

**KHENPO NAMDROL RINPOCHE:
ORAL COMMENTARY ON PATRUL
RINPOCHE'S WORDS OF MY PRECIOUS
TEACHER,
THE KUNZANG LAMA'I ZHALUNG**

Khenchen Namdrol Rinpoche gave this commentary in 2005 to a group of Tibetan and Nepali practitioners entering 3-year retreat at the Palyul Retreat Center in Parphing, Nepal.

INTRODUCTION

MOTIVATION

The Dorje Tsemo Tantra states:

*Gather your conceptual thoughts and
Always listen with wholesome earnest intention.
Vajrasattva and the other victorious ones of the three times
Cannot shower their blessings on those who neglect mindfulness.*

In general, we must always abandon nonvirtuous thoughts, including neutral thoughts as well as thoughts of nonvirtue, and try to generate virtuous thoughts, thoughts of good will. We especially need to engender good will when listening to¹ the teachings, or when beginning to teach the Dharma, and even more so while practicing the meaning of the Dharma. In particular, we must bring forth a positive attitude before undertaking the practice of meditating on the generation and completion stages.

The blessings and compassion of the enlightened ones are impartial, with no difference between those who are near and those who are far. From the point of view of the buddhas, the blessings and compassion are unbiased and flow regardless of distance; from the perspective of the beings to be tamed, however, the buddhas' blessings appear to flow easily for some and are obstructed for others. The reason that some beings fail to absorb the blessings and compassion of the enlightened ones is not caused by any fault of the blessings and compassion, but results from differences among the beings. Although the king of the gods brings down rain on all seeds equally, spoiled seeds will not sprout while good seeds sprout and make shoots. The rain itself is impartial, but certain seeds cannot sprout.

The compassion of the enlightened ones flows into beings who continuously have good and virtuous thoughts, but cannot penetrate those without virtuous thoughts. The difference between receiving or not receiving the blessings and compassion is that the blessings penetrate those with positive intention but not those with nonvirtuous and neutral thoughts. Since we need the blessings and compassion of the enlightened beings to sink into us, we must abandon nonvirtuous and neutral thoughts. Except for periods like deep sleep and fainting, when coarse thoughts of virtue and nonvirtue are blocked, conceptual thoughts flow through our

1 Note that the Tibetan term *thos* (listening, hearing) carries the sense of “studying” and so also includes reading Dharma texts.

minds constantly during our entire lives. Although these thoughts run ceaselessly through our minds, we fail to analyze them to determine whether they are nonvirtuous, neutral or virtuous. One after another, we produce a chain of thoughts, but failing to analyze them, they become lost.

Rather than acting like that, however, with the recognition that we need our present conceptual thinking, we should look inward and analyze whether our thoughts are of attachment, anger, ignorance, pride and jealousy² and so on, or whether they are neutral – neither virtuous or nonvirtuous – but simply thoughts of whether to eat or sleep or walk, thoughts like those of a dog who only follows its master without any intention of its own. The virtuous thoughts are faith, devotion and the thought of developing *bodhicitta*, a mind that wishes to attain enlightenment for the sake of all beings. All thoughts that arise are virtuous, nonvirtuous or neutral. Only these three types exist.

We need to look within our minds to discover what is going on. We should not let the thoughts stray outwardly; but must bring our attention to them and look inwardly. First, we have to scrutinize to see whether the conceptual thought that is arising is virtuous, nonvirtuous or neutral. If it is a nonvirtuous thought of one of the afflictive emotions, strive to conquer it. At best find an antidote and abandon it. If the antidote doesn't work, for the time being try to suppress nonvirtuous thoughts and forget about them. Neutral thoughts should also be discarded, although they are not as bad as nonvirtuous thoughts.

Nonvirtuous thoughts lead to the fruition of great suffering. Neutral thoughts do not ripen into such fruits of suffering, but they neither lead to attaining liberation nor to the state of enlightenment. Therefore attempt to give up neutral thoughts as well. Seek to produce conceptual thoughts of virtue. Always listen with a positive intention. The thought of attaining rebirth as a human or a god can be considered a positive intention, as are aspiring to achieve liberation or nirvana, and wishing to reach the unsurpassable state of enlightenment. These three are all varieties of virtuous thoughts.

THE SPECIFIC TOPIC

The topic here concerns Mahayana Dharma,³ of which the teachings of

2 The five major afflictive emotions.

3 Generally speaking, the three *yanas* or vehicles are the Hinayana (the “lesser” vehicle), the Mahayana (the “greater” vehicle) and the Vajrayana (the

Dzogpa Chenpo, the Great Perfection, are the pinnacle. In particular, we are discussing the Dzogchen preliminary practices. We must try to engender a motivation that accords with the teachings being studied, in this case the great open-minded Mahayana motivation of bodhicitta and the particular Vajrayana motivation of the vast methods. Therefore, we should generate the overall motivation of the Mahayana teaching; within that we need to produce the motivation of the Vajrayana. The method for developing these thoughts will be taught later. The main point here is to always listen to the teachings with a good motivation.

Will the blessings of the glorious Vajrasattva and the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the three times penetrate the mind of someone who neglects to generate virtuous thoughts and only fosters nonvirtuous and neutral thoughts, even when physically present in the teachings? They will not. The enlightened ones' blessings cannot penetrate those whose minds are creating negative thoughts. Thus, listen to the teachings with a good motivation right now. Later, when practicing the teachings, the buddhas of the three times and their heirs will always protect you, just as someone with sight cares for and protects someone who is blind. Whether or not persons with this virtuous mindset specifically supplicate the buddhas and bodhisattvas, their blessings flow spontaneously. That is why you must listen to the present teaching with a good motivation in mind.

The text being taught is called "The Words of My Perfect Teacher," in Tibetan, "*Kunzang Lama'i Zhalung*," and it describes the Dzogchen preliminary practices. The buddhas teach in accordance with the capacities, sense faculties, and thoughts of each individual being. Because these capacities, faculties, and thoughts are inconceivable in number and type, inconceivable numbers of teachings are taught. If we ask which among all these numerous teachings is the unsurpassable actual cause for attaining enlightenment, the answer would be the unsurpassable teaching of *Dzogpa Chenpo*.

The "Secret Essence Tantra"⁴ states that although the buddhas have taught countless levels of teachings, they are all taught as a stairway to reach the level of Dzogchen. Dzogchen itself is the actual cause for attaining buddhahood. Without relying on Dzogchen's definitive teachings, we will not succeed in accomplishing the ultimate goal, enlightenment. *Dzogpa Chenpo* is the supreme path.

"diamond" vehicle), also called the Mantrayana (the vehicle of mantra).

4 *Guhyagarbha* (Skt); *Sangwa Nyingpo* (Tib).

The Dzogchen teachings are classified into three: the outer division of *semde* – the mind category – the teachings on clarity; the inner division of *longde* – the expanse category – the teachings on emptiness; and the secret teachings of *mengagde* – pith instructions that teach the indivisibility of clarity and emptiness, or in other words the indivisibility of intrinsic awareness and emptiness (*rigtong zung jug*). Mengagde contains Dzogchen's two main subdivisions: *kadag trekchod* – cutting through to primordial purity – and *lhundrub togal* – spontaneously crossing over.

Of these two, Trekchod is the more general teaching. All of the four divisions of the pith instruction section – the outer, inner, secret and most secret, known as the four cycles of pith instruction – equally teach the path of Trekchod. The difference concerns the teaching of Togal, which is not taught as explicitly in the outer, inner and secret cycles. The ground, path and fruition of Togal are clearly and explicitly taught in the most secret cycle. The highest teaching of Dzogpa Chenpo is *yangsang nyingtik* – the most secret heart essence drop, also called *Longchen Nyingtik*. In this case, the teaching is named after a person; it was Omniscient Longchenpa who propagated these teachings. They are also known as the teachings of the luminous Dzogpa Chenpo (*osal dzogpa chenpo*).

To enter into the main part of the path of Longchen Nyingtik we must undertake the preliminary practices described here, practices that are taught as well within the teachings common to all the *yanas*. The preliminary practices can be divided into outer and inner. The paths taught in the common vehicles are known as the outer common preliminary practices, while those from the Mahayana and unsurpassable secret Mantrayana are called the uncommon inner preliminary practices. A practitioner needs to complete these preliminary practices to follow the path of the actual ultimate luminous Dzogpa Chenpo.

Both the outer common preliminary practice and the uncommon inner preliminary practice mainly train the mind. These practices help dispel obstacles that prevent us from bringing forth the real nature of the actual luminous Dzogpa Chenpo, and they create favorable conditions through the accumulation of enormous merit. The practices constitute a special method to give rise to actualizing the reality of the main Dzogchen teaching. They are called “preliminary practices” since we cannot do without them. Guru Yoga in particular helps manifest the special luminosity, and is also the path that swiftly transfers the blessings.

We can call this kind of teaching *tri*, meaning to guide or to lead,

because, through these pith instructions, one gradually learns how to practice, and also because the instruction leads ordinary beings along the path of luminous Dzogpa Chenpo.

The Tibetan title, “Kunzang Lama’i Zhalung,” indicates that from the primordial buddha Kuntuzangpo (Samantabhadra in Sanskrit) down to one’s present lama, all the lineage gurus have been teachers of Dzogchen. The teachings have been transmitted from Kuntuzangpo through the lineage to one’s present lama. Three different methods of transmission are found: mind to mind transmission of the glorious ones; transmission through signs of the great bodhisattvas; and transmission from mouth to ear of the yogis. Through all these methods, the teachings have been passed down from Kuntuzangpo to our own root lama without a break. The teachings that pass from mouth to ear are called *zhalung*, oral instructions.

OFFERING PRAISE AND HOMAGE

As a prologue to the text, Patrul Rinpoche makes offerings of praise and homage to the lineage lamas, to Omniscient Longchenpa, to Jigme Lingpa, and especially to his own root lama, Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu. The offering is uttering words of praise and prostrating to the qualities of the lama’s body, speech, and mind. This practice is a powerful method for accumulating merit; it is generally said that someone who has accumulated vast merit can fulfill all of his or her⁵ aspirations. Individuals who lack sufficient merit and who have strong negative thoughts cannot achieve their hopes, but those who have accumulated merit can do so without any obstacles.

Numerous methods are available to gather merit, including the seven branches.⁶ Among these, praising the qualities of the lama’s body, speech and mind, and paying homage through making prostrations instantly accumulate inconceivable merit. The qualities of the root guru equal the attainment of all the buddhas, making the lama a special field of knowledge. The kindness

5 Please note the occasional and deliberate use of both the male and female pronoun (he and she, his and hers, him and her) to indicate that at all times both genders are equally indicated. The original Tibetan contains no gender differentiation; it is the standard usage of the male pronoun in English which causes apparent gender discrimination where none exists.

6 The seven branches are: prostration as an antidote to pride; offering as an antidote to miserliness; confession and remorse as antidotes to the three poisons of attachment, hatred and ignorance; rejoicing at others’ happiness and virtue as an antidote to jealousy; requesting that the wheel of Dharma be turned; praying that the enlightened ones remain in this world; and dedication of merit.

of one's master is even greater than the kindness of the buddhas, so the guru is a special field of kindness. With a positive intention, faith and devotion, making prostrations and carrying out other virtuous actions to a special field like the lama brings greater benefit than prostrating and making offerings to the buddhas of the ten directions. Lacking faith and respect toward one's root lama is a more serious fault than lacking faith and devotion to the buddhas of the ten directions. Vast benefit accrues from viewing your lama with faith and devotion; lacking faith and devotion, however, you can accumulate great fault.

Thus, before composing this book of teachings on the Dzogchen preliminary practices, Patrul Rinpoche offers praise and pays homage to his root guru and to the lineage lamas. Through this method he accumulates vast merit, assuring that his aspirations will be fulfilled. The goals to be accomplished are to be free of obstacles while writing this text, to succeed in completing the composition, and for the book to vastly benefit the teaching and beings. For all these reasons Patrul Rinpoche makes this offering of praise and homage in the beginning. As I have just explained, the objects of offering are his root lama, the lineage lamas and others. Making offerings to one's root and lineage gurus is even more powerful than making offerings to the buddhas of the ten directions.

Patrul Rinpoche begins by praising his root lamas in a prosaic manner:

I bow down to the venerable lamas, who possess great nonconceptual compassion.

Generally speaking, the mindstream of one's root guru holds inconceivable qualities of rejecting and accepting. Although his gurus possess all these qualities, Patrul Rinpoche particularly extends his praise to their nonconceptual compassion. He does this because, from among all the qualities and knowledge of what to reject and what to accept, nonconceptual compassion is the primary one. Compassion is the seed that generates all the qualities of buddhahood; it is the water that causes the seed to expand the qualities and bring about the knowledge of what to reject and accept; and finally, compassion is like the ripened fruit. Thus, compassion is considered the most significant feature of all the qualities and knowledge of what to reject and accept.

Compassion can be divided into three types: compassion focused on beings, compassion focused on the teachings, and nonconceptual compassion. Although these three are explained in different ways, this text

teaches that ordinary compassion is mainly compassion focused on beings. Ordinary beings need an object toward which to generate compassion, and the object is sentient beings. With such a solid object, one experiences the compassion of wishing that beings could be free from suffering. This is called the compassion in the mindstream of ordinary beings. Speaking of compassion focused on the teachings, the philosophical texts say that while an individual may have realized that persons or sentient beings do not exist in reality, he or she still grasps onto the *skandhas*⁷ as an object of reference. Clinging to the reality of the *skandhas*, this kind of individual generates the compassion to free them. Known as compassion focused on the teachings, this is the compassion possessed by *sravakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*.⁸

Nonconceptual compassion is the compassion of the buddhas and noble bodhisattvas. The objects of their compassion are realized to be like the moon reflected in water – they can be seen but have no true nature. Focusing on beings like a mirage in that way and wishing to free them from suffering is nonconceptual compassion. Patrul Rinpoche identifies compassion as nonconceptual compassion, the ultimate compassion, the compassion of the wisdom mind of the buddhas. Again, compassion is the seed of the Mahayana teachings; like water it functions to expand the seed; and finally compassion is the ripened fruit.

“Venerable lamas” refers mainly to Patrul Rinpoche’s guru, Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu. Although his mindstream contains inconceivable qualities of rejecting and accepting, the main quality is nonconceptual compassion. We should pay homage to our lama as the one who possesses nonconceptual compassion, showing great respect with devotion of body, speech and mind. Behaving respectfully through one’s physical appearance is paying homage with the body; praising the qualities of the lama’s body, speech and mind is paying homage through speech; and having heartfelt faith and devotion is paying homage with the mind.

Concerning how to make prostrations as the act of paying homage, the best is the prostration that realizes the view. In this case no object is found

7 *Skandhas* (Skt), *pung po* (Tib), “aggregates” (Eng) refer to the psychophysical constituents that make up a sentient being. These are form, feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness.

8 *Sravakas* (Skt), *nyan thos* (Tib): practitioners of the Hinayana who realize the suffering of samsara and focus on understanding the lack of an independent self. *Pratyekabuddhas* (Skt), *rang sangye* (Tib): practitioners of the Hinayana who achieve final liberation without the help of a spiritual master, through understanding interdependent origination.

to whom prostration is made, no subject is found that makes the prostration and there is no act of prostrating. These three spheres of subject, object and action are primordially nonconceptual and free of all elaborations, and are actualized as one taste in the sphere of the true nature of things, *dharmata*.⁹ This is the ultimate way of making a prostration. The medium way is to make prostrations as a meditation. Visualize your body emanating as many bodies as there are dust particles in the universe. Each emanation offers respect and devotion with body, speech, and mind; each is prostrating, reciting mantra, and praising and emulating the qualities of the deity. Visualizing like this, one's virtues are limitless. The third is called prostrations of devotion. With your physical form – your body – fold your palms and touch your five places¹⁰ to the floor; prostrate with speech by uttering praise; prostrate with mind by showing faith and devotion. These three ways of making prostration correspond to view, meditation and action.

Of these three, prostrations that realize the view are the best. In that case, one is able to perform prostrations without conceptualizing the three spheres, and so must be a noble bodhisattva. As ordinary beings, we can make prostrations that are similar, but not truly the supreme type. Here Patrul Rinpoche makes the highest form of prostration, that of actualizing the view.

HOMAGE TO THE LINEAGE LAMAS

Next, Patrul Rinpoche pays homage generally to the lamas of the three lineages:

*I bow down to the gurus of the three lineages:
The mind lineage of the victorious ones, the sign lineage of the
vidyadhara,¹¹
And the oral lineage of individuals of superior fortune who,
Guided by the enlightened ones, fulfill the benefits for self and others.*

In the realm of Akanishta,¹² the Sambhogakaya Buddha is Samantabhadra as the display of the five *dhyani* buddhas.¹³ When teaching a retinue not

9 *dharmata* (Skt), *chos nyid* (Tib).

10 Two hands, two knees and forehead.

11 *vidyadhara* (Skt), *rigdzin* (Tib): “knowledge holder.”

12 The unexcelled buddhafield of Ogmin, the highest buddhafield.

13 The five *dhyani* buddhas, representing different aspects of the buddhas' wisdom, are Vairocana, Ratnasambhava, Amitabha, Amoghasiddhi and Akshobya or Vajrasattva.

different from himself, he uses the method of mind transmission, rather than transmitting the teachings by words and sentences. The mind transmission teachings Samantabhadra gave in the Akanishta realm are in this world propagated by the vidyadharas, through the use of gestures.

Vidyadharas in this context means the family of Manjushri as the body, Avalokiteshvara as the speech and Vajrapani as the mind. These three classes of deities also represent themselves as Buddha Samantabhadra's actual disciples in Akanishta. After receiving the teachings from Samantabhadra, they use symbols or gestures to transmit these teachings in the world. As this method of transmission does not rely on spoken language, it is called the sign lineage, propagated through symbolic methods and signs. The three families of bodhisattvas teach noble beings by using gestures, the vidyadhara's transmission by symbols.

When passing on to human beings the teachings received in the Akanishta realm, the three families use oral transmission, from mouth to ear. Human beings are fortunate to understand the meaning of *tantra*¹⁴ through this method of transmission. Patrul Jigme Chokyi Wangpo's root lama was Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu, whose root guru was the vidyadhara Jigme Lingpa. Jigme Lingpa's root teacher was omniscient Longchenpa, the Dharma king. This lineage is called the oral transmission to humans, transmission to "individuals of superior fortune." Oral transmission is a gradual method of passing the teachings from one person to another. Through this style of transmission humans follow in the footsteps of, and are accepted by, sublime beings. By practicing these teachings, one accomplishes the purposes of self and others. Starting from the primordial Buddha Samantabhadra down to Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu, the root lama of Patrul Jigme Chokyi Wangpo, all are said to have accomplished the two purposes of benefiting self and others.

Patrul Rinpoche goes on to offer homage especially to Longchenpa, the unsurpassed chariot of Dzogpa Chenpo:

*In the expanse of the exhaustion of all dharmas, he attained the realization of Dharmakaya;*¹⁵

*In the clear light of empty space, he saw the buddha fields of Sambhogakaya;*¹⁶

*Appearing in Nirmanakaya*¹⁷ *form, he worked for the benefit of beings:*

14 *Tantra* (Skt), *gyud* (Tib): the root texts of the Vajrayana, a classification of the Buddha's teaching concerning the swift path to buddhahood.

15 *Dharmakaya* (Skt), *cho sku* (Tib): the empty aspect of buddhahood.

16 *Sambhogakaya* (Skt), *long sku* (Tib): the luminous aspect of buddhahood.

17 *Nirmanakaya* (Skt), *trul sku* (Tib), the manifestation aspect of buddhahood.

I bow down to Omniscient Longchenpa, king of Dharma.

The Dharma king Longchenpa – in a display for ordinary human beings – meditated upon the teachings of the luminous Dzogpa Chenpo and attained the state of exhaustion of all *dharmas*, of all phenomena. Possessing six special qualities, he actualized the nature of Dharmakaya. The “exhaustion of dharmas” here means exhaustion into dharmata, the nature of reality. Dharmakaya is attained from the sphere of the exhaustion of dharmas. After exhausting all dharmas, the enlightened intention of Dharmakaya is realized.

The above verse refers to the four spontaneous visions, and mainly to the state of actualizing intrinsic awareness (*rigpa*). The Sambhogakaya realm is seen in the sphere of luminosity when intrinsic awareness has been perfected. At this time, luminous spheres and vajra chains appear as pure realms, celestial palaces and enlightened forms. This experience is referred to as “having the vision of the Sambhogakaya realm.” Generally speaking about the path, the vision of Sambhogakaya reaches completion while intrinsic awareness is being perfected. During the time of the exhaustion into dharmata, this luminous vision dissolves in the sphere of dharmata and finally the actual state of Dharmakaya is realized. This is in the context of explaining the path.

In the context of the fruition, at the end of the exhaustion into dharmata, when Dharmakaya is actualized, the vision of the spontaneous Sambhogakaya realm appears from the luminous sphere of dharmata. When the nature of Dharmakaya is actualized, the realm of Sambhogakaya spontaneously appears. Simultaneous with the appearance of the Sambhogakaya realm, an inconceivable number of *Nirmanakaya* manifestations appear for the benefit of the inconceivable number of beings to be tamed.

In this case beings are benefited by receiving teachings. Giving teachings is the only true way to benefit beings. Since beings have many different kinds of faculties, sensory capacities and mindsets, an uncountable number of Dharma teachings is given in accordance with their needs. The unfathomable number of teachings is categorized in numerous ways. They are classified into three, five or nine vehicles. If elaborated upon, an inconceivable number of vehicles can be enumerated.

Omniscient Dharma King Longchenpa is the embodiment of the three kayas. Therefore, the text says: “I bow down to Omniscient Longchenpa, king of Dharma.” The Vidyadhara Jigme Lingpa was blessed three times

by visions of the wisdom body of the Omniscient Dharma King. Thus, the next homage is offered to Jigme Lingpa.

*Through his exalted knowledge, he saw the full suchness of all dharmas;
His light rays of love and compassion shone like splendor for those to be
tamed;
He clarified the teachings of the profound path of the supreme vehicle:
I bow down to the Vidyadhara Jigme Lingpa.*

Of Jigme Lingpa's many qualities of accepting and rejecting, the homage here is paid to his knowledge and kindness. Thus the text states: "Through his exalted knowledge, he saw the full suchness of all dharmas." The suchness of all dharmas, all phenomena of samsara and nirvana, which are unborn in the state of dharmata, is clearly experienced by self-recognizing intrinsic awareness. This is known as seeing the suchness of all phenomena, or seeing all knowable things exactly as they are. When dharmata is realized, it spontaneously radiates rays of love and compassion. Therefore, "His light rays of love and compassion shone like splendor for those to be tamed." The force of nondual knowledge and kindness is the profound path of the ultimate vehicle. Dzogpa Chenpo is the greatest of all the paths, and because it was Vidyadhara Jigme Lingpa who propagated the teaching of this highest path, homage is paid to him.

The next homage is offered to Jigme Lingpa's disciple, Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu.

*Lord Avalokiteshvara in the form of a spiritual teacher;
Hearing his teachings, whoever he met was set on the path to
enlightenment;
He acted in limitless ways to tame each according to need:
I bow down to my most kind root guru.*

Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu is considered to be Avalokiteshvara in person, appearing in human form as a teacher. He made connections with the beings to be tamed by teaching them the Dharma. Whoever came into contact with his teaching was guided to the path of liberation. Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu, Patrul Rinpoche's most kind root guru, carried out limitless activities in accordance with beings' particular needs. Thus, Patrul Rinpoche pays homage to him.

The kindness of our guru is actually greater than the kindness of all the buddhas. The root guru is the lama who confers the ripening empowerments, who reveals the tantra that liberates, and who teaches the pith instructions.

A lama who has bestowed upon you an empowerment, explained to you the tantra and also given you pith instructions is called the “lama of the three kindnesses.” That explains a root guru. Any lama from whom you have received teachings can be referred to as a branch lama. Omniscient Longchenpa’s “Treasury of Words and Meanings”¹⁸ teaches that a lama who has given you only an empowerment, only an explanation of the tantra or only a pith instruction is considered a branch lama. In this case, Patrul Rinpoche’s guru Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu had given empowerments, explained the meaning of the tantra and had given pith instructions. For that reason Patrul Rinpoche pays homage to him as his root guru.

*The thoroughly complete teaching of the texts of the lineage of the
Omniscient One,
The essence of the pith instructions of the Dharma of enlightenment in
one lifetime,
The path of the common outer and inner preliminary practices,
Along with instructions on the additional practice of transference of
consciousness (phowa),
Are clear and easy to understand with a profound and marvelous
meaning.*

*The unmistakable spoken words of my unparalleled lama
I explain here exactly as I have understood them.
Deities and lamas, grant your blessings to my mindstream.*

The great Omniscient Longchenpa presented teachings such as the “Seven Treasures,” the “Ya Shi,”¹⁹ the three volumes of “Resting the Mind in Peace,” the three volumes of “Dispelling the Darkness” and the three volumes of “Self-liberation.” Jigme Lingpa also bestowed an inconceivable number of teachings. Longchenpa’s “Resting the Mind in Peace” and Jigme Lingpa’s “Treasury of Knowledge”²⁰ condense the entire doctrine, all the teachings of Sutra and Mantra, into paths for the three types of beings.²¹ These two great masters compiled all the Sutrayana and Mantrayana

18 *Tsig Don Dzod*

19 The “four branches” - a series of Dzogchen texts: the Khandro Nyingtig, Vima Nyingtig, Khandro Yangtig, and Vima Yangtig.

20 *Ngalso Korsum* (also translated by H. Guenther as “Kindly Bent to Ease Us”) and *Yonten Dzo*.

21 This covers all the teachings of the Buddha, from the outer teachings of the sutras to the inner teachings of the tantras. The three types of beings refers to beings’ differing capacities for Buddhist practice.

teachings into the different paths, and thus represent a kind of teacher that had never before appeared in this world.

DZOGCHEN PRACTICES

Dzogpa Chenpo teaches the essence of all the pith instructions and is the pinnacle of all the vehicles. Of the three categories of the path, the best is the path for the superior being. The Dzogchen oral pith instructions, *mengagde*, are the end point of that superior path. By properly practicing these pith instructions, we can attain enlightenment in one lifetime, in one body. Without perfect practice, even if the teaching is Dzogchen, enlightenment will not be achieved in this lifetime, but the fault lies with the practitioner and not the teaching. The teaching is a profound and unsurpassable method for liberating a person in one lifetime and one body. Nevertheless, differences exist between those who are able to practice and those who cannot. The quintessential pith instruction is the Dzogchen teaching of the luminous clarity, the teaching of the most secret heart essence drop.

The Dzogchen teaching is not something that a lama can simply teach and a disciple simply practice. Lamas are allowed to directly teach Dzogchen instructions to fortunate individuals with a karmic connection, and to those who did considerable practice in a past life. Such disciples can quickly understand the meaning of Dzogchen and can liberate themselves in one lifetime. Such students are known as single-pointed persons. Their faculties are either very sharp by nature, or due to past life practice. Other than people like those, most must depend on practicing the path of the lower vehicles to train their minds; only after this practice can they enter into the Dzogchen path.

In many cases, the teaching may be Dzogchen, but the person is not qualified, so that entering directly into Dzogchen practice is inappropriate. In order for a lama to directly give Dzogchen instructions and for the disciple to directly train in the practice and attain the nondual state of Vajradhara or buddhahood, both the practitioner and the teaching must have the qualities of the Dzogpa Chenpo. If the teaching is Dzogchen but the student is not ready, the practices of the lower vehicle – the stages of mind training, purification of negative emotions and accumulation of merit – must be accomplished. Only then can one engage in Dzogpa Chenpo. Thus, these practices are considered the Dzogchen preliminaries.

The preliminary practices are divided into the common outer

preliminaries and the uncommon inner preliminaries. *Phowa* – transference of consciousness – is also taught as a branch instruction, and is mainly practiced to assure the continuance of the path. One who has received empowerments, teaching on the meaning of the tantras and the pith instructions, but who has been unable to practice diligently cannot liberate himself in this lifetime or during the intermediate state. In this case, the transference of consciousness practice is needed to assure rebirth in a pure realm where Dzogchen practice can continue. All these practices are here explained clearly, in a way that is easy to understand, profound and praiseworthy.

The words and meanings are taught as they emerged from the mouth of the unparalleled root guru, with nothing missing, no words added, and no fault in the meaning, exactly as spoken by Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu. It is based upon notes Patrul Rinpoche made to keep from forgetting the instructions of his root guru. Patrul Rinpoche says he is teaching just as the words are clearly reflected in his mind, with no mistakes or confusion. He writes exactly what his teacher taught, without altering anything. Thus, he is not giving a teaching of his own, but is reiterating his teacher's words.

Aspiring to teach this text, Patrul Rinpoche supplicates his personal meditation deities – his *yidams* – and the lineage lamas to bless his mindstream. With these words he also makes the commitment to write the text. Offering words of praise to the sublime beings accumulates enormous merit. After this, promising to write the text helps clear obstacles during composition and makes it possible to complete the task. Noble people rarely make commitments, but they never waver from those they do make. They make certain to fulfill all of their commitments.

The teaching is in three sections: 1) the outer common preliminaries, 2) the inner uncommon preliminaries, and 3) how to engage in the practice of *phowa*. When we say outer common preliminaries, the question arises “common to whom?” It is common to teachings taught in the vehicles of the *sravakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*. These vehicles teach the difficulty of attaining a precious human body endowed with freedoms and advantages, impermanence, the disadvantages of *samsara*, and the cause and effect of *karma*,²² the teachings known as the outer common preliminaries.

The inner uncommon preliminaries are taught in the context of the Mahayana. The main practices are *Trekchod*, the Dzogchen practice of

22 *Karma*, *ley* in Tibetan, literally means action, but is often used to refer to the results produced by past actions.

cutting through to primordial purity, and Tegal, the Dzogchen practice of spontaneous crossing over. To receive the main practice for oneself, a disciple must first receive the uncommon Dzogchen empowerment that helps ripen his or her mindstream. After receiving the empowerment, he or she must receive the pith instructions that lead to liberation. Following this, he must guard his *samaya*²³ vows, and not let them degenerate. The life-force of empowerment can be traced to samaya.

Practitioners who abide by their samayas but practice Trekchod and Tegal with only limited diligence do not experience the necessary depth of practice – whether Trekchod or Tegal – in this lifetime, nor at the time of death, nor in the *bardo of dharmata*.²⁴ They must carry out the practice of phowa in order to continue with Trekchod or Tegal in the next life. For that reason, transference of consciousness is taught as a branch of the main practice. Phowa is considered a shortcut since someone who cannot realize the meaning of the main practice in this life can reach *Sukhavati*²⁵ and continue practicing until he succeeds in liberating himself.

This explains the three sections of practice. The first section has six parts: the difficulty of attaining the freedoms and advantages, the impermanence of life, the disadvantages of samsara, the cause and effect of karma, the benefits of liberation, and how to rely on a spiritual friend. We will begin with the difficulty of attaining the freedoms and advantages, but first we must learn how to listen to the teachings. We must know the proper motivation for receiving the teachings, and the proper demeanor of body and speech. Learning this well, we must put it into practice. After that, we can study the stages of the Dharma that we should know.

23 *samaya* (Skt), *dam tshig* (Tib); vow or promise, the link between teacher and disciple and among disciples of the same teacher.

24 The intermediate state of suchness – the intermediate state immediately following death.

25 Amitabha's pure land of great bliss.

1. THE DIFFICULTY OF FINDING THE FREEDOMS AND ADVANTAGES OF A HUMAN REBIRTH

HOW TO LISTEN TO THE INSTRUCTIONS

The teaching on the difficulties of finding the freedoms and advantages has two sections: the manner of listening to the instructions, and the teachings to be known. We begin with the first, which is also divided into two subsections: the attitude and the behavior.²⁶ The attitude or motivation is taught in two parts: the motivation of the vast intention of bodhicitta and the motivation of the vast method of Secret Mantra Vajrayana.

ATTITUDE

While the teaching here pertains to listening to the teaching, the same motivation and behavior are needed while doing *sadhana*²⁷ practice and training in meditation. We should maintain proper motivation and conduct not only while listening to the teaching but also while practicing. Proper motivation has the two divisions of the vast intention of bodhicitta and the vast method of Secret Mantra. We begin with the motivation of the vast intention of bodhicitta.

Bodhicitta Motivation

The vast intention of bodhicitta is included within the Mahayana texts of the Prajnaparamita. This type of compassion is required to practice both the Sutra²⁸ and the Mantra vehicles. Even the most effective path of the luminous Dzogpa Chenpo cannot be practiced without bodhicitta. To determine whether or not a particular path falls within the Mahayana tradition, one must examine whether it incorporates bodhicitta. Any virtue embraced by bodhicitta can be called a virtue of the Mahayana path; otherwise it cannot. To differentiate between the Hinayana and the Mahayana paths one must determine whether the virtue is embraced by

26 *kunlong* and *kunchod*: These Tibetan terms have various connotations and definitions such as attitude, intention, aspiration and motivation for *kunlong* and behavior, conduct and demeanor for *kunchod*.

27 Following a ritual text.

28 The class of Mahayana teachings based on the discourses of Lord Buddha.

bodhicitta.

We accumulate virtuous merit by performing prostrations, making offerings, confessing negativities and practicing the rest of the seven branches. Lord Maitreya, in his text “Discerning the Middle and the Extremes,”²⁹ teaches ten Dharma activities for accumulating virtue, including copying Dharma texts, reading the Dharma and others. Thus, various methods are found for accumulating merit. The presence of bodhicitta is how we distinguish Hinayana virtuous merit from Mahayana virtuous merit.

In Secret Mantra practice, “method” refers to the stage of generating the deities and “wisdom” means the completion stage of enhancing inherent wisdom by bringing the channels, winds and essential drops³⁰ into their places. At the final stage of Dzogpa Chenpo, the practice of the four kinds of Trekchod, and the four visions of Togal, the four illuminating lamps or the six key points, can all be classified as Mahayana virtue if embraced by bodhicitta. Without being so embraced, no practice – not even Dzogchen – will be considered as belonging to the Mahayana. In the context of this text, whether you are listening to the teachings, practicing the sadhana or meditating, you must have the motivation of embracing these with the vast intention of bodhicitta. Generally, Mahayana practice requires that one generate such a motivation.

Motivation of Secret Mantra

The second subdivision concerns the motivation of the vast method of the Secret Mantra vehicle. This is the required motivation for listening to the unsurpassable Mantrayana teaching, for practicing a sadhana of the unsurpassable Mantrayana and for meditating on the unsurpassable Mantrayana. This motivation is taught in accordance with the unsurpassable Mantrayana view, and is unique to it, even within the general Mahayana. Generally, after a buddha appears in the world, he or she starts turning the wheel of the Dharma for the sake of the beings to be tamed. A buddha acts to benefit beings by propagating the teachings. Buddhas care for beings by displaying the act of teaching. Any buddha who appears in this world would commonly start teaching the Sutrayana, but not all teach the Secret Mantra Vajrayana.

29 *Madhyanta Vibhanga* (Skt), *U Tha Namje* (Tib), one of five texts taught by the Buddha Maitreya to his human disciple Asanga in the Tushita heaven.

30 *nadi, prana, bindu* (Skt); *tsa, lung, thigle* (Tib).

During this Fortunate Eon,³¹ buddhas appear one after another, but only three explicitly propagate the Mantrayana. Billions of years ago during the eon of *Kunkoed* (the “all-arrayed”), Buddha *Ngonjung Gyalpo* (“the Victorious One who appeared first”) extensively taught secret Vajrayana. In this present eon, since Buddha Shakyamuni appeared in this world, the secret Vajrayana teachings have been propagated widely. In the future, in the eon called *Metog Tram* (“spreading the flowers”), Buddha Manjushri will appear and vastly transmit the secret Vajrayana. Only these three buddhas will spread the secret Vajrayana teachings.

Guru Rinpoche’s Seven Chapter Prayer³² says: “From the inconceivable wonderful teachings of the Buddha, three especially sublime teachings will appear.” The “three especially sublime teachings” refer to the teachings of these buddhas. At the present time, we follow the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha, who in this world has extensively taught on cause and effect, cause being the Sutrayana teaching and effect, or fruition, being the Vajrayana. Beings of the present are fortunate to have the opportunity to practice Vajrayana. The fact that we can still teach, listen to, practice and meditate on Secret Mantra Vajrayana teachings is an indication that Buddha Shakyamuni’s teachings are still flourishing and not diminishing. When Buddha Manjushri appears after many eons in the future, the Vajrayana teaching will again be propagated widely. Other than that, however, the mere appearance of a buddha in this world does not mean that Vajrayana will be taught.

Mind Training

We must practice mind training in order to generate compassion for beings as extensive as space. Generally speaking, bodhicitta means focusing with great compassion on the benefit of others and focusing with great wisdom on attaining complete buddhahood. Bodhicitta refers to a mind with these two qualities complete. In the “Ornament of the Middle Way,”³³ Chandrakirti taught the primacy of compassion. Bodhicitta is generated spontaneously in

31 The name given to the present eon.

32 Guru Rinpoche is the commonly used epithet for the master Padmasambhava of Oddiyana (Orgyen Pema Jungney in Tibetan), who in the 8th century enabled the establishment of Buddhism in Tibet, and is venerated as the Second Buddha. He was invited by the great religious king, Trisong Detsen, through whose efforts Buddhism was firmly established in the country. The Seven Chapter Prayer is an instruction Guru Rinpoche gave to his early Tibetan disciples, including King Trisong Detsen.

33 *Madhyamaka Alamkara* (Skt), *Uma Gyen* (Tib),

individuals endowed with compassion. For those with the bodhicitta that benefits others, the view of actualizing dharmata spontaneously develops.

The causes of becoming a bodhisattva – an heir of the victorious ones – are to possess a compassionate mind of bodhicitta and a nondual mind that has actualized dharmata. Of these, compassion is considered the most important; therefore in the “Ornament of the Middle Way” Chandrakirti made an offering to compassion. Bodhicitta cannot be generated in a mindstream that lacks compassion. A compassionate mind arises spontaneously only in extremely fortunate individuals. Most practitioners must engage in mind-training to give birth to the compassionate mind that has not yet developed within them.

We train the mind by realizing that all sentient beings who live in this world of samsara have been our mothers from time immemorial. Engendering this thought of recognizing all beings as mothers, we remember their kindness and wish to repay it. We engage in these particular mind trainings. Developing a compassionate mind toward one’s present parents, spouse, friends and relatives is easy, but engendering compassion toward those who harm us – such as our enemies – is more difficult. Although we find it effortless to develop compassion toward those who are close to us and challenging to generate compassion toward those who cause us trouble, timing is the only difference between them. Understanding the reality that beings as vast as space have all at some point been our parents, we can see that only the time is different. Therefore, as part of our present mind training, we must develop the perspective that sees all beings as our parents, spouses, friends and relatives. Realizing our relationship to all beings, we can readily generate compassion. When compassion arises with ease, bodhicitta will also flow effortlessly.

When these beings were our parents, they looked after us with great kindness. How did they show their kindness? From the worldly point of view, our parents gave birth to our body and later nurtured it. They gave us the first portion of food and the best clothing they could afford. Whether the food was bad or good, our parents fed us first. This worldly explanation helps us understand that all beings have treated us benevolently. As long as they are beings, we should recognize their kindness. Our present parents are the root parents who cared for us by nourishing, clothing and raising us. Our previous parents raised us in the same way, as did the parents before that, and so on. What makes someone our present rather than our past parent is only a difference of time. Others have been our parents, some

perhaps many years ago, but at all times they brought us up with great care and concern. Even our enemies have in the past been parents who fed and dressed us. They may appear to be causing harm in this present lifetime, but in past lifetimes they looked after us as our present parents have. Thinking in this way, not only humans, but also animals, worms and germs have been our parents. The time alone differs, otherwise their kindness is equal to all others.

Examining what all these kind beings desire, we discover that they wish for contentment and ease. All sentient beings are the same in experiencing happiness and unhappiness. Earth and stones have no minds and therefore do not experience these two states, but any being with a mind and consciousness experiences pleasure and pain. Just as we experience comfort and discomfort in our human bodies, all beings with consciousness share this experience. Just as we prefer contentment to discontent, so do others. Right down to the level of a germ, beings desire wellbeing and do not desire torment any more than we do. It is not true to say that we desire happiness and ease but beings in other realms, for example animals, desire the opposite. For this reason all sentient beings are said to be equal in desiring comfort and wishing to avoid discomfort.

The causes of happiness are the ten virtuous acts. Those who seriously practice these virtues will experience more happiness, while unhappiness is the fruit of accumulating the ten nonvirtuous acts. Although both humans and other beings desire wellbeing, none know how to bring forth the causes for happiness and contentment. Not wanting suffering, we don't know how to abandon or discard suffering's causes. Lacking that knowledge, our desires and our actions are in opposition. We need wellbeing and contentment but we engage in nonvirtuous acts to bring it about. Although we don't desire distress, we bring about the causes of suffering.

“Wrong path” is explained as follows: if someone who desires comfort achieves comfort, this is not the wrong path, but if someone desires comfort without knowing how to accumulate its causes and instead cultivates causes that generate suffering, that is the wrong path. Confusion is being unable to differentiate between what to accept and what to reject. The example is of a blind person being left in the middle of a vast plain and therefore not knowing which way to go. Many beings are in this state of confusion. Incapable of accepting or rejecting properly, like the blind person they become quite confused. Compassion is the ability to generate a mindset that sees beings experiencing the fruit of suffering, sees the cause of their

suffering – their nonvirtuous acts – and wishes they could be free from this pattern. The wish to free beings from suffering and the causes of suffering is compassion.

We should cultivate the following thoughts: “Today I am practicing this profound Dharma and am able to benefit beings, having met with a spiritual teacher and received instructions on the teachings. I have learned what to accept and reject, and know that what to accept is virtue and what to abandon is evil. Before meeting a spiritual teacher and learning the Dharma, I was confused and on a wrong path, just like that blind person in the vast plain, but because of the virtues accumulated over many past lifetimes, I have been reborn in a human form. What is more, I have been able to encounter a spiritual teacher. Not only have I met a teacher, I have received teachings on rejecting nonvirtuous acts and accepting virtuous acts. I have not understood this simply through my own capacity, but due to the kindness of my spiritual teachers.

“Our root guru is considered to be more kind than the buddhas of the past. Countless buddhas have appeared, but we had no opportunity to be tamed by their actual presence. We took the wrong path and became confused. At present, what we know about following the right path and abandoning the wrong path comes from our lama’s kindness, and so we say that our lama is kinder than the buddhas. That is why today I will listen to the sublime teachings and understand what to accept and reject and will act according to that. I will listen to the Dharma and be able to benefit those beings.

“Right now I have the capacity to free sentient beings and benefit myself because I have obtained a human body endowed with the eighteen special freedoms and advantages. I have met a spiritual teacher and received instructions. Therefore, I can practice the Dharma if I want to. Had I been born in the animal realm I wouldn’t know how to distinguish between a genuine and a wrong path. Due to my confusion I wouldn’t know what to accept and what to reject. Not only could I not benefit others, I could not even benefit myself and would be left like a blind person in the middle of a vast plain.”

Thinking of our present human birth, we know what to accept and reject and we can practice the Dharma. Since we are able to benefit both ourselves and others we must engage diligently in benefiting others. Attaining buddhahood is the ultimate of all benefits. Nothing is more beneficial than our efforts to attain buddhahood. Right now, beings born in

different realms of cyclic existence experience the suffering corresponding to their realm. Therefore, we should fervently pray: "May all parent sentient beings who are suffering in the cycle of the six realms be free from the experiences and habitual patterns of each of the six realms and attain the state of omniscient buddhahood." This kind of motivation is known as focusing on complete enlightenment through wisdom, and is one of the two aspects of bodhicitta: focusing on the benefit of others through compassion and focusing on complete enlightenment through wisdom. We need this kind of motivation at all times when we are listening to or practicing the Dharma.

The Three Excellences

As Mahayana practitioners, our practice must be embraced by the three excellences. The beginning must be embraced by the genuine motivation; the main part must be embraced by genuine nonconceptuality; and the conclusion must be embraced by genuine dedication. Whether we are listening to or practicing the Dharma, we cannot do without these three excellences. The roots of virtue of whatever virtuous act we carry out must be embraced by the first excellence, the endowment of genuine motivation. The second excellence of genuine nonconceptuality is necessary to protect the virtues from being destroyed by circumstances. The third excellence of the seal of dedication is required to keep the virtue increasing.

The roots of virtue include virtue with a reference point and virtue without a reference point. Both must be held within the method, within the embrace of bodhicitta. When so held, the virtue expands. As the endowment of the genuine motivation precedes the accumulation of virtue, whatever virtuous act we do must begin with the bodhicitta motivation. A virtuous act embraced by bodhicitta is embraced by method; such roots of virtue are extremely vast.

Whether the intention is virtuous or nonvirtuous is the distinguishing factor; the physical size of the virtue or vice is not important.

The size of a virtue cannot be determined by external appearances. Being small in appearance does not mean the virtue is small, nor does a large appearance mean the virtue is large. A virtue's size depends on the virtuous or nonvirtuous motivation. The motivation arising from bodhicitta and the roots of virtue that result from such a motivation are vast. Were we to ask which of two butter lamp offerings is more virtuous when one contains hundreds of thousands of lamps and the other only a single lamp, the answer

depends on the motivation. Comparing the size, an offering of hundreds of thousands of lamps is certainly greater than a single butter lamp, but the size of the virtue must be determined by the motivation, by whether or not it is embraced by method. Of the two, a single butter lamp offered with the motivation of bodhicitta is greater than a massive offering made with the motivation of pride. If both are offered with the same bodhicitta motivation, however, then an offering of hundreds of thousands of lamps will be better than a single lamp offering. Roots of virtue that are held within the embrace of bodhicitta are extremely vast.

A nonconceptual main part prevents circumstances from destroying the virtue. In general, without being embraced by the three excellences, circumstances – for example the arising of anger – can ruin whatever merit is accumulated. You could make hundreds of thousands of prostrations, but without embracing the practice by the three excellences, anger would destroy the virtue. You must embrace your practice with the nonconceptual main part to prevent circumstances from destroying it. Anger cannot spoil virtue held within nonconceptuality, and embracing the virtuous act with bodhicitta will also keep it from being damaged.

In addition, all your virtuous acts must be supported by dedicating them for the sake of all beings attaining complete and perfect enlightenment. When this is done, the virtues will expand and will not deteriorate due to anger or other negative situations. You cannot do without embracing all practices with the three excellences.

Wishing to practice the supreme Dharma, you must first learn how to practice. Whether you desire to practice the Hinayana path, the path of the pratyekabuddhas or the Mahayana path, you must first learn the methods and then begin practicing. You cannot simply embark upon practice without learning how. Even when working in the world, we must learn how to carry out whatever worldly activities we wish to engage in, and then perform them with this knowledge. Someone who wants to succeed in business must study business methods; similarly someone who wants to farm must learn agriculture. Whatever path you are drawn to, you must initially learn the correct methods and only then begin your practice. By proceeding in such a way you will achieve the fruition without being deceived. You could not possibly have an incorrect fruition. Without knowing how to practice properly, however, your fruition could be incorrect.

Whatever path we practice, be it Hinayana or Mahayana, the power of the practice will gradually be generated within us and we will attain the

fruition. If we are practicing the Mahayana teaching we must incorporate the three excellences fully. When practicing the Dzogchen teachings of Trekchod and Togal as well, unless we embrace our practice with these three excellences, the practice will not help us attain buddhahood in one lifetime and one body.

