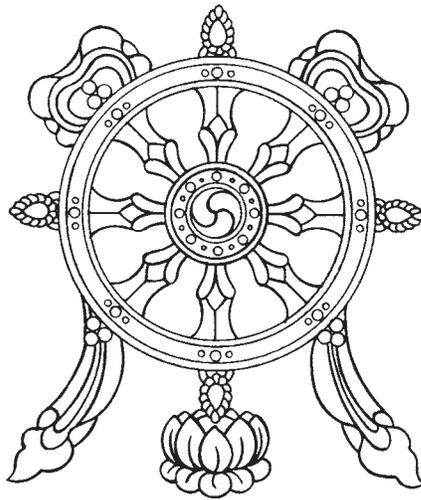


# Discovering BUDDHISM *at Home*

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



SUBJECT AREA 6  
All About Karma

*Readings*



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*Further required reading includes the following texts:*

*The Wish-Fulfilling Golden Sun*, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche (pp. 76–83)

*Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, 1997 gold edition (pp. 430–70) or 2006 blue edition (pp. 386–423)

*Healing Anger*, by His Holiness the Dalai Lama

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# Karma and Psychology

*by Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche*

Because of not having done enough analysis and examination of the science or the knowledge of the death evolution and birth evolution, there is a limited knowledge of what to do about daily life problems. In dealing with daily life problems, the answer given, the solution given, is that as long as you are okay, as long as you are comfortable, then it doesn't matter about others. So for example, if you feel angry with somebody, negative toward somebody, if you think a lot about other people's mistakes, then you think you should express it, that you should bring out the anger that you feel inside. You bring it out and you say every negative thing that you have to say about other people. So after letting the anger rise and expressing all the negative and harmful words to other people, then the selfish mind rejoices that it has been able to hurt other people, other sentient beings. When you have expressed what the selfish mind, the angry mind, wanted to say, wanted to say to hurt, then when that is done you rejoice, you feel happy and relieved. The result is that one person feels relieved. One person feels able to hurt others and thus feels comfortable. Feeling comfortable, feeling happy that one is able to hurt others is what the self-cherishing thought and anger do. These are the actions of the self-cherishing thought and anger. So this becomes an achievement, a goal in the life.

So even if you feel comfortable, what about those other people? What about them? They become upset and they get hurt. What about others? In the advice and instructions of some psychologists there is no emphasis on others. In science there's no emphasis, there's no concern for others, other sentient beings. There is only emphasis on yourself, only how to make yourself happy, comfortable. But what is left out, what is missing, is concern for others. So now with this solution you feel comfortable by expressing all the negative thoughts, but sooner or later you have to do it again as you did not practise patience, as you did not achieve happiness from your own mind.

In reality the evolution of life's problems comes from one's own mind; also one's own mind is the creator of one's own happiness. Not being aware of this evolution, of this science, of this psychology we seek happiness externally, from outside. When one has anger, that anger makes the friend into an enemy. However, if one has patience in the mind, even the enemy becomes a friend. Life's problems come from one's own mind. Peace and happiness in life depend on one's own mind. It has to come from one's own mind. What I am trying to explain is this psychology. How happiness and suffering are created, how they basically have to come from one's own mind. All these things depend on oneself, one's own mind.

As long as we haven't developed this science, this psychology, there is something left out. Therefore, all the blame goes outside – whatever problems happen in life, we put the blame outside onto others. For example, if one is born imperfect or if there is some difficulty in the life or limbs, or some mental disorder, then we put blame on the parents. If the parents didn't treat you well or take good care of of you, then all the blame is put on them, the blame is completely put on others. Then even the harmoni-

ous relationships, the good relationships that one with one's family are completely destroyed. Even the love and compassion that you have toward your parents are destroyed.

You see how this builds up emotions and anger toward other sentient beings, toward one's parents. Then, you see, it suddenly breaks the relationship. The family becomes disharmonious, and then the parents become upset and have to cry because of feeling blame. You also become angry toward them. So it didn't really help, you see; blaming others didn't really solve the problem. It brought more problems; it brought very strong hatred toward them. It caused strong hatred toward them who have been very kind to you, and this brings up so many problems, so much confusion in the family.

By practising psychology in this way we create suffering for ourselves and others; by practising the other way we can create happiness for ourselves and others. By not practising patience, the good heart, then even if you expose all the anger, express all the emotions in the morning, and then feel comfortable ... but since you do not practise patience, the good heart, then sooner or later, after some hours or in the afternoon, again you will find something in that person's behavior that you don't like. You will again find something that you interpret as bad, something that you dislike; you will find something to get angry about. Again you will use reasons; again you will create the reasons to get angry.

You experience something that hurts, something that the self-cherishing thought and desire don't want, don't like. Then you label that as hurting, as bad. By following the self-cherishing thought and desire, then anger arises. That person is doing something against this mind, something that this mind doesn't like. Then you see that as harm, and you interpret that this person is harming me, doing something bad to me. Then, by putting reasons, one builds anger, one raises anger. So then again, according to the previous method, you express your anger. You say everything, all the negative thoughts, all the negative things that you wanted to say.

You express and hurt as much as possible; you express whatever bad thing, the worst thing that you can think of. You feel hurt so there's some self-cherishing thought that feels comfortable, feels happy. Then this is regarded as positive; whatever the self-cherishing thought feels comfortable with is regarded as positive.

But the same thing will happen again and again, as the person does not practise patience and the good heart. As there is no practice of the good heart from his or her side, therefore again, sooner or later, that person will find some action, some reason, something that is disturbing, something that is bad, and will again make up the reasons to get angry. As the person does not practise the good heart, the anger will come again. So like this, the same thing tomorrow, it goes on and on. It only makes the problem return over and over again, creating problems again and again, raising anger again and again.

By expressing anger to other beings, then the other people also become upset and angry. They become angry and negative toward you. So you have made the other people become negative toward you by telling them all their mistakes, how bad they are. So how can there be happiness in life?

Those people become unhappy, you yourself have made them unhappy. But your own happiness is dependent on other sentient beings, especially the people with whom you live, with whom you deal, with whom you work together, eat together. So there's no way that you can have peace in the mind in your day-to-day life.

From the beginning the only emphasis is for one's own comfort and one leaves out the comfort of

others. If one says all the bad things to other people, to other sentient beings, if one get angry to others, what happens to them, what happens to their happiness, to their peace of mind? That is one problem that isn't mentioned. You see this solution doesn't answer the problems of daily life. Besides not eliminating the root of the problem, it doesn't really benefit the daily life.

So why is there limitation in this answer, in this psychology or science in regard to solving problems in the daily life? Because the phenomena of the continuation of life after death is not known, that the present life's consciousness continued from the past life's consciousness, that this present consciousness continues after death to the future life. So this phenomena is not known, this culture is not known, and karma, the unmistakable, the real expression of what is the cause of happiness and what is the cause of suffering is not known.

There is some philosophy that by doing business you get profit or by planting seeds one receives the crops. Also by having education, then one can have good life, successful life, one can obtain happiness by having education, by having wealth, by having friends. There is some philosophy that by having something you can get happiness. By not having this or that you get problems. There is a philosophy like this that is accepted. But it is not necessary for all philosophies to bring happiness. It is not necessary that they do not bring problems and bring only happiness. It is not necessary that they are correct. Generally there is some philosophy like this that is accepted.

However, karma means that your problems come from your own mind, that problems come from your own way of thinking. The wrong way of thinking brings suffering result. With the proper way of thinking, with the right attitude, with the good heart one obtains happiness. This explanation of karma is according to the reality. The non virtuous thought, the non virtuous karma brings the result suffering, now and in the future. The positive, the virtuous thought brings the result happiness now and in the future. Action which brings problems to others, unhappiness to others is non virtue, action which brings happiness, especially ultimate happiness in the long run, that is virtue.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama mentioned that while the action is being done if it gives unhappiness, if it disturbs other's happiness it is non virtue. So harming others itself is harming to oneself. This is the characteristic of the non virtue, the result of non virtue. This phenomena, all the happiness, suffering came from ones own mind, the doer, the creator is one's own mind. This phenomena of the karma and the existence of past and future lives is not known. So I think basically because of not having discovered these phenomena, then the solutions to day to day life problems are limited. When it does not accept the root of the problems then it is very difficult for it to benefit. It doesn't eliminate the self cherishing thought, it only emphasizes, it advises to take care of and to develop the self cherishing thought. So that makes constant problems. Therefore the conclusion is that, since we have to go through this experience until we directly perceive emptiness and achieve the Arya path, the Mahayana Right Seeing Path, until we achieve this we have to experience sickness, old age, death and rebirth. As we have to experience this then we are only cheating ourselves by ignoring reality, by not thinking about the reality of life, the nature of life. It is only cheating oneself to not meditate on that, to not make preparations for death. It cheats the life to not make preparations to avoid a fearful death.

