, which came from previous trees, and so on. Everything is like that.

So this non-physical energy called mind: same. At this moment your mind is existing This moment of your mind is like a link in a chain: this moment is linked to the previous moment, which is linked to or comes from the previous moment, which comes from the previous moment. You cannot find a link missing. Your mind is a continuity of mental energy: mental continuum or mind stream, as they call it.

So, if everything is governed by the process of cause and effect – which is a fundamental assertion in Buddhism – then this moment can be called the effect or result or fruit of the previous moment, which can be called the cause or seed. That, in turn, is the result of the previous moment, which is the result of the previous moment, and so on. You can trace your mind right back to the first moment of yourself, when the egg and sperm came together and the indestructible consciousness from the previous life entered into the womb of your mother while she was having sex with your father. The egg and sperm are the basis into which it entered. So, you then can say the mind of the first moment of the person had to come from a previous moment of mind – and so you keep tracing it back. You can go back like this for 20 years, 2000 years, whatever. But wherever you get to, you always have to say this moment of mind came from a previous moment. How could it come from nothing? How could you say that suddenly, boom, the first moment of your mind started? What was the cause? Where did it come from? Nothing can come from nothing. It's not possible!

The only options are: mind comes from some superior being; mind comes from mother and father; mind comes from nothing. If our mind comes from God or Buddha, then we would be God or Buddha. Apple seeds don't give rise to pears, so how could God or Buddha – perfect

beings – give rise to a deluded suffering being? Illogical.

If our mind comes from mother and father then we would possess all their qualities without exception. We would be them. Just like we would God if we came from God. Which also means we would know their minds perfectly. But look at how your brothers and sisters that came from the same mother and father are different from you. Some more angry, some less generous, some kinder. All so different.

If Hitler's mind came from his mother, then what kind of monster she must have been! But no one talks about how Hitler's mother killed millions of people. She was just some little Austrian woman doing her thing!

Beginningless mind

And how could our mind come from nothing? How could anything come from nothing? Not a possibility! Christians, for example, say that God is the source; Buddhism says that there is no ultimate source. If something exists at this moment, it necessarily has to be part of a beginningless continuity of energy similar to it.

Our mind is like a river of energy, if you like, and whatever we experience here at this place in the river necessarily comes from what you put into downriver. This is the concept of karma. If the river is polluted here it's because we polluted it downriver: it's logical. If you don't pollute the river then the water will be pure; how can it be anything else?

You could say, simply, that mind is our personal experience: what I think in my mind produces results in my mind, not in yours, not directly. Sure, I have an indirect effect on your mind, but the direct cause of what's in your mind comes from your mind. I could be unkind to you for a hundred years, but if anger is not in your mind, it would not have the slightest effect. It's like a seed: you can water the ground for a hundred years, but if there's no seed there, nothing will ever grow. The seed is the main

cause for the tree; the water and soil and fertilizer and sun are indirect causes. Your habit of anger in your own mind is the main cause for your present suffering; my mean words are an indirect cause, a mere catalyst.

So, if we look in our mind now and see anger, say, then we can deduce that anger is beginningless as well. It cannot have begun. If we look in our mind now and see love: same thing: it is beginningless. Our delusions are beginningless. But they are not endless. A seed comes from a previous fruit, which comes from a previous seed, which comes from a previous fruit. . . but you can burn the seed any time you like, can't you?

Buddha nature

But virtue, according to Buddha, interestingly, is endless; it cannot cease. It can be buried by delusion for eons. But because it is the fundamental nature of our mind, it cannot ever be destroyed. Buddha would say that our fundamental nature is purity, perfection, love, compassion, wisdom, etc. That's who we naturally are – not necessarily that we've been this before and lost it; it's simply our potential, waiting to be uncovered. The anger, jealousy, pride, attachment, anxiety, etc. are the pollutions in our mind. They're real, but they're not our true nature.

Buddhism says we all possess "Buddha nature": Buddha is a Sanskrit word that simply means fully awakened and it refers to the state of mind of a person who, having removed all the pollution from their own mind, has discovered their own pure nature. It's something psychological, not some religious concept. And it doesn't exist out there somewhere; it's our very nature.

Water in its nature is pure. It can be polluted, but that pollution never permanently transforms the water: the water always remains water nature. The pollution can be removed from the water and what you're left with is natural pure

water: you can't remove water nature from water: it's what it is. Mind is the same. Its nature is pure, and pure means virtue. It's not some abstract concept. Buddha mind is what is left once every atom of pollution, delusion, has been removed.

And that Buddha mind, being infinite virtue, simply perpetuates itself forever. It pervades the universe: there's not an atom space where that mind can't be.

Our minds, now, due to ego-grasping and delusion, are individual streams of energy, each experiencing the results of what went into them downriver. But when we become Buddha, we will effectively be one: your Buddha mind and my Buddha mind will know everything that exists, both will pervade the universe, both be able to manifest effortlessly in countless forms. But you get to be your Buddha from your hard work and I will get to be mine from my hard work. But the dharmakaya is one.

The Buddhas are everywhere, but the major cause for them to protect us, to be present, is our requests to them, our karmic connection with them, our merit: the Buddhas too are interdependent. My friend Harry, a monk, was leaving for Lawudo one day, up in the Mount Everest region of Nepal where Lama Zopa comes from. Anyway, Lama Zopa had a dream that Harry died, and he tried to get a message to Harry not to go, but he was too late. My friend Sarah, a nun, was with him as they trekked up the mountains. Near a narrow pass, Harry stepped back to make way for some Sherpa porters to come down the path, and Harry slipped backwards and began to fall down the ravine. He knew he was going to die, he said, and everyone else watched in horror as he fell backwards. Then, suddenly, Harry felt two hands pushing him back upwards, and everyone else saw him suddenly reverse direction for no obvious reason. No one could believe it! Lama Zopa, for example, has the power to help everybody in this way, but the only ones who are

able to be helped are those who have created the merit. And Harry obviously had the merit!

Emotions are conceptual

Buddha says that there are two ways the mind functions: either through conception or through perception. It's only when we've accessed a very subtle level of our mind that we are able to have what they refer to as direct perception of things, so that means that the way we function normally is only conceptually.

What's interesting about this is that it includes all our emotions. The way we use that word in the West, "conceptual" usually only refers to the intellectual or thinking process, doesn't it? Well, for Buddha, everything that we experience during our day to day lives is conceptual: thoughts and emotions, positive and negative.

What's hard to see is how attachment and anger, for example, are conceptual states of mind. We tend to think "emotions" have nothing to do with "thought" or "conceptual mind," but the more we look at our mind, the more obvious it is.

Of course, when these emotions are very powerful, it's virtually impossible to see how they are conceptual. But the more and more we begin to subdue our own mind, the more clearly we can observe how the deluded conceptual minds such as anger, attachment, pride and the rest arise, and how they are based in thought.

In fact, what Buddha is saying is that the various delusions, or afflicted emotions, are misconceptions: false, untrue, inaccurate ways of seeing things. One of the key characteristics of delusions, or misconceptions, is that they exaggerate the qualities of their objects: attachment, for example, exaggerates the good qualities of the object – the body, the cake, the music, whatever; anger, or aversion, exaggerates the bad qualities of the object.

It seems that the strong energy of the emotions – which is what makes them feel so utterly real and why they don't seem simply thought – is there simply because of habit: eons of

lives of attachment and anger and the rest make them completely automatic.

Once the initial strong emotion has calmed down it is easier to see the conceptual quality, isn't it? In other words, what sustains the emotion of anger are the various thoughts about the person: he is this, he did that. That constant monologue in the mind: that's the anger, the aversion.

I remember one lama saying that anger arises when attachment doesn't get what it wants. We can see how attachment is at the base of the others (the ignorance of ego-grasping is the root of all of them).

The other interesting thing about the mind is how the sense consciousnesses and the mental consciousness function: they are completely different. As Lama Yeshe said, "You think that attachment is a function of the senses. Well, attachment has nothing to do with the senses."

Although we experience attachment for sense objects through our senses, it is not our senses that experience the attachment, it's our mental consciousness. In other words, when we see a person whom we call beautiful, and then all the attachment arises, it's not the eyes that have attachment, or even the body. When we taste that delicious cake and greed arises, it's not the tongue that experiences greed. It's the mind that makes up a story about the person, about the cake: that's attachment.

We say: "Wow, what a beautiful person," but actually the eyes can see only shape and color; the eyes don't see a beautiful person, the conceptual mind interprets that shape as "beautiful." Due to karma with that person – our past kindness to them – they appear to our mind now as "beautiful." Then, because there is attachment in our mind now, the mind makes up a story about the person, all based on our own needs, and then we believe our own story. Literally, as Lama Zopa says: our mind makes it all up!

Of course, the senses are unbelievably powerful, and although they are like dumb animals – they just follow where the mind goes – the perfect way to subdue our mind is to begin by subduing our senses, protecting our senses, avoiding the objects of the senses. This is the logic behind the vows of morality. It makes such sense.

If it's hard to distinguish between the senses and the mental consciousness; but within the mental consciousness itself it's also hard to distinguish between positive or virtuous states of mind and negative or non-virtuous ones. Attachment and love, for example: they are absolutely opposite. Attachment is always negative, destructive, non-productive, the cause of suffering, and love is always positive, beneficial, productive, the cause of happiness. But how we confuse them!

The trouble is we usually only ever love the people we are attached to and usually only have attachment for the people we love – so we think they're mixed. But love is necessarily altruistic: the wish that another be happy, and attachment is necessarily self-centered and needy. And of course, it's rooted in the fundamental misconception of ego-grasping: the stronger this ignorance that grasps at and believes in the self-existent me, the more the attachment, the hunger, the neediness.

Love and attachment

"How is it possible to love without attachment?" The key to this is the understanding of precisely what attachment is and what it isn't. Unless we are clear about this, there will always be confusion. And to understand this, in turn, we need to be clear about the *way* the mind works. In the commentaries on the functioning of the mind – there's a text we study called *Lo-tig* (Tibetan): *Mind and Awareness* – it is explained clearly that there are two "ways of knowing": conception and perception, and that basically we live our entire lives at the conceptual level. Perception – or "non-conceptual, direct

perception" – is only experienced by the subtler levels of our consciousness in strong meditation; it's in fact a state of mind that only very advanced meditators achieve.

Therefore, it follows that all the "emotions" and "feelings" we experience are, according to Lord Buddha's model of the mind, all conceptual. What does this mean?

In our culture – and it's certainly how we all experience things – we talk about intellectual or thinking mind and then we talk about emotions, and we see them as completely separate, don't we? Well, according to Buddha, everything we experience in our ordinary waking, talking life is conceptual.

How, then, is anger, for example, "conceptual"? Okay: the more we become familiar with our minds, the more we can see that once the heat and energy and agitation has calmed down, we're left with the thoughts of anger running through our heads, right? The commentary about the person, what he did, how dare he, who does he think he is, poor me, not fair. . . and all the other garbage that follows.

Well, these are all thoughts, right? That's "conception," isn't it? All the packaging of those thoughts, the emotion and heat and agitation and the rest, all this is there simply because we have the strong habit to be angry from before, before, before. But because that's the most vivid part of it for us, we call anger an "emotion" or "feeling" and therefore don't even notice the conceptual component.

In other words, when we begin to harness the emotional components of the anger, we're left with the bare bones, which is the thoughts.

Attachment is just the same: it's a bunch of *thoughts* about the object. But we only notice all the emotion because it's the most evident to us: the *feelings* of yearning and neediness and craving, the agitation, desperation and the rest. Again, all of that is there simply because we have had attachment for eons: it's a huge huge habit.

For this reason we reify all these emotions, giving them such power and not believing we can change them. Which is why the first level of practice is to subdue the grossest level of our energy, which is the body and the speech. When we can begin to subdue them, we have some space to see the workings of our mind, the bare bones of the conceptual thoughts. Now, interestingly, love is also conceptual. And when it is deeply habitual, it is also packaged in emotion and feeling, isn't it? Again, though, that's all we understand about "love": that it's an "emotion." But strip away the emotional packaging and you're left with the bare bones, which is thought: "May he be happy." Which is why we have to start with the simple thought, "May he be happy," then, with much practice and familiarization, genuine affection – the feeling and emotion – will come, won't it?

It's easy to see that we have practiced anger and jealousy and attachment and the rest, isn't it? Look at how easily the emotion arises! The job is to practice love and kindness and the rest; then those emotions will arise easily.

The point, then, is to be able to discriminate between these two: attachment and love. Attachment is a bunch of neurotic, needy thoughts based on *me*. Love is a bunch of altruistic thoughts based on *other*. That's all. Right now we have both, and they're completely mixed, like water and milk: impossible to distinguish between them. But that's our job: by looking deeply into our minds every minute, to see the difference; and the more we look, the clearer it will become – that's logic. The key to success, however, is a clear understanding of how the mind functions – and, of course, here we're using Lord Buddha's model of the mind.

Conclusion: it *is* possible to enjoy the cake without attachment; and it *is* possible to love a person without attachment. That's Buddha's point! Then, ironically, we will *really* get pleasure and joy! That's what is hard to see; at the moment, we can't even imagine love without

attachment. And mainly that's because we have very woolly views of what they are.

Collective consciousness?

As for collective consciousness: every individual living being has their own stream of consciousness and what's in it comes from previous actions, or karmas, of that being. If there were collective consciousness we would all experience the results of everyone else's actions, wouldn't we? And clearly we don't. We can see this in everyday things: I don't feel your headache, which is the result of a particular action you did in a past life; you don't get robbed as the result of my past action of stealing; I do. I don't win the lottery when you do, which is the result of your past generosity.

However, it can be said, without contradiction, that when your consciousness is enlightened and my consciousness is enlightened, we would then effectively be the same consciousness in the sense that we both know everything; what you know I know so our minds are essentially one. But you got to your enlightenment by your hard work and I got to mine by my hard work.

Also it can be said that people experience collectively the result of an action done collectively in the past, but each of them experiencing it in their own particular way according to their own individual way of having created that action. Everyone in the plane crash must have done an action together to experience the result called plane crash, but each in their own way: each of them would have different things on their minds as the plane crashes: some would be thinking about the safety of the child next to them, others would be thinking of themselves, others would be accepting, others angry – each of them different although it's a "collective" experience.

Excerpted from advice to various Buddhist practitioners in prison, by Ven. Robina Courtin

4. *The Stages of Death*

THE FIRST STAGE

1. **The aggregate of form is absorbed**

External sign: the physical body becomes thinner and loses power.

2. **The great mirror-like wisdom is absorbed**

This wisdom clearly sees many objects at the same time, just as a mirror reflects many objects together.

3. **The earth element is absorbed**

External sign: the physical body becomes very thin, the hands and legs are very loose, and we feel as if we are being buried under a great weight of earth.

4. **The eye sense power is absorbed**

External sign: It is impossible to control or move the eyes.

5. **The inner subtle form is absorbed**

External sign: the color of the physical body fades and the body loses its strength completely.

Internal sign: a vision of trembling silver blue-mirage, like water in the heat.

THE SECOND STAGE

1. **The aggregate of feeling is absorbed**

External sign: the physical body doesn't experience pain, pleasure or indifference.

2. **The wisdom of equanimity is absorbed**

This wisdom sees all feelings of pleasure, pain and indifference together, as having the same nature.

External sign: we no longer remember these feelings, that is, the feelings perceived with the mind as distinct from those experienced by the physical body.

3. **The water element is absorbed**

External sign: all the liquids of the body, urine, blood, saliva, sperm, sweat, etc. dry up.

4. **The ear sense power is absorbed**

External sign: hearing ceases.

5. **The inner sound is absorbed**

External sign: the buzzing in the ear ceases.

Internal sign: a vision of smoke.

THE THIRD STAGE

1. **The aggregate of discrimination is absorbed**

External sign: there is no longer any recognition of our relatives and friends.

2. **The wisdom of discriminating awareness is absorbed**

This wisdom discriminates and remembers who our relatives and friends are.

External sign: not remembering their names.

3. **The fire element is absorbed**

External sign: the heat element of the body disappears, and the capacity to digest food ceases.

4. **The nose sense power is absorbed**

External sign: breathing in becomes difficult and weaker; breathing out becomes stronger and longer.

5. **The inner smell is absorbed**

External sign: the nose no longer detects smells.

Internal sign: a vision of sparks of fire, trembling like starlight.

THE FOURTH STAGE

1. **The aggregate of compounded phenomena is absorbed**

External sign: the physical body can no longer move.

2. The all-accomplishing wisdom is absorbed

This is the wisdom of attainment, remembering outer work and success and their purpose.

External sign: losing the idea of the necessity and purpose of outer work.

3. The air element is absorbed

External sign: breathing ceases.

4. The taste sense power is absorbed

External sign: the tongue contracts and thickens and its root turns blue.

5. The tactile sense power is absorbed

External sign: neither soft nor rough sensations can be experienced.

Internal sign: a vision of a dim red-blue light, like the last flickering of a candle.

THE FIFTH STAGE

The white vision

Internal vision: a vision of a very clear sky, like that in autumn, full of the brightness of the moon.

It is caused by the wind going up through the left and right channels, opening up the head chakra, and coming down through the central channel. The vision occurs when the central channel opens, the white seed (or sperm) received from the father comes down to the heart chakra, visualized in the form of the letter *hum* upside down. This called the empty vision.

THE SIXTH STAGE

The red vision

Internal vision: a vision of a copper-red reflection in the sky.

It is caused by the wind going up the central channel to the heart, opening up the navel and fifth charkas. It occurs when the red seed (or blood) received from the mother comes to the heart chakra, visualized in the form of the letter *ah* upside down.

THE SEVENTH STAGE

The dark vision

Internal vision: a vision of empty darkness, like a dark and empty space.

At this point the white seed and the red seed are absorbed into the tiny seed at the heart, whose bottom half is red and top half is white. The vision occurs when these two come together. After this vision we fall unconscious into complete darkness. Then the subtle mind arises and momentarily all gross superstitions absorb.

THE EIGHTH STAGE

The clear light vision

Internal sign: a vision of complete emptiness, very clear, like the sky of an autumn dawn. This is the clear light, the vision of the final death.

At this time, the time of actual death, the gross mind, that which is holding gross objects, ceases, but only momentarily. Due to karma the seed of it is always there. The subtle mind having this vision is enclosed within the seed formed by the united white and red hemispheres. The seed then opens and the subtle mind goes out, leaving the body, to take the intermediate form.

Then the white seed goes down and comes out the sex organ, while the blood leaves from the nostril. This is the final sign the consciousness has left the body. Now the mind has completely separated from the body. It is possible that ordinary beings stay in this stage of clear light vision for some time, but don't then recognize it. Highly realized yogis can stay in this stage, meditating in the void for months, and are able to recognize all the visions of the death evolution.

This explanation was taken from the Wish Fulfilling Golden Sun of Mahayana Thought Training by Lama Zopa Rinpoche, IMI, 1977.

5. Refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha

General Advice

In general, there are four points to the practice of Dharma.

1. One should rely upon holy beings, listen to the holy Dharma and after correctly comprehending, follow the Dharma and practice it.
2. One should not let one's senses become excited (that is, control the senses when in danger of creating negative karma), and take as many vows as one is capable of keeping.
3. Have a compassionate attitude towards sentient beings.
4. Whenever you eat or drink, make effort to offer to the Rare Sublime Ones, and train well in the refuge precepts, including exerting oneself to make offerings to the Triple Gem.

Refuge Advice: What is to be avoided

1. Having taken refuge in the *Buddha*, one should not take refuge from the depths of one's heart in worldly gods such as Brahma and so on, and one should not prostrate to such objects.

One should not entrust oneself from the depths of one's heart to non-virtuous friends or teachers of non-Buddhist teachings that have no supporting levels.

2. Having taken refuge in the *Dharma*, one should avoid harming any being, either directly by oneself, or indirectly by making others do it for you.

3. Having taken refuge in the *Sangha*, one should avoid entrusting oneself to and keeping company with negative friends and followers of hedonism.

What is to be practiced

1. Having taken refuge in the *Buddha*, with a mind of respect towards them, one should regard

even statues as being actual buddhas, prostrate and pay respect to them.

One should avoid showing disrespect to them by, for example, placing them on the bare ground, judging them according to their material value, or discriminating between them, saying that some are good and others bad.

2. Having taken refuge in the *Dharma*, one should pay homage and respect by generating the recognition of all scriptural texts or even just one syllable of the teachings as being the actual Rare Sublime Dharma.

And one should avoid placing them on the bare ground, regarding them as material objects, using them as security for a loan, or carrying them together with one's shoes.

3. Having taken refuge in the *Sangha*, one should regard even one member of the Sangha as being the actual Sangha. One should avoid discriminating within the Sangha community and have equal respect for all.

One should train well in all the advice concerning what is to be practiced, such as not even stepping over pieces of robe or placing them in dirty places, but in clean places instead.

Motivation for One's Life

The purpose of my life is to free all sentient beings from every suffering and to lead them to happiness, especially the sublime peerless happiness of full enlightenment.

Since the enjoyments in my every-day life – all the past, present and future happiness, including enlightenment – are dependent on other sentient beings, the numberless sentient beings' happiness also depends on me.

Because if I generate loving kindness towards sentient beings, then all sentient beings receive no harm from me and they have peace, success. Therefore, I am responsible for all sentient beings' happiness and peace. I must serve sentient beings without discrimination between those who harm and those who help. For the success of this I must achieve full enlightenment.

Therefore I am going to put all the actions of my body, speech and mind in virtue: may all these actions not cause the slightest harm and only be of the greatest benefit to all sentient beings so that they will achieve enlightenment as quickly as possible.

The Lay Vows

The five branch vows to be kept by a full *upasika* [*ge-nyen*, “nearing virtue”] are to avoid

1. killing;
2. taking what has not been given;
3. sexual misconduct;
4. telling lies;
5. drinking alcohol.

Of these vows, killing, taking what has not been given and drinking alcohol are very easy to understand.

Losing the Vow from the Root

One would lose the vow from the root, and so should take it again, if one transgresses these vows by

1. killing a human being;
2. stealing an object that is valuable to another person;
3. engaging in sexual misconduct, that is, engaging in sexual activities with another’s husband or wife or partner.
4. telling a supreme lie, that is, pretending one has attained realizations of the Grounds and Paths even though one hasn’t.

Receiving a Downfall

Otherwise, one would not lose the vow from the root but would receive a downfall, which must be confessed, if one transgresses the vows by

1. killing a non-human being such as an animal;
2. stealing an object of no value;
3. engaging in sexual conduct at a holy place, at a special time (for example, the day before full moon, the eighth day of the lunar calendar, Buddha’s special holy days. Etc), or engaging in

sexual activity whilst living in the one-day eight precepts [*nyen-ne*, “near abiding”];

4. telling ordinary lies;
5. drinking alcohol (or taking mind-altering drugs)

So, one should confess and abstain precisely, which is the method of purification.

One should protect well with the mind the six remaining non-virtuous actions, similar in part to the previous negative karmas (that is, close to those heavy negative karmas): avoiding slander, harsh words, gossip, covetousness, harmful intention and wrong views.

Benefits of Protecting the Vows

The benefits of protecting the vows like this are: you will not fall to the evil-gone realms [hells, animal and hungry ghost]; temporarily you will continuously achieve the body of a *deva* or human, and ultimately you will easily achieve the state of liberation. Furthermore, the virtue of protecting these five vows increases constantly, even while one is asleep or unconscious, intoxicated and so forth.

