

# **HOW TO PURIFY NEGATIVE KARMA WITH VAJRASATTVA IN THE CONTEXT OF THE FOUR OPPONENT POWERS**



**VAJRAYANA INSTITUTE  
SYDNEY, NSW  
MAY 18–20, 2012  
WITH VEN ROBINA COURTIN**



## *Contents*

1. There's Nothing Better than Purification	5
2. The Stages of the Path	9
3. Karma: Law of Cause and Effect	21
4. Unravelling Negative Emotions	27
5. Purification: Vajrasattva in the Context of the Four Opponent Powers	35
6. A Meditation on Emptiness	41

Produced in Sydney, NSW, for use by the students of FPMT's Vajrayana Insititute for a course with Ven Robina Courtin, May 18–20, 2012.

**vajrayana**

With gratitude to Wisdom Publications for the use of "Stages of the Path to Enlightenment," the editor's introduction of Lama's Yeshe's *Becoming the Compassion Buddha*; and "The Psychology of Tantra", an edited excerpt from various chapters of Lama Yeshe's *The Bliss of Inner Fire*.

**wisdompubs.org**

And to Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive for "The Illusory Nature of Things."

**lamayeshe.com**

Cover illustration of Buddha Vajrasattva, a statue at FPTM's Tushita Retreat Centre in Dharamsala, India, commissioned by Lama Zopa Rinpoche to be made in the aspect of Lama Thubten Yeshe.

# ***1. There's Nothing Better Than Purification***

***By Lama Zopa Rinpoche***

You see, what we're doing here, even if the Third World War that people talk about were happening, other than Vajrasattva practice, what else could you do? Even if the Third World War had broken out, there'd be no other way to spend your life than practicing Vajrasattva to purify yourself and benefit others. When you practice Vajrasattva you also purify others. Even in the face of nuclear danger, there's nothing better to do than practicing purification. The immediate thing to do is to practice purification...purifying not good karma but the other kind!

Even if you discover you have cancer—you go to a hospital for a check up and the doctor diagnoses cancer—there's nothing else to do but practice purification, to purify your mind of the causes of suffering rebirths, the negative karma that causes your consciousness to migrate into the lower realms. Even if you find out that you are terminally ill with cancer, AIDS or any other life-threatening disease, the immediate solution is to purify as much negative karma as you can, to ensure that your next rebirth will be a good one, so that in your next life you can continue to practice Dharma, to actualize the path to enlightenment.

When some people find out that they have cancer or AIDS, they go on vacation to some pure land like Goa, Tahiti or Rio de Janeiro—which I used to call Rio Degenerated, but I haven't been there for a while!— anyway, to some place that Westerners consider to be pure lands! But that doesn't help. That doesn't solve your problem; that doesn't heal your sickness or purify your negative karma. It just distracts your mind from the problem. Similarly,

drinking alcohol or taking other substances to suppress your fear, to not feel afraid, works for only a short time and is simply cheating yourself. Not only does getting intoxicated not solve your problem but it also leads to additional life problems. Therefore, even if you are going to die tomorrow, tonight, this hour, there's nothing else to do but purify your mind.

Besides benefiting yourself, to be successful in benefiting others, to have no obstacles for that, you also need to purify your mind. To free numberless sentient beings, the source of all your past, present and future happiness, including not only temporary happiness but also ultimate happiness—liberation from samsara and the great liberation of full enlightenment—to bring these numberless sentient beings to full enlightenment by yourself alone, you need to actualize the steps of the path to enlightenment. What interferes with your doing that is your negative karma, your defilements. Therefore, purification is very important; a key point in your practice. Even to liberate yourself forever from the oceans of samsaric suffering, the continuity of which has no beginning, you need to actualize the path that ceases the defilements, the cause of all suffering—karma and delusion, including the seed of delusion. Even for your own liberation from samsara, purification is the essential practice.

Pabongka Dechen Nyungpo advised that, out of meditation on that path and collecting merit and practicing purification, it is more important to spend time collecting merit and practicing purification than meditating.

Here, meditating means meditating on the path. Of course, practicing purification and collecting merit all involves meditation, but the specific meditation Pabongka Dechen Nyungpo was referring to was meditation on the path.

As we know from our own experience, we've tried a lot to meditate on the lam-rim, starting from guru devotion, the perfect

human rebirth and so forth, spending time on that, but not much has happened in our minds. Even though we've spent much time meditating on the lam-rim, there's been no real change in our hearts. The words on which we've been meditating remain just words and haven't connected with our hearts.

There's a gap between our hearts and the words we've been repeating or reciting during meditation. Sometimes, instead of getting transformed, our minds have even gotten worse.

You might have heard this example used by Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo. A rock might have been immersed under water for a long time, but it still remains very hard and solid. Similarly, our minds have been around Dharma for a long time, we've been reading and listening to teachings for ages, but nothing has happened; there's been no change in our minds. We have no realizations and our egos are just as big as they were before we met the Dharma, if not bigger! Perhaps our egos have become even more professional, more sophisticated, better qualified than they ever were! Anyway, I'm joking. However, if you've been meditating on the lam-rim for a long time and feel no benefit, your mistake is that you have not practiced enough purification or collected enough merit.

Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo also said in his lam-rim teachings that even if you have been doing many preliminary practices [of purification and collecting merit] along with your lam-rim meditation, if there's been no change in your mind, you need to examine your guru devotion.

There might be something wrong in your practice of that. You have to analyze what might have gone wrong in your guru devotion and fix any mistakes that you find by confessing past errors and correcting your future practice. If you fail to do this, you'll continue to collect the heaviest of negative karmas, the greatest obstacles to realization and the development of your

mind in the spiritual path, the path to enlightenment. If you are unaware of this and continue to do mainly preliminary practices and lam-rim meditation, not much will happen in your mind. What you are doing is good, but it won't transform your mind, won't bring you realizations.

Even in this case, therefore, purification is required. You have to recognize your mistakes and confess them, refrain from making them in future, and do whatever else should be done. In *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo said that of all the things you do in your life, the practice of purifying negativities and collecting merit is more important than meditation. This is what we are doing here, what's happening now.

Also, for old students who knew Lama Yeshe, who was kinder than the buddhas of the three times, doing Vajrasattva practice is the best offering we can make to Lama. He wrote these teachings on the Vajrasattva practice and tsog offering, put together the sadhanas and so forth, so our doing one of Lama's favorite practices would please him a lot and is repaying his kindness. Whether you're a direct or indirect disciple, it's the same.

## **MOTIVATION FOR VAJRASATTVA PRACTICE**

Think of all your non-virtuous actions—all actions you've done motivated by attachment clinging to this life, ignorance and anger; all actions that result in only suffering. Think of all the actions that became negative karma. Think especially of the actions done out of the attachment that clings to the pleasures of this life, to a good reputation and so forth.

Think of all the ten non-virtues—killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, slander, gossip, harsh speech (which means saying words that hurt another person), covetousness, ill will and heresy—you have committed in this life and numberless times in your past lives.

Think of the times that you have broken the pratimoksha, bodhisattva and tantric vows in this life, and even if you haven't broken them in this life, you have broken them numberless times in your past lives. Then think of the heaviest negative karmas, those created in relation to the guru through harming the guru's holy body, not following his advice, disturbing his holy mind, generating non-devotional thoughts, criticizing or giving up the guru. Even if you haven't done some of these things in this life, you have done them numberless times in your past lives.

"These negativities are obstacles that not only block my achievement of the realizations of the path to liberation and to enlightenment but also prevent my bringing every happiness to all sentient beings. On top of this, they cause me to be reborn again and again in samsara, especially the lower realms, where I have to suffer for an inconceivable number of eons. So, this is the only chance that I have to free myself from all these defilements and from the sufferings of samsara, especially the sufferings of the lower realms. This is my only opportunity to escape; this is my only opportunity to purify.

"Since death could come within this minute, I must purify all these negativities without even a second's delay. I must free all sentient beings, the source of all my past, present and future happiness, from all their sufferings and bring them to enlightenment. Therefore, I myself must achieve enlightenment as quickly as possible. It is for this reason that I am going to practice the Vajrasattva meditation-recitation."

*Teachings by Lama Zopa Rinpoche given at Land of Medicine Buddha, California, 1999.*





## 1. The Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

Before we practice Vajrasattva, which is from Lord Buddha's Tantrayana teachings, we need to have prepared our minds by studying and practicing the various stages of the path, lam-rim – a packaging of Buddha's teachings, unique to Tibet, based upon the elucidations of the eleventh-century Indian master Atisha.

In the lam-rim the essential points of Buddha's extensive explanations of psychology and philosophy are extracted and presented from A to Z in such a way that they can be internalized, experienced as something relevant to one's life – which is the point of all the teachings. As Lama Tsongkhapa, the fourteenth-century founder of the Gelug tradition, says in one of his poetic texts on the lam-rim, *Songs of Experience*, "All the teachings are to be taken as sound advice as there is no contradiction between scripture and practice."

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

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

In other words, by sitting still and thinking about Buddha's views again and again and from many angles in a clear and intelligent way with a finely focused mind – in other words, by analyzing them – we are

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

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

### THE PRELIMINARY CONTEMPLATIONS 1. NATURE OF MIND

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

According to Buddha, "mind" refers to the entire spectrum of our internal experiences: thoughts, feelings, emotions, tendencies, personality characteristics, unconscious, subconscious, intuition, spirit;

all of this is known as mind, or consciousness. It is not the brain, it's not physical. It does not come from anyone else, neither one's parents nor a superior being.

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

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

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

That is to say, we can develop all our good qualities – such as love, compassion, generosity, wisdom, and so forth – to a state of perfection beyond which we can't develop

them further. This state of perfection, Buddha says, is our natural state.

## 2. THE VIRTUOUS FRIEND

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

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

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

## 3. THIS PRECIOUS HUMAN REBIRTH

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

This human life is a rare thing to have. According to Buddha, human beings

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

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

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

#### **THE LOWEST SCOPE OF PRACTICE**

##### **4. DEATH AND IMPERMANENCE**

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

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

##### **5. THE SUFFERING OF THE LOWER REALMS**

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

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

##### **6. REFUGE IN BUDDHA, DHARMA, AND SANGHA**

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

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

## 7. KARMA

Now we actually begin to practice: we apply Buddha's instructions on how to avoid suffering. We learn to know what to practice and what to avoid. According to Buddha, everything we say, do, and think is a karma, an action, that will necessarily bring a reaction, a result, in the future. Every thought, word, and deed plants seeds in our minds that will necessarily ripen as fruit: negative actions ripen as suffering, positive actions ripen as happiness. There is nothing that living beings experience that isn't the result of what they've done before. With karma, there is no one sitting in judgment, punishing or rewarding us. Actions bring their own results; it just naturally happens, according to Buddha.