To reiterate, whatever we wish to practice, we must first receive the teachings on how to proceed. Proper motivation is the most important thing to learn, even for listening to the Dharma and receiving instruction. As Patrul Rinpoche said, "Whether the intention is virtuous or nonvirtuous is the distinguishing factor." With a good motivation your virtues will be vast, but actions performed with a nonvirtuous intention are not virtuous, no matter how they may appear. For example, doing prostrations while the mind is full of anger and ignorance looks virtuous but actually isn't. A root of merit depends on motivation.

While proper intention is primary, having bodhicitta is still more important. The benefit of activities embraced with the Mahayana motivation of bodhicitta is greatly increased. No matter how much teaching you listen to, if you are inspired by pride, or by wanting to enhance this life through fame or great renown, pure Dharma will not result. Someone could receive and learn the Dharma with the desire to obtain a high position or to become famous in the future, but this sort of intention does not qualify as genuine Dharma. Thus, we must examine ourselves and mend our motivation, even when listening to teachings. Khenpo Ngaga,³⁴ in his "Notes on Kunzang Lama'i Zhalung," states in the section on how to supplicate the lama through guru yoga that motivation must be embraced with bodhicitta before the practice session commences.

When entering into retreat we must first mend our motivation. From beginningless time we have trained strongly in considering our own purposes,

34 Khenpo Ngaga was an incarnation of the great scholar, the pandit Vimalamitra, who lived in the 8th century. After Vimalamitra achieved the rainbow body of great transference without death in India, he travelled to Tibet and taught Dzogchen. When he completed his teaching there, he went to the Five-Peak Mountain in China, where he is said to remain to this day. Vimalamitra made a vow that every hundred years he would reincarnate in Tibet particularly to give the Dzogchen teachings. Although Vimalamitra has many emanations, they do not all give Dzogchen teachings. Khenpo Ngaga was one of the incarnations who did give Dzogchen teachings, as were Kumaradza, Longchenpa and Jigme Lingpa. Khenpo Ngaga's root teacher was Lungtog Tenpa'i Nyima, whose root teacher was Patrul Rinpoche.

and this habit makes it difficult to generate bodhicitta spontaneously. Although we do not instinctively arouse the mind of bodhicitta when listening to or practicing the Dharma, we should examine ourselves, correct our conceptual thoughts and try to deliberately create the bodhicitta mind. Knowing how to consciously rectify our conceptual thoughts like this, our virtues will be embraced by the method and will become an immeasurable source of the merit of a great being. Mending the motivation of bodhicitta, whether during a Dharma teaching or when practicing, is called “embracing virtue with the method,” and is the path of a Mahayana practitioner. If the root of virtue is held within bodhicitta, making even a single prostration is also the path of a greater being, the Mahayana path.

A virtue embraced by bodhicitta is the source of immeasurable merit, but because of our strong habituation to a mindset of self-benefit, bodhicitta will not be generated unless we know how to correct our thoughts. We need not work on our desire to benefit ourselves since as soon as day breaks we consider our own happiness – wanting comfort and sufficient food, proper clothing and so forth. A mind that wishes to accomplish its own goals arises artlessly because of long training in thinking of our own benefit. Our chain of conceptual thoughts begins the moment we wake up, and we do not instantly think, “Today, how can I to benefit others?” Because of not training in the mind of bodhicitta that benefits others, this thought does not occur automatically.

As beginners we must deliberately alter our motivation. As soon as we emerge from sleep and thoughts start bubbling up, we should try to block any negative thinking and generate good thoughts. It is also important to diligently try to rectify our thinking by generating bodhicitta. Without correcting our motivation, practicing or listening to the Dharma has no power. Our efforts would be mere replicas, and the practice not genuine. Giving the appearance of practice, it would actually be a mere shadow of the Dharma. Such a shadow is inauthentic, just as the face in a mirror is not real.

Any practice you do – listening, performing a sadhana, visualizing a deity, chanting a mantra, offering prostrations, making circumambulations, even reciting a single syllable of mantra – must be embraced by the motivation of bodhicitta. From the large perspective of practicing generation or completion stage, or meditating on the Dzogpa Chenpo, as well as from the smaller perspective of reciting a single mantra, making a single prostration and so

forth, all these practices must be held within the bodhicitta motivation. As I said before, since we cannot generate bodhicitta spontaneously, it is crucial to know how to correct our thought patterns to mend our motivation.

Attitude of the Vast Method of Secret Mantra

The motivation of the vast method of Secret Mantra is an attitude that accords with the Secret Mantra view. Describing the path of Secret Mantra, the “Lamp of Three Ways”³⁵ states:

*The meaning is the same, so there is no confusion;
Because of the many methods there is no difficulty;
It is meant for those with sharp faculties.
For these reasons, Mantra is unique.*

Having the “same meaning” indicates that although both the Paramitayana³⁶ and the Vajrayana lead to the same accomplishment of buddhahood, the modes of practice differ. The difference is that the Secret Mantra view is without confusion. This view recognizes that the natural state of dharmata has from the very beginning been enlightened as the essence of *kayas*³⁷ and wisdoms. The Paramitayana does not teach this view. By not recognizing all that appears and exists as *kayas* and wisdom, the Paramitayana view is mistaken. The training also differs, as Sutrayana training does not include Vajrayana’s numerous methods, such as the practices of development stage and completion stage and others. For example, the Paramitayana has no method for taming a *rudra*,³⁸ whereas many are found within the Vajrayana. Moreover, many special qualities are found in Vajrayana training. Its “lack of difficulty” primarily refers to activity. The Paramitayana requires freedom from attachment to sense pleasures, whereas these are not abandoned in Vajrayana but are used on the path. Thus, engaging in the activity of Vajrayana does not require one to endure difficulty.

Followers of the Paramitayana are considered to have sharp faculties, but Vajrayana practitioners are considered the sharpest of the sharp. Such especially sharp practitioners can realize the view, meditation and action just

35 *Tsul Sum Dronme.*

36 The “vehicle of the perfections.” The Paramitayana and the Sutrayana refer to the same vehicle, as do Secret Mantra and Vajrayana.

37 Here meaning “bodies,” referring to enlightened forms.

38 A malicious demon with ten evil qualities, also considered to be the demon of ego-clinging.

as they are. There are many doors for entering into Vajrayana, many ways of accumulating merit and many profound methods for bringing forth fruition without much difficulty. The entrance doors are the ripening empowerments, each leading to a different path. The vase empowerment path is meditation on generation stage and the path of the secret empowerment is meditation on completion stage, especially the upper door of *prana* practice, the practice of the wind energy. The wisdom empowerment takes one through the lower door practice of *bindu*, the practice of the “essential drops,” and the word empowerment leads to the completion stage of Dzogpa Chenpo. Each empowerment thus opens a different door to practice.

Vajrayana provides many methods for accumulating virtue as well. I already noted that Sutrayana has no means for taming the rudras, while Vajrayana does. Vajrayana teaches that the method of subjugating a rudra brings forth self-abiding wisdom. A means of subjugation like this accumulates vast merit instantaneously. Furthermore, in Sutrayana, one practices generosity through hardship such as giving up the head and limbs, while Vajrayana does not require that one experience this difficulty. Not only that, but Vajrayana incorporates the profound method of taking material pleasures as the path without abandoning them, and in this way leads to realization of the ultimate fruition without much trouble.

Generally speaking, the view, meditation and action of the Vajrayana are special and more advanced than those of the Sutrayana. As a result, one’s view and motivation must change when teaching or listening to these teachings. For example, the motivation we have generated now is merely ordinary, impure intention. When studying Vajrayana teachings, however, we must try to generate pure motivation.

*As it is said: since all phenomena have their causes,
Everything rests on the tip of one’s attitude.*

All phenomena depend on our intention; all depend upon causes and conditions. Therefore, our motivation changes as the path changes. Practicing Vajrayana rests mainly on altered motivation. When listening to or teaching Vajrayana Dharma we should realign our intention to accord with its particular view, meditation and action. We correct our attitude and motivation by changing how we perceive the place of the teaching, the teacher and the retinue. Right now we see them as ordinary and impure. This perception is not appropriate. Rather than viewing them as ordinary, when listening to the Vajrayana teachings we should perceive their purity as the five perfect qualities: perfect place, teacher, retinue, time, and

teaching.

As explained before, the view of unsurpassable Secret Mantra establishes that nirvana and samsara are primordially pure as kayas and wisdoms. The view is established as nothing other than the primordial purity of the nature of enlightenment. When training through practice that accords with the view, the practice contains both the method of the generation stage and the wisdom of the completion stage, and is called generation and completion stage practice. In Secret Mantra, one must first generate the view within oneself to be able to practice generation and completion stage. Without this view, if we practice the generation stage of visualizing the deity and the completion stage with characteristics – the oral instructions on putting the channels, winds and essential drops in place – our practice will not be the genuine unsurpassable Secret Mantra.

No matter what Hinayana or Mahayana practice you want to engage in, the view must precede the practice. The view is like having eyes, and the meditation is like walking. If we want to follow a path, we must first look and then step forward. If during our meditation we appropriately practice whatever the view has established, our path will be genuine. For this to occur, we must understand the view first. Someone who wants to practice the Hinayana path of the sravakas must create the Sravakayana view, proceeding with the practice of meditation according to this view. To practice the Vajrayana path we must generate within us the Vajrayana view; otherwise our practice will be merely like a shadow, and not the genuine path of completion and generation stage.

We must also develop the attitude and intention that match the view. At this point, our motivation must change to accord with the view of Vajrayana. This teaching concerns the Dzogpa Chenpo preliminary practices, which are part of the path of the unsurpassable Secret Mantra. When practicing Secret Mantra, we initially generate the motivation according to the Secret Mantra; in the middle we generate the view of the Secret Mantra, and abide continuously in the practice of that view. Post-meditation as well must harmonize with the view and practice of Secret Mantra. For this reason we bring forth a motivation that accords with the vast methods of Secret Mantra.

The Five Perfect Qualities

How is such an attitude generated? When, at the final point, the fruition is

actualized, it appears as the nature of the five perfect qualities: the perfect place, the perfect teacher, the perfect retinue, the perfect time, and the perfect teaching. We need to be decisive about this ultimate state from the very beginning. At the very time of the ground, the teaching that will be actualized during fruition is – without wavering – spontaneously inherent. Thus, we visualize in terms of the ultimate fruition. Patrul Rinpoche teaches:

The perfect place is the *dharmadhatu*³⁹ palace of Akanistha, – the “unexcelled” – the perfect teacher is the Dharmakaya Buddha Samantabhadra, and the perfect retinue consists of the male and female bodhisattvas and the gods and goddesses of the mind transmission lineage of the victorious ones and of the symbolic transmission lineage of the vidyadharas.

The place is the Akanistha palace of dharmadhatu, the completely pure dharmadhatu free of all elaborations of extremes, where resides the Dharmakaya Buddha Samantabhadra. From the Dharmakaya sphere, the Sambhogakaya arises as the five dhyani buddhas. The Sambhogakaya buddhas reside in the palace of the Akanistha heaven of the Dense Array, which emerges from the realm of the palace of dharmadhatu. This palace is free of all size and depth; its nature is the completely pure Dharma that appears only to the primordial wisdom of the buddhas.

Understand that there are the Dharmakaya Samantabhadra, the Sambhogakaya Samantabhadra and the Nirmanakaya Samantabhadra. The Dharmakaya buddha abides in the Akanistha palace of dharmadhatu, and must be recognized from the Dharmakaya point of view. When we refer to the field of the Sambhogakaya, the palace is the Akanistha heaven of the Dense Array, visible only to the primordial wisdom of the buddhas.

Dharmakaya Samantabhadra refers to the ultimate natural state of the Dharma that is free from the meeting and parting – the joining together and separating – of dharmadhatu and primordial wisdom. In short, dharmadhatu and primordial wisdom are here known as “Samantabhadra.” This is not a Samantabhadra with a face and arms; it is free of the elaboration of such characteristics. A Dharmakaya buddha of this kind resides in the dharmadhatu. Thus, the “palace of dharmadhatu” refers to the abode of Samantabhadra in the context of Dharmakaya, Samantabhadra as the form body that arises from the Dharmakaya sphere. This bodily form appears as the essence of the primordial buddha’s wisdom and can never be seen by

39 *dharmadhatu* (Skt), *cho kyi ying* (Tib), expanse of the nature of reality.

anyone whose mindstream diverges from that of the primordial buddha.

The bodily form of Sambhogakaya that appears to the wisdom of the buddhas with faces, colors and hand implements is the Sambhogakaya buddha Samantabhadra, whose essential nature is the five dhyani buddhas. The Sambhogakaya Samantabhadra thus appears as the five dhyani buddhas. The realm where this Samantabhadra resides is the buddha field of the spontaneous Sambhogakaya, the buddha field of Samantabhadra as the five dhyani buddhas. This is Samantabhadra in the Sambhogakaya context. The Nirmanakaya Samantabhadra is our present Buddha Shakyamuni, and all the thousand buddhas of this fortunate eon.

Generally, in our thinking we recognize Samantabhadra only as the buddha who is blue in color and naked. We don't consider the display of the dhyani buddhas' bodily forms or the display of the Nirmanakaya as Samantabhadra. Such thinking is incorrect. There are the Dharmakaya Samantabhadra, the Sambhogakaya Samantabhadra and the Nirmanakaya Samantabhadra. Samantabhadra in the context of Nirmanakaya is visible to the beings to be tamed. When Shakyamuni appeared in this world, for example, beings could actually see his physical form as the Buddha. The buddha field of Nirmanakaya Samantabhadra is the buddha field of the world of those enduring suffering and other Nirmanakaya buddha fields.

Just now Samantabhadra is being explained mainly in the context of Sambhogakaya. Therefore, the perfect place is the Akanistha palace of dharmadhatu visible to the primordial wisdom of the buddhas, the spontaneous display of the Akanishta heaven of the Dense Array. Actualized at the time of fruition, this nature is primordially present at the time of the ground. At this point we visualize it to develop the proper attitude or intention.

The perfect teacher is the Dharmakaya Buddha Samantabhadra, again in the context of the Sambhogakaya. In the Akanistha buddha field, the teacher takes the form of the five dhyani buddhas adorned with major and minor attributes, those with faces and hands. This form, which is actualized at the time of fruition, is already present at the time of the ground. While listening to the teachings our attitude – in other words how we perceive – must be changed. The teacher who is giving the teaching should not be seen as ordinary but as the actual Sambhogakaya buddha residing in the buddha field of Akanistha.

The perfect retinue is the retinue present in the Sambhogakaya buddha field, and is the same in essence as the buddha. Appearing as teacher and

retinue, their mindstreams are in reality the same. In Akanistha, Buddha Samantabhadra – in the form of the five dhyani buddhas – teaches the retinue that is undifferentiated from himself. He uses the method of mind to mind transmission, without having to rely on words and sounds. Because the teacher is actualizing the reality of the complete dharmadhatu, the mind of the retinue – in no way different from himself – never wavers from the experience. Thus it is called the mind transmission of the victorious ones. This is how the nature is actualized at the time of complete fruition. Since whatever is actualized at fruition is spontaneously present in the ground, we must visualize this nature now, thereby changing our attitude and motivation. Understanding that the Victorious One in the Akanistha realm teaches through mind transmission to the undifferentiated retinue – including male and female *sugatas*,⁴⁰ male and female bodhisattvas and male and female wrathful deities – we receive the teachings while visualizing in the same way.

The male and female bodhisattvas who reside in the Akanistha buddha field of Sambhogakaya are the vidyadharas, who for the sake of the beings to be tamed, teach through signs or symbols, in what is called the “vidyadhara sign transmission.” When teaching, these bodhisattvas mainly use the method of sign transmission. They themselves are undifferentiated from the buddha in the Akanistha buddha field, and receive the teachings through mind transmission. When giving teachings in the world, however, this retinue teaches through symbols. As the retinue includes gods and goddesses, when listening to the teachings we must not think of ourselves as ordinary beings but as primordially pure, equal to those who are not different from the buddhas. In order to change our motivation, we visualize ourselves as the male and female *sugatas*, male and female bodhisattvas, gods and goddesses who reside in the Akanistha buddha field.

Another manner of visualizing is to see the place of teaching as the Great Palace of Lotus Light, Guru Rinpoche’s buddha field on top of the Copper Colored Mountain, the mountain in the fabulous continent of the cannibal demons, Nga Yab Ling. We visualize the place of teaching as this great pure realm, and the lama giving the teaching as Guru Pema Jungney,⁴¹ the lord of all protection, who resides on the Copper Colored Mountain. We see ourselves as the retinue listening to the teaching, the inconceivable retinue that includes the eight vidyadharas of India, the twenty-five – king

40 *sugatas* (Skt) “those who have gone to bliss” – i.e. the Buddhas.

41 A form of Guru Rinpoche.

and disciples – of Tibet, *viras* and *virinis*, and *dakas* and *dakinis*.⁴² Receiving the teachings while visualizing like this, we have the attitude of the vast method of Secret Mantra.

We can also visualize the perfect place as the eastern buddha field of the Pure Realm of Complete Joy, the perfect buddha as the Sambhogakaya Buddha Vajrasattva and the perfect retinue as the assembly of the deities of the vajra family.

The Pure Realm of Complete Joy is the buddha field of Vajrasattva as one of the five dhyani buddhas. The buddha fields of the five dhyani buddhas contain ordinary beings to be tamed. Although their mindsets differ from those of the buddhas, the retinues are all noble bodhisattvas. These bodhisattvas are called “the retinue of the assembly of vajra family deities,” and should be visualized as male and female bodhisattvas of the vajra family.

Additionally, the perfect place can be seen as the western buddha field of Great Bliss, the perfect teacher as Buddha Amitabha and the perfect retinue as the assembly of lotus family deities.

Because Amitabha, the central figure of this buddha field, belongs to the lotus family of speech, the retinues – male and female bodhisattvas, gods and goddesses – are also from that family. Visualizations like these develop the attitude of the Secret Mantra.

There are also the perfect time and the perfect teaching. In the Akanistha buddha field, teachings are given timelessly within what is called the “primordial time of the continuous cycle.” What we visualize is primordially in that state, and we meditate in order to recognize it. The teachings in the Akanistha buddha field are exclusively Mahayana; of the Mahayana teachings, it is the doctrine of the unsurpassable Secret Mantra that is taught. In the buddha field of the natural state of the Nirmanakaya, both Sutra and Mantra teachings are given, but the Hinayana teachings of the sravakas and pratekyabuddhas are not taught, so it remains exclusively Mahayana. In this Nirmanakaya buddha field, teachings are sometimes being given and sometimes not, as for example when a buddha passes away. The teaching therefore is not a continuous cycle – when the teacher and disciples assemble, the Dharma is taught; when they do not gather, it is not. In the buddha field of Akanistha, however, the gathering of teachers and disciples is unceasing and hence the teaching is continuous. Therefore, it is called “the time of the continuous cycle.”

42 Different classes of Dharma protectors.

When receiving Secret Mantra teachings we must try to change our attitude to one that complements these five perfect qualities. Even though we may not be able to hold this attitude for a long period, at the beginning we should try to make our minds focus in this way. Developing such an outlook is not like thinking that charcoal is white. By nature charcoal is black; visualizing something that is by nature black as being white would not match reality. However, right now, while receiving the teaching, to visualize everything to be pure in the state of the five perfect qualities is to see things in their natural state of purity. Although they are pure by nature, we are not yet capable of realizing this purity; we visualize the purity to help us recognize pure as pure. A common example is to say that someone suffering from jaundice sees a white conch shell as yellow. The actual color of the conch is white, and it looks yellow only to those who are ill. Seeing it as yellow, a person who knows that the actual color is white and who tries to visualize it that way is in accord with reality. Similarly, although we now see things as impure, in reality they are primordially pure. If we actually saw them as pure, we would not need the visualization.

“Changing one’s attitude” means becoming able to see the naturally pure for what it is. We are visualizing the nature of reality and not something unreal. As visualized, the five perfect qualities represent reality’s actual purity. We are not trying to visualize the impure as pure. Black charcoal will not become white no matter how much we visualize it. But if you visualize a white conch shell as white, you can actually see it that way. Were it not truly white, no matter how much you visualized it as white, it would not become white. For us, the nature of reality does not at present appear to be pure, although it is. We must establish the view that it is pure. Visualizing it as pure at this point will enable us to see its purity for ourselves later. Therefore, generation stage practice involves visualizing that everything has the nature of the pure deities. Establishing this view, we visualize that our own bodies also have the deity’s primordially pure nature. Meditating like this, at some point our bodies become the pure deity as visualized.

Although the body is primordially pure, we may not realize its nature and continue grasping at it as impure. If during generation stage practice we simply think: “I am the primordially pure deity, I am Guru Rinpoche, I am the *yidam*⁴³ Youthful Vajra” – from the worldly point of view this is simply being boastful or proud. How could you visualize yourself as Guru Rinpoche without possessing at least some of Guru Rinpoche’s qualities? How will you become the yidam deity Youthful Vajra by simply thinking that you are if

you don't possess any quality of freedom from accepting and rejecting?

Secret Mantra it is not like this, however. Secret Mantra doctrine teaches that the body is pure as the nature of Guru Rinpoche, the nature of the yidam Youthful Vajra. Yet merely being pure doesn't help; we must establish the view that recognizes pure as pure. After such recognition, visualizing ourselves through meditation as a deity accords with reality. Through practice, we will at some point be able to realize the deity of the pure nature. Before engaging in generation stage practice it is necessary to actualize the view of unsurpassable Secret Mantra. Lacking the view, simply thinking that you are this or that deity is merely a boastful pretense that serves no purpose. You would be better off to simply visualize the assemblage of buddhas and bodhisattvas in the space in front of you and to make fervent supplications while remaining in your ordinary form. No good will come of just thinking of yourself as one or another yidam.

Even though the unsurpassable Secret Mantra primarily teaches the generation and completion stages, this is not a practice that one can engage in immediately. Only knowing how to use the vajra and bell and how to beat the drum or merely learning the tunes of the chants is not the true Secret Mantra teaching. The main thing is to achieve stability in the view. At this point we are discussing changing our attitude and correcting our thoughts so we understand that which is primordially pure as being pure. Usually, those to be tamed perceive their spiritual teacher as an ordinary being.

Attitude toward the Spiritual Teacher

Over 2500 years ago, Buddha Shakyamuni tamed beings by displaying the major and minor marks of a supreme Nirmanakaya. He did this to benefit the beings of that time, but when passing away he told his attendant Ananda: "Do not grieve, Ananda; do not mourn. In the future I will appear as a spiritual teacher to benefit you and others." He clearly said he would appear in the form of a spiritual teacher, not that he would appear adorned with the attributes of a supreme Nirmanakaya. Inconceivable Nirmanakayas are displayed for the sake of taming beings. A Nirmanakaya buddha cannot perform all the activities of taming beings only by displaying the major and minor marks. Some Nirmanakayas do work to tame beings by displaying these marks; others appear as spiritual teachers for the sake of certain beings. For the sake of some beings, they may at times manifest as prostitutes or hunters, or even as bridges and lakes. All beings are not tamed by a form

adorned with the major and minor marks, so the Nirmanakaya manifests in various forms according to beings' needs and inclinations.

The capacities, sense faculties and thoughts of beings are inconceivable. Therefore, the Nirmanakaya forms to tame these beings should also be displayed in inconceivable numbers. Likewise, the teachings must be taught in inconceivable stages or vehicles. Simply declaring Dzogpa Chenpo to be the ultimate teaching and proceeding to teach Dzogchen alone will not benefit all beings. Even though it is the ultimate teaching, all practitioners are not Dzogpa Chenpo; some benefit from sravaka teachings, some need the teachings of the pratyekabuddhas, for some the bodhisattva teachings are necessary and for some Secret Mantra teaching is the best. Dzogchen teachings must be given to those fortunate beings that have a karmic link, those who are the sharpest of the sharp. The beings to be tamed should be brought onto the path most appropriate for them. It is not the case that all beings should be given only Dzogchen teachings.

Always displaying a form endowed with the major and minor marks is likewise not necessary. The teachings should be given in the appropriate form – for some as a Nirmanakaya endowed with the major and minor marks, for some as a spiritual teacher, and for the sake of certain others even as prostitutes and hunters. An inconceivable number of forms must be displayed in order to tame different beings. For us now the teacher appears as an ordinary human being; at times a real buddha can appear as a spiritual teacher in order to tame beings. This teacher is by nature a truly enlightened being and is free from suddenly arising impurities. He or she is a buddha possessing two types of purity.⁴⁴ Such a spiritual teacher is the display of a buddha, and it is due to our fault that we humans may not be able to see his or her enlightened nature.

Because of their karma, the six classes of beings perceive things very differently. Hell beings perceive everything as liquefied metal; hungry ghosts see all places as lacking food and drink. Having accumulated the karma of humans, we will perceive even a real buddha as an ordinary human. We do not have the karma to see him or her as a buddha. When our teacher, Buddha Shakyamuni, appeared in this world, for example, the heretic teacher Dzojed saw him with a nature of nine unpleasant qualities. Some beings felt faith for Lord Buddha and others disparaged him because they could not see what was pure as pure. Likewise, although a buddha may

44 The two-fold purity is original purity, the buddha nature possessed by all beings, and purity from all adventitious stains. Only a buddha has this second purity.

manifest for us as a spiritual teacher, we may not see him or her as pure. This is not the lama's fault, but the problem of us human beings. When someone sees a white conch as yellow, the discoloration is not from the conch, but results from the viewer's illness.

Even when an ordinary being is teaching, he or she may appear to be ordinary but since in reality all phenomena of samsara and nirvana have the same primordially pure nature as do the deities, the one who is teaching is also primordially pure. Whether or not they are actually realized buddhas, not a single being can be found in this phenomenal world who is not by nature enlightened, who is not primordially a buddha. Therefore, in accordance with this reality, the lama who teaches should be seen and understood as a buddha in essence. Generally, a lama is considered the condensed essence of the buddhas of the three times.⁴⁵ This is a very important point.

The teacher embodies in essence all the buddhas of the three times. He embodies the unity of the three precious ones: his body is the Sangha, his speech is the Dharma and his mind is the Buddha. He embodies the unity of the three roots: his body is the lama, his speech is the yidam and his mind is the dakini. He embodies the unity of the three kayas; his body is the Nirmanakaya, his speech is the Sambhogakaya and his mind is the Dharmakaya.

The common vehicles speak of the three precious ones, or the Three Jewels: the precious Buddha, the precious Dharma and the precious Sangha. Thinking that the three precious ones are separate, that the Buddha cannot be Sangha, or the Sangha cannot be Buddha, or the Buddha or Sangha cannot be the Dharma, is incorrect. In Secret Mantra we think of the three roots: lama, yidam and dakini. Normally, when we think of the teacher, we think that the teacher we perceive is an ordinary human being; when we think of the yidam, we think that the peaceful and wrathful deities are the yidam; and when we think of the dakinis, we think that the Dharma protectors are the dakinis. We think of the lama, the yidam and the dakini as though they were three different categories of beings who had gathered together. We may think like that but the reality of the natural state is different. By nature, the three precious ones are all present in the Buddha; in the same way the essence of the spiritual teacher contains the inner three roots. In the context of this teaching, the lama is the condensed essence of the buddhas of the three times. The buddhas of the three times are all said to be contained within the spiritual teacher.

45 The buddhas of the past, present and future.

As I explained before, we should understand that enlightened beings do appear as spiritual teachers. The mindstream of a buddha who is appearing as a spiritual teacher possesses the all-knowing wisdom, the wisdom all buddhas possess. The ultimate state of all-knowing wisdom is the self-arising wisdom, the peak of all wisdoms, identified as the wisdom of dharmadhatu. Recognizing the self-arising wisdom as the wisdom of dharmadhatu means that no difference can be found in the state of wisdom of all the buddhas. The buddhas of the past did not go beyond the nature of the wisdom of dharmadhatu, nor does the present Buddha, nor will the future buddhas. All the buddhas of the three times are of the nature of self-arising wisdom; they are free from meeting and parting with the nature of this single wisdom.

How is it that the three precious ones are all condensed within a single lama? We must understand the lama's body as the precious Sangha; the lama's speech as the precious Dharma; and the lama's mind as the precious Buddha. The lama's body serves as the precious Sangha, the ultimate object for accomplishing merit. All the teachings a lama gives – whether from the Sutrayana or the Secret Mantra – are considered the precious Dharma. The lama's mind is the nature of the Buddha, the all-knowing wisdom. In this way, the mindstream of one lama contains the three precious jewels.

Concerning the three roots, while outwardly the lama is the condensed essence of the three precious ones, inwardly the lama is the condensed essence of the three roots: body is the lama, speech is the yidam and mind is the dakini. The lama's external form is the root of the blessing, the body as lama. The lama's speech, expounding the tantra, is the root of the accomplishment, which is yidam. The wisdom mind of the lama is the root of activity, which is dakini. Thus all the three roots are present within the lama.

According to Khenpo Ngaga's "Notes on the Kunzang Lama'i Zhalung" – explaining that the three roots are complete within the lama – the lama's mind is completely non-conceptual. It is the unity of wisdom and dharmadhatu, with no meeting and parting of these two. This union of wisdom and dharmadhatu is the ultimate lama. The form this ultimate lama displays – whether as an ordinary monk or a *ngagpa*⁴⁶ – is the lama with characteristics of ordinary significance. Thus, he identifies two types of lamas. The ultimate lama is the unity of wisdom and dharmadhatu, the nonconceptual, self-arising wisdom. From that state is displayed the lama with characteristics of ordinary significance. The lama's mind is thus the

ultimate lama.

The lama is also taught to be the root of blessings. The meaning of “lama” is complete within the “kaya” of the lama’s body. In its actual manner of abiding, the kaya is the vajra body of empty appearance, the unity of emptiness and appearance, vajra wisdom. The appearance of the body does not differ from the nature of the nondual wisdom of emptiness and appearance. This vajra body of the unity of emptiness and appearance, which is the lama, is the root of blessing.

The lama’s speech, whether propagating tantra or engaging in ordinary worldly talk, is the unity of emptiness and sound. The nature of vajra speech is the unity of emptiness and sound, and is the root of the accomplishment of common and supreme powers. As the unity of sound and emptiness is the root of all accomplishments, the meaning of yidam is complete within the lama’s speech.

The lama’s mind, the vajra mind of wisdom, is the unity of memory and concept. Dakini is *khadro* in Tibetan, and within the sphere or space (*kha*) of dharmata, the nature of reality, moves (*dro*) the display of intrinsic awareness as it is unobstructedly liberated into its own space, into the essence of intrinsic awareness. This explains the meaning of dakini: “those who move within space.” Dakini is the display of the lama’s mind moving without obstruction throughout the space of dharmata. The meaning of dakini is thus complete within the lama’s mind.

This is how we understand that the three roots do not differ from our own root lama. One who harbors the grasping thought that his or her lama is an ordinary being who is not the same as the yidams – the peaceful and wrathful deities – will never succeed in actualizing the yidam and receiving the common and supreme accomplishments, no matter what deity he meditates upon. Study the stories from the past and you will find no yidams apart from the lama. Meditating upon the yidam with the confidence that the yidam is no different from your lama brings about the accomplishments. No matter how diligent your practice of meditating and reciting the mantra, you never accomplish the meditation deity if you consider the lama and the deity to be separate.

In short, whichever of the wrathful and peaceful deities you practice will be easily accomplished if, as you practice, you understand the inseparability of the lama and the deity. Not only that, such practice will expedite your receiving the common and supreme accomplishments. On the other hand, you will find no stories from the past about the success of a practitioner

who considers the lama and the meditative deity to be different – like two people from the east and the west – and who believes that the yidam is more important than the lama. Such persons, despite diligence in meditation and practice, do not attain supreme and common accomplishments. Nor will this happen in the future either; victorious Vajradhara has clearly stated it is not possible, and his word is undecieving. We can observe this reality at present. People do practice yidams and some achieve accomplishments while others do not. Carefully analyzing how those who attain the blessings succeed while others fail, we find that practitioners who believe the lama and the yidam are different do not obtain the supreme and common accomplishments. This is the importance of the teaching on the lama as “the embodiment of the three roots.”

Furthermore, the three kayas are not different from the lama, who embodies Dharmakaya, Sambhogakaya and Nirmanakaya. The lama’s body, having manifested to benefit beings in accordance with their needs, is the Nirmanakaya, and can be called the vajra wisdom body of nondual appearance and emptiness. The Nirmanakaya that appears as and when needed is the Nirmanakaya with characteristics of ordinary significance. One’s lama, whether a monk or a ngagpa, has the complete Nirmanakaya qualities. The teachings the lama bestows are the Sambhogakaya, referring mainly to his speech. The lama’s mind is the Dharmakaya, primordially free from the meeting and parting of wisdom and dharmadhatu. This so-called “gathering of the three kayas” represents the truth that the kayas are complete within the nature of a single lama.

The lama is the embodiment of all past buddhas, the source of all future buddhas and the regent of all present buddhas.

Lord Buddha Shakyamuni said when he passed away that in the future he would reappear as a spiritual teacher to act for the benefit of beings. The emanations of all past buddhas benefit us by appearing as the nature of our spiritual teachers, since our teachers are in fact emanations of past buddhas. Attainment of enlightenment – buddhahood – requires relying on a spiritual teacher, and thus the lama is the source of all the future buddhas. A teaching states: “Before the lamas, not even the name of buddha is found.” Everyone who attains buddhahood depends upon a spiritual teacher. Without reliance on a teacher, no one can appear as a buddha, teach ordinary beings and attain nirvana. Attaining buddhahood requires trust in a lama appearing as a spiritual teacher. Such masters can appear as ordinary beings or as supreme Nirmanakayas. The characteristics of a lama are complete in someone who

teaches the path of accepting and rejecting. Thus, all future buddhas appear as a result of relying upon a spiritual teacher.

The lama is said to engage in the activities of all the buddhas as their regent in the present time. In the world, a regent carries out the activities of a king who cannot rule. In the same way, our spiritual master performs the activities of the buddhas, and is known as their regent.

Since he cares for the sentient beings of this degenerate time, those who were not tamed by the thousand victorious ones of the Fortunate Eon, from the standpoint of compassion and kindness he is superior to all of those buddhas.

Considering his kindness, the one endowed with the major and minor marks is not the most superior. We are in the time of the fourth spiritual guide of this present Fortunate Eon. Of the thousand buddhas of this eon, we are the beings to be tamed by the fourth buddha; we have been born at his feet. When Shakyamuni Buddha appeared in this world, he appeared as one endowed with the major and minor marks. Nevertheless, we were not tamed by him. Over 2500 years have passed since the time of Shakyamuni Buddha and we continue to wander in samsara. For this reason alone are we still suffering in this world. Had he tamed us, we would be free from cyclic existence and would not be the lowest of the low, continuing to suffer.

At present we are cared for and tamed by spiritual teachers. They teach us the path of accepting and rejecting, the sections of Sutra and Secret Mantra. As humans we have some idea about what to adopt and what to abandon, more than animals like cows and bulls. Unable to distinguish between virtue and nonvirtue, these animals lack any knowledge of accepting and rejecting. We are a bit better than that, as we understand the virtue of saving lives, practicing generosity, observing morality and so on. We know about the ten virtuous actions. We know not to kill since taking life is nonvirtuous, not to steal because it is wrong. From the most basic point of view, this simple knowledge of virtue and nonvirtue is also due to the kindness of a spiritual teacher.

From a larger perspective, knowing something about the method of bodhicitta and the nature of empty wisdom, even understanding method and wisdom roughly and seeking to practice these to some degree, also derives from our master's kindness. From an even higher viewpoint, to comprehend what is generation stage, what is completion state, what is the teaching of the unsurpassable Secret Mantra, what are the view and the activity, and believing you are practicing these teachings results solely from the kindness

of a spiritual teacher. Even more, knowing about the Dzogpa Chenpo practice of cutting through to primordial purity, Trekchod, and having some idea of how to practice the direct crossing, Tögal – understanding to some degree how to undertake Dzogchen training and having some ability to practice, and showing some signs out of your practice – if you really think about where the root of all this knowledge lies, it derives from the kindness of your precious guru.

As newly born infants, we didn't walk like animals on four limbs, but neither did we have the qualities of human beings. We had no qualities of accepting and rejecting, not knowing how to accumulate virtue and abandon nonvirtuous deeds. We were not born with knowledge of Sutra and Mantra, but later we grew up, met a spiritual teacher and received his teachings. Because of this, we have some idea of how to practice. The cause is traceable to our lama's kindness – the root of our knowledge is not Lord Buddha, but our lama, our personal spiritual master.

From the point of view of kindness to us, therefore, Buddha Shakyamuni is not the most kind. It is not he who gave us the teachings on accepting and rejecting and helped us understand them. We learned what to accept and what to reject from our own spiritual teacher. Moreover, through his benevolence we gained some understanding of Sutra and Mantra. Our lama is thus more helpful than the Buddha. Comparing their knowledge, the lama's knowledge equals that of the Buddha. We cannot say that our master knows more than the Buddha. Examining their kindness and personal benefit to us, however, our guru's kindness is greater than that of Buddha Shakyamuni; really it is greater than the kindness of all the buddhas.

We should reflect as is taught in the following verse:

The lama is the Buddha; the lama is the Dharma;

Likewise the lama is the Sangha.

The lama is the one who accomplishes everything.

The lama is the glorious Vajradhara.

This stanza explains that outwardly the lama is the precious Buddha, the precious Dharma and the precious Sangha. The lama incorporates the complete meaning of the three precious ones, and is thus the condensed essence of the precious ones. The lama “accomplishes everything” means that it is he or she who emanates and absorbs the mandalas. The lama can emanate an inconceivable number of mandalas outwardly, and can also absorb them into his mindstream – the mind of completely nonconceptual

wisdom. The mandala of the yidam Vajrakilaya emanated from the sphere of Guru Rinpoche's completely nonconceptual wisdom. No mandala of Vajrakilaya can be found apart from Guru Rinpoche's nonconceptual mind. Thus, as the one who emanates and absorbs all the mandalas, the lama is the doer of all.

Our guru does not differ in nature from the primordial Buddha Samantrabhadra or from Vajradhara, and in actuality neither do we. If we who are listening to the teaching think we are ordinary human beings lacking knowledge, this might be true in the manner of appearing (*nang tsul*). However, Secret Mantra Vajrayana teaches that in the actual manner of abiding (*ney tsul*), samsara and nirvana are both primordially pure, and we are included within that. From the view of the actual manner of abiding, we all possess the buddha nature, the essence of the sugatas, the sugatagarbha. The Buddha nature, which is the essence of the sugatas, is present at the time of the ground, or in other words at the time of sentient beings.

As all beings have buddha nature within their mindstreams, the ground itself is endowed with sugatagarbha. Beings suffering in the hell realms possess sugatagarbha, although their form does not enable them to practice Dharma. They have buddha nature, but it cannot benefit them unless they migrate to a higher realm. Hell beings are unable to follow the path that brings forth the sugatagarbha because their form is not suitable for Dharma practice. Nevertheless, every sentient being has buddha nature, and just as mustard oil can be pressed from any mustard seed because the seed inherently contains the oil, the fruit of buddha nature will develop when anyone possessing the buddha nature practices the path. Mustard oil never comes from pressing sand, and similarly, without already having the buddha nature, no matter how diligent our practice, we could not possibly attain buddhahood. We ourselves, however, not only possess the ground of sugatagarbha, but have also attained the precious human form. Unlike beings in the hell realm, the animal realm and the hungry ghost realm, as humans we do have the capacity to practice. Whether or not we make use of our precious opportunity is in our own hands.

At the most basic level, our physical form enables us to practice the Hinayana path; moreover, if we want to practice from the higher perspective of Dzogpa Chenpo, we can do that as well. Generally, the human form is considered to be particularly suited for Dharma practice. When such a special body actually engages in practice, what is enlightened by nature can

be displayed outwardly as a buddha. A truly diligent Dzogchen practitioner is able to reach enlightenment in one body and in one lifetime. Even more, the Chetsun Nyingtig teachings say that one who properly practices the Chetsun Nyingtig pith instructions can achieve the rainbow body within six months! Our physical form is capable of practicing any Sutra or Mantra teachings we want. Thus it is called the precious human body.⁴⁷

A “precious” circumstance is one that can grant all our wishes. Our human form can support liberation and enlightenment; therefore we call it “the precious human body.” We have attained a physical form capable of Dharma practice. As I explained before, however, even having obtained such a body, we cannot directly enter into the path of practice without relying on a teacher and hearing the teachings. The teachings do not simply arise in someone who is born, grows up and ages without receiving any instruction. The lama is the cause for understanding the Dharma.

In our case, not only do we have a human body, we have also met a spiritual teacher. Our guru is alive, and is teaching us. We have encountered a lama who is embracing us with the oral instructions of Sutra and Mantra. Such instruction comprises the unsurpassable path leading to liberation and enlightenment. We have eliminated unfavorable conditions and obtained a favorable circumstance; we are supported by the oral instructions. Therefore, we will surely attain buddhahood before long. We have the buddha nature; we have the special form for practicing the Dharma; we have a spiritual master and the precious oral instructions. As long as we practice diligently, it will not be long before we are born as a buddha in the future.

Think about a hell being. Although he too has the buddha nature, he lacks the special form that can practice the Dharma, has no spiritual teacher, and has not received any oral instructions. Until his life in the hell realm is exhausted, he can do little else than remain there. The life span in hell for someone whose Secret Mantra samaya has deteriorated is said to be twelve thousand eons. For that long he must abide without much hope. Unlike this unfortunate being, however, we have attained the precious human body, met an authentic lama and received oral instructions. By sincerely engaging ourselves with diligence, we will certainly achieve liberation and enlightenment.

The Hevajra Tantra says:

*Although sentient beings are actually Buddhas,
This is obscured by adventitious defilements.*

47 *mi lu rinpoche* (Tib)

Purifying this defilement, the Buddha is revealed.

Considering their nature, all beings are buddhas, but the adventitious stains or defilements prevent us from appearing that way. To appear as a buddha, we must purify these defilements. Being buddhas by nature, we will appear as such once we are free of stain. Becoming free depends on obtaining a precious human body, encountering a genuine master and receiving the oral instructions from that lama. We possess all we need to free ourselves from the adventitious defilements, and we have no negative conditions. A man or woman who can practice diligently is on the verge of becoming an enlightened one.

When receiving teachings, we must transform our attitude and aspiration and realize that we are buddhas by nature. Buddha Samantabhadra, as a Sambhogakaya buddha in the Akanistha heaven, teaches a retinue of male and female sugatas and male and female bodhisattvas undifferentiated from himself. As we are also the same in nature, we must visualize in that way and receive the teachings.

This ends the teaching on developing the proper attitude.

CONDUCT TO BE ABANDONED

The teaching on conduct includes the behavior to be abandoned and the behavior to be accepted. That to be abandoned includes the three faults of the vessel, the six defilements and the five wrong modes of apprehending.

We are taught to give these up. The text discusses proper behavior of body, speech and mind to adopt while receiving teachings. Negative or faulty behavior must be discarded and positive or good conduct encouraged.

The Three Faults of the Vessel

Initially, improper conduct is taught; the three faults of the vessel must be identified. Not listening is the fault of an upside-down vessel; not remembering what you have heard is the fault of a vessel with a leaking bottom; mixing the teachings with afflictive emotions is the fault of poison. These faults must be cast off when listening to the Dharma.

Defect of an upside-down vessel

Your hearing should not be at all distracted from the teaching. You must listen to the instructions with single-pointed concentration on the words

and a completely focused mind. Thus, the conduct to be adopted while attending a teaching is to listen attentively on the teachings being given, without being sidetracked by any other sound. The mind consciousness must also focus wholeheartedly on what the lama is saying, the words and meanings of the Dharma being taught. We must listen to the Dharma in that way.

If the ear consciousness is unfocused and preoccupied by other sounds from outside, the mind consciousness also becomes distracted. When both mind and ear are diverted elsewhere, although you are physically present, you cannot grasp even a single word of Dharma. The sutras usually attribute inconceivable merit to listening to Buddhist teachings, but this refers to listening with complete attention. Merely being physically present does not qualify as listening to the Dharma nor does it gather the benefit of listening.

The best is to understand the words and meanings of the teachings. Being attentive and diligent, with undistracted ear and mind consciousnesses, and the ability to comprehend the profound words and meaning is excellent. Even if you cannot grasp the complete meaning and words, simply hearing them has immeasurable benefits. However, merely being physically present while your mind is wandering elsewhere does not accumulate any merit. Flies and other creatures are present where teachings are being given, but do not accumulate virtue. Nowhere is it taught that they accumulate merit. One must listen with full attention of the ear and must understand with the mind.

Not listening is like pouring water over an overturned vessel. However much the lama teaches, the student will understand nothing. Not listening with the ear and mind consciousnesses is the greatest fault when listening to the Dharma. You must eliminate this defect and learn to concentrate single-pointedly. Otherwise you will not succeed in understanding a single word of the teaching, which is the same as not listening. No benefit results from attending a teaching in this way. You must focus single-pointedly with the ear and mind consciousness.

Defect of a leaky vessel

The second fault is not keeping the teaching in mind, or being like a leaky vessel. Leaving the teachings merely as something you have heard or understood without retaining is the same as pouring water into a broken cup. Listening to the Dharma with your ear and mind consciousness

focused develops some degree of understanding. Next, you must reflect on the teachings again and again, attempting to maintain them in your mind. Since time immemorial we have not been habituated to the Dharma, so we cannot grasp the teachings simply by listening and thinking that we understand. After the teaching ends, consider well what the lama taught, and try to retain it. Otherwise, you may feel that you understand the teaching when you are sitting in the teaching hall, but later you will forget it. If you forget, it is as though you had not heard the Dharma at all. For example, when you put an iron into a fire it turns bright red, but once you remove it the iron again becomes black. In the same way, without contemplating the teaching after the talk is over, you will not remember the meaning. Nothing remains if you pour something into a leaking vessel.

Without retaining the teachings in your mind, the power of the Dharma cannot shine forth. For the power of the Dharma to reveal itself in your mindstream, you must hold on to the meaning. If not, no matter how much teaching you receive, it will not influence you. Not understanding the Dharma, you cannot practice, so you might as well not have heard the teaching in the first place. Therefore, grasping the teaching in one's mind is a very important positive quality, and failing to grasp is a fault.

Defect of a vessel mixed with the poison of afflictive emotion

If your motivation for receiving teachings involves wanting to understand the Dharma in order to become a famous scholar or to attain a high position, that aspiration – wanting to be well-known and powerful – is negative. Although the teaching is good, the intention is bad. Mixing these two is damaging, like mixing poison into good food, and will not help anyone. Never mix listening to the Dharma with the wrong motivation. The teachings should not be received for the wrong reasons.

If you are experiencing strong attachment, aversion, ignorance, pride or other negative emotions when listening to the Dharma, even though your ears are listening and the teaching is good, the generation of afflictive emotions will cause harm. Attachment and aversion are afflictive emotions, which inevitably cause harm and never bring benefit. Practicing the path of the unsurpassable Secret Mantra can transform afflictive emotions into the nature of wisdom, and in that case the power of those emotions can bring forth the great bliss from our mindstream. On such occasions afflictive emotions are taught as the path, and at that time the afflictive emotions are not the specifically characterized phenomena but are arising as the nature of

the primordial wisdoms.

In all other cases, the nature of afflictive emotions is to harm. For example, any fire will burn your fingers, be it large or small. The size does not matter since burning is characteristic of fire. Likewise, afflictive emotions will harm you whether or not you are receiving the teachings. The fault is even greater when the negative emotions arise during a teaching. Allowing such emotions to come up during a Dharma teaching will not only keep the mindstream from benefiting, but the emotions will cause even greater harm than usual, thereby turning Dharma into non-Dharma. Our incorrect concept will turn the Dharma that we hear into non-Dharma, increasing the harm. This is like putting good food into a vessel containing poison. No matter how good the food one puts into a contaminated vessel, it becomes poison and can make you sick. Eating good, pure food nourishes our body, but food mixed with poison damages us. Similarly, Dharma unmixed with afflictive emotion benefits our mindstream, while Dharma polluted with negativity – although it is Dharma – nonetheless causes serious harm.

