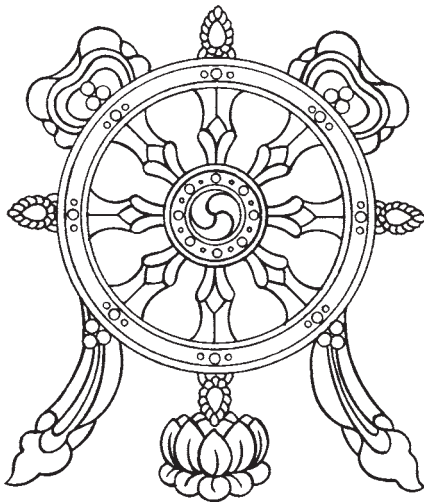


# Discovering BUDDHISM *at Home*

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



SUBJECT AREA 4

The Spiritual Teacher

*Readings*



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*Further required reading includes the following texts:*

*Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, 1997 gold edition (pp. 251–306) or 2006 blue edition (pp. 217-69)

*Relating to a Spiritual Teacher*, by Alex Berzin

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# Practicing Guru Devotion

*by Lama Zopa Rinpoche*

I mentioned before that benefiting others, making your body, speech and mind beneficial for others, is the purpose of life. However, there are different levels of benefit that you can offer. The first is bringing others the happiness of this life. More important than that is causing them to have happiness in all their future lives. Then, even more important than that, is leading other sentient beings to complete liberation, freedom forever from the entire round of suffering, the cycle of death and rebirth and the three kinds of suffering. The three sufferings are the suffering of pain; the suffering of change, temporary samsaric pleasure; and the suffering that is the basis of the other two, pervasive compounding suffering, the aggregates that are under the control of karma and delusion, and the contaminated seed of disturbing thoughts, which is both the container of this life's suffering and the basis of future lives' suffering. The benefit of bringing others to total liberation is much more important than the first two.

However, the highest, most important benefit that you can possibly offer other sentient beings is causing them to achieve full enlightenment, complete attainment of all the qualities of cessation and realization.

In order to do this work for all sentient beings perfectly, with no mistake, first you need to achieve full enlightenment yourself. Enlightenment doesn't occur without cause. You need to actualise the three levels of the path to enlightenment – the graduated path of the being of greatest capability, which depends on actualising the graduated path travelled in common with the being of intermediate capability, which depends on the actualising the preliminary graduated path traveled in common with the being of least capability. Success in all this – from the beginning of the Lam-rim, realization of the perfect human rebirth, up to enlightenment – depends completely on the root of the path, guru devotion.

## *Guru devotion*

Proper guru devotion means seeing that your guru is buddha. Based on quotations of Buddha Vajradhara or Shakyamuni Buddha, logical reasoning and your personal experiences with your guru, the special qualities you have seen, you train your mind to look at your guru as buddha, free of all mistakes and complete in all qualities.

You must see as buddha all the teachers with whom you have established a Dharma connection. A Dharma connection is established when from your side you recognize the teacher as guru and yourself as disciple – even if all you have received from this teacher is the oral transmission of just one mantra or one verse of teaching – supporting this view with quotations of the Buddha,

logical reasoning and your experience of the particular qualities you have seen within that teacher. In this way, then, you see your guru as buddha, as pure.

Proper guru devotion, correct devotion to your virtuous friends, allows you to actualise successfully all the realizations of the steps of the path to enlightenment, from the perfect human rebirth up to buddhahood itself.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama mentioned analysis of the guru's qualifications. The qualification needed to teach the Lesser Vehicle path is accomplishment in the three higher trainings – morality, concentration and wisdom. In order to teach the Mahayana, the teacher needs more than that; he or she should have the ten qualities mentioned in Maitreya Buddha's teaching *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras* (*Do-de-gyän; Mahayanasutralamkarakarika*). I'm not going to translate these word-for-word but will just mention their meaning [see *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, pp. 272–3].

First [1–3], a Mahayana guru should also be accomplished in the three higher trainings. Moreover, since we are talking about practicing Dharma, [4] the teacher should have more good qualities than you do and greater knowledge of Dharma. [5] He should have perseverance and [6] his holy mind should be enriched with scriptural understanding, having received the lineage of the teachings.

Also, [7] your teacher should have realized emptiness. Now, I have already mentioned that the guru should be accomplished in the three higher trainings, one of which is the training in higher wisdom, so why is the realization of emptiness mentioned again here? The difference is that here, the realization of emptiness refers to the Prasangika Madhyamaka view – the view of emptiness according to the higher of the two Madhyamaka schools, the Prasangika school. That particular view of emptiness is the only one that can eradicate the actual root of samsara, the specific ignorance that causes all the other delusions and karma and the suffering that sentient beings experience. There's only one root of samsara – that specific ignorance can be cut only by the Prasangika view of emptiness and not by the view of any other school. That is the seventh quality your teacher should possess.

The final three qualities are [8] skill in explaining Dharma, [9] compassion for the students, and [10] not being lazy when it comes to giving teachings and guiding disciples. A guru should not have the attitude, "It's too difficult" or "I can't be bothered teaching." Even if the teacher doesn't have all ten qualities, he should have as many as possible.

The qualities of a guru are also mentioned in the *Fifty Verses of the Guru Devotion* [verses 7–9; see also Lama Tsongkhapa's commentary to this text, *The Fulfillment of All Hopes*, pp. 40–48] and the *Guru Puja*, in the section praising the qualities of the guru – having a well-disciplined body, speech, and mind; great wisdom and tolerance; a sincere, straight mind, without the cunning of hiding one's own mistakes; and the ten inner qualities required to teach Highest Yoga Tantra and the ten outer qualities required to teach the lower tantras [verse 45].

### *Your teacher must emphasize morality*

However, whether you can see all those qualities or not, the essence is to have a teacher who

emphasizes morality. The one basic, important, fundamental quality to look for is the teacher's emphasis on morality – pratimoksha, bodhisattva and, for those who practice tantra, tantric vows. A teacher who does not stress moral conduct cannot even lead disciples to good rebirths in their next lives, let alone to liberation from samsara and enlightenment.

These are very essential, fundamental practices. Without the practice of morality, there's no enlightenment, no liberation from samsara, not even good rebirths in future lives. I'm not saying that in order to receive a good rebirth you have to take all three levels of vow, but in order to receive a good rebirth you must at least keep the pratimoksha vows.

Death can come at any time; any minute, you can die. Therefore, if you are going to die today, at least you must be sure of getting a good rebirth; you must be completely sure that you are not going to fall into the hell, hungry ghost or animal realms, where you will be completely overwhelmed by suffering.

Even when we're sick or the weather is hot, we human beings can't meditate. If we compare our lives to those of sentient beings in the lower realms, we have incredible freedom, incredibly luxurious lives. Nevertheless, when we experience problems, we cannot practice Dharma. Beings in the lower realms are totally overwhelmed by suffering and have no opportunity to practice. Therefore, you have to guarantee that when you die – this year, this month, this week or even today – you will not be reborn in the lower realms. You must make sure you receive a good rebirth. For this, you have to prepare right now.

The best preparation, the main cause for receiving a good rebirth, is practicing morality. That doesn't necessarily mean becoming a monk or nun. There are lay vows. You can take the eight precepts, the five precepts, or even fewer than five. Of the five, you can take one, two, three, or four; whatever you feel you can manage. However, if you keep whatever vows you take purely and die with them intact, the immediate benefit is that you will definitely receive a good rebirth in your next life. Then, in that life, you can practice Dharma again, and in that way, from life to life, go from happiness to happiness, all the way to enlightenment.

Therefore, emphasis on morality to inspire morality in the disciple is a very important quality to look for in a teacher. That's why I rejoice whenever I hear how Geshe-la always emphasizes and teaches his students the importance of moral discipline. It gives you incredible freedom. If you take precepts and live in them purely, you are giving yourself freedom – liberation from samsaric suffering, and enlightenment.