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

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

Purification is a psychological process. “We created negativity with our minds,” says Lama Yeshe, “and we purify it by

creating positivity.” The four opponent powers are regret, reliance, the antidote, and the promise.

First, we need to regret the harm we've done in the past to others, because we do not want any more suffering in the future; we're fed up with suffering. Second, we need to rely upon the Buddha and his methods; we also rely upon the sentient beings whom we have harmed by developing compassion for them, aspiring to become a Buddha as quickly as possible, since only then can we really know how to benefit them. Third, we apply the antidote in the form of a purification practice. This is like taking the medicine for our karmic illness – and Buddhism has a medicine cabinet full of medicines. Finally, we make the promise, the determination not to create these negative actions, not to do harm, again.

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

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

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

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

## THE MIDDLE SCOPE OF PRACTICE

### 8. SUFFERING: THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

At this point, we are now subdued enough, and aware enough, to delve more deeply into the way our mind works; to understand in a more sophisticated way Lord Buddha's model of the mind. We now truly become our own therapists, as Lama Yeshe would say. By familiarizing ourselves with the **four noble truths**, for example, we can fully develop renunciation.

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

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

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

The **causes of suffering** are two: karma, our past actions that set us up to meet this suffering situation, and the delusions, our present neurotic responses to our situation.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Contemplating the four noble truths again and again will eventually bring us to a genuine renunciation of suffering and its causes. As Lama Zopa Rinpoche says, we will have achieved renunciation when "just the thought of another moment of

attachment is so disgusting, it's like being in a septic tank."

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

### **THE GREAT SCOPE OF PRACTICE**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 9. EQUANIMITY

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

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

We need to argue with our ego's views, gradually seeing the illogic of them, discovering that in actual fact our friends, enemies, and strangers, from their point of

view, are completely equal in wanting to be happy.

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

We now meditate on the eleven techniques for developing bodhichitta.

## 10. ALL SENTIENT BEINGS HAVE BEEN MY MOTHER

Recognizing that our mind is beginningless, it follows that we've had countless previous lives in which we have been connected to all beings countless times. It's a matter of numbers. This contemplation is a practical way to expand our mind to encompass all others. In order to open my heart to these countless faceless beings, it helps to think about how they've all been my mother in the past. In the West, we might think this is meant to make us miserable, as we tend to think that our mothers are a main cause of our suffering. It's helpful, then, to contemplate the many ways in which our mother has been kind.

### 11a. CONTEMPLATING THE KINDNESS OF THE MOTHER

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

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

### **11b. CONTEMPLATING THE KINDNESS OF ALL BEINGS**

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

### **12. REPAYING THEIR KINDNESS**

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

### **13. SEEING OTHERS AND MYSELF AS EQUAL**

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

### **14. THE DISADVANTAGES OF CHERISHING MYSELF MORE THAN OTHERS**

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

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

### **15. THE ADVANTAGES OF CHERISHING OTHERS MORE THAN MYSELF**

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

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

### **16. TAKING UPON MYSELF THE SUFFERING OF OTHERS: DEVELOPING COMPASSION**

Using the meditation technique called *tong-len* (giving and taking), we visualize a suffering person or group of people in front of us. This technique can be done conjoined with the breath: when we breathe in, we imagine taking into ourselves the sufferings of others.

Pabongkha Rinpoche recommends that we start in the morning: after we rise, we visualize taking upon ourselves our own



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

### **17. GIVING MY HAPPINESS AND GOOD QUALITIES TO OTHERS: DEVELOPING LOVE**

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

### **18. GREAT COMPASSION**

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

### **19. BODHICHITTA**

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

We now practice the six perfections of the bodhisattva: generosity, morality, patience,

enthusiastic perseverance, meditation, and wisdom. The first four are accomplished in relation to sentient beings, the last two in one's meditation.

### **20. GENEROSITY**

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

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

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

### **21. MORALITY**

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

### **22. PATIENCE**

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

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

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

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

### **23. ENTHUSIASTIC PERSEVERANCE, OR JOYFUL EFFORT**

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

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

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

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

### **24. MEDITATION**

Calm abiding, or mental quiescence, is the state of mind of a person who has achieved single-pointed concentration in meditation. There are two kinds of meditation, and this is the accomplishment of the first kind: concentration meditation.

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

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

### **25. WISDOM**

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

This ignorance is not merely unawareness of what's actually happening but a state of mind that actively makes up its own

fantasies. It is impossible to see through the elaborate projections of ignorance with our usual gross conceptual level of mind; we need to access the microscope of our mind to do that, using the techniques of calm abiding.

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

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

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

So unbearable is the suffering of others, we will now happily embark upon the skillful practices of the Tantrayana, which

will enable us to very quickly become our real self – a Buddha .

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



## 4. Karma: the Law of Cause and Effect

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

Karma ripens in four ways:

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

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

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

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

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

mind, from the very moment it is planted, just like any seed, it will expand, get bigger. Even after a few days, it is huge, which means the fruits will be many.

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

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

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

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

karma. We can see how miraculous it is for good karma to ripen. So: killing causes a lower rebirth. It leaves imprints in the mind to keep doing the same action. It causes us to be killed or to die young.

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

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

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

And another aspect: I remember hearing in a teaching by Rinpoche that the Kalachakra Tantra describes the intimate relationship between external activity and internal karma. Because everything is caused by karma: that earthquake is the karmic result of the sentient beings who experience

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

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

You can see how understanding emptiness helps understand karma.

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

Each of our moments of mental experience in one day, for example, would

be labeled either pleasant, unpleasant or indifferent, wouldn't it? There are no other choices. We either have a happy experience, an unhappy one or an indifferent one, and every instant would be covered by these three. Well, the mental factor (as the various states of mind are called) that experiences pleasure, pain or indifference is called "feeling." In the teachings about mind, "feeling" is one of the so-called always-present mental factors: every moment we are always experiencing some feeling or other, and each of them is in response to contacting an object through our senses (and in response to thoughts, too)

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

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

Which shows us there are two things to do: 1. purify the karmic seeds, and 2. get rid of delusion. Practice consists of both, of course, but the main thing we must do, because karma is so extensive and deep and its ripening so unexpected, is work on getting rid of delusion. If we can do that then we can really purify karma quickly. So

there you are in prison, which in conventional terms (and karma is simply convention) gives rise to unpleasant feelings, is called suffering. This is due to your past karma and you can't have much control over that now. But how you deal with it, whether with delusion or with virtue, this is definitely within your control. And that's what really purifies. (Of course, delusion is due to karma too, but that's another angle on it.)

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

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

So, having met a person before causes us to meet them again. How we treated them in the past causes us to see them as friend or enemy now. And having attachment and aversion in the mind now perpetuates it. This is the wheel of samsara. Which is why it's vital to stop believing in our karmic appearances. Because two people have been kind to each other in the past, they see each other as nice now. But attachment is usually what instantly takes over after the arising of the pleasant feeling, and then it builds up its story, its fantasy about the beautiful person and is convinced that the person is the cause

of the pleasant feeling. The more pleasant the feeling, the stronger the attachment, which becomes the cause of suffering, not more pleasure, which is what the mind thinks. So, practice is to cut the karmic appearances, to stop believing in the real object out there existing in and of itself as a cause of our pleasure.

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

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

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

The Buddhist view could be, in a sense – big deal! Ants in their nature do not have the mental capacity to calculate technological

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

So, killing, for example: 1. ripened result: a lower rebirth, “thrown” by the karma ripening at the time of death, 2. the experience similar to the cause: being killed

or dying young or being sick or unhealthy; and 3. the action similar to the cause: the habit to kill; and 4. environmental result: food and medicine etc. that cause ill-health not health.

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

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

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

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

The Buddhist view is that the universes are made up of physical matter – which boils down to the four elements – and mental consciousnesses. And there is a very subtle

wind energy that is the basis of all the four elements, which is what all physical matter are made of. This subtle wind energy exists and then, due to the collective karma of sentient beings, it will begin to form into a particular universe, this one, let's say. This universe is the karmic creation – over eons and eons – of the collective karma of all of us who experience it. And it will eventually cease, again according to the collective karma of humans.

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

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

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

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

If we were all enlightened there would not be an atom of anything physical; there would not need to be because there would

be no suffering sentient beings, because universes are the abodes of sentient beings, created by their past karmic actions. (Sentient beings are ordinary, deluded beings, locked into the cycle of rebirth and suffering; enlightened beings are those who have gone beyond suffering and cyclic existence).

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

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

## 5. Unravelling Negative Emotions

If in tantra we learn to use and transform our delusions, then first we must understand what they are and how they function. And if we want to truly purify our minds of karmic imprints and practice Dharma, we need to distinguish between positive and negative states of mind.

The Buddhist view is that we've all got extraordinary potential to cultivate our minds, our consciousness. It's not some special gift that only some people have; it's innate within all of us.

But potential for what? Not something holy, like heaven in the sky, or next life, but potential to eliminate entirely fear, depression, anxiety, neediness, low self-esteem and to fully develop love, contentment, compassion, clarity, courage and the other qualities we want so badly. That's the meaning of nirvana.

It is something very earthy, so tasty, not something vague and mystical.

This potential exists, simply, in our minds, our consciousness. Therefore we need to learn how to access our own mind. Sounds simple enough, but it's not a job we're educated to do. It is not our habit to look inside, much less know deeply and well what's going on there.

### WHAT IS THE MIND?

From the Buddhist point of view, the word "mind" covers the entire spectrum of our inner experiences: thoughts, feelings and emotions, unconscious, sub-conscious, intuition, instinct, even what some might call soul – all of this is our consciousness. And this, as Lama Zopa Rinpoche puts it, is where the workshop is. This is what we have to become deeply familiar with in order to cultivate our marvelous potential.

Mainly what we're familiar with, what we run to in order to understand our lives, is the outside world, the past – the people and

events and objects – which we're convinced are the main cause of our happiness and suffering.

This is okay, and necessary, but not enough. Our parents, our genes, the boyfriend, the boss, the external environment – they are merely catalysts for our experiences, not the main event. The main thing is our own mind, our own emotions, characteristics, personality traits, tendencies: our own very being itself.

Investigating, unravelling, and transforming this is the Buddhist approach to psychological work.

### BEING OUR OWN THERAPIST

According to this model of the mind, psychological states fall into three categories: positive, negative, and neutral. Leaving aside the neutral, the positive states, which are at the core of our being, are necessarily the cause of our wellbeing and happiness, and the basis of our capacity to benefit others. The negative, which are not at the core of our being and thus can be removed, are necessarily the cause of our unhappiness and the basis of our harming others.

The key job, then, is to develop the skill to look inside, to be introspective, in a clear and disciplined way, so that we're then qualified to do the actual job of changing our emotions, of distinguishing between the positive and negative. To become our own therapist, in other words, as Lama Yeshe puts it.