How to Actually Listen

The Indian master Padampa Sangye said:

Listen to the Dharma like a deer listens to a sound.

Deer listen with one-pointed focus when they hear the melodious sound of a lute. Focusing their consciousness single-pointedly, they are aware of nothing else. Losing their awareness of other things, the deer are shot by hunters with poisonous arrows. We should focus our attention in the same way when listening to the teachings, with our ear consciousness attending wholeheartedly to whatever words and explanations the guru is speaking.

Padampa Sangye also taught:

Contemplate the teachings, like a northerner shearing sheep.

A northerner shears sheep very slowly and deliberately. This example tells us that when the teaching is completed we must reflect repeatedly on what we heard. That helps retain the teachings in our memory. He continued:

Meditate on the Dharma like a mute experiencing taste.

A mute who tastes honey cannot describe the taste to others but still experiences it exactly as it is. He has total belief in his experience. This

example means that when contemplating the meaning of the Dharma you should have confidence in your understanding. Practice after gaining such confidence.

As an example of the diligence we need to practice or meditate upon the teaching, Padampa Sangye said:

Practice the Dharma intensely, like a hungry yak eating grass.

A starving yak will devour an entire pasture without leaving any gaps. We should likewise meditate diligently without gaps or breaks. Finally:

Attain fruition like the sun set free of clouds.

Clouds obstruct the sun's rays, but the sun shines brightly after the clouds are cleared away. The result of practice is to gradually free the mindstream from attachment and aversion, from the faults of afflictive emotions. Experiencing a gradual fading of afflictive emotions is the fruit of Dharma practice. If our afflictive emotions are the same as before we started to practice and have not diminished, the fruit of the Dharma has not ripened, no matter how many years we have spent in retreat. The fruit of the Dharma is the ability to pacify the afflictive emotions in our mindstream.

Why do we practice? We practice to liberate ourselves from cyclic existence, the roots of which are the concepts of attachment and aversion. We cannot abandon samsara without ridding ourselves of these two. The power of the Dharma must liberate the causes of birth in cyclic existence – attachment and aversion. Freedom from attachment and aversion is nirvana. Overcoming one's mistaken mind is to be beyond suffering.

Buddha Maitreya said, "Liberation is the exhaustion of mistakes." Exhausting the mistaken mind is nirvana. For this reason Padampa Sangye speaks of the "sun free from clouds." Just as clouds obscure the rays of the sun, the five poisons obscure nirvana. As the five poisons are gradually exhausted, the fruition of the teaching begins shining forth.

Padampa Sangye taught that when listening to the Dharma, you should be like a wild animal listening spellbound to the sound of a lute, unaware of a hunter shooting a poisonous arrow at it from the side. The hair of your body standing on end, eyes filled with tears and hands folded, you should not be distracted by other conceptual thoughts. When we are receiving teachings with sincere devotion, these are the external signs that appear. On the other hand, if you are sometimes focusing on the teaching and at other times thinking about your business, these improper conceptual thoughts

obstruct the meaning of the Dharma.

From the beginning of the teaching until the end, your mental consciousness should be single-pointedly focused on the Dharma being taught. Otherwise, although your physical body is present at the teaching, your mind is wandering outside. Merely placing the body in the teaching hall, while letting the mind roam randomly, thinking of worldly pleasure or wealth, or traversing among the five sense objects of form, sound, smell, taste and touch, does not qualify as receiving the teachings. Being at a gathering where a lama is teaching or bestowing an empowerment, and opening the door of endless unnecessary speech, like Tibetans who habitually congregate and talk on such occasions, serves no purpose. Receiving a teaching is meaningless if you listen while your mouth and eyes are busy elsewhere. You neither benefit from the teaching, nor understand the explanation. If you cannot listen to a teaching in any other way, you should simply go home and relax.

When receiving a teaching, not only should you abandon unnecessary talk, you must also leave aside even virtuous aspects of speech such as reciting your daily prayers or mantras, or counting recitations on your mala. This is how to listen to a teaching. After receiving the teaching, do not forget its meaning but practice it. When physically present in the teaching, you hear the words. After the teaching, unless you reflect on the meaning, you will forget and when the time comes to practice you will not know how. You will not recall what the excellent generation of bodhicitta is, nor what the excellent main part without an object is, and neither will you remember the excellent conclusion of dedication. Without knowing these, when you want to engage in any practice, you will be unable to decide how to do so. Therefore, do not forget anything that you hear at the time of teaching, and then engage in the practice.

Lord Buddha said:

*I have shown you the way to liberation,
But know that liberation rests with you.*

Without practicing, no benefit will result. We cannot possibly find a greater teacher than Shakyamuni Buddha. Although he taught the unmistakable path enabling beings to be tamed and to attain liberation and enlightenment, the actual achievement of enlightenment rests with each individual. The Buddha can himself do nothing. If every individual being to be tamed diligently practiced the path of liberation and enlightenment,

all would attain the fruition. However, if they fail to follow the path properly and diligently, they cannot be helped; liberation and enlightenment will not be achieved. Were it possible to attain liberation and enlightenment without practicing, Lord Buddha would have sought to learn how, and would have succeeded, since within this entire universe and among all knowable things, no one is greater than he.

A buddha cannot put someone in the state of enlightenment, as one tosses a stone onto a ledge; enlightenment depends on individual effort. Enlightenment rests with you. The lama teaches you. First he or she tells you how to listen to the teaching. In the middle, at the time for engaging in practice, he tells you how to practice, and how you should at all times abandon negative behavior and accumulate merit. If you want to meditate, he teaches you how to meditate. A guru teaches all these methods: how to listen, how to practice, how to leave nonvirtuous acts behind, how to accumulate merit and how to meditate upon the profound Dharma. Buddhas and scholars of the past taught and lived by the oral teachings and commentaries. Our gurus teach without wavering from the meaning of those teachings. So we disciples, after understanding the meaning, when we are able, should practice accordingly. Then we will know how to reach the state of liberation and enlightenment. If we do not practice properly, however, we will not attain fruition.

Other than this, no new method of attaining liberation and enlightenment can be found. Disciples should not forget the meaning of what they have heard; remembering it, they should embark upon the practice and actualize the fruition. Even if you cannot keep the teachings in mind, if you have listened properly, some benefit will result. Without recalling what you have heard, however, you will not succeed in liberating the mindstream from afflictive emotions and attaining liberation and enlightenment. Not remembering anything of the teaching you listened to is no different from not having heard it. What we understand during the teaching should not be forgotten later. Failing to remember is the same as not understanding in the first place. If that happens, what benefit have you gained from the teaching? Correctly paying attention accumulates the virtue of listening to the teaching. The benefit of freeing your mindstream from attachment and aversion does not occur, however.

The peerless Dagpo Rinpoche taught:

*Unless you practice the Dharma as the Dharma,
The Dharma could be the cause of rebirth in the lower realms.*

In other words, retaining the teachings in your mind while mixing them with afflictive emotions is counterproductive. Understand the meaning of the teaching and use it properly. To use the Dharma you have learned for worldly benefits like fame and wealth is inappropriate. By misusing the meaning and words of the Dharma, the very Dharma itself can become a cause for lower rebirth. The Dharma must, first of all, be understood by listening and reflecting. After comprehending it, use it properly. Mixing a teaching with afflictive emotions results not in pure Dharma, but in a Dharma leading to the lower realms. That is the meaning of Dagpopa's statement.

Maintaining a wrong view about the Dharma and the guru, insulting your Dharma friends and being proud and disdainful are grounds for falling into the lower realms and should be discarded. Before hearing the Dharma, you lack knowledge; whatever pride you may have is not strong. You haven't enough learning yet to be arrogant. Later, when you have received, understood and remembered the teachings, you do know something of the Dharma. Once you have such knowledge, pride can arise if you don't utilize it properly. When pride swells in someone's mindstream, faith and pure view deteriorate and he or she can find fault even in the root lama. This is incorrect, and leads a disciple to maintain wrong views toward his guru, and also toward the pure Dharma. This results from negative conceptual thinking.

Before receiving teachings you are on friendly terms with your Dharma friends, but later you begin feeling jealous and critical. In such a way the Dharma can lead to the generation of self-importance in a person's mindstream, and to feelings of disdain toward those of lower status. The Dharma can facilitate the birth of these various nonvirtuous concepts. Unless you overcome them, receiving the teachings and having understood them can actually lead to rebirth in the lower realms. These negative concepts must be abandoned.

The Six Defilements of the Vessel

The Vasubhandu text "Well-Explained Reasoning"⁴⁸ identifies pride, lack of faith, lack of interest, outward distraction, inward withdrawal, and listening with discouragement as the six defilements to be abandoned when receiving a teaching. These defilements are not like physical dirt but refer to afflictive emotions. These six concepts are afflicted by nature.

Pride

The arrogance of feeling superior to the spiritual master giving the teaching is not generated at first when a practitioner seeks a lama to receive Dharma teaching and comes to understand the meaning. Later, after receiving the teaching and gaining understanding, a new type of conceit can be born. The development of that conceit, coupled with an evil nature, produces the pride of feeling superior and more qualified than one's lama.

Lack of faith

When this pride arises, one has clearly lost faith in the lama. Feeling superior to one's guru prevents devotion from arising. Faith in the lama and in his teaching deteriorates and confidence in the Dharma is lost. A lack of faith in both the lama and the Dharma arises. Thus, the pride of feeling superior to the guru, and the deterioration of faith in the Dharma and one's lama are aspects of the same defilements, faults or afflictive emotions.

Lack of interest

Interest in the Dharma is crucial. You may have no pride and be full of faith in your lama and the teaching, but genuine Dharma cannot be accomplished without interest. Unless you are sincerely interested, whether or not you receive a teaching makes no difference. This makes a lack of interest another facet of defilement.

Outward distraction

If someone is distracted by other sights or sounds when receiving or practicing the Dharma, the purpose of such study or practice is defeated. The mind must be engaged; distraction keeps us from concentrating. Therefore a mind distracted toward form and sound is also defiled. Whether you are hearing a teaching or practicing alone, do not let your mind be distracted by outside sights or sounds. Such distraction means the mind is lost elsewhere, and not actually listening or practicing.

Suppose you are contemplating on the freedoms and advantages that are difficult to find. You begin with the teaching but after a while your mind wanders toward some outer noise or form, without you realizing that the distraction has occurred. Subsequently, you look at your watch and see that thirty minutes or an hour has passed while your mind was drifting everywhere. You have failed to abide in the practice of reflecting on the freedoms and advantages. Not only is your mind unstable, you didn't

even realize that you were distracted. You have no idea when or how the distraction started. Such outward distraction only harms the practice and must be discarded.

Inward withdrawal of the faculties

Trying to prevent outward distraction by forcefully withdrawing your mind internally is also a defilement. If you concentrate with too much effort you will either fall asleep or feel unclear. Too much inner concentration causes you to be overcome by drowsiness or fogginess, which is a fault. You cannot engage in any kind of practice with that sleepy or dull feeling, and thus you should avoid withdrawing the sense doors.

Discouragement

Some practitioners feel discouraged if they find a teaching lasting too long and the lama talking on and on. Their knees may hurt, the sun could be too hot or the weather too cold and they wish that the teaching would end. This is a thought of very strong negativity, and is called abandoning the Dharma. Without forsaking the teaching permanently, if on one particular day you feel: "I wish this teaching would end; I don't care whether or not I learn anything," you accumulate the karma of abandoning the Dharma. You need to cast aside such feelings of discouragement.

DETAILED EXPLANATION

Abandon afflictive emotion

We must rid ourselves of these defilements. Pride and jealousy are difficult afflictive emotions to recognize; we must examine ourselves carefully, discovering how arrogance and envy arise within us. While anger is recognized instantly, we can at times feel proud and jealous without noticing. Anger causes discomfort to body and mind, so we become aware of angry thoughts immediately. Attachment, jealousy and pride are more difficult to identify because we feel less distress and more readily accept these emotions. The fault is quite large, however, so we need to scrutinize ourselves well.

From the spiritual point of view, understanding some aspect of the Dharma can lead to a kind of pride. From the worldly view, being famous or wealthy, young and beautiful may cause conceit. From both perspectives, we become arrogant when we develop positive qualities. Having a little or a lot of knowledge, someone has a little or a lot of pride. Smugly, you

experience your greatness as: "I am a scholar, I am famous; I am pretty and young." Pride is the mind flying too high. Such a mind cannot see its own faults. When you feel wonderful, the element of pride merges into that feeling without your notice. We fail to see the faults of our own mindstreams because of this. Although we do have defects, our arrogance keeps us from seeing them.

Pride also prevents us from seeing the good qualities or knowledge in others. We do not consider other people's scholarship or qualities as a practitioner to be very important. A person who is inflated with conceit won't recognize the positive qualities in another, no matter how extensive they are. If you realize that someone else has considerable knowledge, you should not think that you are nevertheless better. Try to avoid or abandon pride at all times. Even if you do know something, this is no reason for arrogance. Remember the scholars of the past, and the great realization they achieved through their practice. Compared with them, our knowledge is a mere dewdrop on a blade of grass. Contemplating thus, do not feel proud about whatever little knowledge you have gained.

You should always keep to a humble position. However, if you just sit at the end of the line with the worldly attitude that people will otherwise think you proud, while still feeling that you are better than they, this is presenting a deceitful appearance. Remaining humble means thinking that while you haven't much knowledge or experience from practice, you still experience pride and attachment, anger and ignorance, and that no one in the universe is lowlier. Such an attitude will keep you from ever believing yourself superior or great or special. Someone like this does not generate self-importance. This is what abandoning pride and remaining humble means.

Develop unchanging faith

Lack of faith blocks the entrance door to the Dharma. You need faith both in the Dharma and in the master who teaches you. Without this, the door to the Dharma remains closed. Without faith, a person could practice all his life without ever receiving the blessings of the teaching and the guru. Lack of faith has blocked the door and the blessings cannot enter his mindstream.

Faith is subdivided into four types: clear faith, aspiring faith, confident faith and unchanging faith. Of these, seek to develop unchanging faith.

Clear faith is the devotion an ordinary person feels when visiting a temple

and seeing the different images, or when listening to the liberation stories of past lamas. Clear faith is generated from reviving habitual patterns, but it is unstable. Although you might experience pure devotion the first time you visit a temple, the same faith may or may not arise the next time. This faith arises within us through our habitual patterns or through the blessings of the enlightened ones, but it is not something we experience all the time.

Aspiring faith is somewhat more stable than clear faith. When you hear about the qualities of liberation and enlightenment, you wish to attain these qualities; when you hear of the suffering of the lower realms, you wish to be free from this suffering; and when you hear about the suffering of cyclic existence, you feel it is a great suffering and wish to abandon it. Developing this attitude is aspiring faith.

Confident faith arises through reason. Whether it concerns the lama or the Dharma, this faith rests on awareness of their superior qualities. Faith based on this reason is confident faith, a stable faith that no one can change. This faith is more difficult to generate because one must have a reason for it. After confident faith has developed, however, it will never change. It is like knowing that fire is hot; no matter how many people tell you fire is cold, your confidence will not be shattered. Similarly, devotion caused by knowing the qualities of the guru and the Dharma will never change. Once you have confident faith, you will never be moved away from it.

Unchanging faith cannot be reversed by any means. Thus we divide faith into these three or four types. At this point try to generate unchanging faith. You must develop unalterable faith in the lama and the Dharma.

Develop sincere interest

To earnestly seek the Dharma is the basis of all knowledge. Three degrees of interest – superior, medium and lesser – lead to three levels of practitioners. Without sincere interest in the Dharma, the teachings are like grass to a dog. Since a dog is not interested in eating grass, whether or not you pile it in front of him makes no difference. In the same way, no matter how much Sutra and Mantra teaching is given to a person who is not interested, he or she will not benefit. Sincere interest in the Dharma is necessary for anything positive to occur.

Sincere interest means being interested in buddhahood, the fruition of the teaching. It means having a genuine intention to attain liberation and enlightenment. A person with such a strong desire for liberation and enlightenment will never waver from diligently practicing Dharma, the

cause of attaining the fruition. He or she will be able to experience hardship in practice. That is why a sincere interest in the Dharma is considered the base of all knowledge.

One with the highest level of interest in the Dharma becomes a superior practitioner; with medium interest, a medium practitioner; and with only a little interest, a lesser practitioner. Having sincere interest in the Dharma indicates awareness of the value of the Dharma. Lacking a sincere interest in the Dharma, ordinary beings who have received a particular teaching from their guru may not take this as a special kindness. Worldly people feel more grateful to someone who gives 100 or 1000 rupees than to a lama who gives a Dharma teaching. This results from not understanding the teaching and lacking sincere interest in it.

With an authentic interest in the Dharma, the worldly matter of 100 or even 1000 rupees will count for nothing. This amount of money will serve only to fill your stomach for a day or two, or will allow you to have a few drinks. No comparison can be made between someone who gives you 1000 rupees and someone who teaches you the path to liberation and enlightenment. Nothing in this world is greater than the power of the Dharma. Knowing that, you will generate more interest and come to value the teachings. Someone who knows the true value of the Dharma is the best kind of practitioner.

Just as a person who is unaware of the value of gold will not be interested in acquiring it, those who are ignorant of the value of the Dharma will never care about learning it. Without sincere and serious interest in the Dharma, months, years or even an entire lifetime of practice will not turn someone into an excellent practitioner. No one can accomplish the Dharma without interest.

An old proverb says,

The Dharma has no owner. It belongs to whoever has tenacity.

Since the Dharma has no owner, we cannot claim, "This is my Dharma and others cannot practice it." Anyone can practice. Whether people succeed or not depends solely on their personal capacity to practice. Lacking sincere interest and fortitude, it does not help that the Dharma has no owner. However, when practiced with desire and diligence, this "ownerless" teaching can lead to enlightenment in this very lifetime. Even if not in one life, a sincere practitioner will attain liberation and enlightenment before long.

Our Buddha Shakyamuni said that for the sake of one *shloka*, four lines of teaching, buddhas have burned a thousand butter lamps on their bodies. The buddhas of the past did receive teachings in this way, and when on the path of learning and receiving teachings from his spiritual teacher, Buddha Shakyamuni made a thousand holes in his flesh, put in wicks, filled them with oil and offered them for the sake of four lines of teaching. He endured this difficulty for the sake of one *shloka*. At times he had to jump into a fire pit to or drive a thousand nails into his body to receive four lines of teaching. He could endure such tremendous hardship simply because he knew the value of the teaching. Quoting a sutra, Patrul Rinpoche says:

*Crossing over bonfires and sharp knives,
The search for Dharma continues until the very brink of death.*

Considering the tremendous value of the Dharma, you shouldn't hesitate to light a fire on your flesh, jump into a fire pit or pound nails into your body. One could go through hundreds of other difficulties to receive one *shloka* of teaching. For the sake of the Dharma, you must endure whatever is required. Even if you are put into a life-threatening situation, or are about to die from these hardships, you should still continue seeking the teachings. Someone who feels tired or sick during a teaching, who feels too hot or too cold, experiences these problems because of lacking a sincere interest in the teaching. If even Lord Buddha endured the hardships described, it should be nothing for us to sit in the sun or be soaked by rain. We should listen to the teachings without being bothered by problems of heat and cold.

Avoid outward distraction

Indulging the six consciousnesses⁴⁹ in external sense objects of form, sound, smell, taste and touch is the root of the entire illusion of cyclic existence and the source of all suffering. We must receive the teachings without our five senses being distracted toward these outer objects. Moreover, our senses should remain undistracted by the objects of the six consciousnesses not only at the time of the teaching, but all the time. On the whole, distraction is a fault, but if you are distracted while listening to the Dharma you won't understand a word of the teaching. In general, do not let your six consciousnesses be distracted by sensory phenomena; such distraction is the root cause of all samsaric delusion and the source of the all the suffering of cyclic existence.

 We can see solid proof of the dangers that result from outward distraction.

The attraction of the eye consciousness to form causes the moth to die in the butter lamp. This is a fault of the visual sense: the moth dies because its eye is drawn to the form of the lamp flame that causes its death. The ear's attraction to sound leads wild animals to be shot by hunters. The evident outcome of an animal being distracted by the song of the lute is being killed by the hunter's poisonous arrow instantly ending its life. Simple attraction to the sound of the lute becomes the root cause of its death. The attraction of a bee to a flower's perfume leads to its death trapped within the flower. Death comes from its olfactory sense being attracted to the scent. Recognizing these things, we gain certainty that distraction to outer forms causes illusory cyclic existence.

Fish end their lives caught by hooks because their tongues are attracted to the taste on the tip of the hook. Craving the taste, the fish take a bite and die. A body desiring touch is like an elephant trapped in mud. When elephants get hot, they enter a muddy swamp to cool down and sink because their huge bodies are too heavy. They become trapped and die. Their death results from their desire to feel cool. These examples all show that our six consciousnesses – when distracted toward outer form, sound, scent, taste and touch – are not only the root cause of the suffering of cyclic existence, but can also lead to immediate experiential consequences. Generally, we should try as much as possible to keep our consciousness from being attracted outwardly. When we practice the meditative concentration of calm abiding,⁵⁰ we are seeking to abandon the six consciousnesses and to single-pointedly abide with a one-pointed mind. If your six consciousnesses are distracted during a teaching, you might as well not listen; you will understand nothing. These are the faults that arise from our six consciousnesses being distracted by form, sound, smell, taste and touch.

Patrul Rinpoche goes on to teach on the need to abandon thoughts of the three times:

In addition, when listening to, teaching or practicing the Dharma, you should avoid following past habitual patterns, anticipating future afflictive emotions or indulging your present attention with whatever objects and conditions are around you.

The strength of our past habitual patterns causes many conceptual thoughts to arise when we look back and recollect what we have done during this lifetime. Some people think that they will live a number of years into the future, and plan the beneficial deeds they will do during those years,

⁵⁰ *shamatha* (Skt); *shiney* (Tib).

or think about their worldly activities of conducting business or engaging in agriculture. This leads to many conceptual thoughts about the future. Our consciousness can also become distracted by whatever forms we see at present, resulting in numerous conceptual thoughts of the present.

With our minds wandering like this, we have no opportunity to pacify our conceptual thoughts and engage in Dharma practice. Sometimes we are thinking of the past, sometimes of the future, and sometimes we are involved with present forms, sounds and smells that cause different conceptual thoughts to arise. This leaves us with no time to relax and practice the teachings. We can generate only one thought at a time. When engaged with one conceptual thought, we cannot have another simultaneously. A mind that is alternately thinking of the past, the future or the present never has time to listen to or practice the Dharma. Therefore, pacify or discard conceptual thoughts of the three times. Without abandoning thought when hearing the Dharma, the purpose of listening is not served; without abandoning thought when practicing, the purpose of practicing is not served. It is crucial to give up gathering conceptual thoughts of the three times when listening to a teaching, giving a teaching or practicing one.

Patrul Rinpoche quotes a teaching by Gyalsay Rinpoche that begins:

Past comfort and suffering are like drawings on water.

We need not think much about the past. Previously, we experienced peace and comfort, but this has now vanished. We also experienced suffering, but no benefit comes from recollecting it since it too has vanished like writing on water.

Past grasping leaves no trace so we should not track it.

We cannot cling to our past and thus should not follow thoughts about it.

*If you cannot but remember, consider the decline of wealth into poverty,
and of meeting into separation.*

No matter how much worldly wealth you gain, it will reach a peak; not growing endlessly, it will begin to diminish. That is the reality of worldly life; first expansion and then decrease. When we get together with our brothers and sisters, the occasion is happy, but meeting always ends in parting. In worldly life, does gathering without dispersing ever occur? No, it does not. The end result of having something is losing it; the end result of gathering is parting. This is the fact. Thinking like this, although you have wealth,

there is no reason to be happy about it. People with wealth do feel content and at peace; however, their prosperity will eventually decrease, and at that time they may suffer. Similarly, we are happy to be with our family and friends, but we will one day part; when that occurs new sorrow troubles us. Looking at these worldly situations – after having you will have not, and after meeting you must part – and understanding their utter lack of essence helps keep many thoughts about the past from arising.

Gyalsey Rinpoche first considers the past and asks whether any worldly phenomena are reliable. Can we find any worldly situations that do not change? No, we cannot. He therefore recommends abandoning thoughts about the past instead of indulging in them. He advises supplicating Avalokiteshvara and reciting Om Mani Padma Hung.

Gyalsey Rinpoche next teaches on the uselessness of thoughts of the future:

Future projects and plans are like casting fish nets in a dry riverbed.

You won't catch any fish because no fish are there. Whatever you think, your thoughts never reflect what will really happen. Mind easily imagines many things. You may think you want to be a universal emperor, but this will not happen as you desire. You can crave all the wealth in the world, but your hope will not be fulfilled. Gyalsey Rinpoche thus teaches that conceptual thinking about future plans brings little benefit. He counsels discarding such thoughts, making them decrease. Why make many worldly plans for the future when they are hardly likely to come about? Such thoughts have no function other than to disturb the mind and invite more concepts.

From a spiritual point of view, planning for future practice in order to attain liberation and enlightenment is beneficial, even if the plans are not actualized. For spiritual purposes one must be able to plan for the future, but making worldly plans brings no benefit. Worldly plans are unlikely to come to fruition, and are causes for accumulating nonvirtue. Try to abandon the habit of making such future plans. If you cannot block these thoughts, then by all means consider the uncertainty of the time of death. Think: "I don't know when I will die. Why make plans for the future when my time of death is unknown? I could die today. Who knows? If I die today my plans for the next many years serve no purpose." Contemplating the uncertain time of death, you will not find yourself caught up in planning for the future. We really don't know when we will die. Who can decide that you will not

die tonight? As our lifespan is not set, why think about anything other than the Dharma; why have any non-dharmic thoughts? You will be happier simply reciting the Mani mantra. This is Gyalsey Rinpoche's teaching.

The next verse begins:

Your present activities are like housekeeping in a dream.

Let them go because your worldly endeavors will achieve nothing.

Whatever worldly tasks you undertake in the present are like dreams of gaining wealth or achieving a higher status. All you experience is just a dream, lacking any reality. No matter what you dream, nothing remains to point to or hold onto. Everything vanishes the moment you awaken. In the same way, whatever worldly tasks you are working on right now bring no benefit. No essence can be found – not even as tiny as a mustard seed – and so Gyalsay Rinpoche says to abandon such activity.

You should consider even the food permitted by Dharma without any attachment.

Food earned through worldly work can be wrongly obtained, but even if your livelihood is earned in accord with the Dharma, you should be free from attachment, greed or grasping at it.

Once again pointing out that worldly activities have no essence, Gyalsey Rinpoche teaches us to recite the Mani mantra instead. When in meditative equipoise, you are abiding in the nature of intrinsic awareness; therefore, the attitudes of the three poisons do not occur in your thinking. On rising from your meditation, if your state of meditative equipoise has been very powerful, everything appears as a mirage or magical appearance. Concepts of the three poisons are naturally pacified at that time, and will not form in your mind. During post-meditation, however, you need effort to tame these negative concepts. Do not pursue ordinary thoughts but examine whether or not the three poisons are arising. If they are, seek to abandon them by means of the antidotes.

Engage in this practice until all thoughts and projections appear as the Dharmakaya.

Until all concepts are transmuted into the Dharmakaya

You cannot neglect training to recognize the three poisons in the post-meditative state.

Remember this when necessary.

Once you reach the state of all thoughts appearing as the essence of Dharmakaya and all projections arising as deities, meditation and post-meditation become nondual, with no difference between them. At this stage, engaging in the practice of abandoning the five poisons is no longer necessary. Until you have that experience, however, if you find yourself experiencing the three poisons during post-meditation, strive to tame them with mindfulness and conscientiousness. You cannot do without these antidotes; they are crucial to combat thoughts of the three poisons. By remembering to practice when such thoughts occur, you will not become lost in confused conception. In brief, when you detect confused thoughts of attachment and so on beginning to surface, stop them.

On another occasion, Gyalsey Rinpoche said:

Do not anticipate the future. If you do, you will be like Dawa Dragpa's father.

This is the story of a man who found a sack of barley and hung it above his bed, daydreaming about marrying and having a son. Just as he decided to name the boy Dawa Dragpa, a rat gnawed through the rope holding the bag and it fell on his head, killing him. This story comes in many teachings, so the actual event may have occurred. Whether it did or not, it is an example of what can happen to future plans. I could think that next year I will achieve something special and accumulate worldly possessions that will make me famous. If I am then spontaneously afflicted with a fatal disease and instantly die, I won't be able to follow my plans, which all become quite useless.

Just as Dawa Dragpa's father fantasized about becoming rich from his grain, finding a wife, having a son and naming him, we also dream of future accomplishments. Many conceptual thoughts result from this. These thoughts are difficult to actualize. People frequently die suddenly. Plans made for the future have no essence, and the example – showing what can happen to our future plans – is taught to indicate that what we plan for will not come about. We cannot actually create the reality of what we think. Many people die before they realize their expectations. Thus, planning for the future is meaningless. Thinking about the future a great deal brings distraction to our mindstream, and is a habit we must try to abandon. Through mindfulness and conscientiousness we should aim at all times to discard our misguided and confused conceptual thoughts. Likewise, we should apply mindfulness and conscientiousness when we are receiving teachings and practicing the Dharma.

Avoid inward withdrawal

Inward withdrawal is the defilement of someone who is so withdrawn as to feel dull and sleepy. This is a fault similar to letting the mind be distracted and attached to outer forms. In general, a student should try to reach an understanding of the Dharma gradually. Trying to grasp hold of the meaning of each individual point is like a bear digging up a nest of rats. Catching one, he forgets about the others. Similarly, one can never hope immediately to understand the entirety of Dharma teachings.

When studying a philosophical text, you must initially clarify the beginning and then slowly move on. Otherwise, if you move too quickly from one section of the text to another you may forget the meaning of the first section when you reach the second. Therefore you must know and understand the beginning and keep it in mind when continuing to the next part. If you forget the first section when studying the second, you are like the bear digging up rats. Catching the first rat but forgetting to secure it, he loses it when grabbing the next. In the same way, failing to stabilize your understanding of the first teaching before moving on to the second, you will forget the first. By forgetting, you are returning to the time before you received any teaching, and you will never reach a time when you fully understand the text's meaning. However, if you become sure of the words and meaning of the first part and then go forward, eventually you will understand the entire text. That is how to grasp the teaching of the Dharma.

The fault of being sleepy and dull occurs when a student becomes too inwardly withdrawn. Whether you are listening, contemplating or practicing the teachings, your mind must be balanced, neither too tight – in which case dullness will result – nor too relaxed, bringing the danger of distraction.

In the past when Lord Buddha's attendant Ananda was teaching meditation to the musician Srona, he was at times too inwardly withdrawn and at other times too relaxed, so that his mind became distracted toward external forms and sounds. He could not generate a genuine meditation. He sought out Buddha Shakyamuni, who asked him, "When you were at home, not meditating but living as an ordinary person, you were expert in playing the lute, were you not?" "Yes," Srona replied, "I am extremely skilled at this."

Lord Buddha continued, "Does the sweet melodious sound of the lute come when the strings are too tight or too loose?"

“Neither,” said Srona. “The melodious sound comes when it is neither too tight nor too loose.”

“Your mind is also like that,” answered the Buddha. After this teaching, Srona meditated, properly developed his practice and attained the result.

You must have a balanced mind when receiving or contemplating on the teaching. Do not become too relaxed because that leads to external distraction, but do not withdraw too much within or your mind will lack clarity. Without clarity, you cannot understand the meaning of what you hear nor will you be able to abide in the meditative state. That is why you must balance the mind between tightness and laxity when practicing or receiving the teaching.

Machig Lapdron taught in a similar way:

*“Concentrate intensely, then release and relax.
There lies a key to the view.”*

The mind needs to be tightened but not too tight, loosened but not too loose. A proper balance between the two is the basis for realizing the excellent view. Practice without being extremely inwardly withdrawn; keep your mind well-balanced and your faculties, like your eyes, a bit relaxed. In this way, your mind will experience clarity or luminosity. Achieving clarity and luminosity, the teachings are easier to understand and easier to hold in your mind. Moreover, you will generate concentration more easily when meditating.

Do not become discouraged

When the teaching continues for a long time, you may at times suffer from hunger and thirst, be burned by the sun, drenched by the rain or blown by the wind. On those occasions you might feel discouraged, unable to generate much interest in receiving the teaching. Being uncomfortable, you don't want to listen. When this kind of attitude arises, you must try to cast it aside. If you cannot leave that feeling behind you will accumulate the negative karma of abandoning the Dharma. At that moment you accrue the bad karma of abandoning the Dharma, and in the future you will not have the chance to hear the excellent teachings. Thus, you must discard this nonvirtuous thought.

What should you reflect on in order to abandon this? Think: “At this time I should be delighted to have obtained the human form with its freedoms and

advantages. I have met a genuine lama and have the opportunity to receive profound instructions.”

The belief that since you are now in human form you will again take birth as a human will not help you understand how hard it actually is to obtain this form. Without appreciating how difficult it is to achieve, you will not consider it precious. Not acknowledging its preciousness, you become distracted and waste your life. To avoid such thinking, reflect on the difficulty of obtaining this human form. Consider this from the aspects of the cause, the example and the numbers. Thinking that you have gained this form that is extremely hard to acquire, you should rejoice at your good fortune.

Mere birth in human form is not enough, however. Since we are not born from our mother’s womb knowing the Dharma, without a spiritual master to teach us we could live for hundreds of years and still know nothing of the doctrine. We would be like stones deep in the ocean: “as it was in the beginning, so it is at the end.” We do not automatically understand the Dharma after living for a certain number of years. Encountering a genuine guru is crucial. In this life you have met a lama and have had the opportunity to listen to profound teachings. Consider this precious opportunity, and reflect back on your countless number of previous lives. Rest assured that you have not had this good fortune in the past.

Had you enjoyed this opportunity before, you might – to think from the highest point of view – have attained the state of enlightenment. Otherwise, you would have become an *arhat*⁵¹ and would not have been born within cyclic existence. That did not occur, however, and you have continued to take birth and experience karma and afflictive emotions. Either you did not encounter an authentic lama in the past and did not receive instructions in the profound teaching, or you didn’t have the chance to practice. Thus, you have remained in samsara. In any case, you did not have the opportunity you have now. In the future as well this circumstance will occur only rarely. Reflecting again and again on this, rejoice from your heart at the opportunity to receive this teaching.

Having the good fortune to hear the Dharma – the fruit of accumulating virtue for countless eons – is like a feast that comes only once a century. Meeting a lama and being present for this profound teaching is the result of vast merit you have gathered during uncountable past lives. That effect has

51 Becoming an arhat is the final goal of the Sravakas. It is a kind of liberation and is beyond rebirth, but is not buddhahood.

ripened on your present form; you have met a genuine lama and can hear and understand the Dharma. Except for your auspicious accumulations, this chance would not have arisen. Such an opportunity comes only once. In the future it will be difficult to find a guru and receive the teachings. Therefore, resolve that for the sake of this teaching you will endure all hardship and suffering, and will always strive to listen to the Dharma with a happy and interested mind.

Generally, we must try to bear whatever suffering of cold or heat, hunger or thirst occurs when we are receiving teachings. This is known as the patience of facing the difficulties of hearing the teaching. Of the six transcendent perfections,⁵² patience is said to be the greatest virtue. As no difficulty is greater than practicing patience, it brings the greatest benefit. You must endure whatever difficulty or suffering you encounter for the sake of the teaching. Do not be overpowered by thinking of the suffering and discomfort you are experiencing. Do not lack faith in the Dharma, and feel lazy about receiving teachings. Learn to endure with patience.

Make a commitment to yourself to bear these difficulties; that is the highest practice of patience. The force of this resolve helps exhaust negative karma that has accumulated over lifetimes and aids in gathering vast merit. For this reason, the life stories of genuine masters of the past, – the Omniscient Longchen Rabjam and others – relate details of the sufferings they underwent to study the Dharma. When Longchenpa served his lama, Vidyadhara Kumaradza, he had only a sack made from yak hair as his cushion and clothing. With only that he endured great misery to receive teachings. Omniscient Longchenpa was not incapable of finding food and clothing, but bearing hardship for the sake of the Dharma helps diminish negative karma and is an excellent method for accumulating merit. Therefore, to demonstrate that disciples must experience difficulties to receive the Dharma, he used a single yak hair sack for both his clothing and cushion.

Reading Jetsun Milarepa's famous biography, we learn of the extreme torment he suffered to obtain teachings from his teacher, Marpa Lotsawa. His life story details this very clearly. Likewise think of the great pain Naropa endured to receive teachings from Tilopa. All these are sufferings borne for the sake of the Dharma. We are not capable of undergoing this degree of suffering, but the temporary discomfort of hunger and thirst, or

52 *paramitas* (Skt); *pha rol tu byin pa* (Tib): The six transcendent perfections are generosity, discipline, patience, joyful diligence, concentration and wisdom.

heat and cold that we sometimes experience when receiving teachings are not unendurable. Practicing patience in the face of these difficulties is for an excellent cause. Do not be overcome by the problem, but seek to generate interest in your mind.

The Five Misapprehensions

Third is the teaching on the five misapprehensions: apprehending the words, but not the meaning; apprehending the meaning, but not the words; apprehending the words but without understanding; apprehending the words in the wrong order; and apprehending the wrong meaning of the words.

Apprehending the words, but not the meaning

In general, individuals have different inclinations. Some people, when they see a text with proper grammar and a poetic style of writing, become interested in the words and try to grasp the meaning without, however, analyzing it much. Their lack of interest in analysis results from their particular temperament. Seeing sweet and beautiful words, they may try to memorize them without considering the meaning at all. One type of person can remember only the words, but not the profound meaning. This is like a child plucking flowers; except for seeing the flowers as beautiful, children have no other reason to collect them. Likewise, encountering beautiful and well-written words, some individuals will memorize them without seeking the meaning. This serves no purpose. The mere words are insufficient to benefit the mind. The essential meaning is what helps our mindstreams.

Apprehending the meaning, but not the words

According to Khenpo Ngaga, some great meditators of the Nyingma tradition say that exposition of the words is the mere residue the teaching. Asking, "Why do we need such explanation?" they ignore it, clutching instead at the meaning. Some argue that elucidation is mere wordplay and wonder what purpose it serves. Believing that those who engage in scholarly discourse fail to meditate, they emphasize practice alone, coming to ignore the words and seek only to train in the meaning. Actually, they are correct; if one can grasp the essential meaning and practice it, this covers everything. However, without relying on the words, the meaning cannot be grasped. It never happens that one can completely eliminate the words and go directly to the meaning.

Even a lama who explains the meaning of the profound teaching must

rely on words. Otherwise he has no way to teach; the situation becomes empty of expression and thought. Similarly, the disciple who receives the teaching needs words to understand the meaning. No other method of comprehending sense and significance can be found except reliance on words. In order to practice the essence we must attain certainty about the meaning; without words, we cannot achieve certainty and practice. If we do not use words to understand the meaning, the words and meaning become two separate things, and no one can understand the meaning by itself.

Apprehending the words but without understanding

Unless you know the different categories of relative and ultimate truth and indirect and hidden meaning, you might misunderstand the teachings, confusing the words and the meaning so they become contrary to the pure Dharma. The Sutra section of Lord Buddha's teaching differentiates four types of teaching: relative truth, ultimate truth, indirect meaning and hidden meaning. In some sutras, when giving indirect teachings, the Buddha says to kill your father and mother. This is an aspect of hidden meaning; the meaning being that you should abandon the roots of cyclic existence, which are compounded phenomena and ignorance, and the karmic aspect of formations.

When studying Sutra, you must differentiate among these four without confusion. Otherwise, word and meaning can be confused. For example, hearing the teaching on killing one's father and mother and acting on those words would constitute a heinous crime. Thus, learn to clearly differentiate between the types of teaching, and try to arrive at the essential meaning. If you do not, being confused between the words and the meaning could lead you to understand the words in a way that contradicts the Dharma. You would be unable to bring forth profound Dharma in your mindstream.

Apprehending the words in the wrong order

Apprehending the words in the wrong order violates the systematic progression of the Dharma. This contradiction will continue at all times, whether you are listening, teaching or meditating. Do not change the order. Among the vehicles Lord Buddha taught, begin with the Sravakayana and practice gradually. Practice the vehicles in the correct order.

Dzogchen teaching also contains two sections: the preliminary and the main part. Do not upset their systematic order. Thoroughly practice the preliminaries first; only after stabilizing them should you enter into the main

practice. Proceeding directly to the main practice without completing the preliminaries is incorrect. Even moving directly into the inner preliminaries without first practicing the outer preliminaries contradicts the order of the teaching. Moreover, the Dharma should not be presented in the wrong order at the time of teaching and listening. First complete the preliminaries and then teach the main practice. Within the preliminaries, first teach the outer and then the inner preliminaries.

The special path of Dzogpa Chenpo also includes a preliminary practice. The uncommon preliminaries, through which one must recognize the intrinsic awareness (*rigpa*) of the main practice, are considered even more profound than the main part. The intrinsic awareness of the main practice must be clearly brought forth by relying on the preliminary practice. The main practice involves pointing out the intrinsic awareness that is generated in the disciple's mindstream, pointing out the aspect of three kayas, and pointing out the aspect of view and meditation. The disciple is directly introduced to these realizations within his or her mind. Without stabilizing through the preliminary practice, engaging in the main part and directly generating the experiences of "cutting through" with Trekchod and "direct crossing" with Tögal is not possible.

While completing the preliminary practices, the practitioner learns to clearly recognize intrinsic awareness. The subsequent main practice points out what has already been experienced during the preliminaries, and therefore the preliminary practice is considered the more profound. The uncommon inner preliminaries mainly teach the aspects of refuge, generating bodhicitta, practicing Vajrasattva, mandala offering and guru yoga. Someone might think, "Since I have received the initiation into Trekchod practice I don't need these preliminary practices." For a practitioner who has truly experienced intrinsic awareness without any confusion or fault, that could be correct. However, recognizing the intrinsic awareness as taught in Trekchod is not easy.

Even if a person who has previously experienced the main practice and recognized intrinsic awareness again practices the preliminaries from refuge onward, his or her experience of the main practice will be enhanced. No obstacle or defilement for the main practice, the preliminary practice on the contrary both generates the intrinsic awareness of the main practice that was not generated earlier, and further develops what was already generated. In particular, many lamas teach that guru yoga practice is an aspect of preliminary practice, of the main practice and of the practice of luminosity.

They have repeated this again and again. Anyone who thinks that having once received the main practice, he should not practice the preliminaries or that it is unnecessary to practice the preliminaries is absolutely wrong.

The general order of teaching is to receive the lower ones first and then go on to receive the higher ones. Is it reversing the order of the teaching to repeat the preliminary practices after having developed the experience of the main practice? Not at all! We need the preliminary practice to generate the intrinsic awareness of the main practice that was not generated before. Directly engaging in the main practice in an effort to experience intrinsic awareness that was not already generated is the reversal, and does not lead to generating the intrinsic awareness of the main practice. Engaging in preliminary practice brings one to recognize the intrinsic awareness of the main practice. Then, with this clearer recognition, one again engages in preliminary practice.

Proceeding directly to the main practice without carrying out the preliminary practice is practicing out of order and will never help the recognition of intrinsic awareness. At all times, whether you are receiving teachings, giving teachings or practicing, you must follow the proper sequence. Proceeding in that way, you have no confusion or contradictions. Not following the proper order causes confusion and contradictions.

Apprehending the wrong meaning of the words

By apprehending the wrong meaning, you will always be accustomed to wrong ideas, the nature of your mind will be impaired and you will bring disgrace upon the Dharma. Khenpo Ngaga taught that the path of Secret Mantra Vajrayana includes the activity of union and liberation; the aspect of taking desire and wealth as the path, without abandonment; and also the aspect of taking afflictive emotions as the path, without abandonment. If you don't understand the Secret Mantra properly, you could become confused by mere words and think that whoever practices Secret Mantra can directly engage in having sexual relations, drinking alcohol, killing and eating meat. This is a complete misunderstanding of the meaning of the Secret Mantra.

A practitioner of Secret Mantra must first understand the hidden secrets; only based on such understanding can he or she practice the hidden secrets of the activity of union and liberation. Without knowing anything about the hidden secrets, let alone understanding the meaning exactly as it is, a person who engages in the activity of union and liberation will be

understanding the meaning incorrectly. That is confusion, a condition that causes those who wrongly engage in this practice to become demons or samaya violators. This fault of misunderstanding leads to birth as an evildoer. Apprehending the wrong meaning wastes time, spoils one's life, and brings disgrace to the Dharma.

We must be able to understand the genuine path without fault. Sometimes we feel fed up, and we could think: "The meaning of the teaching is hard to understand, not only now but often. Maybe I'll never understand anything. Maybe I should just sit in a corner, count the Mani mantra and spin my prayer wheel." Do not become discouraged like this; engender diligence and will-power. Whatever difficulties you face, resolve to endure them and not to give up listening to and studying the teachings until you grasp the entire meaning. Develop interest in your mind and commit yourself.

When you find something seeming small and easy, do not consider it so simple that you can look down upon it and abandon it. Grasp the meaning in your mindstream, and try to mingle your mind with the meaning of what you have understood. The instruction is "to grasp without forgetting." You must try to grasp the teachings in your mind in the proper sequence, without mixing up the streams of teaching.

CONDUCT TO BE ADOPTED

Three types of conduct should be adopted when listening to the Dharma: making the four assumptions, practicing the six perfections, and following various other modes of conduct.

The Four Assumptions

When receiving teachings we must try to generate the four most pure assumptions in our mindstreams. Patrul Rinpoche quotes from the sutra "Arranged like a Tree,"⁵³ which states:

Noble child, regard yourself as a sick person. Regard the Dharma as the medicine. Regard your spiritual teacher as a skilled physician. Regard constant practice as the treatment that will definitely cure the illness.

Understand that you are continually suffering from the disease of karma and afflictive emotions. See the teachings of the Dharma – be it Sutra or Mantra, oral or written – as something that cures your spiritual illness. Think of your spiritual master as a qualified doctor who recognizes your disease and prescribes medicine to directly cure it. One who seriously practices the

Dharma is like a sick person who takes medicine and follows his or her doctor's advice. Gradually the disease will be cured. When engaging in serious practice, the cause of suffering – afflictive emotion – and its fruit – the suffering in our mindstream – are both eliminated. This teaching is called the four completely pure assumptions. Patrul Rinpoche explains:

As stated, you who have been in this ocean of samsaric suffering since beginningless time are like a patient stricken by disease, caused by three poisons and resulting in the three sufferings.

Actually, we are not *like* the patients, but we *are* the patients. When we identify the sicknesses, there are disorders of the wind, phlegm and bile.⁵⁴ These constitute the fruit, which is the suffering. The cause is the three poisons: attachment, anger and ignorance. “Sickness” is nothing other than the three poisons bringing about the wind, phlegm and bile. Our mindstreams contain the three poisons, and we experience the fruit, the suffering. Within samsara, we are patients suffering from three poisons.

No one wants to have a serious disease, and as soon as an illness arises, we search for an experienced physician. Once we find the doctor and rely on his or her treatment, we should show respect through our body, speech and mind and should follow whatever actions the doctor recommends. Otherwise we will never be able to cure the disease. Relying on a doctor, following his advice and taking the medicine he recommends, we will enjoy the peace of having recovered from the disease.