*Colophon:*

Teaching given by Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche, London 1989, and edited by Gelong Konchog Lhundrup, London 1991. Printed here for the "Discovering Buddhism" program with permission from Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive.

# Karma and Emptiness

by *Lama Zopa Rinpoche*

## *Preface*

Karma, or the law of cause and effect, is one of the most basic principles of Buddhist philosophy. *Karma and Emptiness* delves into the subject of karma from the perspective of an understanding of emptiness, the underlying essential understanding of all Buddhist theory and practice, which is that all things, both persons and phenomena, lack inherent existence. In other words, they do not exist as we perceive them, as solid, absolute, and concrete, existing from their own side, but are merely labeled by the mind. The realization of emptiness is the ultimate method which cuts our delusions at the root—especially the delusion which perceives an inherently existent “I,” or self. The realization of emptiness is also the realization which will lead us to the fully enlightened state of buddhahood.

The Buddha also taught that the practice of pure morality is the foundation for the development of single-pointed concentration, which is necessary for a direct realization of emptiness. It is only through a thorough understanding of karma that the wish to practice pure morality will arise, thus leading the practitioner to the other realizations of the path.

– Author unknown

## *The Actual Teaching from Lama Zopa Rinpoche*

*The following material consists of the transcript of a lecture given by Lama Zopa Rinpoche; at Maitreya Instituut in Holland in September 1981.*

We are listening to Buddha’s advice, the graduated path to enlightenment. The motivation for listening to this advice should not be seeking happiness in this life—at the very least we should be free of worldly concerns. Nor should we be seeking the happiness of future lives. Nor should our motivation be to seek the sorrowless state only for ourselves. Our motivation should be bodhichitta. Even if we do not have this realization, the effortless experience of bodhichitta, at least we should try to generate this motivation. So think this way: “I must achieve enlightenment in order to free all sentient beings from suffering and lead them to the state of omniscient mind. Therefore, I am going to listen to the teachings.”

## *Understanding and protecting karma*

The subject of the program is karma. Understanding karma and protecting it are very important for those starting to practice Dharma, for those whose mind has progressed on the path, and even for advanced meditators who have high realization of Secret Mantra.

Actually, karma is something that anybody who wishes happiness and does not want suffering has to understand and protect. Even if a person does not believe this, has no faith in karma, that sentient

being nevertheless continuously creates karma with body, speech, and mind. It is like a person who has TB; even though he does not believe it, not believing it does not stop the bleeding. If it were just a matter of faith, of belief, there would be no need for hospitals. Even if your leg were broken, by thinking it is not, it would become whole again. But this does not happen.

It is not that somebody who has faith has karma and somebody who does not have faith does not experience it. It is not like that. Otherwise the more you understood Dharma, existence, the more you would suffer. The less you understood, the less you would suffer. So animals would have greater peace than human beings. But on this earth the persons who really have peace of mind, ultimate happiness, are very rare. They are the few who understand and protect karma, who renounce the cause of suffering and obtain the cause of happiness.

In order to eliminate suffering and obtain happiness, it is extremely important to understand the evolution and nature of inner existence. However much you understand external existence and study its nature and evolution, this does not have much effect on your mind; your everyday problems are the same. Your disturbing thoughts are still there: anger, attachment, and the ignorance clinging to the I as truly existent. These three poisonous minds are still the same as before, even after thirty, forty, fifty years, even after one hundred years. Nothing changes.

For this reason, it is very important to study the mind, its inner evolution and nature, especially karma, which is action and result. The more you study this, the more effective it will be. Virtue causes happiness and non-virtue results in suffering, but neither of these exists from its own side. They exist only in dependence. The medicinal fruit is a result of the medicinal seed, and the poisonous fruit is a result of the poisonous seed or the root of the poisonous plant. So, like these flowers, happiness and suffering come about as a result of their own individual seeds.

By understanding this inner evolution, we can understand more about karma, action and result. Through this, as we understand suffering, we understand also the inner factor, the unsubdued mind. Then we realize that peace of mind also has to be accomplished by depending on the mind. So we come to understand that happiness and suffering come completely from the mind, only from the mind. The mind is the creator of all our happiness and all our suffering. So we see more and more how important it is to develop the mind, to change the mind.

One of the meditations that helps to protect karma, to eliminate the cause of suffering, non-virtue, and to complete the cause of happiness, virtue, is knowing how precious the human body is. By meditating in this way, you see how meaningful it is; how precious it is, qualified with the eight freedoms and ten endowments; how difficult it is to find such a precious, meaningful human body in future lives. This helps to cultivate a correct, strong mind, which we need in order to renounce non-virtuous actions and create virtuous ones.

### *Impermanence and death*

The meditations on impermanence and death also help to protect karma. Stop the fantasy that this life will be long; remember that this life is short and the time of death uncertain. In a city, let us take Amsterdam—how many people die in one hour due to various conditions? In one city, in one country, on this earth, each hour, how many people are dying from different conditions? Some people die suddenly and unexpectedly. When they get up that morning, they have the intuitive thought that

definitely they will live for thirty or forty years. This wrong conception of permanence is carried on in the mind until the time of death, until they actually meet the conditions of death.

Therefore, there is nothing to trust in the wrong conception that intuitively rises; even now we are feeling that way. We do not examine the impermanence of life, how it is getting shorter and how life is surrounded by conditions of death. When our mind is not aware of this, when we do not think about it in this way, then for many years we will think, “I will not die today, I will live for many years.” If you live life like this, just sleeping on the bed, then nothing gets done. No preparation for the happiness of future lives gets done.

Because of this wrong conception of permanence, those unsubdued minds of ignorance, anger, and attachment arise very easily. As you meet the different objects, the unsubdued mind rises and you are overwhelmed by delusions. Then you create various non-virtuous actions with these delusions. Then when you die, you are not happy—not to mention experiencing suffering instead of happiness in future lives. At the time of death, there is much fear and worry, the body experiences much pain, the face looks afraid, with the whites of the eyes showing and tears coming out; the hands try to grab, the feet move, urine and excrement come out, blood comes through the mouth and ears, and things like that. So even in this life we do not have the opportunity to die happily. The person dies with many signs that he or she will be reborn in one of the three lower realms—animal, *preta*, or hell realms—where the beings have more suffering than human beings. The hell beings have the most suffering.

If in our everyday life we are sensitive and alert, aware all the time of what is happening to others, then everything in the newspapers and on television—all these examples of impermanence and death—will become teachings. So many are dying today in car accidents, or are burned in their houses, or have a heart attack or cancer, or are paralyzed. So many are dying in hospitals, at home, in the streets, while traveling. This morning they were so healthy, had plenty of money and food, there was no reason why they should die today. They were laughing, having coffee in the morning, dancing, shopping, going to the hairdresser. Then suddenly it is all finished. Laughing, dancing, shopping in the supermarket, going to the hairdresser, building, business—in the evening, it is completely finished, it is all over. So many were alive this morning, enjoying themselves, and this evening are lying on beds like pieces of wood.

All this is meditation, what we see and hear in the newspapers and on television are all teachings, are all effective advice on impermanence and death. All these teachings are reminding you, knocking on your door and saying, “Hello, *your* life is like this, so hurry up, don’t be lazy. Prepare for the happiness of future lives; hurry to create the cause for omniscient mind so that you can do extensive works for other sentient beings.”

Remembering impermanence and death is like nectar to calm the mind when it is bubbling like hot water, angry, proud, jealous, and so on; when you have no peace of mind; when your mind is full of the pain caused by these delusions. Especially if you think, “I am going to die today, I might even die this very hour,” there is no space for anger, attachment, or pride. You no longer see the point in quarreling, in clinging to sense objects, being so disturbed, keeping yourself so busy. So as strong delusions subside, one stops accumulating very heavy negative karma, harming oneself and others.

We should decide, “I am going to die today” instead of “I am not going to die today.” For death will definitely occur.

Generally, if something is going to happen and you expect it, expect any danger that is going to happen, you can make preparations to prevent it or protect yourself. Even if you cannot prevent it, at least you don't have to worry or fear, you can be happy when it comes. At the moment we cannot prevent death and sickness, but the cycle of birth and death can be stopped.

The best meditators and Dharma practitioners have a very happy mind when they die. It is like going on a picnic, like returning to their parents' home. In the mind there is complete trust that even if one does not get born in the pure realms, one will be reborn in a perfect human body again, to continue the practice of the path, the rest of the path that was not actualized. For these meditators themselves have created the cause, have made arrangements to be born in such a place and such a family; they have complete confidence in that project. Many accomplished lamas and geshe meditators do this. Or, the mind is comfortable, at least, because you do not fear that you might be born in a lower realm. Thus we should make preparations today so that we can die in one of these three states of mind.