Not an easy job. First of all, we're not educated to look into our minds. Second, we only notice we're angry, for example, when the words vomit out of the mouth; or that we're depressed when we can't get out of bed one morning. Third, even if we do look at our feelings, often we can't tell the difference between the positive and the negative: they're mixed together in a big soup of emotions – and a puréed soup at.

And one of the biggest obstacles is that we don't think we can change them: they're so concrete, so real: "I'm born this way, what can I do about it?" We so fiercely identify with the neuroses, believing that they're the real me. We even think they're physical. And anyway, who *wants* to look into their mind?

"It's not my fault, is it? I didn't ask to get born! This is how we all are! What am I supposed to do about it?"

Everything conspires against our doing this job.

### NEGATIVITY IS NOT INNATE

To give ourselves the confidence to even start, we need to think about how the negative states of mind are not at the core of our being, they do not define us, they are not innate, and thus can be removed. This flies in the face of our deeply held assumption – one that's reinforced by all contemporary models of the mind – that the positive and negative have equal status; that they're natural; they just are who we are. If you ask your therapist for methods to get rid of all anger, jealousy, attachment and the rest, they'll think you're insane!

We can be forgiven for thinking the negative, neurotic, unhappy emotions are at the core of our being: they certainly feel like it! We identify totally with them, follow them perfectly, truly believing this is who I really am. This is the irony of ego.

### NEGATIVE STATES OF MIND ARE DISTURBING AND DELUSIONAL

So, if the negative, neurotic emotions are the source of our pain and the positive ones the cause of our happiness, then we'd better learn to distinguish them. This is the very essence of the job our being our own therapist.

What are negative states of mind? They have two main characteristics (which the positive ones necessarily lack) and these are indicated by two commonly used synonyms: "disturbing emotions" and "delusions".

**Disturbing** Even though we can see that anger is disturbing to oneself – just look at an angry person: they're out of their mind! – we fiercely live in denial of it; or we deflect it, so determined are we to believe that the external catalyst is the main problem. My friends on death row in Kentucky told me that they receive visits from an old Catholic man who, after thirty years of grief and rage after his daughter was murdered, finally realized that the *main* reason for his suffering was his rage, his anger.

**Delusional** The other characteristic that these unhappy states of mind possess is that they're delusional. We'd be offended if someone accused of that, but that's exactly what Buddha is saying. The extent to which our minds are caught up in attachment, anger and the rest is the extent to which we are not in touch with reality. He's saying that we're all delusional, it's just a question of degree.

In other words, anger, attachment and the rest are concepts, *wrong* concepts. It seems like a joke to say that these powerful emotions are based in thoughts, but that's because we only notice them when they roar up to the surface as emotion.

Perhaps we can see the disturbing aspect of them, but rarely the delusional.

They are distorted assessments of the person or the event that we are attached to or angry with; they're elaborations, exaggerated stories, lies, misconceptions, fantasies, conceptual constructions, superstitions. As Rinpoche puts it, they decorate on top of what is already there layers upon layers of characteristics that are simply not there. Bad enough that we see things this way; the worst part is that we *believe* that these stories are true. This is what keeps us locked inside our own personal insane asylum.

Understanding this is the key to understanding our negative states of mind and, therefore, how to get rid of them.

### ATTACHMENT AND ANGER COME TOGETHER

The delusion that runs our lives is attachment. It's a profound dissatisfaction, neediness; a primordial sense that something is missing, of being bereft, lonely, cut off. It's just there, *all the time*, in the bones of our being.

And this is where aversion, anger, the exact opposite of attachment, comes into play. The split second that attachment is thwarted, doesn't get what it wants – and that's a thousand times a day – aversion arises. Then this is expressed externally as anger or internally as despair and depression. Attachment and aversion are utterly linked. Being a fantasy, attachment is

not sustainable; the bubble has to burst, and it has nowhere to go but aversion (or ignorance, which manifests as boredom, indifference, uncaring).

In our never-ending efforts to keep the panic at bay, we hungrily seek the right sounds, smells, tastes, feelings, thoughts, words, but the split second we don't get them, aversion arises, exploding outwards as anger or imploding inwards as depression, guilt, hopelessness, self-hate.

### DELUSIONS ARE LIARS

At the root of this, as Buddha calls it, is ignorance: *marigpa* in Tibetan: unawareness: a fundamental unawareness of how we actually exist. The function of this "ego-grasping", as it's called, is to isolate and concretize this universe-big sense of self, a deluded sense of "I", a totally fabricated sense of I, whose nature is fear: paranoid, dark, cut off, separate, alienated, and overwhelming.

This instinctive, pervasive sense of an independent, self-existent, real, solid, definite me-ness, totally pervades everything – there is not an instant when it is not there. It's at the deepest level of assumption, beneath everything. It is always there, informing everything we think and feel and say and do and experience.

And the main voice of this I is "I want." Why? The vivid sense of a separate, lonely I manifests as a deep sense of missing something, not being enough, not having enough. And that is the irony of ego – we actually feel empty, bereft. And so that neediness, that bottomless pit of yearning, that hunger: that's attachment. And it's the main voice of ego, it is constantly there, moment by moment; not just occasionally there, but constantly there.

This attachment, this desire, being a misconception, makes the mistake of believing, a million percent, that that delicious person, that gorgeous taste, that lovely smell, that nice feeling, that idea – that when I get *that*, when I have it inside me, then I'll feel full, then I'll be content. That is what desire thinks.

This is so hard to see how desire is deluded. And it is not meant to be a

moralistic issue. As soon as we hear these words we feel a bit resentful, "What do you mean – I'm not allowed to have pleasure?" That's how we feel. But as Lama Yeshe has pointed out: we're either completely hedonistic, and grasping and shoving everything in, or we're completely puritanical. And the irony is that they are both coming from a misunderstanding of desire; they both come from ego.

Buddha is not being moralistic. He is not saying we should not have pleasure – the reality is he is saying we *should* have masses of pleasure, joy, happiness, but naturally and appropriately, and, incredibly, without relying upon anything external. This is our natural state when we've depolluted our minds of the neuroses, in fact.

Right now, because of the misconception that desire has, we have got the wrong end of the stick. Desire thinks that the delicious chocolate cake, that gorgeous thing is *out there*, vibrating deliciousness, demanding that I eat it – nothing coming from my side at all. We don't think our mind plays any role at all. We think that it's all happening from the cake's side, all the energy is coming from the cake.

### OUR MIND MAKES IT UP

And the thing is that we don't see this process! The fact is we are making up the cake – attachment has written a huge story about cake and what it will do for us. It is a complex conceptual construction, an invention, an elaborate view, an interpretation, an opinion.

We're like a child, as one lama said, who draws a lion, and then becomes afraid of it. We invent everything in our reality, and then we have all the fears and the paranoia and the depression and the grasping. We're too much!

But we make up that cake, we make up the enemy – we made them up ourselves. This sounds pretty cosmic, but it is literally true. This doesn't mean there is no cake there – there is. And it doesn't mean that Fred didn't punch you – he did. We need to distinguish between the facts and the fiction: that's the tricky part.

It is hard to see this, but this is the way delusions function. And basically they are liars. What attachment is seeing is simply not true. What attachment is seeing simply does not exist.

There *is* a cake there, but what we think is cake and what cake actually is are hugely different. This is interesting. And because this is hard to understand indicates how ancient it is within us.

What we're seeing or experiencing, what we are grasping at – delicious cake from its own side that will make me happy – is a total lie. It doesn't exist like that at all. There *is* a cake there, it *is* brown, it *is* square: that's valid. And this is what's hard to distinguish – the correctness, and the incorrectness. What is actually there and what is not there. That is the job we need to do in knowing the way delusions work and therefore how to get rid of them.

#### **ATTACHMENT IS THE VOICE OF THE VICTIM**

Another characteristic of attachment is that it is the voice of the victim. We truly feel we have no control – cake is this incredible powerful thing, and I just have to have it. What choice do I have? That is attachment talking. Attachment gives all the power to the outside object. Which is why we feel like a baby. That's the victim mentality. And victim mentality, the one of hopelessness, the one of no control, that's the voice of attachment. Literally. That's exactly how attachment functions. Attachment is giving all the power to that object. It sees this truly delicious divine thing, which in reality our mind has made up, and then we believe it and then blame it.

#### **ATTACHMENT IS NOT A FUNCTION OF THE SENSES**

"We make the body the boss," as Lama Yeshe would tell us. We totally follow what the senses feel. We assume the delicious cake is an object of the senses – of course, it is; but what we think we see isn't what's there. What appears to the sense of sight, for example, is not a delicious cake but simply the shape and colour of the thing. "Delicious cake" is a story made up by the mental

consciousness, specifically attachment. This is a crucial point.

Let's analyze. What is being experienced in relation to that cake? What are the states of mind? One of them is the senses indeed – we smell it in the kitchen, so there's our nose sense. Then there's the touch, the sight, we see the shape and color when it comes to the table; then we touch it, the hand feels it, then there's the taste consciousness, the one we're wanting the most. So four of the five senses are involved in the experience of that cake.

The senses are like dumb animals. Our tongue doesn't experience the hunger for the cake, it doesn't leap out of our face and grab the cake desperately; even our hand doesn't, although it looks like it. The hand goes out to the cake, but not from its own side. So what does? It's propelled by the neurotic need to get the cake in the mouth. The mental consciousness, in other words. The thought. It is the story about what is chocolate cake, and I need chocolate cake, all the stuff about chocolate cake that is chattering away in the mind. That is where the delusions exist. Attachment is not a function of the taste. It is simply not possible. How can it be? Our tongue doesn't feel neurotic. Our tongue doesn't feel grasping, our tongue doesn't feel, "I want to have more cake," it is just a doorway through which this bunch of thoughts, these concepts, this sense of "I" grasps at the experience, isn't it? That is all. So the senses do not experience attachment. It is a logical fact.

#### **WE ARE JUNKIES**

So of course for aeons we have had the mistaken assumption that satisfying the senses is the way to get happiness. So right now, we are totally dependent on sensory objects. We are all junkies, it's just a question of degree. We can't imagine having pleasure unless we get that fix. That fix is any one of the objects of the five senses. Which makes it sound quite brutal.

But unless we can start to look into this and cut through this whole way of working, we will never break free of suffering, we'll never become content, satisfied, fulfilled. Ever. Which is why, the basis of practice, the

foundation of all realizations, is morality. Discipline. It means literally practicing control over the senses. And it is not a moralistic issue; It's a practical one. The aim is to get as happy as possible. This is the aim.

### **NOTHING WRONG WITH PLEASURE!**

This happiness, this pleasure, is not deluded. If pleasure were deluded, we might as well give up now. Pleasure, happiness, joy are totally appropriate.