Relating to the spiritual teacher

Likewise, in this context you should regard your lama as an experienced doctor. When relying on a spiritual teacher in this way, you should be able to follow whatever he or she says. A genuine lama commands only in accordance with the genuine Dharma. Unless there is a special purpose for doing otherwise, a lama will never command anything contrary to the Dharma. Thus, a disciple must try to carry out whatever is commanded by an authentic lama. Generally, when teaching about the samayas, the commitments of the unsurpassable Secret Mantra, the student's promise is to accomplish whatever his guru commands. Thinking that you will do whatever your lama commands as long as it suits you and not otherwise, you are differentiating his or her commands and choosing among them.

54 The three “humors” of Tibetan medicine – *rlung*, *bekhan* and *tripa* – which must be in balance to maintain health; each corresponds to a particular poison, or afflictive emotion.

This is the same as sometimes revering the lama and sometimes not. If that happens, you are guilty of the fault of violating the commitment to abide by your spiritual master's commands.

Your spiritual teacher is very powerful. You should try to generate the faith of seeing your guru as an actual buddha. Through the auspicious connection of considering the teachings that come from your teacher's mouth as even more profound than those of Lord Buddha himself, the most excellent realization will arise in your mindstream. Actualizing this realization will not be difficult; because of the auspicious connection it will be generated spontaneously. Some lamas may be genuine buddhas and some may not. Not every lama is a real buddha, but students must strive to generate the faith of seeing their teachers as buddhas, although developing this faith may not be easy.

Once a disciple sees his or her lama as an actual buddha, whether the guru gives a teaching that accords with the genuine Dharma or not, the student must accept it. This auspicious connection causes an extremely excellent realization to arise in the student's mind. Otherwise, the lama could actually be a buddha, but if the student lacks the faith to see this, the lama's blessings will never flow into his mindstream. When we talk about the guru's blessings flowing into the disciple's mindstream, this is not like an experience of heat or cold. The arising of the lama's realization in the student's mind is the flow of blessing. A student who has received his guru's blessings will generate this special realization. Other than the lama's realization, there is no other experience of receiving the blessing.

When we pray, "May my mindstream be sanctified by the lama's blessing," we are praying for the quality of the lama's body, speech and mind to become inseparable from our own body, speech and mind. That is what blessing means. If a disciple generates outstanding faith and devotion, the force or power of this devotion leads directly to an excellent realization in his or her mindstream. On the other hand, seeing the lama as sometimes like a god and sometimes like a human, without any certainty, is like the flow of your own wind element. The blessing of the lama's mindstream will never flow into the mind of a disciple who says, "This is my lama's command," and tries to accomplish it if the lama's instructions suit him, but who says, "I don't care; I'll just do it my way," when he doesn't find the lama's instruction pleasing. Special realization will never arise in such a disciple's mindstream. No sutra or tantra will teach that realization could be generated in the mind of an individual like that.

Indeed, it is difficult to have the faith that the lama is a true buddha. The lama of my teacher, Khen Rinpoche Rinchen, was Drayab Khenpo Lodro, an extremely learned scholar and a direct disciple of the great Khenpo Shenga. Drayab Khenpo Lodro was also a disciple of Dzongsar Khyentse Chokyi Lodro. Khen Rinpoche Rinchen said that Drayab Khenpo Lodro would say in class that while many people claimed to have the faith of seeing their lama as an actual buddha, he considered this a kind of boasting. He felt that disciples generally behave deceitfully, acting in a certain way before the lama and in another way behind his back. Behaving in such a hypocritical manner means we do not really see our lama as a buddha in person. If our faith were actually that strong, we would be afraid to conduct ourselves hypocritically since a buddha knows all phenomena clearly and would thus be aware of our behavior. Based on our actions, simply saying we have the faith to see our lama as a genuine buddha is boastful. Deceitful behavior is a sign that we lack that kind of faith.

Drayab Khenpo Lodro said that had Khyentse Chokyi Lodro asked him to jump off a cliff, assuring him that he would suffer no great harm, he had sufficient confidence to do it without hesitating, but that it was still difficult to generate in his mind the faith that his guru was a real buddha. He was correct to speak like that. A student who acts one way in front of his lama and another way behind his back does not actually see his lama as a true buddha. If buddhas didn't possess the quality of omniscience, the situation would be different, but since buddhas are all-knowing, any false behavior indicates that such faith is lacking. This story reveals the difficulty of generating the faith of seeing the lama as actually buddha. However, the extremely excellent realization is developed in the mindstream of a student who does generate this faith. Jetsun Milarepa said the same thing to Dagpopa.

You can call this the samaya of the Secret Mantra; it represents how the path of Secret Mantra is. A disciple must follow whatever the lama commands, must drink the medicine of the excellent Dharma and become free from the disease of suffering. Relying on a lama by receiving his teachings, but failing to follow them precisely is like going to a doctor but not following his advice. Unless you take his advice, no doctor can help you. Without taking the prescribed medicine, the doctor's skill and experience make no difference. To thoroughly free himself from a disease, a patient must swallow the doctor's medicine. Likewise, to be free from the three poisons, which are the causes of suffering, and from suffering itself, which is its fruition, a student must practice the Dharma as instructed. Otherwise,

he is like a sick man who keeps countless medicines and medical texts by his bed but doesn't take the medicine and so does not recover.

The importance of practice

Patrul Rinpoche emphasizes the need to practice as the teacher has taught.

People these days place great hope in their guru's compassion, while continuing to engage in nonreligious activities. They think they will not suffer the consequences of their nonvirtue because the blessing of the lama can take them to the higher realms like simply tossing a stone.

Not believing that they must abandon the nonvirtuous actions and defilements of their mindstreams, people are frightened when they do experience the fruition of suffering. Fearing the results of the nonvirtuous activity of their body, speech and mind, they cry out to their lama for help: "Oh guru, please look upon me with kindness!" thinking the lama can instantly alleviate their suffering. This does not happen, however.

To be embraced by the lama's kindness means to be led by his compassion. He teaches the profound instructions, opening your eyes by explaining what to accept and what to reject. He shows you the path to liberation as taught by the Buddha.

Before relying on a lama, we don't know what faults to abandon and what virtues to accept. According to the Victorious One's command, the lama teaches the path of liberation of the sravakas, the path of liberation of the pratyekabuddhas, the path of the bodhisattvas attaining enlightenment and then the path of Secret Mantra. The lama teaches all these paths just as they are and in this way embraces you with kindness. Lord Buddha himself cannot look upon you with any kindness greater than this. Relying on this kindness, whether or not you follow the path of liberation is up to you.

We have been taught the instructions that we need. Our eyes have been opened about accepting and rejecting. We have been shown the path to liberation. If we do not practice the instructions and the path, and continue to accumulate attachment, anger and dullness in our minds, the lama will not be able to simply toss us into the pure realms. To really go to the pure realms, we must practice according to the instructions.

You have now attained the human body endowed with the freedoms and advantages, and you know the key points of the behavior to adopt and what to abandon. The power of decision is in your own hands. This moment is the dividing line between making a good

or a bad choice. Following your guru's exact instructions, you must decide between samsara and nirvana.

Had we attained the form of a cow or a bull, our bodies would be useless for achieving liberation. In such a body the motivation of wanting to practice doesn't arise, and animals know nothing of the Dharma. However, our human body makes it possible for us to engage in Dharma practice. Even with a human body, however, we wouldn't know what to reject and what to accept if we hadn't encountered a spiritual teacher and received teachings. But we have met a lama and have heard the instructions. We have the freedom to practice the Dharma; our circumstances are all favorable. We are free of all obstacles. If we want to practice, everything is ready for us to do so. Whether we make a good or a bad choice is up to us. Having the capacity to attain the state of liberation and enlightenment marks the turning point toward the good choice. Otherwise, if we want to again be reborn in the three lower realms, not wanting to practice is the turning point toward the bad choice. Right now we are on the border between good or bad. Therefore, following the exact instructions of the guru, we must decide between samsara and nirvana. We must develop the determination to wish to free ourselves from samsara and to attain nirvana.

Patrul Rinpoche next reproaches village lamas who sit near the head of a corpse and, lacking the opportunity to teach living disciples, teach in a scholarly manner to someone who has already died, whose consciousness has already separated from his body, and who is like a stone. The consciousness of someone who has died is thought to linger near the body for a few days. After this, one who has accumulated vast merit takes rebirth in a pure realm. Those who have accumulated vast nonvirtue fall into the lower realms with no passing through the intermediate state, the bardo.

Ordinary people generally experience the intermediate state at the moment of death. At that time, if an authentic lama performs the ritual of transference, the consciousness can be transferred to the pure realms. But only a genuine lama can perform this practice. It may be that if a lama or a spiritual friend with whom you have pure samaya performs the prayers and supplications, they will immediately help you remember, and with your own power you can be born in the pure realms. However, this is only possible for practitioners who were well-trained in meditation and who practiced during their lifetimes. It is extremely difficult for ordinary people to achieve and generally people forget their practices in the intermediate state. When the consciousnesses of those who didn't understand the Dharma during their

lifetimes wander through the intermediate state, even if they are given the teaching, it is hard to say that they can grasp the meaning.

Unless you have already trained well in meditation, at this time you will be driven from behind by the red wind of karma – your past actions – led in front by the darkness of fear, pressed on both sides by the long, narrow passage of the intermediate state, and chased by innumerable attendants of Yama,⁵⁵ who shout “Kill, kill! Beat, beat!” You will find no place to run to, no place to hide, and no one in whom you can place your hope or trust. How can a time when you do not know what to do be a turning point for going up or down?

How can someone undergoing this kind of suffering hold steady? Even if the Dharma is taught, will understanding be possible? Perhaps a lama with experience in mantra and deep meditation, who is also accomplished in the practice of generation and completion state, could succeed in summoning the consciousness of the person in the intermediate state to the paper effigy⁵⁶ but most people cannot do this. Simply giving empowerment on the basis of the paper effigy will not help the consciousness in the intermediate state. Thus it is crucial to think about this right now.

A worldly person who is wealthy might believe he can avoid suffering by having his wealth used to perform religious rites after his death. Without practicing, he passes his days in distraction and leisure. Patrul Rinpoche does not say that these religious rites will not assist the dead, but that teaching a consciousness in the intermediate state is difficult, and that it is also difficult for the consciousness being taught to practice and succeed in liberating itself since beings in the intermediate state do not have the power of choice.

Now, when we are alive, is the time when we can understand what we are taught, and we have freedom as well. We have the opportunity both to receive the teachings, and to practice them; we aren't experiencing fear as do beings in the bardo – they are driven from behind and led from the front by fear. Our body, speech and mind are presently in a peaceful and stable condition. Hearing the Dharma, we can understand it; through practice, we can stabilize our minds. In the bardo, beings are like feathers in the wind; they have no time to receive the teachings and relax into practice. A consciousness in the intermediate state cannot really hear or understand the

55 The lord of death.

56 The name of the dead is inscribed on a paper during a ritual after death designed to help the dead person through the intermediate state.

teachings; even if he desired to practice, there is no opportunity. How could a being undergoing such terror as Patrul Rinpoche describes comprehend the Dharma, even if it were being preached? How could he practice? By then, the decision about going up or down has already been made. There is no longer any border. Our human lifetimes are the border between going up or down. As the great Orgyen Rinpoche⁵⁷ said:

*Conferring initiation on the paper effigy
Comes too late when one's consciousness
Is running like a mad dog in the bardo.
Leading the consciousness to the higher realms is very difficult.*

By the time of giving empowerment to the paper effigy, it is already too late. If we are to be liberated, it should be while we are alive, able to speak and understand; when body and consciousness are still together and we have the power of choice. Then is the time to receive empowerment and liberate ourselves – not when the empowerment vase is placed on a piece of paper bearing our name. A consciousness roaming like a mad dog through the bardo cannot receive empowerment. Even if liberation and enlightenment are remembered, they are difficult to attain. The border for going up or down is during our lifetime. This is when, as Patrul Rinpoche says, we should turn the horse with the bridle. The accumulation of merit while in this human body is greater than in other situations. Patrul Rinpoche continues:

While in this human form, positive actions done for moving upward are more effective as virtue than merit accumulated in any other form. We must be careful not to waste this precious life. Human beings are also more capable than other sentient beings of performing nonvirtuous actions that lead downward. No other beings can accumulate more negative karma than humans. Thus, we can certainly produce the cause for inescapably entering the depths of the lower realms.

“Human” here refers to beings who are capable of attaining liberation and enlightenment if they wish. Humans can also be born in difficult circumstances without the capacity to free themselves.

At this time you have met a guru, who is like a skilled physician, and have found the noble Dharma, which is like the *amrita* that restores life.

Amrita is the medicine that can restore a dead person to life. Having found the excellent amrita-like teaching, you must rely on the four most pure

57 Another name for Guru Rinpoche.

assumptions: considering yourself a patient, the Dharma as the medicine, your teacher as an expert doctor, and constant practice as the treatment. Engage in practicing the teachings you have received and follow the path of liberation. Avoid their opposite, the four incorrect assumptions.

The Four Incorrect Assumptions

The four incorrect assumptions are generally held to be in the mindstream of individuals who are bad by nature. Khenpo Ngaga taught that teaching people who are essentially good but who act roughly will gradually bring them to a better state; their rough actions will be converted into good behavior. Being good by nature, such persons can be brought onto the correct path. Converting bad-natured individuals who hold the four incorrect assumptions is difficult, however.

The Treasury of Qualities⁵⁸ states: “An insincere disciple 1) deceives with a humble tongue, 2) treats the guru like a musk deer, 3) obtains the holy Dharma like a treasure of musk, and later 4) being happy with his hunting, abandons his samaya commitments.”

In other words, this type of disciple deceives through his body and speech. He is like a hunter who kills deer for their musk, and then earns a profit by selling it. Insincere disciples receive teachings from their lamas to become famous, raise their status and obtain wealth and pleasure. Just as a hunter wants musk for his business dealings, such a disciple intends to acquire Dharma teaching to achieve worldly benefits. If he revealed his intention, the lama would not teach, so he deceives the lama, acting like he is faithful to the Dharma although he is not, appearing to be respectful although he lacks respect. In front of the lama, he speaks pleasingly and makes material offerings. He uses many methods to receive empowerments, oral transmissions and practice instructions.

Likewise, hunters set snares in the forest to catch musk deer. The disciple in this example reveres his guru in the same way the hunter reveres the musk deer.⁵⁹ After receiving teachings he no longer remembers the lama’s kindness; having no heartfelt faith, he no longer honors his guru though body and speech, and no longer cares about the lama at all. He uses the Dharma – like the hunter uses musk – to acquire worldly wealth, fame and position. This negative type of disciple “abandons his samaya commitments since he is extremely interested in hunting.” A hunter kills the deer for its

58 *Yonten Dzo*, a text by Jigme Lingpa.

59 Because he sees the deer as a source of material gain.

musk; a bad-natured disciple might even go so far as to threaten his guru's life. Holding a wrong view toward the lama, he throws the teacher-disciple commitment far away, and accumulates the negative karma of violating this crucial samaya. As Patrul Rinpoche says:

Do not receive and practice the Dharma by treating the guru like a musk deer, the Dharma like musk, yourself as the hunter and your repeated practice as the effort to kill the musk deer with an arrow or snare. If you do not appreciate the guru's kindness you are creating negative karma through the Dharma. You are setting the foundation stone for the hell realms.

An insincere disciple receives the teachings with no gratitude for their preciousness. Deceiving the lama, he does not practice what he has received, and sets a foundation stone in the hell realms. He can never free himself from the lower realms.

Practicing the Six Transcendent Perfections

Whether you are giving or receiving teachings, you must act in accordance with the conduct of the six transcendent perfections. When the path of the heirs of the Victorious One, the bodhisattvas, is being taught, the teaching concerns the vast intention of bodhicitta. All such paths without exception are included within the aspects of the bodhicitta of aspiration and the bodhicitta of application. Any practice that incorporates these two is the path of the Mahayana, the path of the bodhisattvas. When you are receiving teachings, the meaning of the bodhicitta of aspiration is present. Here, in talking about the six perfections, they are taught in accordance with the bodhicitta of application, and must be adopted when receiving or teaching the Dharma. Patrul Rinpoche explains with the following quote from the "Tantra of Thorough Comprehension of the Instructions on all Dharma Practices," which contains the secret instructions on the conduct aspect of Dharma:

*Make offerings of flowers, cushions, and the like,
Put in order the place of Dharma instruction and control your conduct,
Avoid harming any living being,
Be fully devoted to the guru,
Listen attentively to his or her instructions,
Ask questions to clarify any doubts.
Listeners should possess these six aspects of the perfections.*

This tantra enumerates the qualities that the student and the teacher

should possess. This section is explaining how disciples should listen to the teaching in accordance with the six perfections. Before the teaching, the Dharma throne must be set up. This displays the greatness of the Dharma. In the past, before he taught, our teacher Buddha Shakyamuni would arrange the throne with his own hands – those hands “accomplished through the hundred merits”.⁶⁰ Therefore, we should erect the throne, arrange cushions and so on. We should also offer a mandala for receiving the teachings, and offer flowers. Carrying out these activities diligently fulfils the meaning of the perfection of generosity.

We must clean and sweep the area where the teaching will take place, and sprinkle it with sweet scent, making certain to keep it spotless. When actually receiving the teachings, the student should display the behavior of devotion to the Dharma and the lama. Disrespectful behavior must be abandoned. Cleaning the site of the teachings and avoiding disrespectful behavior of body and speech perfects the perfection of morality.

Not to harm even the smallest of beings reminds us that the Buddha’s doctrine, if condensed, teaches disciples to avoid causing any harm at all. Especially when receiving the teachings, we must not hurt small living creatures like flies, lice and nits. Carefully abandon such actions when listening to the Dharma since the fault is greater than at other times. Even if a sentient being is harming you, to avoid anger and remain patient in the face of the suffering that beings cause is patience that endures the harm arising from beings’ negative feelings. The suffering of heat and cold can also occur during a teaching. Enduring this can qualify as the patience of enduring difficulty for the sake of the Dharma.

Tolerating whatever difficulties are encountered when listening to teachings helps accumulate the patience of bearing suffering for the Dharma. If no suffering is involved in receiving the teachings, the need to practice patience will not arise. Without practicing patience, you do not gather the merit of the perfection of patience. If no beings are disturbing you and you thus have no reason for anger, you cannot claim to be practicing patience. Only when beings are causing problems is anger likely to arise. When such difficulties do occur, successfully practicing patience and absorbing the harm brought by others leads to accumulating the vast merit of practicing patience. Facing problems when you are listening to the Dharma is an excellent situation for practicing patience. Without developing a disinterested mind, think as follows: “May these difficulties that I am suffering, such as heat

60 An epithet of the Buddha’s hands.

and cold, free beings from sickness and suffering.” The immense virtue of practicing patience is accumulated by such aspirations. The same result comes from bearing similar hardship when actually practicing the Dharma.

Listening attentively to the guru’s instructions means avoiding feeling any negativity toward the lama and the teachings, and cheerfully paying attention to the Dharma with genuine faith. Through the faith you generate in the lama, you must – from the depths of the heart – generate interest in his or her teachings. Developing deep faith and interest in the lama and the teaching is the essence of the perfection of perseverance. When such great faith is generated, wrong views are discarded. Faith cannot arise in a mindstream that harbors wrong views, and wrong views will not arise when devotion is generated. Wrong views are automatically abandoned when faith and devotion toward the lama and the teaching are developed. Listening to the Dharma with pure devotion and interest is diligence.

Not letting the mind wander from the teaching and focusing single-pointedly on the guru’s instructions is stable meditation. If you let your mind and eyes become distracted, then although your body is attending the teaching, your mind could be wandering around the world. A student who is distracted by various materialistic concerns will be unable to understand anything of the teaching. Thus, abandon all distractions when listening to teachings and focus single-pointed attention on the explanations. Listening with single-pointed and undistracted attention to the lama’s oral instructions is the single-pointed *samadhi*, or the perfection of concentration. Developing this perfection helps accumulate vast merit.

The instruction to ask questions to clarify unclear points is given since a student should question the lama to have any doubts cleared up. Generating confident knowledge in our mindstream through simply hearing a teaching is difficult; when doubts arise they must be clarified. We must cut through doubt to develop certainty; therefore we must ask our lama questions. Conviction is born in our minds through our questions. Sometimes you can cut through doubts and develop absolute confidence by single-pointedly focusing on the meaning and words of the teaching. Confidence develops after Dharma teachings are received, and developing certainty constitutes the perfection of wisdom. Disciples must cut through doubt and develop certainty by listening to the Dharma. This is how to attend to the teaching while engaging in the six perfections.

As explained before, all the practices of the bodhisattvas can be condensed into these six perfections. Try to abide by these six at all times.

Following these instructions while receiving teachings is how to practice the path of bodhisattvas, the heirs of the victorious ones. It is as well the pristine, pure way of listening to the Dharma. Hearing the Dharma in accordance with the conduct of the six perfections gathers the vast merit of receiving the teachings and also brings forth the benefits taught in the sutras.

Other Modes of Conduct to be Followed

Patrul Rinpoche also teaches other proper conduct for receiving the Dharma. He quotes the *Vinaya*:⁶¹

Do not preach to those who lack respect. Those who cover their heads without being ill; those who carry parasols, canes or weapons; and those whose heads are wrapped should not be taught.

Teaching people without devotion or respect is inappropriate since such individuals do not qualify as proper vessels to receive the Dharma. Whether the teachings are Sutra or Mantra, the listener should have devotion to what he or she is hearing. Respecting the Sravakayana is necessary to be an appropriate vessel to receive these teachings. When receiving the teachings of the pratyekabuddhas, you needn't have faith in the Sutra or Mantra teachings, but must have faith in the Pratyekabuddhayana. Those who are appropriate vessels for the bodhisattva teachings should feel a natural sense of devotion when they hear the teachings on bodhicitta, and they should listen to those teachings with delight.

Chandrakirti's "Ornament of the Middle Way" teaches that individuals who are appropriate vessels for receiving teachings on the path of emptiness will experience signs – such as their body hair standing on end, and tears welling in their eyes – simply on hearing the word "emptiness." The seed of completely enlightened buddhahood is present in those with excellent pure minds; hence they are perfect vessels for the teachings on emptiness. This also applies to all other teachings of Sutra and of Mantra. People with natural devotion for certain teachings are considered to be students of those teachings and can receive them. Those who lack this natural faith do not qualify as students. Teaching those who are not proper vessels not only brings about no benefit, but is also a fault on the master's part. From the Secret Mantra point of view, this constitutes the fault of openly teaching tantra. Those without faith are not appropriate vessels, regardless of the

⁶¹ *Vinaya* (Skt), *dulwa* (Tib), one of the three pitakas, the "baskets" of teachings. The teachings on monastic discipline and ethics.

level of teaching.

In addition, people displaying any behavior that is considered disrespectful should not be taught. The rule against teaching “those who cover their heads without being ill” means that people who are sick are permitted to keep their heads covered. In the Vinaya, Buddha Shakyamuni made some exceptions: someone who is sick can cover his or her head, or can even lie down during the teachings. In other cases, however, covering the head or wearing a hat during teachings is considered disrespectful, so people who cover their heads without being ill should not be taught.

Teaching should be given to those with devotion and whose behavior is respectful. The Dharma cannot be taught to anyone at any place – for instance, “those who use parasols or carry sticks or weapons.” Generally only kings, leaders and high lamas use parasols as it indicates their status. So, disciples should not listen to teachings while sitting under a parasol. Holding sticks or clubs or other weapons is also disrespectful behavior during a teaching. “Those whose heads are wrapped,” means people wearing turbans.

What is the respectful behavior to be adopted for receiving Dharma teaching? The Jataka tales⁶² teach the following:

Take the lowest seat. Show signs of good discipline. Look up with joyful eyes. Like drinking the nectar of the words, listen to the Dharma with full attention.

Someone receiving a teaching should sit lower than the master, and the students should be calm and at peace. Disciples must always maintain this respectful behavior, while gazing upon their teacher happily, as children look at their parents. “Drinking the nectar of the words” means to gradually try to realize the meaning and absorb the words of the Dharma into our mindstream. This is like drinking the sacred nectar that will save us from death. Drinking what is called the nectar of the gods helps cure sickness, suffering and death. This example indicates that realizing the meaning of the words the lama is teaching helps purify the many kinds of suffering of this and future lives.

The meaning of “listening with full attention” is that we need to generate diligence in our minds and actually practice the Dharma. We should be single-pointedly focused on the teaching, listening without allowing any distraction to draw us away. Abandon all diversions and disrespectful behavior.

62 Lord Buddha’s teachings on stories of his previous lives.

Up to this point, Patrul Rinpoche's teaching has mainly been concerned with how to listen to the Dharma. Adopt this behavior at all times, whether you are receiving Sutra or Mantra teachings. Embracing this behavior brings about the benefits taught in the sutras. Therefore, whenever you receive teachings, remember how to behave, and do not mix up what to accept and what to abandon.

THE TEACHING TO BE KNOWN: THE DIFFICULTIES OF FINDING THE FREEDOMS AND ADVANTAGES OF A HUMAN REBIRTH

The teaching being explained is the preliminary practice to the Dzogpa Chenpo, the Great Perfection. The preliminaries include the outer common preliminary, the uncommon inner preliminary, and the swift path of phowa, transference of consciousness. Within the teachings of the outer common preliminary, the first section on the difficulties of obtaining a human rebirth will now be clarified. This instruction has four topics:

1. contemplation on freedom, the main subject;
2. contemplation on the special advantages related to Dharma practice;
3. contemplation on examples showing the difficulty of obtaining a human body; and
4. contemplation on the numerical improbability of obtaining a human body.

INTRODUCTION

Since human beings can engage in practicing whatever Sutra and Mantra teachings they wish, this human body is the best of all six forms in the six realms, even more excellent than the form of the gods. A human body is the most favorable basis for practice. Generally, beings who obtain the form of the gods have immeasurable exhaustible pleasure but not the physical support needed to practice all forms of the Dharma. While the Sutra teachings indicate that the gods can practice, they lack the suitable physical support to receive Hinayana vows or teachings. Nor is the god form a proper support for Vajrayana teachings. Unlike the lower forms of beings, the god form can be a support for practice, but not for all types of Dharma.

In this human form, however, anyone who wishes can practice any teaching of Sutra and Mantra. A human being can practice whichever of the paths designed for beings with the three classes of faculties – lesser, higher or middling – he or she finds appropriate. Those who want to practice the Hinayana as well as those who want to practice the higher aspects of Dzogchen find the human form a fitting support. Therefore, among the six classes of beings, the support of the human form is considered the best.

Although a god's exhaustible pleasures are hundreds of thousands times greater than those of a human being, the human form is a better support for Dharma practice, and in this respect is more excellent. Nevertheless, unless we actually receive and contemplate the teachings, we will not recognize our special body as such an excellent support. Without such recognition, this body that can engage in the Dharma becomes involved in negative activities like taking life, stealing, committing adultery and so on. Humans diligently participate in these nonvirtuous acts. A human form is not required in order to undertake negative actions. Beings in hell and hungry ghosts can also accumulate uncountable nonvirtuous acts. Their forms cannot support Dharma practice but can definitely serve as sources of nonvirtue.

If, despite having obtained a human body, one carries out the non-virtuous deeds of beings in the lower realms, this conforms to the example Nagarjuna provides in his "Letter to a Friend," where he comments that worldly people would consider totally stupid anyone who carried excrement in a golden ladle studded with gems. In Tibetan philosophy, such an example of something that could happen but that wouldn't is called an example that "captures the limits of possibility." People would scorn someone who used a jewel-encrusted golden ladle to carry excrement. Using the excellently endowed human body to practice nonvirtue is even more stupid.

Right now we have obtained precious human bodies, and we will be human beings for however many years we live in this form. At some point we will die, and will be born in a new form. After we die we will not necessarily be reborn as human beings. We should realize that we will take some form in the future, but we don't know what. We are not beyond the six realms of cyclic existence; we will be reborn as a being within one of the realms.

As soon as you die you could take on the form of an animal and be unable to practice virtue even if you wanted to, whereas in the human form you have now you can engage in virtuous deeds whenever you wish. A human form is not necessary for nonvirtuous actions; animals also act negatively.

Although in human form now, we could take an animal form next, then the form of a hell being, a demi-god or a god. The only issue is the sequence; in some way we possess all the forms of cyclic existence right now. Of all the six forms of existence, however, only the human form is fit for Dharma practice. In no other form will we be able to practice any Dharma we wish; generally we will be able only to accumulate nonvirtue.

We must not waste this opportunity and should use our bodies to support Dharma practice. Patrul Rinpoche teaches the difficulty of obtaining a human body endowed with freedoms and advantages. The true essence to retain in our minds is that our present physical body is the only form fully capable of practicing the Dharma, and that although we possess it now, we have no indication that after death we will again be reborn in this form. Were that the case, whether or not we practiced in this life wouldn't matter much since we could obtain a new human form when we died and practice then. This is not the case, however. Once we have died, again obtaining a human form is difficult. We could be reborn as beings of the lower realms where the conditions will not be at all favorable for Dharma practice.

We must realize the preciousness of our present human form and understand that having attained it, we must practice so as to put an end to cyclic existence in the future. This thought should occur not only when we are listening to the Dharma; we must generate this recognition again and again, at all times. We should always use our human form to practice the Dharma. The teaching on the difficulty of attaining the freedoms and advantages then serves the purpose of both teaching and listening to the Dharma.

Counting the eight freedoms and ten advantages is not difficult. The point of the instruction is that our human form is always excellent for engaging in Dharma practice and no one knows how long we will possess it. Death is uncertain. If this life continues for a long time, we could have twenty, thirty or even up to fifty more years, but if it is short we might only have tomorrow. Thinking deeply, we have no certainty that we won't die tonight. We think we won't die soon, or for the next twenty or thirty years, but such a thought is merely a way of comforting the mind, with no logical reason behind it.

A clairvoyant lama, god or deity could prophesy that you will not die for twenty years, giving you some assurance. Nevertheless, without such a prediction, simply thinking that you won't die today just keeps you procrastinating, planning to practice the Dharma tomorrow, or next year

or some other time. Really, however, no one can say how long-lasting is your present human form, this form that is capable of Dharma practice. Whether you have one year, ten or twenty, you must determine to use this time to practice. Contemplating this repeatedly fulfills the purpose of the teachings on the freedoms and advantages. This contemplation lessens our attachment to this life, teaching us that whatever we do with our lives – whether we are farmers, business people or scholars – it all lacks essence. Such understanding helps us develop a mind of renunciation, enabling us to abandon attachment to our present and future lives.

CONTEMPLATION ON FREEDOM, THE MAIN SUBJECT

The nature of our human form is one of freedom, or a state of leisure or ease, but by simply keeping ourselves busy and involved in different kinds of work, we cannot engage in Dharma practice. To be able to practice the Dharma we must not have other employment; we should try to ease ourselves out of our work commitments. If we don't purposely make our lives busy, the human form is naturally relaxed. We have time to practice if we want to; thus we need to contemplate the essence of freedom. Simply being born human is not enough; we must also have the ten advantages, which are discussed below. Consider whether or not you actually have all these advantages. Identify what might be missing and try to acquire it.

The example given for the difficulty of obtaining the freedoms and advantages is one that captures the limits of possibility. We cannot find any actual example so we say, "If a rabbit had horns, and if the horns were a certain length...." Such an example captures the limits of possibility. In reality rabbits have no horns. But they stand in for something virtually impossible to obtain.

Numerous kinds of worldly activities can be found, but worldly vocations generally lack supreme qualities. As the most excellent support for Dharma practice, the human form is unmatched among the six forms of cyclic existence, but human beings are far fewer in number than other beings. Understand that humans are much rarer because the human form is the absolute best and therefore difficult to obtain.

States Without Freedom: the eight inopportune states

The four contemplations on the subject of the difficulty of attaining the freedoms and advantages begin with the eight inopportune states, the states without freedom, in which beings completely lack leisure. Karmic actions

lead to these situations. As humans, we are not without leisure because we inherently lack freedom, but because of situations we create ourselves. We turn the state of freedom into a lack of freedom. Although by nature we enjoy leisure, we make it otherwise. We do not lack choice simply due to negative karma. Beings in other realms have no freedom until they can attain another form. As long as they remain as hell beings, hungry ghosts, animals and so on, they lack independence. Thus these states are called “inopportune” (*mi khom pa*). We, however, were not born in an inopportune state but were born with the freedom to practice the Dharma, which is the natural condition of a human being.

The eight states without freedom, the inopportune states, are said to be the following: hell beings, hungry ghosts, animals, barbarians, long-lived gods, heretics, those born in a time without a buddha, and mutes.

Beings born into these situations have no freedom or independence. Until they abandon that form, they remain in an inopportune state. One born in hell cannot follow the Dharma because of constantly suffering the pains of heat and cold. A hell realm is a place where, because of your karma, you suffer endlessly until you are freed from that form. We humans regret to die and fear death since we suffer less while alive than after death. If we knew that as soon as we died we could be reborn in *Sukhavati*, the pure realm of great bliss, we would rejoice as death approached. We would be glad to die early, to be born in *Sukhavati* sooner. However we truly fear death because after death we must endure more suffering.

When we are alive, our freedom keeps us from experiencing great suffering and we can abide peacefully. After dying, we have no freedom; we fear death due to the misery and torment we must experience. Yogis who have attained supreme accomplishment can transform the “bardo of the time of death” into Dharmakaya. Some attain the state of buddhahood as soon as they die. Others can transform the bardo visions into the nature of Sambhogakaya. If this does not happen, some simply rest in the natural state of Nirmanakaya. In this case there is nothing to fear; one should be joyful in the face of death. If not to benefit beings, lamas with supreme accomplishments would, from their own perspective, be more peaceful if they went to the pure realms; in other words if they simply passed away. For this reason, lamas who have attained supreme accomplishment neither regret nor fear the approach of death. Like geese swimming without hesitation in a lake full of lotus flowers, they have no dread of birth or death.

Hell beings

Normal beings like us are extremely afraid of death. If a doctor tells us we will die within the year, we experience great distress – all because of the great suffering to be faced after dying. While still alive, we have peace and comfort, but we know about the great torment coming when this life ends. Thus, human beings shrink away from death. Other beings in the six realms, such as those in hell, cannot die. Since only death can free them from their suffering, they long to lose their lives and wait impatiently to die. This is actually true. With a serious headache, we cannot read books; we cannot practice. Even a small ailment prevents us from practicing Dharma. When we are well, feeling free and comfortable, we can practice to some extent. But even a minor illness holds us back, no matter how much we want to practice. Our trifling sickness, however, bears no comparison with the misery of the hell realms. How can one possibly engage in Dharma practice when tormented by heat and cold? Hell beings lack the freedom to practice.

Hungry ghosts

Likewise, hungry ghosts suffer from intense hunger and thirst that keeps them from following the Dharma. Think of ourselves – without breakfast, we feel too ill to practice. Hungry ghosts experience hunger and thirst for years on end, not even hearing the names of food and drink. Undergoing that kind of agony, their karma makes Dharma practice impossible, despite their wishes.

Animals

In the animal realms no opportunity to practice arises because animals suffer from exploitation and from causing harm to each other. Animals in the human and god realms primarily experience exploitation. The many creatures who live in the oceans suffer from eating one another. Therefore animals are said to experience exploitation and harming each other.

Long-lived gods

The form gods have seventeen categories, with the realm of the long-lived gods being one of them. The long-lived gods are a subdivision of the gods of the fourth samadhi⁶³ state. People like us who wish to be born there should, during this lifetime, practice absorption without discrimination, a state of blocking the mind and whatever appears through mind. Meditating like

that, when dying you will immediately be born into the realm of long-lived gods. The moment you are born there, your mind and whatever appears to it is blocked. The lifespan of these gods is thousands of years. Initially, after being born there, they might have a mind and appearances through mind, and at the time of their death the mind and that which arises through mind seem to appear. Between these two, however, for as long as they live they have no chain of mind and mental events. They are almost like rock or soil. With no mind and no thought, one certainly cannot practice Dharma. Mind and thought are crucial for a practitioner. Someone who is like a rock or soil will not be able to practice the Dharma.

Barbarians

One born in a barbarous country lacking Buddhist teaching has no opportunity to practice the Dharma. These days, because of airplanes, ships and cars, even if Dharma has not spread somewhere, people can travel to places where teachings are available. This was not true in the past. Someone born in Tibet would also die in Tibet, being unlikely to visit any place else. If people could not hear teachings in their home area, they could not practice, even if they wanted to, until they died and were reborn in a region where Buddhism had spread. This is an inopportune state. An area where the teachings have not reached is called a primitive borderland without education. Being born there puts a person in a disadvantageous situation since the teachings of the Buddha are not available.

Heretics

Being born into a lineage of heretics is also inopportune. Birth into such a lineage leads a person to hold wrong views since heretics discredit Lord Buddha's teachings. Anyone born into this kind of lineage will automatically hold wrong views about the Dharma. Someone born into that lineage cannot enter into the Dharma without ridding himself of those views.

Those born in a time without a buddha

At times the Buddhist teaching does not even remain in words. Right now, while some parts of the world lack Buddhist teaching, the Dharma can be found elsewhere. Eras do come when Dharma teachings entirely cease to exist. That is a "dark eon" when the Dharma is not spread. Then, even being born a human being has no special qualities. From the point of view of practicing the Dharma, birth as a god, human or animal would all be the same, since not even the name of the Three Jewels would be heard. People

can't even learn the meaning of virtue and nonvirtue. Not knowing that, whether or not you are born in human form makes no difference. The teachings are not available even if you want to practice. Thus, such eons constitute an inopportune time of not being able to practice.

Mutes

A mute is someone whose consciousness does not function properly. Worldly people generally call a mute person “dumb,” meaning someone who cannot speak. If a mute person wants to practice the Dharma, he or she cannot practice like a normal individual. Because they are not senseless, however, they can practice to some extent. In this context a person called senseless is someone who can speak but whose mind cannot understand anything. His or her consciousness does not function to practice the Dharma. He does have consciousness, but it is extremely dull, and cannot be used for Dharma practice. Being born as a mute or senseless is an inopportune state to practice the Dharma.

DETAILED EXPLANATION

Altogether eight inopportune states are identified. Hell beings, hungry ghosts, animals and gods are non-human beings in inopportune states. The other four are human beings who are in an inopportune state. Thus, even a human birth is no guarantee of being able to practice the Dharma. The “Kunzang Lama'i Zhalung” explains these states elaborately. Beings in the three lower realms suffer incessantly from heat, cold and hunger, and karmic results from their own past wrongdoing. They have no leisure to follow the Dharma, and no freedom at all. Freedom is not possible when the fruition of karma and defilements sprout. Even the Buddha cannot block karma and cause and effect. You have no choice about whether your karma will ripen or not. When the force of your bad karma results in birth in the three lower realms, you haven't wished for it, but you can do very little. You cannot abandon the suffering; you have no time for Dharma practice.

Long-lived gods

The long-lived gods are in a non-perceptive state. Since they lack mind and the thoughts that rise within mind they have no concept of virtue and nonvirtue. They believe that their manner of godly abiding is the liberation state, but it is not. Of the three realms,⁶⁴ this one falls within the realm of form. They were people who achieved a samadhi that perceived nothing;

64 Desire realm, form realm and formless realm.

taking it for liberation they continued to meditate. This led to their rebirth as gods in a non-perceptive state. They remain in this state for many great eons. After a while, their time of samadhi is exhausted, the force of samadhi being the main cause for birth in the long-lived god realm. As soon as this karma of being in the long-lived god realm finishes, mind and the thoughts arising from the mind appear. When that happens, they know through their clairvoyance where they will be born. Knowing they will be reborn in the three lower realms, they immediately generate the wrong view that cause and effect do not exist, and that there is no such thing as liberation. As these wrong views cause their rebirth in the lower realms, this is an inopportune state.

Barbarians

The word “barbarian” refers to the people of places where the Dharma has never spread. Altogether, thirty-two such areas were traditionally identified. The inhabitants are considered barbarians, those who regard the infliction of pain on others as Dharma, those who consider taking life a virtuous act. They are called “border areas” because the Dharma never spread there, and although the people are human, they cannot turn their minds toward the Dharma. They abandon the Dharma. As soon as they die, they are born in the lower realms. Not to abandon the limit of possibility, one or two might avoid such a rebirth, but they are generally reborn in the lower realms. Therefore being born a barbarian is an inopportune state for practicing the Dharma.

Heretics

Those not believing in the Buddhist doctrine are considered to hold wrong views. Five heretical views are identified, referring to the five main kinds of non-Buddhist philosophical views. In summary, they are the views of eternalism or permanence, and nihilism. Patrul Rinpoche remarks:

Their minds are spoiled by these contrary views, so they have no opportunity to develop the pure faith to practice the Dharma.

Their wrong views have polluted their mindstreams, and they will never be drawn to a teaching that is free from the extreme views of eternalism and nihilism. Generally, in India, those outside the Buddhist belief system are called heretics. In Tibet, people may have wrong views but there are no heretics, or complete outsiders. Because the second Buddha, Guru Rinpoche, assigned the twelve guardian sisters to protect the snow-clad

country of Tibet, it was impregnable to heretics.

However, Tibet does have some people who are similar to heretics, with wrong views about the excellent Dharma and excellent persons. They are many in number. For instance, some Gelugpas say the Nyingma tradition is contrary to Dharma. Many accumulate the negative karma of abandoning the Dharma in this way. In the past, certain people accumulated great negative karma by having wrong views of the Dzogchen teaching. When you see such a teaching as a wrong view, you also see the teachers in such a light. There are plenty of people like this in Tibet. Because they have tainted their mindstreams with wrong perceptions, they have no opportunity to practice the Dharma. In the past, the monk Legpai Karma was one such individual. He had met Shakyamuni Buddha in person and served him for many years, but his mindstream was so defiled with wrong views that he could not be tamed or protected. He was later reborn as a hungry ghost.

Being born in a time without a buddha

The later part of the text explains more about periods of time without buddhas, and periods of time with buddhas. Even without a buddha appearing in this world, our negative karma might cause us to be born anyway. In a world where a buddha does not appear, whether or not we are born in human form makes no difference since the sound of the Dharma is not heard at all. A period devoid of buddhas is called a “dark eon” and is an inopportune state for practicing Dharma.

Mutes

In general, ordinary people consider “mute” only those who cannot speak. Having all the characteristics of a human includes the ability to talk and understand; therefore, someone who cannot talk lacks one human characteristic. This is considered an inopportune state for Dharma practice. “Mute” here also refers to one with a senseless mind. Such a person might be able to speak, but his mind is so dull that he cannot understand anything, including the words of the Dharma. No one can teach him the Dharma and hence he is not in a good position for practicing the Dharma. In this context, mute primarily refers to one with a senseless mind.

The eight inopportune states have now been taught. We are ourselves currently free of these states, and are in a state of freedom, or leisure. However, if while in this form we fail to practice genuine Dharma, we will certainly be born in an inopportune state as soon as we die. Why would we not take

such a birth? From this very moment, therefore, we must reflect properly. When we hear that hell beings suffer terribly from heat and cold, we think this will never happen to us; only others will experience such suffering. For example, children watch an animal being slaughtered, laughing and playing nearby. The life force of that animal is being taken, but we never take this personally. We feel nothing when watching an animal being butchered; like children we do not consider the animal's suffering.

Similarly, we don't think we will be born in the realms of hell beings, hungry ghosts or animals. We feel that only other people are being born in hell and undergoing the torments of that realm. Such an understanding renders this teaching meaningless. Abandon the thought that those born in hell are merely other beings; truly consider what such suffering is like. "In this life I can't even bear the pain from a single spark, so how will I bear the pain of burning in hell?" Contemplate the pain of birth as a hungry ghost. How will you bear that distress? Thinking like this, we will develop compassion for those who are enduring that suffering, and will moreover – during this very lifetime – engage in practices designed to keep us from rebirth in those states. Otherwise, simply considering this outwardly is like watching a movie and seeing the suffering of hot and cold but never thinking that it could happen to us. Without feeling it, we don't fear it. Unlike that, we must reflect on those things happening to us. Even while we have the eight freedoms we should think in this way.

CONTEMPLATION ON THE SPECIAL ADVANTAGES RELATED TO DHARMA PRACTICE

Of the ten advantages, five are found within oneself, and five with others.

The Five Advantages Found Within Oneself

Nagarjuna taught that the five advantages found within oneself are: to be born a human being, in a central country, with perfect faculties, to be engaged in a proper vocation, and to have faith in the object of the Dharma.

Right now we have attained a human body. Had we not been born human, we wouldn't be able to encounter the Dharma. That is why birth as a human is an advantage. Someone born in a border area without Dharma will not encounter Buddhist teachings. Thus, having been born in a central country where the Dharma is prevalent – as you have been in this life – is a favorable advantage. "Born in a central country" means a place where the Dharma is taught. A "border region" is an area where the Dharma is not

known. Geography is another way of referring to border or central countries. In that context Bodh Gaya is the center of the world, and everywhere else is considered a border region. In the “Kunzang Lama'i Zhalung,” however, “central” or “border” relates to the spread of the Dharma. Since we were born in countries of widespread Buddhism, we have the advantage of place.

Practicing genuine Dharma is more difficult for those without perfect faculties, for example the blind or deaf. A defective faculty is an obstacle to Dharma practice. A blind person cannot read the Dharma easily, so one advantage for embarking upon practice is missing. A deaf person cannot hear the sound of the Dharma and this is also an obstacle. We are not facing these obstacles at this time. We have vision; we can hear; and we have the advantage of the other faculties. We thus have the advantage of perfect faculties.

Concerning improper livelihood, in earlier times children in India generally had to follow their fathers' occupations. If a father was a hunter, his son also became a hunter. Many occupations required that children followed in the footsteps of their parents. That caused some people to be permanently engaged in improper livelihood that kept them from the Dharma, kept them from even thinking of the Dharma.

Moreover, we have a sincere interest in the Dharma. With such interest, engaging in Dharma practice is the advantage of thought, having faith in the object. Buddha's teachings are the object of our faith. Without devotion to the teachings, a person can never engage in Dharma practice. Someone whose mind is turned toward the Dharma and who always feels happy to engage in Dharma practice has the advantage of faith.

A person who has these five advantages complete fully possesses the fortunate advantages for practicing the Dharma. Without these five – the five advantages that must be present within us – we have obstacles to practicing the Dharma. Having summarized the meaning, the elaborate explanation comes next.

DETAILED EXPLANATION

To be born as a human being

To truly practice the real, pure Dharma, you must certainly be born as a human being. Without obtaining a human body, the animal realm is the best of the three lower realms. Animals in the human world may be beautiful, valuable, and so on, but no matter how superior

they may be, if you told them they would become Buddhas by simply reciting OM MANI PADME HUNG one time they could not hear the words, understand their meaning, or recite them.

Generally our human body is said to be like the wish-fulfilling jewel, the object that can fulfill all wishes. This is because the human form is the source of all liberation and enlightenment. The true comparison between the wish-fulfilling jewel and the human body is made because the human body is a special form that can engage in practicing the excellent Dharma. That is why the human body is like the wish-fulfilling jewel and is superior to all other forms of beings in the six realms.

Except for the superior quality of being able to practice the teachings, there is no difference between an animal form and a human form. We cannot say one is better or worse; it depends on the force of one's karma. The difference appears when considering whether or not one can practice the genuine Dharma. From that point of view, the human body is an excellent basis for practice, and the others are not. Therefore, since being born human is required to practice, the human body is considered superior or more valuable.