Also, in addition to these, the Founder (Guru Shakyamuni Buddha) always thinks of you; the gods (protectors beyond sorrow, worldly protectors, devas) praise and protect you; non-humans cannot harm you; your qualities increase limitlessly; and at the time of death you will die without regret. Again, by avoiding killing, you will have a long life in all future lifetimes.

By avoiding taking what has not been given, you will have great wealth (in future lives).

By avoiding sexual misconduct, you will meet with a perfect wife or husband and friends (harmonious exactly according to your wishes) (in future lives).

By avoiding telling lies, you will have a good memory and be conscientious (in future lives). It is said in the Sutra *The Lamp of the Moon*: “If, with a mind of devotion, one makes offerings of umbrellas, fan-flags, rows of lights, food and drink to as many billions of Buddhas as there are

grains of sand in the River Ganges and for that many tens of millions of eons, the merit of this can in no way compare with that of a person who keeps one precept even for one day at the time when the holy Dharma, the teaching of the Gone to Bliss One, perishes.”

Based on teachings from Lama Zopa Rinpoche

6. Karma: the Law of Cause and Effect

Everything every sentient being does, says or thinks is necessarily a karma, an action, which will necessarily ripen in a result in the future. Negative actions ripen as suffering and positive actions ripen as happiness. If the seed is planted, it will ripen as a fruit; and if the fruit has ripened, necessarily a seed was planted. And all seeds expand in that they bear many fruits.

Karma ripens in four ways:

1. The Fully Ripened Result, which is the type of rebirth our consciousness will take when it leaves a previous body at the time of death.

2. The Action Similar to the Cause: all the words, thoughts and actions we do in any one life are due to the habit of having done them before.

3. The Experience Similar the Cause: all the things that other people or beings do to us, or all the things that happen to us.

4. Environmental Karma: even the way the world is for us: polluted, beautiful, earthquakes, etc; all this is due to the collective karma of the sentient beings who experience that environment.

For the Fully Ripened Result, the “throwing” karma that is the main cause for this life’s body, there have to be four conditions in place at the time of the action for it to become the karmic action that “throws” us into the next life. Let’s say there is the negative karma of killing: first, there is the *intention* to kill that ant, and within intention there are several other points, the most important of which is motivation – and let’s face it, 99% of the time that we kill it’s with a negative motivation. Then there is the *object*, the ant has to be there, alive. Then there is the *action* of killing; and finally the *completion* of the action, the death of the ant before oneself. If this karma is left in the mind, from the very moment it is planted, just

like any seed, it will expand, get bigger. Even after a few days, it is huge, which means the fruits will be many.

So, it’s left in the mind and is not purified. Eventually it will definitely ripen as a future rebirth in a lower realm (which realm depends on many conditions). But not just one rebirth; one seed gives rise to many fruits.

There’s this woman I knew at Kopan. She came to my room one day crying after hearing Rinpoche teach about the lower realms. Her dear son had died five years beforehand at the age of 29. He’d been a professional fisherman, and he died while scuba diving. I suggested she talk to Geshe Lama Konchog about it. Surprisingly, he told her exactly where her son was now (the lamas rarely do that, so it must have been beneficial for her to hear it). She just mentioned his name and he said, “First he was born in the animal realm, and now he’s in the hell realms.”

So, there he was, this nice man: good, kind, intelligent, moral. But he had the karma to kill thousands of fish and to not see that he was harming sentient beings. And that’s the point about karma: From killing in past lives he had been born in the lower realms. That karma got finished eventually and his karma to be born human ripened again. But the problem is that the karma of killing left the propensity to kill still in his mind, and even though he got a good rebirth again, he was attracted to killing fish. His mother said he always loved the river and even use to call himself Salmon. The habit to kill was still there. And killing in the past caused him to die young in this life.

This is one of the worst aspects of karma. Due to past actions, the propensity to keep doing the same actions is there; and we can’t even see that they are negative. Because of the habit, the feeling that the doing of the action brings in our mind is pleasure, so of course we think it is good. That’s what is so terrible. We really are locked in the vice of karma. We can see how miraculous it is for good karma to ripen. So: killing causes a

lower rebirth. It leaves imprints in the mind to keep doing the same action. It causes us to be killed or to die young.

The karmic cause for the next rebirth ripens at the time of death. Whichever seed is strongest is the one that ripens first. Which is why it is so vital to die peacefully, without regret, with awareness, with acceptance. The majority of people die with fear, mainly because they have never thought of death. So even for this reason alone, it is likely that a negative seed will ripen, because fear is a function of ignorance, and ignorance is the main delusion, and delusion activates negative karmas to ripen.

And there are literally countless karmic seeds sitting there in our mind now, latent, waiting for the appropriate conditions to activate them. Which is why conditions are so vital. If you'd told a Serbian man, for example, five years ago that he would become a multi-rapist and murderer, he would have laughed at you. There he was, living in Bosnia, surrounded by Muslims, but leading his life the best he could. But one day, war starts, and becomes the condition for those karmic seeds to murder and rape Muslims to ripen.

So many times when people kill, they don't really mean to, and it's not because they're "bad" people. It's just conditions. The karmic seed was there on their minds (and they don't know about it), and one day a person comes into their life whom they have the karma to kill because that person had harmed them in a past life, and boom, killing happens. They are as surprised as everyone else that it happened. They didn't plan it. Karma ripened, that's all.

And another aspect: I remember hearing in a teaching by Rinpoche that the Kalachakra Tantra describes the intimate relationship between external activity and internal karma. Because everything is caused by karma: that earthquake is the karmic result of the sentient beings who experience it; they caused it. That airplane crash; that war. Everything. Rinpoche said that basically the entire external universe is made up of the

four elements: earth, air, fire and water: this body, the mountains, the flowers, whatever. They are just different quantities of the four, if you like: the ocean is mostly the element of water whereas the mountain is mostly earth, and so on. Anyway, when the mind is disturbed – deluded – this disturbs the balance of the body elements, which causes the body to be sick. And this in turn causes the imbalance of the external elements: floods, volcanoes, the environment, whatever. They call this environmental karma. Of course, it all happens over eons. But you can see how delusion now is a condition for karma to ripen. Equally, if sentient beings are purifying, this can be a condition for a karma to be averted or to ripen less severely.

Literally, everything is our karmic appearance. We cause it all. There is not an atom of this universe that is not the result of the karma of the sentient beings who experience it. Nothing exists out there, from its own side. Everything depends upon sentient beings' minds. As Lama Yeshe said, hell is not some place out there where this heavy guy is saying, "Ha, ha, I'm waiting for Thubten Yeshe." No, it is made up by our own minds; our previous actions create it.

You can see how understanding emptiness helps understand karma.

It can be said that there is not one single event in the universe that is random; everything has to do with sentient beings' karma. And every being we meet, every human, ant, dog, bird, whatever – that is not random either. We have met each of them before and experience at that moment the karmic result of a particular past association. And, of course, each feeling we experience in relation to each sentient being we meet is the direct result of a past action towards that sentient being.

Each of our moments of mental experience in one day, for example, would be labeled either pleasant, unpleasant or indifferent, wouldn't it? There are no other choices. We either have a happy experience, an unhappy one or an

indifferent one, and every instant would be covered by these three. Well, the mental factor (as the various states of mind are called) that experiences pleasure, pain or indifference is called "feeling." In the teachings about mind, "feeling" is one of the so-called always-present mental factors: every moment we are always experiencing some feeling or other, and each of them is in response to contacting an object through our senses (and in response to thoughts, too)

We see a scorpion, for example: immediately an unpleasant feeling arises. The extent of that unpleasant feeling – fear, revulsion, the wish to kill it, whatever – is equal to the past harm we did that particular scorpion during a past life. Even more specifically, that unpleasant feeling is the fruit of our own seed planted in the mind at the time of some interaction with that sentient being. So, quite literally, our own karmic action can be said to be the main cause for our own suffering now. It looks like the scorpion is the main cause for the fear, the revulsion, but it's not; it's only a condition.

It is said that the causes of samsara are 1. karma and 2. delusion. The action of harming the scorpion (when it was our mother, a friend, an animal, whatever) in a past life is the direct cause of even meeting that scorpion now and the cause of the unpleasant feeling; that's the karma part. And the ignorance, attachment, aversion and the rest in our mind at this moment are the delusion part.

Which shows us there are two things to do: 1. purify the karmic seeds, and 2. get rid of delusion. Practice consists of both, of course, but the main thing we must do, because karma is so extensive and deep and its ripening so unexpected, is work on getting rid of delusion. If we can do that then we can really purify karma quickly. So there you are in prison, which in conventional terms (and karma is simply convention) gives rise to unpleasant feelings, is called suffering. This is due to your past karma

and you can't have much control over that now. But how you deal with it, whether with delusion or with virtue, this is definitely within your control. And that's what really purifies. (Of course, delusion is due to karma too, but that's another angle on it.)

So, we can see how fortunate we are to have virtue within our mind as an option in the face of suffering. Suffering is coming all the time, to all sentient beings, so nothing special about that. But having virtue in the mind as a way of dealing with that suffering: that is so fortunate.

Rinpoche said in a teaching one time: a person who has totally uprooted anger, for example, from their mind would not see an enemy. In other words, when you are totally free of aversion, gone from your mind completely, upon meeting the scorpion there would be no aversion in the mind. You would not label it enemy. You would know it was a scorpion, you would know it would sting you, you would feel the sting, but your mind would not label enemy. Enemy is a fabrication of our own mind. You would see a suffering sentient being, an object of compassion. Which is why Ribur Rinpoche, for example, was able to "transform suffering into pure joy."

So, having met a person before causes us to meet them again. How we treated them in the past causes us to see them as friend or enemy now. And having attachment and aversion in the mind now perpetuates it. This is the wheel of samsara. Which is why it's vital to stop believing in our karmic appearances. Because two people have been kind to each other in the past, they see each other as nice now. But attachment is usually what instantly takes over after the arising of the pleasant feeling, and then it builds up its story, its fantasy about the beautiful person and is convinced that the person is the cause of the pleasant feeling. The more pleasant the feeling, the stronger the attachment, which becomes the cause of suffering, not more pleasure, which is what the mind thinks. So, practice is to cut the karmic appearances, to stop believing in the real

object out there existing in and of itself as a cause of our pleasure.

Rinpoche has said that it's bad enough that, due to karma, someone *appears* self-existently beautiful to our mind, our senses; the real problem is that we *believe* that picture to be true. That's what keeps us bound in samsara.

A person who is able to see a beautiful person and know that they do not exist as inherently beautiful, that that appearance is simply due to karma, is a person who is qualified to use the pleasure that arises in their mind on the path to enlightenment. Which is why Lama would say, "The more pleasure, the better, dear!" (Lama was famous for calling everyone "dear.") But it's obvious that this is the most difficult practice, isn't it? To even begin to distinguish between the pleasure and the attachment is unbelievably difficult.

Evolution? Creation?

It is very interesting, this evolution of species. The Buddhist explanation of it is most interesting. I remember in particular one program about nature by an Englishman, Attenborough, who is very well known in England. He was discussing a particular group of ants in Africa and their habitat, their anthill, and explaining how amazing they were. For example, he pointed out, their home, which was maybe ten feet tall, had many levels, where different ants did different things; how skillful they were. And how their basement, if you like, was kept at a very precise temperature for this reason and that. He said that these ants had evolved in their sophistication over the years and was truly awestruck at their talents.

The Buddhist view could be, in a sense – big deal! Ants in their nature do not have the mental capacity to calculate technological things, but the fact that they seemed to do these things by instinct shows that the karmic imprints to do them are strongly in their minds – and that these imprints are from human lives, when that mental

capacity was evident. These busy creatures, all following their instincts, were simply reincarnated humans who obviously had developed very sophisticated technical skills – look at today's world! – but because these skills had been developed and carried out as humans in conjunction with huge attachment and grasping and the rest, these delusions had caused them to be born as lower creatures who nevertheless kept the imprints of their technical training. There were these birds too, for example, who did this elaborate dance for 8 or 9 hours, non-stop, in order to attract a mate: all I could see was highly skillful dedicated dancers overwhelmed with attachment, no thought of altruism.

Attachment and anger and the rest, and the actions done on the basis of them – designing buildings, dancing, etc – are the causes of lower rebirths, according to Buddha. But the same actions done from the perspective of wanting to benefit others, of altruism, would leave virtuous imprints in the mind that would cause a human rebirth, or even enlightenment itself if they're done on the basis of bodhicitta.

So, according to this scenario, we can see how certain species would evolve – but the real point, from Buddhism's perspective, is that they're not really "evolving": again, big deal, so an ant can do clever things. Cleverness in itself is no virtue. The cause of an ant life – the karmic seed that ripened at the time of the previous death of that sentient being – is necessarily a non-virtue. The various other things that happen to the ant and what it does, its tendencies to kill or build temperature-controlled basements, etc., all come from previous imprints in its consciousness, created when it was human/animal/spirit, whatever.

So, you could say that insects are evolving, becoming more sophisticated – human traits, if you like; and we can also say that humans are degenerating, becoming more violent, angry, deluded, attached, etc – lower realm traits.

The real meaning of evolution, in Buddhist terms, is in terms of the development of kindness, wisdom, patience, compassion, and the rest. An intelligent mind is not one that merely can do technological things, but is one that can distinguish between right and wrong and can, eventually, perceive the true nature of reality.

We can see how karma operates similarly with humans: due to extraordinarily virtuous past actions, the karmic imprint that ripens at the time of the previous death was necessarily a virtue, which causes the being to go to a human womb. But look at some of the tendencies of us humans: negative, violent, angry, destructive, etc. We can see that many of these could even be called animal-like – from much habituation these tendencies are carried into the human life, just like the human tendencies – an ability to achieve things technologically, or kindness, whatever – are carried into the life of an animal.

There is what the lamas call throwing karma, which is the seed that ripens at the time of death that “throws” the being into their next womb/egg/whatever; and then the other karmas that ripen in terms of habits, on the one hand, and experiences, on the other. Past killing, for example, if ripening as a throwing karma, causes rebirth as an animal, a suffering spirit, a hell being. Then, if one has the throwing karma to be born a human, other karmas can ripen in that life from past killing as an experience of being killed, and as the habit to continue to kill.

So, killing, for example: 1. ripened result: a lower rebirth, “thrown” by the karma ripening at the time of death, 2. the experience similar to the cause: being killed or dying young or being sick or unhealthy; and 3. the action similar to the cause: the habit to kill; and 4. environmental result: food and medicine etc. that cause ill-health not health.

There’s the lion, for example, who has the ripened result of a lower rebirth, and within that rebirth the habit to continue to kill and, most likely, the experience of being killed. That’s the

story of most animals’ lives, in fact! Or the human, who has the ripened result of virtue, but within that life has the habit to kill or experiences being killed. Look around. There’s hardly a human on this planet who doesn’t kill something.

All this is why the purification practice known as the Four Opponent Powers is so important for a Buddhist. It’s in the context of the practice called Vajrasattva.

The various realms that Buddhism asserts, such as spirit and hell, are basically different dimensions; you can’t just climb on an aeroplane and go there. But if you were to die now as a human right here, say, due to karma, the next split second our consciousness could be in a hell realm. A realm is a mental experience, mentally created by our own minds. This human realm is the collective karmic creation of the minds of all the beings labeled human; ditto animals, spirits, etc.

The Dalai Lama has said that, sure, the big bang makes sense in Buddhist terms, but there must have been infinite big bangs, not just one, because you cannot posit a beginning of everything; this is literally an impossibility. Because everything is cause and effect, then no matter how far back you go with your memory – 47 eons, let’s say – and say, ah ha, there was the beginning. No, how can that be? Because if 47 eons ago there was something, then it necessarily had to come from something the moment before. Chicken and egg.

The Buddhist view is that the universes are made up of physical matter – which boils down to the four elements – and mental consciousnesses. And there is a very subtle wind energy that is the basis of all the four elements, which is what all physical matter are made of. This subtle wind energy exists and then, due to the collective karma of sentient beings, it will begin to form into a particular universe, this one, let’s say. This universe is the karmic creation – over eons and eons – of the collective karma of all of us who experience it. And it will eventually

cease, again according to the collective karma of humans.

There is nothing in any universe that is not created by the karma of the sentient beings that experience them. They don't exist from their own side, by the power of their own physical elements, and nor are they creations of some superior being.

All of which is why, for a Buddhist, the physical universe, although indeed totally fascinating and amazing, is secondary to the inner universe. When we discover the nature of our consciousness we will discover the nature of the universe – and that is not meant as a trite cliché but a profound truth.

Other than the consciousnesses of countless beings – superior beings, those who have gone beyond samsara, and ordinary beings, those who are in samsara – there is no other conscious force, according to Buddhism. What holds things together in harmony is, quite literally, the past karma of virtue. What causes the elements to explode apart and cause chaos – whether it's wars or volcanoes – is, quite literally, the past karma of non-virtue. If we want to find a “creator” then it's the karma of sentient beings.

Of course, there are the consciousnesses of enlightened beings, who have been ordinary at some point and have now gone beyond samsara. They pervade the universe; are omniscient, all compassionate, all powerful. But they don't create universes. Universes are the polluted creation of the karma of ordinary beings.

If we were all enlightened there would not be an atom of anything physical; there would not need to be because there would be no suffering sentient beings, because universes are the abodes of sentient beings, created by their past karmic actions. (Sentient beings are ordinary, deluded beings, locked into the cycle of rebirth and suffering; enlightened beings are those who have gone beyond suffering and cyclic existence).

If we want to find a creator, it's our own mind. Everything is made up by our mind, Lama Zopa says, including the physical universe. As Lama Yeshe said, “Hell is the manifestation of our own past delusions.” The very subtle wind energy conjoined with the very subtle mind, after it's left the body of the past life, will manifest as the body and mind of a hell being, a scorpion, a human, a spirit, whatever, each in their appropriate, karmically created external universe. Nothing exists from its own side; everything is created by the mind.

Excerpted from advice to various Buddhist practitioners in prison, by Ven. Robina Courtin

7. *The Ten Non-virtues and Their Results*

There are four ways that karma ripens in future lives:

1. The Fully Ripened Result, which is the type of rebirth our consciousness will take when it leaves a previous body at the time of death.

2. The Action Similar to the Cause: all the words, thoughts and actions we do in any one life are due to the habit of having done them before.

3. The Experience Similar the Cause: all the things that other people or beings do to us, or all the things that happen to us.

4. Environmental Karma: even the way the world is for us: polluted, beautiful, earthquakes, etc; all this is due to the collective karma of the sentient beings who experience that environment.

All positive and negative actions of body, speech and mind bring all four results (not necessarily at the same time).

Here is a summary of the ten non-virtuous actions that one should refrain from, and their karmic results.

The **Fully Ripened Result** of all non-virtuous actions is rebirth in one of the three lower realms: animals, spirits, hells. The **Action Similar to the Cause** is the habit to continue to do each action. The **Experiences Similar to the Cause** and the **Environmental Result** differ for each action.

PHYSICAL ACTIONS

1. KILLING

Experience Similar to the Cause You get killed; your life is short; you get sick easily, and have little energy.

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

2. STEALING

Experience Similar to the Cause You don't have enough to live on or make ends meet; what you do have is all just common property with others.

Environmental Result Crops are few and far between, have no power to remove hunger, spoil, or never come up; dry spells stay on too long; it rains too much: crops dry up or die off.

3. SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

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

Environmental Result You live in a place where there is urine and feces all round, and mud, dirt, filth; everything stinks, and everywhere seems unpleasant and distasteful.

VERBAL ACTIONS

4. LYING

Experience Similar to the Cause No one believes what you say, even when you are speaking the truth; others are always deceiving you.

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

5. DIVISIVE TALK

Experience Similar to the Cause You easily lose friends; people around you are always fighting one another; people around you have an undesirable character.

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

6. IDLE TALK

Experience Similar to the Cause No one listens to you. No one respects what you say; no one thinks your speech has value.

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

7. HARSH SPEECH

Experience Similar to the Cause You will always hear distressing words.

Environmental Result you will be born in a desert country.

MENTAL ACTIONS

8. CRAVING/COVETING

Experience Similar to the Cause Your personality is dominated by desire; you are never satisfied with what you have

Environmental Result Every good thing you manage to find starts to get worse, decreases as seasons, months, days pass.

9. ILL-WILL

Experience Similar to the Cause Your personality is dominated by anger; you always find yourself without help, or never find the help you need; you are always hurting others, or always being hurt by others.

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

10. WRONG VIEWS

Experience Similar to the Cause Your personality is dominated by stupidity; you become a person who keeps harmful views (like "an eye for an eye"); you become a deceitful person.

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

From teachings by Lama Zopa Rinpoche.

8. Understanding Negative Emotions

What does Buddha mean by liberation from suffering? Well, there are different ways of packaging Buddha's teachings. One of these packages, if you like, the principal one setting the context here, is known as The Four Noble Truths.

The first of these states that there is suffering – quite blunt; the second, that there are causes for it; the third, which in a sense is the “real” one, is that it is possible to be free of it; the fourth, that there are methods for doing it.

The context, then, for understanding suffering in terms of the Four Noble Truths is that we can be free of it. (This is what my friend Francisco was saying he wanted: to be free of suffering. He didn't know if there were any means to it, but he knew he was fed up with suffering. The particular types of suffering he experienced involved gangs and murders, knifings, shootings, wars and dramas – quite intense sorts of suffering.)

So, okay, in order to consider whether freedom from suffering is even possible, we first have to know what suffering is (the first Noble Truth) – what we would be free from? If we believe we really can be free of it, then we have to know what the causes are (the second Noble Truth), because, obviously, the elimination of suffering (the third Noble Truth) depends on eliminating the causes; the methods (the fourth Noble Truth) are the way to eliminate them. So, it's all very practical: There are weeds in your garden; there are causes for the weeds; there is a possibility to be free of them; there is a way to do it. It's like a step-by-step process.

Each of us has, from our own experiences and observations of the world around us, our own notions about what the word “suffering” means. That there might be way to be free of it sounds

kind of interesting, kind of like a novel idea. Let's look, then, at what Buddha means by suffering and at the same time talk about the causes for it.

How to listen to what Buddha says

This is one of the most essential things in Buddhism; it demands that we – any person using Buddhism in their life – do this kind of analysis. This is not some religious thing – “religious” in the sense of having blind belief in something. This is not the Buddhist approach at all. This is ignorance, according to Buddhism, a kind of acting out of fear. It's really important that what we believe be based on experience and arrived at through choice and understanding. Then, we will have some energy to want to put it into practice.

So when listening to these teachings, it's really important to hear them not as remote religious concepts. What Buddha is describing is our psychology. This is not meant as some kind of cliché – it's actually true: Buddha's teachings deal with human consciousness, with the mind, with how we experience reality.

So, what is suffering? Again, there are different “packages,” different ways of presenting suffering. One very practical one describes three levels or types of suffering. The first level is very obvious. It's the kind my friend Francisco talked about – suffering at a very gross level: harming, violence, and so on. That's the level most of us understand. Perhaps we haven't been gangsters – we might not know about that; we might not have murdered people or been threatened. But we experience sickness, people leave us, our hearts are broken, people aren't kind to us, they steal from us; we get old, we get wrinkled, we get fat – ordinary level of everyday suffering. If we look around we can see that no one escapes this. You can be the most beautiful person on this earth, but it's guaranteed that you're at least going to get a headache at some point or that someone is going to stop loving you

or that someone is going to criticize you. We all experience this type of suffering.