This was Tsongkhapa's advice. Think: "I will definitely die today." Your delusions will subside; you will create less negative karma and get more done, create more virtue, more causes for the happiness of future lives and ultimate happiness, omniscient mind.

This is one of the powerful methods to protect karma. Another powerful meditation is to reflect on the sufferings of those in the three lower realms—animals, hungry ghosts, and hell beings. Rebirth in these realms is one result of a non-virtuous action. So, reflecting on these sufferings makes you care more about karma, encourages you to protect yourself. When we understand that we will burn our finger when we put it in the fire, then we won't put it in. If you know how dangerous poison is, what harm it does, you will have faith in the explanations of how harmful it is and will be careful. Even when that poison is around, you will get rid of it immediately. Or when a spark of fire jumps on your body, you will throw it off without a moment's delay. So, even if you are in danger of doing negative actions or of delusions arising, you can stop yourself at once by remembering these sufferings and having deep faith in Buddha's explanation of cause and result.

You need not think about the sufferings of the lower realms particularly, but think about and feel the sufferings of the happy transmigrators, the gods and humans. Look at this human body, this samsaric body born from delusion and karma; see how samsara is in the nature of suffering, how this samsaric body is in the nature of suffering. See it as a prison and do not hallucinate that it is a beautiful park. Meditate again and again on the eight types of human suffering: rebirth, old age, sickness, death, and so on. The more you feel these sufferings as an unbearable hell, the more the thought of renouncing cyclic existence arises, and the easier it is to protect karma and renounce negativity.

In order to be free, it is most important to see that these present aggregates, joined by continuity from life to life, are caused by delusions and karma and are only in the nature of suffering. Try to feel this, to see it clearly. Feel it like a prison where there is no peace, or like hell where there is only suffering. Being caught in samsara is like living in a red-hot burning iron house. The more we see samsara in this way, the weaker becomes our attachment to this body, these aggregates.

It is said in the teachings that the lasso of attachment, of craving, ties us to the prison of samsara. The way to change this clinging is to meditate as Buddha explained. He explained how samsara is in the nature of suffering; how the suffering of pervasive formation and the suffering of change are in the

nature of suffering. Meditate on these and relate them to yourself; examine them and you will be able to identify them yourself. It is not a matter of faith; it is very scientific.

When you meditate with understanding on Buddha's teachings—true suffering, the true cause of suffering, true path, and true cessation of suffering; when you generate the path by listening, reflecting, and meditating; when you experience the cessation of suffering, it is like having a picture of Buddha's teachings, it is exact. There is nothing that is not true. It is all as Buddha explained.

So it is important to be aware of the sufferings of the human body and mind, the suffering of rebirth, old age, sickness and death, dissatisfaction, the problems of your own body and mind, others' problems. All these are the shortcomings of samsara. Always think about having taken these samsaric aggregates, from one life to another, under the control of delusion and karma. Whenever there is some problem of dissatisfaction or pain, think: "Of course this can happen; I live in the pot of suffering. It is my own mistake."

Or when you see an old man, his body—once so youthful, beautiful, strong, and healthy—is now curved and full of wrinkles, shrunken. When you see a picture of this person as a baby, as a handsome happy youth, looking at him now, you get a shock. You cannot believe it. How is it possible? How did it happen? It must be a mirage.

It is the same when you see old people in the street: an old man or woman unable to walk properly, having to rely on a stick; one whose eyesight is failing; one who cannot hear very well, to whom people have to speak very loudly and say things over and over again. Or in hospitals where people are sick. Seeing this is very good for the mind—at least for a while your attachment to samsara may become weaker.

All these problems arise from samsara, which is in the nature of the suffering of pervasive formation.

**Student:** What is pervasive formation?

**Rinpoche:** It is this present samsara, these aggregates, this body and mind formed by previous delusion and karma.

I will go into more detail. The "I" is merely labeled on the base of the aggregates, but we are born with an ignorance that has been with us from beginningless time. This ignorance believes the I exists from its own side, that it truly exists, even though the I is merely labeled by thought. This ignorance believes the "I" to be independent; it completely hallucinates the absolute nature of the "I." This inborn ignorance of true existence is the very root of samsara.

Whether we talk a lot about this ignorance, describe it or not, it is present day and night, all the time, even right now, tightly holding on to a real me on the aggregates, as real as it appears. Without using many words, the ignorance is like this: above the heart, in the chest, there is a real me. There is a conception there, a mind, strongly believing and tightly holding that real "I." There is a real me sitting on this cushion, listening to the teachings in this house. To that mind, to that conception appears the truly existent "I," an "I" that exists from its own side, a real "I," a solid "I," and then the ignorance believes that there is such a solid "I" doing the actions of listening to the teachings, meditating, eating, feeling hungry, having a stomach ache, being full, then making peepee and kaka. But the actual fact is

that there is not such an “I,” there is not such a solid “I” or real “I” that exists from its own side, doing all these actions. We only believe there is.

In fact, there are no such activities of that “I,” because the subject, the doer, that solid “I” that we believe in does not exist. The “I” that exists from its own side does not exist at all, not even in name, nowhere from the tip of the hair to the feet, in no way does it exist.

Without a doer how can there be action? What we believe in everyday life is completely hallucinated. From morning till night, from birth until death, from beginningless past lives, what we believe is completely hallucinated.

But the “I” that is merely labeled on the aggregates—that “I” does exist. Why does that “I” exist? For instance, the “Thubten Zopa” that is left on the aggregates by merely being labeled by thought and name, labeled by the abbot who granted the ordination, that exists. On the cushion on which you are now sitting, is there an “I”? There is. Why? Because there is a labeled base, the aggregates, on the cushion. Only because of that. There is no other reason, nothing secret or hidden. There is an “I” on the cushion because the aggregates, the body and mind, are there on the cushion. That is all. Nothing else.

This “I” has activities. How does it get the name activity? Because the aggregate body is sitting on this cushion, because of the base, what the body does, because of that it is labeled “I am sitting.” It is the same for the labeled base, the mind. What the mind does is thinking, listening, therefore we put on the label, “I am listening, I am thinking.” If there is a base, the “I” exists.

This is an amazing thing! Inexpressible! Without choice, without wish, even without thinking “I exist,” the “I” uncontrollably exists because the base exists. Even if you intellectually try to believe that the I does not exist, or if you believe the theory that the I does not automatically exist when there is a base, or even if there is only mind or body and mind together, the I exists powerfully.

The more you seek the I that looks as if it exists from its own side, the more you see that it does not exist from its own side. At the same time the existence of the I appears powerfully in your mind, and you see that it exists under the control of name. This happens quite automatically, naturally, without faith or purposeful thought. The more you see that the I is empty of existence from its own side, the more you see how the “I” exists under the control of name. When you experience this, you have found the incredible right view, shunyata, emptiness.

Similarly, with the aggregates, we believe them to be real, as they appear. Also the objects of the senses and all the rest of existence, though, in fact, empty of self-existence, appear to exist from their own side. Everything exists by being merely labeled on the base by thought. It is like believing this is a golden house, even though this house is empty of being a golden house.

His Holiness used to say, “Things are empty of true existence, existence is empty of existence from its own side. To prove this there are many logical reasons, but to prove that, for example, the rosary exists, there is no reason.” There are innumerable logical arguments to prove that the rosary is empty of existence from its own side, but there is no reason to say that the rosary exists.

The rosary automatically comes into existence since there is the base, the parts gathered together. It is

on this gathering of the parts, this base, that the rosary is merely labeled, and this is how it exists. There is no way to check the existence of the rosary. One has to be satisfied with this reason, that it is only labeled on its base.

But when we touch the non-self-existent rosary, it does not appear as a rosary that is merely labeled. What appears is a rosary that exists purely from its own side, without depending on anything. That is what we feel when we touch the rosary. A rosary that appears in this way and in which we believe does not exist anywhere. You cannot find one anywhere.

Or when someone hits you over the head with a stick. In your mind the stick is not merely labeled by thought and name on its base; instead it appears as a stick that exists from its own side.

**Student :** When you are hit from behind you cannot see the stick, so it cannot appear.

**Rinpoche:** I am just describing how it appears when your head meets the stick. Appearing does not necessarily have to do with the eyes. At night time, even now, you are not looking at everything. How do you feel while you are sitting on the cushion, how does the cushion appear to you?

**Student:** As form.

**Rinpoche:** Nothing else besides that? How does the form appear?

**Student:** It feels. I feel form.

**Rinpoche:** How does it appear to you? It is form, yes. As it is form, how does it appear to you?

**Student:** I sense the form through feeling.

**Rinpoche:** How do you feel it?

**Student:** Through touching, it touches my body.

**Rinpoche:** That is not the question. How do you feel it or how does it appear to you? If it is soft, how does the soft cushion appear to you? If it is hard, how does the hard cushion appear to you?