So where's the problem? Why do we suffer? Why are we frantic and anxious and desperate, fantasizing about the cake before it's even there, then shoving two pieces in when it comes, and then being depressed when we eat too much? Why all this rubbish? Because we have these delusions. Suffering doesn't come from pleasure, it doesn't come from the senses. It comes from neuroses in the mental consciousness. But right now it's virtually impossible for us to have pleasure without attachment.

### **ATTACHMENT TO A PERSON**

It's the same with people. Let's look at the person we are attached to, the person we are in love with – even more dramatic. Again, this soup of emotions, which we never analyze, never deconstruct.

I can say, "I love you". That means I wish them to be happy. Totally appropriate. Unbelievable, virtuous. The more of this the better. We will only get happiness if we keep thinking that. "I want you not to suffer", that's called compassion. Generosity, maybe you'd like to give the person something. Generosity, in its nature is a virtue, necessarily the cause of happiness.

So, love doesn't cause suffering, compassion doesn't cause suffering, the senses don't directly cause suffering, happiness can't possibly cause suffering – so what does? The cause of suffering is the attachment, first of all, the neurotic sense of an "I", a hungry "I" that sees this person, grossly exaggerates their value to me, gives too much power, puts the power "out there" in that person, just like the cake, which implies that we are devaluing the power of ourself. We're giving all the power to this person, like it's all out there, this person,

vibrating, so delicious, so gorgeous, this is exactly how it feels. So attachment is hungry and empty and bereft and lonely. And is completely convinced that having that person is going to make me happy.

What attachment does is exaggerate the beautiful qualities of the person, it is exaggerating our sense of an "I" that needs that person, because attachment thinks that if I don't get that person then I am not happy; because we don't believe we can be happy inside, we have to have an object. Attachment then starts to manipulate this person, expects massively that this person will give me happiness.

It's the same with the person we loathe. We really believe that that person, from out there, from their own side, independently, definitely, is an awful person, as if ugliness is coursing in their veins along with their blood. We hear their name, it appears awful, we see their face, it appears awful. The discomfort in our mind is huge. We think the discomfort, the unhappiness, the hurt, the anger, the pain, we actually think and believe they are doing it to us.

But it's a lie. It's our own anger that causes the person to look awful, the anger that makes us so miserable.

### **GOING BEYOND ENEMY, FRIEND, STRANGER**

Usually the only person we wish to be happy – that's the meaning of love – is the person we are attached to. And the only person we are attached to is the person we love. So we assume because they come together, they're the same thing. It is just not accurate. We need to start going beyond those limits, which is so scary. When we start practicing equanimity, we analyze: enemy, friend, and stranger – we try to cut through this narrow self-centred view of attachment, ignorance and aversion.

Right now we assume it is normal that when a person is mean to me, I don't like them. So we call them enemies. And we assume it is normal that when a person is nice to me, we call them friend. And when a person is doing neither, they are called stranger. That's the reality of the entire

universe, isn't it? We need to go beyond this one.

### **WHAT IS ANGER AND WHAT IS ANGER NOT?**

A perfect question. And the perfect answer, which I heard from a lama, is: "Anger is the response when attachment doesn't get what it wants." But what is it not?

**Anger is not physical.** Anger is part of our mind, and our mind is not physical. It exists in dependence upon the brain, the genes, the chemical reactions, but is not these things.

When anger's strong, it triggers huge physical symptoms: the blood boils, the heart beats fast, the spit comes out the mouth, the eyes open wide in panic, the voice shouts. Or if we experience aversion as depression, the body feels like a lead weight; there's no energy, a terrible inertia. And then, when we boost our serotonin, the body feels good again.

But these are just gross expressions of what, finally, is purely thought: a story made up by our conceptual mind that exaggerates the ugly aspects of the person or event or oneself.

Recent findings prove what is explained in Tibetan Medicine: that what goes on in the mind affects the body.

**Anger is not someone else's fault.** This doesn't mean that the person didn't punch me; sure they did. And it doesn't mean that punching me is not bad; sure it is. But the person didn't make me angry. The punch is merely the catalyst for my anger, a tendency in my mind. If there were no anger, all I'd get is a broken nose.

**Anger does not come from our parents.** We love to blame our parents! Actually, if Buddha is wrong in his assertion that our mind comes from previous lives and is propelled by the force of our own past actions into our mother's womb; and if the materialists are right in asserting that our parents created us, then we *should* blame them. How dare they create me, like Frankenstein and his monster, giving me anger and jealousy and the rest! But they didn't, Buddha says. (Nor did a superior being – but we dare not blame him!). They

gave us a body; the rest is ours (including our good qualities).

**Anger isn't only the shouting.** Just because a person doesn't shout and yell doesn't mean they're not angry. When we understand that anger is based on the thought called aversion, then we can see we are all angry. Of course, if we never look inside, we won't notice the aversion; that's why people who don't express anger experience it as depression or guilt.

**Anger is not necessary for compassionate action.** His Holiness the Dalai Lama responded to an interviewer who suggested that anger seems to act as a motivator for action, "I know what you mean. But with anger, your wish to help doesn't last. With compassion, you never give up."

We need to discriminate between good and bad, but Buddha says that we should criticize the action, not the person. As Martin Luther King said, it's okay to find fault – but then we should think, "What can I do about it?"

It's exactly the same with seeing our own faults, but instead of feeling guilty we should think, "What can I do about it?" Then we can change. Anger and guilt are paralyzed, impotent, useless.

**Anger is not natural.** Often we think we need anger in order to be a reasonable human being; that it's unnatural not to have it; that it gives perspective to life. It's a bit like thinking that in order to appreciate pleasure we need to know pain. But that's obviously ridiculous: for me to appreciate your kindness, you first need to punch me in the nose?

**Anger is not at the core of our being.** Being a delusional state of mind, a lie, a misconception, it's logical that anger can be eliminated. If I think there are two cups on my table, whereas there is only one, that's a misconception. What to do with the thought "there are two cups on my table"? Remove it from my mind! Recognize that there is one cup and stop believing the lie. Simple.

Of course, the lies that believe that I'm self-existent, that delicious objects make me happy, that ugly ones make me suffer, that my mind is my brain, that someone else



created me – *these* lies have been in my mind since beginningless time. But the method for getting rid of them is the same.

What's left when we've removed the lies, the delusions, is the truth of our own innate goodness, fully perfected. That is what's natural.

### **PRACTICE IS PAINFUL**

Real practice is painful – real practice. Until it is painful, it is not practice, we're just playing safe. We're just keeping our nice comfort zone. Practice has to threaten something – it has to feel painful. Just like when we are overweight, we decide we are going to get thin and beautiful, and we start doing push-ups. It has to be painful at first. We know that if the second we start feeling pain from doing pushups we stop, we will never benefit from doing them. We can always pretend "Oh I did my pushups this morning", but if the second they started being painful, we stopped, we know that if our muscles don't hurt, they will never get strong – it is logic. Giving up attachment is like that – it has to be painful.

Until then, we are just being in our comfort zone – we're playing safe, thinking that being spiritual means smiling and being holy and having a pleasant manner. It is just not so. Until we stretch, until we go beyond our limits, we won't get better at doing anything. We really get our body strong when we go beyond our limits every day. How do we become an accomplished pianist or anything? We have to go beyond our limits. That's what spiritual practice is – we have to stretch our limits.

This means we have to be facing our attachment every day, feeling the pain of it, seeing it. And then, the second we start to do that, somehow we become fulfilled, satisfied. That is what is interesting. When we start to give up being a junkie, we start to become happy. We begin to taste our own potential. As long as we continue to follow attachment, which is so deep, we will never be happy.

### **PRACTICE STARTS WITH MOTIVATION**

So how to begin? It all comes from motivation. We can start the day by deciding

we will begin, be very courageous. It starts from the thought. We tend in the West to dismiss thoughts. We say, "It's only in the mind", we give no value to the mind, even though we are caught in it. We give no value to just thought.

The point is, that if we really understand this fundamental, and easily provable, truth that every thought programs us into what we will become, we would be so happy to have positive thoughts, and be content with them. Because of two things; first, everything that we do comes from the thought that we think. If I am going to get up and walk out the door, what is the first thing that has to happen? My legs don't just jump up and walk out, my mind has to say "I want to walk out that door". So what does that mean? How do we walk out a door? The first thing is to think "I want to walk out that door".

So every day, you're saying "I want to be compassionate, I want to be beneficial". You're aspiring, and then you'll act. It is no mystery. That's how we become pianists, footballers, a cook – or a happy, beneficial person. It starts with the thought, the motivation, the aspiration.

So we just start our practice with powerful sincere motivations. We are sincere, after all; we do want to be these things, loving, compassionate, etc. Genuinely wanting, seeing the reasonableness of having a compassionate thought, seeing the reasonableness of turning around a negative thought. Not thinking that thought doesn't matter. What we are is the product of our thoughts. It is simply a fact. This is what karma is saying. No one else made us into anything, we made yourself. As Lama Zopa says, we can mould our mind into any shape we wish.

Practice is, in the beginning, every day, is motivation, motivation, motivation. I want to do this, I am aspiring to that. When we start every day, we wish "May I be useful, may I not shoot my mouth off to too many people", etc. Even this is so profound. We have to value the thought, value the mind, it is so powerful. Like the Dalai Lama says, we are then on the right track for the rest of the day. Don't underestimate that. If we really

got that, we would be so content, knowing we were sowing the seeds for future crops of happiness. It is like we had a big open field, and we are sowing seeds for the future. That's practice. That's how we start.

We shouldn't fret, "I'm hopeless, I'm useless". We are too concrete in our thinking. So we start with the motivation, start with the thoughts, and we go into the day, and bring that awareness with us. Watch our mind, be careful of the rubbish, try not to shoot our mouth off too much, try to be a bit useful, rejoice in the good stuff. At the end of the day, we look back, we regret our mistakes and rejoice in our efforts, and then go to bed with a happy mind. That's one day of practice. One day at a time. It is organic, and it's humble. We start one day at a time, and slowly, something develops.

*From teachings by Ven. Robina Courtin*

## ***6. Purification: the Practice of Vajrasattva in the Context of the Four Opponent Powers***

There is no negativity that cannot be purified. The purification process is basically a psychological one. As Lama Yeshe says, it is our mind (and on the basis of that our actions) that create the negativity and it is our mind that transforms it by creating positive energy. Although we rely on Buddha's methods for the purification, it is not as if it is Buddha purifying us or forgiving us; we ourselves do the purifying.

We purify by applying, the Four Opponent Powers.

### **THE PRACTICE**

Prostrate three times then sit. Bring your mind to a quiet state.

#### **1. THE POWER OF REGRET**

Sincerely regret, from the depths of your heart, anything you have done to harm any living being, on this day, in this life, in all past lives.

As Lama Zopa Rinpoche says, "Not only that, but continuously I have also been breaking my pratimoksha, bodhisattva, and tantric vows. Worst of all, I have created the heaviest of negative karmas in relation to my virtuous friends – getting angry at them, generating wrong views, having non-devotional thoughts towards them, harming their holy body, and disobeying their advice.