It is also extremely important for your guru to have maintained pure samaya, a good connection, with his or her own gurus, because the extent to which a teacher can benefit his disciples and cause them to have realizations depends on his own samaya with his gurus. If you devote yourself correctly to a virtuous friend whose samaya is good, even if he gives you only a few words of instruction, because of the purity and power of his samaya, those words can have an incredible effect on your mind. They can generate strong feelings of compassion, renunciation, impermanence and death, or even precipitate a realization of emptiness. If your guru does not have pure samaya, there's always the danger that you will receive mental pollution or make the same mistakes with your gurus as he did.

## *The Nine Attitudes of Guru Devotion*

Now I'd like to read the nine attitudes of guru devotion that Lama Tsongkhapa explained in the *Lam-rim Chen-mo*, which I translated during the Vajrasattva retreat at Land of Medicine Buddha in early 1999. I'm not going to give much explanation here; I just want to read through it. Those of you who have studied this subject will understand it; those who haven't will get some idea of it. Reading this teaching is very helpful, especially if your mind is experiencing difficulties with your guru. It's like an atomic bomb; it makes all those difficult thoughts vanish completely.

What follows is not from the *Lam-rim Chen-mo* itself, but these nine attitudes are mentioned there. The text, *Practicing Guru Devotion with the Nine Attitudes*, was actually written by Shabkar Tsogdrug Rangdrol, a Nyingma lama who received teachings from Gelug lamas who taught the Lam-rim in the way that Lama Tsongkhapa did. Shabkar's presentation is so effective that I translated it.

I am requesting the kind lord root guru,  
Who is more extraordinary than all the buddhas –  
Please bless me to be able to devote myself to the qualified lord guru  
With great respect, in all my future lifetimes.

By realizing that the root of happiness and goodness  
Is correctly devoting myself to the kind lord guru,  
Who is the foundation of all good qualities,  
I shall devote myself to him with great respect,  
Not forsaking him even at the cost of my life.

Thinking of the importance of the qualified guru,  
Allow yourself to enter under his control.

Well, I said I wasn't going to talk, but sorry, it says "control," so I think I have to say something, because nobody likes to be controlled! – especially in the West. Nobody wants to be controlled by anybody. Not even by mosquitoes! Anyway, I'm joking. But if you don't understand what this verse means, you might take it the wrong way when you hear that you should put yourself under your guru's control. However, a simple example will clarify this.

If you put yourself under the control of a good friend and follow that person's advice, you too can become good person, but if you let yourself be controlled by a bad friend, you might become a bad person yourself. If you do what a good friend says, you don't create problems for yourself or others; you only make others happy.

In *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo talks about two people, one of whom was an alcoholic, the other who didn't drink. The drinker went to Reting Monastery and became a teetotaler. The non-drinker went to Lhasa, where, influenced by others, he began drinking and became an alcoholic. Each man became the complete opposite of what he was before, due to the influence of the type of friend he followed.

If you listen to the advice of the Buddha who has only compassion for sentient beings and no trace of self-centered mind; who is perfect in power, wisdom and compassion; whose holy mind is omniscient – all you get is benefit. Putting yourself under the control of the Buddha brings you every happiness up to that of enlightenment. You get happiness now and you get every possible future happiness. Similarly, if you put yourself under the control of a virtuous friend, you get the same benefits as you do from putting yourself under the control of the Buddha. There's only benefit and not the slightest harm.

Now, relating this teaching to those of us who met the Dharma a long time ago, if we had been under the control of our gurus from that time forth, we would have achieved many realizations by now. We could have realized guru devotion, renunciation, bodhichitta and emptiness; we could have received realizations of tantra; we could have been totally liberated from samsara. We might even have become enlightened. At the very least, we would have received some lam-rim realizations. But none of this has happened because we have not opened our hearts to our guru; we have not put ourselves under the control of our virtuous friend. Because of this mistake, our minds are totally devoid of any realization whatsoever.

The first two attitudes are:

1. Be like an obedient son –  
Act exactly in accordance with the guru's advice.
2. Even when maras, evil friends and the like  
Try to split you from the guru,  
Be like a vajra –  
Inseparable forever.

The yogi Drubkang Tsangpa Gyari, a Kagyu lama, said, “If something goes wrong in your relationship with your guru, even if all sentient beings become your friend, what's the use?” In other words, if something damages your connection with your guru – the auspiciousness of the relationship or your samaya – then even if all living beings become your friend, what's the use? What can they do? What can you do? Since something has gone wrong in your relationship with your guru, until you repair that relationship, until you do something to restore it, even if everybody becomes your friend, you cannot achieve liberation from samsara, enlightenment, or even realizations of the path.

I don't remember the next verse of this lama's teaching word for word, but the meaning is that if you maintain a good connection with your guru, if nothing goes wrong with it, then even if all living beings desert you or become your enemy, it doesn't matter.

Ordinary people would think that everybody becoming your friend or enemy is a big thing, but in Dharma practice, once you have made a connection with a guru and not made any mistakes in the relationship, that's all that matters. Even if everybody becomes your enemy, it's of no consequence, because from the foundation of that good relationship you can attain all realizations and enjoy every success up to enlightenment, and after that, you can benefit all sentient beings by enlightening them too. That's the meaning of this great yogi's teaching.



3. Whenever the guru gives you work,  
No matter how heavy the burden,  
Be like the earth –  
Bear it all.
4. When devoting yourself to the guru,  
Whatever suffering occurs,  
Be like a mountain –  
Immovable.

Here, suffering means hardship or problems, and when this happens, your mind should remain immovable and not be upset or discouraged.

5. Even if you are given all the difficult tasks,  
Be like the servant of a king –  
Perform them with an undisturbed mind.
6. Abandon pride.  
Be like a sweeper –  
Hold yourself lower than the guru.

I'm not sure how this comes across in the West, but in the East, a sweeper is the lowest of the low. In the West, people like to think that everybody's equal, but in the East, a sweeper is regarded as very low.

7. No matter how difficult or heavy the burden,  
Be like a rope –  
Hold the guru's work with joy.
8. Even when the guru criticizes, provokes or ignores you,  
Be like a faithful dog—  
Never respond with anger.

No matter how much a dog gets beaten by its master, it always shows respect and never gets angry. When it sees its master coming, it starts wagging its tail and runs to lick him, showing much happiness.

9. Be like a boat—  
Never be upset to come or go for the guru  
At any time.

O glorious and precious root guru,  
Please bless me to be able to practice in this way.  
From now on, in all my future lifetimes,  
May I be able to devote myself to the guru like this.

If you recite these words aloud and reflect on their meaning in your mind, you will have the good fortune of being able to devote yourself correctly to the precious guru from life to life, in all your future lifetimes. If you offer service and respect and make offerings to the precious guru with these nine attitudes in mind, even if you do not practice intentionally, you will develop many good qualities, collect extensive merit and quickly achieve full enlightenment.

This last verse explains that even if you don't study or do any particular practices, like preliminaries, retreats and so forth – in other words, you don't practice intentionally – if you devote yourself to your virtuous friend correctly with thought and action, you will naturally develop many good qualities, constantly collect extensive merit and quickly achieve full enlightenment.

Therefore, each time you do even one thing your guru told you, you take a step closer to enlightenment. Whenever you do something that your guru has advised, it becomes great purification. Many lifetimes' heavy negative karma gets purified, you collect inconceivable merit and you get closer and closer to enlightenment.

For example, even cleaning your guru's room. Each time you clean it, you get closer and closer to enlightenment. This is because, of all the powerful objects, your guru is the most powerful; more powerful than the numberless buddhas and bodhisattvas. This power comes into being the moment that person becomes your guru. The moment you make a Dharma connection with the recognition of another person as guru and yourself as disciple – whether from their side the other person is enlightened or not, a bodhisattva or not a bodhisattva – that person becomes the most powerful person in your life; more powerful than all the buddhas and bodhisattvas. Therefore, whatever service you offer, even one cleaning of your guru's room, purifies much negative karma and brings you closer to enlightenment. Therefore, you should remember that each time you offer service to your guru, whatever it is, you are purifying your mind and getting closer to enlightenment.