Thinking of the three lower realms of hell beings, hungry ghosts and animals, the best among these is in the animal realm. Even in our world, some animals are physically beautiful and valuable, but if we merely glimpse a hell being, we will not only see it as unpleasant, but as very frightening. Likewise, momentarily glancing at a hungry ghost would cause so much fear that we might faint. Because of the force of their karma, the forms of hell beings and hungry ghosts are quite awful. The animal forms we are talking about now are the animals in our realm and in the god realms. These are called "scattered" animals. Some are beautiful and expensive to own, and for this reason their form is considered a good one. They are the supreme among the animal forms. From the perspective of Dharma practice, however, there is nothing good about it. Since your pets or domesticated animals have not been born in a form appropriate to practice Dharma, even if you told them to recite a mantra they could not understand what you are saying nor would they be able to utter the words. They wouldn't be able to follow you in the recitation.

Not only can they not understand the Dharma, such animals cannot keep themselves warm. Forget practicing Dharma, animals don't even know how to protect themselves from cold, even when about to die. Generally, animals are stupid. Once born as a human, however, no matter how dull

you may be – unless someone is mute or deaf – he or she will be able to follow and recite *OM MANI PADME HUNG* if asked to do so. That is the difference between humans and animals. Once you are a human being it is impossible not to know how to guard yourself against the minimal suffering of experiencing cold. Patrul Rinpoche explains:

Even when about to die of cold, animals merely remain still, unable to think of any way to warm themselves. A man, no matter how weak, knows how to go to a cave or the foot of a tree, how to collect firewood and make a fire to warm his hands and face. If an animal cannot do even that, how could it possibly think of practicing the Dharma?

No matter how weak, human beings are still superior to animals. Their capacity to think is much greater than that of animals. They can consider how to search for methods. When it comes to practicing the Dharma, the beings in the three lower realms do not have suitable forms. We cannot say positively that they absolutely can never practice, but in general animals are not able to practice the Dharma. Continuing on to talk about the god realms, Patrul Rinpoche says:

While beings in the god realms are considered to have the best physical status, their internal mechanisms are unsuitable for taking the vows of individual liberation. They thus lack the fortune to receive the Buddhist doctrine in its entirety.

The gods are more beautiful than humans, and if you consider their prosperity, their wealth and leisure are greater than those of human beings. Their life spans are longer and we also can say the gods are superior in wisdom to humans. While the god form is generally suitable for Dharma practice, the human form is better, since it is the basis for all teachings of Sutra and Mantra. The gods can practice Sutra and Mantra in a limited way, but not completely.

While the Sutrayana teaches the vows of individual liberation, the very entrance to practicing the vehicles of the sravakas and pratyekabuddhas is preserving the pure vows of monastic ordination. Someone who chooses to practice either of these vehicles must take the full vows of ordination. Although these systems include a vow for lay practitioners, one cannot purely practice the Hinayana path without the full vows of an ordained monk. For the Bodhisattva vehicle, holding the monastic vows of self-liberation doesn't matter. The main thing is to keep the supreme vows of bodhicitta, which can be received by lay as well as ordained individuals.

Without the bodhicitta vows one lacks the fortune to practice the vehicle of the Prajnaparamita or the Mahayana. Considering Secret Mantra, one must first receive the Mantrayana vows and an empowerment. One must rely on empowerment to receive Secret Mantrayana vows. The ripening empowerment is the entrance to the Secret Mantra teachings. Following empowerment, one engages in Secret Mantra practice. You cannot begin the practice without having the vows.

Generally, a practitioner requires whatever vows are needed to practice any of the three vehicles; to practice the paths of the sravakas and pratyekabuddhas the vows of individual liberation are necessary. These vows can be received by humans, but not by gods; the god form is not a support for receiving the vows of individual liberation and therefore is not suitable for practicing these paths. The form of the gods is likewise unsuitable for the completion phase of channels, winds and essential drops according to the unsurpassable Secret Mantra. The gods can practice action (*kriya*) yoga and performance (*upa*) yoga, but not the Secret Mantra teachings of channels, winds and essential drops.

Thus, the god form that we consider good is not the basis for engaging in the full range of Dharma practice. The human form, however, can practice all the teachings of Sutra and Mantra, and so is considered superior. Beings in the god realms are not so fortunate. To practice the entire Dharma, one must obtain a human form.

We now have this human form. As I explained before, if we consider the past we have been born in all the forms of the six realms; if we think of the future, unless we practice a genuine Dharma that will exhaust the possibility of our being reborn in cyclic existence, we will be reborn in all these six forms again. We can take all the forms of the six realms; the only difference is time. Among all of these, the human form is the best for practicing Dharma. Taking the opportunity of birth in this human form, we must engage in genuine Dharma practice. After acquiring the suitable form, if we still do not practice, but simply continue diligently engaging in nonvirtuous, negative deeds, the other forms we will be born into will not provide even the opportunity to practice. Beings in the other realms know nothing except how to accumulate negativity. There is no choice; once you obtain an animal form, you can do nothing much except continue to accumulate negative deeds. You have no time to even think about practicing the Dharma. Therefore, recognize this human body as an excellent support for practice, and use it to practice. This is the meaning of being born as a

human being.

To be born in a central country

What is called a central country has two aspects, geographical and spiritual. Geographically, Bodhgaya in India is considered the center of the world, a holy place where the thousand Buddhas of the Fortunate Eon will be enlightened. Able to survive the destruction of the eon and the cataclysmic forces of the elements, Bodhgaya will remain like a sickle hanging in space with the bodhi tree at its center. Bodhgaya is the axis, the geographically central place, surrounded by all the other cities of India, the land of the Aryas.

There is a geographical center and border area, and a spiritual center and border area. From the geographical point of view, a thousand Buddhas will appear during the Fortunate Eon, all of them in Bodhgaya. Four have appeared so far, and in the future another 996 Buddhas will appear and become enlightened in Bodhgaya, which is thus considered the center of the world, the most sacred and precious of all places – the place of enlightenment of the thousand Buddhas of the Fortunate Eon. When the time comes for this eon to exhaust itself and to end, Bodhgaya will not be destroyed. Patrul Rinpoche elaborates, speaking of his own time.

From a spiritual perspective, a central country is one where the Buddhist Dharma prevails. Other countries are borderlands. India was regarded as a central country both spiritually and geographically from the time when the Buddha appeared on this earth and for as long as Buddha Dharma was practiced in India. Since heretics have seized Bodhgaya and Buddhism no longer remains there, India is also now a borderland as far as the Dharma is concerned. As for the snowy land of Tibet, it was scarcely inhabited by human beings when Buddha visited this world, and was known as the borderland country of Tibet.

Regions where the Dharma has not spread are considered borderlands. Lord Buddha's teachings proliferated in India before reaching Tibet. India was regarded as both the geographical and spiritual center of the world when the Dharma was widely practiced. When Shakyamuni Buddha appeared in India, not only did Dharma not exist in Tibet, but the population was also very small. From that point of view, Tibet was both a geographical and spiritual borderland.

Later, the human population gradually increased and many miraculous

kings appeared. During the reign of Lhathori Nyentsen, the “Sutra of a Hundred Invocations and Prostrations,” a mold for *tsa tsa*⁶⁵ and a stupa called the “Dode Zama Tog” fell onto the palace roof, marking the beginning of the Dharma in Tibet.⁶⁶ Prophecies indicated that their significance would be understood during the reign of the fifth king to follow.

Those three treasures, representing the three aspects of body, speech and mind, are known as the powerful secrets.

Accordingly, during his reign, King Songtsen Gampo,⁶⁷ an emanation of Avalokitesvara, the Great Compassionate One, sent the translator Thonmi Sambhota to India to study Sanskrit, grammar, writing and so on. When he returned he developed a system of writing, something Tibet had previously lacked. He translated twenty-one sutras and tantras dealing with Avalokiteshvara, the “Powerful Secret,” and other works into Tibetan.⁶⁸ The king, through different miraculous manifestations, and his minister Gartong Tsen, through diplomacy, ensured the country’s defense by receiving one princess from China and another from Nepal. As their dowry the queens each brought a statue of the Buddha and other representations of the Dharma.⁶⁹ Beginning with the main monastery in Lhasa, many “border taming” and “further taming” temples were built at important places to subdue demonic forces.⁷⁰ Thus the Dharma was established.

Five kings later, Trisong Detsen⁷¹ invited the tantric teacher Orgyen Pema Jungney – unparalleled in the three worlds – and 108 other scholars to Tibet. Monasteries, such as the unchanging, spontaneously accomplished temple of Samye, were built to hold the representations of the form aspect of the Buddha. The great interpreter Vairocana and 108 others were trained as translators. They translated the noble Dharma – the main sutras, tantras and

65 A small clay image of a stupa, or a Buddha, made from a mold.

66 Approximately 350 AD.

67 617 - 698 AD.

68 Including the Dode Zama Tog, one of the three treasures that had descended on the palace roof.

69 One of the statues is currently in the Jokang temple and one in Ramoche temple.

70 *tha dul* – “border taming”: a temple to guard the border; *yang dul* – “further taming”: a temple to pin down negative forces. Tibet was considered to be a reclining female demon that needed to be subdued.

71 790 - 844 AD.

shastras⁷² then current in India – to represent the speech aspect of the Buddha.

In this case the number 108 indicates many, not literally 108, and refers to Pema Jungney, Khenchen Bodhisattva,⁷³ and countless other translators who were invited during this time. To test whether or not the vinaya teachings would spread in Tibet, Khenchen Bodhisattva ordained seven Tibetans, who became known as the original seven monks and represented the mind of the Buddha.

Buddhism came to shine in Tibet like the sun. Up to the present time, although the Dharma in Tibet has gone through various phases of thriving and declining, the Buddhist traditions of statement and realization have been preserved unimpaired. Thus, from the standpoint of Buddha Dharma, Tibet is considered a central country.

In Tibet, the Buddha's teachings began during Lhathori Nyentsen's time, spread during the time of Songsten Gompo, and were widely disseminated during the time of Trisong Detsen. Since the Dharma has again spread in India, someone born there has the advantage of being able to practice the Dharma. Likewise the Dharma spread in Tibet, so those born in Tibet are also endowed with the capacity to practice; therefore it has become a central place.

To be born with perfect faculties

If any of the five faculties are defective, one is not suitable to receive monk's vows.

Someone with faulty sense faculties cannot receive monk's vows. If one faculty is defective, the body is not a supreme basis for taking the vows. One who is blind cannot see objects of reverence, such as statues and other forms that represent the body of the Buddha; one who is deaf cannot hear the Buddha's teachings, the precious scriptures that facilitate learning and contemplating. That is why having all the sense faculties is an advantage.

To be engaged in a correct livelihood

Improper livelihood always involves harmful activities that turn one away from the Dharma. One following a proper livelihood to earn good merits has the special advantage of a reverent mental attitude.

72 Commentaries.

73 The abbot Shantarakshita.

Children in India had to follow their parents' occupation, even if they were butchers or prostitutes. A person born into such a family who is forced from a very early age to follow an occupation that is in opposition to the Dharma is someone engaged in a wrong livelihood. Tibet was not the same; children didn't necessarily have to continue their parents' work. Some people, however, do always involve body, speech and mind in activity that is contrary to the sublime Dharma. These individuals follow a perverted livelihood. We need an unperverted livelihood to support ourselves.

Even those not born into a family engaged in wrong livelihood can later take up a negative occupation. Without doing improper work during the first thirty years of your life, if you gradually fall into wrong livelihood as you age; your activities become perverted. Some have a perverted livelihood from the beginning, while for others their livelihoods become perverted later. We must always consider whether or not we are violating the teachings. If we are, we must abandon whatever we are doing that is contrary to the Dharma; if not, we should diligently continue on that correct path.

Although you might not presently be involved in nonvirtuous activities, unless you practice the correct path you could begin following a wrong path in the future. On the other hand, if you are presently involved in wrongdoing, you can still become a better person by following the teachings of a genuine lama. We must at all times analyze the actions of body, speech and mind to determine whether or not they are in accord with the Dharma. If they are, we are not pursuing any activity contrary to the Dharma; if not, our work falls into the category of perverted livelihood. Try to follow an unperverted livelihood at all times.

To have faith in the object of Dharma

If you are now capable of turning your mind toward the Dharma you have the favorable advantage of faith. The object of faith is Lord Buddha and his teachings. Hearing about faith, ordinary people think it is a clear and happy mental state. That is one kind of faith, but a lower type. True faith is confidence. Who should we be confident in? We must be confident in the unsurpassable teacher, Buddha Shakyamuni, and in his sublime teachings. This is confident faith, and is the ultimate faith, a stable faith. Without such confidence, faith in the object of Dharma is incomplete.

Those who lack faith in the Buddha's teachings may have faith in the teachings of other religions, but no level of faith in these can free one from the sufferings of cyclic existence or save one from rebirth in the lower

realms. Right now, many people follow neither Buddhist nor non-Buddhist teachings, but in ancient times people followed one or the other. Not many had no religion at all.

Without faith in the Buddha and his teachings, people sometimes take refuge in powerful worldly gods, *nagas*, or *tsen*.⁷⁴ If you place your faith in these objects when you are sick, your advantage of faith in the object of Dharma is incomplete. If you have confidence in these, or in Brahma, Shiva or Vishnu, they might eradicate your present sickness or suffering, but they will never be able to rescue you from the sufferings of the lower realms. They themselves are bound in the misery of cyclic existence. How can they then protect you?

Confidence in the Buddhist teachings must be developed through reasoning. Unless you listen to many teachings, generating faith or confidence through reasoning is difficult. In fact, the unmistakable basis for teaching is to help people develop confidence through reasoning. Buddhist teachings can be classified into two sections: the Dharma of oral transmission and the Dharma of realization. Upholding the Dharma means upholding these two classes of teachings. The oral teachings are upheld when a genuine lama explains *Tripitaka*, the “three baskets of teachings,”⁷⁵ and a genuine student listens to these teachings. Teaching and listening upholds the oral teaching. The teaching of realization is upheld by practicing the oral teachings. If the oral teaching is practiced, the realization teaching will not diminish.

From a limited point of view, explaining a single stanza is considered oral teaching. Even without knowing the great discourses and all the sutras, simply understanding one stanza of teaching can sustain the teachings of the oral transmission in one’s mindstream. Even without practicing the generation and completion stage, or Dzogpa Chenpo, generating a single virtuous thought is also upholding the teachings of realization.

CONCLUSION

This completes the teaching on the five advantages present in oneself. Of the five, faith is the most important. Contemplate these teachings properly: you have obtained this human birth from the virtue accumulated in past lives, but you cannot decide to take a human form again before you die in

74 Nagas are powerful snake spirits; *tsen* constitute another class of worldly spirits.

75 Vinaya (discipline), Sutra (discourses) and Abhidharma (cosmology and psychology).

this life. Even such conditions as imperfect sense faculties, blindness or deafness for instance, can nowadays be overcome. Without being born in a “central land,” you can go to a country where the Dharma teachings are available.

Failing to receive Dharma teaching, being ignorant about virtue and nonvirtue, and through this dullness engaging in nonvirtuous acts is perverted activity. However, this perverted activity can be changed by later encountering a genuine lama, listening to the Dharma, contemplating and more or less understanding how to act, and subsequently abandoning nonvirtuous acts and sincerely attempting to engage in virtuous acts. Unchangeable, confident faith is the most crucial advantage, and results from listening to and contemplating the teachings. Lacking faith, whatever Sutra or Mantra practice we engage in will not be genuine.

The Five Advantages Resting with Others

These five advantages largely depend upon others. They are not all under our control. They are the following:

A Buddha has appeared, and has taught the Dharma. The Dharma abides and is followed. There are those with kindness and compassion toward others.

First of all, a buddha must appear in this world; the eon when a buddha appears is called an eon of light. During such an eon, the Dharma spreads and clears up the ignorance and misconceptions in the minds of beings, like light dispelling the darkness of ignorance. For someone not born during an eon of light, even the name of the Dharma cannot be heard, so practice is impossible. We are all fortunate to have been born now, during a period when Buddha Shakyamuni has appeared and taught. This is the advantage of the excellent teacher.

Even when buddhas appear, they sometimes teach and sometimes do not. Beings in the Akanishta realm receive teachings unceasingly, but buddhas do not always teach in this world. Had Lord Buddha not given teachings, we would not know how to practice. Unless he teaches, his mere presence does not benefit beings.

In this era, Buddha Shakyamuni has appeared in this world and three times turned the well-known wheel of the Dharma. The teachings are complete and have not been exhausted. Although Lord Buddha passed away over 2,500 hundred years ago, his teachings remain. Even now beings to be tamed practice what he taught, attaining liberation and enlightenment.

The time of the Dharma has not run out; that the Dharma is still available is the advantage of the time.

Although the teachings exist, one must enter into the door of the Dharma. Without studying and practicing the teachings, regardless of their presence, we will still suffer endlessly in cyclic existence and the teachings won't benefit us. Being able to enter the door of the Dharma is having the advantage of the era. One can enter the Dharma in many ways and the possibility always exists. Although it is considered an advantage that lies with others, the choice is ours. Taking the refuge vows and accepting the Three Jewels as the genuine object of refuge constitutes entering the door of the Dharma. Finally, Patrul Rinpoche emphasizes the importance of the spiritual teacher.

Even having embraced the Dharma, without being accepted by a spiritual teacher, an indispensable factor, you cannot understand the essence of the Dharma.

To actually practice, you must learn a practice properly. You must rely on a teacher to receive and contemplate the teachings. You must first seek a genuine spiritual teacher; he or she must accept you and teach you the Dharma. Even if you find a genuine teacher, simply hanging around will not help you receive teachings and attain liberation. Without the teacher's acceptance, which means being taught by the teacher, the student will not be able to understand the meaning of the Dharma. Acceptance by a spiritual teacher is the advantage of extraordinary compassion. Repeatedly request the lama to be kind to you by accepting and teaching you. Unless you study and reflect upon the teachings, however, the lama cannot toss you into the pure realms and keep you from the hell realms. Nothing like that will happen. To be "accepted with kindness" means to be accepted and taught. These five advantages mainly rest with others.

DETAILED EXPLANATION

A buddha appeared

In this world a buddha sometimes appears and sometimes does not. A time when a buddha appears is an eon of light; when no buddha appears it is a dark eon.

An eon is the time it takes for a universe to form, abide, be destroyed and remain in a state of emptiness. An eon during which a buddha comes into the world is called an eon of light.

What we call a “great eon” begins with the initial formation of the world, which requires twenty medium eons, followed by twenty medium eons of abiding. Next, the world experiences destruction for a period of twenty medium eons. Then, the eon of emptiness lasts a further twenty medium eons. These eighty medium eons are known as one great eon.

During the Eon of Manifest Joy (*Ngon-par galwa*), 3300 buddhas appeared one after another. Thus, it was an eon of light. After the coming of these 3300 buddhas, an eon of darkness began that lasted for 100 eons before the beginning of the next eon of light – the Perfect (*Dzogden*) Eon – when 10,080,000 buddhas appeared. Next, there came 100 eons of darkness before the Excellent Eon (*Zangden*), another eon of light with 10,084,000 buddhas. This was followed by another 500 dark eons and then, the Eon Delightful to See (*Thongna Gawa*) an eon of light, with 10,080,000 buddhas. After 700 more dark eons, the Joyous Eon (*Gawa Dang Denpa*) arrived, an eon of light with 60,000 buddhas that was followed by the present eon, the, the Fortunate Eon (*Kalpa Zangpo*).

Our eon is Fortunate because earlier the billion universes had been covered by a massive ocean, in which a thousand lotus flowers appeared, each with a thousand petals. The gods of the form realm saw those flowers and wondered why they had arisen. Analyzing through their clairvoyance they realized that the a thousand lotus flowers indicated that a thousand buddhas would appear one after another during this eon. They said the eon should be called the Fortunate Eon. The Buddha Destroyer of Samsara (*Khorwa Jig*) appeared when people lived up to eighty thousand years of age, as opposed to our time when people live up to fifty or sixty years.⁷⁶ Following Buddha Khorwa Jig, life expectancy would fluctuate, and a thousand Buddhas would appear sequentially.

As Guru Rinpoche said, during this Fortunate Eon, when the life span of humans is one hundred years, Buddha Shakyamuni visited this world. Therefore it is an eon of light.

When Buddha Shakyamuni taught, people lived up to one hundred years. Generally buddhas do not arise at such a time. Only Buddha Shakyamuni appeared at a time like this because on his path of learning, he generated special compassion for beings with a hundred-year lifespan and made five hundred more prayers than other buddhas. Of the other 999 buddhas, not one would appear when life expectancy is so limited. Some appear when

76 Current life expectancy in Nepal, where these teachings were given, is about 53 years. (tr note)

life expectancy is immeasurable, some when it is eighty thousand years, and so on. The last of the thousand buddhas will be Buddha Mopa. All of these buddhas will go to Bodhgaya to display the act of enlightenment, and will turn the wheel of the Dharma in Varanasi. Because of the appearance of these buddhas, our present eon is an eon of light. We thus have the fortune of birth during an eon of light. Following this eon sixty barbarous eons will come, and then the Vast Numbers (*Drangden*) Eon, with ten thousand buddhas. The dark ten thousand Inferior Family (*Rig Nyen*) eons will be next. Subsequently eons of light and eons of darkness will appear. One born during a dark eon does not even hear the words “Three Jewels.”

Moreover, not all buddhas teach Vajrayana Dharma; these teachings appear only rarely. Although countless buddhas can appear in the world, Guru Rinpoche taught that only three buddhas would disseminate Vajrayana teachings since only beings born in certain eons are suitable to receive Secret Mantra teachings. In the Eon of the Complete Array (*Kun Kod*) in the past, Buddha Ngonjung Gyalpo spread the Vajrayana vastly, and Secret Mantra became widespread. During the present eon, Buddha Shakyamuni taught Secret Mantra, without it spreading much during his lifetime. He prophesied that Vajrayana would expand shortly after his death. As he said, the secret Vajrayana teachings began to proliferate about twenty-eight years after he died. A million eons in the future, during the Eon of Array of Flowers (*Metog Konpa*), Buddha Manjushri will appear and again teach the Vajrayana, as during Buddha Shakyamuni’s time. The beings of these eons only are suitable vessels for these teachings.

We ourselves are more interested in practicing Secret Mantra than Sutra teachings, because reaching the stage of enlightenment takes a very long time on the Sutra path, whereas the best Vajrayana practitioners can achieve enlightenment in one body and one lifetime. Since it is an unsurpassable method for reaching enlightenment, we want to engage in Secret Mantra practice, and at this time the teachings are widespread and available. In the future, Vajrayana teachings will be available only for those who are born during the eon when Buddha Manjushri appears. Other buddhas will not widely propagate Secret Mantra. As Guru Rinpoche said, only the beings of three specific eons have the capacity to receive Vajrayana teachings. We must trust Guru Rinpoche – his words are undecieving. We cannot know what buddhas will appear in the future and what teachings they will give, but Guru Rinpoche possesses the knowledge of the phenomena of the three times as clearly as a churura fruit⁷⁷ held in the palm of his hand. If we fail

to practice Secret Mantra at this time, we will be unlikely to have another opportunity in the future. Being born now, while the Vajrayana teachings are widely spread, is a special advantage.

A buddha taught the Dharma

Could a buddha appear and not teach? Yes, such times do occur. Buddha Shakyamuni did not teach for forty-nine days after he attained buddhahood at the foot of the bodhi tree in Bodhgaya.

Although buddhas may come, if they sit in meditation without teaching, the light of the Dharma does not shine, and there is no difference from a period when no buddha visited this world. After fully attaining buddhahood at the foot of the bodhi tree in Bodhgaya, Lord Buddha said: “I have found a nectar-like Dharma teaching, deep, peaceful, free of elaborations, luminous and uncompounded. If I taught this, no one would understand. It is better to remain in the forest without speaking.”

For those seven weeks, Lord Buddha was present but not teaching, and the Dharma was not spread. From our point of view, such a situation is no different than when no buddha has appeared. Buddhas benefit beings by teaching the Dharma; therefore, after the seven weeks when he did not teach, the gods Indra and Brahma offered Lord Buddha a golden thousand-spoked wheel and a right-turning conch and requested him to turn to wheel of the Dharma.

Patrul Rinpoche continues:

Masters who know the Dharma but do not explain it cannot really benefit sentient beings.

He tells the story of the renowned Indian pandit, Smritijnana, who visited Tibet after his mother died since she had been reborn in an indeterminate hell realm here referred to as Tibet. Being Indian, he brought a translator as a companion, but the translator died on the way. Smritijnana nevertheless managed to reach Kham, where his mother had been reborn. Unable to communicate, however, he couldn't benefit beings and had to work as a shepherd in order to survive. Had he taught in his own language, the local people would not have understood. He passed away in Tibet with no benefit to the beings there. After his death, Jowo Atisha went to Tibet, and when he learned the story of Smritijnana he cried, “Alas, how unfortunate you Tibetans are! Neither in eastern nor western India are there any panditas greater than Smritijnana.”

Smritijnana failed to benefit the beings of Tibet because they had insufficient merit. Hearing this, Jowo Atisha folded his hands and wept. That is history: although the great master Smritijnana visited Tibet, he could not teach and thus did not help the Tibetan people. He did not deliberately refuse to teach, but he could not communicate, so the conditions to teach did not arise. The Tibetan people at that time were unlucky.

In our case, Lord Buddha has turned the wheel of Dharma three times; according to the fortune of beings he has displayed unfathomable emanations of his body. Buddhas appear differently according to beings' interest, intellect and mental dispositions. Their manifestations teach according to the mental abilities of the listeners. They teach the nine vehicles as well as innumerable other vehicles of teachings, ripening and liberating beings through their activities.

The teachings remain

Despite the presence of the buddhas, however, the teachings will not help us if their life force ends. This would be like an eon of darkness; the teachings of the previous buddhas are no more and the teachings of the future buddhas have not arisen. The period between, when the teachings do not exist, is an eon of darkness. Even during such a dark time, however, a very few fortunate individuals with sufficient merit can meet pratyekabuddhas. Generally, pratyekabuddhas appear when the Dharma no longer exists. No activity of listening or teaching can occur. Pratyekabuddhas teach only through signs and gestures. Oral teachings can be difficult to understand; comprehending teachings through signs is even harder. Since their appearance and teachings do not benefit beings extensively, the Dharma teaching of the pratyekabuddhas is quite narrow.

The present is a time when Shakyamuni Buddha has come. His teachings survive in a tenfold sequence of five hundred years each, which begins with his parinirvana. The first, consisting of three five hundred-year cycles, is the time of the fruition. According to Patrul Rinpoche, the second set of three five hundred-year cycles is the time of accomplishment, the third set of three five hundred-year cycles is the time of teaching, and the final five hundred year cycle is the time when only signs and symbols of the Dharma remain.

According to Omniscient Longchenpa, the second set of three five hundred-year cycles is the time of teaching, and the third set of three five hundred-year cycles is the time of accomplishment. Longchenpa taught

that his time was the time of accomplishment. He elaborated that the first five hundred years of this cycle are the time of discipline, the second five hundred years are the time of meditation and the third five hundred years are the time of wisdom. Longchenpa said that his time was the time of meditation, the eighth five hundred year cycle. This means, according to this system, that Longchenpa was active about 3500 to 4000 years after Lord Buddha's parinirvana.⁷⁸

Although it is not stated explicitly in the text, Patrul Rinpoche was referring to Longchenpa's commentary concerning the time when Longchenpa was active. Since Patrul Rinpoche taught about five hundred years after Longchenpa, he was teaching during the ninth five hundred-year cycle. About one hundred and fifty years have passed since Patrul Rinpoche's time so that we have arrived nearly at the end of the ninth five hundred-year cycle. The life of beings is short, their views perverse and their negative emotions coarse. We call these degenerate times when the five degenerations⁷⁹ increase. We are almost at the time when only the signs and symbols of the Dharma remain.

The Dharma is properly followed

The scriptural teachings and the teachings of realization have not diminished, however. The advantages of the teachings that have remained are complete. But, while the teachings exist, they will not help those who do not enter the door of the Dharma, just as the sun cannot help the blind to see. If the sun fails to rise, even those with perfect vision cannot see well; the sun's light helps them see clearly. But even if the sun rises, those born blind cannot see. We may be near a river, but without drinking the water our thirst will not be quenched. Although the scriptures and the

78 The contemporary understanding is that about 2500 years have passed since Lord Buddha's time. However, this is a Hinayana view found in the three Sthavira schools, among the total of eighteen Hinayana schools. The Mahayana tradition is different, and different texts have different traditions concerning the time of Lord Buddha's birth. Longchenpa was referring to a commentary on the Prajnaparamita in One Hundred Thousand Verses when he calculated the cycles of five hundred years up to his own time. According to the Mahayana traditions of sutra and vinaya, Lord Buddha himself said that his teaching would continue for ten five hundred-year cycles, and then calculated three periods of three five hundred-year cycles, and one additional five hundred-year cycle. This is not taught in the Vajrayana tradition. According to the Vajrayana, the Dharma will continue beyond five thousand years.

79 The degenerations of lifespan, views, emotions, beings and time.

teachings of realization exist, unless we enter the door to the Dharma and begin practicing, the availability of the teachings does not help us.

Moreover, if we embark upon Dharma practice with the improper motivation of seeking to pacify the diseases and demons that torment us, our Dharma will rest on “seeking protection from fear” and will not be genuine. Some people dread the sufferings of the three lower realms, and enter the Dharma for refuge. Refuge taken in the Three Jewels for such a reason is not authentic and cannot be considered entering the path. The motivation of “aspiring for auspiciousness,” practicing Dharma for food and clothing, or to achieve the rebirth of gods and humans in the next life, is also not genuine. To practice pure Dharma, you must understand that all aspects of samsara lack essence; you take refuge because you aspire to practice the path of liberation. Then you have genuinely entered the door of Dharma.

Acceptance by an authentic teacher

We may have genuinely entered the door of Dharma, but without relying on an authentic spiritual teacher who compassionately cares for us by giving instructions this will not benefit us. Otherwise, despite our sincere motivation, we won't know how to practice. The Dharma teachings contain many levels, from the Sravakayana to Dzogchen. They each have their respective door for embarking upon the path of the view, conduct and fruition. To understand the important aspects of these different levels, we must depend upon a master who teaches from the scriptures of Lord Buddha and the commentaries of the scholars.

Without relying upon a teacher we won't even understand the entrance to the Sravakayana – the lowest path – much less the Dzogchen teachings. How can we say we have entered the door to the Dharma unless we understand the Sravakayana view, conduct and meditation? Whichever path of Sutra or Mantra we wish to follow we must first listen to the teachings, contemplate and understand them. Then we should mingle our minds with our understanding. Doing so exhausts our negative emotions, which are temporary, and gradually generates within us the mind of renunciation, bodhicitta and nonconceptual wisdom. All the qualities of the path will progressively arise.

Entering the door of Dharma requires us to learn from an authentic master who leads us with compassion, meaning that the teacher should teach us according to our mental capacities and interest. If the master fails to instruct, or the disciple fails to request instruction, the teacher cannot

lead us to liberation and enlightenment. Lord Buddha taught this in the Prajnaparamita text called “The Condensed Transcendent Wisdom,” where he said that the teachings arise when buddhas attain enlightenment and the unfathomable qualities of abandonment and realization, and that this fruition is obtained from the spiritual master. The buddhas attain ultimate enlightenment – the supreme of all qualities – by relying upon a spiritual master. While the buddhas possess the supreme qualities, Lord Buddha taught that they too depend upon spiritual masters.

As Buddhists, we must have faith in the words of the buddhas and practice what they have taught. Thus, we become their followers. Unless we perfectly practice their teachings, and respect the sutras and tantras, we can never claim to be following them. The dividing line between being a follower of Buddha or not is whether or not we practice the words of the buddhas. Having faith in and practicing their teachings, we become their followers.

Why must we rely upon a spiritual master? Lord Buddha’s scriptural teachings in the sutras and tantras are wide and countless. Those that have been translated into Tibetan – the Kangyur – consist of 111 volumes; the Tengyur – the translated commentaries given by Indian Buddhist scholars – comprises more than two hundred volumes. This still does not cover all of Lord Buddha’s teachings, since not all were translated. Within a lifespan of sixty to seventy years, we can’t learn all the scriptures. The categories of teachings to learn are inexhaustible. Generally, we should learn all the sutras, tantras and common traditional sciences, but a time will never come when we can say we have finished studying all of these. Study only ends when we reach enlightenment, since this is the state in which we have no need for further study.

Although we cannot study all these scriptures under the guidance of a spiritual master, we must individually practice the path of Sutra and Mantra. We should study perfectly whatever we need to practice. We need the pith instructions of a spiritual master for whatever particular teaching we are practicing. Without relying upon our teacher’s instructions, we won’t be able to practice the essence of the entire teaching. Our spiritual master reveals the instructions on how to effortlessly practice the essence of Sutra and Mantra.

In short, without relying upon a spiritual master, we won’t know how to practice. Jowo Atisha explained this to his three principal disciples – Ku, Ngok and Drom. They once asked him what was most crucial for attaining

liberation and enlightenment – the Kangyur and Tengyur, or a spiritual master's instructions. Atisha replied that the master's instructions were more important. This is not because the spiritual master's words differ from the meaning of the sutras and tantras and their commentaries. Were that the case, the instructions would not be Buddhist teachings, but would be non-Buddhist. The reason that our master's teachings are more important is because understanding the meaning on our own is very difficult.

For instance, to understand the meaning of the Prajnaparamita, one must attain the first Bodhisattva level, as Nagarjuna did. He could therefore comprehend Prajnaparamitra texts without a master's help. He explained the direct emptiness taught in these texts. Maitreya attained the last stage of a tenth level Bodhisattva and understood the secret meaning and the realization aspect of the Prajnaparamitra. Ordinary persons, however, cannot understand Lord Buddha's teachings without relying upon a master. To understand the emptiness aspect of the Prajnaparamitra, we need to study Nagarjuna's instructions. To understand the realization aspect, we must study Maitreya's instructions. Without relying upon these two masters, no ordinary being can understand the meaning of the Prajnaparamitra texts.

Likewise, our own teacher gives us instructions that do not contradict the Kangyur and the Tengyur, but that help us understand their difficult meaning. Just as a treasure prophecy can help us reveal treasures hidden beneath the earth, the instructions of our master are an effortless means to understand Lord Buddha's words and their commentaries. This is why our guru's words are more important than the Kangyur and the Tengyur. Just try to read these texts and see whether you can understand them on your own. We can read the letters, but won't understand the meaning, not even a shloka or a word. Relying on our teacher's instructions, we learn to understand the meaning word by word and come close to comprehending the entire meaning. For this reason Jowo Atisha taught that from among Lord Buddha's teachings, the commentaries, and the instructions, the instructions of a master are the most important.

When the three disciples asked why this was so, Jowo Atisha answered that even a great scholar who can recite through memory the Tripitaka, which contains Lord Buddha's complete teachings, and who understands the characteristics of individual and collective phenomena, must rely on the instructions of a master in order to actually practice these teachings. Without a guru's personal teachings, knowledge of the Tripitaka and one's mind will go their separate ways; the individual and the teachings will not

be one. Scholastic knowledge by itself does not aid practice or help one apply one's knowledge in practice or ensure that the knowledge is mingled with one's mind. We depend upon our masters' instructions to apply the teachings in practice, or to mix them with our mind.

Next Ku, Ngok and Drom asked whether observing the three vows and engaging in virtue with the three doors⁸⁰ would suffice for condensing the master's instructions. Atisha replied that it would not, that simply observing the vows would not cover all the instructions. When they asked why, he replied that the mind of renunciation is crucial even if one perfectly observes the three Pratimoksha vows – the upasika, the shramanera and the bhikkhu vows – without being stained by any faults, or even if the three vows refer to the Pratimoksha vow, the Bodhisattva vow and the Tantric vow. Lacking the mind of renunciation, merely observing the vows is not enough. Without renouncing the three realms of existence, the merits derived from observing the three vows serve the cause for rebirth in samsara. The virtue will not lead to birth in the three lower realms, but it will send us into the three higher realms. We need to observe the three vows with the mind of renunciation. Otherwise, we could observe the vows perfectly without being stained by the smallest of faults, but the virtue would still be a cause of samsara.

What is the mind of renunciation? It is the thought that aspires to liberation from all samsaric realms, that renounces all six realms of existence. The mind of renunciation sees that not one of the realms is permanent or stable and realizes they all have the nature of suffering. Despite speaking of the need to renounce the entirety of samsara, we remain attached to the god realm, the highest realm of existence, as well as to the human realm into which we have now been born. This attachment keeps us from developing the thought of renunciation and liberating ourselves from the human realm. Therefore, we certainly cannot generate the mind of liberation from the god realm, as it is even better than the human realm.

If we develop the same aversion toward the realms of gods and humans that we have toward the three lower realms, with no more desire to remain there than to remain in a pit of fire, then we can say the mind of renunciation has arisen within us. However, attachment to this life is a certain indication that we do not have the authentic mind of renunciation. Without renunciation, whether or not we perfectly observe the three vows will not help us, since the virtue thus accrued is a cause of samsara. Generating the

80 Body, speech and mind.

mind of renunciation is important; otherwise, all merits become causes of rebirth in samsara.

Similarly, we can engage in virtue of the three doors day and night, but unless we know how to dedicate the merits accumulated toward enlightenment a few negative thoughts will exhaust any virtue we accrue. Whether we engage in virtue for a short time or for a long time, whether the merit accumulated is extensive or not, we must seal the virtue with the sublime dedication. The moment we have accumulated roots of merit, we should seal them with dedication. As ordinary individuals, negative emotions arise within us all the time; if we fail to dedicate our merit, these emotions will exhaust whatever virtues we have accumulated.

Accumulated virtues can be exhausted in four ways. First, undedicated merit can be exhausted by a single thought of anger. Unless it has been sealed, one angry thought can exhaust virtues accrued over hundreds and thousands of years. Anger is a distorted thought and in the “Way of the Bodhisattva,”⁸¹ Shantideva states that a moment of antagonism can destroy merits garnered over a thousand eons. We may feel that we won’t let such annoyance develop within us, but anger surfaces involuntarily when we face unfavorable circumstances. The antipathy may be beyond our control, but it still wipes out any accumulated merits that have not been sealed by dedication. Believing that a moment of anger will not destroy our merit or that it will be exhausted only gradually is wrong and mistaken. The “Way of the Bodhisattva” teaches that merits accumulated over a thousand eons of virtuous actions like generosity and making offerings to the buddhas are destroyed by a single moment of anger. It does not say the virtues are destroyed gradually; thus, efforts made over eons are in vain and we return to the same state as before we accumulated the virtue. Dedicating the merit prevents this from happening.

The second cause of exhausting merit is repenting virtuous actions. This regret destroys the virtue. When we confess, we should repent our past mistakes, all misdeeds of body, speech and mind. We can’t remember mistakes we made in past lives, but we should remember any mistakes we made in this life, beginning from about the age of eight. We must remember, recollect and remember all of them, and then repent, thinking with regret, “Alas! How could I have committed all this negativity?” This regret destroys the power of our misdeeds and makes purification easier.

81 Bodhisattva-caryavatara (Skt); byang chub sems dpai’ spyod pa la ‘jug pa (Tib).

On the other hand, if bad circumstances cause us to grieve over our past virtue of spending our financial resources, for example by thinking, “Alas! Had I not already spent my money I wouldn’t be facing such difficulty,” such regret becomes the nonvirtue of lamenting good deeds. Therefore never feel remorse for past positive behavior. Remember your principled deeds again and again and rejoice in them; think happily of the good opportunity you had to act so well. This increases the previously accumulated merit, while bemoaning past virtue exhausts it. Since we can never be certain that negative thoughts will not arise within us, we cannot be sure that we won’t later regret our good deeds. Therefore we must always remember to seal our actions with dedication.

The third way that merits are exhausted is through ripening without being sealed by dedication. Once the merits come to fruition, their roots are exhausted. Just as a banana plant will not produce fruit a second time after doing so once, undedicated merits are exhausted once they produce their fruit. Merits not destroyed by anger or remorse will ripen, even if not sealed by pure dedication. When we seal with aspiration prayers such as “May this merit help me live for one hundred years,” that merit will help us live for a century. After ripening into this fruit, however, the virtue is finished.

Showing off our merits to other people also exhausts them. Recounting our evil deeds would help us cleanse the negative actions, but we generally conceal our nonvirtue while flaunting to everyone we meet whatever small virtuous actions we have engaged in. The desire to exhibit our virtue exhausts the merit. We should not display our positive qualities, but should rather try our best to accumulate virtue and rejoice over the merit we have gathered while remembering to seal it with pure prayers of dedication.

These examples reveal how negative emotions ruin any virtue we have accumulated. Our positive actions should be preceded with the mind of renunciation, and Mahayana virtues should be enveloped by bodhicitta. Sealing our merit with pure dedication ensures that their roots will never be exhausted. The virtue amassed by observing the three vows and engaging in ethical activities through the three doors, when sealed with the mind of renunciation, bodhicitta and pure dedication, is never consumed and will not be lost until complete enlightenment is attained. Our master is the one who teaches us how to seal the merit with the mind of renunciation, the mind of bodhicitta and the sublime dedication, and this is how we should understand the importance of relying upon a master.

A scholar is one who understands the teachings of Lord Buddha and

the commentaries. A person who is pure in morality is someone who has observed the full monastic vows without any transgression. Some practitioners teach Dharma to others for many years and others meditate for a long time. Such individuals can be motivated by the eight worldly concerns.⁸² A scholar who has attained knowledge in order to gain fame, a monk who has observed monastic vows to become well-known and acquire wealth, someone who teaches for reputation and prosperity and those who meditate and remain many years in retreat to become celebrated or to gain wealth and possessions – such individuals have not renounced the eight worldly concerns. Without renunciation, whatever merit they accumulate by being scholars or maintaining pure morality, teaching others, meditating or staying in retreat will ripen for the good of this life only. As they are motivated for prosperity in this life, their merit will ripen in that way.

Their accumulated virtue could help them achieve fame and prosperity in this life, but the merits could also ripen in the future so that they become well-known or wealthy in a future life. Whatever happens, merit accumulated through the eight worldly concerns only benefits worldly life and will not help one on the path of the next life. The “path of the next life” refers to the path of liberation and the path of enlightenment. If we do not attain either of these paths, at least we should attain the higher rebirths of the gods or human realm in the next life. We do not seek to attain the path of the lower realms. Whatever merits we have accumulated with the eight worldly concerns will only serve the purpose of worldly life. Thus, always examine your thoughts. “No other teacher knows your thoughts as well as you yourself.”

Except for Lord Buddha, no teacher can know you as well as you know yourself. You can recognize whatever good or bad thoughts you might have. When good or bad thoughts arise, recognize them. Try to increase good thoughts and avoid bad thoughts. In this way, you act as your own teacher. Otherwise, although you rely upon an external teacher to show you what to adopt and what to avoid, external teachers do not always have the clairvoyance to see what thoughts you are creating. Even with clairvoyance that can point at the thoughts in your mind, you may not accept this; you could suddenly lose faith in your teacher or feel angry toward him or her. One in a hundred students accepts faults and tries to overcome them when their teacher points them out.

Pointing out your own shortcomings, anger need not be feared, and
82 The eight worldly concerns are gain and loss, pleasure and pain, praise and criticism, fame and ill repute.

will not arise. We will not lose faith in ourselves. It is when others point out our faults that we suddenly feel annoyed. Thus, you can find no better teacher than yourself. Consider your mind well. Sometimes we experience the mind of renunciation and bodhicitta arising within us; at other times thoughts of the eight worldly concerns push forward. Always be vigilant. Once the thought of the eight worldly concerns comes up, try to abandon it. Think: “Studying the scriptures out of the eight worldly concerns is worthless; observing vows and staying in retreat out of the worldly concerns are also worthless.”

Fame is one of the eight worldly concerns; but learning the scriptures isn't necessary to achieve fame. These days, a singer can gather many hundreds or thousands of people together at once without having studied any Buddhist teachings at all. Many people amass vast wealth without ever hearing Lord Buddha's name, let alone studying his teachings. The Dharma is not at all needed to accomplish the eight worldly concerns. Consider this carefully. If, out of the eight worldly concerns, you have devoted your entire life to strict retreat, that will serve only the purpose of this life and will not help in future ones. For all these reasons, relying on a spiritual teacher is crucial.

CONCLUSION: MIND TRAINING

After examining whether you have the eight freedoms and the ten advantages just explained, you must repeatedly train your mind by considering the difficulty of obtaining a human birth with these qualities. Remind yourself of the eight freedoms and ten advantages. Determine which you possess; discover what you lack. Decide on how to obtain the qualities you need. Pray to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions, and to all the lamas to bless you with all these qualities. This is called mind training, “*lojong*” in Tibetan. To train like this we need meditation and post-meditation sessions; we cannot train while talking or walking. During *lojong* meditation, avoid all activities like meeting others, talking and walking. Meditate single-pointedly again and again. Possessing all eighteen qualities is called human birth with the eighteen qualities of freedoms and advantages. This is like a wish-fulfilling gem and is the perfect support for Dharma practice.

CONTEMPLATION ON THE SIXTEEN OTHER INOPPORTUNE STATES

Even if one has the qualities of freedoms and advantages complete, the

Omniscient Longchenpa in his “Wish-Granting Treasury”⁸³ discusses other disadvantages that hinder Dharma practice. These are the eight intrusive circumstances and the eight incompatible propensities. Persons in any of these inopportune states do not fall within the category of those who can practice Dharma.

The Eight Intrusive Circumstances

These are the following: to be mentally disturbed by the five poisons, to be ignorant and stupid, to be influenced by an evil person, to be lazy, to experience the breaking forth of the ocean of negative karma, to be under the power of others, to use the Dharma as protection from danger, to pretend interest in the Dharma.

Being mentally disturbed by the five poisons

One who is mentally disturbed by the five poisons is overwhelmed by powerful poisons such as attachment, hatred, pride and so on. Compared to the five negative emotions that arise continuously, whether they are strong or not, abandoning the powerful negative emotions is quite easy. Even though we cannot abandon powerful negative emotions instantly when they arise, after these emotions subside we can apply their antidotes. When negative emotions arise continuously, however, we do not have the opportunity to use the antidotes, and are therefore not in a position to practice Dharma.

Being ignorant and stupid

Of the five faculties, everyone has the faculty of wisdom, but people with strong qualities of ignorance and stupidity have a very poor wisdom faculty. Since such individuals cannot understand the meaning of Dharma, this is considered an intrusive circumstance.

Being under the influence of an evil person

This refers to someone who meets an inauthentic spiritual master. Actually evil, the teacher assumes the form of a spiritual master, causing the student to fall into one of the eight intrusive circumstances.

Being lazy

Laziness means thinking that you cannot understand what you are hearing and cannot strive to listen and reflect. You thus lack interest in learning and

contemplating, and also in meditating; instead you always fall into distraction or sit idle, and are therefore suffering from an intrusive circumstance.

Experiencing the outburst of an ocean of negative karma

We have accumulated negative karma over many lifetimes, and this ocean of past bad karma can burst forth when we engage in pure Dharma. Past negative karma can ripen both before and while we are practicing Dharma. When practicing, we may repeatedly fall sick and experience physical or mental hardships. Other undesirable circumstances might arise. If we stop our practice, we don't feel sick and everything proceeds nicely. Sickesses, as well as obstacles created by demons, result from previously accumulated negative karma that ripens as hindrances to Dharma practice. Obstacles arise when our practice reaches perfection.

Karma Chagme Rinpoche taught that we will face many obstacles when practicing authentic Dharma, and this is good because our practice is perfect. Encountering difficulties during practice indicates that the practice we are undertaking is pure. Do not be carried away by these setbacks because you won't achieve any results if you are. To be sidetracked by obstacles while practicing is to become a failed practitioner. Sickness, harm from evil spirits and other hindrances, whatever undesired circumstances you experience during practice result from your ocean of past negative karma suddenly ripening. Do not postpone Dharma practice when that occurs; but recognize that these difficult experiences are helping cleanse your previous karma.