"Having these negative imprints on my mental continuum is unbearable. It's as if I've swallowed a lethal poison. I must practice the antidote right away and purify all this negative karma immediately, without a second's delay."

The reason to regret is based on the logic of karma: We experience everything due to our past karma, our past actions; so having

harmed others we ourselves will necessarily experience suffering in the future. Thus we cannot bear the thought of the future suffering that we ourselves will experience. And who wants that? We know from the present suffering that we do not want it, so the logic is, therefore, to remove the karmic seeds before they ripen as future suffering.

Go through the three non-virtuous action of the body and four of the speech, regretting those we remember and those we don't, in other words all the harm we have ever done to any sentient being since beginningless time.

If we have taken vows, then we must regret having broken them specifically: pratimoksha vows, bodhisattva vows, tantric vows.

For all of these, think like this: "I regret from the depths of my heart having harmed others, broken my vows, etc., because I do not want the future suffering. I am sick of suffering."

Then think, "What can I do about it? Whom can I turn to?"

#### **2. THE POWER OF RELIANCE REFUGE**

We rely upon, turn to, the Buddha, the doctor, who has the methods that we can use to purify. It's not that we need Buddha to forgive us; we purify ourselves by relying upon his methods..

Visualize Vajrasattva above the crown of your head. He is your guru manifesting in this aspect for your benefit.

He is in the bodhisattva aspect, radiant, blissful white light. He is adorned with jewels and silken clothes. He's sitting cross-legged on a white lotus, which although born out of mud is untainted by mud, just like our enlightened potential, which is born out of our delusions but is untainted by them. His face is radiant and beautiful. His eyes are long (horizontally) and peaceful and full of love and compassion for you. His mouth is red and very sweet. His hair is black and held up in a top knot.

Guru Vajrasattva's right hand, holding a vajra, which represents compassion and bliss, is at his heart; his left, holding a bell, which represents the wisdom realizing emptiness, is resting in his lap.

On a moon disk at Guru Vajrasattva's heart stands a HUM encircled by a garland of the hundred-syllable mantra.

Think: "Vajrasattva is my root guru, the holy mind of all the buddhas, the dharmakaya, who out of his unbearable compassion, which embraces me and all other sentient beings, appears in this form to purify me and all others."

Now invite the wisdom beings to merge with your visualization, the commitment being: imagine light goes out of from the HUM at Guru Vajrasattva's heart to all the ten directions and hooks the energy of the body, speech and mind of all the enlightened beings of the universe. This light comes back and dissolves into the heart of Guru Vajrasattva, who now embodies all their energy. He is even more brilliant and blissful than before.

Now, say a prayer of refuge:

To the Buddha, the Dharma and the  
Sangha  
I go for refuge until I am enlightened.  
By this practice of meditating on Guru  
Vajrasattva  
May I reach Buddhahood so as to benefit  
all sentient beings!

**b. Compassion** In order to develop compassion, we need to rely upon other beings, the very beings we have harmed and who have harmed us, by developing compassion for them.

Think in particular of people you have harmed recently; and in the past; and then, in general, all beings we have ever harmed since beginningless time.

Then remember those who have harmed you: have compassion for them because they will suffer as a result of the harm they have done to you.

Make the strong aspiration to do this practice of purification for the sake of all these sentient beings. "I must purify for their sake."

### 3. THE POWER OF THE REMEDY

This is the actual medicine, the doing of the actual practice of purification. There are three stages to the meditation, and it consists of visualization and recitation of mantra.

#### *a. Purification of body*

Guru Vajrasattva very compassionately sends powerful white nectar, like coming out of a hose very forcefully, from his heart. It arcs around and enters your crown and pours into your entire body, filling you completely. It keeps coming and it forces out of your lower orifices all the harm you have ever done to any living being with your body in the form of inky liquid, which pours out of you and disappears into space, not one atom left. Feel completely purified.

Recite the mantra as you visualize (3 or 7 or as many as you wish):

OM VAJRASATTVA SAMAYA MANU PALAYA  
/ VAJRASATTVA DENO PATITA / DIDO MAY  
BHAWA / SUTO KAYO MAY BHAWA / SUPO  
KAYO MAY BHAWA / ANU RAKTO MAY  
BHAWA / SARWA SIDDHI MEMPAR YATSA /  
SARWA KARMA SU TSA MAY / TSITAM  
SHRIYAM KURU HUM / HA HA HA HA HO /  
BHAGAWAN / SARVA TATHAGATA / VAJRA  
MA MAY MU TSA / VAJRA BHAWA MAHA  
SAMAYA SATTVA / AH HUM PHAT!

Then be delighted that all the harm you have ever done to any sentient being with your body is completely purified. And think that there is no way you could do anything but benefit others now with your body.

#### *b. Purification of speech*

Again, Guru Vajrasattva very happily sends powerful nectar from his heart chakra. It arcs around and forcefully enters your crown, filling your entire body, this time forcing up

to the top of your body all the negativity of your speech, which overflows and disappears into space, not one atom left – just like, as Lama Yeshe says, when you turn on the tap in the sink and fill the dirty glass, all the junk in glass comes to the top and overflows.

So imagine that all the gossip and harsh speech and useless speech and lying and talking badly about others behind their backs – all this is purified by the powerful nectar filling you.

Recite the mantra as you visualize this.

OM VAJRASATTVA SAMAYA MANU PALAYA  
/ VAJRASATTVA DENO PATITA / DIDO MAY  
BHAWA / SUTO KAYO MAY BHAWA / SUPO  
KAYO MAY BHAWA / ANU RAKTO MAY  
BHAWA / SARWA SIDDHI MEMPAR YATSA /  
SARWA KARMA SU TSA MAY / TSITAM  
SHRIYAM KURU HUM / HA HA HA HA HO /  
BHAGAWAN / SARVA TATHAGATA / VAJRA  
MA MAY MU TSA / VAJRA BHAWA MAHA  
SAMAYA SATTVA / AH HUM PHAT!

Again, feel so happy that your speech is now completely purified. And imagine that it's not possible that you could do anything but benefit others with your speech.

### *c. Purification of mind*

Third, Guru Vajrasattva now very compassionately sends powerful beams of laser light from his heart chakra, which arcs around and enters your crown chakra and fills your entire being – just like, as Lama Yeshe says, when you turn on a light in a room the darkness is instantly dispelled. So, just as the light hits your heart chakra, the darkness of the negativity of your mind – all the attachment and neediness, the anger and violence, the depression and resentment and jealousy and bitterness, etc. – all instantly dispelled, not one atom left.

Recite the mantra as you visualize this.

OM VAJRASATTVA SAMAYA MANU PALAYA  
/ VAJRASATTVA DENO PATITA / DIDO MAY

BHAWA / SUTO KAYO MAY BHAWA / SUPO  
KAYO MAY BHAWA / ANU RAKTO MAY  
BHAWA / SARWA SIDDHI MEMPAR YATSA /  
SARWA KARMA SU TSA MAY / TSITAM  
SHRIYAM KURU HUM / HA HA HA HA HO /  
BHAGAWAN / SARVA TATHAGATA / VAJRA  
MA MAY MU TSA / VAJRA BHAWA MAHA  
SAMAYA SATTVA / AH HUM PHAT!

Again, be delighted that all your delusions, which are the source of our own suffering and the cause for why we harm others with our body and speech, are totally purified, gone, finished.

Think: there is no space in your heart now for anything but love and kindness and forgiveness and wisdom and bliss and compassion.

### *d. Purification of even the imprints of negativity of body, speech and mind*

This time imagine that Guru Vajrasattva sends light again and it fills you completely and eradicates even the subtlest imprint of negative energy from your mind. (It's like once you removed the garlic from a jar, you still need to remove the smell.) Again recite the mantra.

OM VAJRASATTVA SAMAYA MANU PALAYA  
/ VAJRASATTVA DENO PATITA / DIDO MAY  
BHAWA / SUTO KAYO MAY BHAWA / SUPO  
KAYO MAY BHAWA / ANU RAKTO MAY  
BHAWA / SARWA SIDDHI MEMPAR YATSA /  
SARWA KARMA SU TSA MAY / TSITAM  
SHRIYAM KURU HUM / HA HA HA HA HO /  
BHAGAWAN / SARVA TATHAGATA / VAJRA  
MA MAY MU TSA / VAJRA BHAWA MAHA  
SAMAYA SATTVA / AH HUM PHAT!

Now feel you are completely purified, not one atom of negativity left in your mindstream; even the subtlest obscurations to omniscience have been removed.

#### 4. THE POWER OF RESOLVE

The fourth step in the purification process, and such a crucial one, is the determination not to harm with our body, speech and mind again. Without this, we keep doing the same old things. The determination, the aspiration, to not harm again is like a beacon that guides our body, speech and mind in new directions. Remember, as Lama Zopa Rinpoche says, "Everything exists on the tip of the wish, the aspiration."

If you have taken vows, then think, "I will never break my pratimoksha vows. I will never break my bodhisattva vows. I will never break my tantric vows and commitments."

As for our other old habits, if we can't commit to never do them again, then don't lie to ourselves, as Lama Zopa Rinpoche says. So think carefully and then decide to refrain from them for a year, a month, a day, even a minute – whatever is realistic. Then in general vow to make the effort to avoid the others.

This determination not to do again is what gives us the strength to change.

#### CONCLUSION

Guru Vajrasattva is delighted with us. Wanting to merge with your mind, he melts into white light and absorbs into you through your crown. Think: "My guru's body, speech and mind, Vajrasattva's body, speech and mind, my own body, speech and mind: same thing." "Union-oneness," as Lama Yeshe would say. Meditate on this.

Next, as Lama Zopa Rinpoche recommends, meditate on the emptiness of the three circles: "In emptiness, there is no I, creator of negative karma; there is no action of creating negative karma; there is no negative karma created." Place your mind in that emptiness for a little while. In this way, look at all phenomena as empty – they do not exist from their own side.

#### DEDICATION PRAYERS

Finally, dedicate all the merit, the positive energy, you have created by doing this purification to all living beings:

As a result of the three-times' merits of myself and others,  
May bodhichitta – from which the happiness of all sentient beings comes –

Be generated in the minds of self and other sentient beings without delay, even for one second.  
And that which has been generated, may it increase.

As a result of the three-times' merits of myself and others,  
May emptiness be generated in the minds of self and others sentient beings, without delay, even for one second.  
And that which has been generated, may it increase.

As a result of the three-times' merits of myself and others,  
May I, who am empty from my own side, Achieve Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's enlightenment, which is empty from its own side.  
And lead all sentient beings, who are empty from their own side,  
To that enlightenment, which is empty from its own side,  
As quickly as possible, by myself, alone.