Towards the end of his life, Lama Atisha showed the aspect of sickness and incontinence and made peepee and kaka in his bed because he was unable to get up and go to the toilet. His translator, Dromtönpa, with no thought of dirtiness, offered service by bathing Lama Atisha and cleaning his bed. As a result, Dromtönpa purified so many karmic obscurations that he developed the clairvoyance of being able to read the minds of even tiny creatures, such as ants and worms, that were as far away as an eagle can fly in eighteen days.

By serving your guru, realizations just come. The potential of all realizations is there within your mind. You just need purification to reveal them. The more you purify, the more realizations you receive.

Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo, the author of *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, had a disciple who couldn't read. I think his name was Jamyang. He didn't even know the alphabet. Before Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo passed away, he told this attendant that eventually he would be able to read the entire *Guru Puja* by himself, without being taught. And that's exactly what happened. After going into exile from Tibet, Jamyang ended up at the refugee camp at Buxa, where I lived for eight years and received philosophical teachings from my three gurus, Geshe Rabten Rinpoche, Lama Yeshe and another lama, also called Gen Yeshe. During the British rule of India, Buxa was the concen-

tration camp where Mahatma Gandhi-ji and Prime Minister Nehru were imprisoned. Nehru-ji's place of imprisonment became the Sera Monastery prayer hall and Gandhi-ji's, a nunnery.

At Buxa, the incarnate lamas lived on a mountain high above the rest of the camp. The abbot and main teacher at Kopan Monastery, Lama Lhundrub, who supervises the education and discipline of the three hundred Kopan monks, used to live up there in the same building as Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo's incarnation, where the attendant Jamyang also lived. When Jamyang first arrived at Buxa, he couldn't read a thing, but suddenly one day he was able to read the entire *Guru Puja*. He himself told Lama Lhundrub that Pabongkha Dechen Nyingpo had predicted that this would happen.

If you purify your mind, realizations will come. What you need is purification and the most powerful purification is correct devotion to your virtuous friend; obeying your guru's advice. The best way to devote yourself to your virtuous friend is through practicing his teachings, the second is by offering service and respect – cleaning your guru's place, cooking for him and so forth – and the third is by offering material things, if you have them to offer [see *Liberation*, p. 299 ff.].

The story goes that Lama Atisha's cook, who spent all his time cooking for Lama Atisha and never had time to meditate, had much greater realizations than the Kadampa geshe Gombawa, another of Lama Atisha's disciples, who spent all his time meditating in a cave. So that's how it is, and now it's time to finish.

## *Conclusion*

I would like to thank you all very much for giving me this opportunity to share something with you. I hope that there's been at least some small benefit from my mumbling.

The opportunity we have to learn Dharma in this life is great; we can't be sure that we will get such a good opportunity again in future lifetimes. Those who are able to receive realizations of what the Dharma texts talk about are those who have proper guru devotion; they're the ones who can achieve enlightenment in one life. Those who have realized guru devotion, who have correctly devoted themselves to their virtuous friend, can become enlightened in one brief lifetime of this degenerate age. It's the same thing as regards all the realizations of the path to enlightenment. Without guru devotion, no matter how many Dharma words you learn, they're all dry. But those who are like Geshe-la – who has such strong guru devotion that whenever he simply mentions his guru's name, tears come to his eyes – have the possibility of gaining realizations of bodhichitta, emptiness, and everything else without much difficulty, in this very life.

*Colophon: This teaching was given in the East Village, New York City, on 13 August 1999, on the auspicious occasion of His Holiness the Dalai Lama's visit to New York. This excerpt is reprinted here with permission from the Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive.*

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# The Kindness of the Guru

*by Lama Zopa Rinpoche*

*Edited transcript of a talk given to the monks and nuns of the International Mahayana Institute (IMI) at Tushita Retreat Center, India, during the First Enlightened Experience Celebration, May 1982.*

I will make what I want to say to you brief, as there is not much time. Lama Yeshe said to try to generate great will in order to obtain happiness for yourself and others, but I don't know how to speak on that as I am lazy and don't have any will myself to accomplish happiness for self and others. So, I hope to speak a little about kindness.

One very helpful method for generating will is to remember the kindness of sentient beings deeply, from the heart. This will help your will to practice Dharma and to work for happiness, especially the happiness of others.

It is very important to remember the kindness of the guru. By remembering this again and again, wrong thoughts do not arise so much and even stop. The more we think about kindness and feel it from the heart, the more we develop perseverance and a strong will to bear hardships, follow the orders, and accomplish the advice of the guru. On the basis of what is explained in the lam-rim and outlined in these teachings and our own experiences of the guru's kindness and goodness, we are more able to keep our mind calm and clear and less like dirty water. Then devotion arises. Once we have devotion, our mind is prepared for realizations to come, at least the guru's kindness blessing our mind and sudden strong thoughts of death and impermanence, compassion, and loving kindness. The feelings of loving kindness and unbearable compassion become so powerful that the strong wish develops to be reborn in the narak immediately, for the sake of others. One feels this unbearably and sincerely, from the heart. Also, unexpectedly, some realization of sunyata arises. It is a surprise, but by developing devotion, we create the conditions for it to happen.

Remember how we were before we met Lama Yeshe. We were no different from wild animals – tigers, leopards, etc. living in the forests – except that our body was called a human body. I see the last life in that way – no joking! Before we met our guru, we were like an animal, only thinking of our own needs, of having enough to drink and eat, to be able to sleep, etc.

Now we can check the difference after having met Lama Yeshe; we can check how much progress has happened in our lives and minds. However much dharma understanding we have now, that is how much freedom we have to practice. We have the opportunity to practice; from our side, there is that much freedom. It is important to compare the past with the present in this way.

Also remember how, after we met Lama Yeshe, our mind was inspired, and we generated some thought

of renunciation and took ordination. Think how, since we took 5, 8, 36, or 253 precepts, the merit created by us, every hour of our lives, has been increased. All this is made possible by the kindness of Lama Yeshe. Even if you were not ordained by Lama himself, the causes of your ordination, the thought of renunciation, were generated by his kindness. Think of the infinite amount of merit we have generated by keeping the bodhisattva precepts as well as the vows of secret mantra – again, all made possible by the kindness of Lama Yeshe. Even the Dharma understanding we have received from other teachers was made possible by Lama Yeshe’s kindness in creating the conditions and making the centers, in creating the place and inviting the teachers, in organizing all this. So even though we may have extensive understanding of a subject – tantra or sutra, Madhyamaka, *Abhisamayalankara*, or whatever – even though we may have received fantastic teachings from another lama, the kindness of Lama Yeshe is at the root. For instance, during this time of the Dharma Celebrations we have received incredible teachings!

We should think about our actions in everyday life and, even though we have been born human beings, how difficult it is to make our actions virtuous as in the *Bodhicharyavatara* or to make them the cause for enlightenment. It is hard to work out how we have created the cause to receive such fortune; such profound teachings of secret mantra that give enlightenment in one brief lifetime, particularly Highest Yoga Tantra teachings, such as Guhyasamaja body mandala and Heruka body mandala teachings. If we think of the life we lead and our everyday conduct, it is absolutely surprising that we have received the causes to have all these teachings. And even if we can’t become enlightened in this life or can’t generate realizations of dzog-rim [completion stage] or kye-rim [generation stage] teachings or can’t practice what we have heard, just by receiving these teachings an incredible impression has been left on our minds.

We have heard the story from many lamas about Nagarjuna’s disciples who were two pigeons in their past lives and who heard Nagarjuna reciting while they sat on the roof of his cave. Even though they did not understand the meaning, they were reborn as great pandits in their next life, making many commentaries on the teachings they had heard. This and many other stories like it show that, even if we cannot practice what we have heard, it makes an incredible impression on our minds. Just by having heard, you can live the rest of your life with great happiness. And think of the prosperity of your next life, all due to these impressions. So even if we cannot practice now, we can figure out that our next life will be better than this one, and we will be able to practice lam-rim and tantra, and generate realizations. I think this is the way the guru guides us to enlightenment, from life to life.