“Whatever difficult circumstances I experience, I will never be carried away by these problems nor will I change my plan to practice. Even in the face of disease or death, I will not postpone my practice.” With such a pledge and resolve, obstacles will never overwhelm you. One who is victorious over difficulties is a true practitioner. Most people postpone their practice when the ocean of negative karma bursts forth. Being carried away by obstacles is being harmed by evil spirits. I will explain this in more detail later.

Being under the power of others

Some people who want to practice Dharma are controlled by their parents, political leaders or other superiors and hence have no opportunity to practice.

Using the Dharma as protection from danger

One who enters and practices the Dharma to obtain food and clothing or

to escape from possible danger such as conscription or a prison sentence is using Dharma as protection from danger.

Pretending interest in the Dharma

Without being sincere, someone might adopt the appearance of a Dharma practitioner in the eyes of others.

All of these circumstances make it impossible to practice Dharma.

The Eight Incompatible Propensities

These are: to be fettered by the rope of attachment, to have very bad behavior, to have no dissatisfaction with samsaric existence, to have not the slightest faith, to perform non-virtuous acts, to lack interest in the Dharma, to violate the vows, to break the bond of trust.

To be fettered by the rope of attachment

Those who are tightly bound by attachment to material goods think that practicing Dharma will keep them from increasing their fortune, or will exhaust their resources. They are bound by wealth. People who have great attachment to children, parents and relatives also lack the opportunity to practice. If the practitioner is a parent, looking after his or her children leaves no time for Dharma practice.

To have very bad behavior

This refers to those of bad nature. Bad-natured people cannot be easily changed. They have little hope of improving their positive qualities. Great masters in the past have said disciples can be made knowledgeable through teaching, but those with bad characters cannot be changed. Even if such a disciple meets an authentic master, the teacher cannot easily turn him to the noble path.

Students who rely upon the noble teacher and the four sublime thoughts are disciples of good nature. However, those who hold onto the four perverted thoughts are disciples of bad character. The four perverted thoughts are: 1) thinking of the lama as a musk deer, 2) thinking of the Dharma teaching as the musk, 3) being willing to violate the life of the lama to get the teaching – as one will kill the musk deer in order to take the musk, and 4) turning one's back on the lama after receiving the Dharma one requested. A person who holds these thoughts is considered to have a bad nature.

Such a person is considered worthless in worldly terms and bad-natured from the Dharma point of view. Even the three activities of listening, contemplating and meditating will not help him, as he is resistant to Dharma. The more effort he or she makes to study, reflect and meditate, the more resistant he will become. A Tibetan example says that while a leather bag can be softened by working oil into it, a leather bag that holds butter does not automatically become soft. An evil person can be tamed by Dharma, but someone who is “Dharma-resistant” cannot be tamed since he has no faith in the lama and uses whatever Dharma he knows for worldly ends. Khenpo Yonga Rinpoche has said that if someone’s character is good, it does not matter if he or she is temporarily harsh. This can be corrected by Dharma. But Dharma cannot tame a person of bad character.

To have no dissatisfaction with samsaric existence

Some people remain unaffected and do not become frightened even after hearing teachings on the disadvantages of the lower realms and the defects of samsara; they feel nothing when they hear of the sufferings of this life. They cannot generate the mind of renunciation, and therefore have no hope of accomplishing true Dharma practice. Patrul Rinpoche has said that the first step toward the door of liberation and toward the path of freedom from samsara – and the first practice of all – is the prayer: “May I generate the unfabricated mind of renunciation.” Generating the mind of renunciation should definitely precede all other Dharma practices. Someone who feels no anguish over the defects of samsara or the sufferings of this life is like a cow or an ox, with no hope of experiencing the mind of renunciation or of developing a genuine practice.

To have not the slightest faith

Lacking faith in the perfect Dharma and the lama blocks the entrance to Buddhism, and you will be unable to enter the path of liberation.

Lord Buddha taught the perfect Dharma and we should have faith in this Dharma. Faith means to have trust or belief, particularly if the person teaching you is your master. A student must have faith and belief in his or her guru, and must remind himself of the teacher’s kindness. Faith is the door to practicing Dharma; as long as you have faith you will be able to accomplish whatever path of liberation and enlightenment you practice. Otherwise, our Dharma becomes just study, in the same way as we can speak about what the Christians believe if we study Christianity, without necessarily believing in the Christian teachings or desiring to become Christians. We simply

take it as a subject of study and do not apply it in our practice. Without faith in the teachings, we might consider a Sutra or Tantra teaching only as an object of study and not apply it to our minds.

We also need faith in our teacher, reminding ourselves of his or her kindness. Having faith in a teacher does not mean offering money and wealth or service in the worldly sense. We consider as kind people who make an effort or strive for our welfare. Our lama teaches us Dharma, educating us about what behavior to adopt and what to abandon, and about how to accumulate merit and give up nonvirtue. By practicing these teachings we can attain liberation and enlightenment. The root of these benefits depends upon our lama or spiritual teacher. Thus, from both the worldly and the Dharma points of view, our lama is very kind.

If someone gives us a thousand rupees when we are facing financial difficulties we will consider that person as quite thoughtful for helping us at a time of need; we will remember that kindness again and again. Similarly, when you are tormented by negative karma and afflictive emotions, your spiritual teacher shows you how to liberate yourself from this suffering, benefiting you immensely. Remember your teacher's kindness in this way.

While no one owns the Dharma, which is not an object of ownership, a practitioner is subject to causes and conditions. Some people approach a teacher they do not know and who does not know them and request teachings like Guhyagarbha or Dzogchen or Ngondro. Without being acquainted, they unhesitatingly approach and abruptly ask the teacher to grant such teachings. Think about this carefully: if we want some monks or lamas to recite the Prajnaparamita text, we first make the request, and then make preparations and offer food and money. With such effort we can accomplish recitation of the text. Even reciting the Prajnaparamita text for a day is not an easy task that is done casually. Bestowing teachings on Guhyagarbha and Dzogchen is more important than a lama's recitation of the Prajnaparamita, and should not be taken lightly.

To give teachings on Ngondro the master has to explain the words and meaning carefully; if it is a tantra teaching, this explanation is even more time-consuming and difficult. For an enlightened teacher it may be different, but ordinary individuals find that speaking continuously for even an hour is not easy. Therefore, although no one owns the teachings, and anyone can practice at any time without any conditions, receiving a teaching from a master is conditional. People fail to realize this because they have the notion that as the Dharma is not owned, anyone can approach a teacher

and receive teachings at any time.

When someone who thinks like this is given a teaching, he will not feel gratitude. Today he receives the teaching and tomorrow he forgets the teacher. This is the limitation of his thinking. Remember the biographies of past masters. Think of the world famous saint Milarepa – he suffered greatly to receive teachings from his teacher Lodrak Marpa Lotsawa. Milarepa did not receive teachings merely by asking; nor did Marpa Lotsawa bestow teachings easily. In the initial stage Milarepa struggled hard to receive teachings, in the middle he practiced with great effort the teachings he had received, and finally he attained the fruit of practice.

Some people, however, feel that receiving Dharma teaching is a simple matter and that lamas should give teachings because it is their responsibility. If the teachers do not teach, these “students” denigrate or scorn them severely. Such individuals can be considered persons of bad character or bad nature. They might receive a teaching, but it will not benefit them, as they are like those so-called students mentioned earlier who consider the teacher the musk deer and the teaching the musk.

Whenever I think of the teachers from whom I have received teachings, I remember their kindness from the depths of my heart. These days, people with status – leaders and others – do not praise their teachers when they are alive and consider them to be just like everyone else. Once the teachers have passed away, they eulogize them highly. Among worldly people, someone with high status will not acclaim another with the same status because they fear losing their power. When their teachers are no longer alive, they don't worry about them becoming powerful. As Dharma practitioners, however, we should praise our lamas not only to their faces, but also behind their backs. Praising your lama is your responsibility, and is a cause for accumulating merit. These days the worldly way of thinking prevails, and some practitioners even consider their lama as their equal.

To perform non-virtuous acts

If you enjoy negative or harmful habits and cannot control the actions of your body, mind and speech, you will lose your noble qualities and turn away from the Dharma.

To lack interest in the Dharma

Without seeing the value of virtue and the nobility of the Dharma, you will be like a dog given grass to eat. Taking no pleasure in

following the Dharma, knowledge will not grow within you.

We need a sincere interest in Dharma. If we try to feed grass to a dog, it will never eat it; give the dog meat and it will quickly gobble it up. If Dharma is for you what grass is for a dog, there is no use in teaching you since your mind will not benefit.

To violate the vows and samayas

If you embrace the general Buddhist teachings and then violate the motivation and vows, you will go nowhere but the lower realms, and escape from the inopportune states will be impossible.

The “general Buddhist teachings” refers to Sutra and “the vows” refer to the Bodhisattva and Pratimoksha vows. Violating these vows leads to birth in the lower realms and the inability to be liberated from the intrusive circumstances.

To break the bond of trust

If you enter the vehicle of Secret Mantra and then break the bond of trust, the “samaya” between yourself and your lama and spiritual companions, you bring disaster on yourself and others. The opportunity to obtain the ultimate result will be gone.

We all accept that we have entered the vehicle of Secret Mantra. All who live in the Land of Snow claim to be practitioners of Mahayana and also the Mantrayana. In Tibet the Secret Mantra teachings became more widespread than in India. Everyone in Tibet has received empowerments, and by receiving empowerments we have also received Tantric vows. Violating these vows brings on the nonvirtue of breaking samaya. Do not think that violations of samaya harm only you and not others. One student’s breaking of samaya also affects others, just as a sick frog will infect an entire community.

Secret Mantra teachings are very powerful; you should strive wholeheartedly to observe all the various samayas, especially those connected with your lama and spiritual companions, disciples of the same master, and those that involve maintaining the secrecy of the Mantrayana. These are the most serious commitments one makes once one has received empowerment.

Concerning the lama, maintaining samaya involves having faith in the lama, following his or her instructions, and not developing wrong views toward the lama. Keeping samaya with spiritual friends means arousing a

loving attitude toward them, and avoiding anger, harsh words, or speaking negatively about them.

Secondly, one must teach the profound view, meditation and conduct of Secret Mantra only to truly worthy disciples. Teaching Mantrayana to those who are unworthy violates the samaya of Secret Mantra.

The Tantra teachings declare that these two are the most serious of all violations. When we receive empowerment, we also receive the vows and the samaya. Traditionally, only these two samayas are explained, since they are the most serious. Once we enter the Mantrayana vehicle, we must observe all the samayas, and especially these two. Thus, never break the bond of trust between yourself and your guru and your spiritual companions, and never teach Secret Mantra to unworthy students.

DETAILED EXPLANATION

Individuals in any of these circumstances are not part of the family of Dharma practitioners. Those of you who are under the coarse influence of the delusions of the five poisons, such as hating your enemies and loving your relatives, may have sporadic intentions to properly practice the perfect Dharma. Those with strong negative emotions of attachment, hatred, jealousy, pride and so on, despite their occasional intention to practice well, become overwhelmed by negative emotions and cannot practice purely. As mentioned earlier, simply having strong negative emotions does not matter, but if they arise continuously there will never be any opportunity to practice Dharma.

Those who are extremely ignorant, who have not the slightest ray of intelligence, whose wisdom is very weak and poor, may enter the Dharma and try to listen and contemplate, but their ignorance prevents them from understanding the teachings. They lack the fortune to study, reflect and train. By single-pointedly supplicating Manjushri, the deity of wisdom, the light of intellect might be generated within so they can enter the Dharma. Otherwise, their ignorance will keep them from understanding so that no matter what effort they make to study and contemplate the teachings, they will thus not be able to perfectly practice the Dharma.

An inauthentic guru whose views and conduct are contrary to the teaching of Sutra and Tantra is an evil spiritual teacher. Following such a master, a disciple will follow a wrong path and violate the noble Dharma. Initially one might not know that the teacher is evil, but discovering this later, one must use different methods to leave him or her. Students are

allowed to forcefully separate themselves from wicked teachers. No one can follow the true Dharma by relying upon an inauthentic teacher.

Despite a desire to study the Dharma, a lazy person with no diligence will fall prey to these habits and procrastinate, thus failing to practice. Even wishing to practice, he or she cannot make the needed effort. Practicing Dharma is not an easy task; only the skilful and determined can practice. Dharma is a hundred or a thousand times more difficult to understand and practice than worldly activities. Diligence and courage are required to succeed. The mere ability to function in the world does not guarantee that someone will be able to practice Dharma. The lazy always postpone practice, thinking that they may have time next year; when the next year comes, they again push their intention onto the future. Those whose laziness leads them to continually postpone practicing Dharma can be considered to be suffering from an intrusive circumstance.

Although you may follow the Dharma diligently for a while, if you have the karma and obscuration within you that opposes the growth of spiritual knowledge, you will lose faith. Some people practice with perseverance, but strong negative karma and obscurations bring them many unfavorable circumstances like sickness and harm from demons. Undergoing difficult experiences while practicing Dharma, most people fall prey to the obstacles. Ignorance of the theory of cause and effect keeps them from recognizing that these experiences all result from past karma. Hence they think that whatever negativity they experience, like sickness and harm, is the result of their practice and they lose faith.

Losing or lacking faith in the Dharma is thinking that Dharma practice does not help during adverse circumstances. However, Khenpo Ngaga's "Notes on Kunzang Lama'i Zhalung" teaches that all the sickness and harm we experience results from past negative karma that ripens when practicing Dharma. The law of cause and effect is infallible. We should have the following aspiration: "May the fruit of negative karma that I experience cleanse all the negative karma accumulated by all sentient beings." Vow to never postpone practice because of experiencing the fruits of negative karma. Resolve to never feel discouraged but to redouble your efforts to practice. Never give up when experiencing obstacles.

Some people lack any personal independence. They may intend to pursue the Dharma, but will not be permitted. People who must serve others have no leisure to practice Dharma even though they have the desire.

If you adopt the Buddha Dharma to earn food and clothing or because you

are afraid of being harmed by others, you will not understand the teachings in the core of your heart. Your past habits will lead you to continue to indulge in nonvirtuous activities. In Tibet, where people sometimes fear being killed for revenge, they may become monks to save themselves. These people are not authentic practitioners; they lack certain knowledge of the practice.

People who assume the outer trappings of the Dharma in order to amass wealth, respect and fame are but mere shadows. Deliberately impersonating a genuine Dharma practitioner, a perfect novice or fully ordained monk for worldly purposes one becomes a shadow practitioner: seemingly religious in the eyes of others, but actually concerned only with this life. Such individuals are severed from the path of liberation. Patrul Rinpoche cautions:

If you do not properly check yourself for these sixteen factors that leave no opportunity for practice during the present degenerate age, you will possess a mere shadow of freedoms and advantages and the pursuit of Dharma. Rulers on thrones, gurus with umbrellas and followers, meditators in their retreats, renunciate yogis who travel from place to place and regard themselves as great, all are influenced by the causes of these factors. That is why, although they may think they are practicing Dharma, they fail to tread the sublime path.

Many people pretend to practice Dharma without entering the perfect path. Do not rush to pursue an image of Dharma or to receive instruction on the main practice. First, look closely to determine whether you carry within yourself the eight freedoms and ten advantages, and then examine whether you suffer from the eight intrusive circumstances or the eight incompatible propensities. Patrul Rinpoche advises:

Examine yourself thoroughly to see whether or not you have all thirty-four aspects of the freedoms and advantages complete within you. If you do, rejoice and repeatedly resolve from the depth of your heart that you will not waste these freedoms and advantages, which are so difficult to obtain, and will put all your effort into practicing the authentic, noble Dharma.

If these aspects are not all present, seek to obtain them by any means. Repeatedly check to see whether or not you have the qualities of freedoms and advantages. If you fail to make such an inspection and lack even a single one, you will not have the fortune to practice the genuine Dharma.

Recall that, except for the timing, we have the qualities of all six realms within us, and that among the six classes of sentient beings the human

form is the only one with the potential to practice Dharma. Moreover, not all human beings are capable of actually practicing. One needs all eighteen qualities of freedoms and advantages and must be free from all sixteen inopportune factors. If you find that you have all of this, resolve to use this human body to practice genuine Dharma and to abstain from negative actions and worldly activities. Strive to bring forth whatever is lacking. One needs all the qualities of the freedoms and advantages in order to practice pure Dharma. Patrul Rinpoche asks:

When fulfilling even the small, immediate requirements of worldly people requires so many causal factors, why would you not need as many interdependent factors to follow the Dharma, which leads to the ultimate goal? Consider a traveler who wants to make salt tea. Many factors, including a pot, water, fuel and fire are needed to boil the tea. Out of these take the fire. It cannot be produced without many additional contributing factors: a piece of iron, a flint, tinder, a pair of hands and so on. If out of these, tinder is not available, having all the rest will not lead to the smallest result, and the idea of boiling tea must be completely abandoned. Similarly, lacking a single quality of the freedoms and advantages fundamentally eliminates the opportunity to practice the Dharma. Examining yourself thoroughly, surely it is difficult to find within yourself all aspects of the eighteen freedoms and advantages.

He continues, pointing out the difficulty of having all the factors one needs:

Having all ten advantages complete is even more rare than the freedoms. You may be born as a human being, in a central land, with perfect sense organs, but if you follow an improper livelihood and lack faith in the Buddhist doctrine, you have only three advantages within yourself. Even if you acquire one of the other two factors, you will still have only four. Of these factors, correct livelihood is the most difficult. If your three doors of activity are engaged in nonvirtue and whatever you do is done for mundane life only, you may earn the reputation of being honorable, learned and so on, but you will in fact have taken an improper livelihood.

Of the five advantages resting with others, you may have the advantages of the appearance of the Buddha, his teaching and the continued availability of the doctrine. Without actually following the Dharma, however, only those qualities are present. Even if you do seek to practice the Dharma, merely learning or receiving the

teachings does not count as having entered the Dharma. To find the entrance to the path of liberation, you must genuinely desire to leave samsara, having seen it to be completely without essence.

Three different kinds of path are taught: the inferior, the mediocre and the great. Individuals of inferior motivation aspire to attain the higher rebirths of gods and humans. For that they must understand the suffering nature of the three lower realms of hell, hungry ghosts and animals; they must desire to be liberated from these realms and to attain higher rebirths. This is called “the motivation of the inferior individuals.” These people do not see the suffering nature of the three higher realms and do not aspire to liberation from them. This motivation cannot be considered the mind of renunciation.

Mediocre motivation refers to the path of sravakas and pratekyabuddhas. Practicing the path of mediocre individuals requires the mind of renunciation. One must recognize not only the suffering nature of the three lower realms but also the suffering nature of the three higher realms. Samsara refers to all six realms of existence. We are subject to suffering wherever we are born in these realms. Those with the inspiration to be liberated from samsara – from all six realms – can be considered to have the mind of renunciation. This motivation must precede the practice of the path of liberation.

To follow the path of Mahayana, you must have genuine, not artificial bodhicitta within you. Without at least possessing a heartfelt, strong faith in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, which you would not abandon even on pain of death, you should not consider yourself a Dharma practitioner merely because you chant prayers and wear a yellow robe. In order to examine yourself, you must correctly understand the exact nature of the freedoms and advantages.

Great individuals have not only the mind of renunciation but also a distinct motivation. The path of the great individual is the path of Mahayana, the bodhisattva path. The objective here is not only to liberate oneself from the six realms of existence, but to attain complete and perfect enlightenment. The path that leads to enlightenment is called the “path of the great individuals.” However, even in this case the mind of renunciation must come first. In addition, the distinct motivation of bodhicitta, the uncommon approach of great individuals, is required. Without the unfabricated mind of renunciation, one’s accumulated virtues will not help in attaining liberation or enlightenment. The mind of renunciation is needed to develop the merit that leads to liberation. To practice the

Mahayana path, one must generate the mind of unfabricated bodhicitta. Whatever merit is accumulated with this motivation becomes the path of the great individual and ultimately the cause of attaining enlightenment.

Merit accumulated without the motivation of bodhicitta could lead to obtaining liberation, but will not become the cause of enlightenment. "Virtue or nonvirtue depends not on the appearance, but on the motivation." Whether a virtue is extensive or insignificant, whether it is the cause of the higher realms of samsara or of liberation, or is the cause of enlightenment – these differences all result from the motivation. We cannot differentiate on the basis of the virtue alone. The motivation is primary. The main point here is that a genuine mind of renunciation is necessary to enter the Hinayana path and that an uncontrived mind of bodhicitta is necessary to enter the path of the Mahayana.

As to "genuine," we must apply effort from the very beginning. For example, when we train our minds we think of samsara as the six realms of existence, which are suffering in nature. As noted in the teachings on samsara, we must first reflect on this, and after a while we will truly understand samsara's suffering nature. No one wants suffering, but no matter where among the six realms we are born, all are suffering in nature and lacking in essence. After reflecting on this, we seek liberation from all six realms. This is the mind of renunciation. Initially, we must apply effort to arouse the intention that aspires to attain freedom from all aspects of samsara. Once we become used to it, the aspiration to attain liberation from all realms of samsara will arise without effort on our part. This is called the genuine mind of renunciation that arises naturally, effortlessly.

In order to enter the path of Mahayana, one needs the uncontrived mind of bodhicitta – the mind that aspires to attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. At first, since we have been habituated to selfish desire from time without beginning, this mind does not arise of itself and all the thoughts that occur in our minds are related to selfish desire. However, we begin by training ourselves with the Four Boundless Qualities⁸⁴ we equalize ourselves with others; we exchange ourselves with others. Just as the selfish mind now arises automatically when we awake in the morning, in the same way, from our diligent efforts a time will come when bodhicitta automatically arises within us. This is called "the uncontrived bodhicitta."

If we cannot generate an uncontrived mind of renunciation and of bodhicitta, as Buddhist practitioners we must at least have firm faith in the

three precious ones, promising not to abandon them even at the cost of our lives. Taking refuge is the door to entering the Buddhist path and for that we need firm faith in the Three Jewels, all three kinds of faith: the faith of aspiration, pure faith and unchanging faith – the faith that will not forsake the Three Jewels no matter what happens. Firm, unchanging faith is crucial. Simply reciting mantras and prayers, or wearing monk's or nun's robes does not make us genuine Buddhists. The prerequisite for being a Buddhist is to – at best – have genuine uncontrived bodhicitta, next best a genuine uncontrived mind of renunciation or, at least, unchanging faith in the Three Jewels.

Examining ourselves carefully, we cannot say that we lack faith in the Three Jewels, but neither can we say that we have firm faith, because it is not very strong. While we do pray to the Three Jewels during times of happiness and times of suffering, our faith in the teachings on the need to give up nonvirtue and cultivate virtue, and to follow the law of cause and effect is not firm enough. Even though the doctrine teaches this, we do not take it seriously enough. We continue to act nonvirtuously, even engaging in killing, and we do not extensively cultivate virtuous actions. Khenpo Shenga's disciple Dragyap Khenpo Lodro said:

These days, Dharma practitioners have more faith in those who make predictions than in the Buddha. They neglect whatever is being taught of Lord Buddha's teachings and do not practice, whereas when those who perform *mos*⁸⁵ advise them to do certain things for their own welfare they readily carry out these suggestions. This thinking shows that they have more faith in prediction makers than in the Buddha.

When we talk about mind training, we must first be certain that we know all eighteen freedoms and advantages by heart so we can examine whether we have them or not. If they are present, we should rejoice; if not, we should strive to bring them forth. Reflect on this for a long time, until you become tired. Once you are exhausted and can think no longer, let your mind remain in a thought-free state for as long as possible. This will help you achieve the samadhi of calm abiding in the future. Mind training in this context means carefully considering the teachings. Wandering here and there, meeting and talking with different people disturbs your concentration; a single mind cannot concentrate on many objects. If we are distracting ourselves, genuine mind training cannot happen.

In his “Notes on Kunzang Lama’i Zhalung,” Khenpo Ngaga therefore advises practitioners to stay in their own places. Contemplate the preliminary practices of proper motivation and so on. As the main practice, reflect on the teachings concerning the preciousness of human birth. Being undistracted, you will succeed. Eventually this effort will overcome your attachment to worldly activity, and you will always practice genuine Dharma. You won’t be able to sit idle without practicing. Achieving this level indicates accomplishment of mind training.

CONTEMPLATING EXAMPLES SHOWING THE DIFFICULTY OF OBTAINING A HUMAN BODY

We have now obtained a human body with all the eighteen qualities of freedoms and advantages. After we die, will we attain this same human body with the qualities complete? That would be very difficult. Lord Buddha taught in the sutras on the difficulty of finding this precious human body, and his followers have explained this in great detail in the commentaries, giving many examples of the difficulty. The cause of finding the precious human body is a basic, pure morality. While the virtue accrued from observing pure morality is the cause, it must be supported by repeated practice of the six transcendental perfections as the condition. Finally, at the moment of death, it should be sealed with dedication prayers for the attainment of the precious human body in the next life. Achieving a human birth without relying upon causes and conditions is not easy. Examine whether your morality is pure and whether your practice of the six perfections supports it. When we die, immense suffering torments us, and remembering to make dedication prayers is quite difficult. Thus, obtaining a human body is far from assured.

Lord Buddha gave the following example to illustrate the obstacles to gaining a human form: “Obtaining a human body is even more difficult than it is for a tortoise rising from the depths of an ocean tossed by the turbulence of violent waves to put its head through the hole of a yoke drifting on the surface.”

We cannot declare that it is impossible for the tortoise to pass its neck through the yoke, but it is extremely unlikely. This exemplifies the limit of possibility. Patrul Rinpoche elaborates further:

Assume that the great oceans of the three realms of samsara have become one on which there floats a wooden yoke like those used to hold a pair of oxen together for plowing. The yoke moves unceasingly,

with the eastern waves driving it westward and the western waves carrying it to the east. At the ocean's bottom lives a blind tortoise that surfaces once every hundred years. That the two might meet is highly unlikely. The inanimate yoke has no mind to seek the tortoise and the tortoise has no eyes with which to look for the yoke. Were the yoke to stay in one place, they might meet, but it never rests for even a moment. Likewise, were the tortoise to rise constantly to the ocean surface, it could encounter the yoke, but as it surfaces only once every hundred years, the chances of the yoke and the tortoise meeting are immeasurably small. Nevertheless, the tortoise might, by sheer chance, slip its neck into the yoke. According to the sutras, obtaining a human body complete with the freedoms and advantages is even less likely.

Examples of “sheer chance” are the following. A blind man who finds a wish-fulfilling gem in the middle of an intersection where many people pass, finds it not through his own potential but by sheer chance. Likewise, by sheer chance the tortoise might slip its neck into the yoke. Just as the story of Dawa Trakpa's father was told to illustrate why we should not fantasize about the future, these made-up examples show the limits of possibility.

Lord Nagarjuna explained the meaning thus:

*For a hole in a wooden yoke rolling on a great ocean
To meet the neck of a tortoise is more likely than being born as an
animal.*

*Compared to that, being born as a human is extremely difficult.
Your Majesty, practice the noble Dharma and reap the fruit.*

To review the order of the six realms – the god realm is at the top; below it are the demi-god realm and then the human realm. The human realm includes animals, indicating that animals are near to humans in terms of birth. Yet, to obtain a human birth after being born as an animal is not at all easy. Nagarjuna, in the text “Letter to a Friend,” tells his disciple, King Decho Sangpo, that as being born a human is very difficult, no one is guaranteed another human birth in the next life. Therefore he says the king should be sure to practice Dharma in this life and achieve results. Nagarjuna and King Decho Sangpo were priest and patron.

Shantideva wrote:

*Like a tortoise's neck passing through the hole
Of a yoke tossing upon the wide sea,
Obtaining the human state is said to be extremely difficult.*

The Mahaparinirvana Sutra contains other examples of this difficulty: the likelihood of finding a pea remaining on the smooth surface of a wall at which it has been thrown, or of a single bean remaining standing on the tip of an upright needle over which the beans have been heaped. We must consider and understand these analogies.

As Nagarjuna advised King Decho Sangpo, based on the human birth we have obtained, we must practice Dharma to achieve the ultimate fruition. If we fail to do so, finding a human body again in the next life will be extremely challenging. Thus we should never spoil our precious human birth but should practice genuinely. Simply knowing how to count the eighteen qualities doesn't guarantee the attainment of liberation and enlightenment, nor does not knowing them lead to lower realms. The most important thing to recall is the difficulty of obtaining a human birth and why we must use this precious human body we have now gained to attain the ultimate fruition. Otherwise, in the future we won't be able to achieve such a precious birth. Thinking like this, we will be less attached to this life, and our perseverance in Dharma practice will increase. One who has trained his or her mind in the rarity of finding a human birth and can generate this thought effortlessly will be too engrossed in practice to even find time to drink tea. This concludes the teaching on the examples of the difficulty of finding human birth.

CONTEMPLATING THE NUMERICAL IMPROBABILITY OF OBTAINING A HUMAN BODY

Considering the variety and relative numbers of sentient beings, attaining a human body is only a remote possibility.

Among beings in the six realms, human births are extremely rare compared to others since the human body is so difficult to attain. Were it easy to attain a human body, human beings would not be fewer in number than other beings. Think of ants in an anthill – hundreds and thousands of ants are found in a single hill because of the ease of being born as an ant. Human beings are among the least of the six classes of beings. The human population within the entire large area of Tibet is about six million, which may equal the number of ants in one anthill. Animals greatly outnumber humans because their bodies are easily obtained. Patrul Rinpoche gives extensive examples of the rarity of finding birth as a human.

Beings in hell are as many as stars seen at night, while hungry ghosts are as few as the stars seen in the daytime.

We see stars only very rarely during the day, whereas at night we can see many stars.

Considering hungry ghosts to be as many as the nighttime stars, the number of animals is like the stars seen during the day. Were animals like the stars observed at night, beings in the upper regions of comfort would be like the number of daytime stars.

Since gaining birth as a human or a god is difficult, their numbers are fewer. Among the six classes of beings, being born as a hell being is the easiest, and therefore their numbers are quite high. Compared to beings in hell, birth as a hungry ghost is harder; compared to humans and gods, being born as an animal is easier. Hence the numbers vary.

Beings in hell are as many as specks of dust in the entire world; hungry ghosts are as many as grains of sand in the valley of the Ganges; animals are as many as the dregs of malt that remain after beer is pressed; demi-gods are as many as snowflakes in a blizzard; gods and men are as few as dust particles on a fingernail.

Even more difficult is finding a human body with freedoms and advantages. As Patrul Rinpoche says:

Compared to human beings in border areas where no idea of Buddhism has reached, only very few are born where Dharma flourishes. Even more rare are human beings with freedoms and advantages, a mere one or two among many. Reflecting in this way, feel delighted to have the complete set of freedoms and advantages.

Among human beings, those born where Buddhism abounds, such as India, Tibet, Nepal, Burma, Taiwan and so on are few compared to those born elsewhere. Moreover, even where Buddhist teachings prevail not everyone practices Dharma. Those who practice are those with the freedoms and advantages, who are very few, a mere one or two to one hundred thousand. Having the freedoms and advantages complete is very unusual. In a worldly sense we consider gold and silver precious because of their rarity; those who practice Dharma are similarly very rare and hence precious. Rejoice again and again that you have obtained such a hard to find human birth with freedoms and advantages. Do not only rejoice but also resolve to use this precious opportunity to practice genuine Dharma. Vow to use this human birth wisely, and always persevere in Dharma. Merely rejoicing without practicing would serve no purpose; no matter how precious a human birth is, it is not permanent and firm, and is thus bound to disintegrate.

If you have the full complement of all aspects of freedoms and

advantages, the possibility of calling yourself a “precious human being” should be obvious from today onward. If any are missing, while from a worldly view you may be well-accomplished with regard to intelligence or cleverness, from the spiritual point of view you are not a precious human being, but are considered an ordinary human being, a human merely in name, an ill-fated human being, a heartless human being, or one who returns empty-handed. This is like wasting a wish-fulfilling gem that is in your hand or like returning empty-handed from an island of gold.

If you have a wish-fulfilling gem in your hand and someone steals it before you have an opportunity to use it, you have wasted your opportunity. Likewise, one who fails to practice Dharma despite having attained a human body with the complete freedoms and advantages and then dies has wasted the opportunity to practice Dharma. Patrul Rinpoche quotes:

*Finding a precious gem does not equal
Attaining a precious human body.
Yet haven't you seen it being wasted
By those who are not weary of samsara?*

Haven't you seen those with no remorse over samsara who are attached to and love worldly life, and who feel no dissatisfaction with this and future lives, wasting their precious human birth, this birth that is like finding a wish-fulfilling gem?

*Obtaining a kingdom does not equal
Meeting an authentic guru.
Yet haven't you seen him being treated as an equal
By those lacking faith and respect?*

Meeting a genuine master is like obtaining a kingdom. Those without faith and respect for the guru who do not know how to receive teachings from him will not learn how to practice Dharma even if they accompanied the guru all the time. This does not serve the purpose of meeting an authentic master.

*Attaining worldly power does not equal
The shaping of motivation and the taking of vows.
Yet haven't you seen those with no compassion
Casting them away like a stone from a sling?*

Achieving royal power does not equal

*Receiving a tantric empowerment.
Yet haven't you seen those who do not honor their samayas
Tossing them into rivers?*

Receiving a tantric empowerment is like achieving the status of a universal monarch, but unless you always observe the samayas the purpose of the empowerment is wasted. The Bodhisattva vows as well degenerate in someone lacking compassion, just as a stone flung from a sling gets nowhere.

*Seeing a buddha does not equal
Seeing mind's primordial nature.
Yet haven't you seen people lacking diligence
Letting their minds sink into delusion?*

After meeting your noble guru, you are introduced to mind's primordially enlightened nature. For a disciple who understands this introduction, this is like seeing the Buddha in person. When a lama introduces a disciple to the Dzogchen view of rigpa, this equals meeting the Buddha in person, or actually seeing Samantabhadra. However, despite having met the Buddha, people without diligence let their minds fall back into delusion. Unless you sincerely commit to practice, being introduced to the nature of mind is pointless since your mind will be carried away by delusion.

The freedoms and advantages are not acquired accidentally or by simple good luck. It is the fruit of the two accumulations⁸⁶ gathered over many eons.

We could say that the human birth we have found came from sheer luck, just as a blind man might find a wish-fulfilling gem in a crossroads. From beginningless samsara, we have been under the power of illusion and have suffered and been tormented by bad karma and negative emotions. Nevertheless, we managed to be born human. This is not mere chance, however. Just as the text says, we have obtained this excellent birth based upon past good actions accumulated over unfathomable eons. Without past virtue and merits, we could not have obtained a human form. The great scholar Trakpa Gyaltzen said:

*This free and favored human existence
Is not the result of your resourcefulness.
It comes from the merit you have accumulated.*

86 These are the accumulation of merit and the accumulation of wisdom.

Using this precious human body for nonvirtue is a great fault, as Patrul Rinpoche teaches:

You may have obtained a human body in name, but lacking any idea of Dharma, if you completely indulge in nonvirtue, this is even worse than being in the three lower realms.

Jetsun Milarepa said to the hunter Gonpo Dorje:

Generally a human body with freedoms and advantages is said to be precious;

However, seeing a human like you it does not seem precious at all.

Gonpo Dorje had engaged in the nonvirtuous action of killing wild animals all his life, and while those who practice Dharma are rare, people who engage in nonvirtuous actions are common. Patrul Rinpoche comments:

Nothing has more power than a human life to pull you into the lower realms. Right now, you have the freedom to act in any way you wish.

Looking at their nonvirtuous actions, human beings are much more sophisticated than beings of the lower realms. As a stone beneath the ocean remains unchanged for thousands of years, the nonvirtue done by humans has the potential to throw them into the depths of hell for countless eons with no chance of liberation. Breaking samaya, a crime only humans can commit, leads to birth in the Vajra Hell. No other beings can accomplish this. A human being meets a spiritual teacher from whom he receives the ripening empowerments and liberating instructions of Secret Mantra. Later, he violates his commitments and accumulates the negative karma of broken samaya, which ultimately leads to birth in Vajra Hell. This negative karma can only be accumulated by a human and not by a god, demi-god, hell being, hungry ghost or animal. Hence, being born as human beings, we have the choice of making ourselves worthy to attain liberation and enlightenment or of leading ourselves to the depths of the lower realms.

Patrul Rinpoche quotes the following:

Used well, this body is the boat of liberation.

Used badly, this body anchors us to samsara.

This body serves both merit and nonvirtue.

He continues:

Based on the power of merit accumulated in the past, you have now

obtained this human body complete with the eighteen freedoms and advantages. It is a meaningless waste of these freedoms and advantages if you do not take up the sacred Dharma, which is the essential thing, and merely acquire food and clothing and accomplish the eight worldly concerns of this life. At the time of death, you will beat your chest with your hands in remorse. You will have made the wrong choice.

If we waste this precious human birth in the pursuit of food, clothing and the eight worldly concerns, at the time of death we will definitely regret that we did not properly use this body – a perfect support of Dharma practice. Our life decreases year by year. The average lifespan of humans in Nepal these days is between fifty and sixty. As the years pass, we approach ever nearer to death. If we are to live for sixty years, after one year, our life decreases to fifty-nine more years and after two years, to fifty-eight. Calculating like this, those of us who are already forty or fifty have only ten to fifteen years to live. In ten to fifteen years, although we want to live, our body will disintegrate and lack the potential to live much longer.

These days, people with serious cancer or other incurable diseases, whose doctors personally inform them that their illness cannot be treated, experience great fear, especially if they have spent their lives in negativity. This terror comes because of regret for not practicing Dharma when they were young and able and instead engaging in nonvirtuous actions. When already sick, it is too late to do anything constructive. Ill, physically weak and in immense pain, Dharma is not possible. “I will die within one year. After death, the only place I can go is to the three lower realms.” Thinking like this, they tremble with alarm.

However, those who have practiced pure Dharma, even without attaining liberation and enlightenment, are assured of birth in Sukhavati, Amitabha’s pure realm of great bliss, so they can be told they will die tomorrow and will still not be frightened. Sukhavati is a pure realm superior to our present human realm. A person who is to travel from one happy place to another one wishes to arrive as quickly as possible, and will have no reason to panic about death.

As for us, we are healthy at present, with no serious diseases and with the full potential to practice; if we are careful enough to practice genuine Dharma, we will be happy even at the time of death, and will suffer no regret or fear. On the other hand if we do not practice, when about to die we will beat or scratch our chests in terror of death and regret over wasting

our precious lives. We will realize we have not been wise and skilful enough to practice. Those who have committed serious crimes will have visions at the time of death of being born in hell. Therefore, make certain you have no cause for regret.

In the “Way of the Bodhisattva,” Shantideva wrote:

*Having found this kind of freedom,
And then not to train in virtuous activity;
No self-deception can be worse than this.
No ignorance can be worse than this.*

We deceive ourselves if we fail to practice well when we have this precious human body. And there is no one more ignorant than a person who does not practice Dharma when he or she has the perfect support for practice and engaging in virtue.

Whether or not we attain the state of liberation and enlightenment is entirely up to us. Accumulating merit that ensures reaching liberation and enlightenment can be considered a great achievement. Whether or not we lead ourselves to the lower realms in our next rebirths through committing bad actions is entirely within our hands. Accumulating negative karma that guarantees sinking into lower realms after death is called a bad achievement. This life is the border for moving up or down. As Patrul Rinpoche says:

This present life is the crossroads between attaining an utterly good or an utterly bad result. If you do not in this very life achieve the throne of realization, obtaining freedom such as this in the future will be difficult. When you are born as one of the life forms in the lower realms, you will have no experience of the Dharma. Ignorant of what behavior to adopt and what to abandon, you will fall endlessly deeper and deeper into the lower realms.

One who is reborn from the human to the animal realm, from the animal to the hungry ghost realm, and from the hungry ghost realm to the hells can amass only negative and nonvirtuous actions. In order to migrate from a lower to a higher realm of existence, we need to accumulate virtue, which is not possible in the lower realms.

Determine that you must exert yourself right now, and meditate again and again, applying the three excellences – developing the mind of bodhicitta, the non-conceptual main part, and the dedication of merit.

Whatever merits you gather, whether extensive or not, must be sealed

with the three excellences: the perfect motivation of supreme bodhicitta at the beginning, non-conceptual meditation upon the nature of all phenomena in the middle, and the supreme dedication at the conclusion. Repeat this practice many times. What is the limit of training one's mind in the teaching on the difficulty of finding a precious human birth? Patrul Rinpoche tells a story about Geshe Chengawa to illustrate this point:

As a measure of how much this practice has developed in your mind, you should be like Geshe Chengawa. He did not sleep, and engaged solely in his spiritual practice. Geshe Tonpa advised, "Son, you had better break for a little rest, or you might get sick." "You are right," replied Geshe Chengawa, "I should take a rest. But when I think of the difficulty of obtaining the freedoms and advantages, I have no time to relax." It is said he recited the mantra of Miyowa⁸⁷ nine hundred million times and did not sleep throughout his life. We should practice until this sort of certainty is born in our minds.

Geshe Chengawa slept neither during the day nor during the night; seeing this, his teacher Geshe Tonpa asked him to rest or his energy would dissipate due to exhaustion and illness. For Geshe Chengawa, practicing Dharma was like resting. Considering the difficulty of finding a human birth, he could not remain idle. He had trained his mind to such an extent that he succeeded in actualizing the teaching on the preciousness of human rebirth. Other than this, reciting the eighteen qualities of human rebirth is unimportant. This ability brings no benefit.

The crucial thing is to remind yourself continuously of the rarity of obtaining a human rebirth and, now that you have obtained this precious body, to resolve again and again to practice Dharma in this life in order to attain liberation and enlightenment. When you reach the state where you involuntarily and happily engage in virtuous actions with diligence throughout day and night, you are training your mind in the teachings on the preciousness of human birth. Patrul Rinpoche admonishes us to contemplate these teachings until a firm conviction about the freedoms and advantages grows in our minds.

Claiming to be distracted by non-dharmic activities even though he has found freedom from the lower states of existence and become a Buddhist, Patrul Rinpoche concludes the instruction on the difficulty of obtaining the freedoms and advantages with a prayer that the lama and the three precious ones will bless him and all sentient beings to attain the essence of the freedoms and advantages.

*Although I have obtained freedom, I am poor in the essential Dharma,
Although I have entered the door of the Dharma, I am distracted by
non-dharmic activities.*

May I and sentient beings deluded like myself

Be blessed to acquire the essence of the freedoms and advantages.

2. THE IMPERMANENCE OF LIFE

Explaining the instructions on the impermanence of life comes next. The teaching begins with Patrul Rinpoche paying homage to his root lama by praising his qualities.

*He saw the three realms of existence as impermanent;
Like spit in his mouth, he abandoned the activities of this life.
Through perseverance, he followed in the footsteps of the noble ones.
At the feet of my peerless guru, I bow down.*

Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu, Patrul Rinpoche's root teacher, always saw the three realms – the desire realm, the form realm and the formless realm – as impermanent, lacking essence and like an illusion. The nature of the three realms is illusory, without essence and not permanent for even an instant. Since Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu understood the essenceless and impermanent nature of this life's activities, he abandoned them like a speck of dust, just as we cough out our saliva and mucus with no attachment.

Following the example of past masters, Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu struggled with body, speech and mind to practice Dharma. Physical and mental hardships occur when pursuing the Dharma. The biographies of past masters reveal their strenuous efforts. Later on, this text describes the unfathomable austerities undertaken by the great Pandita Naropa when following his teacher, Tilopa. Jetsun Milarepa also experienced severe hardships when practicing Dharma with Lhodrag Marpa, his root lama. Likewise, Omniscient Longchen Rabjam made inconceivable efforts of body, speech and mind under Rigdzin Kumaradza's guidance. Many biographies of masters and scholars relate the extreme efforts they made. With great respect, Patrul Rinpoche prostrates at the feet of his unequalled root guru. In doing so, he prays for the blessing of liberation from attachment to the worldly phenomena of this and future lives and from attachment to samsaric phenomena as a whole by understanding them as impermanent and essenceless.

We should listen to the teachings on impermanence just as we listened to the teachings on precious human rebirth, giving the same importance to motivation and conduct. The main teaching concerns discarding attachment to this life based on the impermanent nature of samsara. Despite the impermanence of worldly life, we retain the mistaken notion that things are real and lasting. We believe in the permanence of samsara and worldly

activities, thereby generating attachment to them. Our erroneous beliefs cause us to remain attached to samsaric phenomena. After being introduced to the real nature of samsara, we will understand it to be illusory, unstable and impermanent, and will overcome our attachment to this life or the next. No longer will we aspire to rebirth as humans or gods. However, we learn that everything is impermanent and without essence not simply to abandon attachment to the world, but because it is the truth of phenomena. Failing to understand this reality causes attachment to arise within us, whereas realizing the true nature of phenomena helps us abandon clinging.

The teachings initially reveal impermanence by leading us to think about outer phenomena. We can easily realize that our bodies are impermanent, but transience is not limited to the body. All samsaric phenomena are fleeting. Both the universe (the vessel for everything) and the inner contents (the beings that inhabit the universe) are impermanent. We must reflect upon this deeply. The true nature of past masters who realized their essential Buddha nature – the primordially enlightened ultimate reality – and thus actualized the transcendental state of nirvana may be permanent, firm and unchanging, but they nevertheless appear as impermanent to beings. For example, our teacher Lord Buddha Shakyamuni possessed all the major and minor marks and had actualized the primordial essence of Dharmakaya. When he manifested to beings, however, he appeared to be impermanent and to pass away into nirvana. In the same way, noble beings of the past who realized the ultimate reality of the buddha nature and attained the ultimate fruition of enlightenment manifested as impermanent. We must contemplate this and reflect upon impermanence.

We should also consider the nature of the “lords of living beings,” which means the mundane gods like Brahma, Shiva, Vishnu and others who have infinite energy and power. They too are impermanent and subject to destruction. By contemplating carefully many examples of impermanence we can understand and realize the concept of transience. Not a single samsaric phenomenon is permanent and stable. All samsaric phenomena can be taken as examples of impermanence. While reflecting upon impermanence we also recall the uncertain causes of death. When we think of what we need to remain alive, medicine, food, health and hygiene always come to mind. Yet if we consider well, death is caused not only by weapons, poisons and enemies – the very causes and conditions of life such as food and medicine can also become factors of death. Except for the practice of pure Dharma, all other phenomena can cause death. This leads us to understand that practicing pure Dharma is the only method that can

keep us from death by bringing us to the immortal, peaceful and ultimate state of nirvana.

We can never know when we will die. When seriously ill, we tend to think we might die soon because of the illness. On the other hand, when not sick or plagued by demons, we assume we will live on because of our good health. In fact, however, both people with diseases and without diseases die. Both young and old people die. There is never any certainty about who will die and who won't. Were it guaranteed that only sick people died and not the healthy, we could have some assurance. Likewise, if only old people died and not the young, we would have a better idea. This is not the case, however. Death is always uncertain. Young and old, sick and healthy, rich and poor, all die. The causes of death are unfathomable and uncertain.

Reflecting on impermanence as taught will naturally generate within us a strong sensitivity to death during all our daily activities – whether sleeping, walking or sitting down. When we travel to another place, we will realize that we might not return. When we fall asleep at night, we will understand that we may not awaken the next morning. When we eat, we should think that it could be our last meal. We must repeatedly contemplate the impermanence of life.

Having dwelt upon impermanence in this way, one day the thought of impermanence as well as an authentic fear of death will effortlessly arise. When this occurs, merely fearing death will not help; you must ponder what will benefit you at the time of death. You come to understand that only genuine Dharma practice can make death easier. Discarding your fear, resolve to practice Dharma. At this point your efforts to practice should succeed. The main reason for contemplating impermanence as a method of mind training is to generate diligence in Dharma practice throughout day and night.