**Student:** How do I know this? I answer that when I find out.

**Rinpoche:** Being aware that you are sitting on the cushion is not enough. You are aware that your foot is on the carpet; is it warm or soft? Soft?

**Student:** It is there. I am aware of the carpet.

**Rinpoche:** You are aware of the carpet? It must be. Anyway, you feel the cushion and the carpet, you are aware of them. You are aware that your feet are on the carpet, that your body is on the cushion. Do you see that the cushion is merely labeled? Do you feel that way?

**Student:** It appears that I am sitting on the cushion.

**Rinpoche:** That is not the question. Do you feel you are sitting on the cushion that is not merely labeled? Do you feel that?

**Student:** I could be sitting on anything.

**Rinpoche:** Can you sit on your I?

**Student:** Then it would be merely labeled.

**Rinpoche:** I will give you anything if you can sit on something that is not merely labeled. I will give Holland to you. That is a joke!

So when the stick hits your head, when it makes contact with your body, in your mind it absolutely exists from its own side. It does not appear as merely labeled. Similarly, the person who hit you, your head and your pain, even the reason for being struck, all these appear as if they absolutely exist, as if they exist from their own side. However, whatever appears to our mind, what we believe in, all this is, in fact, completely empty.

When you realize deep in your mind, when you do not find the truly existent person who hit you, the truly existent stick, the truly existent pain, the truly existent reason, you understand that they are, in fact, empty. Seeing that these are completely empty, you understand simultaneously that they are all under the control of name. Then you have realized the absolute nature of the person who hit you, of the stick, the pain, all that.

How do I appear to you? As real Lama Zopa, truly existent Lama Zopa, here on this throne, existing all the time? And truly existent juice, truly existent glass, plate, and then I drink. Did this appear to you? On these aggregates is Thubten, not depending on past and future, existing from his own side, doing the truly existent action of drinking, and so on. In fact, all these are hallucinations.

There is no such truly existent juice. There is no such truly existent drinking. There is no such drinker, real truly existent Lama Zopa. But if we question, “Isn’t there a Lama Zopa on this throne drinking juice? Intoxicated?” There is. The merely labeled Lama Zopa that does the action of drinking merely labeled juice. That exists. Even if you do not have faith, that exists. All the other objects of the senses are like this, they appear to be truly existent, and we believe it.

**Student:** If you were self-existent how would you appear to us?

**Rinpoche:** If I were self-existent, how would I appear to you? As merely labeled! Now when you realize emptiness, shunyata, and see everything as illusory, especially when you become enlightened, then I appear to you as truly existent. I am joking! If I am truly existent, you won’t exist. And as you do not exist, there is no way to see me. I am just joking! When you look at me, Thubten Zopa is there, but you do not see Thubten Zopa as merely labeled, you see Thubten Zopa as *not* merely labeled. That perception, that way of appearing, is itself intuitively believing truly existent Lama Zopa.

It is similar to when you see objects in a dream. They are merely projected by the hallucinating mind, but we do not perceive them that way. We hallucinate everything, subject, action, and object, as truly existent. We do not know we are hallucinating, and when we see these different objects, then anger, attachment, jealousy, pride, and so on arise. Then with these unsubdued minds we create virtuous and non-virtuous actions—karma.

Karma leaves a potential ability on the consciousness, like planting a seed in a field. With respect to this life's twelve links, this life's aggregates: at the time of death in one's last life, *craving* and *grasping* arose—clinging to the old body and grasping to find a human body in the future. The ability left on the consciousness, strengthened by the ignorance clinging to the I as truly existent, is made ready to ripen by craving and grasping, ready to receive this body—*that* is becoming.

Thus, the ignorance holding the I as truly existent while the I is really empty of true existence, and craving and grasping are delusions. The karma produced by ignorance and becoming are *action*. So—delusion and action—these are the causes that have created these aggregates, just as a seed causes a plant. The physical cause of the physical body is the egg and sperm of the parents. The principal cause, which is formless, the cause that puts the consciousness and body together, the compounds, is delusion and karma. So now you understand *formation*. All these explanations of true existence are about formation. In the teachings it is always explained like this and in Tibetan it is very easy to understand: *zag che nyer len gyi phung po*, the “contaminated aggregates of attachment.” Understanding the meaning of this is very effective for the mind. It gives the whole idea of how this is in the nature of suffering, just from the title, *zag che*—contaminated. These aggregates are contaminated with the seed of the unsubdued mind.

Because our minds are thus contaminated, even though we are smiling now, very relaxed and nice looking, if someone were suddenly to say something nasty or blame us or show us disrespect, the flame of anger would burn in our mind, and our beautiful face would become very red. Or you may not feel attachment now, but it can arise suddenly, strongly, without any effort.

So, “contaminated” means having the seed of the unsubdued mind. The aggregates of craving and attachment are like the fire that comes from wood—they come from their principal cause, attachment. Thus “contaminated aggregates of attachment” gives the whole picture, the complete understanding of how this is samsara, how this is the nature of suffering—just this phrase can give us full understanding. It is caused by delusion and karma, attachment and karma; it is in the nature of suffering; not free, but under the control of delusion and karma because it is contaminated by the seed of delusion. Also delusions arise constantly, and without freedom, without choice, the mind and body experience various sufferings. The formation, these aggregates formed by delusion and karma, is the base for the suffering of change and the suffering of suffering, which arise from it as water bubbles from a lake, and thus, these aggregates encompass the three sufferings. This is how Lama Tsongkhapa explained the meaning of pervasive suffering.

We can also understand it this way: from your head to your feet, all of you is under the control of delusion and karma, pervaded by it. Whichever of the six realms you are born in, all your aggregates are completely controlled by delusion and karma. These aggregates themselves are the suffering of pervasive formation, in all six realms. If we are completely liberated from this suffering then that is the end of our experience of the suffering of change and the suffering of suffering. As long as you are not free from this fundamental pervasive suffering, you will sooner or later experience the other two. Even

though you experience pleasure, you experience the suffering of change—temporal pleasure is the suffering of change. Even if you feel indifferent, it is still suffering. Just having the contaminated aggregates of attachment itself is suffering.

As long as we are not free from them, whatever lifestyle we live, whether in a city, on a mountain, with people or alone, rich or poor, we constantly experience the suffering of pervasive formation. When we feel this is unbearable, we do not find the slightest attraction for samsara, not even for a second. Then think of other sentient beings and how they experience samsaric suffering. You will feel great compassion for them. In this way you are able to generate bodhichitta. And the more you practice the good heart, cherishing others and renouncing yourself, the more you can protect karma.

**Student:** Could you explain divine pride? I do not know exactly what it means.

**Rinpoche:** You generate yourself as a deity, then you think “This is the deity.” You do not visualize your physical body, made up of blood, flesh, and bone and covered by skin, you do not visualize this as Maitreya Buddha and then think, “I am Maitreya Buddha.”

First you create the pure base through meditation. In Kriya tantra there is a practice to purify yourself before generating as a deity. You enter yourself in shunyata, in emptiness only. Then the merit field—Maitreya Buddha or Chenrezig or whatever—is absorbed into your own heart. The absolute nature of your own mind becomes one with that of Maitreya’s holy mind. Meditate like this. At the end, that pure base manifests in a golden-colored holy body in the nature of light, with one face, two arms, and sitting in that position on the throne. That is called Maitreya Buddha; he is labeled on that pure base. Then think “I am Maitreya Buddha.” After having created the pure base, then on that I am labeled Maitreya Buddha.

At the moment, you label the I on an impure base, on the impure aggregates. Every time we think I, we label it on that base. When we become Maitreya Buddha, however, the two obscurations that have temporarily prevented us from seeing all existence get completely removed. When the continuation of the present consciousness becomes pure of the two obscurations, there are no impure aggregates, no impure body—all are purified. That pure mind becomes Maitreya Buddha’s holy mind, the dharmakaya, and that pure form becomes his holy body, the rupakaya.

If you have meditated, what manifests as Chenrezig, Tara, Maitreya Buddha? It is not these gross aggregates, not the gross body and mind. The subtle body and subtle mind are the main material, as in the death process.

So by completing the path to omniscient mind, the path of remedy, the consciousness as well as the other aggregates get completely purified. Achieving this state is the unification of the holy body and holy mind; it is enlightenment. You must realize the three principles of the path, then the tantra path, the path of Secret Mantra. If you want details of the process, if you want it scientifically proven, you must study, take a Maha-anuttarayoga initiation, and listen to the commentaries. Through Maha-anuttarayoga tantra you will be able to understand the gross and subtle mind and bodies, and even the details of basic, ordinary evolution of mind. You will also find complete information on how to become enlightened, how your body, speech, and mind become the deity’s vajra body, speech, and mind. But details cannot really be explained without first receiving the Maha-anuttarayoga initiation. Also, if

a lama explains these things without first thoroughly checking the one who takes the initiation, he breaks the precept of not revealing the secrets.