It is due to seeds that were planted in our previous lives that we now have contact with Lama Yeshe. We received teachings in past lives and were guided in many different ways by him. But that also depended on previous contact. So gradually, by planting seeds, impressions on our minds, by the kindness of the guru, under the guidance of the guru, our lives become better and better. If there was no contact with Lama Yeshe in the past life, there would be no reason to have contact now.

Maybe I will tell you the story of how I met Lama Yeshe, if it doesn’t take too much time. It’s a very funny story. After my two alphabet teachers, I was taught by the abbot who granted me getsul ordination. He passed away at the same time as the Chinese invaded Tibet. Following him, I was taught by Geshe Rabten Rinpoche, whose kindness is responsible for whatever interest in

meditation practice I now have. Whilst I was at Buxa, Geshe Rabten taught on sunyata and samatha meditation, and even though I was very small, I was interested. I tried to do samatha meditation on my bed after the mosquito net was put on it. I used to meditate on the silver cover of my Tibetan tea bowl, even though I didn't know how. When they brought me from Tibet to India, I tried to meditate one-pointedly. I fell down. I don't know what happened; my whole body fell completely. This happened several times, and eventually I gave up. Anyway, in that house there might have been a small impression from a past life. So that is how I have some interest in lam-rim, more than in meditation practice.

Originally by the kindness of Geshe Rabten Rinpoche, I recognized my root guru. After that Geshe Rabten was very busy, and he sent me to another teacher from Kham whose name was also Yeshe. From this teacher I received the meditation and visualization on *Ganden Lha Gyäma*, and the teachings on the kindness of mother sentient beings from the part of the *Prajñāparamita* scriptures dealing with that subject. There was no text, so my teacher Yeshe had to say it by heart. I hadn't learned Tibetan writing in Tibet, just studied it myself so that I could read; so I copied everything down. It wasn't until I was in India that I studied handwriting from one of the governors who works here now in the department. Then this teacher Gen Yeshe wanted to lead a different life, so he left Buxa to wander around and stay in different places in India. Now I think this teacher Yeshe, in aspect disrobed, lives in a Sakyapa settlement near Dharamsala. I haven't see him for many years since he left Buxa. Anyway Gen Yeshe was very good at debating and, like Lama Yeshe, was always joking, smiling, and always happy to debate.

Then Geshe Rabten arranged for me to be taught by another geshe who is not here now, and later he had the idea for me to go and take teachings from a Tibetan monk, Geshe Thubten. I was happy to have teachings from the Geshe, but somehow I was reluctant to go and receive teachings from Lama Yeshe.

There was a monk in my class who most people know as Chomphel – he was Kopan's cook for many years and now works for Samsara Trading. He, along with Lama Pasang and other Tibetan monks, were taking teachings from Lama Yeshe. At that stage I was only receiving teachings from Geshe Rabten and then only when he wasn't busy, as he had many disciples and had to teach many different texts to different classes. At that time Chomphel used to be the leader of my class, and he kept pushing me to go and take teachings from Lama Yeshe. My friend used to go outside for a walk, for relaxation. One day, we started to walk outside the camp, but I didn't take anything, no offering. When we came to the mango tree where there used to be seats, I said, "I want to go back." But he pushed, so I went a little bit further. I stopped again and again saying, "No, I don't want to go," but he kept pushing me. It was quite far to where Lama Yeshe lived on the mountain, about half an hour or an hour, depending how fast you walked. Even when we had reached the hut, I wanted to retreat. I had brought no offerings, which was partly my reason for wanting to go back. When you first make contact with the guru, it is very important to perform the offerings correctly. How many teachings you receive depends on that. So much depends on that, as you know from the stories of Milarepa. For this reason I didn't receive many teachings at Buxa.

The leader of my class brought a bowl with some rice and a few rupees, together with a very poor, old offering scarf. He went in first to ask if Lama Yeshe would receive me. I think Lama Yeshe asked, "Have you received permission from Geshe Rabten?" and he replied "Yes." I had asked Geshe Rabten

to which teacher I should go for teachings, but he didn't say which one. He was a very skillful teacher, knowing exactly what was best for the disciple. I could feel what he had in mind, and he said it didn't matter what one learned. So then I just left.

On my first day, I sat on the same bed as Lama Yeshe because of having the name "incarnate," something like that, and the others sat on the floor. The teaching was about cause and effect. I didn't understand anything at all – I think it was because I went with a bad motivation. I thought, why couldn't Lama Yeshe teach more slowly? Although the others could understand, I couldn't. Then on the second day, I could understand a little better. I think that's because I had been guided by Lama Yeshe in many lifetimes, just as you have. So even though I had no strong wish, there was a strong force, karma, between Lama Yeshe and myself. So you see, there had definitely been contact in past lives. He hasn't only helped and guided me in this life, but he planted seeds in my mind in many past lifetimes. I think you can see in this clearly why all the happiness of the past, present, and future depends on the guru.

It is very effective when we say the six session guru yoga prayer if we visualize Guru Vajradhara up above and below, however many gurus we have – fifteen, sixteen, etc. The guru is the one who does the action of Buddha. Make requests, then remember the kindness of the guru in the longer six session guru yoga prayer. "I request to the precious guru who is the embodiment of the Buddhas of the three times and ten directions doing actions in various numberless realms by manifesting in whatever aspect suits." The meaning is this – Vajradhara manifests according to one's own level of mind and that of sentient beings.

When we are saying the long version of the prayer, we should remember the meaning – that Vajradhara manifests according to the karma of each sentient being. If he manifested in the form of animals or lower forms, we wouldn't be able to receive teachings. If Vajradhara manifested in nirmanakaya or sambhogakaya aspect, then we wouldn't have the karma to see him. So he manifests exactly according to the karma we have at this moment, in human aspect, so that we can communicate with him and receive teachings.

There are uncountable numbers of buddhas – the thousand buddhas of this fortunate age; the four divisions of tantric deities, the innumerable various aspects of buddhas and bodhisattvas. Yet however many there are, we don't have the karma to see them or to receive teachings directly from these aspects. Therefore, it is very kind that our teacher has manifested as a human being so we can communicate and receive teachings. He is kinder than all the Buddhas of the three times and is admired in the supreme field of merit for doing good actions for us and other beings in countless realms. At this time remember this: the gurus we now visualize up there have, in past lives and in this present one, guided us with various means, planting impressions in our minds. Gradually by revealing different means, each guru leads us to the state of omniscient mind in life after life. When we remember the gurus guiding us in each life and we see how the happiness of the three times comes from each of them, it has a very powerful effect on the mind.

As it says in *The Essential Nectar* – you must have read these verses many times – even if we make offerings for eons equal to the number of words in one verse, we can't repay the kindness of the guru. I find this very effective for the mind. If Buddha said this, how could we repay the kindness of being shown the complete, holy path to enlightenment? Even showing us one verse is so kind.



One reason we can't repay the kindness, even if we made countless offerings for eons, is, I think, because impressions are left on our minds by hearing Dharma. Even if you hear only one verse from a guru, such a strong seed is planted that it brings much progress from life to life. The seed grows into an incredible tree with huge branches covering a wide area and many places, sheltering many horse carriages and houses. If the verse is about bodhichitta, we can carry the benefit of the small impressions up to enlightenment. What we get from life to life is incredible, just from hearing one verse.

Having shown the methods by which we can be liberated from the three lower realms, the kind guru has provided us with the necessary conditions – freedoms and endowments. On the basis of this perfect human body, the guru reveals the highest, most perfect method to pacify the sufferings of samsara and to be liberated from the bondage of nirvana, and so leads us to enlightenment. How greatly kind he is! All this depends on past lifetimes, on seeds being planted in the mind, on being guided.