For Buddha to say we can be free of all that is quite shocking; that's quite a radical statement – "What do you mean be free of headaches? We've been trying for how long...?" Even with our sophisticated medical knowledge we haven't succeeded in getting rid of illness; in fact, we continue to find more illnesses. So what Buddha is saying sounds quite outrageous.

The mistaken sense of self

Let's look more at the second level of suffering. This is the one that's most interesting and quite shocking in a way. This one is much more insidious than the first. It's more insidious and, therefore, much harder to recognize, because this second level of suffering is, in fact, what we mean by happiness.

Now, it sounds kind of depressing to say that what we mean by happiness, and the ways we go about getting it, are actually a particular level of suffering. Let's look at what this means and, also, at the causes of this, because this is what leads to liberation from suffering – it leads to nirvana. This word "nirvana" just refers to the state of mind of a person who, having used the Buddhist techniques, has liberated themselves from suffering. This is a psychological process. Nirvana is not a "place" like heaven, a "somewhere" after this life – it's not like that.

So, basically, what makes what we think of as happiness actually suffering is our states of mind – certain states of mind we all possess, all living beings possess, such as anger, jealousy, pride, all the way to up to attachment.

Attachment is effectively the root of all of these others, but it in turn arises out of an even more subtle and insidious state of mind, one that Buddhism refers to as a deep ignorance about the very nature of phenomena, about how things truly exist. This fundamental state of mind, called "ignorance," is one that clings to a sense of "me" (and everything else) as self-existent, solid and

independent. And what this powerful sense of an independent, inherently-real-from-its-own-side me-ness gives rise to is an enormous sense of "I want": to attachment.

This powerful sense of "I" is actually a mistaken sense of "I," a mistaken, miserable sense of "I," in fact. And, in Buddhist terms, this type of ego, or ego-grasping – the ignorance that clings to an independent "me" – is the very root of suffering. It is the uprooting of this one that brings you to that state of being called "nirvana."

This ignorance, this ego-grasping, is very deep, very insidious. The irony is, the more powerful it is, the more miserable it makes us feel and the more separate. This is one of the ways ego-grasping functions. It causes us to feel cut-off, alienated, lonely; there's a sense of a "me," here, *against* the world. That's a feeling we all know very well – it's due to this root delusion: ignorance. It gives rise to the sense of a bereft, lonely "I," which only naturally, then, gives rise to a very hungry "I" – to "I want" (this is the energy, you could say, of this one called "attachment").

Attachment as the cause of suffering

In Buddhist terms, *these* states of mind – specifically the one of attachment, of "I want" – are the *causes* of suffering. We can see how this neediness, this strong feeling of "I want," is, in a neurotic way, based on a sense of not having; otherwise, we wouldn't want. If you're not hungry, you don't think, "I want food." If you're feeling satisfied, there is no vivid sense of "I want something, I need something; I'm not fulfilled, I'm not complete."

So, the suffering we experience as happiness is like this: We have a neurotic sense of "I," which gives rise mainly to the state of mind called attachment. Now, we might think that when we say, "I *like* chocolate cake" or "I *like* this and I *like* that," that refers to attachment. We, in our culture, use this word in a very general way: "I'm

so *attached* to my children." It isn't the same way in which we're using the word here.

The word "attachment," in Buddhism, necessarily implies a polluted or deluded state of mind. It doesn't mean loving someone, being kind to someone or even liking something – these are totally appropriate and valid states of mind. Attachment, on the other hand, comes from a neurotic sense of "I," a *mistaken* sense of "I." This word "mistaken" is very important. Our sense of "I," Buddha is saying, is actually mistaken; we're not like that at all. And what this mistaken sense of "I" gives rise to is mistaken, kind of inappropriate, ideas: to delusions. So attachment is a sense of not well-being, a sense of dissatisfaction, a sense that something isn't right, that something is always missing; therefore, always wanting something. What's interesting is that what this needy, hungry "I" is doing all the time is projecting. It projects onto people and things, sounds, smells, concepts, environments... you name it – the entire world. Basically, the entire world and all the people and things in it are the objects of attachment.

We're talking now just about the deluded states of mind. We're not looking at all, at the moment, at the positive states of mind, such as love, kindness and generosity, which also relate to the outside world. Let's dismiss those for now. We're trying to look at the problem, right? We're trying to look at the suffering. It's like when you're trying to locate a problem with your car, you don't just sit there praising the nice leather, or whatever – you might; that's okay, but it won't get the job done. You're trying to find the problem, the reason it isn't working. You're leaving the good things aside, you're happy about those. That's what this type of analysis is all about, it's looking at the problems inside us. When we get all upset, for example, we feel a kind of suffering. Even if we're not sure what it all means, we still have the vague feeling that, "Things aren't right, things could be better; things always go wrong; I don't have control."

Even though it's only a vague sense, we all recognize that suffering. That's what we're trying to locate – that suffering (as well as the causes of it). Why? So we can eliminate it, be liberated from it.

The junkie mind

So, attachment – as I said, one of the ways it functions is, in an almost primordial way, to give rise to neediness. It's there even when everything is going fine: your body's just beautiful, you've got the best husband or lover on earth, you've got enough money, the weather's lovely – all the things we imagine to be the causes of happiness all seem to be in place. But if we dare just to sit, we'll always find an underlying dissatisfaction. Any sense of well-being, if it is there, doesn't last long. That dissatisfaction, when it's really raw, is unbearable pain, isn't it – when things go really wrong.

So, how this neediness and dissatisfaction relate to attachment and the suffering we experience as happiness is like this: it's as if we were junkies (just use that as an analogy). In other words, we have the type of mind that is always craving something to give it relief from dissatisfaction. The happiness we get now, Buddha is saying, is based on this craving mind, just like the junkie's: it's based on attachment. Therefore, when attachment doesn't get what it wants there's this immense dissatisfaction, frantic grasping and freaking-out; we're miserable; things are a disaster. So, then, we frantically look for the junk to get the fix: the cake, the person, the job, the money, the good sound, the praise... we label it; we search it out. When we get it, then we get the fix. When we get the fix is when we get the relief. That relief is what we call happiness. That sounds like a depressing picture, but it's an interesting one to look at.

Samsara, you could say, is the opposite of nirvana. (Again, nirvana is not a place where you have pleasures you're supposed to give up and be miserable, which is how we tend to think of

religious practice.) One simple way of saying it is that *samsara* is a word, just like the word “*nirvana*,” that refers to the state of being of a person who hasn’t reached *nirvana*, who isn’t liberated from suffering, who is a junkie caught up in the suffering.

A person who’s given up being a junkie is like the person who’s achieved the state of *nirvana* – the freedom from *needing* the junk in the first place. If you’re not a junkie and you look on at someone who is you don’t even think about getting a fix, because you don’t want one: you’re fulfilled already. Do you see my point? Whereas for the junkie, there’s this whole scenario: first, there’s the desperate grasping, frantic freaking-out; then, there’s all the manipulating and controlling to get the fix (and all the stuff that goes on with that); then, finally, there’s the relief – the respite from that gross suffering. That relief feels very blissful in comparison to the awful craving. Well, that’s what we mean by happiness.

The happiness we get now is valid; it is valid happiness. But what Buddha is saying is, it’s totally polluted, just like the fix. It’s polluted because it’s based on this frantic craving.

Another quality about it is it doesn’t last. That’s evident to any one of us. The best sex in the universe does not last – you’ve got to go do it again to get the same feeling of happiness; the best meal in the universe goes into the toilet a couple of hours later. Every single thing that we think of as being a cause of happiness (which always turns out to be something external) is completely ethereal; it doesn’t last, so we’re always having to look for another fix. We do this until we die. I mean, it’s a depressing picture, isn’t it; but it’s a way of looking. It’s an interesting way of looking.

So, let’s just say, if there were not (according to Buddha’s assertion) a third Noble Truth, if it were not possible to be free of suffering, then, of course, it would be insane to be thinking like this. How depressing to go on about how life is suffering. If we didn’t have a choice to be

anything but junkies, it would be foolish to think about how not to be. We’d learn to do the best we could, deal with it and make the most of life, wouldn’t we?

But the context for talking about it here, and the reason it *is* so important to be thinking like this, is that we *can* be free of it, honey. Knowing we can be free of it gives us some motivation to understand what suffering is and what the causes are. Do you see my point? First Noble Truth: there is suffering; second: there are causes of it; third: we can be free of it; fourth: there are methods to be free of it. It’s a very practical kind of presentation.

A key thing here is that this level of suffering is something we’ve actually never thought of as suffering. *Why* is because every time we look around we don’t see anybody but junkies; we’re living in a world of junkies. We’re all junkies basically; therefore, it’s very hard to have any other context.

On the face of it, this sounds like a depressing picture, so it’s something we have to really learn to observe. This is not something we’re supposed to just *believe*. It’s something that requires a lot of contemplation. That’s the point. And that’s a major function of the meditative approach in Buddhism. The meditative approach is, by listening to the teachings (as we’re doing now, for example), to take this away and chew over it, contemplate it and compare it to our actual experiences to see if there’s some truth in it. Buddha also says, “If you don’t find truth in this, excuse me, you must leave it.” You have to make it tasty for yourself. All he is doing is giving his presentation, based on his own experience. It’s up to you to check it out and to see if it’s true for you, too. (This is not the only story of suffering; there are subtler levels as well, but we won’t even worry about those for now).

Short-changing ourselves

If it is true, then, that the happiness we get now is, in fact, suffering, it’s kind of like: “My God,

where do I turn? What's the point?" It would *seem* that what Buddha was saying was, "Sorry guys, you've got to give up happiness" – No. On the contrary, a person who has achieved that state of being called nirvana is, actually, ridiculously happy. What comes, in other words, from Buddhist practice is extraordinary well-being. Words like "bliss" are not used lightly in Buddhism. But being this junkie now, we get our happiness by following attachment.

In this culture it's really easy for most of us to get what we want. If we were in Kosovo right now, if we were in one of those camps, we would definitely see the pain, the immense pain that comes when attachment is thwarted (not to mention all the other things). What Buddha is saying is, the extent to which we *crave* something is the extent to which we suffer. And just as it is for the junkie, the best-case scenario is not to get the best junk, nor even to get it all the time, but rather to give up being a junkie altogether – to give up the craving. This is really an essential way of saying it.

We, in our culture, have no experience of people who have eliminated attachment, we have no psychologies that would posit this as a possibility, let alone provide methods for accomplishing it, so to think we can completely get rid of attachment seems quite shocking. The idea that we can get rid of anger and pride sounds dreadful. In fact, we would criticize this idea and say a well-rounded person has a reasonable amount of anger, a certain amount of jealousy, a bit of this, a bit of that – as long as they're not out of control. Well, Buddha says we're really short-changing ourselves. It's like saying it's good to be a junkie – we just have to keep it under control, get good quality junk and we'll be cool. According to Buddha, we can be beyond this altogether.

Right now, though, we can't even conceive of the potential of our own human minds – the potential for unbelievable joy and bliss (again, we're not talking about heaven, we're talking

about *our mind*), for clarity and kindness, love, generosity and all the other qualities we know about and touch upon at some point. Realizing the full development of these qualities, he is saying, is our natural potential (and is the goal of a Buddhist).

What's holding us back now is the presence in our minds of these pollutions, the presence in our minds of these delusions – anger, jealousy and all the rest which come as a result of attachment.

Mistaken and non-mistaken states of mind

Anger is the response when attachment doesn't get what it wants – when carrot cake comes instead of chocolate cake. We've got it all worked out, all tightly controlled; we know exactly, we want this, we want this, we want this; then, we do all this manipulating to make sure we get exactly that one thing. But the more we try to control what we get, the more we freak out when the wrong thing comes. It's just logical. It's not because there's anything wrong with carrot cake (and we think there is), it's not because there's anything so delicious about chocolate cake (and we think there is), it's only because we're so dependent on having that certain thing and have done all kinds of manipulating to get it. In other words, we're setting ourselves up for suffering – this is the whole Buddhist idea.

And the causes for this are these states of mind – *my* states of mind. They don't come from mother and father, don't come from God or Buddha, aren't just random, but are states of mind coming from previous moments of themselves – it's me; it's mine: *my* states of mind.

So, it is the giving up of the neurotic attachment, itself, that is the cause for happiness. The way we think now is, "Well, cake won't do it, so I'll try apple pie." We keep changing the objects. It's like changing the junk. We've got to give up wanting the junk in the first place.

But, because we don't know any other way to bring about happiness, it sounds as if giving up

this attachment, which we believe so thoroughly to be the *cause* of happiness, means we end up with nothing, that we end up kind of boring and cold and indifferent. We can't even conceive of happiness without attachment. We can't conceive of not having attachment, so we just think there's nothing left when we've given it up.

As Lama Zopa says, when we're told we've got to give up attachment, we think, "You mean I've got to give up my heart, my happiness?" For this reason it needs a lot of very careful, subtle contemplation to really be able to discriminate between, for example, the positive qualities, such as love, kindness and generosity, and the neurotic ones, such as attachment. The more we look at attachment, the more we contemplate it, the more we taste it and understand its nature – poison – the more we know it can't possibly be the cause of happiness, just in the same way we know a poison seed can't ripen into a medicine plant: we know it can only ripen as a poison plant.

So attachment, the way the word is used in Buddhism, necessarily refers to a deluded state of mind, a suffering state of mind. The trouble is we mix it with, and confuse it for, something, for example, called "love" – especially when it comes to our attachment to people. But love, in Buddhist terms, is necessarily an altruistic state of mind. And, interestingly, though it might sound strange, it's an *accurate* state of mind.

Interdependence

Everything is necessarily interdependent – at very many levels. It is the way things actually exist. The deluded states of mind, Buddhism is saying, are those that come from an ignorance of this interdependence; therefore, any state of mind arising from this ignorance is necessarily mistaken.

Attachment, for example, comes from this sense (as I've said) of a "me," *here*, cut off from all the things *out there*. There's this huge division between me and you, me and it, me and other. So, coming from this mistaken state of mind,

attachment then projects onto things out there, wanting those things to fill up poor, lonely me.

It's not just that it causes us to suffer emotionally, it's actually inaccurate. Whereas, the state of mind of love – even a small amount of love – means, in Buddhist terms, wanting another to be happy. When I say, "I love her," that means I am rejoicing in her qualities, I'm delighting in her happiness. The more I love her, the more affection and genuine kindness towards her there is. This state of mind, as opposed to the one of attachment, which is "I *want* her; I *need* her," is actually an accurate one in the sense that there is a recognition of interdependence: there's a sense of "we." There's not much difference between me and her when there's real affection there.

With attachment there is an incredibly strong sense of this person *out there*, so, then, all the manipulating comes, all the wrong stuff, all the neurotic stuff. It causes suffering in your heart, as well as causing suffering for her. From the wisdom perspective, it actually has this quality of being inaccurate, because it comes from this sense of separateness.

Love, however, comes from a sense that the person is not separate from me. It's very interesting to see it this way. So these positive qualities, Buddha says, are in fact innate; they are part of our true nature. It is in fully developing these that we are able to achieve nirvana and, eventually, to become fully enlightened, as they call it – a Buddha (which simply means, "fully awakened"). It is our natural state, Buddha says. It's our natural state.

Making it real

It's not enough to just listen to these ideas about the nature of mind and all these things, which sort of sound like interesting philosophy: we need to contemplate them through meditation, through observing, through learning to taste our own minds. It is important to see that it's our own minds – our own attachment, our own jealousy, our own anger, etc. – that are the causes

of our suffering, not the people out there. The more convinced we are by the truth of this, the more impetus we will have to develop the marvelous potential we all possess and the more impetus we will have to rid ourselves of the junkie mind. This is really Buddha's key point: it's within the mind. Happiness – the source of it – is in the mind; the source of suffering is in the mind. This is meant quite literally, it's not just some interesting cliché.

Lama Yeshe said, "I could tell you about attachment for one whole year, but it won't make the slightest difference until you start to build something up in your own meditation, your own contemplation." Listening to all these ideas is like listening to the cold theory, but, then, you have to test them out, relate them to your own experiences. This is what developing insight means. In Buddhism, one of the functions of a certain kind of meditation is to develop insight into how things are (which is what we're talking about here). That can only come from contemplating, internalizing, and slowly, slowly building up some sense, some reality, some taste, of these words. It's just like when you learn to play the piano: in the beginning it's mere theory, but, slowly, slowly, by practicing, you literally internalize the music until it just comes spontaneously through your fingers. This is what practice is.

The whole *point* to listening to all of this is to make it experiential. Just *believing* something, in Buddhism, is useless; though, it's a good start. If you don't know that fire will burn you, it's a good start to trust someone enough to believe them when they tell you it will. That's a good start, because it will prevent you from burning yourself. But when you have the direct experience, that's when you know it *definitely*. That's the point: to know it, yourself, directly, to have the experience, not just to know it in the head. Buddhism is dealing with our minds, with the way we think and feel. We have such potential – potential for joy and bliss and

kindness and all these qualities. It is our potential, it's just waiting to be tapped – for our benefit and, certainly, for the benefit of others. There's no question.

Samsara: an old, old story

So the key thing we're discussing here is that there is suffering (going back to this First Noble Truth). The second of the three types of suffering is, as I've said, much more insidious than the first, which is just ordinary, everyday, common garden-variety of suffering: headaches and the rest. To really learn to see how the happiness we get now is, in fact, suffering... Let's look at this more. Let's analyze it more and not just hear it as some heavy religious thing being dumped on us by Buddha. Take a simple example; let's say we like chocolate cake: When we're hungry and the thought "chocolate cake" arises, we know for a fact, we've got it all worked out in our minds, that the cause of happiness is the cake. We never doubt that thinking for one second. So to be told, "Sorry guys; it isn't the cause of happiness," is quite shocking, because it *appears* to be; everything seems to point to that. If it is true that chocolate cake isn't the cause of happiness, then it needs some analysis, doesn't it; it needs some looking at, it needs some unraveling, it needs questioning. The whole process, the whole scenario, the whole story – the assumption that cake is this, this and this; that when I put it in my mouth it will make me feel good – needs, quite literally, an enormous amount of analysis.

What Buddha is saying is, we've believed something for so long that we are now absolutely caught up in the "truth" of that, so when we're told that it's not the cause of happiness at all it's very hard to accept; it's quite shocking, in fact. We don't know where to turn – "What do I start looking at?" We know, though, when we've been doing something long enough – a certain habit in our lives – it's really hard to change, isn't it? We don't even know we're doing it any more; it's completely spontaneous. Well, Buddha is saying

we've had this habit for eons; we've had the habit of grasping and of attachment and all the rest for so long that now it *is* the nature of who we are. It's not our ultimate nature, but for so long we've been locked into this way of being... This is what he means by samsara. All living beings are cycling in samsara, locked into this story one way or another – the story of samsara.

It's interesting, we use the word "instinct" as though it referred to some deep truth: "It's just *instinctive*;" we say, "it's just who we *are*." What Buddha is saying is that instinct is just a word that refers to the deep habit of having done something so often it *feels* as if it is who we are. "But, honey;" he says, "it's not your real you at all." A Buddha is a being who is "instinctively" kind, loving, wise and compassionate – due to having practiced those things. When a person can play piano really well, we say it's just "second nature," it's "instinct." We know, though, that when that person was two years old they couldn't play the piano – but now look at them. A person who is the best football player on earth – he wasn't once, but now look at him. So we can see how even in one life there can be an evolution from being a non-football player to the best, most "instinctive" one on earth. We know it was from habit, that's all. That's all instinct is, it's just simply habit. It's an expression of the fact of having done something so often that we now do it spontaneously; it *is*, now, who we are.

Take, for example, a lion: We would say a lion has a lot of attachment and a lot of aggression. It has immense attachment, huge neediness, and an enormous amount of aggression to carry out its wishes, which is to stalk the buffalo and, then, to rip its guts out for breakfast. We say, "That's just how wild animals are: it's just instinct. They're made that way by God or... they're just that way, I don't know why."

In Buddhist terms, that being is the result of massive amounts of attachment and aggression brought in its mind from the past and manifesting at this particular time as a lion. Each

of us – each being, in fact – is simply the result, the fruiting, of certain qualities within us that we have practiced in the past and which we are manifesting at this time, in this life. But we in the West would simply say, "Well, that's just how a lion *is*," as if it always were a lion – as if it possessed "lion-nature."

The nature of mind; and karma

That brings us to one of the most crucial points in Buddhist philosophy: Yes, there is a lion there, relatively speaking, and, yes, there is a Robina here, relatively speaking – a human being, an Australian this or that; however, when it comes right down to the subtlest level of consciousness (which, in Buddhist terms, is what is there at the first moment of conception and at the time of death), that lion or human doesn't possess a "lion-nature," a "human-nature," a "male-nature," a "female-nature," etc. There is no innate "something" there as in the Christian view, for example, where humans are seen to have a soul, which comes from God; they have that nature, whereas lions don't.

Buddha has a whole different story. There is a very subtle consciousness at the subtlest level of our being; this subtle consciousness doesn't have a "lion-nature," "male-nature," "female-nature," or any other kind of nature. This subtlest level is, in a sense, the same for all beings, except that each being bears all the imprints and all the seeds of everything that being – that lion, human or whatever – has done in countless past lives. This is because consciousness, or mind, isn't physical. It isn't made by God or Buddha; it doesn't come from Mummy or Daddy and it isn't just some random event. Each moment of consciousness comes from a previous moment of consciousness – an infinite number of previous moments. So before being conceived in Mummy lion's womb that being, who is now a lion, was another type of being – whatever type of being that was. At the time of her previous death there was, at the very subtlest level of her consciousness and as a result

of her own past actions, a kind of programming of her being. Then, due to the prevalence of, say, very strong negative emotions, like attachment, anger, and so on, she is attracted to and, then, zaps into, the egg and sperm of lions: There are lions mating and, due to past karma with those particular mother and father lions as well as her own karma, this particular being who might have been a human in the past life, is powerfully attracted to "lion-energy." Her consciousness then zaps into the lion's womb and comes out as a baby female lion. She lives as a lion, acts like a lion – creating more negative karma all the time.

So, the point is, there is nothing that is innately human, innately this or innately that. We have no fundamental nature. We have the potential, as one lama said, for heaven and hell – for everything; it's all right there in that subtle consciousness. There are countless imprints on that consciousness from countless past lives – past energies, if you wish. And according to what we practice is what manifests. Each of us is a manifestation of certain qualities. As Lama Yeshe said, "Hell... It's the manifestation of those beings' own minds. It's their own experiences ripening as intense suffering."

So, if you want to assert the existence of a creator in Buddhism, you assert your own individual consciousness, as well as your own past actions (karmas), which then manifest as experiences: *this* is the creative process. We are our own "creators," if you like. We are the fruit of our own past. We're not created by God or Buddha; we're not just some random set of events; we're not just created by our parents. This is the Buddhist story.

Grasping at "me"

What sense of "me" we have depends on the type of being we are – a lion, a human or whatever. We then hold onto that sense of "me" as self-existent, real, solid, and independent. We manifest that sense of "me" in the world; we act out those qualities, manifesting aggression,

depression, this or that. We believe in that "me" implicitly – "This is *me*," we say. Yet, we think either God did it or the devil did it or our mothers did it or the Catholic Church did it. Always somebody else did it – made me.

That way of thinking is literally schizophrenic: there's this self-existent "me," yet, somehow, someone or something else is responsible for making me how I am. "It was *done* to me; I was *made* this way," we say, as if *we* have nothing to do with it. What's most interesting about the Buddhist view is that we have *everything* to do with it. We *are* the creators. We are bearing the fruits of the seeds that we – our past actions – have sown. So if you want to say there's a creator, it's you, yourself. It's not like you have a magic wand and then you manifest something out of the blue – Not like that. It's an evolutionary process: karma, cause and effect. It's a natural law, like gravity. It's not something that comes from outside – we do it ourselves. The implication of this is, "Wow, if I'm the creator of my own suffering and happiness, if I am the creator of what I'm experiencing now, then I can create my future experiences."