Whatever dedication the Victorious Ones  
Gone to Bliss  
Of the three times have admired as best,  
I shall also perfectly dedicate in the same way all these roots of virtue  
So that I may perform good works.

Because of the past, present, and future merit created by me and by the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and sentient beings,

May I, my family, students, and all  
sentient beings  
Be able to actualize completely in this  
very lifetime  
Lama Tsong Khapa's path of unified sutra  
and tantra,  
Which is pure like refined gold.  
May this pure teaching of Lama Tsong  
Khapa  
Spread in all directions and flourish  
forever.

**SARWA KARMA SU TSA MAY** please grant all  
virtuous actions

**TSITAM SHRIYAM KURU** please grant your  
glorious qualities

**HUM** the vajra holy mind

**A HA HA HA HO** the five transcendental  
wisdoms

**BHAGAWAN** one who has destroyed every  
obscurations, attained all realizations, and  
passed beyond suffering

**SARVA TATHAGATA** all those who have  
realized emptiness, knowing things just as  
they are

**VAJRA MA MAY MUTSA** do not abandon me  
**VAJRA BHAWA** the nature of indestructible  
inseparability

**MAHA SAMAYA SATTVA** the great pledge  
being; the great being who has the pledge,  
the vajra holy mind

**AH** the vajra holy speech

**HUM** the transcendental wisdom of great  
bliss

**PHAT!** clarifying the transcendental wisdom  
of inseparable bliss and emptiness and  
destroying the dualistic mind that obstructs  
it

## THE FOUR TYPES OF KARMIC RESULTS THAT THE FOUR OPPONENT POWERS PURIFY

**1. The power of regret** purifies the *experience*  
*similar to the cause*, which, let's say for killing,  
is to get killed, to die young or to get sick.

## THE MEANING OF THE MANTRA

**OM** the qualities of Buddha's holy body,  
speech, and mind; all that is auspicious and  
of great value

**VAJRASATTVA** the being who has the  
wisdom of inseparable bliss and emptiness

**SAMAYA** a pledge that must not be  
transgressed

**MANU PALAYA** lead me along the path you  
took to enlightenment

**VAJRASATTVA DENO PATITA** make me abide  
closer Vajrasattva's vajra holy mind

**DIDO MAY BHAWA** please grant me a firm  
and stable realization of the ultimate nature  
of phenomena

**SUTO KAYO MAY BHAWA** please grant me the  
blessing of being extremely pleased with me

**SUPO KAYO MAY BHAWA** bless me with the  
nature of well developed great bliss

**ANU RAKTO MAY BHAWA** bless me with the  
nature of the love that  
leads me to your state

**SARWA SIDDHI MEMPAR YATSA** please grant  
all powerful attainments

**2. The power of reliance**, *Refuge and bodhicitta* purify the *environment result*, which for killing is living in a place where the food and medicine are not conducive to good health.

**3. The power of the remedy**, in this case the *visualization and recitation of mantras* – or whatever action one does as the actual antidote – purifies the *throwing karma* that causes birth in the lower realms.

**4. The power of the resolve** or *determination not to do* again purifies the *action similar to the cause*, which in a sense is the worst result: it's the habit to keep killing, which propels one back into the lower realms.

*By Robina Courtin, based on the teachings of her lamas, Lama Thubten Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche.*



## 5. The Real Purification: Realizing Emptiness: A Meditation

By Lama Zopa Rinpoche

### WE CANNOT FIND THE I ANYWHERE

Let's concentrate for a few moments on what I'm saying. [Silence.] We believe, "I am here, in this building." We believe, "I am in America, Soquel, Land of Medicine Buddha, Land of Medicine Buddha, Land of Medicine Buddha! I'm in this gumpa, I'm in Vajrasattva retreat, I'm on this cushion, I'm in pain! I'm tired! I'm sleepy! I'm exhausted from a long day! What is he talking about? What is he mumbling about?" Anyway, thinking like that.

We think there's a real one, a real I, a real me, here doing Vajrasattva retreat, or listening to teachings. Here, sitting on this chair, or on this cushion – a real me listening to teachings. Now, I is your label; me, I.

You point to your body and label it I: "I am going out." You don't pick up a book and point to it and say, "I am going out!" No. You point to your body and apply the label, "I am going out."

And as your mind does the activity of thinking, you label, "I am thinking."

As your mind meditates, "I am meditating." By first thinking what kind of activity your mind is doing – for example, it's wandering – you say, "I am wandering. I am not meditating." "Are you meditating now?"

"No." You check the mind, then you say, "I am wandering," or, if it is meditating, being transformed into virtue by analytical or fixed meditation, you say, "I am meditating"; you call, or label, it, "I am meditating."

In exactly the same way as in this example, when you say "I," instead of pointing here [at your chest], point at this table; label I on this table.

So now, you have labeled I on the table, but where is that I on the table?

You cannot find I on the table. Even though you label I on the table, you cannot find it anywhere, on any corner of the table, inside the table, above the table – you cannot find I anywhere. Not only that, but this corner of the table is not I, this other corner is not I – no part of the table is I. Even all the parts of the table together are not I.

So now, like this, it's exactly the same, exactly the same, even though our mind constantly labels I on this association of body and mind [Rinpoche pointing to his chest], constantly, twenty-four hours a day, labels I on this association of body and mind, exactly as in the example where your mind labels I on the table – even if you label I on the table, you cannot find I on the table – the table is not I, nor is I on the table, inside the table, or anywhere else; you cannot find I on any part of the table, and even the whole thing is not I – in the same way, I cannot be found anywhere on the association of body and mind. If you look for your I, you cannot find it, from the ends of your hair to the tip your toes – your little toes, your big toes – nowhere can it be found. You cannot find your I anywhere. It is neither inside your nose nor on the tip of your nose! I'm joking!

Anyway, I is nowhere to be found, not even inside your body.

Normally you believe I to be inside, but even if that's what you normally believe, apprehend – that there's a real I inside the body, there's a real me inside the body – if you look for it, you cannot find it. When you start to analyze, it cannot be found. Where is it exactly? Look for it. Where is it exactly, inside the body? Where is it exactly, inside the chest – the part of the body where we normally believe the I to reside? It's somewhere there, within the body. We don't think that the I is outside – we think that it's inside, inside the chest. But if you try to identify exactly where the I is located, it cannot be found. There is no particular location. You can't find it. If you look for the

I, you cannot find it or its particular location.

Even though you normally believe that the I is there, somewhere inside your body, inside your chest, if you really check inside where it is, its exact location, you cannot find it.

### **SUBTLE DEPENDENT ARISING**

When you think that the nature of the I is dependent arising, subtle dependent arising, the real I that appeared to you at the beginning and that you apprehend, disappears. It immediately becomes empty. It becomes empty, as it is empty in reality. If that real I that appeared to you were true – that you believed at the beginning to really be there – if that were true – according to the way in which it appears, the way in which you believe – if that were true, then even after analysis it should still be there. Even after your analysis of its dependent arising, it should remain. You should be able to find it. But it is not there.

Even when you meditate on the chakras, a real I seems to exist, but there is no real I existing in this body the way it appears to exist, the way you apprehend, or believe, it to exist. That I is not there, neither on the body nor inside the body. The body is not I; nor is the mind. Even the association of body and mind is not I; these aggregates are not I.

Without going through the Madhyamaka or lam-rim analyses of emptiness – for example, if the aggregates are I, then what happens, what illogical consequences arise? If the body is I, what illogical consequences arise? If the mind is I, what illogical consequences rise? – without going through all those detailed analyses, what I have just mentioned gives you an idea of how the aggregates are not I. From that, you can understand, or get the idea of, the rest.

### **SUBJECT & OBJECT CANNOT BE ONE**

Even this association of body and mind is not I. As the texts state, the aggregates – this association of body and mind – are what is received.

They are what is received, and I is the receiver. I received these aggregates this time; I is the receiver. I is the subject who receives these aggregates, who has received, or taken, them. The I is the receiver. Can you say “taker,” that I is the taker? Like take-away food! I is to be taken away, like take-away food! I is to be taken away. Anyway, I’m joking...well, there is a way in which this can be true.

In Tibetan, we say *nye-wa lang-cha lem-pa-ko*. *Nye-wa lang-cha*: what is to be taken, the aggregates. The aggregates are what is to be taken, and I is the taker, who takes them. I is the subject and the aggregates are the object, what is to be taken. I is the taker of the aggregates. *Nye-wa langcha*, and *lem-pa-ko*; *lang-cha* is what is taken and *lem-pa-ko* is the taker.

So, there are two. The I created the cause of these aggregates; the continuity of this I created the cause of these aggregates, this samsara. Then this I has received, or taken, these aggregates. So the aggregates are what is to be taken and I is the taker. Subject and object. Therefore, they are not one. Therefore, the aggregates are not I, cannot be I, the subject.

Because aggregates are what is to be taken – the object. I is the taker of that object. So they cannot be one.

Similarly, an ax and the tree it cuts cannot be one. One is the object, the other is the subject, so they cannot be one. The cutter – the ax – and what is to be cut – the wood – cannot be one. The wood that is to be cut is not the cutter, the ax.

### **POSSESSOR & POSSESSION CANNOT BE ONE**

In that way, there’s one reason. The other reason is similar. [We say] “My aggregates, my aggregates, my aggregates.” Even from the common, language point of view, “my aggregates” shows that the aggregates are the possession, and my, or I, is the possessor. “My aggregates, my mind, my body.” Even normal language shows that these two are

completely different; two completely different phenomena. They are not one. They are totally different phenomena. “My aggregates, my body, my mind” shows that they are possessions, and from that it follows that my, I, is the possessor.

Again, through that reason, you can see that there’s no way in which the possession, that which is possessed, can be the possessor, I.

There is no way. The two are totally different phenomena. They don’t exist separately, but they exist differently.

### **THE LABEL & THE BASE CANNOT BE ONE**

Perhaps another thing to mention is this. The aggregates, the association of the body and mind, is the base to be labeled, and I is the label to be applied – what the base is to be labeled with. Again in Tibetan, I is dagchö, the label to be applied, and the aggregates are dag-shir, what is labeled, the base to be labeled. The aggregates are the base to be labeled, and I is the label, what is labeled on the base. Thus again here, one is the base, the other is the label. Two totally different phenomena; two totally different phenomena. They don’t exist separately, but they exist differently.

If they did exist separately, it would help a lot if you were a criminal!

It would help a lot. Because then you could say, “It wasn’t me that did it; it was the body. I didn’t do it”! Or you could say, “This mind did it, not me”! You could have many arguments! In court! You could argue in court, “I didn’t do it – the body did it; the mind did it.” If what you did was criminal or something for which you’d get punished, you could say, “The body did it; the mind did it. I didn’t do it.” But if it was a situation where you had something to gain, then you could say, “I did it”!