And by the kindness of the guru we are able to live a celibate life in a secluded place or monastery, renouncing worldly family life. If you are now living a family life, it is exactly like living in a fire – your own problems, your children's problems, your wife's problems. So many family problems. By comparison, how great is the peace that we have, thanks to the kindness of the guru giving ordination, and things like that.

Many of us here have taught Dharma to other people at the centers and in other places. By explaining Dharma and working at centers, we offer great benefit to sentient beings. All the merit we accumulate by teaching Dharma and building centers where sentient beings can practice Dharma and follow the path to omniscience is clearly due to Lama Yeshe's kindness. For example, since starting the first center in Australia, how many people have been there and had seeds planted to reach omniscient mind; how many people have been saved from the lower realms?

Even just by thinking of people coming to the centers and understanding Dharma, we can feel so happy and joyful, without even thinking about the omniscient mind – just imagine them being saved from the lower realms! If they come to the center with a troubled mind and find a perfect, worthwhile, trustworthy refuge object and take refuge, they are unbetrayed and reliably guided, an incredible benefit for other sentient beings. Towards barbarians, suffering sentient beings, we should have pity. Even without complete teachings on Lam-rim, bodhichitta, or tantra, just receiving teachings on refuge and meeting a reliable refuge object is of unbelievable benefit. From this root branches develop, and many sentient beings receive peace. By actualizing the centers, people have created the cause of happiness in future lives. So many have opened their eyes to the causes of happiness and the causes of suffering. In England at Manjushri, in America, in Germany, in France and in New Delhi – year after year, the centers benefit sentient beings, temporally and ultimately. You work hard at these centers and see the result and the benefit you are able to offer, you have offered, and they have received. So far what has happened is a great accomplishment. It's unbelievably worthwhile, however much we have dedicated our life or suffered, it was worthwhile bearing these hardships.

Sometimes we find it difficult with Lama – he says to do something, and even if we do it that way, he then says to do it differently – he is so difficult to please. We work hard in the hot sun or cold, while

thirsty or hungry. And for years we bear criticism from people who complain about us from the east or west and from all ten directions – not from the buddhas maybe. I am joking! On top of that, after we explained our work to Lama expecting a compliment, “Oh that’s very good, fantastic, thank you,” we get something else instead. We have a hard time, being squeezed so much. It’s difficult to do the work not knowing exactly what to do or exactly what Lama wanted. The scolding of the guru is like a wrathful mantra to purify hindrances. The conclusion is that all the hardships and criticism become incredibly worthwhile.

We should think of the advantages, of all the sentient beings who benefit and receive from what we are able to offer. So then, instead of being discouraged and our mind becoming smaller, our will becomes stronger to continuously work for others. This is very important. I don’t mean we should feel proud, “Oh, I have done this and that, now I am great.” Pride doesn’t lead to enlightenment or the happiness of others. But rejoicing again and again, especially when we work for a center, is very important. That great accomplishment we have done for sentient beings is also by the kindness of Lama Yeshe. You should continue and develop – by seeing the past progress and accomplishments. It is great that even before we become enlightened or generate any lam-rim realizations, we are able to offer incredible benefit to others. It’s not easy; it depends on so many things. The person who does that is a very fortunate person and should rejoice very often.

The people who come to the centers to study, all these sentient beings are one family. The difference is in body and in time – someone is a dog now, someone else is this or that, just different bodies at different times, in different relationships. We are all one family, so we are helping sentient beings within one family. Working for the centers while we are living in ordination, working so busily with lay people, I think that’s great. It takes a brave person, a hero, to live in ordination while at the same time working with people. It’s like living in a thorn or a fireplace. I think that’s very brave and something for which we should rejoice from our very hearts. In this way we become a real army against the delusions. Thanks to the kindness of Lama Yeshe. It’s something for which we should feel great happiness.

In the Lam-rim it says that if a lama shows he is pleased, it doesn’t mean he is really pleased, or if a lama shows he is displeased, it doesn’t mean he is displeased. Maybe his mind is actually pleased but his aspect has to show displeasure for some purpose. This is what skillful, perfect, real gurus do. When Lama gives, it’s like this, so you can’t really judge. When you think, “Oh, Lama’s manifesting like this, now I am going completely berserk,” it doesn’t mean that he is necessarily displeased.

Also when Lama Yeshe gives different jobs and work to people, I feel it is a method that fits each person. It’s a way of guiding that particular person. For example, there are different jobs – to be the leader of a group or the director of a center. Each director fits the people at that center; they have the karma to have that director. It depends on sentient beings’ karma, and they have to do according to their karma. If it weren’t for the powerful force of karma, Buddha would have liberated all sentient beings and there wouldn’t be any left.

One time, we were just having a general conversation, and Geshe Kelsang said that even in Tibet, in Sera, when they were studying, Lama Yeshe was not a famous, well-known geshe with regard to education; nothing like that. But somehow in the class when he saw Lama Yeshe debating, even

though Lama was no expert, there was something peculiar about him. “Peculiar” may have a bad connotation, I’m not sure if it has a bad or a good connotation. Anyway he used to see him as a different person from the others, very noble and holy, so Geshe-la said. What an incredible advantage and benefit he is able to do by teaching sentient beings.

Sometimes when I used to say to Lama “I don’t need to go to the West,” Lama replied, “For some people, whatever action they do, even breathing, becomes work for other sentient beings’ benefit.” Of course for me that is a dream, but I think it was Lama Yeshe describing himself, the qualities of his own mind. He was talking of his own experience; it had nothing to do with me – “even breathing becomes work for others.” That is a bodhisattva practitioner who has completed dzog-rim. Like that, I think these are the general qualities of his holy body, holy speech, and holy mind.

Most people who met him or heard teachings from him know; I don’t need to explain – it’s common knowledge. He has a particular quality which simply cannot be expressed. In order to generate faith or to see the guru as the essence of Buddha, an effective method is to think of the qualities of the guru’s holy body, speech, and mind in all actions. This is from our own experience, not something that is taken from scriptures, not imitating. It should be our own experience; what we have seen, heard, and felt. So you bring this into your own meditation. Remember – faith is very effective for the mind.

The more we think of these good qualities, the more our wrong thoughts are obscured, cut down. You see, it’s uncommon to be able to see many good qualities that we don’t have ourselves in someone else; and when we see these qualities, we can’t find fault at the same time. So it’s a puzzle, sometimes seeing faults and then these good qualities. It is seeing these qualities, however, that stops the thoughts of finding fault from arising. As Lama Tsongkhapa said, the more we see good qualities and the less we see mistakes in others, the smaller and weaker their faults become. So we should think: the qualities of the holy body are like this, the holy speech like this, and the holy mind like this. Also think: this guru taught me this, and the holy action that he does to me is this and this. So does it lead me to enlightenment or not? It definitely benefits to achieve enlightenment in your mind, even if it is the *lung* of a mantra, whatever it is, it definitely benefits our degenerate minds.

By doing this, the guru definitely leads us to enlightenment. So if the one who does this action is not a manifestation of Shakyamuni Buddha, then who else can be Shakyamuni Buddha working for us? If it’s not, then who else can be Shakyamuni Buddha? If this is not the action of Shakyamuni Buddha, then there is no one to point out as working for us.

I didn’t mean to go this way but since I have, there are just a few points I want to emphasize. If we think well about Shakyamuni Buddha and his biography, how he worked for others when he was in India in bhikshu form, then I think it helps a great deal. The more we remember how he worked for sentient beings without effort, the more it helps your meditation on your guru. When we have faith that Shakyamuni Buddha is guiding us, then I think there’s no other way to relate. When we have faith in that then we see the connection between the guru from whom we receive teachings and Shakyamuni Buddha, the enlightened being.