And this consciousness, at the subtlest level (which the lamas call the "indestructible consciousness"), is beginningless and endless. It can't have a first moment, not if it's the product of the law of cause and effect – how can you have a first, causeless, moment? Not possible! And it's endless: it has its own ever-moving-forward momentum. This is just how it is.

Question: Could you talk about the antidote or purification for attachment?

Ven. Robina: Yeah. What's the way to stop being a junkie? What's the way to stop the suffering of being a junkie? This is not a trick question. What would you think? The bottom line is you've got to give up the craving, right? You can use thousands of methods and have many people supporting you and, even, use alternative drugs to help you, but the bottom line is that every time the craving arises you have to go

against it, you don't feed it. That's really the bottom line of giving up attachment. The antidote to attachment is giving up attachment. If you have the suffering of being a smoker, the antidote is to give up smoking. Whatever methods you use... That's what Buddhist practice is: all the various methods – the helping methods, the supporting methods, the purification, the doing this and the doing that.

The very first step, though, is to develop the *skill* to even recognize the attachment. This is unbelievably difficult, because we've never even thought of the suffering until now. We know that anger is suffering, because we can feel the pain. But to be told that just to *want* something – “I just *want* a piece of chocolate cake” – it's like, “What's wrong with that? What are you talking about? How can that be suffering?” It sounds pretty brutal.

So, the very first step is, through meditation practices, to develop mindfulness techniques just to be able to recognize it. That's the first step. But the essential job is to give it up, to not follow it; it's like cold turkey. But, of course, the extent to which we can do this depends on our own levels; everything is according to our own levels – that's the basis.

So the antidote... If attachment is a main cause of suffering, we have to first recognize it. That can take years. Then, it is just an ongoing job. When I begin to see what it is, it's like, “Wow! So *that's* attachment. That's interesting”; I haven't really seen it before. I think that just points to how deep, how subtle, how pervasive it is.

The whole structure of Buddhism is made up of the methods. The First, Second and Third Noble Truths are the presentation. Then, the Fourth Noble Truth refers to the methods: the whole path. There is no shortcut and no secret to it. So the first step is to recognize. Having only one piece of chocolate cake is a good way to start dealing, for example, with attachment. (It certainly feels like suffering to have only one piece of chocolate cake when you're really dying

for two.) Most of time, though, we do it because we don't want to be fat, it's not because we want to change our minds. It's interesting that, at the gross level of attachment, we can be very disciplined; however, all we're doing, usually, is just replacing one object of attachment for another. We don't see that the problem, the cause of suffering, is not the cake: it's the neurotic, grasping mind. That's the key thing.

Ego-grasping is the root delusion: the very positing of the “me” in the first place. And the branches, if you like, are the attachment, the anger, the jealousy, the pride, the neuroses, the lying, the stealing, the killing and all those other things we can see are the flourishing top of it. The whole first level of Buddhist practice, which is encompassed by the first level of vows, is designed to control – at the very least to *control* – the growing of anger, jealousy, pride and the rest, to subdue them a little bit. Then you can start working on the root – the cause; that's the bottom line, that's the one. So, even putting it in very traditional Buddhist terms, what you're doing is developing some kind of control in your meditation as well as in your daily life. You're developing some kind of discipline so you can start subduing the crazy mouth, so you don't go shooting it off every two minutes – you're controlling that one, the one of speech. You're also controlling your actions so you don't abuse and harm too many beings. Then, when you have the space in your own meditation to really observe what's going on in your mind, you start to control the mind, itself – that raging train, doing its own trip day and night. Then, slowly, slowly, after years and years of practice, you get to the point where you achieve a level of well being that, compared to how we are now, is just beyond belief. And you haven't even finished with the delusions, yet. Do you see what I'm saying? You get to a point where the mind is so subdued, so naturally blissful, kind and joyous. Then, having developed single-pointed concentration, you can start the job of actually

realizing emptiness, which is what uproots the root.

Question: If you recognize that you are suffering due to attachment, then the only antidote is to give up the attachment itself?

Ven. Robina: It's like a many-sided thing, isn't it; there are many aspects to it. It's the same as with any old habit, like smoking, for example (I use these simple examples because they are so simple and obvious). If you're completely addicted to smoking, you can say the smoking part of you is really strong. The *wanting* to smoke is like a very highly developed muscle and the not wanting to smoke is like a little baby muscle. That's the weakness you're talking about, right?

So how do you start developing a strong muscle, Cliff? You have to exercise it, dear. So every now and again you have to have the courage to say, "Oh, all right; I want to give up smoking." You dare to say it to yourself; then, you slowly start to build that thought up until it begins to have some power. But what makes you even *want* to develop that muscle is the recognition – staring you in the face – that you're fed up with the suffering of smoking. You have to first recognize that, because you won't have the strength even to *want* to give up cigarettes until you've seen the suffering.

Until we even *begin* to contemplate what attachment is, just to *look* at the nature of it, just to get some kind of feeling for what it is... I mean, right now, what we think is meant by attachment is the same as what we call "happiness." We call it the wrong thing. Just to recognize this needs a lot of courage, let alone trying to change it.

As I said, this process is an evolutionary one, one that requires many different approaches. So, yes, you're absolutely right; the muscle inside (just using that as the analogy) is very weak right now, because it hasn't been exercised. The aim, then, is to keep looking until you start to recognize the suffering.

Why some of my friends in prison practice much harder than we do is because, darling, they don't need to be convinced that they're suffering. They know that suffering is disgusting; they are fed up to their teeth with it. You know yourself, when everything is going wrong in your life, that's when you really start to practice – if only for a day. You see it so starkly, then: the angry mind, the jealous mind, the mind that's freaking out. But when everything is going nicely, it's really hard to see.

This is exactly why I always quote something Lama Zopa wrote to one of these guys: "Your prison is nothing in comparison with the prison of Robina and Cliff." That's because Robina and Cliff don't think they're suffering: we're getting the junk all the time. As long as we're getting the junk all the time, we don't think we're suffering. Do you see my point? But the people in prison can't get the junk; their suffering is obvious, it's staring them right in the face.

We often need the wake-up call before we can start to get strong. Being able to observe and analyze this stuff when you're living an ordinary life in which you're not experiencing obvious kinds of suffering, needs a very clear, intelligent mind. It's not an easy job. This is why suffering can sometimes be the best wake-up call for us. Extreme suffering – losing somebody, somebody leaving you, losing all of your money, getting cancer – can be the best catalyst for some changes to happen. That's exactly what happened to one of my friends in prison. He had been a drunk all his life – he woke up in a car accident having killed somebody. He said it was a complete wake-up call. He went through a huge catharsis. It transformed his life, finally. But it took that accident and getting life in prison. That's how thick we are; that's how stupid we are.

So the first step is to really *see*. It's got nothing to do with having some sort of guilty oh-I-better-give-up-attachment kind of feeling. You've got to *know* it. Really knowing it yourself is what gives you power. So you have to just look and analyze,

that's all – just catch it. Just watch, just look. The fact is, as the Dalai Lama says, if your own direct experience leads you to the conclusion that what Buddha says is not true, then, of course, you have to stop immediately. If Buddha is wrong you have to reject him. So it's not a question of feeling guilty or having blind belief, that's sort of childish. Using our own minds, using our own intelligence, is the most important thing. Buddha is either right or he's wrong. He's not challenging us, not forcing anything down our throats. It's up to us to decide. No one is forcing us to be Buddhist or even to practice one percent of it.

Question: So, are we supposed to feel powerful once we've given up attachment?

Ven. Robina: You will feel powerful, yes. Absolutely. What this process brings is an enormous sense of empowerment – of the right kind: you have great courage and strength. You *know* you don't want that suffering anymore, so you have great... it's like you've gained self-respect. Just to use an analogy from the ordinary, gross level suffering, the person who is able to give up being a junkie or an alcoholic shows great self-respect. The fact that we can *do* it indicates we have great power. So, you're exactly right. This process certainly does not bring weakness: "Oh, I'm lost: I've given up everything; I've got nothing left. Life is pathetic" – That's terrible. The second you start tasting your own potential, rather than tasting the cake (believing you're empty now and that cake will give you what you haven't got), as soon as you start exercising your own potential, rather than giving power to the cake, immediately satisfaction comes. That's what's interesting. Usually, we're overwhelmed by the cake. That, essentially, is what happens with attachment. Attachment is like a baby; what it says is, "I am nothing – all these *gorgeous* things out there..." Do you understand what I'm saying? That's the real weakness, that's the child's mind (which is how we all are in samsara). The instant you don't give in to the attachment, although you might feel the pain of

giving up something, you're empowered, because in that very instant you're tasting your own ability to do something; you're tasting our own potential. So you just keep doing that a million times until you become who you really are: a fully satisfied person, a fully developed, blissful being. Do you see?

Question: So then [my connection with my wife...?] I love her, but I'm attached to her, too, so it's like she's a possession.

Ven. Robina: Exactly. It's interesting; in the history of Mahayana Buddhism there are all kinds of stories about these ridiculously rich and powerful people, like kings and queens who govern worlds. But it is because they have developed to the point of being totally motivated by altruism that they have manifested in that world as that kind of person. It's effortless. They do it only to benefit others. We can see how some people who have a lot of things, because they are not attached and have big hearts, can give everything away. And they keep getting more, which is interesting. When you've really given up attachment and you have altruism in your heart, then everything you have is for the sake of others. That, alone, brings immense joy to oneself. It's sort of like you've finished the job, you're now full, you're done – now, you can benefit others; it's why you use everything you've got. It makes complete sense.

So put it like this: If you know you're grossly attached to a certain object, it *is* appropriate sometimes to give up the object so you can give yourself some space to look at the mind. Most of us might not be that attached, but that's something we have to look at. The sign you are attached to something is that when you loose it you freak out. So test yourself every now and again.

Of course, we're attached. I mean, the thought of loosing your wife is heartbreaking. But that's the thing, we are this whole package: there's some love, some attachment, some this, some that. It's all a big mixture; everything's all

together. It's like a glass of liquid that has a bit of milk, a bit of water, a bit of something else. What we have to do is grow the love part.

The sign that there is love in a relationship is that it lasts even when all the fire is finished. I mean, look at the relationships that don't last, where anger and jealousy take over – that's when it's *mostly* attachment. But if it is real love that's there, that's when the relationship lasts; it just grows more and more. Okay, the attachment can grow, too, but one just has to keep an eye on that. We need a lot of awareness of all the different qualities within us and the skill to observe them.

An interesting sign that attachment is present is when the second a person says something you don't want to hear, or the person you love doesn't do what you want, you get irritable, you get annoyed, you don't like it. That's a sign of attachment. But if the person you love doesn't do what you want and you are able to work through it, let go, accept and be happy for them, that's a sign that love is most prevalent. The aim is to grow that one. That's the point.

In other words, if you feel good inside, it's a sign there's some virtue there. If you're feeling kind of upset, it's a sign of delusion there. It's a very simple kind of litmus test. Makes sense, doesn't it?

Question: Once you no longer have attachment, once you're at a high level, then there is no need to harm anybody?

Ven. Robina: From your own side, for *your* sake, there is absolutely no need to harm a single being. It just wouldn't even arise. Any time we harm people now it's usually because of attachment, because of grasping and anger and my "me" being threatened. When there's no longer an "I" to be threatened, when you are blissful, when your consciousness is like pervading the universe and you experience oneness with all beings, then harming is irrelevant; it just wouldn't arise. That's what is meant by going beyond rules and all that. Once you're at that level, of course you don't need

rules and laws of morality: you are *naturally* moral. It's in that sense you've gone beyond. So it's not that you don't care about other beings and, therefore, it's okay to abuse them. That's just another form of delusion. Do you see the difference?

Question: We've been talking today about how to train ourselves, how to observe ourselves. Yet we are human beings and the trouble is that we have to change. When we do try to change other people say, "That's nonsense." So, while we might be sitting here thinking, "Oh, this is great!" and, even, that we're fed up with the suffering, when we go back out into the world where people have a very different agenda, and where there are all these material things we're drawn to... it's difficult.

Ven. Robina: Well, if you were trying to give up being an alcoholic, you wouldn't keep going back to the bar. So it is difficult when everything is a bar. To have at least one friend who can support you. . . I'm using this as an analogy. I'm using the bar as an analogy for samsara – for what you're talking about. Because you don't have a choice – this *is* the world – you just have to learn to select your friends, learn which people to be around. That might sound arrogant, but it's not meant to be. If you're seriously trying to practice some kind of path – if you're learning to play tennis, for example, you don't go hanging out with football players. You have to find other tennis players, dear. That's your responsibility. If not, you'll keep forgetting you're trying to be a tennis player and keep playing football. Do you see my point? It's very simple.

Comment: It's seem, then, that you have to alienate people.

Ven. Robina: No. You don't have to alienate people – No. No, you don't. You can learn to be skillful.

Comment: Well, I have this friend who says to me, "You're becoming so different." The result

is that now we don't spend as much time together. But, the thing is, I fear losing that friend.

Ven. Robina: Well, you have to look at that, don't you? What is it you fear losing? You just have to look carefully. So, there are several points here. One point is, you can be a Buddhist, even a one percent Buddhist, and not look any different to anybody: it's an internal thing. That's one thing – to develop that skill.

Secondly, of course, you have to reassess. It's like anything in your life – like in the analogy of the tennis player. When you start developing new interests – tennis, let's say – your football friends will naturally start to fall away. But you don't go about it in an arrogant way. Yes, it can be painful sometimes, but you have to be able to just look at the situation and not make too many decisions – just allow it.

And if everyday you make the decision to be a good person and to practice – you do this practice, you do that practice – then, slowly, something new will develop. It's just that this transition time is a bit painful. You have to be skillful; you have to check your own mind. Just go one day at a time; try not to impose a lot of rules on yourself.

And try not to find fault – that's very important. Don't separate yourself by thinking, "Oh, I'm being so pure. Look at all these ordinary people out there..." It's very common for people to start thinking like that. It's not appropriate; it's just arrogance. Plus, it cuts you off unnecessarily. You're trying to develop a good heart. Remember that. Just because you don't like football any more doesn't mean you are unkind to your former football friends.

Yes, it's painful. Changing anything is painful, which is why having the clarity is so important. Understanding why we're doing it, rather than doing it for some vague reason or doing it out of guilt, is what gives us the courage to want to do it.

Dedication

All right, let's finish with a little prayer. The way Buddhism says karma works is that we're sowing seeds in the mind with every thought. So, as many moments that have passed since we started an hour and a quarter ago is as many seeds that we have planted in our minds.

Think: May all these seeds, all the things we've listened to and contemplated, ripen in our minds.

May we develop courage to see our own minds – to recognize what suffering is, what happiness is, and what the causes of these are.

May we learn to eliminate the causes of suffering and grow the causes of happiness.

May the seeds we've planted eventually result in the full development of our own phenomenal potential – for our sake and the sake of others.

A teaching given by Ven. Robina Courtin on June 5, 1999, at Gyalwa Gyatso Buddhist Center, Campbell, California, USA.

9. *Finding No Self to Cherish*

By Lama Zopa Rinpoche

Living in a hallucination

Our whole problem is not being aware of the reality of things. Just like hallucinogenic drugs or mushrooms, wrong conceptions make our minds hallucinate. We are unable to practice awareness of reality – that is, that all causative phenomena are transitory and, the basic thing, that what appears to us does not exist in the way it appears.

The ignorance in our mind that holds everything as truly existent focuses on the I that does exist, but apprehends a truly existent I, which doesn't exist. Like this, everything our ignorance focuses on – I, body, mind, others, six sense objects – does exist, but not in the way ignorance apprehends it. That is the hallucination.

Look at all your projections of true existence. Just as this brocade cloth covers the table, the truly existent I covers the mere I. In your own view the subject, the I, is covered with true existence, as are the action and the object. They are all decorated with the appearance of true existence. Look at all these things, aware that they are empty. Concentrate on the fact that everything – subject, action, object – is empty. Every single thing that exists is completely empty.

Concentrate on emptiness. In emptiness, there is no I and others, no subject and object, no friend and enemy. In emptiness, there is no attachment, no anger. In emptiness, there is no emptiness. While meditating on emptiness, while you are looking at emptiness, think this. Then it makes sense. There is not the slightest reason to believe that anything exists from its own side.

The I, which is merely imputed, which is labeled on the aggregates, does not exist in the way it is seen by our ignorance. Ignorance holds

the I not as merely labeled but as existing from its own side. This truly existent aspect held by ignorance does not exist. We have to be aware that what appears to exist from its own side is empty of existing from its own side.

All things that exist, starting with the I, are nothing other than what is merely imputed. There is no I other than what is merely imputed. There are no aggregates, no body, no mind, other than what is merely imputed. Similarly, action, object, friend, enemy, stranger, possessions, sense objects, all these are nothing other than what is merely imputed by the mind. All of these are completely empty, almost as if they don't exist.

But all these – self, action, object, friend, enemy, stranger, possessions, happiness, unhappiness, good reputation, bad reputation, praise, criticism, acquiring things, not acquiring things – are not non-existent. It is as if they are illusory, as if they do not exist; but they are not illusory – they do exist.

Look at all these things as illusory. What appears to you – real self, real action, real object, real friend, real enemy, real stranger, real possessions – has nothing to do with reality. This real existence from its own side has nothing to do with reality. In reality, all these are completely empty.

Happiness, unhappiness, praise, criticism, pleasant sounds, unpleasant sounds, good reputation, bad reputation, getting things, not getting things – the appearance of all these as real, existing from their own side, has nothing to do with reality. Not even an atom of them exists in this way. In reality, all these are completely empty.

Due to imprints left on our mental continuum by our past ignorance, which held everything to be truly existent, again we project true existence onto all these things now, which in reality are merely imputed. The seed, or potential, left on the mental continuum is actualized in this way.

Nothing exists without labeling. The I doesn't exist without labeling "I." The aggregates,

samsara, nirvana – nothing exists without labeling. Therefore, everything is empty. Everything that appears to exist from its own side – self, action, object, friend, enemy, stranger, sense objects – is completely empty.

From morning to night, we talk about things that are merely imputed, think things that are merely imputed, hear things that are merely imputed, look at things that are merely imputed. From morning to night, from birth to death, from beginningless rebirth to enlightenment, everything is like this.

So there is no reason at all to generate attachment, anger and ignorance. It is complete nonsense, unnecessary and meaningless. Without reason, your mind has created these problems. Your own mind has made up ignorance, attachment and anger. The conclusion is that there is no reason at all for discriminating thoughts of attachment, anger and ignorance to arise.

Looking for the I

None of the aggregates is the I. Even the whole group of the aggregates is not the I. The body is not the I. Even the mind is not the I. Understand clearly that none of these is the I. The aggregates are the base upon which we label “I,” but they are not the I; the I is something other than that. The I is not separate from the aggregates, but it is different from the aggregates.

From the top of your head down to your toes, the I is nowhere to be found. All this that you can point to is not the I. All this that you can touch is not the I. Nothing of this is the I. Be clear about this: the I is nowhere. Meditate on this.

If the I could be found on the aggregates, it would mean that it exists from its own side, that the I is truly existent. By using scientific analysis, not just by relying on faith, you cannot find the I on these aggregates. But this does not mean that the I doesn't exist. There is no I on these aggregates – but there is an I. There is an I in this world, in this Root Institute in Bodhgaya.

The I exists – why? Because the I is experiencing suffering and can abandon suffering by abandoning its causes. Because of the suffering, the I is practicing Dharma.

If there were no I, life would be very simple – you could just relax. You wouldn't have to worry about getting up in the morning and rushing off to work. You wouldn't need to look for a job. If there were no I, why would you need to work? Or go to university to get a degree? All this would not be necessary. There would be no I to experience happiness and comfort, so why would you bother to do any of these things? If there were no I, why would you worry? You could stop all these activities immediately.

If there were no I, there would be no action of meditating. If there were no subject, how could there be an action of meditating? It would be lying to say, “I am meditating.” There wouldn't be subject, action or object.

However, since there is a base, since the base of the I exists, there is no choice: the I exists. Since there is an action that results in suffering, there is no choice: non-virtue exists. Since there are secondary thoughts that disturb the principal consciousness, there is no choice: delusion exists. Since there are undesirable, uncomfortable, unpeaceful feelings, there is no choice: suffering exists.

Looking for Lama Zopa

When you look at me, there seems to be a real Lama Zopa existing from the side of the object, but this is completely opposite to reality. The way that Lama Zopa appears to exist is not the way that Lama Zopa really exists.

We are living our lives in a big hallucination. We lack the awareness that the way everything appears to us as real from its own side is a hallucination. The “real” Lama Zopa means the one that has existence from its own side. When we say “real” we actually mean “truly existent.” If you do not see things as illusory, when you talk of “real,” you mean “truly existent.”

There is no Lama Zopa on these aggregates. That real Lama Zopa from its own side cannot be found. From the top of my head down to my toes, there is no Lama Zopa here. Lama Zopa is nowhere to be found: in this world, in Bodhgaya, in these aggregates. It is nowhere.

The whole group of the five aggregates – form, feeling, recognition, compounded aggregates, consciousness – is not Lama Zopa, and none of the aggregates individually is Lama Zopa. To express it another way: besides this body not being Lama Zopa, even this mind is not Lama Zopa. Lama Zopa cannot be found anywhere from the crown of my head down to my toes. This is a simple, short and effective way to meditate on emptiness.

But Lama Zopa is not non-existent. At this time what is called “Lama Zopa” exists in this world, in India, in Bodhgaya, in Root Institute. Right now, in Root Institute, Lama Zopa is performing the function of talking, with noises coming from the mouth (and from the nose, from time to time!). But the existence of Lama Zopa is something completely other than what you normally think. The reality is something else, completely something else.

The reality of the way Lama Zopa exists is extremely subtle, something that we don’t normally think about. The way we normally apprehend Lama Zopa has nothing to do with the way Lama Zopa exists. The way Lama Zopa exists is completely something else.

So, how does Lama Zopa exist? What is the I? If you label “I” on a table, a bicycle, a car, a rock, how do you feel? If you label on a TV set what you usually label on the aggregates, how do you feel?

Let’s say there is a scarecrow in a field, protecting the crops from the crows. When you are at a distance and unable to see it clearly, you may think it is a person. When you get nearer, you see that it is only a scarecrow. How do you feel when what you have previously labeled as a person turns out to be a scarecrow? How do you

feel about your previously imputed label of person?

How do you feel when a relative dies and you are left with just their empty name? How do you feel about that name? The person is dead; you cannot see their body; there is nothing you can see – so, how do you feel about their name? They seem like illusions, don’t they?

This is how those who have realized emptiness feel about actual living beings. They understand everything in this way: the I, all existence, samsara and nirvana. Those experienced meditators see everything as illusory – and this is reality. This is how everything exists in reality.

The way things exist is extremely subtle, almost as if they don’t exist. You cannot say that they completely don’t exist, but it is very easy to say that they don’t exist, to come to the point of nihilism. It is a very subtle point. You can see why so many people have difficulty understanding the Prasangika-Madhyamika view of subtle dependent arising.

We become so confused. Our problem is that if we accept that something exists, we tend to think it exists from its own side. It is difficult to understand that something can still exist while being empty of existing from its own side – that is, not truly existent in nature. It is hard to accept these two views on the basis of one object.