In tantra what is important, how perfect the meditation is, depends on how much clarity and divine pride there is. You label I on that pure base and that I is Maitreya Buddha. This is not the pride of the unsubdued mind, for example, being richer than others, better educated, feeling superior. That is not peaceful. But when you think “I am Maitreya Buddha,” the nature of that thought is great peace and calm. So thinking “I am Maitreya Buddha” on the pure basis, that is called holding divine pride.

It is said in the outlines of the lam-rim meditations that faith in karma is the root of all happiness and perfections. Actually, how much someone is able to practice Dharma depends on this. But it is very difficult to have faith in karma.

In the sutras Buddha explained many stories of sentient beings’ karmas. When he traveled in India his disciples would ask him, “Why is that sentient being suffering so much?” “Because such and such a karmic cause was created before.” Or, “Why does this one have such a good life?” “Because a virtuous action was created before in such and such a time.” Able to generate the path, create much merit, and do extensive works for others, Buddha Shakyamuni is omniscient, there is not the slightest ignorance, no resistance to understanding karma, action and result. His omniscient mind sees each sentient being and their karma of the three times.

Even though Buddha gave many explanations of karma, it is still difficult to have faith in it. There may be some faith, but when you really check, you still ask, “How is this possible? How can it happen?” You get a shock when you read about the cause of each different life, or the results certain sentient beings experience in their life.

The reason why it is difficult to have faith in karma is that one has not accumulated merit, the cause of faith, in the past. Faith is fundamental to practicing Dharma, so one should make many prayers to the field of merit, the holy object. Then you will have understanding faith in karma and will be able to protect it well.

The ten virtuous actions are not the only good karmas there are, and the ten non-virtuous actions are not the only negative karmas. They are simply basic examples.

The complete action of killing consists of four parts: the base which is to be killed, the thought, the action, and the goal. The thought is the unsubdued mind: ignorance, anger, or attachment.

**Student:** If a soldier kills because he was ordered to, then what about karma?

**Rinpoche:** It still creates negative karma. There is the thought to kill, maybe for his job, his living. He carries out another person’s orders. By doing that job he gets money for the happiness of his life. So the motive is a kind of attachment. There doesn’t have to be anger to kill.

### *The karmic results of the ten non-virtuous actions*

The complete action of **killing** has four suffering results: the ripening aspect, experiencing the result similar to the cause, creating the result similar to the cause, and the possessed result.

The ripening aspect is rebirth in one of the lower realms, depending on how heavy the action is. Rebirth in the hell realms is very heavy. When sentient beings have finished the ripening result in these realms, then, even after being born in an upper realm, they will experience the result similar to the cause.

Experiencing the result similar to the cause of killing is to have a very short life. For example, one may be conceived in the mother's womb, but a few minutes later the consciousness will leave, or one may be aborted or not be born alive, or one may die as a baby and not have time to grow up, or one may get killed by others. The cause of all this is shortening the life of others in the past.

Many Buddhists ask lamas or astrologers if there are hindrances to their lives, the danger of untimely death, but one very effective method to avoid these hindrances is to save the lives of others. So you can go to a butcher and buy animals or fish that are going to be killed and take care of them. Perhaps you can even save human beings from execution. And in everyday life, if we see even the tiniest creature being attacked, a worm attacked by ants or a fly caught by a spider, whatever the creature, we should protect its life.

You do not have to generate the conscious motivation, "I want to live long, so I'll save this being's life." Protecting others from harm automatically becomes a cause for longevity in this and future lives.

Usually when we see a cat attacking a mouse, we care more for the cat's pleasure than the life of the mouse. It is your cat, and you have partial love for it. Similarly, if you have a dog, you care more for its happiness than that of its fleas, even though the dog is one and the fleas are many. But all sentient beings, the cat, the mouse, the dog, the fleas, are all the same in desiring happiness and not desiring suffering. So there is no reason why you should give love and help to one sentient being and harm another. Also, from a logical point of view, the beings that are more numerous are more important.

It is also good to imagine that you are that sentient being, very pitiful and powerless. Then think how you would feel if you were attacked by a tiger, cats with long nails going through your body.

**Student:** What if I get attacked by a dog? What should I do?

**Rinpoche:** You do what you can. If you are not brave enough to practice charity, giving yourself to the other being, then at least give as little harm as possible.

**Student:** Isn't there also the idea of the middle path? In Dharamsala I was bitten by bugs and had bites all over my body, but we cannot kill bugs.

**Rinpoche:** And then?

**Student:** Isn't there a middle path?

**Rinpoche:** If one is able to practice, these are not problems. The more bites, the happier the mind. You are very pleased that you can be useful to them, even for their temporal pleasure. When you have great loving thought or compassion, that itself becomes a protection. Meditators in Tibet who renounced themselves and cherished others, who generated bodhichitta—Milarepa, for example—they

made charity of their own body to bugs. Even when their own clothes were full of bugs, they would take bugs from other people's clothes and put them on their own body.

Geshe Rabten, my very kind root guru who first explained Dharma to me, has a disciple, Geshe Pemba. He is a monk and a cook; but he does not appear to understand anything, and I don't think he is a very good cook! But what he does is to recite *om mani padme hum*, the Chenrezig mantra, all day. In fact, he is a great bodhisattva, a great meditator. He turns the prayer wheels, listens to teachings, and recites mantras. This is what he does all day. When he gets bugs in his clothes, he moves them to a better place on his body. It is unbearable for bugs to be in a cold place. If you can practice like this, it is excellent. It is a great purification and a bodhisattva's action similar to the perfection of charity, the cause of omniscient mind. When you dedicate yourself like this, it is very effective, very good for the mind. You feel great happiness when bugs take your blood.

But if you cannot do this practice of charity, try to do as little harm as possible when you remove the bugs from your clothing.

The third suffering result is creating the result similar to the cause. Even if you are born as a human being, you harm or kill others again. You can see many children with an urge to kill, when they see birds, for example. It is not something they have learned from their parents. In the West you call it instinct. It is the action similar to the previous cause.

The fourth result, the possessed result of killing, is the place where you live. It is deserted, dirty, very upsetting, dusty, full of danger, fighting, disease, and harmful creatures.

The worst result is creating the result similar to the cause. You again kill others and that again becomes a complete non-virtuous action, the cause of a further four suffering results, and so when you are born in the upper realms again, you experience this urge again and again.

Now for the opposite, avoiding killing. Just not killing is not the same as avoiding killing. Trees and rocks do not kill, but they do not receive the virtue of avoiding killing. Avoiding killing is by knowing the suffering results of killing, and through fearing these you abstain and renounce the non-virtue of killing.

The complete virtuous action of avoiding killing has four results: rebirth in the upper realms is the ripening aspect; having a long life is experiencing the result similar to the cause; after taking a human life again, practicing pure morality and avoiding killing is creating the result similar to the cause; and living in a magnificent place where there is not much harm to life, not having many dangerous diseases and so on, this is the possessed result.

The complete non-virtuous action of **stealing** also has the four suffering results. You experience the ripening result in the three lower realms; after being born as a human being, you experience the result similar to the cause: poverty, poverty in enjoyments. Sometimes you see people who work hard for many years, day and night, but they have the same difficulties all the time and remain poor. Or even when they succeed in business and have material possessions, they soon get robbed. This is experiencing the result similar to the cause.

Creating the result similar to the cause is stealing again in this life. How often do some people get punished, put in prison, and again they steal.

The possessed result is to live in a place where there are many droughts, or where the crops fail or are damaged or completely destroyed by hail, mice, or insects. So there is no chance to enjoy life. Similarly with clothing—it gets destroyed by worms or mice. There are also many robbers about. You can see that there are many places in the world where there are droughts. There was one in England some years ago. The water had to be brought from other countries by trucks, especially in the south of Wales. In hotels people were not allowed to have showers; they were only allowed to use the water to drink. So you can see it can happen anywhere.

Now let us look at avoiding stealing. As with avoiding killing, there are four results. Being in a place where there are perfect enjoyments, having rain in time and good harvests, not being disturbed by insects or hailstorms and so on, and being able to enjoy and have possessions now is the result of the past good karma of avoiding stealing.

Then **sexual misconduct**, especially with one of the poisonous minds. Again, you experience the ripening aspect in the lower realms; the result similar to the cause in the human realm—disharmony. Even if there are only two people living in a house, they are always quarreling, day and night. Like a daily practice—daily practice to achieve a lower realm. Just as others do daily practice to achieve enlightenment, they do the opposite. The wife cannot control her husband, and he cannot control her; or she cannot keep him and he cannot keep her. One always loses the partner. So this is the result similar to the cause.