The example used is how quickly a long-haired woman will act if her hair catches fire. She will naturally do all she can to douse the fire. This teaching is given to encourage similar diligence in practicing Dharma without rest. If someone isn't interested in Dharma or doesn't want to make any effort to practice, teaching impermanence serves no purpose even though it does

reflect the true nature of phenomena. If contemplating the impermanent nature of things generates fear of death and interest and diligence in Dharma practice, then training the mind in impermanence is truly valuable.

CONTEMPLATING THE IMPERMANENT NATURE OF THE VESSEL, THE OUTER UNIVERSE

The outer environment, created by the collective good karma of beings, contains the four continents, Mount Meru and the heavenly realms, and is encircled by a strong fence. Lasting for eons, it is still impermanent, however, and will finally be destroyed by seven stages of fire and one of water.

From among the four continents, we dwell in Jambudvīpa, the southernmost. From our human perspective, Jambudvīpa constitutes the entire world and all directions. Accordingly to traditional Buddhist cosmology, the World of Endurance,⁸⁸ which contains one billion sets of four continents, one billion sets of Mount Merus and one billion sets of heavenly realms, is created by beings' collective good karma. The "heavenly realms" are the realms of the six families of gods of the desire realm and the world of Brahma.⁸⁹ These are all bounded by a firm and solid iron fence. Mount Meru, the four continents, the heavenly realms and the surrounding iron fence are all subject to destruction, and are being destroyed moment by moment. They will finally be completely ruined, becoming like dust scattered by the force of wind. If we hit an earthen pitcher with a hammer, it will be smashed to bits. Mount Meru and the four continents are destroyed in the same way and become nothing. At the end of this eon their continuum is destroyed by the forces of fire, water and wind. They are first destroyed seven times by fire and then once by water. After this repeats itself seven times, the universe is destroyed by one final wind.

As the present great eon approaches the time of destruction, the beings, the inner contents of the lower realms, will gradually migrate until not one remains up to the god realm of the first meditative state.

A great eon has four stages: formation, abiding, destruction and voidness. Formation refers to the creation of the universe. Abiding is its

88 The world system in which we live.

89 These six are: the four great kings, the gods of the heaven of the thirty-three, the gods of non-combat, the gods of the Tushita heaven, the gods enjoying emanation, and the gods controlling others' emanations.

continuing to remain, and destruction is its gradual annihilation. The beings inhabiting the universe will begin to disappear from below through death and transference to other realms of existence. The beings of the hell of Ultimate Torment will depart first. If they exhaust their negative karma, they will be born in the higher realms of gods and others; otherwise, they will be born in hell realms in other world systems. Thus the hells become completely empty. One by one, beings in the realms of hungry ghosts, animals and humans will disappear; finally the beings of the realm of the gods of desire and the beings in the Brahma world in the form realm – the god realm of the first meditative state – will cease to exist. This will take twenty intermediate eons. This teaching concerns the destruction of beings, the inhabitants of this universe.

The outer universe disappears gradually. Initially, one sun will appear and then two, until finally seven suns appear and destroy the entire universe. These suns will be hotter than our normal sun.

After this, seven suns will successively rise in the sky. The first sun will burn up all fruit trees and forests. The shining of the second sun will evaporate all brooks and ponds. The third sun will dry up all the great rivers;⁹⁰ the fourth will dry even large great lakes, including Manasarovar.⁹¹ The fifth sun will gradually evaporate the great oceans, first to a depth of one hundred leagues, then two hundred, seven hundred, one thousand, ten thousand, until eighty thousand leagues. and more. Finally the remaining water, merely enough to fill a hoofprint, will dry up.

When sixth sun rises, the land masses and snow-covered mountains will burst into flames. The seventh sun will burn up Mount Meru itself, along with the four continents, the eight sub-continents, the seven golden mountains and the encircling iron fence. Everything will combine into one ball of fire. Blazing downwards, the fire will consume all the hell realms. Reaching upward, it will consume the heavenly palace of Brahma, already empty. The young gods of the realm of Clear Light will cry fearfully, “A huge fire is burning!” The older gods will comfort them, saying, “Have no fear! In the past, this fire has reached the world of Brahma, and then receded.

Following the seventh destruction by fire, rain clouds will form in the god realm of the second levels of concentration, and showers of rain will fall, first as deep as a yoke and then as deep as a plow. As

90 Including the River Ganges.

91 Considered to be the largest lake and the source of the four great rivers.

salt dissolves in water, everything up to the of the god realm of Clear Light will be destroyed.

After being destroyed by fire, the world re-forms over a period of twenty intermediate eons and remains without destruction for twenty more intermediate eons before again being annihilated by fire. Such fiery devastation occurs seven times. After that the world is ravaged by water, beginning with the formation of rain clouds whose essence is gold. While the gods of the third level of concentration will not disintegrate, the entire world beneath – the gods of the second and first levels of concentration, the six realms of the gods of desire, the four continents and sub-continents, and the hell realms – will be destroyed like salt dissolving in water.

After the seventh destruction by water, the crossed vajra of the air at the base of the universe will turn upright. Everything up to and including the realms of the gods of the third level of meditative concentration will be completely devastated, like dust blown by the wind.

Each world system consisting of Mount Meru, four continents and heavenly realms that is included in our world system of one billion universes will crumble and ultimately vanish into empty space. Given such destruction as this, contemplate deeply: Is there any permanence or stability to our human bodies, which are like those of seasonal insects?

Following the first destruction by water, seven annihilating firestorms will occur before the world is again obliterated by water. This will be followed by a ravaging wind. The hell realms, four continents and sub-continents, the gods of the desire realm and the gods of the first, second and third levels of concentration will be destroyed like dust before the wind. This shows that elemental nature can destroy everything up to the form realm's third level of concentration. The elements of fire, water or wind cannot, however, destroy the fourth level of concentration.

We live in the World of Endurance, a world system that contains one billion universes. Each constitutes a separate cosmos, containing a Mount Meru, four continents, four sub-continents, heavens including the world of Brahma, and hell realms. When destroyed by fire, water and wind, so that only space remains, that time period – spanning twenty intermediate eons – is called an “empty” eon. If even these realms can suffer annihilation, how could our human bodies, which are like flies at the end of summer, remain

for a long time without facing destruction? The life of flies is fragile and so is our body. How could it have any permanence or stability? Mount Meru itself is composed of four precious gems as high as eighty thousand leagues above the sea and as deep as eighty thousand leagues beneath it. If fire, water and wind can destroy this solid and hard substance, how can our bodies, fragile and delicate as an insect, remain stable?

CONTEMPLATING THE IMPERMANENCE OF THE INNER CONTENTS, THE BEINGS LIVING IN THE UNIVERSE

Of all the sentient beings living between the summit of the highest heavens and the lowest depths of hell, not a single one can escape death. As the Letter of Consolation⁹² says:

*Have you ever seen, heard or even suspected
That any being born on earth or in the heavenly realms
Might not die?*

The highest heaven in the formless realms is called the pinnacle of existence. The life of the gods in this heaven is longest of all beings. The lowest realm of beings is the hell of ultimate torment. From the highest to the lowest realm of existence, beings are nowhere free from death. Even the gods of the formless realms, despite very long lives, must ultimately die. The beings of the hell of ultimate torment, the lowest realm of existence, live for about half of one intermediate eon, but none escape death. Everyone who is born will definitely die one day. Some die early and some die late but all die. Among family members, some die sooner and others later, but all ultimately die. It is only a matter of time. As the power of Dharma is unfathomable, one with a long life could, through practicing Dharma well, achieve enlightenment within one lifetime, or after two or three rebirths. Otherwise, he or she could end rebirth in samsara by being born in a pure realm like Sukhavati. If someone who lives longer practices sincerely, the purpose of a long life is served. Unless you accomplish some essential tasks, however, no particular advantage comes of living for a long time.

With birth there is always death. From the higher realms downward no one has ever seen or heard of anyone who was born but didn't die.

Whenever there is birth there will be death. No one, not even in the god realms, has ever been born and not died. We never wonder whether or not someone will die. Death is certain. Especially for people like us, born at the end of an era in a world where the length of life is uncertain, death can come soon. Death comes closer and closer from the moment we are born. Life only gets shorter, never longer. Inexorably, death closes in, never pausing for an instant, like the shadow of a mountain at sunset. In other realms of existence beings' lifespan is predictable, but the lifespan of beings in Jambudvīpa is not. Some die young, some old, some just after being born. In earlier times, in Jambudvīpa, human lifespan was seemingly limitless; later people lived for eighty thousand years. As time passed, lifespan decreased. In Lord Buddha's time, human beings lived for one hundred years. Lifespan continued to decline; now most human beings live for fifty to sixty years. Some may live longer, but many die before sixty. Every second, death comes closer.

From the moment we emerge from our mother's womb, we move nearer and nearer to death. If my lifespan is sixty years, I was one day closer to death the day after my birth; a month later, I was one month closer. Death creeps up upon us every passing day. If lifespan could increase, we could slow down the approach of death. This is not the case, however. Long life practice or other healing rituals for noble beings might prolong their lives by a year or two, but their lives cannot be greatly lengthened. If such is the case for noble beings, what about us? While long life practice and healing rituals can avert death under bad circumstances, actually increasing our lifespan is very difficult. History shows that Lord Buddha prolonged his life for only a few years, and the same is true for other authentic and noble beings. "Death," or the "demon of death," refers to the one who destroys our life force. Like the inexorable setting of the evening sun as the shadows grow longer, the shadow of death continues to advance, and the end of our life grows ever nearer. Patrul Rinpoche reminds us:

You can never be certain of when you will die, or where. You could die tomorrow, or even tonight. You might die right now, between one breath and the next.

We think we will not die this year or the next. We believe we will live twenty or thirty years longer. However, this notion is completely wrong, and has no sound reason behind it. If we had a vision in which our yidam deity predicted that we would not die for a certain number of years, we could reasonably think we might live that long. Our thought would be backed by

a sound reason. On the other hand, simply assuming we won't die results from constantly habituating our mind to grasping things as permanent; even when close to death, we still feel we won't die soon. We always think the next life is distant while the next year is close. We struggle day and night to prepare ourselves by securing for the future food to eat, clothes to wear and a house to live in. Although as Buddhists we believe in past and future lives, we feel that the next life is far away and we have plenty time to prepare. Understanding that we must practice Dharma for the benefit of the next life, we still do not plan to practice now, but only after a few years. Thus, we are careful to prepare for the next year but not the next life. Considering carefully, however, we find no reason for this thought.

With serious contemplation, we realize that 365 days remain before another year begins but we have no such certainty about the next life. If, through bad luck, we meet the causes of death today, the next life will have come in an instant. The next life is not time-bound while the next year is marked by a certain prescribed time. Next year definitely will not come before 365 days have passed, but the next life begins in the intermediate state as soon as we encounter a cause of death and die. Life in the intermediate state lasts between a minimum of seven and a maximum of forty-nine days. Within that time, we are born in one of the six realms. Lacking certainty when the next life will come, we cannot say whether or not the next year will arrive first. Thus, just as we make efforts for the next year, we should also strive to practice Dharma for the next life. The masters of the past have said that since we don't know which we will first encounter, struggling for the benefit of the next life is more important than preparing for the next year. By neglecting next year, we may suffer from lack of sufficient food or clothing, but will not experience the suffering of the hell realms. The misery of not having food and clothes is nothing compared to the unfathomable suffering of hunger and thirst for those born in the three lower realms.

We won't be able to carry with us into the next life the wealth we accrue for the next year. The status and position we have accomplished in this life will not help in the next, nor will the disciples and followers we have gathered. The only thing that will benefit in the future is Dharma practice. The Collection of Deliberate Sayings⁹³ says:

*Who knows if he will even die tomorrow?
Do what you must today.
The powerful demon of death*

Is not your friend.

Were you friends with the lord of death, he might spare you and give you more time to live, but this is not the case. If you had a prophecy from your yidam deity, you could have some certainty about your death. Other than these two exceptions, no one has any proof that he or she won't die today.

Nagarjuna teaches:

*Our life confronts so many dangers,
More impermanent than a bubble in the wind.
To breathe in and out and awaken from sleep,
Is quite a wondrous matter.*

Life is full of many dangers; the causes of death are unfathomable. Our life, more unstable and fragile than the fleeting bubbles in a stream, is like a lantern in the wind. We never know when the fire will be blown out. Awakening to life is a miracle since each breath departs and is again drawn in while we sleep. The human body is very delicate and always ready to die, and yet we remain alive after waking from a sleep in which our breath must return after leaving. Patrul Rinpoche says that everyone we look at is about to die, both young and old. No one is stable and strong enough to stay.

A person may be sleeping happily, but there is no certainty that he might not die between slowly breathing in and breathing out. To wake up alive should be considered a miracle, but we take it completely for granted. We may realize that we will die one day, but we do not keep the certainty of death clearly in mind.

We do believe we will die someday. No one thinks he can forever escape death. Not knowing the difference between life and death, cattle and other animals do not feel this way. We humans, however, know that we will die. Nevertheless, because we do not incorporate the unpredictability of death into our mindstreams, we always consider our lives as ongoing, thinking we won't die this year or the next, not for ten or twenty years.

Still attached to the idea of life's permanence, we become lost in hope

and fear about the future. While we are deeply engaged in seeking comfort, happiness and good reputation for this life, the demon of death suddenly arrives, holding a black noose, fiercely biting his lip and baring his teeth.

Although we know we will die someday, not knowing when, we remain distracted by this life's struggle for wealth and prosperity, position and status, name and fame. When we come face to face with death, can we do anything to change it? In the past we strove for well-being and happiness, status and reputation. Perhaps we achieved this. Then suddenly one day the demon of death appears and slips his black noose over our necks, ferociously grinding his teeth and grinning through his fangs. What can we do? Will the happiness and recognition that we obtained help us? Will our disciples and wealth help us?

No, at that time nothing can help us. No soldier can display his might to frighten death off and no rich man can use his wealth to buy his way out. Can any scholar persuade the Lord of Death to depart, or any beauty charm him into changing his mind? Can any athlete run fast enough to escape him? As Patrul Rinpoche makes clear:

We might seal ourselves inside an impenetrable, armored metal chest, guarded by hundreds of thousands of strong men bristling with sharp spears and arrows, but even that would afford not so much as a hair's breadth of protection or concealment. When the Lord of Death catches us with his black noose to pull us down the road to the next life, our faces pale, our eyes fill with tears, we tremble spasmodically, and we must follow.

At that time, no warriors can help us, no authority has any power, and no wealth can ransom us. We have no escape nor place to hide, no refuge or protector. No skillful means or compassion can help us. Even if the Medicine Buddha appears in person, he cannot delay death when one's life is exhausted.

Therefore, from this very moment, without falling under the power of laziness and procrastination, reflect sincerely and contemplate the importance of practicing the genuine Dharma, the only thing certain to help at the moment of death.

Abandon laziness and diligently practice without postponing. Thinking like this really will generate fear of death. Remind yourself of death at night and, fearing death, you will not sleep. Contemplate death during the day and such fear will arise that you don't even wish to eat. Dread of death is

always within us. Simply living with this fear will not help us; we must find a method that will benefit at the moment of death. None of the good things of this life will help us then.

Only genuine Dharma practice will benefit. At the lowest level, practice by abstaining from the ten non-virtuous actions and accomplishing the ten virtuous actions;⁹⁴ at the mediocre level, follow the path of the sravakas and pratyekabuddhas; and at the highest level, practice the Bodhisattva vehicle or the Vajrayana teachings. Practicing Vajrayana can bring about the state of union with Vajradhara, enlightenment in one lifetime and the attainment of the immortal state by destroying the demon of death, such as was achieved by Guru Rinpoche and Pandit Vimalamitra. Attaining their level is to achieve the best among the best. Many practitioners have achieved freedom from the fear of death. Accomplishing this level, one is certain to be born in the pure realm of Sukhavati in the next life.

Compared to the United States, India is a poor nation in terms of material wealth and so on. Therefore, Indians who get a chance to visit the more prosperous US are generally happy and anxious to travel as soon as possible. People who need to go to the US are not sad about going. Similarly, the happiness and prosperity of this life are nothing compared with the happiness and prosperity of the Sukhavati pure realm. They are as different as the sky and the earth. The Aspiration Prayer to be born in Sukhavati says that this world contains not even a fraction of the characteristics and features of the Sukhavati realm.

Anyone certain of birth in a pure realm like Sukhavati is more than happy to die. He or she will look forward to death, knowing there is nothing to fear. However, a person who did not practice Dharma and spent his or her entire life pursuing worldly prosperity, engaging in nonvirtuous actions to do so, will always be frightened at the prospect of death. As death approaches, the fear grows. The suffering of the human realm cannot be compared with that of the hell realm, which is incomparably more severe. For those who accumulated nonvirtue that will deliver them to the hell realms, even a month or a day more of human life is an opportunity. Such a person is bound to be extremely afraid of dying, and this panic is

94 In brief, the ten non-virtuous actions are killing, stealing and sexual misconduct (non-virtues of the body); lying, divisive speech, harsh words and idle chatter (non-virtues of speech); and covetousness, ill will and wrong views (non-virtues of the mind). The virtuous actions are their opposites, such as preserving life, practicing generosity, and so on. These are detailed in the chapter on Karma, the Relationship of Cause and Effect.

reasonable. For one who has practiced pure Dharma, even without the certainty of attaining enlightenment, having the confidence of being born in a pure realm overcomes any fear of death. Thus, the purpose of always remembering life's impermanence is to reflect deeply and sincerely that fearing death is pointless since diligently practicing genuine Dharma will help at that time.

This concludes the teaching on the impermanent nature of the beings living in the universe.

CONTEMPLATING THE IMPERMANENCE OF HOLY BEINGS

Our eon is called the Good or Fortunate Eon. So far during this eon, seven excellent Buddhas have appeared in this world. Of these, four are considered within the one thousand Buddhas. The other three are called the intermediate or the middle Buddhas, and are classed differently. The seven Buddhas, who followed one after the other, are Vipasyin, Sikkin, Thamched Kyob, Krakuchanda, Kanakamuni, Kasyapa and Shakyamuni. Each had a retinue of an unfathomable number of Sravakas who were Arhats. These seven Buddhas and their followers came to this southern continent of Jambudivpa in the World of Endurance.

Each of these buddhas extensively turned the wheel of Dharma for the benefit of beings. Whenever buddhas come to this world, they work to benefit many beings through the teachings. Except for Lord Shakyamuni Buddha's teachings, however, the other Buddhas' teachings have all disappeared. This is a result of impermanence. Although Buddha Shakyamuni displayed passing away into nirvana, his teachings have remained without degeneration. Having been born at this fortunate time, we have the opportunity to follow his teachings.

The Buddhas and their retinues are all impermanent. The great sravakas – the sixteen exalted elders, who were circled by entourages of five hundred arhats during the time when Shakyamuni Buddha's teachings flourished – have all passed away into nirvana and we cannot see them. After Lord Buddha passed away, the arhats assembled to record and compile the teachings through their mental powers. The five hundred arhats involved in this task, being impermanent, all departed.

In the same way, the Indian scholars Nagarjuna, Asanga and the others known as the Six Ornaments and the Two Supreme Ones also came and

passed away into nirvana. In addition, there were eighty-four *siddhas*⁹⁵ who had mastered the attributes of the five paths and ten levels, and who possessed unfathomable clairvoyance and miraculous powers. Nothing of them remains now except their stories and the places that they blessed. We cannot see them because they are all impermanent and are no longer with us.

In the past, Pema Jungney, the Second Buddha of Orgyen, went to the snowy land of Tibet and widely turned the wheel of Dharma for the fortunate beings living there by giving the ripening empowerments – primarily of the unsurpassable Tantra and Dzogchen teachings – along with the liberating instructions. As a result, twenty-five disciples known as the king and the subjects, including King Trisong Detsen, attained high levels of realization and spiritual attainment. There were also the eighty *siddhas* of the river Yerpa. Not one of these disciples or great *siddhas* remains alive. All we have are their stories and the sacred places they blessed. We lack the fortune to see them.

The Nyingma tradition was blessed by many noble scholars and masters, including those of So, Zur and Nub. Scholars and masters of the Sarma Tradition included Marpa, Mila and Dagpopa. Most attained the state of *siddhas*, becoming *aryas*.⁹⁶ Practitioners who achieve this state have mastery over the elements and cannot be harmed by them. They can transform compounded phenomena into uncompounded phenomena and vice versa. The *siddhas* of the past displayed wonderful miracles, being unburned by fire, overcoming the force of water, withstanding the crushing force of earth after being buried, and not falling from precipices even when thrown from them. The four elements could not harm them. Patrul Rinpoche recounts the following story from the life of Milarepa:

Once Jetsun Mila was practicing in silence in the Katya cave in Nyeshang in Nepal when a band of hunters passed by. They asked him whether he was a man or a ghost. Continuing his silence, his gaze fixed before him, he remained still. The hunters shot many poisoned arrows at him, but they didn't pierce him. They threw him over a cliff into a river, but he reappeared sitting where he had been before. Finally, they piled firewood on his body and set it alight, but the fire did not burn him. Many beings attained such powers, but finally they all chose to demonstrate impermanence. Today their stories are all that remain.

95 Highly accomplished masters.

96 A “noble one,” one who has reached the first bodhisattva level.

We lack the fortune to actually see those highly realized persons because they are impermanent and have passed away. If such extraordinary practitioners of the past departed into nirvana, then what of us?

As for us, our negative actions, led by the wind of negative conditions and causes toward our negative habitual tendencies, have driven us into this unclean arrangement of the four material elements, in which we are trapped and on which the continuum of our mind depends. We have no certainty about when or where this scarecrow of an illusory body will fall apart, so from this very moment onwards we must inspire ourselves to virtuous actions of our three doors of body, speech and mind. Practice with this in mind.

Our bodies are created by the causes and conditions of karma and negative emotions. The physical body, comprised of flesh and blood formed from the four elements, can easily be harmed. In this arrangement of impurities abides our mindstream. This illusory body is like a scarecrow in a field. Scarecrows also result from causes and conditions, and like us cannot exist without them. We have no idea of when our scarecrow-like body will disintegrate. When and where we will die remains uncertain. We do not know how long we will live, nor where we will die. We could die in India, Nepal, Tibet or elsewhere. Death has many causes: sickness, accidents, natural disasters and others. We can choose neither the cause nor the time of our death. We could even die today. Such is our situation, and therefore, we should always reflect on the uncertainty of death.

When overtaken by distraction or the eight worldly concerns, by looking inward and remembering the uncertainty of death, thoughts of this world or our future aspirations will naturally cease. Just as an elephant's footprints are the most impressive, no thought excels that of impermanence. Generating the thought of impermanence quickly brings forth all attributes of the path and fruition. If our minds wander into future unattainable objectives, merely considering death's uncertainty will cause all negative conceptual thoughts, distractions and procrastination to cease; our body, speech and mind will quickly engage in virtuous activities. Among all thoughts, the thought of impermanence is the best. From now onward engage your three doors in virtue.

CONTEMPLATING THE IMPERMANENCE OF THOSE WITH WORLDLY POWER

Many means are taught to contemplate impermanence: reflecting on

the impermanence of our universe and the living beings within it, the impermanence of holy beings and the powerful. The lords of ordinary beings are the gods Brahma, Indra, Ishvara and Vishnu. Brahma is considered the king of the gods. Indra is lord of the sky, Vishnu is the preserver, and Ishvara is the god Shiva – also called the “great god” Mahesvara or Mahadeva. These worldly gods, whose bodies are immense, can live as long as an eon, and their brilliance outshines the sun and moon. But they cannot escape death; when the time comes, they die. Not being beyond impermanence, they have disappeared from this world and we cannot see them. Jigme Lingpa’s “Treasury of Qualities” says:

Even Brahma, Indra, Mahesvara and the universal monarchs cannot evade the demon of death.

In the end, not even divine or human sages with the five kinds of clairvoyance and the power to fly through the sky can escape death.

The “Letter of Consolation” teaches:

Great sages with five-fold powers

Can fly throughout the sky,

But will never reach a land of immortality.

Even sages with extraordinary powers, including clairvoyance and flight, cannot reach a place beyond death. When their time comes, they die. Our human world has held universal emperors – *Chakravartins* – who have reached the highest pinnacle of power and material wealth, possessing the seven royal treasures. They may rule over continents, but they also die. In India, from the time of Mahasammata, who was the ancestor of our teacher Buddha Shakyamuni, many unfathomable emperors have come to rule the entire continent. However, all these great emperors had to die when death approached. There has never yet been a king who has not died.

The first Tibetan king Nyatri Tsenpo was not an ordinary person but a particular emanation of one of the buddhas and bodhisattvas who manifested as Dharma kings. The histories of Tibet mention other such Dharma kings, including Songtsen Gampo and Trisong Detsen, but not even they could escape death.

In the reign of the Dharma King Songtsen Gampo, a magical army subdued all lands from Nepal to China. King Trisong Detsen brought two-thirds of Jambuvidpa under his power. During the reign of Ralpachen, an iron pillar was erected on the banks of the Ganges marking the frontier between India and Tibet. Tibet exercised

power in many regions of India, China, Gesar, Tajikistan and other countries. At the New Year festival, ambassadors from those countries were required to spend a day in Lhasa. Such was Tibet's past power. But it did not last, and these days nothing but historical accounts remain. Reflect on those ancient splendors. Compared to them, our home, belongings, servants, status and whatever else we prize, seem no more significant than a beehive. Meditate deeply, and ask how you could think that they would last forever and never change.

If we compare our possessions and status with those of these kings, they are quite insignificant. Since the palace, servants and splendor of the kings are all impermanent, what can we say about our homes and belongings? They are certainly neither permanent nor stable. In this way, contemplate impermanence.

CONTEMPLATING OTHER EXAMPLES OF IMPERMANENCE

Patrul Rinpoche presents many other examples of impermanence.

GROWTH AND DECLINE OF EONS

Consider the growth and decline of this eon, and that it is also impermanent. In the distant past, when the eon began, there were neither sun nor moon in the sky and all human beings radiated their own light. With miraculous power they could travel through space, and their bodies were many leagues tall. For food they had *amrita*, divine nectar. Their perfect happiness and well-being equalled that of the gods. Over time, however, the influence of negative emotions and nonvirtue gradually reduced human beings to their present condition.

The cycle of growth is when the life and wealth of beings increase and the cycle of decline is when they diminish. Together, the cycles of growth and decline constitute the twenty eons of abiding. Twenty eons each for the formation, abiding, destruction and emptiness of the universe makes eighty eons, also known as a great eon. Within the twenty eons of abiding are eighteen eons of growth and decline; when the initial eon of growth and the final eon of decline are included, this adds up to twenty eons. The duration of the initial eon of growth and one eon of growth and decline is the same. Likewise, the final eon of decline is as long as an intermediate eon of growth and decline. Thus, the cycles of growth and decline are impermanent.

The first age of this eon was known as the Golden Age. People in the Golden Age illuminated the things around them with light emanating from their bodies. They had miraculous powers, could fly and were clairvoyant. With no need for ordinary food, they lived for many eons. While human beings of the Golden Age had no manifest negative emotions and thus did not accumulate nonvirtuous actions, they did have dormant negative emotions. Over time, they began to decline; their physical radiance faded and the sun and moon appeared in the sky. Their miraculous powers weakened; the divine nectar was exhausted and they had to eat rice. In this way, the human race slowly degenerated.

As human beings' negative emotions become ever more gross, their lifespan and fortune diminish further. Whereas earlier human beings lived for unfathomable numbers of years, lifespan will decrease down to ten years. People will die from epidemics, warfare and famine. Those who survive the epidemic diseases will be tormented by periods of warfare when their hatred will increase. When they meet others, they will see them as the enemies who killed their fathers. Whatever they touch will transform into weapons. Like the demi-gods, they will fight continually. Most will die from the fighting. Those who yet endure will perish in a great famine. Hence, human beings of the degenerate times will generally pass away from the sequential occurrence of disease, warfare and famine. All who die during these times will be born in lower realms. In particular, those who die of hatred during the eon of warfare will be born in hell.

To those who survive the eon of epidemics, warfare and famine will come an emanation of Maitreya to teach them to stop killing each other. This will end the negativity of killing through harmful intentions. Consequently, lifespan will begin to increase, first to twenty years and then gradually longer and longer. When lifespan reaches eighty thousand years, Lord Maitreya will come, display attaining enlightenment at the Vajrasana in Bodh Gaya, India, and turn the wheel of Dharma in Varanasi.

Eighteen such cycles of growth and decline will take place. Initially human beings will live for uncountable years and then their lifespan will gradually decrease to ten years. Lifespan will later increase back to eighty thousand years before again diminishing to ten. After eighteen cycles, lifespan will increase to an incalculable number of years. The buddhas of the Fortunate Eon will generally appear when beings' lifespan grows. Buddha Shakyamuni was an exception since he came when lifespan was declining and beings lived for only one hundred years. All the other nine

hundred and ninety nine buddhas will appear only when beings live for either uncountable years or eighty thousand years.

Only our teacher Shakyamuni Buddha holds with compassion humans who live for a mere hundred years and who live during the time of the five degenerations. When he generated bodhicitta, the mind of enlightenment, Shakyamuni aroused immense altruistic concern for the benefit of the beings of degenerate times and made five hundred extra aspirations on our behalf. Because of these wishes his altruistic motivation is considered greater than that of other buddhas. Even the buddha Great Shakyamuni, before whom Shakyamuni Buddha took the Bodhisattva vow, praised him to be as rare as the white lotus.

Other Buddhas do not appear during degenerate times when lifespan is in decline. At the time of beings living for incalculable years, Buddha Mopa, the last of the thousand buddhas of the Fortunate Eon, will appear. The lifespan of this buddha, whose name means Infinite Aspiration, will equal the lives of all the previous nine hundred and ninety-nine buddhas. His activities to benefit beings will likewise equal the activities of all previous buddhas combined. Following his appearance, the universe will begin undergoing destruction. The period of destruction will be the same as the duration of the eon of remaining.

Thus, the increase and decline of eons renders them also impermanent. Sometimes the universe is forming; sometimes undergoing destruction. Sometimes full, it is also sometimes empty.

EVERYDAY IMPERMANENCE

Considering such changes, you can see that even on this vast scale nothing is beyond the reach of impermanence. Watching the changing of the four seasons also reveals the impermanence of everything.

Throughout each year seasons undergo perpetual change – from spring and summer to autumn and winter. During summer, the mountains and plains appear green and lush. Summer rain acts as nectar for trees and forests. All living things, both human and animal, relax in joy. Wildflowers bloom and the landscape becomes a multicolored paradise. One doubts that even heaven could be more beautiful. But as autumn brings on cooler winds, the colors fade. During winter, rainfall is less and snow falls in Tibet, drying up the forests and trees.

Each season comes in turn, autumn following summer, winter following

autumn, and spring following winter. With every phase, what came before changes into something different, revealing impermanence. Observe the changes between yesterday and today, this morning and tonight, this year and the last. Everything gradually changes. It is impossible to depend on anything. Think especially about your town or monastery, wherever you live. People who were previously wealthy and prosperous are now living in poverty; others, who were earlier poor and powerless, now speak with authority and have power and wealth. Nothing is beyond the nature of impermanence.

Even within a short time appearances change; morning moves on into evening, and this year's appearances become those of next year. Gradually, one after another, everything passes. Impermanence is all-pervasive. Reflect on our home areas; the fortunes of people who were previously prosperous later decline. Wealth reaches a certain level and begins to diminish. No one prospers without limit. Adversity always follows upon prosperity, just as those who are now poor or destitute will someday flourish. People who were too poor and helpless to speak before others are now powerful and converse with authority. Because of impermanence nothing stays the same.

In our own families, the generations of those who came before, parents, grandparents and great-grandparents, all those who were born, have died and become nothing more than names. Sisters, brothers, and other relatives have also died when their time came, and no one knows where they went or where they are now. Of the powerful and wealthy people who last year were the most eminent in their countries, many are now merely names. Who knows whether those whose present wealth and importance make them the envy of ordinary people will be in the same position next year, or even next month?

Consider your own family. How large was your family when you were young? How many now remain? Do you know where those who have passed away are now? Where they were born within the six realms? We have no idea where they are, let alone being able to see or hear them. When your time of death comes, can your parents, relatives or even your spouse help you? Patrul Rinpoche reminds us:

Reflecting on these truths, we understand that nothing stays the same forever. Of all the people who were alive over a hundred years ago, none can be found who has escaped death. And all people now alive throughout the world will be dead within a hundred years. Not one will remain. Absolutely nothing, neither the outer container

of the world nor the inner contents of the beings within it, has any permanence or stability.

Even though these days a few people may live beyond one hundred years, none survives more than about one hundred and twenty years. Nor are wealth and prosperity permanent or stable, so you should never be attached to material things. You might have status and position now, but that is no guarantee that you won't someday become powerless and weak. This year, your family is alive, but you could be alone next year. Nothing is completely reliable; nothing in this world has a permanent essence. Everything is impermanent. Strive to discard attachment to worldly things not only of this life but of the next lives as well.

IMPERMANENCE AND RENUNCIATION

Renunciation arises naturally in someone with no attachment to worldly life, this one or the next. Attachment to this life keeps a person from renouncing; such a person cannot be considered a Dharma practitioner. An authentic practitioner must be able to abandon grasping after this life. If you are attached to samsara, you lack the mind of renunciation. If you are attached to yourself, you are not a Bodhisattva. Such grasping means you have not understood the view. Reflecting on the impermanent nature of things as taught in this text, you need to abandon attachment to your body, wealth, relatives, house, status, position and the like, knowing they are neither permanent nor stable, and lack any essence. Patrul Rinpoche quotes a well-known verse:

All that is born is impermanent and will die.

All that is accumulated is impermanent and will be depleted.

All that is gathered is impermanent and will be dispersed.

All that is built up is impermanent and will collapse.

All that is raised is impermanent and will fall.

Impermanence is all-pervasive. Whatever is amassed with great effort is impermanent and will be depleted one day. No amount of hoarded wealth is inexhaustible. Anything collected is bound to fall apart. Our parents, relatives and others who gather will one day depart because of impermanence. Some depart by returning home; others through death. Whenever people are drawn together, they have no chance of always remaining in each other's company. They will separate. Everything constructed is impermanent and will someday collapse. No buildings remain stable forever; their nature is to disintegrate after a certain time. Whatever rises up will eventually fall.

Those who achieve power and status will one day lose them. In the same way, likes and dislikes; good luck and bad; nobility and evil; all the thoughts that run through our minds: everything is constantly changing.

You might be as high as the heavens, as mighty as a thunderbolt, as rich as a *naga*,⁹⁷ as good-looking as a god or as beautiful as a rainbow, but no matter who you are or what the case, when death suddenly comes you can do nothing, not even for a moment. You must go, naked and cold, empty hands folded under your armpits. Although you cannot bear to be separated from your money and possessions, friends and relatives, followers and disciples, wealth, food, drink and so on, you must leave everything behind, like a hair pulled from butter.

At the time of death, despite your strong attachments, you have no power to do anything except leave everything behind. A hair pulled from butter comes out by itself. Likewise, regardless of your wealth, loved ones, property and so on, when death strikes, you must leave with empty hands holding your armpits. You cannot carry anything with you, nor can you show your status and position. No one can accompany you; you go alone.

Even if you are a lama with thousands of monks, you cannot take a single one; if you are a governor over tens of thousands of people, you cannot take a single servant. Even if you own all the wealth in the world, you cannot carry even a needle and thread. Leaving even your beloved body behind, you must go.

No matter how carefully you have nourished your body with good food and dressed it in fine clothes, your consciousness alone takes on the new form of the intermediate state and travels to the realm of the next life. Your body, formerly a well-fed and well-dressed object of attachment will be looked on with fear and disgust and avoided, even by your parents and relatives. After death you must be concealed from others.

At that time, the body that previously was clothed in silk and brocade, whose mouth was always filled with tea and beer, that had been as beautiful as the image of a god, is called a corpse, frightening and dark, heavy and distorted. As Jetsun Mila sang:

*That thing that is called a corpse, fearful to look upon,
Is here right now: your own body.*

Your body is tied with a rope, hidden behind a curtain and secured

97 Serpent spirits of great wealth.

with earth and stones. Your bowl is turned upside down on your pillow. No matter how dear and loved you were, you will cause horror and disgust. Now, while living, you lie down in soft lambskin-lined garments and piles of furs, but feel uncomfortable after sleeping for a while and must turn from right to left. When dead, you will have nothing more than rocks or tufts of grass under your cheek, with mud in your hair.

Right now, some of you may be householders or clan chiefs who worry about your survivors, thinking they could easily starve, die of cold, be killed by enemies or carried away by a river. You might believe that all of their wealth, comfort and happiness depend on you. After your death, however, they will feel only relief at quickly disposing of your corpse by cremating it, throwing it into a river or taking it to a cemetery.

When you die, you must wander by yourself in the intermediate state of the bardo, alone and without a single friend. At that time, the excellent Dharma will be your only refuge. Thus, from this very moment, reflect again and again that you must by all means strive to accomplish at least one genuine Dharma practice.

No longer will people call you by your title, nor will they look upon you with respect as when you were alive. The wealth and prosperity you struggled to gather cannot help you, and neither can the friends and relatives you lovingly cared for. Your body will be useless. What will help on your deathbed? If you have accomplished at least one Dharma practice, this will help. One recitation of the Mani mantra or a single prostration will help. Having practiced the Dharma will definitely make your death easier. When you are alive and have freedom to practice, remind yourself over and over to do so genuinely.

In the same way, all that is accumulated will certainly be depleted. A king with power over the entire world could at the end have nothing. Sometimes those who earlier had great wealth end up exhausting it all and starving to death. People who last year had hundreds of animals can, because of heavy snow or epidemics, this year become destitute in one day. One who yesterday was powerful and wealthy could have his riches destroyed by enemies and today be reduced to begging. We ourselves can see such things happen. We cannot keep control of our riches and possessions forever. Always remember that you must accumulate the wealth of generosity.

Someone who gathered abundant wealth and property can lose or

exhaust it and end up penniless. In Tibet, wealth took the form of animals that could be quickly killed by disease or blizzards. If you are generous and openhearted to others with whatever possessions you have, you will accumulate virtue and will prosper as a result. Otherwise, regardless of your abundant resources, without accumulating merit through generosity, the virtue you gathered in the past will ripen and be used up by your becoming rich. Failing to accrue new merit, you could starve.

IMPERMANENCE AND RELATIONSHIPS

No union can last forever, without separation, like people of different places who gather in great numbers for a major market or an important religious festival, only to part again as each returns home. Whatever affectionate relationships we now enjoy – teachers and disciples, masters and servants, husbands and wives – we cannot avoid being separated in the end. We cannot even be sure that death or another terrible event might not suddenly part us right now.

All those who gather together are impermanent and bound to separate. During your life, your parents, relatives and loved ones assembled. Yet they will not remain together. Since all congregations are impermanent in nature, even though we are together for a time, eventually we will depart from one another. In a busy market, thousands of people from many places may collect at one time, but after completing their business, they return home. When great masters teach, no matter how many tens or hundreds of thousands of disciples gather from all over the world, at the conclusion of the teachings, everyone sets out for home. Meeting is always followed by parting.

When we get together with relatives and friends, we feel happy. Gathering naturally leads to departing, however, and when that occurs, we may feel quite miserable. This is the nature of samsara. Joining together brings suffering as well as happiness. Do not consider the gathering of those you love to be permanent; it will inevitably end with leave-taking. Not clinging too much to the meeting, we face less difficulty upon parting. Being overly attached brings about immense suffering or disappointment at the time of separation. Conditioned phenomena work like that.

Parents, relatives and couples who delight in each other's company might suddenly experience a death or another unexpected unhappy event that forces an early and involuntary departure. People who gather due to past karma or other causes can, without warning, be separated at any

moment by death or other swiftly changing circumstances. Whether we are together for a day, a month or a year, we should avoid anger and fighting and should care for each other with love and affection. Padampa Sangye admonished:

*Families are as impermanent as a crowd on market day;
People of Tingri, don't argue or quarrel!*

Couples meet due to past karma, but coming together is subject to change so there is no guarantee that they will live together for a long time. Couples and friends encounter each other like a crowd at a market and their time together is uncertain. We should learn to experience the happiness of being together, without clinging to it. Too extreme attachment to the joy of remaining with family and friends causes unbearable torment at the time of death. Although the pangs of separation are excruciating, those you love cannot follow you into death. The misery caused by clinging will cause you to forget to pray to your lama when dying. The pain of feeling that leaving loved ones is intolerable can keep even good practitioners from thinking of Dharma at the time of death. Avoid too much attachment to the temporary joy that comes from being together; gatherings have no permanency or stability.

Steer clear also of hatred, harsh speech or fighting, and care for your companions with love and affection. Such kind attention when people are together brings happiness, and if we prevent ourselves from clinging too hard to this pleasure we will evade the severe torment separation can bring. By understanding that loved ones are like people at a temporary gathering who can be separated at any time, you will neither fight with each other nor experience excessive clinging. This approach forestalls great pain on parting. We cannot always remain together; we must leave each other sooner or later. Being able to separate without any suffering is the best. The sorrow arising from difficult farewells is unnecessary. Prevent extreme attachment from taking you over.

IMPERMANENCE AND DETACHMENT

All buildings that are constructed are bound to collapse. Cities and monasteries that were previously prosperous and extensive are empty and abandoned. Where formerly their careful owners lived, birds and mice now make their nests. Thus, even the three story central temple at Samye, constructed by miraculously emanated builders during the reign of King Trisong Detsen and consecrated

by the Second Buddha of Orgyen, was destroyed by fire in a single night. The Red Mountain Palace of the Dharma King Songtsen Gampo rivaled the Mansion of Complete Victory on the summit of Mt. Meru, but now not even a foundation stone remains. What is the point then of cherishing our own cities, houses and monasteries, which are just like insects' nests?

Whatever is constructed is impermanent; eventually all buildings fall to pieces. Developed cities are considered successful; flourishing monasteries have growing numbers of temples and dormitories. But one day, these too will collapse, and we will find only ruins in a once prosperous region. Anything that is built is bound to fall apart until nothing but the name remains. Our towns and monasteries are petty and weak compared to the temples and palaces of King Trisong Detsen and King Songtsen Gampo. Why should we cling to them? Patrul Rinpoche recommends the way of the early Kagyu masters, and the four basic aims of the Kadampas:

*Turn your back on your fatherland,
Accept another's homeland,
Live at the base of a rocky cliff,
Take wild animals as your companions,
Abandon concern for food, clothing or renown.*

*Root your mind in the Dharma,
Root your Dharma in humility,
Root your humility in the thought of death,
Root your death in an empty valley.*

From the bottom of your heart, think that you must accomplish these four roots of final liberation of the Kadampa elders.

Kagyü masters of old left home for solitary places with no companionship, and aimed to die alone in remote areas with no disturbances. We should likewise focus on the sublime Dharma rather than the eight worldly concerns. While practicing, we should strive to sacrifice money, wealth and prosperity to embrace the life of a mendicant who has abandoned all worldly activities. A yogi's mind should always be focused upon death, and while mindful of death, a practitioner should stay in empty places, caves or solitary mountains. Kagyü and Kadampa masters practiced like this in the past and attained high levels of accomplishment. Following their example, we must vow from the core of our hearts to accomplish our practice perfectly.

Hearing about the impermanent nature of all things, from time to time

a mind detached from worldly phenomena will spontaneously arise, and you will feel ready to let go of the good things of life. This mere experience, however, is not enough for complete renunciation. This is an incomplete mind of renunciation, as weak as a hair. When such a feeling wells up within you, do not immediately act on it and leave all worldly things behind; you may not be perfectly resolute. On the other hand, if even after careful consideration you repeatedly have strong thoughts of renunciation, you can act accordingly since your mind is resolved. Strong resolve will enable you to accomplish your Dharma practice perfectly. People often experience the wish to abandon the world when hearing teachings on the four thoughts that turn the mind toward Dharma. Acting too quickly and forsaking the world without a firm resolution, one's mind can change after a while and attachment to worldly things can grow greater than before. To achieve complete renunciation, always contemplate deeply on practicing Dharma one-pointedly.

People with high positions and courageous powerful leaders also do not last forever. Impermanence even results in the rulers of nations sometimes being prosecuted and sent to prison. Maintaining a powerful position is never certain. Warriors with mighty armies that can destroy their opponents are impermanent as well; ultimately they may be attacked and killed. Patrul Rinpoche mentions the universal king Mandhatri, who not only had power over humans living in the desire realm, but because of his past good karma even reigned over the gods. Asuras – the demi-gods – are always fighting the gods and each other, and he could even defeat them. Mandhatri's karma gave him the temporary power that won him his achievements. Yet his attainments were impermanent, and ultimately he fell to earth and died without satisfying his ambitions. No one with power and authority can maintain this position forever, so what is the use of such transitory power? Worldly position and power are neither stable nor permanent. Only the state of enlightenment is beyond being diminished or spoiled. Therefore, Patrul Rinpoche exhorts us:

Determine that you must accomplish the state of perfect buddhahood, which can never degenerate or decay, and is worshipped by all sentient beings, including the gods.

Enemies are also impermanent; no single enemy can harm you throughout all your rebirths. An enemy now could later become a friend. Circumstances can cause current relatives and friends to become enemies. Patrul Rinpoche tells a story about this:

One day while on his alms-round Arhat Katyayana encountered a householder with a child on his lap. The man was happily eating a fish and throwing stones at a female dog that was trying to reach the bones. Wondering about the karmic cause of all this, Katyayana saw with his clairvoyance that the fish the man was eating had been his own father in that very lifetime, and the bitch had been his mother. An enemy he had killed in a past life was reborn as his son, to pay the karmic debt for the life he had taken. Katyayana cried out:

*Eating his father's flesh, he beats his mother
And holds on his lap an enemy that he killed.
A wife chews upon her husband's bones.
I laugh to see samsara's show.*

Since samsaric phenomena have no stability, firmness or essence, friends and enemies are never permanent. Without clairvoyance to identify the rebirths of our parents, relatives and friends after they pass away, we cannot even know whether our parents have been reborn as our enemies. We should therefore avoid having too much attachment toward those we love and too much aversion toward those who harm us. We should not nourish intense anger and enmity toward our adversaries. Friends now will not always be friends, and enemies will not be enemies forever. We can see this within our own lives.

Even in a single lifetime, sworn enemies can become amiable friends. They could become close relatives, even more compatible than others. Parents and siblings, on the other hand, may harm each other out of ill feeling over some minor possessions. Husbands and wives or intimate friends can separate over unimportant matters, and even kill each other. Since friendship and enmity are totally impermanent, remember again and again to care for everyone with love and compassion.

Attached to friends and averse to enemies, we do not presently consider everyone equal. Enemies are not everlasting, however, so we should never harbor bad feelings toward them; nor should we cling too strongly to our friends, as they also do not last. Aim to consider that every sentient being has been your parent. Look at all beings as friends and relatives and cultivate love and compassion for all, including those who cause you harm. Patrul Rinpoche continues:

Both joyful times and situations of suffering are impermanent. Many begin life with good fortune and happiness, and later on experience

poverty and difficulties. Others begin in suffering and end with well-being. Some have begun life as paupers and later become kings. Many such reversals of fortune have occurred, as with Milarepa's aunt and uncle, who hosted a happy feast for their daughter-in-law in the morning, while later that day their house fell to pieces, bringing on sorrowful wailing.

When Dharma brings hardships, no matter what kinds of suffering you might have to undergo, like Jetsun Mila and the victorious ones of the past, in the end, your happiness will be unmatched.