We should remember the stories we are familiar with even though we don't know much: the great path arhat, the small path arhat; how Guru Shakyamuni Buddha came along the great path where the baby was waiting, then he came along the small path where the other baby was waiting. That is because the karma was ripening, the right time happened. So if it had not been the right time, even though the baby had been waiting, Shakyamuni Buddha wouldn't have come along the path. Whenever it was the right time to subdue sentient beings without any effort, Guru Shakyamuni Buddha arrived. Just as when there are no other hindrances, no mountains or rocks, when the moon rises, its reflection is seen clearly in water. Like that, Guru Shakyamuni Buddha is just there, without any effort.

Another example is the old man who became an arhat. When he was screaming outside the monastery, his karma ripened at that moment and Shakyamuni Buddha, even though very far away, appeared right in front of him and asked him questions. Also the person who had incredible attachment – Shakyamuni Buddha's younger brother – the gradual way Buddha subdued and guided him, and at the right time, the karma ripened. Guru Shakyamuni Buddha went begging for alms to his house. Similarly, there was the very ignorant monk who couldn't memorize even two words – before he'd learnt the second, he'd forgotten the first. He was crying and so depressed. In that moment, his karma ripened; it was the right time to subdue him. So without a second's delay, Shakyamuni Buddha appeared in front of him, asked questions, and explained some things to him. Guru Shakyamuni Buddha let him clean people's shoes.

There are so many stories like these. When it is the right time for sentient beings to be subdued, without a second's delay, Shakyamuni Buddha is there doing work for them. If Buddha is working even for animals, why not for us human beings? So of course we are guided by Shakyamuni Buddha; we are not barbarians. That much Dharma wisdom we know, practicing Dharma, having received perfect human bodies. You see, Shakyamuni Buddha made prayers in the past, five hundred prayers to subdue in these degenerate times the 100-year-old sentient beings, who are most difficult to subdue, those who haven't been subdued by other Buddhas. We have the Dharma wisdom eye, practicing Dharma, so there is no question, not the slightest doubt, that Guru Shakyamuni Buddha is definitely guiding us. The only way we can find out how he is guiding us is through our own guru, the one who gives us different teachings. So the more we understand Shakyamuni Buddha's life stories, the more helpful it is.

One thing I left out and want to mention is all the courses that have taken place so far and how the first course started at Kopan. There was Zina, and we came to Bodhgaya, and there was Zengo, the Japanese monk, who was doing meditation courses. Somehow Zina was very interested in that program, so she pushed Lama very much to give a course like that. Lama did not accept; we were there for the teachings. Then we came back to Kopan, and I was very interested in doing a course. I had never spoken before; I didn't know Lam-rim, and in order to speak on Lam-rim, of course you should know it. At that time, during Zina's time, I had a very good time, a very good opportunity to practice Dharma, very helpful in thought training. I enjoyed it very much, not so many people came to Kopan. Many hippies, many of Zina's friends used to come just to eat, talk, or hang around. They lived in Kathmandu; it was full of them – Kathmandu was like an ant heap, Westerners everywhere, so many young people.

Zina asked Lama for a long time, but he didn't accept. Then she asked me, so I asked Lama –

somehow I was very enthusiastic. I think because she gave me such a good opportunity to practice. Generally, I had a very good time, because there were so many opportunities to practice thought training. So I asked Lama and he said, “If you think it’s beneficial, you do it.” At that time, I was not observing many auspicious signs, though I might have done so, I’m not sure. Then I accepted to do it. I think it was ten days. There was an American nun and Sylvia, who translated the sufferings of the three lower realms briefly, then the preta sufferings quite extensively, each meditation a few lines, like that, up to equanimity. Then more on the narak. Each session was a different meditation, and we started right from the beginning.

At that time some people used to hang around who used to live in and around Bodhgaya. Zengo’s disciples and he himself came on the second day. I was talking about the benefit of cherishing others. Somehow that very first course turned out beneficial. So that’s how the Kopan courses started. Nick and Yeshe Khadro were at the third course.

During those first courses up to the sixth, I think, somehow I never felt I was the one who was speaking. I am not just making this up or admiring myself, but this I truly feel. I think maybe I was surprised and from the depth of my heart I don’t feel I was the one who was speaking. I have always been 100 percent sure in my heart that Lama Yeshe was doing it. When somebody said, “Oh, the course has been beneficial, blah, blah,” in my mind I was thinking, even though I didn’t say the words, “This was not me, it was Lama Yeshe.” After the sixth course, I don’t know what happened; maybe I did something wrong, because from that time it did not feel like that any more. But during those six courses, I was definitely not speaking; it was beneficial due to Lama’s kindness.

As I mentioned before, by not losing faith and continuously fulfilling Lama’s wishes and doing work for the centers, whatever Lama advises, then Lama will be pleased, as he has been so far with your work. If it continues like this, then what is said in the Kalachakra teachings will happen. By making offerings to all the Buddhas and guiding millions of lives of millions of creatures for three eons, even though we do that much, we cannot become enlightened in this life. But if we have faith towards the guru, we will generate realizations and will achieve enlightenment in this life. So I think the hard work for sentient beings, offering service to Lama, and fulfilling his wishes, these things are in themselves the quick path to enlightenment.

As regards the teachings, preserving them is not just a matter of words, not only receiving the lineage of initiations, because there are two types of teachings: the understanding of the words, and the realizations. We don’t have the realizations now; we don’t have the realizations of the three principles of the path. But among the three higher trainings, we do have moral conduct. So as His Holiness recently mentioned, “Wherever there is ordination of individual liberation, wherever there is that, there is me.”

Also in the *So-jong Sutra* it says that we should recognize the individual liberation ordination as the actual Buddha, then take care of the precepts; through this the teachings will exist a long time. We should have those three recognitions. No matter what happens to the teachings of others, what we possess, it is said in the sutras, is like the bridge that goes to the good place we wish to reach. This bridge crosses the water of samsara; it is the bridge to reach nirvana and omniscient mind. This is the path to defeat delusions. These are the steps towards liberation, the four steps. After I die this is your Buddha, the pratimoksha ordination is your Buddha.

Also it is said that it is extremely difficult to meet the guru, to have the Buddha descend to earth, and from our side, it is difficult to find a human form. But Buddha has descended, we have received a human form and the rare opportunity of moral conduct. Then we have good friends around, living in the same practice and helping. We also have an example, which is difficult to find. But all those difficulties and rare conditions are all gathered now – we have all these. As Lama Tsongkhapa said in the *Lam-rim Chen-mo*, in the graduated path of the middle scope being, the best body to have in order to practice tantra is that of a fully ordained monk. So we have to check and find out why that is. I think the best practitioners of tantra are gelong, because it is easier to accomplish and quicker because they live in the precepts. You can check and find out.

As for Western lay people having faith and devotion towards Western Sangha, I'm not sure. Generally it looks difficult. Some who think a lot about karma might have some faith in Western Sangha. If there is no faith in their minds, there is nothing to degenerate. In order to degenerate faith in the minds of others, there has to be faith in others' minds. So maybe you generate faith in order to degenerate – I'm joking! What I am saying is, if someone has devotion and faith in the Sangha, then through wrong conduct, if we degenerate and it changes their faith towards the Sangha, if we have taken tantric vows and received initiations, we receive the second root downfall. If, through wrong conduct, it changes others' faith towards you or the Sangha, then it is a downfall. In order to receive a complete downfall, we need the four vices, but there is a danger of receiving a root downfall. We should remember these things. It is explained in the sutra teachings that if we sleep with a person who has degenerated precepts, then it creates the negative karma to be born in the narak for nineteen million human years. We have to suffer in the narak for nineteen million human years.

We can remember the story of a bodhisattva. When he was coming through the desert from the ocean to find jewels, he saw two dogs eating someone's brains in a house at night. During the daytime it became a luxurious palace, and the dogs became two beautiful girls, like goddesses or devas, with one son. This was because in the past in India, they took precepts from an arhat and kept them during the day, whereas at night they didn't keep the precepts. The reason the two dogs were eating the son's brains is that at nighttime he didn't keep the precepts, but with attachment was kissed on the head, etc.