Say your body did something that normally brings millions of dollars, but nobody saw it. If your I had no relation to your aggregates, you could say, “I did it”!

Since doing the action that brings millions of dollars didn’t depend on the body or the mind doing it, you could take the credit, “I did it. I should get the money”! You could argue like that. If there were something good to gain, something that you like or want to acquire, you could say, “I did it.” But if what you’d done were criminal or subject to punishment, you could say, “It wasn’t me”!

Anyway, I’m saying that if the I existed separately from the aggregates, it could be very helpful. You could do that. Maybe you could still argue, “I didn’t do it because I cannot find the I anywhere. I cannot see the I, so how could I have done it?” I’m joking!

What I’m trying to say is that since the aggregates are the base to be labeled and I is what is labeled on them – the aggregates are the base and I is the label – they are two totally different phenomena. Therefore, they are not one; the aggregates are not I.

### **THE MIND IS NOT THE I**

Similarly, the mind is not I. It’s the same – you can use all those reasons that I mentioned regarding the aggregates, with the mind, to understand that the mind is not I. Your mind is not you. My mind, your mind – that shows it is not you. Your mind is not you; my mind is not me.

If something that the I possessed had to be I, were the I, then everything you possessed would be you. Your car would be you. Your kaka would be you!

It’s exactly the same with the table, as I mentioned before. You can find the I nowhere on these aggregates. Neither are the aggregates the I.

Exactly the same. Even though you label I on the table, you cannot find I on the table. The table is not I. Exactly as you cannot find your I on the table even though your mind labels the table I, exactly like that, even though your mind labels I on the aggregates, you cannot find I anywhere on the aggregates. Neither that, nor are the aggregates I.

When you get a feeling that the

aggregates are not I, when you cannot find I on the aggregates, this understanding makes very clear what is the base and what is the label; you are able to differentiate. Now you are able to differentiate between the base and the label. After this analysis, you are able to differentiate what is the base and what is the label I.

Before, it was unclear to your mind; these two things were unclear. His Holiness the Dalai Lama would say those two are mixed up, as if the table were mixed into the base, as if the table were inside the base.

His Holiness Ling Rinpoche used to say that the definition of the object to be refuted is the appearance of the base and the label as undifferentiable.

For your mind, in your view, the base and the label – for example, the base to be labeled “table” and the label “table” itself – are undifferentiable. His Holiness Ling Rinpoche explained during a commentary on the Seven Point Thought Transformation at Drepung Monastery many years ago that this is the object to be refuted.

You are unable to differentiate between the label and the base. Your mind is very confused. Your mind is in a state of confusion. What appears to your view is that these two – the base, the aggregates, and the label, I, are undifferentiable. Now, through this analysis, you can see clearly that they – the label, I, and the base, the aggregates – are two totally different phenomena.

#### **WHEN THE REALIZATION OF EMPTINESS OF THE I IS REAL, IT IS SO POWERFUL**

Now, even if you have one hundred percent understanding, or recognition, that the base, the aggregates, is not I, that the I exists nowhere, I would not call that having realized emptiness. In other words, you understand through the four-point analysis, the analysis of the four vital points, that if the I is inherently existent, it should exist either as oneness with the aggregates or as completely separate from them; it has to be

pervaded by being either oneness with the aggregates or existing separately from the aggregates. But simply understanding that the inherently existent I is neither oneness with the aggregates nor does it exist separately from them – having a clear idea that the aggregates are not one with the I but also don’t exist separately from the I – this awareness alone, the ability to distinguish between label and base, is not the realization of emptiness. Even if you had this awareness – the ability to distinguish label from base – even if the difference between the base and the label had become clear for your mind, still I would not say that you had realized emptiness.

When you realize emptiness – not just that there is no I, not just the feeling that there is no I – you should feel something very intensive. It should be very much more than that. Your understanding should be something very intensive. Not just the feeling that there is no I. The feeling should be something very deep; the feeling “there is no I” should be very intensive, very deep. You should feel as you would if you’d had a vision that you had received a million dollars, that somebody had put a million dollars into your hands, and you had totally, one hundred percent believed that you actually had all that money – and then suddenly realized it was just a hallucination! It’s gone! Like that, suddenly you realize that it’s not there, it has totally gone.

What you have believed, were one hundred percent convinced of, and so strongly clung to, grasped at, is suddenly, totally non-existent.

There’s nothing to grab onto, nothing to hold onto. Suddenly, it’s totally non-existent. Nothing of what you have been holding onto, cherishing as if it really exists, is truly there. Nothing of what, so far, you have never had any doubt about, have been grasping at continuously, holding onto like a cat grabbing a mouse – all its claws clutching tightly together – nothing of that I exists. Suddenly, that about which you have never

had any doubt since beginningless rebirths – even since this morning or since you were born into this life – suddenly, it doesn't go anywhere. Suddenly, there's nothing there. Maybe it's gone to the beach! Or to the mountains! To a retreat center! Anyway, it doesn't go anywhere.

Just there! Suddenly! You realize there is nothing there. Suddenly, it is not there. You realize that it's totally non-existent. Totally non-existent.

There's nothing to hold onto. It's lost. Totally lost. Just right there – where it was – totally lost. Not that it's gone somewhere, but right there, it has become totally lost. There's nothing to hold onto. You feel something very intensive – not space, but empty, like space. During that time, there's no dual view, there's no "this is I and that is emptiness"; no "here is the subject, perceiver, realizer and there is the object, emptiness." It's not dual; non-dual. At that time, the view that should appear should be non-dual, not "this I is meditating on emptiness, seeing emptiness. Oh, that is emptiness."

Instead, there should be a very intensive understanding, seeing very intensively that . . . the I is empty. It's not just thinking that there's no I; it's not just that. It's not like, after searching for the table, the labeled table, the general table – not the inherently existent table but the general table, the labeled table – looking to see if any part of the table is the table – it's not that – or if perhaps the whole collection of parts together is the table – it's not that either – and only after all that, then thinking that the table does not exist. It's not that kind of experience. Nor is it like analyzing the body to find if the I is inside the body or on the aggregates, or understanding that the aggregates together are also not the I, then, after all that analysis, at the end, coming to the conclusion that there's no I.

Because you cannot find it, thinking that there is no I. It's not just that.

## **WHEN YOU SEE EMPTINESS, THERE IS EITHER UNBELIEVABLE JOY . . .**

The right way of perceiving that the I is empty is an extremely deep, intensive experience, but there are basically two kinds of experience you can have. You can feel incredible, that you have discovered the most precious thing, such as a wish-granting jewel. Or like a person who has been looking for or waiting to meet a dear friend for many, many years – praying, wishing, to meet that person for many years – and then, after all these many years, suddenly meeting that friend. Or like you've been waiting to get a billion dollars for a long time and then suddenly you get the money. In other words, when you see emptiness, you feel unbelievable joy; incredible joy that makes you cry.

## **. . . OR UNBELIEVABLE FEAR**

The second kind of experience is one of unbelievable fear, incredible fear. Not just any kind of fear. Not just the fear of being attacked by somebody; not that kind of fear. It's a very deep fear; something deep inside your heart, in the very depths of your heart. A very deep fear. The other fear is not fear of losing the I – something is going to happen to this I, but it's not losing the I. The ordinary is fear that this real I is going to receive some harm, but here, something that you've believed in – not only from birth but from beginningless rebirths up until now – something that you've believed in one hundred percent, only now, only now you realize that it's not there. Only now you realize that it's totally nonexistent.

This can cause an incredibly deep fear to arise.

As I often say, even when you recite *The Heart Sutra*, when you say the words, "No ear, no nose, no tongue...no ice cream! No coffee, no chocolate, no cigarettes, no drinks...!" – if fear comes into your heart when you say "no this, no that," if fear arises, that's a good sign. Fear arising means your recitation of *The Heart Sutra*, The

Essence of Wisdom, is hitting, or touching, the root of samsara, hurting it. Your recitation of *The Heart Sutra* has touched the root of samsara, ignorance; has hit it.

Your recitation of *The Heart Sutra*, your way of thinking when you recite *The Essence of Wisdom*, is fitting – like an arrow or a bomb. As an arrow hits its target, as a bomb or a torpedo hits its target, the enemy at which you aimed, like that, your recitation of *The Heart Sutra*, those teachings on emptiness, your way of thinking, your meditation, has hit its target, the object of ignorance, the inherently existent I – the I that is apprehended by simultaneously-born ignorance. You have hit the target you're supposed to hit. The target that you are supposed to hit with the arrow or bomb of your recitation of the words of *The Heart Sutra* and thinking on their meaning is the object to be refuted, the inherently existent I.

Fear in your heart means that you have hit the target.

The texts explain that it is highly intelligent practitioners who have the experience of incredible, blissful joy, tears running down their cheeks, and feel as if they'd found an unbelievably precious jewel, and less intelligent practitioners who feel fear when they realize emptiness. At that time, you should not try to escape from this fear – trying to do so is your greatest obstacle to realizing emptiness. Instead, you must realize that this is the one time, the one opportunity, to realize emptiness – the only wisdom that can directly cut the delusions, the root of samsara, the gross and subtle defilements, bringing liberation from samsara and full enlightenment. Knowing this, you must go through the fear; you must complete your experience. Go through the fear like crossing a river.

Otherwise, if you block your own progress the one time that you have the opportunity of realizing emptiness, if you run away from that, like running away from teachings, from meditation courses, especially my meditation courses – of

course, those are good to run away from! – if you run from the fear that arises when you realize emptiness, that is no good at all.

### **BUT DON'T BE AFRAID THE I WILL DISAPPEAR; THERE IS ALWAYS CONTINUITY OF THE LABEL I**

However, you never have to worry about the I ceasing, because the I never ceases. The I that is the label never ceases. The I never stops, never ceases. Why is there always continuity of the I, the label? Why is there always continuity of the self? Because there is always continuity of consciousness. Even after enlightenment, the consciousness continues forever.

Even though the body might change – one body stops, another body is taken – the continuity of consciousness is always there, even after enlightenment. Therefore, the continuity of the I never ceases. It always exists because the base, the continuity of consciousness, always exists.

Therefore, thinking, "I'm going to cease, I'm going to become non-existent" is totally wrong.

When that feeling arises, the appearance of losing or having totally lost your I, you shouldn't be worried that that appearance means you're falling into nihilism. Because of that appearance, you should not be worried that you are falling into nihilism – just as you should not be worried that the I is becoming non-existent. There are two things – one is the fear of falling into nihilism; the other is the worry, "I am becoming nonexistent."

You should not be scared of those things. If you do get scared, you'll block yourself from realizing emptiness; this one opportunity to realize emptiness will have arisen and you'll have blocked it yourself.