Because these two views are difficult to unify, many people fall into the extreme view of saying that the object does not exist. They are unable to enter the Middle Way. They assert that if an object does not exist from its own side, there is no way that it can exist. Such people then arrive at the philosophy that nothing exists, and that what appears to exist is a hallucination.

The correct view is extremely subtle. By analyzing the example of Lama Zopa, you can see that it is extremely subtle. Lama Zopa exists in dependence upon the aggregates. It is as simple as that. This is the reason that Lama Zopa is here, now, in this tent. Lama Zopa exists in

dependence upon the aggregates; that is why he is here. But what Lama Zopa is extremely subtle, which is why I say it is as if it doesn't exist, as if it is an illusion.

Looking for things other than the I

In a similar way that you meditate on the selflessness of persons relating to your own I, you can meditate on the selflessness of the aggregates, or of everything else that exists. Those not familiar with the subject may not realize that this self in selflessness can refer to anything; it does not necessarily refer to the person, or self. There is also the selflessness of the aggregates.

Look at everything here: table, brocade, light, walls, curtains, flowers, self, action, object, sense objects. You have to understand that the way all these things are appearing to us is a complete hallucination. By analyzing the example of Lama Zopa, you can see how we are completely trapped in a heavy hallucination, which has nothing to do with reality. What we apprehend has nothing in the slightest to do with reality.

For example, we label "table" on this object that performs the function of supporting things. Mainly because of this function, in dependence upon this function, we label this particular shape "table." However, wherever we point, that is not the table. Each part, each piece of wood – the top, the bottom, the four legs – is not the table; even the whole thing, all the parts together, which performs the function of supporting things, is not the table. The whole group of the parts is not the table – that is the base.

So, the table cannot be found on this anywhere; there is no table on this. But there is a table, in dependence on the base. There is a table here. There is no table that can be found on this base, but there is a table here, because there is the base. It is just that there is no table that can be pointed to and found on this base.

Again, the way the table exists in reality is completely different from the way we normally think of its existence. What appears to us and

what we apprehend have nothing to do with the reality of the table. The reality is completely something else. When we analyze what the table is, trying to see the reality of the table, how it actually exists, we discover that the table is something other than what we normally think of as a table. Now, from this you can see the hallucination. Table is merely imputed, merely a concept, in the sense that it has no existence from its own side. On this base there is no table, but there is a table here, because there is the base. The table exists in dependence upon the base. Table is simply an idea; I is simply an idea; the aggregates are simply an idea.

Now the lights have gone out. This is a very good example of true existence: truly existent darkness, unlabeled darkness, darkness from its own side. This is a very good example of the object to be refuted. Light, darkness. There is light from its own side, then suddenly there is darkness from its own side. Even though in reality the darkness exists as a mere imputation, it does not appear to us like this. Like the table, like Lama Zopa, when the darkness is suddenly experienced, it appears to be truly existent.

Look at the whole of existence in the same way. Everything is like this: your own I, aggregates, sense objects, samsara, nirvana. The way in which everything – subject, action, object, all the six sense objects – actually exists is very subtle.

The base is not the label

Look at the nature of everything in this way. The label is imputed to the base, and in turn, that base is also labeled on another base. By nature, everything is merely imputed. In this way, everything is like an illusion. Nothing exists from its own side, but everything appears as if it does.

We label "aggregates" on the base because the base is something that is not the aggregates. First you think of the reason, then a particular label is given by the mind; otherwise, without the reason, there is no way to apply the label. With the five

aggregates, first you think of the reasons, the characteristics and functions of each aggregate; then you label “form” on the one that has color and shape and is tangible. In a similar way, you label feeling, recognition, compounded aggregates, consciousness.

Take consciousness, for example. Because of its function of thinking of an object’s meaning and of distinguishing it from other objects, that particular phenomenon is labeled “consciousness” or “mind.” The phenomenon that performs such functions as remembering contact with sense objects (through seeing, hearing and so on), carrying imprints and continuing from one life to another is labeled “consciousness.”

Or, before you label “this is my father” on one person in a group of people, you think of the reasons: the particular shape of his body, his function in relation to you. By remembering the woman who has a particular body shape and a particular relationship to you, amongst hundreds of people, you label that particular shape, “mother.” It is the same when you say, “this is my enemy” and “this is my friend.”

We can also look at our problems in this way. Without someone first labeling “this is AIDS” and then believing in the label, there was no AIDS. Labeling alone is not enough; there has to be belief in the label. Before the particular doctor first gave that label “AIDS” and believed in it, there was no AIDS. Then other people believed in that doctor’s label; they also labeled “AIDS” and believed in that label. This is simply what AIDS is.

Just as the base of the table, its parts, is not the table, and the aggregates are not the person, the illness is not AIDS. If that illness is AIDS, why do we need to call it AIDS on top of that? Why do we need to label “AIDS” on AIDS? There is no reason to label “table” on the table. For there to be a purpose to label “table,” you have to label “table” on something that is not table. In other

words, if the base is table, why should you label “table” on the table? It’s only duplicating.

Whenever we label anything, we label on something that is not that label – otherwise it doesn’t make any sense. Take a child who is called Behram Singh. The base is the child’s aggregates, the association of body and mind. If those aggregates are already Behram Singh, why did the parents have to give them a name? Why did the parents have to decide a name to give? Why did they have to think of and give the name “Behram Singh”? If the base is Behram Singh, why did the parents have to give a name at all? There would be no point if a name is already there. The parents give the name “Behram Singh” because the base is not Behram Singh. This is the reason they label “Behram Singh” on that base.

If the base itself, this place where these Dharma teachings are being given, were Root Institute, there would be no need to give the name “Root Institute” to it. One names “Root Institute” on the base that is not Root Institute. It is the same with AIDS. The base, the illness, is not AIDS; it is the base. So, what is AIDS? AIDS is the label. The label and the base cannot be one. The aggregates and the I are not one; they are different. They are not separate, but they are different; they are not one.

It is the same with AIDS. So, what is AIDS? It is different from the base. In reality, AIDS is never the AIDS that one thinks is real from its own side. There is no such AIDS. It is completely empty, existing in mere name. Meditate on the emptiness of cancer and other diseases in the same way.

There is no way for the label to arise without thinking first of the reasons. After seeing a particular form, you then impute a particular label. When we label anything, we think of the characteristics of that object or person, and then we apply the label. The base comes first. We think of or see the base first, then we apply a label to it. This evolution proves that the base is not the label; the label comes later. If the base

were the label, it would be crazy to label it again. There would be no reason to label it. You would just be duplicating.

To think about the base and the label as different is another brief way to meditate on emptiness. This is a clear and essential way to get some feeling for emptiness. Practice awareness of this.

Emptiness of the five aggregates

The aggregates are not the I; the I is nothing other than what is merely imputed to the aggregates. So the I is empty, completely empty. When we say “the aggregates,” since the base is not the aggregates, what are the aggregates? The aggregates are nothing other than what is merely imputed, so they are completely empty.

Go through the aggregates one by one. The base on which we label “form” is not form, so what is form? It is nothing other than what is merely imputed. So, form is completely empty.

Then, feeling. The base on which we label “feeling” is not feeling, so what is feeling? It is nothing other than what is merely imputed. So, feeling is completely empty.

Then, recognition. Again, the base on which we label “recognition” is not recognition, so what is recognition? It is nothing other than what is merely imputed.

Then, compounded aggregates. Compounded aggregates comprise all the rest of impermanent phenomena that are not included in the other aggregates of form, feeling, recognition and consciousness. Phenomena such as the other secondary mental factors, persons, imprints, time and so forth are included in this category of compounded aggregates.

Again, the base on which we label “compounded aggregates” is not the compounded aggregates, so what are the compounded aggregates? Nothing other than what is merely imputed. So, the compounded aggregates are completely empty.

The base on which we label “consciousness” is not the consciousness, so what is consciousness? The definition I gave before is the base, but the base is not the label “consciousness.” To our mind the base and label seem to be mixed, or one. That is the object to be refuted, the object that we have to realize is empty, as it is empty in reality. To our mind, they appear as one. The base and the label don’t appear to be different, but in reality they are.

Again, the particular characteristics and functions of the consciousness are the base, so what is consciousness? It is nothing other than what is merely imputed. For example, the I walks, eats, sleeps, sits, builds houses, but this does not mean the I is the aggregates. The same logic can be followed with the consciousness. It performs the function of perceiving objects and so forth, but it is nothing other than what is merely imputed to that particular base with those particular characteristics and functions. Just as the activities of the aggregates are given the label “I am doing this and that,” the actions of this particular base are referred to as “consciousness.” Just like all of the other aggregates, consciousness is completely empty.

Emptiness of the six sense objects

First, form. Again, the base is not form; form is something different from the base. So, what is it? Again, it is nothing other than what is merely imputed, so form is completely empty. All these things that we call “forms” are completely empty.

For our minds, form cannot be differentiated from the base; it is oneness with the base. If we look at a piece of bamboo, we label “form” on the bamboo, but for us the base, bamboo, and the form cannot be differentiated. We see the base and the form as one, mixed. That is the object to be refuted. We do not recognize the appearance of true existence: we see not simply imputed form but form having existence from its own side.

When we look at and think of the bamboo, to our minds the base and bamboo appear the same. I am not talking about people for whom there is no longer an appearance of true existence; I am talking only of those who do not see the base and bamboo as different. So, that is how the object to be refuted appears.

When we see a form, in reality we see the base; we don't see form, which is the label. The base is not the imputed existent, form. So, what is form? It is nothing other than what is merely imputed; therefore, form is completely empty.

Then, sound. Again there is the base, which we label as interesting sound, uninteresting sound, praise, criticism. Again, the words that we label "sound" are not sound. So, what is sound? It is nothing other than what is merely imputed by the mind. Again, sound is completely empty.

Next, smell. The particular sense object experienced by the nose is labeled "smell." That is the base, not the label "smell." We label "smell" on what the nose experiences, that which is not experienced by the other senses. That is the base, and not the label, the imputed existent, "smell." So, what is smell? Smell is nothing other than what is merely imputed by the mind. Again, smell is completely empty.

It is the same with taste. "Taste" is labeled on what the sense of the tongue experiences, that which other senses do not experience. The base itself is not taste, so taste is labeled. So, what is taste? Nothing other than what is merely imputed by the mind; so taste is completely empty.

Touch is the same. "Touch" is labeled on what the physical body experiences through contact, that which is not experienced by the other senses. Again, touch is merely imputed by the mind; therefore, touch is also completely empty.

Emptiness of the four noble truths

True suffering – the three types of suffering: suffering of suffering, suffering of change and pervasive compounded suffering – is merely

imputed by the mind. Therefore, true suffering is completely empty. It is as if there is no true suffering.

True cause of suffering is merely imputed to karma and delusions. Therefore, true cause of suffering is completely empty, as if it doesn't exist.

True cessation of suffering, or liberation, in which the mental continuum is purified of all the disturbing-thought obscurations, is nothing other than what is merely imputed by the mind. Therefore, true cessation is completely empty, as if it doesn't exist.

True path is labeled on the wisdom that directly perceives emptiness. Since true path is nothing other than what is merely imputed by the mind, again true path is completely empty of existing from its own side.

All these – true suffering, true cause of suffering, true cessation, true path – are nothing other than what is merely imputed by the mind; so they are completely empty of existing from their own side.

When you meditate on The Essence of Wisdom, go over each aggregate and each sense object. Meditate on each point. Apply the reasoning that each one is empty because it is merely imputed; this will automatically make you feel that it is empty. Concentrate on the emptiness. The more deeply you understand the meaning of merely imputed, of subtle dependent arising, the more deeply you understand emptiness.

This is the way things are. When we practice awareness of this, it is another world. When we are not aware of reality, we live in one world: truly existent I living a truly existent life in a truly existent world. When we don't see reality, we live our life as truly existent I (which doesn't exist), with truly existent aggregates (which don't exist) and truly existent sense objects of form, smell, taste, sound and touch (which don't exist). We believe in truly existent true suffering (which doesn't exist) and truly existent true cause of

suffering (which doesn't exist). We think of real negative karma from its own side (which doesn't exist), real liberation from its own side (which doesn't exist) and the real path that we are meditating upon (which doesn't exist).

Be aware of reality all the time

The bodhisattva Togme Zangpo says: "Even though I can sit up here on a throne and talk a lot about emptiness, if someone criticizes or praises me a little, my mind goes crazy. Even though I can say the words 'nothing that appears has true existence,' like and dislike arise with just a little praise or criticism. Not one single practice can be called the path of the Middle Way."

You may be able to recite by heart and brilliantly explain the whole of Madhyamika – all Nagarjuna's teachings on emptiness, all Lama Tsong Khapa's teachings on greater insight, all the Perfection of Wisdom teachings – all the teachings on the Wisdom Gone Beyond. But in daily life if someone says something a little negative or a little positive, a little criticism or a little praise, immediately the mind becomes emotional. There is no stability; immediately there is like and dislike. If this is what happens to our mind in daily life, there is not even a particle of practice of right view.

Be aware that all these "real" things that appear to exist from their own side are empty. Understand that they are all hallucinations, which means that they are all empty. In short, all causative phenomena are transitory by nature, and they are empty by nature.

When you do not practice awareness of this in day-to-day life, the mind is overwhelmed by hallucinations, by wrong conceptions, like a city flooded by water. The mind is possessed by wrong thoughts, wrong appearance, wrong view.

As long as the mind is overwhelmed by wrong conceptions, there is no real peace. Life is lived in hallucination. Not seeing everything as illusory is the fundamental hallucination. The people who have not realized emptiness and do

not see things as illusory not only see everything as truly existent, which is an illusion, but also experience the basic problem of clinging to everything as if it were true. This wrong conception, this ignorance, is the origin of all the other delusions, which then motivate karma; and that karma leaves on the mind the seeds that are the causes of samsara.

Like this, the ignorance believing that everything exists from its own side ties you continuously to samsara, so that from life to life you experience all the three types of suffering. Besides that, it interferes with your achieving liberation and enlightenment, and with your ability to fulfill the wishes of all sentient beings by leading them to the peerless happiness of full enlightenment.

Not the slightest benefit comes from following this ignorance, for you or for others – only harm. Believing this ignorance is completely childish, when in reality no such truly existent phenomena exist. By nature, every single existent is empty. Everything is without true existence, so it is complete nonsense for your mind to apprehend it as true just because it appears truly existent. This is unnecessary and meaningless, and the shortcomings are infinite. The harm this ignorance causes you is enormous.

There is no reason at all to follow ignorance, which apprehends everything as truly existent and believes in that appearance of true existence. And there is no point at all in allowing discriminating thoughts of attachment and anger to arise.

No I to cherish

Because in reality the I is completely empty, there is nothing to cherish. Look at the I as empty, then check whether there is any object to cherish. Since the I that exists is merely imputed, there is nothing to cherish, nothing to cling to. If you check, self-cherishing is completely silly, and only creates problems. Although you don't want problems, you create problems.

Self-cherishing is a dictatorship. It is a dictatorship meant to benefit the self but only results in problems and failure. It is not logical. Check, “Why do I cherish myself? Why do I think that I’m more important than all the numberless other sentient beings? Why do I think I’m so precious?” There is not one valid reason for self-cherishing. Though we can give many reasons why we should cherish others, we cannot find one reason why we should cherish the self.

There is nothing important or precious about the I. Just like you, other sentient beings want happiness and do not want suffering. Others are numberless; you are just one person. Your own self-importance is completely lost when you think of the numberless others. It is nothing. Even if you are born in hell, you are only one person, so there’s nothing to be depressed about. Even if you achieve liberation from samsara, you are only one person, so there’s nothing to be excited about. When you think of the numberless others who, like you, want happiness and do not want suffering, you become completely insignificant.

Therefore, in your life, there is nothing to do other than to work for others, to cherish others. With this attitude, you work for other sentient beings with your body, speech and mind. In your life there is nothing more important than this.

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10. Cherishing Others

By Lama Zopa Rinpoche

Exchanging self for others

The thought of bodhicitta is unbelievable. It makes everything other than working for sentient beings boring and unsatisfying. There is no real interest or enjoyment in life apart from this. Anything else is meaningless, empty, essenceless.

Real happiness and satisfaction start when you live your life for others. You retreat for others, practice Dharma for others, study for others, work in the office for others, cook for others. When your attitude is transformed so that you do everything for others, to pacify their suffering and obtain their happiness, there is real satisfaction and peace in your heart.

When you are cherishing yourself, thinking only of yourself - "How can I be happy? How can I be free of problems?" - there is no happiness in your heart, only worry and fear. You see only problems, and your mind is not relaxed. But in the next moment, when you change your object of concern to another sentient being - even if it is only one other sentient being - suddenly your heart is released from self-cherishing, like limbs released from chains.

As soon as your object of concern changes from yourself to someone else, your heart is released from the bondage of self-cherishing thought. As soon as you change the object of your cherishing, there is suddenly peace in the very depths of your heart. Right in the very moment that your mind changes from self-cherishing to cherishing others, there is liberation, freedom from the tight bondage of the selfish mind.

Realizing that miserable conditions come from the superstitions of their own unsubdued minds, Dharma practitioners use these conditions to destroy their own superstitions. You don't have to accept what self-cherishing thought gives you.

You can take the sufferings and problems of others upon yourself. Instead of blaming someone else so that you can feel happy and comfortable, instead of letting someone else experience the suffering, loss, unhappiness, hardships, bad reputation, criticism, punishment or whatever, you take all these difficulties upon yourself and give the victory to the other person. This is the very practical Mahayana teaching of exchanging self for others, renouncing the self and cherishing others.

Here, you give all the problems given to you by your self-cherishing thought back to the self-cherishing thought. Like this, you use your problems to destroy the origin of your sufferings, your own delusions and superstitions. As it says in *Lama Chöpa*: "Please bless me to see that this chronic disease of cherishing myself is the door to all sufferings, and bless me to put all the blame on the self-cherishing thought in order to destroy the great demon of self-cherishing."

Self-cherishing is the source of all undesirable experiences and obstacles: disease or failure in business, education or Dharma practice. Following self-cherishing thought brings only problems and failure. Instead of blaming some outside condition or harboring in your heart all the harms given by the self-cherishing thought, use them "to destroy the great demon of self-cherishing." Not only do you put all the blame on the self-cherishing thought, but on top of that you even give the problems back to it, using them as the medicine to cure the chronic disease of self-cherishing, superstitions and delusions.

Using problems to destroy self-cherishing

In order to achieve ultimate happiness, we must destroy our delusions. The Dharma, the path, the Buddha, the guru, for example: all these are meant to destroy your delusions, to hurt your self-cherishing thought and to subdue your mind.

Receiving criticism, disrespect or bad treatment also hurts your self-cherishing thought, your thought of worldly dharma. This is not bad,

but good. Therefore, hurting your self-cherishing thought and worldly concern is Dharma practice.

Normally in our daily life we interpret someone treating us badly as negative, but actually it is positive. It becomes a remedy for our selfish mind and worldly concern. The person who treats us badly is helping us to destroy our delusions, our self-cherishing thought, worldly concern and desire, just like the Dharma does. By doing something opposite to our wish, the person interferes with the comfort we are seeking out of worldly concern, so they harm our worldly concern. This is exactly the same as Dharma. Their action becomes the real medicine to cure the real inner disease that we have had from beginningless time - the chronic disease of the three poisonous minds.

It is the same with any problem or miserable condition that you experience, such as having cancer or AIDS, which is the result of having followed self-cherishing thought and the three poisonous minds in this life or in previous lives. These diseases are not wanted by the self-cherishing thought; again they are like medicine, the path, the Dharma.

Seeing as negative the people who badly treat you or miserable conditions such as disease doesn't help you at all; this only harms you and others. Look at them as positive, as purification. This helps you to exhaust now the heavy negative karma that would otherwise mean your experiencing sufferings in the hells for many hundreds of lifetimes.

Instead of seeing anything that harms your self-cherishing thought and worldly concern as negative, look at it as positive. Use it to destroy your delusions and to achieve liberation and enlightenment. In this way, whether there is a cure for your problem or not - and especially if there is no cure - you can make your problem worthwhile while you are experiencing it.

As mentioned in one thought transformation teaching, "Suffering is the broom that cleans away negative karma and obscurations." Your

experiencing problems is the broom, the vacuum cleaner, that cleans away negative karmas, that cleans away the cause of problems.

The teaching also says, "Disease is also the broom that cleans away negative karma and obscurations." Disease is just used as an example - this can apply to any problem. Life's problems can become the teaching of the Buddha. If you look at problems as positive, you can use them to destroy your self-cherishing thought.

In the practice of *chöd*, you purposely create a terrifying situation and invoke terrifying spirits in order to slay the ego. For the highly realized practitioners who are successful at *chöd*, it is very easy in such a situation to see clearly the object to be refuted, the truly existent I. The more quickly you recognize it, the more quickly you are able to realize the ultimate nature, the emptiness, of the I, the aggregates and so forth.

However, you don't have to depend upon *chöd* to create a situation in which you can try to realize emptiness. Any miserable situation - being ill, being criticized or harmed by someone - is exactly the same. The people who bother you in your everyday life are the same as the spirits you ask to disturb you when you are practicing *chöd*. Instead of using these difficult people to develop your anger or jealousy and create negative karma, you can use them to recognize the object to be refuted and realize emptiness. You can use the everyday situations that you are already experiencing to realize emptiness and to practice bodhicitta, which means destroying self-cherishing.

Since people who bother you destroy your self-cherishing and other delusions, just as the Dharma, the Buddha and the guru do, they are actually not harming but helping you. Like a mirror, they show you your mistakes and thus help you in the most essential way. By showing you your delusions and helping you to eliminate them, by destroying your delusions and worldly concern in this way, they are giving you ultimate happiness.

By destroying your self-cherishing, these people give you enlightenment, because the main obstacle to achieving enlightenment is self-cherishing thought. And the main obstacle to achieving liberation is desire, which ties you to samsara. In terms of subduing your mind, the person who destroys your worldly concern is as great and as precious a teacher as Buddha. Through causing you to generate the path within your mind, they make it possible for you to achieve enlightenment. This person is as precious as Buddha, as Dharma.

To be precious and kind like this, the person doesn't have to have a motivation to benefit you. For example, your wisdom realizing emptiness helps stop your delusions, but this wisdom doesn't have any motivation to help you. Medicine is also precious because it cures disease, but it doesn't have any motivation to help.

You do not cherish yourself because you are kind to yourself. That is not your reason. Therefore, cherishing someone else doesn't have to involve their being kind to you either. Why not cherish others in the same way you cherish yourself? Why not cherish your enemy, who helps you to practice Dharma, generate the path and achieve enlightenment? This person is unbelievably precious, just like guru, Buddha and Dharma. There are infinite reasons why you should cherish such a person.

Others are numberless

You are just one person. Even if you are reborn in the hells, you are just one person - nothing much to be depressed about. Even if you achieve liberation from samsara, you are just one person - nothing much to be excited about. All of the numberless sentient beings - those who are called "others" - are just like you in wanting happiness and not wanting suffering. Their wishes are exactly the same as yours, and they are numberless. Each one is as important and as precious as you think you are; and these others who are so important and so precious are

numberless. You, just one person, are completely insignificant. You are nothing when compared to the numberless others who are so precious and so important. You are nothing precious, nothing important.