Then creating the result similar to the cause. As a human being you again do sexual misconduct with others and find it extremely difficult to stop. This is because of previous karma. The possessed result is being born in a dirty, muddy place. There is much harm there. Think of the advantages of avoiding sexual misconduct, the opposite of the four suffering results.

Now, the negative action of **telling lies**. After finishing the ripening result in the lower realms, as a human being one is always cheated by others. They always lie to you, and you have a confused, unhappy life. This is experiencing the result similar to the cause. Again in that life you tell lies; it is difficult to stop. Some people lie compulsively. Also, you are born in a place where there are a lot of people always cheating and where there is a lot of harm.

We should think of the advantages of avoiding the karma of lying. Imagine the opposites of the four suffering results.

The non-virtuous action of **slander**. The ripening result is in the lower realm; in the human realm other people slander you, they cause disharmony between you and your parents and so on. They may be jealous of you and so cause disunity. The possessed result is that the place where you live is full of thorns, and is ugly and uninteresting; it is uneven—you always have to climb up and down.

Again for the advantages of avoiding slander, think of the opposites of the suffering results.

Now, **gossiping**. After the lower realms, in the human realm your speech has no power. Others do not

listen, do not trust what you say. Again you do the same thing, talking about unnecessary things out of the poisonous mind. The place is an ugly, uninteresting one.

Then, **speaking harshly**. This is easy to understand: it is similar to gossiping. The possessed result is a place full of thorns and rocks where there is nothing beautiful.

Now the three non-virtuous actions of mind.

**Covetousness**. This is attachment, and also has the four suffering results.

Experiencing the result similar to the cause is that you do not get what you want. For example, you want to buy some particular material, but when you go to the shop someone has already bought it, or you buy it and it gets spoiled after a short while. You do not become successful in what you do. The possessed result is that things degenerate where you live. Water becomes scarce or food loses its nutritional value, so there is less enjoyment in this way.

**Ill will**, or malice, has four suffering results. It is easy to understand.

**Heresy**. Experiencing the result similar to the cause is ignorance—it is very difficult to understand Dharma. However much it is explained to you with logical reasons, it is difficult to understand the words of Dharma or to have faith in the Triple Gem. It is also very difficult to realize shunyata, emptiness. And again in this life you do the same thing—heresy towards karma and the Triple Gem. The place where you live has no treasures, no more gold or production now, although there used to be a lot. Or you do not find any now, but people who live there after you find a lot of treasures. This has to do with individual karma.

These ten non-virtuous actions are basic examples of karma. Karma is definite. Whatever we have created, virtue or non-virtue, great or small action, it definitely brings its own result. Non-virtue definitely brings its own result unless it is purified. Similarly, virtue definitely brings its own result unless destroyed by anger or heresy.

In the case of any action, even though it is only one action, even a small one, the result is expandable, much more than the grains of rice that come from one grain. By planting one tiny seed, see how a big tree grows, how many branches and leaves it has, how much fruit it bears.

The result of the inner action, karma, is much more than this.

You do not experience karma without having created the cause yourself. Once created, karma is never lost. For example, there was a lady in Washington who wanted to throw herself from the top of the highest building because she was so unhappy. She jumped but what she had planned did not happen. She did not fall down and die. When she jumped, the wind pushed her body, and her legs went through the window of the floor below. The glass broke and her body came through the window. What was supposed to happen normally did not happen. Because everything depends on karma, she did not fall and die that time. She did not have the karma to die then, she had the karma to survive and was blown into that room. This was the result of an action in the past.

Similarly in business. No matter how smart you are, how many funds you have, there is no profit. You fail in doing business. This is because you have not created the cause, the virtue to make a profit. Because you created the karma to lose, you experience the result, loss. It is like this. All our life has to do with karma.

### *The four opponent powers*

By doing confession we can stop negative karma before experiencing it—we can stop the four suffering results. Confession should be perfected with these four powers: the power of the object, the power of repentance, the power of the remedy, and the power of vowing not to do it again.

The first, **the power of the object**, is refuge and bodhichitta. We create negative karma either in relationship with sentient beings or with holy objects, the Triple Gem. So we purify the karma by depending on these objects just as a person who falls on the ground gets up from it again by depending on it. This is the power of the object. It stops mainly the first suffering result of karma, the ripening result.

The second is **the power of repentance**. This is the most important one when you confess. Even if you killed a bug, if you feel upset afterwards or feel strong repentance from the heart, your negative karma will get weaker. Repentance weakens the power of negative karma and mainly stops one from experiencing the result similar to the cause.

The third is **the power of the remedy**. There are about six different practices that can be done for remedy, such as reciting the mantras of Vajrasattva, Shakyamuni Buddha, Maitreya, Chenrezig, and so on; making paintings of Buddhas or making statues; reading scriptures like the Prajnaparamita; meditating on shunyata; meditating on bodhichitta, and so on. The power of remedy mainly stops the possessed aspect result.

The fourth power, that of **vowing not to commit the vice again**, particularly stops creating the result similar to the cause.

By knowing these, we know how to do confession and we realize how important it is to practice each one. By practicing these methods all the negative karmas are either purified—the result is then not experienced—or the heavy result one would have to experience for many lifetimes gets experienced in this life by having a disease or even just a fearful dream.

The conclusion is extremely important. Since we wish even the smallest happiness, a small virtue such as making an offering to the Triple Gem is a cause that will bring much benefit. We should try to practice small benefits even if we cannot do great ones. If we have the opportunity to benefit sentient beings, give help to creatures, we should take it. So make offerings to the Triple Gem and do small benefits for others. Practice like this without being careless.

So I think I will stop here. During these two days—I remember only two days—we have accumulated much merit by doing meditation, generating the motivation of bodhichitta, listening to the teachings, reciting mantras, saying prayers. This merit is a cause of omniscient mind and a cause of happiness in many future lives. You have had the opportunity to listen to the teachings of Lama Yeshe and myself. I do not understand much Dharma, but am able to say a few words in your ear.

All this is due to His Holiness the Dalai Lama's great compassion. Without him we would not have this opportunity of coming to the West, and you would not have the opportunity to understand Dharma, to create merit, to understand what is right and wrong, virtue and non-virtue. All the understanding we have, all the merit we have created are the holy actions of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and are particularly due to Lama Yeshe's kindness. Therefore we should dedicate our merits to their long life and their holy wishes to work for sentient beings without hindrances.

Sentient beings' happiness depends on the teachings. Therefore, please dedicate the merits also so that the teachings may exist a long time, particularly in Holland; that the uncorrupted, pure teachings of the Buddha, the sutra and tantra, spread well in Holland.

Also if you had not organized the Maitreya Institute, made plans, and put much effort and hard work into it, we would not have been able to accumulate all this merit. So let us dedicate our merit to all sentient beings, particularly the merit of the organizers, Jan-Paul, Margot, and Paula and the many others who worked hard here. Let us dedicate it so that the center may be highly beneficial, that through it the pure teachings of sutra and tantra may spread in the minds of all beings; that anybody who comes to the center or steps over its land, that all their wrong views and unsubdued minds immediately get pacified and that compassion and the loving thought of bodhichitta naturally rise; that everybody who works here may have a long life and that all their activities become Dharma and that all their Dharma wishes become successful.

I would like to thank everybody. For people who work in the center the motive is extremely important. Even if you do not work for the center, even if you not meditate, if you do your own work, the motive is very important. Have a good heart as much as possible. Then keep sentient beings in your heart and the teachings from where they receive their happiness—keep this in your heart and then do the work for them. That is very good. If you do this day and night everything you do becomes Dharma. The work you do itself becomes working for His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who is only concerned for the happiness of others. Working for Lama Yeshe is working for His Holiness, is service to all the buddhas of the three times. In this way, keeping the guru in your heart, you fulfill his wishes and your own—it is the best method to become enlightened quickly.

In the Kalachakra teachings it is said: "One does not receive enlightenment even if one saves the lives of billions of sentient beings, or makes offerings to the Triple Gem in all the three times eons. But if with devotion one pleases the guru, who is an ocean of qualities, one will achieve general and sublime realizations in this life." This is something to keep in mind.

*Colophon:*

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# *Karma and Emptiness*

*by Lama Thubten Yeshe*

You are all interested in Dharma and meditation. But what is Dharma, and how do we meditate? Basically, Dharma is anything that causes our delusions, our disturbing thoughts, to subside; it is anything that brings us peace of mind and liberation from confusion and suffering.

Buddhadharma teaches methods to purify the mind of negativities and to develop our human potential to the fullest. Some of these methods, such as not harming others, generating compassion and practising generosity, are shared by other philosophical and religious traditions. Other methods are uniquely buddhist. Two of these, karma and emptiness, are the heart of Dharma. Karma is the law of cause and effect, and emptiness is the ultimate nature of reality, devoid of all misconceptions.