When there is danger of degenerating the precepts, the most beneficial thing to do is tong-len practice – taking on all sentient beings' sufferings. Not only their present sufferings, but all they will experience up to enlightenment and all the causes of attachment everything – completely take it on your own attachment. As in the *Lama Chöpa* tong-len prayer, think how wonderful if they were free and I received all that on myself; how wonderful it would be if I alone experienced all this suffering. That cuts off the uptightness or *lung*. As long as thought training is practiced, it definitely benefits as soon as it is in the mind. But as long as long as it is not practiced, then there are problems.

It can also help to generate compassion towards the other person, whether that person is living in ordination or not; this helps stop the arising of delusions, such as attachment. Think: this is a mother sentient being; this is his or her one time trying to do something good, trying to work for omniscient mind, for liberation, trying to practice Dharma. After all the sufferings of the lower

realms, this one time he is trying to do something good. How wonderful this is, how good it is. So many lifetimes from beginningless time, so much suffering, and now he is trying to work for release from samsara; this one time he is trying to practice correctly. If I cannot help him practice Dharma and achieve omniscient mind, at least I should not bring him down to the narak with me. See the person as very pitiful. From this, pure compassion arises and the disturbing thought attachment becomes invisible. Compassion covers the mind. This is one very good way, for it helps generate bodhichitta. Our wish is for the other person to practice Dharma, we are inspired to help him or her reach omniscient mind. Also practice rejoicing, “This one time he is trying to do something good – how wonderful it is.”

Different things can be effective for different people’s minds. So when we dream of a very handsome, beautiful person and we recognize this as a dream whilst dreaming, then we think, “This is a dream.” Immediately the attachment stops because there is no opportunity for it to arise – it collapses. It is a kind of possession of the mind; it’s the way mind projects or creates. Similarly, when we compare the body to which we have great attachment to another, we feel less attachment. You see, when we compare it to another body, even though we believe that it is the most beautiful one there is, we can see that the other body’s beauty changes and degenerates. In the same way, this one will become less beautiful, and so our attachment lessens. The way that the mind creates and clings is not so much from the side of the object, but depends on the mind.

Also as Sangha, teaching Dharma because of Lama Yeshe’s kindness, there is more and more opportunity now to study and to understand more extensively the various teachings. If the Sangha are educated, there are two advantages that other people receive. One is the transmission of Dharma understanding. The other is that when we receive teachings and see the teacher living in discipline and practicing himself, it makes a difference. It persuades others to be more like the Sangha teacher. By living in moral conduct, the Sangha inspires others to accumulate merit.

So not only do people practice lam-rim and understand the teachings, but they also take the example and live in moral conduct, create more merit, and reach omniscient mind more quickly. It’s not the same for everybody, but generally as lay people, they don’t live as examples of moral conduct. So for disciples, there is no influence or inspiration to live in moral conduct or accumulate extra merit. The higher training of moral conduct is difficult even though only five or eight precepts can be taken. That is one thing to feel happy about – the benefits we can offer others.

The conclusion is that, day and night, Lama Yeshe keeps busy for us, bears hardships for us, and is concerned for our temporal and ultimate happiness. All this Dharma, all these programs and centers, the Dharma Celebration, all these things were set up for us. Besides this, what can be done, now or in the future? Lama Yeshe keeping so busy, not having time to relax, is for our benefit. By remembering his kindness from our hearts, by remembering all the advantages that we have received from Lama Yeshe and all the efforts, the time and energy that Lama has dedicated for us, by remembering this again and again, we should think to repay it. The way to repay it is by fulfilling what Lama has in mind.

What Lama has in mind is our happiness and the happiness of other sentient beings. In order to fulfill Lama’s advice, we have been dedicating so much, which is a cause to rejoice. To continue to fulfill Lama’s wishes – that itself is the path. For example, Atisha was able to do great work teaching

sentient beings in India and Tibet because he had many gurus and did nothing wrong against them. Like that, we should follow Lama's advice for whatever is most beneficial in our life for the happiness of other sentient beings. Think, what is the most beneficial thing? Then give up small beneficial actions and choose the greatly beneficial ones. Practicing like this we accomplish happiness for self and others and repay what Lama has in mind. By fulfilling Lama's wishes we also repay Guru Shakyamuni Buddha who, with much hardship, accumulated merit for three countless eons when he was a bodhisattva in order to reach enlightenment for us. He put one thousand nails in his holy body just to receive teachings; he wrote teachings on his skin with bones and used blood as ink – there are many stories like this, as explained in the sutras. So he revealed the complete path. The complete path to enlightenment is there; it is up to us to practice it. So if we practice, Shakyamuni Buddha does not feel disappointed, and it becomes worthwhile that he and all the other pandits, Atisha, etc., revealed the path. As it says in the six-session yoga, “All the sublime and general realizations come by following you, the savior, correctly. By seeing this please grant me blessings to practice what will please you even to the point of giving up my life.”

You should remember this advice when you work for centers and have an especially difficult time. If confusion is in the mind, it is very helpful to remember the long six-session yoga prayer.

In the tantric teachings it says the fortunate one is expert in doing work for the guru. It's much more meaningful than making prostrations to the buddhas of the three times. If we accomplish exactly what our guru wishes, then all our wishes get fulfilled. For example, some people say, “I didn't get time to do a retreat because there was too much work,” or “I want to do this, but Lama says to do that.” But on the way whatever wishes we have for ourselves will also get fulfilled, and we will accumulate infinite merit. If we please our guru with our material possessions, then we breathe in the realm of the nirmanakaya and reach a pure land. As it says in *Lama Chöpa*, “All degenerations, all sufferings, all shortcomings come from self-cherishing thoughts. All perfection comes from cherishing others.” As it says in *Lama Chöpa*, this should be our main practice from morning to night, all the time. As much as possible, even if we have just one minute or one hour or one day, our three doors should be engaged in extensive, beneficial works for all sentient beings by following the guru's advice. There is nothing else to think except to cherish sentient beings with our body, speech, and mind. There is no one to work for except sentient beings. At the moment, the object of our cherishing is only ourselves, and the work we do is only for ourselves. We need to change that so the only object we cherish in our hearts is others, all the time, every minute, every hour. We should keep that constantly in our hearts – there is no work other than the work for sentient beings.

I will stop now as it's becoming quite long. I hope it will benefit some people; those who practice will get profit. That's all.



# Seeing the Guru as Buddha

by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

*From a teaching given at Tushita Retreat Center in Dharamsala, India in April 1987.*

The guru who leads you to liberation and enlightenment is someone about whom you feel: “With this one, I can practice guru devotion.” You then make the decision to establish a guru-disciple relationship and take teachings from him. A guru-disciple relationship does not depend on whether or not you personally go to ask the person to become your guru. For example, there are thousands of people who take teachings from His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Each one of them doesn’t go to His Holiness and ask: “Will you be my guru?” According to tradition, the very first time you take teachings from a guru, you may ask his permission to attend a teaching, in case there are some grounds for refusal – but only if there is time. It is mainly up to you.

Before taking teachings on guru devotion, you may find the idea of the guru-disciple relationship uncomfortable and difficult to relate to. After accepting the relationship and hearing teachings, your view may be different. If you practice guru devotion from your side, you will no longer hold your previous view; your way of thinking will completely change. A lot depends on the disciple’s way of thinking and understanding of the teachings.

As explained by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and by Lama Tsongkhapa in the guru devotion section of the *Lam-rim Chen-mo*, there are two ways to see the guru as Buddha. If you understand and practice these two methods well, you are able to see the nature of the guru as Buddha. The first way is to train your mind to see the qualities of the guru; the second is to see the guru’s mistakes, but use them to develop devotion. These two ways of establishing the realization of the guru as Buddha are explained very clearly and perfectly in Lama Tsong Khapa’s *Lam-rim Chen-mo*.