If there are two people in addition to you, those two people are greater in number than you and thus more important. It is like the difference between one rupee and two rupees: two rupees is more valuable than one rupee. And 100 rupees is more valuable than one rupee; 1000 rupees is much more valuable than one rupee. Given the choice between taking one rupee or two rupees, you would choose two rupees. If the choice is between one rupee and 100 rupees, of course you would take the 100 rupees. If you had a choice, it would be silly to take the one rupee. You would naturally choose the larger amount. Like this, when you compare yourself with one hundred or one thousand or one million people, or numberless sentient beings, you are nothing precious, nothing important.

Compared to all other human beings, who are uncountable, you are insignificant and unimportant. Also, each of the god, demi-god, animal, preta and hell realms contains an uncountable number of beings. The number of ants alone is uncountable. So, between you and them, they are more important. In one dark room - even in one corner - there are so many mosquitoes; they are more precious, more important. Think in detail of each realm, of each type of creature. There are so many beings just in the animal realm: butterflies, worms, flies. If you think in detail, it is incredible. Just on this earth, even in one country, there are so many.

Just like you, all these beings want happiness and do not want suffering. There is nothing more important in your life than working for sentient beings, pacifying their suffering and giving them happiness. There is nothing more important than this. Anything other than living your life for other sentient beings is meaningless, empty.

What we call "I" is completely insignificant when compared to the numberless human beings, the numberless animals and the numberless other sentient beings. Each time that we generate bodhicitta, thinking "I am going to achieve enlightenment for all sentient beings," this includes all those beings, all the mosquitoes and ants. Think of how many suffering creatures, such as worms and flies, there are on one mountain; the bodhicitta we generate includes all of them. It includes all the fish, and all the animals that eat the fish. It includes every single one of the numberless creatures in the water, big and small, that eat each other. Each time that we generate bodhicitta, the altruistic wish to obtain happiness for others, it encompasses without discrimination all the different human races, every type of creature in the water, on the ground, in the air. Without discrimination, it encompasses every living being.

This altruistic thought to achieve enlightenment for all sentient beings is an incredible attitude. When you generate bodhicitta, you include everybody in your thought to benefit. No matter what problem they have, no matter where they are - the East, the West, the Middle East, another world - everybody is included. Not even one sentient being is left out.

Why we need omniscient mind

Each sentient being has a different level of mind and different characteristics, and you have to know the exact method to fit each one. You should be able to say one word at the same time to millions of people and suit each one. Each one will hear something different according to their different level of mind, their different karma; but at the same time, according to their karma, what they hear should guide them on the right path, to liberation and to enlightenment.

However, right now we cannot see even one sentient being's level of mind, one sentient being's karma. To be able to guide all sentient

beings perfectly, without the slightest mistake, and benefit them extensively, we need to know everything about each one's level of mind and characteristics.

Also, to lead even one sentient being gradually to enlightenment, we need the foundation of knowing the whole path. We cannot reveal just one method; one method cannot suit everyone. There have to be various methods in accordance with the levels of beings' minds. For example, by telling Makyeda, who had killed his father and mother, "Father and mother are objects to be killed," Guru Shakyamuni Buddha made him feel happy. In his depression and anxiety, it was helpful for Makyeda to hear this. It actually helped him to realize the two selflessnesses, of persons and of aggregates, and to understand that the two ignorances were to be eliminated. These words became the cause for Makyeda to actualize emptiness. Instead of getting stuck on the literal meaning, Makyeda understood that the words meant that the two types of ignorance, apprehending the I and apprehending the aggregates as truly existent, were to be eliminated.

To say that everything is truly existent suits the minds of some people. Hearing this helps them to practice better and leads them to happiness. Though there is not even one atom of true existence, to that particular person with no capacity to understand that there is no true existence, one would teach that Buddha said there is true existence, because this instruction would become the means to lead that sentient being gradually to liberation and enlightenment.

To lead sentient beings gradually to happiness and enlightenment, one has to see every single karma, every level of mind and characteristic of every sentient being, and all the various methods that are suited to each of them. And that comes only with omniscient mind. Even arhats, who have infinite psychic powers, cannot see every single karma. Though free of disturbing-thought

obscurations, arhats have still not removed the subtle obscurations to omniscience, so they cannot see subtle karma or the secret actions of the Buddhas. Arhats cannot perfectly guide sentient beings, even though they themselves are free of samsara.

Therefore, to work perfectly to benefit all sentient beings, one has to achieve the state of omniscient mind - no matter how many eons it takes, no matter how hard it is. There is no other method. Until one achieves omniscient mind, the realizations of one's own mind are not complete, and one cannot give sentient beings what they need, which is the highest, longest-lasting happiness. Achieving enlightenment is the most meaningful thing one can do to benefit oneself and to benefit other sentient beings.

We are responsible for all sentient beings

You can understand the idea of highest happiness from an everyday example. Given a choice, even animals will choose the most delicious food and leave other food that is not so interesting. Even a dog does this. And when shopping or doing business, people try to get the most profitable deal they can by buying the best quality, longest-lasting goods. Even though they may not know that they can achieve such a thing as enlightenment, in their daily lives everyone wishes to get the best. Unless extremely poor, everyone tries to get the best of everything, to build the best, longest-lasting house. Even though there may be no knowledge of enlightenment, there is a concept of peerless happiness. It is only because of lacking the Dharma wisdom-eye that people are not aware that enlightenment is the main thing missing in their lives, and is what they need to achieve.

Just as you are always trying to get the most in terms of happiness, so too is every other sentient being. What everyone needs is the peerless happiness of full enlightenment, the state free of all obscurations and complete in all realizations.

Having received a perfect human rebirth, met a virtuous teacher to lead us on the path to liberation and enlightenment, and met the Buddhadharma - especially the Mahayana teachings - each of us has the opportunity to free all sentient beings from all obscurations and sufferings and lead them to the fully enlightened state. We have this opportunity to help because we have received all the necessary conditions to develop our mind, to generate the graduated path to enlightenment and to achieve omniscient mind, with great compassion for all sentient beings and the capacity to guide them. Therefore we are responsible for freeing all sentient beings from all suffering and its causes, the obscurations, and for leading them to the fully enlightened state.

I often use this example: If you saw a blind person walking towards a cliff, you would immediately grab them before they fell over the precipice. It wouldn't matter whether they asked for help or not. If you have all the necessary conditions - eyes to see, limbs to grab, voice to call - then you are capable of helping the blind person. Simply by having these, you are responsible for helping the person who is in danger of falling off the cliff.

While having the capacity to help, if someone saw the situation and didn't help, this would be very cruel and shameful. Somehow it wouldn't fulfill the purpose of having eyes and limbs, which is to use them to help others. If such a thing happened, how pitiful it would be from the side of the blind person about to fall off the cliff, and how terrible from the side of the person who had all the conditions necessary to help, but didn't.

How very cruel and harmful it would be, if now while we have all the necessary conditions, we don't practice bodhicitta, the essence of Buddha's teachings, especially the Mahayana teachings; if we don't develop this ultimate good heart; if we don't develop the capacity to guide sentient beings; if we don't achieve

enlightenment in order to work perfectly for sentient beings, but always live our life with self-cherishing, thinking of nothing other than our own happiness. How selfish and cruel this would be. In reality, we are completely responsible for leading all sentient beings to enlightenment.

Sacrificing yourself

Concern for other sentient beings brings a natural wish to give them happiness and not harm them. You don't want to lead them to suffering. Remember the story of the bodhisattva captain who, by killing that one person who was planning to kill the five hundred traders, sacrificed himself completely. In order to save that person from creating negative karma, the bodhisattva captain was willing to be reborn in the hells. But instead of becoming negative karma and cause of rebirth in the lower realms, his action of killing shortened his time in samsara by 100,000 eons. By generating bodhicitta and cherishing this one sentient being, by exchanging himself for this one sentient being, the bodhisattva captain accumulated incredible merit and came closer to enlightenment.

There is also a story about Asanga. For twelve years he tried to achieve Maitreya Buddha in his meditations, but for all those years he was unable to see Maitreya Buddha. One day when Asanga was returning to his cave, he saw a wounded dog full of maggots. He felt such unbearable compassion. First he cut flesh from his own leg and spread it out on the ground so that he could put the maggots from the dog's body onto it. And then, so as not to kill the maggots by removing them with his fingers, he bent down to pick them up with the tip of his tongue. As he leaned forward to do this, with his eyes closed, he found that he could not reach the dog. Asanga opened his eyes and saw Maitreya Buddha right there, instead of the dog. Sacrificing himself for what he saw as a wounded dog became powerful purification; only after this did Asanga see Maitreya Buddha.

There are many other stories like this. Sacrificing yourself to protect even one sentient being from suffering and to lead them to happiness is powerful purification. Not only does it purify many eons of negative karma, but it accumulates much merit, bringing you closer to enlightenment. The fact that you can achieve enlightenment quickly by sacrificing yourself for even one sentient being is one reason to cherish others. Cherishing yourself is an obstacle to the development of the mind, to the generation of realizations of the path. If you cherish yourself, there is no enlightenment, but if you cherish even one sentient being, there is enlightenment. Cherishing even one sentient being makes possible the achievement of enlightenment.

So, there is a big difference. With self-cherishing thought, there is no hope of enlightenment; but cherishing one sentient being, which purifies obscurations and accumulates extensive merit, leads you to enlightenment. From these stories and reasons, the conclusion is that even one sentient being is much more precious than you. Without considering how precious sentient beings are due to their great number, you can see that even one sentient being is unbelievably precious. There is no way to finish explaining the value of this sentient being, all the benefits you can gain from this one sentient being.

What is called "I" is the object to be abandoned forever; what is called "others" - even one sentient being - is the object to be cherished forever. This is why living your life for others - dedicating your life to even one sentient being - gives the greatest enjoyment and the most interesting life. Real happiness in life starts when you cherish others. Living your life for others, cherishing them with loving kindness and compassion, is the door to happiness, the door to enlightenment.

From Lama Zopa Rinpoche's Door to Satisfaction, Wisdom Publications.

PART TWO
MEDITATIONS & PRAYERS

1. *Preparing for Meditation*

Sit

Sit comfortably in either the seven-point posture or some other recommended position. Spend a few minutes settling your body and mind. Finding a quiet place is probably difficult in prison; if not, make a firm decision to keep your mind as focused as you can, not to get distracted by the noise.

Decide which meditation you will do and for how long you will meditate, and determine not to do anything else for that period of time.

It is traditional to prostrate three times before sitting down to meditate. Prostration counteracts pride. It expresses our acceptance that we have work to do, problems to solve, and a long way to go in our inner development. It is not necessarily an act of submission to something external, but a recognition that the potential for wholeness and perfection lies within us. We are prostrating to our own true nature, which we want to awaken through meditation. If done with this understanding, prostration helps put the mind in the right state for meditation.

Motivate

Check up on your thoughts. Why do you want to meditate? What do you hope to achieve? As with any activity, the clearer and more firmly we set our goal, the stronger is our motivation and the more likely we are to succeed.

A short-term goal of meditation is simply to calm down and relax. More far-reaching is the aim eventually to penetrate through to a *complete* understanding of the nature of reality as an antidote to unhappiness and dissatisfaction. However, the most altruistic and thus the best aim of meditation is to achieve enlightenment in order to help others gain it, too. This is the most far-reaching objective – the Mahayana motivation

– and inevitably the other goals will be reached on the way.

Whichever your motivation, think it through clearly before proceeding with your meditation.

If you feel it would help your practice you can say the Refuge and Offering prayers on page 99.

Some people find that reciting prayers, either mentally or verbally, induces a good frame of mind for meditation by reminding them of the wisdom and other qualities they want to achieve. If you do pray, reflect on the meaning of each prayer so that it flows naturally from your heart.

Dedicate

Each time you meditate, even for just a few minutes, you create positive energy and develop some degree of insight. The effects of this energy and insight are determined by your thoughts and attitudes as you move from meditation to ordinary activity. If you finish the session in an unhappy frame of mind or rush off too quickly, much of the energy is likely to be lost.

Before you leave your meditation seat, take a few minutes to recall your reasons and motivation for doing the session and dedicate your energy and insight to the fulfillment of these objectives. Clear dedication in this way stabilizes the insight and ensures that results come.

And don't forget to bring the good experiences of the meditation into your daily activities. Instead of acting and reacting impulsively and following your thoughts and feelings here and there, watch your mind carefully, be aware, and try to deal skillfully with problems as they arise. If you can do this each day, your meditation has been successful.

If you are unable to sit on the floor in any of these positions, you can meditate in a chair or on a low, slanted bench. The important thing is to be comfortable.

Posture

Mind and body are interdependent. Because the state of one affects the state of the other, a correct sitting posture is emphasized for meditation. The seven-point posture, used by experienced meditators for centuries, is recommended as the best way to help gain a calm, clear state of mind. However, if sitting cross-legged is not comfortable, it is fine to sit in a chair.

1. Legs If possible, sit with your legs crossed in the vajra, or full lotus, position where each foot is placed, sole upward, on the thigh of the opposite leg. This position is difficult to maintain but by practicing each day you will find that your body slowly adapts and you are able to sit this way for increasingly longer periods. The vajra posture gives the best support to the body, but is not essential.

An alternative position is the half-lotus where the left foot is on the floor under the right leg and the right foot on top of the left thigh. You can also sit in a simple cross-legged posture with both feet on the floor.

A firm cushion under the buttocks will enable you to keep your back straight and sit longer without getting pins-and-needles in your legs and feet.

2. Arms Hold your hands loosely on your lap, about two inches below the navel, right hand on top of the left, palms upward, with the fingers aligned. The two hands should be slightly cupped so that the tips of the thumbs meet to form a triangle. Shoulders and arms should be relaxed. Your arms should not be pressed against your body but held a few inches away to allow circulation of air: this helps to prevent sleepiness.

3. Back Your back is most important. It should be straight, held relaxed and lightly upright, as if the vertebrae were a pile of coins. It might be difficult in the beginning, but in time it will become natural and you will notice the benefits:

your energy will flow more freely, you won't feel sluggish, and you will be able to sit comfortably in meditation for increasingly longer periods.

4. Eyes New meditators often find it easier to concentrate with their eyes fully closed. This is quite acceptable. However, it is recommended that you leave your eyes slightly open to admit a little light, and direct your gaze downwards. Closing your eyes may be an invitation to sluggishness, sleep or dream-like images, all of which hinder meditation.

5. Jaw Your jaw should be relaxed and teeth slightly apart, not clenched. Your mouth should also be relaxed, with the lips together lightly.

6. Tongue The tip of your tongue should touch the palate just behind the upper teeth. This reduces the flow of saliva and thus the need to swallow, both of which are hindrances as your concentration increases and you sit in meditation for longer periods.

7. Head Your neck should be bent forward a little so that your gaze is directed naturally towards the floor in front of you. If your head is held too high you may have problems with mental wandering and agitation, and if dropped too low you could experience mental heaviness or sleepiness.

This seven-point posture is most conducive to clear, unobstructed contemplation. You might find it difficult in the beginning, but it is a good idea to go through each point at the start of your session and try to maintain the correct posture for a few minutes. With familiarity it will feel more natural and you will begin to notice its benefits. The practice of hatha yoga or other physical disciplines can be a great help in loosening tight muscles and joints, which can make it easier to sit well.

2. Breathing Meditation

The principal mental activity used in breathing meditations is mindfulness, the ability of the mind to keep attention focused on whatever it is doing without forgetting it or wandering to other objects. Here, the object of concentration is one's own breath. In its most effective form mindfulness is accompanied by discriminating alertness, another function of the mind, which, like a sentry, watches out for distractions and disturbing thoughts.

Mindfulness is essential for successful meditation; and in our day-to-day lives it keeps us centered, alert and conscientious, helping us to know what is happening in our mind *as it happens* and thus to deal skillfully with problems as they arise.

It is good to use breathing meditation as a preliminary to other meditations. It is an invaluable technique: regular practice helps you gradually gain control over your mind. You will feel more relaxed and more able to enjoy life, having greater sensitivity to yourself and the people and things around you.

And using your increased mindfulness in other meditations, you will be able to maintain your concentration for longer periods.

Mindfulness meditation is therefore important for both beginners and advanced meditators: for those who want a simple technique for relaxing and calming the mind and for serious meditators who devote their lives to spiritual development.

THE PRACTICE

Sit with a straight back and relax your body. Bring to mind your motivation, or purpose, for doing this meditation, and decide that for the duration of the session you will keep your attention on the object of concentration in order to fulfill this purpose.

Choose one of the following methods of practicing mindfulness of the breath.

1. Focus on the sensation at the tip of the nostrils as the breath enters and leaves your body. Keep your attention on this subtle perception and observe the full duration of each inhalation and exhalation.

- If you like, you can count in cycles of five or ten complete breaths, starting again at one whenever you lose count or your mind wanders.
2. Use the method just described, but focus instead on the rising and falling of the abdomen with each inhalation and exhalation.

Whichever method you choose, breath normally and gently. Inevitably, thoughts will appear, but maintain a neutral attitude towards them, being neither attracted nor repulsed. In other words, do not react with dislike, worry, excitement or clinging to any thought, image or feeling that arises. Merely notice its existence and return your attention to the object of the meditation. Even if you have to do this fifty times a minute, don't feel frustrated! Be patient and persistent; eventually your thoughts will subside.

Imagine that your mind is like a calm, clear lake or a vast, empty sky: ripples appear on the surface of the lake and clouds pass across the sky, but they soon disappear without altering the natural stillness. Thoughts come and go; they are transient, momentary. Notice them and let them go, returning your attention again and again to the breath.

Be content to stay in the present. Accept whatever frame of mind you are in and whatever arises in your mind. Be free of expectation, clinging and frustration. Have no wish to be somewhere else, to be doing something else or even to feel some other way. Be content, just as you are.

When your skill has developed and your ability to avoid distractions increased, take your alertness a step further. Make mental notes of the nature of the thoughts that arise, such as

“thinking of my friend,” “thinking about breakfast,” “hearing a bird,” “feeling angry,” “feeling bored.” Simpler still, you can note “fantasy,” “attachment,” “memory,” “sound,” “pain.” As soon as you have noted the thought or feeling, let it go, recalling its impermanent nature.

Another technique is to use your distractions to help you gain insight into the nature of the mind. When a thought arises, instead of focusing on the thought itself, focus on the thinker. This means that one part of the mind, discriminating alertness, takes a look at another part, a distraction. The disturbing object will disappear, but hold your attention on the thinker for as long as you can. Again, when another thought comes, focus on the thinker and follow the same procedure. Return to watching the breath once the distractions have passed.

These methods for handling distractions can be applied to any meditation. It is no use ignoring or suppressing disturbing thoughts or negative energy, because they will recur persistently. (For other methods for dealing with negative emotions, see page 85.)

At the conclusion of your session, dedicate the positive energy created by your meditation to the fulfillment of whatever aim you started with.

3. Meditation on the Buddha

“Buddha” is a Sanskrit word that means “fully awakened.” It refers not only to Shakyamuni, or Guatama, the founder of the teachings that came to be known as Buddhism, but also to any person who attains enlightenment. There are numberless enlightened beings - beings who have completely transformed their minds, eliminated all negative energy and become whole, perfect. They are not confined to a transient, physical body as we are, but are free from death and rebirth. They can abide in a state of pure consciousness, or appear in different forms - a sunset, music, a beggar, a teacher - in order to communicate their wisdom and love to ordinary beings. They are the very essence of compassion and wisdom, and their energy is all around us, all the time.

Every living being, by virtue of having a mind, is able to become a buddha. The fundamental nature of the mind is pure, clear and free of the clouds of disturbing conceptions and emotions that now obscure it. As long as we identify with confused states of mind, believing, “I am an angry person; I am depressed; I have so many problems,” we don’t even give ourselves the chance to change.

Of course, our problems *are* very deep and complex, but they are not as real or as solid as we think. We also have the wisdom that can recognize our mistaken thinking, and the capacity to give and to love. It is a matter of identifying with and gradually developing *these* qualities to the point where they arise spontaneously and effortlessly. It is not easy to become enlightened, but it is possible.

In this meditation, we visualize the form of Shakyamuni Buddha and recite his mantra.

Shakyamuni was born a prince, Siddhartha, into a vastly wealthy family two-and-a-half

thousand years ago in the north of India. He lived in his kingdom for twenty-nine years, sheltered from the more unpleasant realities of human existence. He eventually encountered them however in the form of a sick person, an old, senile person and a corpse.

These experiences affected him profoundly. His next significant encounter was with a wandering meditator who had transcended the concerns of ordinary life and reached a state of balance and serenity.

Realizing that his way of life led only to death and had no real, lasting value, Prince Siddhartha decided to leave his home and family and go to the forest to meditate. After many years of persistent, single-minded effort, meeting and overcoming one difficulty after another, he attained enlightenment - became a buddha. Having thus freed himself from all delusions and suffering, he aspired to help others reach enlightenment too; his compassion was limitless.

He was now thirty-five years old. He spent the remaining forty-five years of his life explaining the way to understand the mind, deal with problems, develop love and compassion and thus become enlightened. His teachings were remarkably fluid, varying according to the needs, capabilities and personalities of his listeners. He led them skillfully towards the understanding of the ultimate nature of reality.

The Buddha’s life itself was a teaching, an example of the path to enlightenment, and his death a teaching on impermanence.

A powerful way to discover our own buddha-nature is to open ourselves to the external buddha. With continual practice, our ordinary self-image gradually falls away and We learn instead to identify with our innate wisdom and compassion: our own buddhahood.

THE PRACTICE

Calm your mind by doing a few moments of breathing meditation. Then, contemplate the prayer of refuge and bodhicitta.

I take refuge until I am enlightened,
In the buddhas, the dharma and the sangha.
Through the merit I create by practicing
giving and the other perfections,
May I attain buddhahood for the sake of
all living beings.

Generate love and compassion by reflecting briefly on the predicament of all beings: their wish to experience true happiness but inability to obtain it, and their wish to avoid suffering but continual encounters with it.

Then think: "In order to help all beings and lead them to the perfect peace and happiness of enlightenment I myself must attain enlightenment. For this purpose I shall practice this meditation."

Visualization of the Buddha

Every aspect of the visualization is of light: transparent, intangible and radiant. At the level of your forehead and between six and eight feet away is a large golden throne adorned with jewels and supported at each of its four corners by a pair of snow lions. These animals, in reality manifestations of bodhisattvas, have white fur and a green mane and tail.

On the flat surface of the throne is a seat consisting of a large open lotus and two radiant discs representing the sun and the moon, one on top of the other. These three objects symbolize the three principal realizations of the path to enlightenment: the lotus, renunciation; the sun, emptiness; and the moon, bodhicitta.

Seated upon this is the Buddha, who has attained these realizations and is the embodiment of all enlightened beings. His body is of golden light and he wears the saffron robes of a monk. His robes do not actually touch his body but are

separated from it by about an inch. He is seated in the vajra, or full-lotus, posture. The palm of his right hand rests on his right knee, the fingers touching the moon cushion, signifying his great control. His left hand rests in his lap in the meditation pose, holding a bowl filled with nectar, which is medicine for curing our disturbing states of mind and other hindrances.

Buddha's face is very beautiful. His smiling, compassionate gaze is directed at you and, simultaneously, towards every other living being. Feel that he is free of all judging, critical thoughts and that he accepts you just as you are. His eyes are long and narrow. His lips are cherry red and the lobes of his ears are long. His hair is blue-black and each hair is individually curled to the right and not mixed with the others. Every feature of his appearance represents an attribute of his omniscient mind.

Rays of light emanate from each pore of Buddha's pure body and reach every corner of the universe. These rays are actually composed of countless miniature buddhas, some going out to help living beings, others dissolving back into his body, having finished their work.