Let us begin with karma. Every single action performed by body, speech or mind eventually produces a specific reaction. For example, an unwholesome attitude will definitely culminate in problems and suffering, while a wholesome, clean, clear mind always brings happiness.

We have all noticed that when our mind is full of confusion everything we say comes out in a confused way. This illustrates the evolutionary link existing between all actions and their consequences. Although this link seems obvious when analysed, it is not always apparent.

When we catch ourselves saying something senseless or nasty we are apt to say, 'Oh, I don't know why I said that; it just came out that way.' To assume that there is no particular reason for our uncontrolled actions is a mistake. Not one word has ever been uttered that was not motivated by either a positive or negative attitude.

Understanding the karmic connection between causes and effects will give us the energy to change ourselves. Nevertheless, it is essential to approach our practice with patience and wisdom. Changing our habitual behaviour is not easy. It is not like making instant coffee; it takes time. Change occurs gradually because the various negative attitudes and delusions have different degrees of strength. Therefore each mental problem must be treated according to its particular nature, be it extremely subtle and deeply embedded in our consciousness, or quite evident and within reach. The logical approach is to concentrate first on purifying gross negativities before attempting to root out the deeper subtle ones.

The important point is that removing the more obvious faults is something we can do *now*. It is much wiser to work in an area where success is possible rather than to reach for the impossible.

For example, when washing a dirty rag it is impossible to remove the stains and odors from it immediately.

The initial washing takes care of the first layer of dirt but only after it is washed and wrung out two or three times are all the stains finally removed. The root delusions—attachment, anger and ignorance—are the stains polluting our mind and, of these, ignorance of reality is the most deeply ingrained and the most difficult to remove. Cleansing the mind is an evolutionary process and the only way to ensure positive change is to work on the gross delusions now and tackle the more subtle ones later.

Throughout your Dharma practice you must never push yourself, but on the contrary you should try to be at ease and to do only what is possible at the moment. If you push yourself beyond your capacity you may shock your entire nervous system, thus producing an extremely negative reaction; you may even give up trying to deal with your delusions altogether.

Even though we are adults we have the minds of children. A child's mind requires especially tender care; we need great skill and patience to deal with it, It cannot endure being squeezed, or pushed beyond its limits. Yet many spiritual seekers are perfectionists whose egos impel them to try and advance too quickly. They are severe and ruthless towards themselves, and end up in a state of tension. They become frustrated and angry with themselves and everyone around them. Of course it is good to strive for perfection, but we must be practical. It is best to go by degrees, step by step. Otherwise you are likely to jump in too quickly and break your leg. To succeed in your Dharma practice it is best to be at ease, relaxed and down-to-earth, to adjust the intensity of your practice day by day according to your situation.

Being practical includes being open to adapting your practice to external conditions. For instance in this meditation hall we are sitting together cross-legged on oriental rugs, surrounded by beautiful statues and paintings of the buddhas; incense smoke fills the air and candles burn on the altar. Naturally it is easy to meditate in such a positive atmosphere.

However, if you find yourself in another environment, such as in a train or on a 'plane, this does not give you an excuse for abandoning your practice. Just because there are no visible images of the buddhas you feel that Buddha is not there. The whole place seems to lack spirituality and you feel as if you are drown-ing in samsara. Or perhaps at home your family will not allow you to have an altar, or images of the enlightened beings visibly displayed. And because you know how much it would upset them you refrain from saying your prayers out aloud. Then thinking back nostalgically to that peaceful meditation hall, you think, 'Now it seems as though I'm in a different world. No pictures of the spiritual teachers or buddhas, no candles or incense, and I can't chant my prayers. How can I possibly practise Dharma?'

Such dissatisfied thoughts are examples of the dualistic mind at work. You have managed to rationalize your way out of doing your meditations, not realiz-ing that the beauty of the graduated path to enlightenment is that it explains how to meditate in any environment—whether eating, drinking, talking, traveling, or whatever. Religious paraphernalia are useful of course, but not absolutely essential to the practice. By the way, I find the bathroom an excellent place to have a quiet, undisturbed meditation away from noise and confusion. It is a good place for taking refuge.

Actually it is possible to find a Dharma teaching in everything we see—television, films, newspapers, the wind blowing, the movements of the ocean or the changing of the seasons. If we observe the world from the Dharma viewpoint we can gain a profound understanding of reality, including imper-

manence and the law of cause and effect. 'All these things are changing, just as I am.' We usually walk about in a dream, unaware of the changes and movements going on around us. Either that, or we take them for granted. It is easy to dismiss what television and movies are trying to show as mere fantasies. Such prejudices only increase our ignorance and close the door to wisdom. If, on the other hand, we open our wisdom eye and let the universe reveal its reality, we can increase our knowledge and practise Dharma any time and anywhere.

By allowing everything we see to remind us that the law of cause and effect governs all change, that each transformation has a definite reason, we shall gradually understand karma. We will stop assuming that our experiences come to us readymade, like instant coffee. Sensitivity to our nervous system's constant state of flux will become more acute as we watch how our mind and body change again and again.

Once a deep understanding of cause and effect arises within us, and we see that every single action has a definite consequence, we shall realize how important it is to be conscientious about everything we do. Awareness of karma brings spontaneous awareness of our own behaviour. By realizing that positive actions lead inevitably to happiness and negative actions to suffering, we become more discriminating and more conscious of the nature of our own activity. If the law of cause and effect does not guide our life, however, there is no Dharma practice, and without such practice only ignorance and suffering remain.

Sustained conscious awareness of our physical, verbal and mental actions from the moment of waking to the moment of falling asleep at night is more profound and penetrating than one hour's meditation every morning. This makes sense; an hour's meditation is nothing compared to a day's practice, and if we consider the enormous benefits of even one day's awareness of karma we can guard against the apathy and depression that often effect our practice.

One reason for stressing the value of watching our karma is that westerners are always so interested in meditation. They love meditation, but they are not so happy when they are offered teachings on karma. They complain that karma is too heavy. But we must not give way to anxiety. Our body, speech and mind are *already* heavy; it does not take the teachings to make them heavy; we *are* heavy.

I am not implying that meditation is unimportant, but even if we have trouble doing formal meditation, we can still practise Dharma perfectly well. Meditation then means always being watchful of our actions and cultivating an attitude of loving kindness rather than one of exploitation. This is meditation. In fact, in view of our present level of spiritual development, this sort of approach to our practice can be even more precise and realistic than meditation on profound tantric subjects.

If we can awaken to the immediate moment we have achieved something important. Take the present moment. We are all physically here in this room, but our minds are somewhere else, most likely thinking about the future. "After this meditation course, I'll ...." We are dreaming about something else while the present moment is slipping by. Even as I am talking to you my mind is thinking of Tibet. I am not really with you.

There is a powerful Dharma method for bringing the mind into the present. Each morning, as soon as you wake up, you should think in this way: "How fortunate I am to be still alive, and a human being rather than a dog or a chicken. With this human body and mind I have the power to understand my

mind and to practise Dharma. This is something that animals cannot possibly do. So I dedicate this day to the attainment of enlightenment. In order to reach that goal quickly I must avoid impure actions, and emanate a positive vibration towards others.” The power of this dedication will help to keep your awareness and control at peak level throughout the whole day.

Many people spend their time thinking about what they want to do tomorrow, in twenty-five years, or for the rest of their lives. This is foolish. The events that will happen in twenty-five years’ time are nothing but the result of a process of transformation going on from moment to moment—even *now*. The present moment evolves into the following one, which changes into the next one. Today changes into tomorrow, tomorrow into next week, next year and so on. If the process of evolution did *not* depend on events taking place at this very moment, there would be nothing happening twenty-five years from now.

Although the future depends on the present, it is the human ego’s nature to worry about the future instead of how to act *now*. When you meditate, meditate. When you eat, eat. When you cook, cook. Try to replace your fantasies about the future with awareness of the present moment. Only then are you being realistic. It is ridiculous to be overly concerned with what is going to happen in the future, since your projections about it are merely a product of your own hallucinating mind. Unfortunately, however, it is a common pastime to make concrete plans for the future. ‘I must be sure to have enough of this and plenty of that for the next few years.’ Perhaps you will die before the week is out. Worrying about the future is simply a waste of time and energy.

There are many people who do not believe in enlightenment because they have never met or seen an enlightened being. I would ask them, ‘Can you see tomorrow?’ If not, where do all the concrete conceptions that form the basis for all their future plans come from? They worry about what will happen in a future they cannot see, yet they do not accept enlightenment on the grounds that they cannot perceive it.