Why do you need to see the guru as Buddha? Because you, the disciple, want profit and do not want loss. This “profit” includes all the happiness of this life, which is the aim of an ordinary being; the happiness of future lives, the aim of the being of small scope; liberation from samsara, the aim of the being of intermediate scope; and great liberation, or enlightenment, for all sentient beings, the aim of the being of great scope. “Loss” refers to all the failures you experience when you do not practice these means to achieve happiness. All these levels of happiness and all the means of achieving them are contained in the statement: you, the disciple, want profit and do not want loss.

The teachings explain that even if the guru is born in hell, if the disciple continuously practices guru devotion, the disciple receives blessings to develop his mind and have attainments on the path: the

disciple profits. The essential means to achieve enlightenment in one very brief lifetime is to see the guru as the essence of all buddhas. However, in order to develop the devotion to see the guru as Buddha, you have to stop all your wrong conceptions about him and see only his qualities. This is extremely important.

Lama Tsongkhapa explains that allowing one wrong thought to arise towards the guru, even for one second, destroys your perfections; in other words, it causes any realizations you already have to degenerate and interferes with the generation of new realizations of the path and the result of enlightenment. Even though the guru has many qualities, looking from the side of his mistakes obscures all those qualities. Seeing some small mistake obscures all the rest of the qualities, so that you see only mistakes. This is training your mind in a negative way. On the other hand, looking at the qualities of the guru and generating devotion cause you to achieve all the realizations of the graduated path up to enlightenment.

Relate this to yourself: You have oceans of mistakes, but few good qualities. Looking at yourself only in terms of your few qualities obscures all your mistakes so that you see only your good qualities. This is how your mind has been trained to see yourself. So if you look at the guru in the same way, your mind can be trained to develop guru devotion.

Why is the practice of guru devotion so important? Someone may try to do a lam-rim or samatha retreat and fail after some time because many disturbances arise. Or someone may be living in ordination, with great ambitions to benefit sentient beings and the teachings just like Lama Tsongkhapa, Lama Atisha, or Guru Shakyamuni Buddha; however, even though the wish is there, it does not happen because there are so many obstacles. Such experiences are due to having made mistakes in the practice of guru devotion in past lives or in this life. Even though you may have all the necessary conditions to practice Dharma, many obstacles arise, and you fail. Because in past lives you did not practice guru devotion correctly, these shortcomings are experienced in this life and for many lifetimes, on and on and on. Even though you meet Dharma in the future, you still experience obstacles. Everything, from the happiness of this life to enlightenment, depends on the root of guru devotion. Guru devotion is essential for the completion of listening, reflecting, and meditation practice.

Because of incorrect practice of guru devotion in the past, you create the result similar to the cause, which means repeating the same mistake for many lives, again and again. Even on those rare opportunities when you meet a guru and the teachings, again you commit the same mistake in your practice. Therefore, it is very important, even though you may have made many mistakes, to make the determination not to make them again. Making the strong determination to practice guru devotion correctly now and in the future is the remedy that stops these mistakes from happening again. The practice of guru devotion is emphasized so strongly in both sutra and tantra teachings because wrong conceptions of the guru are the greatest obstacles to happiness.

How can we understand that it is possible to achieve liberation? When you understand emptiness, when you recognize the objects held by simultaneously born ignorance as false and empty, you can understand how it is possible to achieve liberation. You then develop 100 percent faith that ignorance, and the wrong conceptions arising from that ignorance, can be eliminated. You develop firm faith that liberation is possible. Through understanding the two stages of the gradu-

ated path of Highest Yoga Tantra, especially the second stage, you understand more clearly the result of the four kayas and develop even more faith that liberation is possible. You then feel much deeper faith when you recite such prayers as *Calling the Guru from Afar*.

It is very practical to think as Kachen Yeshe Gyältsen advised: “I am so fortunate to be able to find even a few qualities in the guru. If even my impure mind is able to see this many qualities, how many qualities must be seen by someone whose mind is purer.” Think of how many non-virtuous thoughts arise in each day. Your mind is constantly overwhelmed by negative karma and disturbing thoughts, which obscure your mind and create obstacles. Think, “With a mind so heavily obscured by impure karma, it is a miracle that I am able to see even this much purity in the guru. I am very fortunate.”

Generally, even the appearance of purity or beauty in sense objects depends on your karma, on your mind. Since the appearance of everything depends on your mind, on your karma, there is no way for Buddha to manifest other than according to your karma; there is no other way for you to see Buddha. Now, since your karma is impure (you can see this by thinking about even one day of your life), the only way Buddha can manifest is in an ordinary form, which means having mistakes and delusions.

This is extremely kind. If Buddha manifested in a lower form, you could not recognize him or receive teachings from him; if Buddha manifested in a higher form, you would not have the karma to see him. According to your karma, these gurus in ordinary aspects, with mistakes and delusions, are the only ones who can reveal the teachings to you. These gurus lead you to enlightenment when you put their teachings into practice. They are the only ones who lead you to enlightenment by directly teaching you; there is no other aspect from which you can receive teachings. Without them, there is no way to receive teachings and put them into practice; no way to achieve liberation from samsara; no way to achieve enlightenment. Think how kind the guru is!

# The Blessings of the Guru

*by Lama Zopa Rinpoche*

Gomchen Rinpoche was a Nyingma meditator who lived in Solu Khumbu. He used to make many medicines against the very strong poison that is extracted from animals such as scorpions and which causes danger and heavy diseases. The concoction of this poison is related to some spirits and it is given sometimes even to Westerners who come trekking. When the victims try to get healed, they cannot find anything that can help, but few of them have discovered that the way to get cured was to come back to Solu Khumbu and take some particular medicinal pills. So Gomchen-la made these pills especially, which are very, very helpful to protect people from the danger of untimely death. Gomchen-la is regarded as the embodiment of the yogi Tangtong Gyalpo.

This text was written by Gomchen-la's root guru, who is also the root guru of Venerable Trulshig Rinpoche. The verses are related to the practice of taking refuge in the guru, the way to establish the awareness of the understanding that the essence of guru is buddha. In this way there is inspiration to become or to achieve the guru. Otherwise, the guru is simply somebody from whom you learn just words, like the school teachers – giving only intellectual knowledge and nothing more deep to rely upon.

It was said by the previous Kagyu lamas:

Whatever actions are done by the qualified, precious guru,  
All are good. Whatever actions are done, all are qualities.

Even if the action of being a butcher, killing human beings, is done,  
It is meaningful and good. It is definite that those sentient beings  
Are guided with compassion.

This refers to transferring the consciousness of evildoers to a pure realm. It is similar to the tantric wrathful methods, such as fire pujas, with which one can separate a person's consciousness from his body. Whether it is done with weapons or with meditation, it is just a different method.

Even if the action of degenerating the moral conduct is shown,  
That is increasing qualities and receiving qualities.

It is showing the unification of method and wisdom.

“Increasing qualities and receiving qualities” could be related to the virtuous teacher, seeing him as a tantric yogi, a practitioner of the second stage who has achieved the clear light. This would be a stainless action to increase his tantric power, to quickly cut off the dualistic views, develop the mahamudra practice and achieve the Vajradhara state. This is relating to the lama himself. It can also be understood in relation to other sentient beings, the disciples to which that conduct is shown: to subdue their minds by guiding them from the disturbing thoughts, the strong dissatisfied mind and attachment, and helping them to develop realizations of the path. For the devoted ones it only causes to increase qualities. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said: “By seeing the mistakes, transform them into the cause of devotion.” Instead of causing heresy to arise, it becomes a strong cause to increase devotion, to achieve more quickly the rest of the path and attain enlightenment.

“Showing the unification of method and wisdom” refers to the virtuous teacher as a resultant buddha, like the father-mother aspect of Vajradhara, etc. His holy mind is clear light and the transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss and void. His holy body is the father and mother embraced whose meaning is to show the unification of the holy body and holy mind. The way of practice is to view the action in pure form and stop the heresy, the wrong conception which is the heaviest obstacle to achieve the graduated path to enlightenment.

These two ways relate to the path and the result: for the guru who is on that path is it not a mistake, even if he is not enlightened. Or else think of him as a resultant buddha.

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