Purification

Feel the living presence of Buddha and take refuge in him, recalling his perfect qualities and his willingness and ability to help you. Make a request from your heart to receive his blessings to help you to become free from all your negative energy, misconceptions and other problems and to receive all the realizations of the path to enlightenment.

Your request is accepted. A stream of purifying white light, which is in the nature of the enlightened mind, flows from Buddha's heart and enters your body through the crown of your head. Just as the darkness in a room is instantly dispelled the moment a light is switched on, so too is the darkness of your negative energy dispelled upon contact with this radiant white light.

As it flows into you, filling your body completely, recite the following prayer three times.

To the guru and founder,
The endowed transcendent destroyer,
The one-thus-gone, the foe destroyer,
The completely perfected, fully-awakened
being,
The glorious conqueror, the subduer from the
Shakya clan,
I prostrate, turn for refuge and make offerings:
Please bestow your blessings.

Now, recite Buddha's mantra,

TAYATA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE
SOHA (pronounced *ta-ya-ta om mooni mooni
ma-ha moon-aye-ye so-ha*).

Repeat it out loud, or chant it, at least seven times, then say it quietly to yourself for a few minutes.

When you have finished reciting, feel that all your negative energy, problems and subtle obscurations have been completely purified. Your body feels blissful and light. Concentrate on this for a while.

Receiving inspiring strength

Visualize that a stream of golden light descends from the Buddha's heart and flows into your body through the crown of your head. The essence of this light is the excellent qualities of his pure body, speech and mind.

He can transform his body into different forms, animate and inanimate, to help living beings according to their individual needs and particular states of mind.

With his speech he can communicate different aspects of the dharma simultaneously to beings of various levels of development and be understood by them in their respective languages.

His omniscient mind sees clearly every atom of existence and every occurrence - past, present and future - and knows the thoughts of every living being: such is his awareness in each moment.

These infinite good qualities flow into every part of your body. Concentrate on this blissful experience while again repeating the mantra,

TAYATA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE
SOHA

When you have finished the recitation feel that you have received the infinite excellent qualities of Buddha's body, speech and mind. Your body feels light and blissful. Concentrate on this for some time.

Absorption of the visualization

Now, visualize that the eight snow lions absorb into the throne, the throne into the lotus and the lotus into the sun and moon. They, in turn, absorb into the Buddha, who now comes to the space above your head, melts into light and dissolves into your body.

Your ordinary sense of I - unworthy and burdened with faults - and all your other wrong conceptions disappear completely. In that instant you become one with the Buddha's blissful, omniscient mind in the aspect of vast empty space.

Concentrate on this experience for as long as possible, allowing no other thoughts to distract you.

Then, imagine that from this empty state there appear in the place where you are sitting the throne, lotus, sun, moon and upon these yourself as the Buddha. Everything is of the nature of light, exactly as you had visualized before in front of you. Feel that you *are* Buddha. Identify with his enlightened wisdom and compassion instead of with your usual incorrect self-view.

Surrounding you in every direction and filling all of space are all living beings. Generate love and compassion for them by recalling that they too want to achieve happiness and peace of mind and freedom from all problems. Now that you are enlightened you can help them.

At your heart are a lotus and a moon. Standing upright around the circumference of the moon, reading clockwise, are the syllables of the mantra, *tayata om muni muni maha munaye soha*. The seed-syllable *mum* (*moom*) stands at the moon's centre.

Visualize that rays of light - actually your wisdom and compassion - emanate from each letter and spread in all directions. They reach the countless sentient beings surrounding you and completely purify them of their obscurations and delusions and fill them with inspiration and strength.

While imagining this, again recite the mantra,

TAYATA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE
SOHA

When you have finished reciting, think: "Now I have led all sentient beings to enlightenment, thus fulfilling my intention for doing this meditation."

Visualize that everyone surrounding you is now in the form of Buddha and is experiencing complete bliss and the wisdom of emptiness.

You should not worry that your meditation is a sham and that you have not helped even one person achieve enlightenment. This practice is known as "bringing the future result into the present path" and is a powerful cause for our own enlightenment. It helps us develop firm conviction in our innate perfection - our buddha-potential; that what we have just done in meditation we will definitely accomplish one day.

Conclude the session by dedicating all the positive energy and insight you have gained by doing this meditation to your eventual attainment of enlightenment for the benefit of all living beings.

4. Meditation on Buddha Tara

Visualize Buddha Tara in the space in front of you. Radiant green light body, so beautiful. Sitting on a multi-colored lotus, her left foot drawn in (like when we sit meditating) and her right foot out resting on a little multi-colored lotus.

Her left foot drawn in indicates her complete and effortless control over desire energy and her right foot out indicates her willingness and capability to get up and act for sentient beings. She represents the power to act, to cut through the problems, to get things done, to remove the obstacles.

Imagine her as beautiful as possible: young, radiant, full of energy, full of bliss. She wears colored silken garments, and jewelry on her ears, ankles, arms and neck.

Imagine that she is the manifestation of your lama; it is their mind manifesting in this aspect of Green Tara for your benefit.

Now, recite three times the Refuge and Bodhicitta prayer (page 99).

Then imagine, one chakra at a time, powerful, blissful light coming from each of her five chakras, entering your chakras and filling you completely, first purifying you and then filling you with blessings.

First, Tara sends powerful blissful **white** light from the *om* at her brow chakra, which enters your brow and completely fills you. You imagine that all your problems and sufferings and heaviness and grossness of your body are purified by this light, and all the harm you have ever done to any living being with this body and all your infinite past bodies is also purified, eradicated completely, not one atom left.

After a little time, you again imagine the light coming, this time visualizing that your body has

become a blissful light body, just like Tara's; nothing gross; indestructible, just like it will be when you attain the deity's body, the *sambhogakaya*.

Second, she sends **red** light from the *ah* at her throat chakra, entering your throat, which purifies all the problems of your speech: inappropriate speech, useless speech, uncontrolled speech, angry out-of-control speech, the inability to express yourself appropriately, and that all the harm you have ever done to any living being with your speech of this life and in infinite past lives is also totally purified, eradicated by the blissful red light, not one atom left.

Then the light comes again, and this time you imagine that you are totally full of all the blissful, perfect, compassionate, wisdom, appropriate speech of Lama Tara, such that whatever sound you utter is necessarily beneficial to any living being who hears it, all of which is your potential. Feel full of this powerful energy.

Third, Tara sends powerful beams of **blue** light, like the sky, from the blue *hum* at her heart chakra, which enters your heart chakra (in the center of your chest). Imagine that all the unhappiness of your mind: your confusion, arrogance, attachment, anger, jealousy, pride, resentment, hurt, anxiety, self-hate, whatever, is all totally purified, and that all your delusions, including the root ignorance, the ego-grasping, which are the cause of your own suffering and of why you harm others, is totally eradicated by the powerful blue light, not one atom left.

The light comes again and this time you feel full of the blissful, omniscient, compassionate mind of Lama Tara, which is your potential.

Fourth, you visualize that Tara sends from the yellow *sva* at her navel chakra, four finger-widths below her navel, powerful laser beams of **yellow** light that penetrate your navel chakra, just below your navel, filling you completely. It purifies totally all your hopelessness,

powerlessness, inability to act effectively, all the blocked energy.

Then you imagine that the light from Lama Tara's navel chakra fills you with power, the ability to act effortlessly, to do what needs to be done, with wisdom and compassion for the benefit of all living beings.

Fifth, you visualize that Tara sends from the green *ha* at her secret chakra powerful beams of **green** light that penetrate your secret chakra, filling you completely. Imagine that it totally purifies all your out-of-control, unhappy attachment energy, all the yearning, the desire, which makes you miserable and unclear and unsatisfied, and which causes you to harm others, not one atom left.

Then you imagine this blissful green light penetrating your secret chakra, filling you completely with bliss, satisfaction, contentment, fulfillment, happiness, pleasure.

Sixth Then you visualize all the five lights coming from Tara's five chakras simultaneously, penetrating your five chakras and filling you with rainbow light. This time feeling that even the subtle stains of all delusion are totally eradicated, not one atom left. Feel that I am now fully enlightened. Feel very blissful.

Stay in this blissful state, concentrating on being oneness with the energy of Mother Tara.

Dissolution Imagine that Lama Tara's lotus dissolves upwards into her body. Then she comes to sit above your crown, facing the same way as you. Then, out of her wish to be oneness with your mind - and she is your guru, remember - she dissolves into green light and melts into your crown and goes down your central channel (which is closer to the back of your body and runs just in front of your spine) to your heart chakra, where she merges with your very subtle consciousness, your clear light consciousness.

You think: Tara's mind, the guru's mind, my mind: same thing. And you feel blissful.

Benefiting Others Then you can visualize all sentient beings surrounding you: your enemies right in front of you, your friends to the left, and the strangers - all the rest - to the right, and everywhere else, filling space: above, below, to the sides, everywhere (anyway, it's said that there's not an atom of space where there aren't sentient beings).

Think: "They all want to be happy, don't want to suffer. So, now that I'm Buddha, what choice do I have but to benefit them? It's my job."

Recite Tara's mantra

OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SOHA

as many times as you like. As you recite, imagine that millions of tiny Green Taras emanate out from your heart, entering the hearts of all the suffering sentient beings, taking away their suffering and giving them everything they need, and transforming them into their own Tara.

Really imagine this, want this.

When you have finished the mantras, say the following.

Please Root Guru, glorious and precious,
Remain upon a lotus at my heart
And looking after me through your great
kindness
Grant me the realizations of body, speech and
mind.

Now you dissolve everything into what they call space-like emptiness. As Lama Yeshe says, this is not the actual meaning of emptiness but it is a very helpful way to let go of grasping at everything as concrete and self-existent.

First you imagine that the entire universe dissolves into empty space: your place, your country, the planet, the galaxies. This universe, and all the beings in it, which we cling to as so real, as existing from its own side, just dissolves into vast empty space, not one atom left: zero, as Lama says.

Then you dissolve your body, the basis of this I, the thing we know most, cherish most, identify with most: you imagine that from your feet up towards your heart chakra and from your crown down towards your heart chakra it just dissolves; you feel that everything absorbs into your heart chakra.

Then you dissolve your thoughts, these elaborate conceptual constructions, all the thoughts of I, which have no basis in reality, which are completely made up, a hallucination, as Lama Zopa says. All of it dissolves into empty space, not one atom left, zero.

All there is left is your Lama Tara consciousness, very subtle, pure, as vast as space: "I am the dharmakaya," you think. "This is who I am." Feel completely blissful - this is your nature. And you feel that you are in the nature of emptiness.

Contemplate conceptually on the meaning of emptiness, at whatever level you understand; for example, think about dependent arising: how this mind, this pure Buddha mind is created by you by your past virtuous actions, therefore it is empty of existing from its own side.

Then you let go of all thoughts and you abide in this vast, blissful, space-like emptiness for as long as you like.

When it's time to finish, you would be roused out of this blissful emptiness by your compassion, your wish to benefit others: you manifest again in your body and imagine that your mind is oneness with Mother Tara's mind. And you make strong prayers that with this body and speech you will benefit whichever sentient beings you come into contact with: human, animal, whatever; that the purpose of your body and speech is to benefit others.

And then you do the dedication prayers.

Dedication

Then dedicate all the virtuous energy created by doing this meditation for the sake of all suffering

sentient beings (say all or some of the dedication prayers on page 99).

By Ven. Robina Courtin, based on instructions from Lama Thubten Yeshe.

5. Dealing with Negative Emotions

We all know we have both positive and negative emotions. As soon as we hear the words love, kindness, generosity we know they are the good ones; and when we hear about hate, anger, jealous, depression, we know they are the miserable ones.

The Buddha's point of view is that we can change our minds. We can learn to know ourselves well, look into our minds, and become deeply familiar with what's there.

The most practical reason for wanting to do this job is, first of all, because it'll make us more happy – and we know we want to be happy. And second, it'll make it easier to live with other people.

WORKING WITH EMOTIONS, STEP BY STEP

Normally we either **suppress** what we feel or we **explode** it out onto other people. The Buddhist approach is a practical one: for our own sake and the sake of others, as above, there is a third option:

The Buddhist way of dealing with emotions involves **recognizing** we have them and then **working** on them.

1. Recognize and identify emotions

Sometimes our mind is like a thick jungle of disturbing thoughts and emotions; it's hard to really see what's going on. With mindfulness, honesty, and discriminating intelligence we can start to identify what's what: "That's anger; that's desire; that's fear;" and so on. Once we know what we're up against, we can choose the appropriate methods.

2. Have a healthy, balanced attitude towards our emotions

Attitudes to avoid include guilt, self-hatred or self-judgment. Also we need to stop identifying with the emotion, for example, "I am my anger," which leads us to be obsessed and act it out. We can avoid these by remembering that delusions are impermanent, coming and going in our mind like clouds in the sky, and that they are not our true nature.

According to Buddha, the real nature of our mind is pure, free of delusions, like a clear, cloudless sky.

3. Work on the emotion in meditation, using one or more antidotes

If there are a number of different emotions disturbing your mind at the same time, it's best to start with the one that is strongest and most troublesome – don't try to take them all on at once! Once you've managed to get the biggest one a bit more under control, then you can move on to the next biggest.

GENERAL ANTIDOTES TO EMOTIONS

1. Mindfulness or self-awareness

When we can be aware of the arising of an emotion such as anger in our mind, we can control and deal with it more effectively. We may sometimes be able to simply let it go. Also, through regular practice of meditation, our mind will be more calm, less likely to react emotionally to situations.

2. Remembering the nature of the mind

The mind is clear, non-physical; a stream of mental events that rise and pass away. These mental events – thoughts, emotions, etc. – are impermanent: they appear and disappear, come and go; they are not permanent, fixed entities. It can be useful to think of them as being like clouds that come and go in the sky, like dreams, like rainbows, or like waves that rise and fall in the sea. Also, it is helpful to learn to de-identify with

the emotions: e.g. instead of thinking “I am angry,” think “anger is in my mind”—this gives the emotion less power over us, and we can deal with it more objectively.

3. Being non-judgmental

We like certain thoughts and emotions, and dislike others. This leads to attachment/grasping, and aversion/rejection. When our mind is caught up in attachment and aversion, it isn't peaceful. Instead of this, it's better to cultivate a sense of equanimity: a non-judgmental, loving awareness and acceptance of whatever arises in the mind.

4. Do a reality check

Investigate the sense of “I” that lies behind the emotion. Is it something real, existing on its own, from its own side? Can you locate it in your body or mind? What exactly is it?

We can also examine the object we are feeling emotional about – does it really exist in the way it appears to us, or is it possible that we might be perceiving it in a distorted, mistaken way?

5. Think of others who have similar problems

When we are experiencing an emotional problem, we tend to get obsessed with it as if we were the only person in the universe who had such a problem. This is clearly not the case, and thinking this way makes the problem seem worse than it really is. So it's useful to remind ourselves that there are many other people who have the same or a similar problem, and some have it to an even greater degree than we do. This makes the problem seem more like a molehill rather than a mountain, so it's easier to bear, and it also helps us to become more compassionate towards others.

THE ANTIDOTES FOR VARIOUS EMOTIONS

ANTIDOTES TO ANGER

Most of our anger is directed toward other people, but we can also be angry at ourselves or at inanimate objects. Anger ranges from a feeling of irritation about the way someone drinks tea, for example, to the powerful hatred that leads to physical violence or murder.

Anger is the very opposite of patience, tolerance, compassion and love. It is a distorted conception, a mistaken way of reacting to things, a delusion, and brings only problems and unhappiness, not the results we want. It disturbs our mind and causes us to hurt others through our actions and words, and is not an intelligent, skilful way to react, in any situation.

Patience, the opposite of anger, is a very valuable state of mind because it enables us to accept difficulties with a minimum of suffering. But patience has to be learned, and the way to develop it is by practicing the remedies to anger.

The most skillful approach is to recognize anger or irritation as it arises, keep it within our mind and deal with it there. Catching it when we first feel it is itself enough to defuse much of the anger-energy. Then we should examine the emotion from many angles: what are its causes? What do we hope to achieve by it? How do we view the situation? Having a clear understanding of anger gives us a firmer hold on it, because when we see how unreasonable it is, we are less likely to get involved in it.

Anger distorts our view of things. So, after examining it we should apply an antidote, such as one of the methods below, in order to bring our mind around to a more correct, realistic view. However, this is not easy. The energy of anger is very powerful, and we are not in the habit of trying to control or transform it.

It is useful to use these methods over and over again in meditation, working with past experiences of anger or imagined situations; then,

when anger occurs in our day-to-day relationships, we can bring to mind whatever insights we have developed in our practice sessions and try to avoid following the old familiar route of getting angry.

We won't always be successful, of course. Sometimes minutes, hours or days go by before we even realize that we got angry and hurt someone! But it is never too late to do something about it. Sit down, recall the situation, recognize what went wrong and figure out how to avoid the same mistakes again. We can also analyze in this way the problems we had years before. There is no reason to feel discouraged if anger continues to arise strongly; it takes time to break powerful habits. The important thing is to want and try to work on it.

1. Contemplate the faults or disadvantages of anger, so that you become convinced that it's harmful rather than helpful, and therefore not something you want to indulge in. First of all, look at the immediate effects of anger on your mind and body. What is it like being angry? Is your mind peaceful and happy, or disturbed and discontent? Are you able to think clearly and make intelligent decisions, or does your thinking become confused and irrational? And how does it affect your body? Do you feel calm and relaxed, or agitated and tense? Scientific studies have shown that anger is a significant cause of certain health problems, such as heart disease and cancer, as well as of premature death.

How does your anger affect the people around you? If you express your anger in words and actions, what is the result? It may cause you to hurt people you love and damage cherished relationships. But even the anger directed at your "enemies" – those who you think deserve to be hurt – may come back at you later. So is that the wisest way of dealing with them?

There are more subtle, less obvious, effects of anger on our psyche. In terms of karma, getting

angry leaves imprints on our mind that will bring painful experiences in the future—more suffering. And it destroys much of the good karma that we have worked so hard to accumulate. It is a major obstacle to the cultivation of positive qualities such as love, compassion and wisdom, and to making progress on the spiritual path....

Recognize the harmful results of anger, and resolve to not let your mind be taken over by it, and instead learn ways of defusing it.

2. Cultivate loving-kindness. This can be achieved by reflecting on thoughts such as "May all beings be well and happy." Becoming familiar with, and filling our minds with, loving-kindness, will naturally decrease our anger.

3. Remember karma, cause and effect. If someone harms you in some way—by being abusive or unfriendly, cheating or stealing from you, or wrecking your belongings—and it seems you have done nothing to deserve it, check again. According to Buddhism, any misfortune that comes our way is the result of harmful actions we created in the past—in this or other lives.

We reap what we have sown. When we can see our problems in this light, we will be better able to accept and take responsibility for them rather than dump the blame on others.

Also, if we understand that getting angry and retaliating will just bring us more problems in the future, we'll resolve to be more patient, and more careful about the karma we create.

4. Put yourself in the other person's place; try to see the situation from their point of view. What is driving them to behave this way? Is their state of mind peaceful and happy, or confused, miserable and uncontrolled? They are human like you, with problems and worries, trying to be happy, making the best of life. Recall your own experiences of being angry and unkind

to get a better idea of what they are going through.

Also, consider that if they continue to act in deluded ways, what will the outcome be? Will they be happy and satisfied, or are they just creating more trouble and suffering for themselves?

If we really understand others' confusion and pain, we'll be less likely to react with anger—which would just give them even more suffering—and more likely to regard them with compassion.

5. Consider that the person you're angry at is like a mirror. Check: what is it that you dislike or feel angry at in the other person? Then ask yourself: "is this something that I have in myself?" The idea here is that what we dislike in others is something we dislike in ourselves; the solution is to become more accepting, less judgmental towards our own faults.

6. Anger is more likely to arise in our mind when we are unhappy or dissatisfied. If you notice yourself getting irritated and angry by even small things, sit down and check what's going on in the deeper levels of your mind. Are there unhappy, critical thoughts about yourself or aspects of your life?

Are you focusing more on the negative side of things rather than the positive side? If this is the case, the meditation on appreciating your human life is a good remedy for this. There are good things about yourself and your life, and if you pay more attention to these, your mind will be more happy and satisfied, and you will be less likely to react with anger, even when bigger problems occur.

7. Difficult situations are usually the most productive in terms of spiritual growth. Thus someone who arouses our anger is giving us a chance to learn that we still have work to do. We might think we've come a long

way in understanding and controlling our mind and that we are fairly peaceful now—but, all of a sudden, anger arises! It follows, then, that when people make us angry, they are giving us the chance to put our knowledge to use and increase our patience.

Contemplate this and strengthen your determination to understand your anger, bring it under control and learn to react instead with patience. It will benefit yourself and others.

8. Think about death Since death could happen at any time, it is senseless to cling to differences with people. Dying with unresolved anger creates havoc in your mind and makes a peaceful death impossible. The other person could die at any time too. How would you feel if this happened before you were able to clear up the problems between you?

You, the other person and your interaction will definitely come to an end. Seen in this light, are the problems really so important? Are they worth the anguish and unhappiness they cause?

9. All the methods explained above involve meditating to try to deal with anger on our own; it is also possible to resolve a conflict by communicating with the other person. But here we have to be careful. First of all we have to consider whether or not the other person would be open to such communication and if it would bring positive results. Secondly, we should check our motivation very carefully: do we really want to straighten out our differences with this person and come to a better mutual understanding, or do we just want to express how irritated we are or win a victory?

If we start discussing the problem with the desire to hurt or with expectations and demands, the communication will not work. So, we need to be very clear about our intentions and very sincere and honest in explaining our feelings. This kind of open communication is very powerful and can transform enemies into friends.

Of course, sometimes anger is very strong and the last thing you feel like doing is sitting down to meditate! At least you should try to avoid getting totally involved and speaking angrily or becoming violent. You can try some method for releasing your energy without harming the person, or become completely unresponsive, like stone or wood, until your anger has cooled down. Later, when your mind is more calm, you can meditate on the problem and apply one of the antidotes.

A frequently recurring problem, like getting angry at someone you live or work with, can be handled more effectively if you think about the situation in meditation and plan what to say and do when it next occurs. In that way, you are better prepared and less likely to be caught off-guard.

ANTIDOTES TO ATTACHMENT

Attachment is difficult to detect and even more difficult to find fault with; we think it is the road to happiness and satisfaction. But fulfillment of desire is an illusion; desire leads to more desire, not satisfaction.

We may be able to see how attachment to alcohol, drugs or money leads to problems rather than happiness, but we may wonder what is wrong with attachment to people. Wouldn't life be empty and meaningless without family and friends?

This question arises because we confuse attachment with love. Attachment is concerned with my needs, my happiness, while love is an unselfish attitude, concerned with the needs and happiness of others. Most of the time our love is mixed with attachment because we do not feel adequate or secure on our own, and try to find wholeness through another. But when a relationship involves attachment, problems inevitably arise.

We become dependent on the good feelings and comfort of the relationship and then suffer when it changes. Real, lasting happiness can only

be found within ourselves, and we will never find it as long as we lean helplessly on others. A relationship free of unrealistic grasping is free of disappointment, conflict, jealousy and other problems, and is fertile ground for the growth of love and wisdom.

Overcoming attachment does not mean becoming cold and indifferent. On the contrary, detachment means learning to have relaxed control over our mind through understanding the real causes of happiness and fulfillment, and this enables us to enjoy life more and suffer less.