From the karmic viewpoint we *should* be concerned about the future, but our present concern is wrongly associated. The general confusion in relation to the future comes out in the kinds of questions often posed to lamas and priests:

‘When I die will I go to heaven or hell?’ ‘Do you think I’ll be happy next year?’

With Dharma wisdom bringing to mind the law of cause and effect, it is easy to predict what the future will bring. A positive, wholesome attitude today bodes well for tomorrow. If the mindstream is clean and clear today, then it is certain to be clean and clear tomorrow. So we *do* have the ability to predict the future: by using our own wisdom. We can see that living and dying happily or miserably depends on maintaining a positive or negative attitude from now on. It is needless to run to our spiritual teachers to ask them what is going to happen. We have the choice between dying the miserable death of a cow or experiencing the blissful death of a meditator. It depends on our karma. If the causes and conditions—milk, heat, and so on—come together in the evening, the result will be a bowlful of yoghurt next morning.

It is silly to ask exalted beings and clairvoyants if there is going to be a world-wide disaster during the next few years. Disasters are happening all the time. By understanding karma we can see that as this

solar system is the product of delusion, it is naturally besieged by wars and catastrophes. Therefore it is waste of energy to fret and worry about it. What we *should* worry about is keeping ourselves as peaceful, positive and aware as possible. That is all we can do.

Let us now turn to the other essential aspect of the Dharma, that of analyzing the ego. The ego is the mind that misunderstands the nature of the I, the self. We generally feel that the I exists somewhere vaguely within the body but our ordinary superficial mind never attempts to pinpoint it precisely. To gain a correct picture of reality, it is necessary to investigate deeply and try to find out exactly where this I resides. Otherwise we shall continue to be deluded, fooled by a view that, although superficial in some ways, still clings to a deep and concrete sense of self. When we make a thorough search for our self, looking throughout our entire body and nervous system, we can never find it. Sometimes we may think we have located it, but upon closer examination we can see that we have been deceived.

Although there is a specific technique for trying to locate the I, each one of us must approach our investigation in terms of the highly individual and instinctive way we habitually refer to ourselves. Some people have a vague sense that the I is in their chest; others feel it is in their head or stomach. When someone is troubled and holds his head between his hands, or slaps his forehead or clutches at his heart, this indicates where he most strongly feels his I at that moment. Each of these gestures is a symptom of the person's ego projecting a particular sense of self. My symptom, for instance, is to hide behind my monk's robes. The fact that we each have our own set of symptoms shows that the intuitive feeling of I is merely an interpretation of the ego. If the I were something substantial, there would be much more agreement as to what and where it is.

The self imagined by the ego has a mysterious, inaccessible nature. This is because there is no general agreement about its qualities or location; we each have our own feelings about it. This is precisely why each person must seek his imagined I *himself*. No one can do it for him. Yet even with the most precise introspective wisdom, seeking the I in every cell of the body, it remains impossible to locate. It is like a thief who sneaks up on us when we are not looking and hides when we turn around. When we are relaxed and not on guard, he advances on tip-toe like a demon ready to attack but if we chase him he suddenly disappears as if swallowed up by the earth. This is exactly how our devious mind deceives us. The ego's hallucination of a concrete, self-existent I is like the thief. We are certain it is there but as soon as we look for it, it disappears.

Our mind will go on cheating us until we finally catch it in the act! Meanwhile we shall continue to carry around a strong intuitive feeling of I, and a vague notion that it exists somewhere, probably in the body. The only way to arrest this fantasy is to observe the object of our hallucination, in this case our own self; examine it carefully and see what it *really* is. As the imagined I is like a sneak thief, it is necessary to use a special trick in order to capture it.

We must somehow bring the object in question into clear view for close inspection. Because the imagined I comes up most strongly in highly emotional states, we should take advantage of those situations, look at the obvious feeling of I that has arisen, and try to locate and identify it. Another effective technique is deliberately to evoke during meditation an emotional crisis in order to bring this feeling of I to the surface. In either case, the meditator must be extremely alert if he is to capture this image before it disappears. Through this practice he will eventually discover that the self he has always believed to exist has no basis at all. It was, and is, nothing more than a fantasy.

All our suffering and fears exist only because of our passive acceptance of the ego-projected illusory self. Because this self appears to exist concretely, it seems to be deeply involved in experiences of gain and loss and the accompanying feelings of depression and elation. This is, in fact, the basis of all our suffering.

At some point in his contemplations the practitioner clearly realizes that all his misery springs from an image projected by his own distorting mind, an image that has no basis in reality. At this point he has reached an indestructible state of mind, beyond all fear. When Tibetan meditators reached this level of realization they used a skilful technique for putting their new experience to the test. They imagined themselves involved in an extremely frightening or emotional situation and then watched their reactions. If no great sense of I fearing loss or pain arose in their minds, they could be certain of their inner achievements. This sort of experimentation is similar to the way ideas are tested in scientific studies. Here, however, the experiment is internal and very personal.

According to the philosophy of the great Indian teacher, Nagarjuna, the self that appears intuitively to our minds does not exist anywhere within the entire atomic structure of the body. This view is not to be confused with nihilism which asserts that nothing exists at all. What, then, *does* exist? The answer lies in Nagarjuna's philosophy of the middle way which denies the existence of the self fantasized by the ego, while asserting that of the dependently arising, relative self.

This is not simply some philosophical concept; I am not interested here in talking about philosophy. This is a practical method for discovering what is real and what is not. And if you look into this for yourselves you will see how your own ego imagines the existence of something that does not exist at all.

When a baby is born, the parents arbitrarily give a name to the little bubble that has suddenly appeared. They have no logical reason for choosing that specific name for that particular bubble. 'Do you like the name Christina?' 'Yes, I like it.' 'Good, then let's call her Christina.' It is not as if the mother and father can see that the baby's innermost self or consciousness belongs, by its very own nature, to a category that is always called 'Christina.' Or that something within that baby is just waiting to be called by its *real* name, 'Christina.' In light of Nagarjuna's philosophy, it is just a matter of a bubble appearing and then being called by a name.

The combination of word and bubble is Christina. But the ego is not satisfied with being just a bubble with a name. Therefore it confuses the issue by imagining that something else exists. 'I am more than just a bubble; I have my own existence apart from that.' The nature of the ego is to be dissatisfied, and it cleverly improves and beautifies its identity by fashioning it into shapes and colours of its own imagination. Just as it is never satisfied with any amount of wealth or beauty, neither is it happy with being merely a name and a bubble. It cannot accept simple reality: the way things actually are. For instance, now that I am in Spain I no longer like being Tibetan. I would rather be a handsome Spaniard with a nice moustache. Wherever I go I want to be something different. I cannot admit or accept who or what I am. It is incredible how unrealistic the ego is! its world is like plastic: pure imitation.

In reference to the ego's fantasy world, Buddha said, 'All is illusion.' To understand the true meaning of this statement, let us first see what is meant by the ego's world. Your world is all that you see, hear, smell, taste, feel and think; in other words it is made up of all your sense perceptions. Each person's ego

creates its own personal world. You are not living in my world; you are living in your own ego's illusory world. Yet when some people hear that all is illusion they mis-interpret it to mean that nothing matters. 'Fantastic! I can steal, drink, take drugs and hallucinate on LSD to my heart's content. Who cares? It's only an illusion anyway.'

There are various terms used in referring to the ultimate nature of reality. Sometimes it is called emptiness, since the true nature of all phenomena is empty, as opposed to the ego's imagination, which is full. Full of what? Full of concepts, expectations, anxieties and projections that have nothing to do with reality. Ultimately, all things are empty. Reality is also called voidness, voidness being the opposite of the solid, concrete world imagined by the ego. All phenomena, both samsaric and spiritual, are void by their very nature.

It is essential to eliminate the ego's basic misconception about reality, because this is the root of all suffering. The ego's view is debased and unrealistic, and produces a low opinion of oneself and of others. It underestimates our true potentialities and qualities, thereby creating a feeling of insecurity and defensiveness. Furthermore, with this sort of negative attitude we easily get involved in arguments and fights with one another. The ego is political by nature. If there were no ego, there would be no reason to quarrel.

The ego's misconceptions about reality also keeps us in bondage, whether it be the iron bondage of worldly existence or the golden bondage of a spiritual way of life. The iron bondage is our continual mental and physical suffering in the cycle of dissatisfied existence known as samsara, while the golden bondage is that of being enslaved to misconceptions and false philosophies.

Many philosophies have a good appearance, an attractive golden facade. However, no matter how respectable they might seem, these incorrect views still bind us to ignorance and suffering. The highest goal is to be free of *all* bondage. But I do not mean being free in the revolutionary sense. Maybe you think that this lama is trying to start another Spanish revolution! No, I am just trying to provoke a revolution in your minds.

*Colophon:*

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