A very clear commentary on the Mahamudra by Ketsang Jamyang (I'm not hundred percent sure that's his name), which is regarded as a very effective teaching, explains why this appearance of the self becoming non-existent happens. It

happens because it has to happen. Furthermore, it is a sign that there is no inherent existence on the I, the merely labeled I. There is no inherent existence on that I, and the experience of its becoming non-existent shows, proves, that. When you have this experience, you see the Middle Way, the Madhyamika, view. You see the Middle Way, devoid of the two extremes of nihilism and eternalism.

### **REALIZING EMPTINESS IS THE FIRST STEP TOWARDS LIBERATION**

I would say that realizing that the object of ignorance – the concept of the inherently existent I – is empty, realizing the emptiness that is the negation of the object to be refuted, is the first step towards liberation.

I'm not saying that by that alone you have entered – of the five paths to liberation – the path of merit. I'm not saying that. But it's like you've taken a step towards liberation, because that wisdom is the main thing that directly ceases the defilements.

### **CONCLUSION: THE I EXISTS BUT NOT HOW WE THINK IT DOES**

Just to conclude now – before we all go to sleep! – as I mentioned before, how when you label I on the table, it's not there – in exactly the same way, when the mind labels I on these aggregates, it's not there either. The aggregates are not the I; the I is not there. I exists, but it's not there. The I that is labeled by your mind exists, but it's not there. Even that is not there. Even that. Besides the real I that you believe to reside in the heart, inside your body, not being there, even the I merely labeled by your mind, which does exist, is not there either. I'm not saying it's not here [in this room], I'm saying it's not there [on your aggregates].

So now, the I that is merely labeled by the mind exists. That is here, that exists, but even that cannot be found on these aggregates, on the base of the aggregates. It doesn't exist on these aggregates. The

merely labeled I exists because the base, the aggregates, exists. In the same way, the base, the aggregates, which are merely imputed, exists, but it doesn't exist on the gathering of the five aggregates; it doesn't exist there. The merely labeled aggregates exist, but they don't exist on the collection of the five aggregates. They don't exist there; they cannot be found there. So that's clear. The merely labeled aggregates cannot be found on the collection of the five. They don't exist there.

In exactly the same way, for each aggregate – for example, the aggregate of form, the general aggregate of form – it's exactly same. The same logic applies. The merely labeled aggregate exists but it doesn't exist on that base. Empty. It doesn't exist there; it's not there, not existent on this base. The aggregate of form does not exist on the collection of the limbs, either in all their parts or on the whole collection together. So there's no question about the inherently existent, real aggregate: it doesn't exist anywhere.

The real one appearing from there – the aggregate, the general aggregate of form – exists nowhere. Similarly, if you go to the parts of the limbs, to the arms, head, legs, stomach, and so forth, all those merely labeled ones exist, but they don't exist on their own bases. Even the merely labeled head cannot be found on the collection of its parts, the brain and everything else. If you look for head, it cannot be found there.

Like that, it's the same for the arms, the legs, the main body – everything down to the atoms – that which is merely labeled exists, but it doesn't exist on its own base. Even the merely labeled atom exists, but it doesn't exist, cannot be found, on the collection of the particles of the atom. And it's the same for even the particles of the atom – they can't be found on their own base either.

Thus, everything from the I down to the particles of the atoms, or, from the general aggregate of form down to the particles of

atoms, which appears as something real, is not there. It's totally empty; every single thing is totally empty. What appears to your view, your hallucinating mind, seems to be something real, from there – but it's not there.

Starting from the real I down to the real particles of the atoms, what appears is not there; it's totally empty – not space, but like space; totally empty, non-existent.

That was form. How about the aggregate of feeling, that which is labeled on the thought, the mental factor that experiences pleasure, indifference and suffering? It's the same with the aggregate of feeling – the merely labeled aggregate of feeling exists, but cannot be found on its base. It's also the same with the aggregate of cognition, which discriminates phenomena as bad or good, as this and that, as friend and enemy, fat and skinny, long and short, and so forth. The merely labeled aggregate of cognition exists – because its base exists – but it doesn't exist on that base. So that's the same. Then, if you analyze the pleasant feeling, the suffering feeling, the indifference, you cannot find those feelings on their base. Similarly with the aggregate of cognition – you can do the same analysis, but neither can cognition be found on its base, even though merely labeled cognition exists.

It's also the same thing with the aggregate of compounded phenomena.

It's also labeled, merely imputed, because its base exists. Subtracting feeling and cognition from the fifty-one mental factors, the rest are called the aggregate of compounded phenomena, labeled that, but that aggregate cannot be found on that base.

Finally, it's the same with the aggregate of consciousness. Merely labeled consciousness exists, but it cannot be found on its base, like a carpet on the floor. The merely labeled consciousness doesn't exist like that. The mind, which knows phenomena, which does the function of continuing from one life to the next, perceiving merely the essence of the object,

that knowing phenomenon, she-pa, because that mind exists, your mind labels it nam-she, consciousness. But using the same analysis I mentioned before, neither that consciousness nor the split seconds of consciousness can be found on their respective bases.

Therefore, starting from the I down to the split seconds of consciousness, each aggregate – form, feeling, cognition, compounded phenomena and consciousness, down to the split seconds of consciousness – everything that appears to our mind, to our view, as real, as something real existing from there, is totally non-existent. Normally, after making all this analysis, you should meditate on this emptiness; let your mind dwell in it for a while. Looking at everything as empty, let your mind stay in that state of emptiness for as long as possible. That's extremely good, very effective.

#### **DWELL IN THIS EMPTINESS OF NON-EXISTENCE FROM ITS OWN SIDE**

So that's reality; that's how things are. This is reality, so let's place our minds in this state for a while. Concentrate for a little bit on this conclusion that the whole thing is totally empty. Everything – from the I down to, and including, the particles of the atoms and the split seconds of consciousness – is totally empty from its own side.

[Long meditation.]

The final thing is that it's totally non-existent – from its own side. It's totally non-existent, but non-existent from its own side. So the second part of that expression makes the way of thinking or the experience correct – seeing it as not just empty, non-existent, but empty, non-existent, from its own side.

Like this, the nature of everything else in existence – forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangible objects, hell, enlightenment, samsara, nirvana, happiness, suffering, life's gains and losses, virtue, non-virtue, everything – is totally empty, non-existent. But, non-existent from its own side.



## **WHILE EVERYTHING IS EMPTY, THEY DO EXIST – MERELY LABELLED BY MIND**

So, while things are empty – everything is totally empty from its own side – they exist. They exist in mere name, by being merely labeled by the mind – which also exists in mere name. Things exist as merely labeled by the mind, which itself also exists in mere name. Everything is unified with emptiness and dependent arising, as Guru Shakyamuni Buddha realized and Lama Tsongkhapa praised highly. Lama Tsongkhapa himself also actualized this emptiness – which is unified with dependent arising, subtle dependent arising – this right view, this wisdom, which is the only one that can cut the one particular root of samsara: the ignorance, the hallucinating mind that – while there's no I on these aggregates, including the inherently existent I – through negative imprints left on the mental continuum, projects on to these aggregates the appearance of an inherently existent I and then believes it to be true; the ignorance that believes this inherently existent I is true, that it really exists.

This particular root of samsara – the ignorance that apprehends the I, which is merely labeled by the mind, as existing from its own side, as not merely labeled by the mind – can be cut only by this specific wisdom, only by this right view, this wisdom, this right view. Only by generating that can you be totally liberated from samsara, from the entire ocean of sufferings of samsara, which are divided into three – suffering of pain, suffering of change and pervasive, compounded suffering. Within samsara, there are the specific sufferings of each realm and the general sufferings of samsara, such as the six, the four and the three.

The specific sufferings of the six realms include those of the eight hot hells, the eight cold hell sufferings and the six or four neighborhood sufferings.

The sufferings of the hungry ghosts – the

heavy suffering of hunger and thirst, and on top of that the suffering of heat, cold and exhaustion. The animal sufferings – extreme stupidity, being eaten by one another, being tortured, heat and cold. Human beings' eight types of sufferings – the sufferings of rebirth, old age, sicknesses and death; the inability to find desirable objects; even if found, the inability to find satisfaction in them; and on top of that, the fear and worry of separating from them; and finally, the five types of sufferings of the aggregates. The sufferings of the sura and asura realms include the heaviest sufferings of the devas – the five signs of impending death, always fighting with and getting controlled by other, more powerful, devas and getting banished.

It is only with this wisdom, this particular right view, the Prasangika view, that you can be totally liberated from the oceans of samsaric suffering – all the specific sufferings of each samsaric realm, and the three, four and six general sufferings of samsara. By ceasing the cause – delusion and karma – you can achieve the sorrowless state of total liberation from samsara, and only with this wisdom, the Prasangika view, can you also eradicate the subtle defilements, achieve full enlightenment and be able to do perfect work for all sentient beings, leading them to enlightenment as well.

I'd better stop here, otherwise we won't finish until tomorrow morning!

To escape from this hallucination, to be liberated from this hallucinating mind, we take refuge and keep precepts. Refuge is the very foundation of the Buddhist dharma, the gate through which we enter the Dharma path.

We take refuge and vows to make certain that we practice, to make sure that we devote ourselves to actually practicing Dharma. That is the fundamental reason for taking refuge and vows. In order to liberate others from the hallucinating mind, ignorance, first we ourselves have to be liberated from the hallucination, from the hallucinating mind, from all these sufferings

that we have been caught in since time without beginning, for beginningless lifetimes. Thus, refuge and precepts are the basic means, the very foundation of the path, for liberating both ourselves and others from the hallucination, from the hallucinating mind, from all suffering, and gaining the ultimate happiness of the highest, full enlightenment.

### DEDICATION

“Due to all the past, present and future merits collected by myself, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may bodhicitta, the loving kindness compassionate thought – letting go of the I and cherishing other sentient beings, who are the source of all happiness and success for myself and all other sentient beings – be generated in my mind and in the minds of all sentient beings, without even a second’s delay, and may that which has been generated increase.”

Dedicate for all virtuous friends to have stable lives until samsara ends and for all their holy wishes to succeed immediately.

“Due to all the past, present and future merits collected by myself, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings – which are totally non-existent from their own side – may the I – which is also totally nonexistent from its own side – achieve Guru Shakyamuni Buddha’s or Vajrasattva’s enlightenment – which is also totally non-existent from its own side – and lead all sentient beings – who are also totally non-existent from their own side – to that enlightenment – which is also totally non-existent from its own side – by myself alone – which is also totally non-existent from its own side.

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, from now on, in all my future lifetimes, may I be able to offer extensive benefit to all sentient beings and the teachings of Buddha just like Lama Tsongkhapa did, by having the same

qualities within me that Lama Tsongkhapa had.

“I dedicate all my merits in the way greatly admired by the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the three times and realized by Samantabhadra and Manjushri.”

*Teachings of Lama Zopa Rinpoche given during a Vajrasattva retreat at Land of Medicine Buddha, California, in 1999.*