1. Contemplate the faults of attachment.

Examine carefully the mind that experiences it. It is excited and full of unrealistic expectations. It glosses over the facts and deals with projected fantasies. It cannot see things clearly and is unable to make intelligent judgments. Is this happiness? Also, the consequences of attachment are not peace and satisfaction, but disappointment and desire for more of the same. Think of the suffering you experience when you separate from an object of attachment. We all know the pain of relationships that did not work and the grief over a loved one's death.

Recognize that attachment is not a peaceful, clear state of mind, and that it leads to dissatisfaction and unhappiness. And making a habit of it leaves imprints on our mindstream to experience more problems in the future.

Attachment clouds the mind and prevents us from recognizing its faults. It is very important to be honest with ourselves, to penetrate its facade and analyze its real nature.

2. Recall that all things are impermanent.

By their nature they change from moment to moment and will inevitably perish. The object of your attachment will not always be attractive and pleasing; visualize it as old, faded and worn and then check if your feelings about it remain the same. And how would you feel if you lost it altogether? The pleasure you experience is

impermanent, too. For how long do you really feel pleased and satisfied with any one object? When we recognize that external things cannot give us lasting happiness and satisfaction, our attachment to them will lessen—and we'll probably enjoy them all the more!

3. Meditate on death. Remember the inevitability of death and that it could come at any time. Imagine how you will feel about separating forever from your objects of attachment: loved ones, enjoyments, possessions. Not only are they unable to help you as you die, but your attachment to them will upset your mind and hinder a peaceful death.

4. Attachment tends to exaggerate the good qualities of an object, so it can be useful to deliberately **bring to mind unpleasant or negative aspects of the object.** For example, if you think, "If I had a BMW, I would be so happy!" – you can think about the expenses, maintenance, worries, etc. involved in owning such a car. Or, if you feel attracted towards someone and think, "If I could have a relationship with that person, it would be so wonderful!" remind yourself that the person may have faults you don't see right now, or that you might run into conflicts later on. But be careful not to go to the other extreme and develop aversion for the object!

5. When we're attached, we don't see the object in a realistic way, **so it's good to do a reality check.** For example, our mind thinks that the object is the source of happiness. If this was true, then we would always experience happiness when we have it, or are together with the person we're attached to – is this true or not?

Also, the more I get, the more happy I would be – true or not? We can also check if the object really exists the way we perceive it. If it's really attractive, from its own side, then everyone would perceive it the same way we do—true or

not? What appears as attractive to one person appears unattractive to another, therefore it is our mind that creates the "attractive" or "desirable" object.

ANTIDOTES TO FEAR AND ANXIETY

Fear is not necessarily negative; it depends on what we're afraid of and how we handle our fears. It can in fact be useful in our everyday life as well as in our spiritual practice. Fear of hurting ourselves and others in a car accident motivates us to drive carefully and observe the rules of the road; fear of a negative, out-of-control state of mind at the time of death motivates us to prepare ourselves for death by developing a spiritual practice; fear of the painful consequences of negative actions motivates us to refrain from bad karma and act compassionately.

Nevertheless, fear and anxiety can have negative effects. It disturbs our peace of mind, it can harm our health, it causes us to see things in a mistaken way, and it can motivate us to act irrationally or destructively, so it is something to overcome. One of the qualities of an enlightened mind is being free of all fears.

The root cause of fear and anxiety is our misconception of our "I" and all other things, seeing them as solid, real, and permanent. From this arises attachment to whoever or whatever appears pleasant and helpful, and fear of separating from or losing them. Towards the people, things and experiences we see as unpleasant or unwanted, we feel aversion and fear of not separating from them.

We rarely face our fears to try to understand and deal with them skillfully. We may feel overwhelmed by them, or helpless, not knowing how to deal them. Or we may suppress them, thinking, "Fear is bad; I shouldn't be afraid," or "If I ignore it, it will go away." But this is not the way to become free of fear; instead, our fears remain in our subconscious, subtly affecting our thoughts and feelings, and our life.

The methods below show us how we can start to face our fears, analyze them to understand what they're about, and change our attitudes

1. Look at your fear. Sit down and make your mind calm with some breathing meditation. Then allow the fear to come into the clear spaciousness of your mind. Don't let yourself get caught up in it, but stand back and examine it objectively. Ask yourself what exactly is it that you are afraid of? Then ask yourself: Is it reasonable for me to have this fear? Is it likely that what I'm afraid of will actually happen, or is my mind getting carried away with highly unrealistic fantasies?

If it is possible that it will happen, then is there anything you can do to prevent or avoid it? ...If so, decide to do it, and stop worrying!

If there's nothing you can do, or even if you try to prevent it, it might happen anyway, then are there things you can do to prepare yourself for that? ... Think of other people who have been through that experience. See if you can draw strength from that awareness: if they could do it, so can I.

It's good to keep in mind the advice of the great Indian master Shantideva: "Why be unhappy (or worried) about something if it can be remedied? And what is the use of being unhappy (or worried) about something if it cannot be remedied?" In other words, if there's nothing that can be done to prevent or remedy an unwanted situation, it's useless to worry; better to just accept it!

2. If you are afraid of change, loss or death, you can **meditate on impermanence and death.** Familiarizing ourselves with the reality of how we, others, and the things in the world around us are changing all the time and will eventually disappear enables us gradually to become more accepting and less fearful.

3. Contemplate how it's in the nature of unenlightened existence to encounter

problems and painful, undesirable experiences. This is true for you, and it's true for all other unenlightened beings—you are not alone! But this situation will not last forever. You and everyone else have the potential to be free of all suffering, and to experience perfect peace and happiness forever.

Problems occur because of causes and conditions— primarily karma and delusions— and these can definitely be eliminated. Resolve to apply your energy to the work of refraining from negative actions, purifying those you already created, doing as many positive actions as possible, and working on your mind to overcome the delusions which are the main cause of suffering.

4. The Dalai Lama often says that a very effective way to instill courage and confidence in yourself is to **cultivate an altruistic motivation for the things you do.** For example, if you're feeling nervous about talking to a large group of people— or even to one person!— spend some time beforehand contemplating love, compassion and the sincere wish to benefit others.

Filling your mind with concern for others leaves little or no space for egotistical worries like "will they like me?" or "what will happen to me?", so the communication will probably be more successful and satisfying.

5. Since the root of fear is our mistaken conception of the way we and everyone and everything else exists, it's useful to **meditate on emptiness.** When you feel fear, go within and examine the I that is frightened? Is it something real, existing from its own side? If so, where and how does it exist—in my body? In my mind? You can also do the same analysis on the thing you are frightened of, to see if it exists in the solid, real way that it appears to your mind.

6. Some people find it helpful to **bring to mind** an object of refuge when they feel frightened. For

Buddhists, this could be **the Buddha**, or another enlightened being such as Chenrezig or Tara (who is actually renowned for relieving people of all kinds of fears). There are many stories of people experiencing amazing results by praying to or reciting the mantras of these holy beings.

But even if nothing amazing happens outside of us, taking refuge and praying helps us to feel inwardly more calm and courageous, better able to handle the difficult situation we are in.

ANTIDOTES TO DEPRESSION

Depression is a dark, heavy, unhappy state of mind, self-centered and lacking in positive energy. It frequently involves self-hatred or self-criticalness. It can be a chronic problem—a habitual response to difficulties—or the side-effect of an unfortunate experience, such as an illness or the death of a loved one. In any case, it is caused by the mistaken thinking that exaggerates the negative aspects of your personality or some situation and ignores the positive side; seeing the glass as half-empty rather than half-full.

Depression concentrates on my problem and blows it up out of proportion. Our thoughts spiral downward; we feel the situation is hopeless with no possibility of improving. We feel sorry for ourselves, seeing our ego at the centre of a sad story, and we have little or no energy to share with others. We find it difficult to take care of ourselves, and we may bring others down with us.

We all have the tendency to be depressed at times. We are not perfect, and life doesn't always go smoothly. We make mistakes, and we don't have control over what comes our way.

When we are unable to accept these problems cheerfully as natural aspects of life or to deal with them skillfully, we become depressed. Of course, the pain we experience is real and the problems need to be taken care of. But sinking into depression is not the answer—it only deepens and complicates our unhappiness. The best

solution is to analyze our thought patterns to see how we interpret the situation and try to recognize where we go wrong.

Gradually we can learn to catch ourselves in time; to look at things more positively and to use our natural wisdom.

1. Take a step back from your thoughts and feelings and check what they are saying. Depression often involved repetitive, self-critical thoughts such as “I’m worthless;” “Nobody cares about me;” “I never do anything right.” If we are honest with ourselves, we’ll recognize that these thoughts are mistaken or exaggerated, focusing on the negative and ignoring the positive.

You can then do the meditation on appreciating your human life. Even if your problem is a very serious one, it is important to remember that you have much positive energy and great potential. It is always possible to overcome (or at least lighten) depression by changing your way of thinking, by emphasizing the positive rather than the negative aspects of your personality and your life; they do exist! It's all a matter of you seeing and identifying with them rather than with your depressed, low view of yourself.

You can then “change the tape” by bringing into your mind more realistic, positive thoughts such as “I have such-and-such good qualities;” “There are people who love and care about me;” “I can do this-and-that well.” You can even feel joyful about the fact that you are still alive, and that you are able to do things with your body and mind.

2. Meditate on the clear nature of your mind. Your unhappiness, worry and frustration, as well as your good feelings, are all just mental energy—clear, non-physical, and transitory. Simply observe the different thoughts and experiences that pass through your mind, without judging them or getting involved in

them. Remember that all experiences are impermanent.

You may have felt depressed in the past, but where is that experience now? It's gone. The same will happen with your present depression. It may last a few hours or days, but eventually it will disappear. And even within that time it is not constant. If you observe your mind carefully, you will notice moments of lightness or joy interspersed with moments of sadness. Do not cling to any of these but let them go.

Remember that your mind is a stream of different experiences—joyful, unhappy, positive, negative—all of the same clear, immaterial nature. These experiences appear and dissolve like waves on the ocean, lasting only a short time. Your depression is like a wave: a transient, ephemeral experience, so it is not appropriate to cling to it, thinking, "This is me."

3. Investigate the I, your sense of self that identifies strongly with unhappy thoughts and feelings. Try to find this I. What is its nature? Is it part of your body or your mind, or is it somewhere else? Is this depressed I something permanent, solid, unchanging?

4. Meditate on either love or compassion. Turning outward toward others and contemplating their needs and suffering will help you be less self-centered and thus see your problems more realistically.

5. A very effective remedy for depression is to get out and help others: do some volunteer or service work. This has been found to cause the release of endorphins—the "happy hormones"—in our nervous system, so we naturally feel better. Doing physical exercise has the same effect. These methods can be useful at times when we're too depressed to meditate! (6) Working with Jealousy Jealousy is a mental factor that, out of attachment to material gain, respect, etc., is unable to bear the good things that others have.

ANTIDOTES TO JEALOUSY

1. Contemplate the faults of jealousy: it disturbs our mind, makes us feel very unhappy, and can lead to hatred and resentment. It can lead us to slander or speak badly of others, or even harm others, and can destroy relationships. People will lose respect for us, and may feel pity or dislike for us. It can lead us to create negative karma and thus experience suffering in the future. It damages our good qualities, and is an obstacle to our spiritual development, and our ultimate attainment of liberation and enlightenment.

2. Remember karma, the law of cause and effect. Everything happens because of causes and conditions, therefore if someone has something and you don't, it's because s/he has created the causes and you haven't. But you can start now to create the causes to have that thing in the future.

3. Learn to rejoice: feeling joy and admiration for the virtues, good actions, good qualities and happiness of others. By doing this, our mind is happy, and we create a great deal of merit.

4. Learn to be content with what you have, with yourself just as you are. If what you are jealous of are things like wealth, intelligence, power, position, good looks, etc., then ask yourself: "If I had these, would I really be happy? Are they long-lasting and reliable?"

5. Cultivate loving-kindness. Loving-kindness is wanting others to be happy. If we can develop this feeling sincerely, then we will feel happy, not jealous, when another person experiences something good.

6. Try to resolve the matter through sincere, heart-to-heart communication. When jealousy arises in a relationship – e.g. your spouse or partner is giving attention or spending

time with someone else – it's best to try to talk it out, but not with anger! It may be that there is some hidden problem (e.g. the other person may be angry at you for something you did, and is behaving this way to get even with you.)

ANTIDOTES TO PRIDE

We can feel pride with regard to our appearance, intelligence, level of education, wealth, status or position, skills, race or nationality, etc.

Pride can sometimes be subtle and difficult to recognize. The following symptoms may be an indication of the presence of pride in our mind:

- we are critical/judgmental of others
- we feel unhappy when we're not number one
- we feel jealous of those who do better, have more, etc.
- we feel angry when we don't receive the respect we think we deserve
- we feel angry when criticized
- we feel depressed about our mistakes, faults, etc.

There is a difference between pride and healthy self-esteem or self-confidence: pride involves feeling superior to and looking down upon others, whereas a healthy sense of self-esteem or self-confidence involves recognizing and acknowledging our good qualities, achievements etc., without going to the extent of feeling egotistical, arrogant and thinking we are better than others.

We need to feel confident in our potential to develop ourselves on the spiritual path and attain higher states such as enlightenment.

1. Contemplate the faults of pride:

It makes us feel arrogant and superior to those we regard as inferior to us, and may lead us to abuse and criticize them.

It makes us jealous and competitive towards our equals.

It makes us envious of those we regard as higher than us.

It disturbs our mind, not allowing us to feel peaceful and contented.

Pride can be an obstacle to spiritual development.

Others will dislike and think badly of us.

It leads us to create negative karma.

The karmic result of pride is being born poor, in a lowly position, not respected by others.

It prevents us from attaining liberation and enlightenment

2. Reflect on the source of whatever it is you take pride in and realize how you are dependent on others. For example, your body came from your parents, your knowledge came from your teachers, your good fortune came from good karma created in previous lives.

3. Remind yourself of what you don't know, the qualities you don't have.

Bring to mind your faults and imperfections. Think: "As long as I'm in samsara (cyclic existence), my mind is full of delusions and karma. What is there to be proud of?"

4. Remember impermanence, that things could change for us and we could lose what we have. For example, healthy people become sick or disabled, wealthy people become bankrupt, people in high positions can fall, etc.

5. Investigate the "I" that feels proud.

Investigate your sense of self that identifies strongly with unhappy thoughts and feelings. Try to find this I. What is its nature? Is it part of your body or your mind, or is it somewhere else? Is this arrogant I something permanent, solid, unchanging?

These notes were compiled by Ven. Sangye Khadro from various sources in the Tibetan tradition. Lightly edited by Ven. Lobsang Tönden, used with permission of the author.

6. Purification Meditation: How to Purify Negative Karma by Visualizing Vajrasattva in the Context of the Four Opponent Powers

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

THE PRACTICE

Prostrate three times then sit. Bring your mind to a quiet state. Start the purification with the first of the Four Opponent Powers.

1. The Power of Regret

Sincerely regret, from the depths of your heart, anything you have done to harm any living being, on this day, in this life, in all past lives. It is good to contemplate the various actions that you remember having done, and then to regret all the things as well that you don't remember.

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

so the logic is, therefore, to remove the karmic seeds before they ripen as future suffering.

2. The Power of Reliance

There are two parts to this step: one, we rely upon the doctor whose medicine we will take to purify our deluded actions, in this case the Buddha. It's not that we need Buddha to forgive us; rather, we rely upon him by using his methods to purify ourselves.

Two, we also rely upon other beings, the very beings we have harmed and who have harmed us, by developing compassion for them. We make the wish to purify for their sakes. Make a strong aspiration to do this practice of purification so that from now on we can only benefit others, not harm them.

Visualize Vajrasattva above the crown of your head. He is your guru manifesting in this aspect for your benefit. He is made of radiant, blissful white light. He's sitting cross-legged on a white lotus, which although born out of mud is untainted by mud, just like our enlightened potential, which is born out of our delusions but is untainted by them. His face is radiant and beautiful. His eyes are long (horizontally) and peaceful and full of love and compassion for us. His mouth is red and very sweet. His hair is black and held up in a top knot. His arms are crossed at his heart, left underneath the right; the left is holding a bell, which represents wisdom, the right is holding a vajra, which represents the indestructibility of compassion; their being crossed represents the union of these two, which symbolizes enlightenment itself: the development of infinite wisdom and infinite compassion.

Now, say a prayer of refuge:

To the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha
I go for refuge until I am enlightened.

By this practice of meditating on Guru
Vajrasattva

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

Now visualize that light goes out of Guru Vajrasattva's heart to all the ten directions and hooks the energy of the body, speech and mind of all the enlightened beings of the universe. This light comes back and dissolves into the heart of Guru Vajrasattva, who now embodies all their energy. He is even more brilliant and blissful than before.

3. The Power of the Remedy

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

Purification of body

Guru Vajrasattva very compassionately sends powerful white nectar, like coming out of a hose very forcefully, from his heart. It enters your crown and pours into your entire body, filling you completely. It keeps coming and it forces out of your lower orifices all the harm you have ever done to any living being with your body in the form of inky liquid, which pours out of you and disappears into space, not one atom left. Feel completely purified. Recite the mantra the whole time (3 or 7 or as many as one wishes):

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

Then feel so happy that your negativity of body is purified. Really imagine now that it is not possible that your body could do anything but benefit others; no way can it harm. Really want that.

Purification of speech

During the second stage of the visualization, Guru Vajrasattva very happily sends powerful nectar from his heart chakra again. It pours forcefully into your crown, filling your entire body, this time forcing up to the top of your body – like when water filling a dirty glass forces the junk to come to the top and to overflow – all the negativity of your speech: all the gossip and malicious speech and useless speech and lying and whatever. All is purified by this powerful nectar, leaving your body through the top orifices in the form of inky liquid, disappearing into space, not one atom left. Recite the mantra as you visualize this.

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

Again, feel so happy that your speech is now completely purified and that no way could you do anything but say something beneficial or useful or appropriate or kind to others. Really want that.

Purification of mind

Third, Guru Vajrasattva very compassionately sends this time light from his heart chakra. This powerful white light enters your crown chakra and fills your entire being, and just like when you turn on a light in a room the darkness is instantly dispelled, so too, just as the light hits your heart chakra, the darkness of the negativity of your mind, all the anger and violence and depression and resentment and jealousy and bitterness, etc.,

are all instantly dispelled, not one atom left.
Recite the mantra as you visualize this.

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

Again, feel happy that all your delusions,
which are the cause of the harm we do with our
body and speech, are totally purified, gone,
finished, and that no way is there any space in
your heart now for anything but love and
kindness and forgiveness and wisdom and bliss
and compassion.

Purification of even the imprints of negativity of body, speech and mind

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

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

Now feel you are completely purified, and feel
very happy. Guru Vajrasattva is happy too.

4. The Power of the Resolve

The fourth step in the purification process, and
such an important one, is the determination not
to harm with our body, speech and mind again.
Without this, we keep doing the same old things;
determination to not harm again is like a beacon
that guides our body, speech and mind in new
directions. If you can actually vow to not do
certain actions again for the rest of your life,
fantastic. But be realistic. If you can vow not to do
them again for a year, a month, a day, even a
minute – whatever is realistic. Then in general
vow to make the effort to avoid the others. This
determination not to do again is what gives us
the strength to turn ourselves around.

Then, very happy, Guru Vajrasattva – your
own guru manifesting as the Buddha Vajrasattva
solely for your benefit – melts into white light
and absorbs into you through your crown
chakra. This energy of white light comes to your
heart chakra and merges with your own very
subtle consciousness, becoming oneness with
you. Meditate on this union.

At the end of the meditation session dedicate all
the merit, the positive energy, you have created
by doing this purification to all living beings (see
page 93).

The four types of karmic results that the Four Opponent Powers purify

1. The power of regret purifies the *experience
similar to the cause*, which, let's say for killing, is
to get killed, to die young or to get sick.

**2. The power of reliance, Refuge and
bodhicitta** purify the *environment result*, which
for killing is living in a place where the food and
medicine are not conducive to good health.

3. The power of the remedy, in this case the *visualization and recitation of mantras* – or whatever action one does as the actual antidote – purifies the *throwing karma* that causes birth in the lower realms.

4. The power of the resolve or determination not to do again purifies the *action similar to the cause*, which in a sense is the worst result: it's the habit to keep killing, which propels one back into the lower realms.

By Ven. Robina Courtin. based on the meditation on Vajrasattva by Lama Thubten Yeshe.

7. Prayers

Refuge and Bodhicitta

To the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha
I go for refuge until I am enlightened.
By the merits I create by listening to the Dharma
May I reach Buddhahood so as to benefit all
sentient beings!

Sang-gye chö-dang sog-kyi chog-nam-la
Jang-chub bar-du dag-nyi kyab-su-chi
Dag-gi chö-nyen gyi-pe so-nam-gyi
Dro-la pen-chir sang-gye drub-par-shog.

Mandala Offering

This ground, anointed with perfume, strewn with
flowers,
Adorned with Mt. Meru, four continents, the sun
and the moon.
I imagine this as a Buddha field and I offer it.
May all living beings enjoy this pure land!

Sa-zhi pö-kyi jug-shing me-tog-tram
Ri-rab ling-zhi nyi-de gyen-pa-di
Sang-gye zhing-du mig-te ul-wa-yi
Dro-kun nam-dag zhing-la chö-par-shog

Dedication Prayers

Through the merits of these virtuous actions
May I quickly attain the state of a guru-buddha
And lead all living beings, without exception,
Into that enlightened state.

Ge-wa-di nyur-du-dag
La-ma sang-gye drub-gyur-ne
Dro-wa chig-kyang ma-lu-p
De-yi sa-la gö-pa-shog.

May the supreme jewel bodhicitta
That has not arisen, arise and grow;

And may that which has arisen not diminish
But increase more and more.

Jang-chub sem-chog rin-po-che
Ma-kye pa-nam kye-gyur-chig
Kye-wa nyam-pa me-pa-yang
Gong-ne gong-du pel-wa-shog.

Just as the brave Manjushri and Samantabhadra,
too,
Realized things as they are,
I, too, dedicate all these merits in the best way,
That I may follow their perfect example.

I dedicate all these roots of virtue
With the dedication praised as the best
By the victorious ones thus gone of the three
times,
So I might perform good works.

I dedicate whatever virtues I have ever collected
For the benefit of the teachings and of all sentient
beings,
And in particular, for the essential teachings
Of venerable Losang Dragpa to shine forever.

May we not arise heresy even for a second
In the actions of the glorious guru.
May we regard whatever actions are done as
pure.
[With this devotion] may we receive the
blessings of the guru in our hearts.

In whatever way you appear, glorious guru,
With whatever retinue, lifespan, and pure land,
Whatever noble and holy name you take,
May I and others attain only these.

In all my lives, through the victorious one, Lama
Tsong Khapa,
Acting in person as the Mahayana guru,
May I never turn aside for even an instant
From the excellent path praised by the victorious
ones.

**Long Life Prayer for His Holiness the
Dalai Lama**

In the land encircled by snow mountains
You are the source of all happiness and good;
All-powerful Chenrezig, Tenzin Gyatso,
Please remain until samsara ends.

Long Life Prayer for Lama Zopa Rinpoche

You who uphold the Subduer's (thub) moral way;
Who serve as the bountiful bearer (zo)-of-all,
Sustaining, preserving and spreading
 Manjunath's victorious doctrine (ten);
Who masterfully accomplish (drub pa)
 magnificent prayers honoring the Three
 Jewels,
Protector of myself and others, your disciples:
 please, please live long!