Dharma practitioners often undergo many hardships in the early part of their lives, but later experience happiness and bliss. They will be content at the time of death, in the intermediate state and in their next lives. Their happiness can keep increasing, while for worldly people, joy and misery change constantly. Someone beginning to study and practice will often undergo difficulties, but satisfaction comes later. Practitioners are happier later in life than earlier, and happier still at the time of death. Greater joy is found in the intermediate state and the happiness of the next life is even superior to that. The victorious ones of the past bore unthinkable misery to practice Dharma. Milarepa, for one, underwent enormous physical hardships at Lhodrag Marpa's place. Later he attained a high level of accomplishment, however, and achieved ultimate happiness. Despite facing many initial difficulties, when practitioners experience the fruit of Dharma, they attain the ultimate bliss and become content.

On the other hand, Patrul Rinpoche warns:

While the luxuries gained by nonvirtue might bring temporary contentment, in the end this will lead to nothing but limitless suffering.

People may gain pleasure early in their lives from wealth gained by nonvirtuous means, but material goods can be used up and suffering results when the assets are exhausted. In addition, the nonvirtue committed to amass a fortune also ripens, bringing more misery. Happiness can never be achieved through improperly gathered riches. In this world no wealth is ever accumulated without some nonvirtue but the seriousness of the unwholesome actions committed to prosper differs. While butchers slaughter animals to make money, people in business employ various tricks to deceive others and increase their profits. If the wealth accumulated by nonvirtue, hardship and abuse is used for virtuous purposes such as donations to the poor and destitute or offerings to the Three Jewels, this both helps you and

also benefits others who connect with your good actions. Otherwise, even though you enjoy your wealth while you are young, ultimately you will attain not happiness but only infinite torment. Patrul Rinpoche relates the following story as an example:

Fortune and sorrow are totally unpredictable. Long ago in the kingdom of Aparantaka there came first a rain of grain lasting seven days. After that clothing rained down for another seven days and then a rain of precious jewels fell for seven days more. Finally a rain of earth fell, burying everyone. After death, the inhabitants were reborn in the lower realms. Thus are happiness and suffering impermanent.

Virtuous actions brought the first beneficial rains, but the final rain of earth resulted from accumulated nonvirtue. Material well-being is the fruit of generosity, a virtue. When wealth is being amassed, however, many unwholesome actions are used to increase it. Genuine good fortune comes from past generosity, but in this life acquiring riches requires that one engage in considerable nonvirtue, which brings nothing but infinite suffering. In Aparantaka, after the fruit of past good actions had ripened in rains of grain, clothing and precious jewels, past bad actions brought in a rain of earth that killed everyone. Prosperity is uncertain. Therefore, we should leave behind our attachment to this life's happiness.

Without clinging to hope and fear about impermanent happiness and suffering, and without trying to control it, leave behind the comfort, happiness and well-being of this life like a droplet of spit.

Avoid attachment to happiness because it is transitory. Experiencing happiness early in life means you will experience unhappiness later. Although you were joyful last year, this year you suffer. If you had a good time last month, this month you will be miserable. Some individuals become very proud, thinking that the contentment they experience is beyond change and impermanence. In fact, happiness is never permanent or stable. People experiencing difficulties feel this is inappropriate and are bitterly disappointed. Do not think like this; misery is also impermanent. One who is sad early in life later experiences joy. If you suffered last year, this year will be better. Neither misery nor contentment is ever stable. Never grasp at them as permanent; do not be too hopeful of pleasure or fearful of pain. Clinging to happiness leads to unbearable torment when the happiness ends and suffering arises. If we avoid too much attachment to good fortune, we will be less upset by change and will suffer less when our well-being ends. Have no more attachment to worldly prosperity than to the spit in your

mouth. Contemplate its impermanent and essenceless nature and be able to let it go at any point.

IMPERMANENCE AND DHARMA PRACTICE

For the sake of the Dharma, bear hardship with courage, sincerely resolving to follow in the footsteps of the victorious ones of the past.

As Patrul Rinpoche says, determine to practice Dharma. First listen to and contemplate the teachings. Rely upon your spiritual master and persevere in practice, regardless of the physical and mental hardships you are bound to undergo. Decide that you will bear whatever adversities arise. After studying and reflecting, practice meditation and endure the physical and mental difficulties that entails. Our teacher, Shakyamuni Buddha, spent six years in rigorous meditation by the Nairanjana River with only a bit of water and a few grains of rice for sustenance. This story reveals the enormous effort required to practice the Dharma. In ultimate truth, Lord Buddha attained buddhahood primordially and had no need to go through the hardship of doing without enough food and water. He practiced like this to show sentient beings that we must struggle with perseverance and bear adversity to practice Dharma. One who can do so is following the way of the past buddhas, treading the same path they traversed. Resolve from the core of your heart to act accordingly.

Excellence and inferiority are also impermanent. In worldly life, you may be learned and eloquent, intelligent and clever, strong and alert, but at some point those qualities will decline. When the merit you accumulated in the past is exhausted, wrong thinking develops and whatever you do fails. People criticize you and you suffer; you are scorned and insulted. Whatever slight advantages you once had are used up and you end up having nothing.

Many who were once considered uneducated and thoughtless, or cheats and liars, acquire comfort and wealth. A proverb states, "Aging frauds become leaders." Others come to trust them and they are thought to be excellent people. On the religious side as well, it is said, "Old yogis take up studies, aging renunciates gather wealth, and elderly religious teachers become heads of families."

People's life situations are extremely impermanent. Past good karma brings out the worldly qualities of being learned and eloquent, intelligent and clever, strong and alert. The words of learned and eloquent people are taken

seriously and followed, but once this karma has ripened into the fruit of these qualities, the merit is exhausted and the qualities eventually diminish. At that time, negative emotions arise. These feelings should be avoided.

Some so-called practitioners, instead of studying scriptures during their youth, emphasize the importance of meditation and only try to meditate. Because they failed to study, however, they do not know how to meditate properly. Despite many years of strict practice in enclosed hermitages, they have no spiritual experience or realization, and no qualities of the path arise. When they become old, they finally feel the need to study. This is called the study of an old yogi.

We should plan our lives as follows: When young, we should focus on study rather than practice. When old, we should primarily practice and not study. As youths, our minds and intellect are smart; we should use them for this purpose. Reaching fifty to sixty years of age, our minds dull and are less suitable to study or gather knowledge. Our sense organs degenerate. We should reflect upon whatever meaningful knowledge we gained through our earlier study, and practice meditation. If we succeed in meditating until the time of death, the practice can enable our minds to rise directly to the level of Dharmakaya or if not, to the nature of Sambhogakaya during the intermediate state. Even if that does not happen, we can be born in a pure realm of one of the five buddha families. We should be certain to use our meditation practice to help ourselves at the time of death. Trying to meditate when young, and study when reaching old age is a mistake. Without meditation, listening and contemplation cannot lead us to single-pointed concentration. The practice at the time of death must come through meditation.

People who give up interest in all worldly activities early in life may at the end strive to hoard wealth and provisions. Others at a young age become teachers explaining the Dharma but end their lives as hunters, thieves or robbers. Scholars and teachers who started out keeping all the monastic vows may in old age father many children, and so on. Other people may in their youth commit only nonvirtuous actions, but later on do nothing but practice the pure Dharma. They either attain accomplishment or, even if not, by being on the path at the time of death they at least achieve a higher birth.

When young, some people appear to lack all attachment to money and wealth, acting as though they had already attained accomplishment and renounced all desire for worldly prosperity. Without having achieved in-

depth certainty, however, despite their temporary detachment, grasping will later arise. In order to abandon worldly things, one must realize with certainty the essenceless nature of attachment. A person may pretend to be detached for a while, but not for his or her entire life. Eventually, clinging will arise and he will become someone who garners wealth.

In contrast, consider Jetsun Milarepa. He began adult life by wreaking serious harm on many sentient beings, producing hailstorms, killing people through sorcery and so on. Later, however, he greatly persevered in Dharma practice, and ultimately attained accomplishment in one lifetime. Although you might not achieve such a result, even without being introduced to the nature of mind or practicing phowa at the time of death, it is possible to enter the path without depending on others. Reaching this level is itself noteworthy; some people, bypassing rebirth in hell, are born in pure lands or higher rebirths within samsara.

Therefore, whether at present someone seems to be good or bad is just a momentary appearance with no permanence or stability at all. A partial sense of renunciation and disenchantment could be born within you, so that you superficially undertake Dharma practice. Other worldly people might consider you very good, and when patrons and students lift you off your feet, unless you examine your own mindstream in detail, you could think you are like that and become swollen with arrogance. Appearances become confused and you develop the thought that you can do whatever you want. In fact, you have been deceived by negative forces.

Sometimes when a disciple hears teaching on the essenceless nature of samsara, he or she feels slightly disenchanted with worldly life – without the feeling being stable. Generally, we consider people whose thoughts waver a lot to be indecisive or irresolute. Without a genuine mind of renunciation, Dharma practice will not be heartfelt, but only an imitation or appearance. Nevertheless, ordinary people may see this supposed practice, consider it good and shower praise, calling the disciple a true renunciate and a genuine practitioner. They may come forward to become patrons and offer their wealth. With great respect, these followers will call their “lama” a great practitioner and serve him. But if the mind of renunciation is not authentic and the practice is false, when people pay respect, the mind will be inflated with more pride than before. Such things do not happen to true practitioners, those who have generated genuine renunciation.

You must examine yourself to determine whether you have qualities that deserve respect and service from others. When patrons offer wealth,

consider whether you are worthy of their offering. To accept donations you should have certain scholarly or masterly qualities. Do you have those qualities? Without probing yourself, service and respect from others can lead you to feel you are really extraordinary and your mind becomes full of pride. You start thinking that you are a quite remarkable person who can do whatever you want.

These days many religious people, whether they are lamas, *tulkus*,⁹⁸ *khenpos*⁹⁹ or ordinary monks, go to foreign countries, especially Taiwan. Except for a few authentic teachers – practitioners who through contact can make life meaningful – most are not genuine. As they are well-known and everyone can recognize their true nature, they do not find sponsors or disciples who respect them in India and Nepal. Therefore, they go elsewhere and pretend to be true practitioners.

People cannot always analyze and distinguish between false and authentic practitioners. They become patrons and offer wealth that they themselves did not even dare to enjoy. The disciples consider whatever their lamas say as their *samaya* and follow them reverently. At that time, the “teachers” begin to feel that they really are great and develop more pride than ever. This arrogance can lead to disrespecting the masters from whom they received teachings, so they begin to speak ill of them, belittling and backbiting. Having been completely deceived by demons, they come to feel superior to their own teachers and speak of their superiority to others. If such episodes had happened in Taiwan during his time, Patrul Rinpoche would have mentioned them. Since similar situations did occur in Tibet, he gives his warnings here.

Root out ego-clinging and arouse the wisdom of egolessness. Until you attain the level of a noble bodhisattva, there is no stability to appearances of good and bad. Constantly meditate on death and impermanence. Analyze the faults of your own mindstream, and always keep to the lowest place. Cultivate renunciation and disillusionment with the world. Train yourself to become peaceful, disciplined and conscientious.

The state where self-centered beliefs and thoughts never arise is called the “exalted” state. When the wisdom of egolessness – the wisdom that sees the emptiness of self and phenomena – is aroused, the bodhisattva level has been reached. At that level, as the “Way of the Bodhisattva” teaches: “When one treads from happy to happier states, is there any sensible person

98 Incarnate lamas.

99 Monastic scholars.

who will feel discouraged?” After attaining the first bodhisattva level, even one born in the hell realms will see them as pure realms, and take birth in hell with no fear or anxiety – like a swan swimming happily in a lotus-filled lake. For such a being, every appearance is pure and good, and beyond change and impermanence.

Until reaching the level of a sublime bodhisattva, however, you remain an ordinary being for whom positive and negative karma is still accumulated. Both positive experiences and the appearance of suffering due to bad karma continue. If you become rich, think: “Is there essence to this wealth? Earlier I was not rich, but past good karma has led to prosperity. When the positive karma is exhausted, the wealth will naturally also come to an end. Riches and prosperity have no essence, nor do position and status, respect from others, and the like. These conditions never last and have no more essence than a hair.” Always reflect on life’s impermanence. You may not have time to enjoy your wealth. No one can guarantee that you will not die today. Understand that amassing wealth and honor has no essence. Wonder why people respect you. “I have no scholarly qualities or signs, no experience or realization. I have plenty of attachment, hatred and ignorance. As for virtuous qualities, no difference can be found between me, who is respected, and the person who respects me. If I think about my negative qualities, I may be worse than they are.” By contemplating like this, you will not feel proud when people believe you to be worthy of respect.

One who is overwhelmed by the respect and wealth offered by others, feeling that he might be someone special with the qualities of a scholar or an accomplished practitioner, becomes ever more proud and arrogant until he engenders disrespect and lacks reverence for even the root master who has given him teachings. The Secret Mantra teaches that developing this kind of mind causes the most serious of all violations of samaya: opposing one’s root teacher. For those with faith in the words of the victorious Vajradhara, this is the complete cause for being born in Vajra Hell. Such a thought, the root of unhappiness in this and the next lives, arises only with the blessing of the demons.

Nothing other than demonic power can directly cause someone to consider himself superior to his lama. To avoid such a thought, meditate on impermanence and reflect on your faults. Be humble and take the lowest seat, thinking that no one is inferior to you or has less knowledge. If we reflect carefully, we haven’t reached such a high level. Were we superior beings, we would be able to attain the bodhisattva level or at least the path

of accumulation¹⁰⁰ when we generate the samadhi of the stream-of-dharma. At this level, we should be able to directly see and listen to the teachings of the buddhas of the ten directions. Have we achieved this? If we cannot easily meet an authentic master, then how could we manage to see the buddhas? Be certain that you have not a single quality of the path. Once you think of yourself humbly, you will not feel proud. Arrogance will never arise if you constantly maintain an unassuming nature. People become conceited by considering themselves to be superior.

Always examine your body, speech and mind. Notice whether or not your actions accord with the Dharma, whether your speech accords with the Dharma, and whether your thoughts accord with Dharma. Do covetousness and harmful intentions arise in your mind or do you find only virtuous thoughts? Scrutinizing your three doors enables you to abandon nonvirtue and to strive to transform all actions of body, speech and mind into virtuous ones. Being peaceful and disciplined does not mean being physically inactive, but abstaining from nonvirtuous actions. A peaceful and disciplined body means one's actions of body are virtuous. This applies in the same way to peaceful and disciplined speech and mind. Conscientiousness means being careful about what actions to adopt and what to discard.

Patrul Rinpoche continues:

Contemplating the impermanence of all compounded phenomena and the suffering of samsara, develop a constant feeling of grief.
Jetsun Milarepa sang:

*In a rocky cave in an unpeopled place
I am never free from sorrow.
Lama, Buddha of the three times
I never stop yearning for you.*

Suffering pervades all six realms of existence. Develop sorrow on contemplating these realms. This sadness leads to a desire for liberation from samsara. Melancholy feelings facilitate thoughts of renunciation. Weariness for samsara follows upon unhappiness. One who develops a sense of heartfelt grief at the thought that all compounded things are impermanent and fleeting, and that samsara is pervaded by suffering is a true practitioner. Misery cannot be escaped until samsara is abandoned.

Always remember the qualities and kindness of your lama; this will clarify

100 One of the five paths. The five paths are: path of accumulation, path of preparation, path of seeing, path of meditation, and the path of no-more-learning.

your mindstream with yearning and faith in your teacher, embodiment of the buddhas of the three times. One with this faith is a true practitioner. By maintaining this attitude Jetsun Milarepa achieved a high level of accomplishment. He did not attain this through attachment to samsara or a perverted view of his master. Even when living alone in solitary retreat, a practitioner must contemplate the essenceless nature of samsara with deep sadness, while generating faith, respect and reverence to his or her root guru, remembering his qualities and kindness. Kindness here is not the giving of food or clothing; in spiritual terms this is not even considered benevolent although it is thoughtful in a worldly way. Spiritually, the lama's kindness refers to his or her generosity in showing us how to generate virtue and abandon nonvirtue, how to develop renunciation as well as bodhicitta, and especially his kindness in introducing the view of looking at one's mind as primordially enlightened.

Worldly parents, gods and sages cannot show such munificence. Some kindness can require many years whereas introducing the nature of mind may be done in a mere hour, but is nonetheless an act of supreme compassion. The time factor is irrelevant. If such sincere concern brings forth within you qualities of the levels and paths of liberation and enlightenment, it is great kindness. Think like this when remembering your lama's generosity and you will not lose faith, reverence and respect; simply remembering his or her name will bring tears to your eyes. Strive wholeheartedly to generate faith in your lama.

Maintain this experience constantly. Since your momentary thoughts are also impermanent, you cannot know how they may change. A man known as Gelong Thangpa the Practitioner had turned to the Dharma after his relatives became his adversaries. Gaining control of his energy and mind, he could fly through the sky. One day, when a large flock of pigeons gathered to eat the offerings he had made, he thought, "If I had an army of that size, I could finish off my enemies." Because he did not take this negative thought onto the path, he later returned to his homeland and took command of an army.

In the same way, although you might superficially have achieved some experience of the Dharma thanks to your lama and virtuous friends, the feelings of ordinary people do not last. Thus, beginning from today free yourself with the Dharma. Resolve to practice throughout your entire lifetime.

By reflecting on the meaning of these many examples, you will achieve certainty that from the highest peak of existence down to the lowest

hells, nothing has the slightest permanence or stability. Everything is subject to transformation, change, increase and decline.

We must maintain the experience of faith and renunciation. Gelong Thangpa did not attain supreme accomplishments but only common accomplishments.¹⁰¹ Such a negative thought as his would never occur in one who attained the supreme accomplishments. Until attaining the bodhisattva levels, the feelings of faith and renunciation that arise for practitioners never last; therefore we must always employ mindfulness and vigilance. Since everything changes, a time inevitably comes when we feel mentally tired. When you achieve something good, do not cling to the positive feelings that arise since they will eventually change; when you suffer, do not fight against it since misery also changes. No worldly phenomena – good or bad – ever last since they have no stability or permanence. Hence, whatever positive or negative things happen, learn to consider them all without differentiating or distinguishing among them. That is the fruit of reflecting on impermanence.

CONTEMPLATING THE UNCERTAINTY OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF DEATH

Although from the moment of their birth death is certain for all human beings of this world, the manner of death, the circumstances of death and the time of death are uncertain. The time and place, how and from what you will die are indefinite.

Every human being born on the Jambudvipa continent will certainly die. No one escapes; once born, we are bound to die although the exact circumstances are uncertain and unpredictable. We die of different causes and in various situations: some while talking, some while eating or walking on the road. Some people who are healthy and not plagued by demons die from injuries caused by weapons, or from sudden calamities of the four elements, such as being burned by fire, being carried off by water or falling from precipices. Some die in conflict and others from poison or disease. Hence, how we die differs even though we share the certainty of death in common. Death occurs in innumerable and unfathomable ways.

Everything can be a cause of death; even things that sustain us or promote life can cause death. Food, medicine and health care are all possible causes

101 *siddhi* (Skt), *ngos grub* (Tib). The common accomplishments refer to the best aspects of worldly concerns, and the supreme accomplishments are those that transcend worldly concerns.

of death. While food is usually considered a cause of staying alive since a lack of food leads to death, many people nevertheless die from overeating or eating the wrong food. Others die because of taking the wrong medicine. Thus food and medicine, which usually promote life, can lead to death.

Just as the causes of death are uncertain, so too is the time of death. Were it fixed, we could plan accordingly. If human beings never died before reaching sixty years old, those aged ten, fifteen, twenty or thirty could say they had fifty, forty-five, forty, or thirty years remaining; they could gradually make plans for death and practice the Dharma that helps when dying. The time of death is completely unpredictable, however; some humans die in the womb, others while being born, still others during childhood or youth, and some when aged. These days, most humans in this region of the world live no longer than sixty. Some may live for seventy or eighty years but many die very young. When Lord Buddha came to this world, people lived for one hundred years. Over twenty-five hundred years have passed since then and human lifespan has decreased. People who live for more than ninety or one hundred years are rare, and many die before reaching the average lifespan. We must understand the uncertainty of both the time and the manner of our death.

Although we know that we will die one day, we feel that we will not die now; not for another twenty, thirty, or even forty years. We feel young and healthy, with no demons tormenting us. We should remember, however, that when the Twin Towers were destroyed in New York, over three thousand people died at once. No one who died on that day expected it. Had they known they would die, they would not have gone to work. Thinking they would live for twenty to thirty more years, they died within a few hours. Despite the unpredictability of death, we do not truly realize its uncertainty and feel we will not die right now. This is illogical.

We are the impermanent within the impermanent. Patrul Rinpoche said that no matter who he looked at, he saw everyone – old and young alike – as just about to die. No one looked firm and permanent. Yet, when he considered how they were all thinking, it seemed that people always believed they were immortal and ever-lasting. Contemplating this, he felt sad and had no interest in becoming involved in worldly activities. He wished only to stay in solitary retreat in the mountains to practice until the end of his life.

We think of ourselves as permanent even while knowing that death is certain. This grasping deludes us; clinging to permanence, we do not

persevere in Dharma practice, but postpone it. Feeling that we can't practice this year, we vow to do so next year. When the next year comes, we find another excuse and postpone again. This continues and we discover no leisure to practice the Dharma that can help us at the time of death. One day death strikes and our lips pale from physical and mental pain. We remember our lama and the Three Jewels and want to do something to escape, but no time remains.

The suffering of death is so intense that we cannot eat or talk even if we want to. This torment cannot be compared with other pains. Undergoing such agony, we are fortunate to even remember the Three Jewels. Apart from this, as the pain overwhelms us we have no hope of practicing Dharma. A simple headache keeps us from practice. The anguish of death is far greater, so that even remembering the lama is difficult. Therefore, the right time to prepare for death is now when we are healthy and free from disease and demonic afflictions. Vow from this moment onwards to practice the Dharma that will protect you at the time of death. Do not be satisfied with promises but act so it happens. Resolve and then put your resolution into practice. Dreaming of becoming a king and ruling a country in the future will not make the dream a reality.

As the place of death is also uncertain, we have no idea where we will die – in India, Tibet or elsewhere. In fact, we have already been born and died all throughout the six realms of existence and the Jambudvipa continent. We have taken innumerable births, and they have occurred at different places. The place of birth and the place of death both change. We have taken countless births and have died countless times. How and in what situation we will die is completely unknown. In this world, the means of living are few and the causes of death limitless. Adequate food, clothing, medicine and health care are necessary to survive, and are not always available. Death has incalculable causes. Disease, weapons, demons, the four elemental forces and many other factors all bring about death. We are like lamps in a windstorm whose wicks can be blown out from any direction at any moment. Keeping them burning is the tricky part. The supports for life are very rare and one or another of the myriad causes of death will inevitably kill us. If food, clothing and other necessities cannot sustain us, we have no other means to employ. We are prone to death rather than life.

In this world the causes of life are few and the causes of death many.
The master Aryadeva points out:

*Causes of death are numerous;
Causes of life are few,
And even they may become causes of death.*

Fire, water, poisons, cliffs, savages, wild animals and the like – the causes of death are very many, but very few conditions support life. Even food, clothing and other things usually believed to sustain life sometimes become causes of death. Food could be poisoned, and even if not, something considered beneficial for the body could suddenly become toxic or could be unhealthy. In particular, these days many people crave meat and carelessly enjoy eating flesh and blood despite the diseases caused by blood-thirsty demons or old meat. Unhealthy eating habits also lead to tumors, phlegm disorders, edema, and innumerable other causes of death.

Except for the sublime Dharma, no true causes of life can be found on this earth. Tibetans had to contend with wild animals like tigers, leopards and various bears. In addition, many negative consequences could result from their food, since the staple diet included a lot of meat, heavy dairy products and salt.

Similarly, the search for wealth, fame and the like leads people to the battlefield, to face dangerous wild animals, to carelessly cross rivers and run many other risks that could cause their deaths.

People die before attaining what they wish, be it wealth, position, status or admiration. If we analyze deaths according to age, we find many young people dying these days. We generally feel that the old will die soon while youngsters still have time. Looking carefully, however, we see that – as the time of death is uncertain – old and young die equally.

In addition, because of the many different causes of death, the time of death is completely unpredictable. Some die in their mother's womb, some die when being born, and others just when they begin to crawl. Some die in the prime of youth, and others worn out by old age. Some die with no time for medicine or help to reach them. Some lie many years ill in their beds, their eyes watching the living, and die as mere skeletons covered in skin. Some die suddenly, while eating, or talking or working. There are many ways to die. Some even kill themselves.

In the midst of so many causes of death, the support for your life has little power, like a butter lamp in the wind. You cannot even be sure that you will not die unexpectedly right now, and that tomorrow you

will not be born as an animal with horns or tusks. Attain conviction that the time of your death is unknown and the place of your rebirth uncertain.

Generally, we care for our lives. Nevertheless, circumstances cause some people to carelessly commit suicide. If enemies kill us, we have no choice, but people also kill themselves. The conditions that sustain life are few and their potential is weak. Medicines do not always help those who suffer from life-threatening illnesses. Drugs cannot overcome death, nor can different food and a change of lifestyle keep us alive indefinitely. Good food and medicine can temporarily cure some serious illnesses but cannot help us when we are actually facing death. Very few escape death after being seriously attacked by weapons. We survive without dying for a very short time; our life is fragile like a candle-flame in the wind. The candle is burning now but with no guarantee that it will remain after the next gust of wind. We can be alive and walking on the road now but tomorrow be dead with pale lips.

We are humans now and are attached to this life form. If after death we were sure to be born as humans, we would not need to fear death, but this is not the case. Today we are humans with no horns; tomorrow we could be born with antlers. The duration of the intermediate state of the bardo is between a minimum of seven and a maximum of forth-nine days. After seven days, beings in the bardo die and take rebirth in other realms. Otherwise, they remain in the bardo. Bardo beings may not even live for seven days. Their lives could be shorter than that. Contemplate repeatedly the complete uncertainty of death and birth; generate fear. However, being frightened of death is pointless unless you diligently strive to practice the Dharma that benefits at the time of death. Resolve to start practicing genuine Dharma from today onward; engage in Dharma through the three doors of body, speech and mind.

CONTEMPLATING WITH INTENSE AWARENESS OF IMPERMANENCE

At all times and in all situations contemplate single-mindedly on death. Whether you are walking, sitting or lying down, say to yourself, "This is my last worldly action," and keep this strongly in mind.

Always remember impermanence. Clinging to permanence leads us to samsara and harms us when we face death by deluding us into believing that

we will not die soon and thus do not need to practice Dharma to help us when we are dying. Despite an eagerness to practice, attachment allows us to delay, planning to practice next year since we are too busy now. We still feel young and think we can practice when older. We indulge in indolence and procrastination, and when death strikes suddenly, we are left to die with great remorse and helplessness. Do not allow this to happen; always remember death.

Lord Buddha said: “Of all footprints, the elephant’s is the best, and of all objects of meditation, impermanence is the best.” The qualities of the levels and paths will naturally and gradually arise in someone who always contemplates impermanence. Such meditation brings all these qualities to fruition. Meditation in this context means deliberating on impermanence in sessions and breaks so that your thoughts focus on one point without distraction. Until this is possible, always remember death, no matter what you are doing.

When going to a different location, think, “I might die there and never return.” While you are on the way, or when you stop to sit down on a bench, think, “I could die right here.” Wherever you are, think that you could die in that place.

When you go to sleep in the evening, think that you might die during the night, so that it is uncertain whether you will wake up the next day. When you wake in the morning, consider that you might die during the day and that it is not sure whether you will be going to sleep at night.

When traveling, single-mindedly reflect on death so you feel you will never visit this place again since you might die first. When talking to a friend, think that you may never talk to him or her again because you could die. Going to sleep, think that you may never get up again in this life since you could die before waking and not see tomorrow. Think and talk like this. Contemplating in this way, you will always sense the empty nature and lack of purpose of all worldly activities. You will no longer desire to pursue worldly goals, and will experience the pointlessness of accumulating wealth, understanding that you may never enjoy it since death is inevitable and its time uncertain. With no opportunity to take pleasure in worldly prosperity, who except for bodhisattvas – always persevering for others’ benefit – would involve themselves in the world?

Whatever worldly activities we engage in – whether large or small – we are working to benefit ourselves and not others. Only bodhisattvas strive

solely for the sake of others. By naturally arousing the contemplation on the uncertainty of death, we will lose the desire for worldly activity, recognizing its essenceless nature. Then we actually experience the genuine thought of practicing the Dharma that will benefit at the time of death. Once practicing, you contact the joy of the practice. Thinking of death, fear arises; practicing the Dharma that surfaces out of our anxiety, we experience enormous joy within. When we perfectly devote one day to retreat, engaged in meditative concentration or mantra recitation, at the end of the day, we recognize the pleasure of having practiced the Dharma that brings relief when facing death. Sadness creeps in due to remembering death, but at the same time joy arises because of our successful practice. We realize that while we may not accumulate wealth and prosperity in this life, we have no regret since this does not help when we die. We will naturally understand the pointlessness of rejoicing over riches and bemoaning their lack.

Meditate on death alone, from the very depths of your heart. When the Kadampa Geshes of the past went to their beds at night, they thought they might not need fire the next morning and so did not preserve their embers under ashes. Likewise they turned their tea cups upside down.¹⁰² They constantly thought about death. Practice as they did. But only meditating on death is not enough.

In the old days, Tibet had neither cooking gas nor matches to make fire. The Kadampa Geshes thought they might not be alive the next day and so would not need a fire. We should practice in the same way. Only reminding ourselves of death again and again is not enough, but remembering death does create fear within us. Even birds both big and small fly away and seek escape when confronting dangers to their lives. They too dread death. If animals can shrink from death and try to flee, then of course we humans who can speak, listen and think will panic in the face of death. Everyone is terrified of death. However, ignorant beings – like some followers of Islam – believe they will be born in heaven when they die. Deceived by such a perverted path, they do not hesitate to sacrifice their lives. They are not really fond of dying, nor do they lack unease; they act as they do out of ignorance.

We Buddhists believe in the infallible law of cause and effect. If after death our five aggregates were destroyed like water drying up or a fire dying out, we would have no reason to fear death. This, however, is not the reality. After death, our physical continuum finishes but not our mental continuum. Just as the continuum of our consciousness has remained from

102 An indication that someone had died.

the time of our childhood until today, were we to die right now, our stream of consciousness would flow through the intermediate state of the bardo, and continue into the next life.

When we die, the continuity of our present physical form ceases; in the bardo we obtain a new form that resembles one of the six realms where we will be born. At death our present physical form is finished like water evaporating from a rock. When, after death, we are cremated or buried, the physical body of this life is gone but not the consciousness. As the sole foundation for all sensations of happiness and sadness, the consciousness continues to exist. Thus, we should fear death and seek to avert it. No one is happy to die, and fright is natural when contemplating death.

Merely thinking of death never helps us, however. We must practice the authentic Dharma that benefits when dying. The best practitioners attain enlightenment in one lifetime. If not, they can emerge in the nature of Dharmakaya at the moment of death, or they can rise in the nature of Sambhogakaya in the bardo. Otherwise, they will be born in the pure realms of the buddhas such as Sukhavati and will not again experience the six realms of existence. Birth in the pure realms of the Nirmanakaya buddhas signifies liberation from the six realms; beings live longer and have superior opportunities. In the pure realms beings receive teachings directly from Nirmanakaya buddhas and can practice the higher paths. This results from practicing Dharma, so always remember that you need to practice genuine Dharma and make this intention a reality.

Only the sacred Dharma will be of benefit at the time of death, so always maintain mindfulness and vigilance, understanding that all worldly activities are impermanent and without any essence.

Being “mindful” (*dran-pa*) means remembering to accumulate virtue and abandon nonvirtue, and also to always reflect on the true intent of the Dharma. “Vigilance” (*shes-zhin*) is repeatedly checking to see whether we are accumulating virtue, abandoning nonvirtue and practicing genuine Dharma. In short, mindfulness reminds us to practice Dharma and vigilance ensures that we are practicing. With these two, we learn to abandon engagement in worldly activities, and to prolong our habit of Dharma practice. The worldly activities of conducting business, farming or caring for our families lack essence, which means that these worldly activities can never be fully accomplished. Even should we succeed, success is brief. We will have no time to enjoy the accomplishment of our worldly pursuits. Reflecting in this way, all worldly activities are seen to be as essenceless as sand castles

built by children. These never last. The children become tired without accomplishing anything. Thinking thus, admonish yourself to practice.

This aggregation of body and mind is impermanent and on loan, so do not cling to it as your own.

The guest-like consciousness borrows the guest house-like body. Just as we may rent a house for anywhere from a day or two up to many decades, the guest-like consciousness remains in its guest house-like body for a few hours or days up to seventy or eighty years and then departs. A guest should not become attached to the guest house, and we should not hold on to our physical forms. We feel no clinging or attachment to borrowed rooms because we do not own them. Since the guest-like consciousness has merely borrowed the guest room-like body we should not cling to it.

The road you walk is impermanent, so aim your steps at the Dharma.

The Condensed Prajnaparamitra says, "If you walk with your gaze a yoke's length in front of you, your mind will not become confused."

Wherever you stay is impermanent, so keep the pure realms in mind.

Food, drink and other enjoyments are impermanent, so feed on meditative concentration.

Your sleep is impermanent, so purify the delusion into clear light.

Monk and nuns should walk looking mindfully at the ground in front of them. One who walks with a distracted gaze could mindlessly kill insects underfoot. Looking ahead mindfully, the mind will not be distracted and your steps will be directed toward the Dharma.

If you wish to be born in the Sukhavati pure realm you should visualize and remind yourself over and over of its distinct features. Amitabha is the buddha who resides in Sukhavati. Supplicate him, accumulate virtue, abandon unwholesome deeds, and with pure dedication and aspiration prayers dedicate all merit to rebirth in Sukhavati. The power of your positive actions and dedication will enable your birth in Sukhavati.

Practice being unattached to worldly food and drink while nourishing yourself on profound concentration to enhance the qualities of your realization. Nor should you be attached to the joy of sleep, which is also impermanent. At best, purify sleep's delusions into clear light so that you continue your meditation practice while sleeping, and actualize Dharmakaya during deep sleep. You can also transform sleep's delusion into the forms of

deities. Sleep is both deep and light. We do not dream during deep sleep, and should strive to actualize Dharmakaya at that time. When sleeping lightly, we dream; at that time, we should try to transform dreams into the appearances of deities.

What wealth you have is impermanent, so seek the seven treasures of the noble ones.

Close relatives, friends and families are impermanent, so in an isolated place, foster renunciation.

High rank and renown are impermanent, so always keep to a humble position.

Spoken words are impermanent, so foster the recitation of mantras and prayers.

As opposed to worldly wealth, the noble riches are faith, discipline, learning, generosity, conscientiousness, modesty and wisdom. We should renounce the higher rebirths of samsara and the status and position of great persons. Considering ourselves with humility because of our afflictive emotions, negative karma and faults is appropriate since this is the reality. "No one is lower than I. I am full of negative emotions and my knowledge is inferior." Thinking like this combats pride. Otherwise, believing that our qualities render us most knowledgeable or renowned, or give us a high status and position, pride immediately arises and will grow. The antidote to pride is to maintain a lowly position. This means recognizing your negative emotions and faults.

Gossip about those who live elsewhere, as well as other kinds of worldly talk, lacks essence and is also impermanent. A common saying is that having many diseases is better than talking a lot. Someone tormented by illness is himself harmed, but harms no one else. Sick people rarely cause disputes, while a talkative person spreads the news from the hills to the plains and back again. Although words are generally dry and in nature merely wind, if we think carefully, nothing is more powerful. Small words of abuse expressing the faults of others swiftly pierce the heart like an arrow and cause great pain. Words can hurt both the body and the heart. Insulting others brings oneself discomfort, and also offends them. Our words often cause harm, and are rarely used to benefit. We may speak for roughly twelve hours a day, and most of our talk is negative; for perhaps five or ten minutes we may speak with a good motivation.

Meaningless talk is idle gossip, considered one of the ten nonvirtuous

actions. The four nonvirtuous types of speech are lying, slander, harsh words and idle gossip. We may think that simple gossip harms no one if we are not speaking badly of others, but this is not true; idle gossip is also nonvirtuous. Therefore, strive to always limit your speech. Talking too much leads to much negativity, and devalues what you say. Speaking to others does not necessarily lead to recognition. Perseverance in the recitation of mantras and prayers, however, turns to virtue and is beneficial.

Faith and renunciation are impermanent, so persevere with strong commitment.

Concepts and thoughts are impermanent, so learn to be good-natured.

Sometimes we experience an impermanent faith and mind of renunciation. At one moment we might feel renunciation as well as faith; at the next we could again become attached to samsaric phenomena and lose our faith. How can we render our faith and the mind of renunciation firm? When we experience faith, we should make vows with firm determination; when the thought of renunciation arises within us, we should generate it repeatedly and solemnly pledge not to allow it to waver.

“Concepts” includes creating many thoughts and plans for the future, all of which are subject to change. Therefore, we must cultivate a generally good nature. When someone with a good nature studies, contemplates and meditates, all these activities will accord with Dharma. A bad natured person may study, contemplate or meditate but his activity could cause him to become an incorrigible practitioner who helps neither others nor himself. Developing a good nature is important. Renowned psychologists say that someone’s character or nature can be improved from the age of eight or nine to eighteen or nineteen. Education or training can be given at this time to change the character from bad to good. Below the age of eight, children cannot truly discriminate between good and bad. After twenty, the nature is difficult to transform. Seek to improve your own nature.

GAINING CONFIDENCE

Meditative experience and realization are impermanent, so continue until everything dissolves within the nature of reality.

At that time, the dividing line between birth and death is erased and you reach the confidence that is ready to die without regret. You have captured the throne of deathlessness and are like an eagle flying through the highest heaven. From that time on you need no longer

sadly contemplate the approach of death.

When we try to abide in rigpa, the nature of mind, we can sometimes succeed and sometimes not. This illustrates that our meditation is still transitory and unstable. When the realization of the path of joining arises within us, we attain the clarity of meditation, and our realization has some sort of stability. Otherwise, during the path of accumulation, meditation is not stable. When we can sometimes abide in meditation and sometimes not, our spiritual experiences and realizations lack firmness. We must continue until reaching the point where everything dissolves in the nature of reality. This stage precedes enlightenment and is the final of the four appearances. After this, the rainbow body of great transference can be achieved. This is called mastery over birth, or the light body, and indicates mastery over application of the teachings.

At that time, the link between death and rebirth dissolves and you reach the confidence that is completely ready for death. Normally, with birth there will be death; they go together. Reaching the state of the exhaustion of phenomena, when all appearance dissolves within the nature of reality, the connection between birth and death falls away. You will no longer fear death, but will be happy to die, knowing you will rise up in Dharmakaya and attain enlightenment at the moment of death. Having captured the throne of deathlessness, you are like an eagle free to soar through the heavens. Once the eagle learns how to fly, it achieves the confidence that it will not fall. Likewise, after achieving the secure seat of immortality, you are no longer subject to death. No more sorrowful meditation on your approaching death is needed, nor must you remind yourself of impermanence. As Jetsun Mila sang:

*For fear of death, I fled to the mountains.
Again and again I meditated on death's uncertain timing
And took the stronghold of the deathless unchanging nature.
Thus, I have turned away from all fear of dying!*

Milarepa ran to the mountains for fear of death. Meditating continuously on death's uncertainty, he captured the stronghold of the deathless unchanging nature and no longer feared dying. His disciple, the incomparable Dagpo Rinpoche taught:

At first, driven by the fear of birth and death, be like a stag escaping from a trap. Next, even if you die, have no regrets, like a farmer who has tilled his fields well. Finally, feel comfortable in your mind, like someone who has finished a great work.

At first, know you have no extra time, like a person struck by an arrow in a vital organ. Next, meditate with no other thoughts, like a mother whose only child has died. Finally, understand there is nothing to do, like a cowherd whose cattle have been driven off by enemies.

Until you have this understanding, you must meditate single-pointedly on death and impermanence.

Gampopa's advice was that initially, driven by terror of birth and death, we should abandon our homes and move to the mountains to practice like an animal fleeing a trap. Later, like an industrious farmer who has tilled his fields no longer worries, we should be happy and free from regret since we have persevered in Dharma practice. Finally, as someone who has finished a large undertaking can relax with pleasure, after practicing Dharma to the extent that we need not to fear death, we can feel reassured and cheerful, without anxiety about death.

One who begins reflecting on death has no time to relax, just as someone hit by an arrow immediately tries to remove it without wasting any time. Similarly, without resting you should strive hard in the practice of meditating on life's impermanence. Later, when practicing meditative absorption, practice with no distraction, like a mother who has lost her only child thinks of nothing but her child. As you gain experience in meditation, remain without wavering.

This teaching is about the need for diligence in the initial stages of Dharma practice. Persisting in practice, realization of the levels and paths will gradually come forth, until finally you are beyond all effort, like the shepherd whose flocks have been driven off leaving him with nothing to do. At that point, whether or not you meditate, the nature of reality remains unwavering. All physical movements become the *mudras*¹⁰³ of yidam deities; speech becomes their mantra; and thoughts are liberated in the essence of Dharmakaya. You will have passed beyond the state of deliberate effort and will remain in the great state of inaction.

The Buddha said:

By meditating repeatedly on impermanence, you make offerings to all the buddhas.

By meditating repeatedly on impermanence, you are relieved by all the buddhas.

By meditating repeatedly on impermanence, you are guided by all the

buddhas.

By meditating repeatedly on impermanence, you are blessed by all the buddhas.

Repeatedly reminding yourself of impermanence is a meditative training, and among all possible offerings to the buddhas, the offering of meditation practice is unsurpassable, pleasing the buddhas. Just as long, deep breaths temporarily ease the pain when we are tormented by immense suffering, the buddhas relieve from samsaric suffering those who persistently meditate upon impermanence. The buddhas also lead and bless them.

Just as of all footprints, the elephant's are the largest, of all the subjects of meditation for a Buddhist, contemplating impermanence is the greatest.

The idea of impermanence is the greatest meditation object for a Buddhist. The actual meditation practices of Madhyamaka, Mahamudra and Dzogchen are beyond perceptible meditation, and are called the "great meditation" or "non-meditation" because they have no focus. Of all subjective meditations, however, meditating on impermanence is the best. Other subjective meditations include visualizing yidam deities, meditating upon ugliness and decay, and so on.

ACCUMULATING MERIT

Lord Buddha taught in the Vinaya:

Rather than serving food and making offerings to one hundred of my disciples who are excellent vessels,¹⁰⁴ such as the monks Sariputra and Maudgalyayana, it is better to remember for one moment the impermanence of compounded phenomena.

Dharma practices vary. Serving lunch to monks is a practice that accumulates merit. Likewise, meditating on impermanence is Dharma practice. Which is more meritorious? The answer in Lord Buddha's infallible words is the latter. For those who don't know how to meditate on impermanence, offering food to the sangha is better than doing nothing and also brings merit. But those who can reflect upon impermanence should do so. If they abandon their meditation to offer food to the sangha, they are making the wrong choice, and are choosing a less meritorious action over a more meritorious one. Moreover, Lord Buddha was not talking about offering food to ordinary monks who simply know how to wear their robes;

104 Those able to properly receive and practice the teachings.

he was referring to Sariputra and Maudgalayana, who had attained the state of arhats. Rather than offering food to even such special individuals, someone who knows how to meditate should stay in his or her room and concentrate for an instant on impermanence.

We need to accumulate merit and should consider which method is the best. Differences are found among the virtuous actions that create merit. These differences have not been invented by ordinary individuals but were declared by Buddha Shakyamuni. Meditating is more meritorious than physical and verbal virtuous activities like making prostrations, circumambulating or saying prayers. All meditation creates merit, be it meditating upon the generation and completion stages, or practicing Dzogchen Trekchod or Togonal, but within meditation, practicing the luminous Dzogchen – meditation without signs – is more meritorious than practicing the generation and completion stages – meditation with signs.

Those who cannot accumulate in every possible way have no choice. Uneducated people, for example, cannot study, contemplate or meditate. Nor do they know how to practice generation and completion stage, or Dzogchen. They will know how to prostrate, circumambulate, and recite the six syllable mantra. Most reasonable for them is to perform the virtue they are capable of; this is much better than remaining idle. If we taught that they should abandon the less meritorious forms of practice and only meditate on the generation and completion stages or Dzogchen they would not know how. On the other hand, people with knowledge and experience of listening, contemplating and meditating on the generation and completion stages should practice meditative stabilization rather than physical and verbal actions. To discard the higher practices to perform lesser virtues thinking that prostration, circumambulation and visiting sacred places might be better as most people do this, is like abandoning the ocean for the water in the footprints of cattle. We must realize that differences exist in the extensiveness of merits. However we are able, we should always strive to accumulate as much merit as possible.

A lay practitioner once asked Geshe Potowa what was the most important single Dharma practice to undertake. Geshe Potowa answered:

As a single Dharma practice, meditating on impermanence is the most important. Meditating on death and impermanence is initially a cause for entering into the Dharma; next it is a condition that encourages spiritual practice; finally it is an aid in realizing the

sameness of all phenomena.

Again concerning meditating on impermanence: initially it is a cause for cutting through the fetters of this life; next it is a condition for reversing all attachment to samsara; finally it is an aid in entering the path to nirvana.

And again, meditating on impermanence is initially a cause for developing faith; next it is a condition for applying diligence; finally it is an aid to the arising of wisdom.

As you meditate on impermanence and it develops within your mindstream, initially it is a cause for searching for the Dharma; next it is a condition for practicing the Dharma; finally it is an aid to bringing the Dharma to completion.

As you meditate on impermanence and it develops within your mindstream, initially it is a cause for the growth of armor-like diligence; next it is a condition for applying diligence in your practice; finally it aids in developing irreversible diligence.

This teaching refers to Dharma practices with effort, in other words conceptual practices. Among the many practices with effort, meditating on impermanence is the best. This meditation leads to diligent practice, whereby the meditator does not take time even to eat or sleep. Ultimately, such a practitioner will realize the sameness of all phenomena – their empty nature – which is the realization of Dharmakaya. Therefore, meditating on impermanence is the best of all meditations with concepts. Meditation on impermanence quickly severs attachment to this life, enabling you to cast off all clinging to samsara, and finally leading you to the path of nirvana. After initially searching for the Dharma through listening and contemplation, you will go on to practice meditation. Those with faith, diligence and wisdom will reach the irreversible path. Armor-like diligence is a profound resolution, for example like vowing to stay in retreat for three years in order to practice the generation and completion stages. This particularly refers to motivation. Diligence in action is the actual practice that derives from the resolution. Irreversible diligence is to be unaffected by procrastination and distraction. Padampa Sangye gave the same teaching:

As impermanence is developed in your mind, at first it is a cause for entering into the Dharma; next, it acts as the whip of diligence; at the end, it brings the accomplishment of the luminous Dharmakaya.

IMPERMANENCE AS AN ANTIDOTE

Without developing in your mind a sincere conviction in the principle of impermanence, whatever efforts you make to learn and practice will simply make you more and more resistant to the Dharma.

Those who listen, contemplate and meditate can develop contempt for the Dharma if they lack a firm conviction in the principle of impermanence. Initially, someone who had not yet begun his *shedra*¹⁰⁵ studies could appear to be very humble. After beginning to study and accumulate some Dharma knowledge, he swells with pride and goes about with his head held high. A Tibetan proverb says some people are humble “like an ox with clipped horn tips.” Were the horns intact, the ox would hold its head up high with pride; it only appears meek when its horns are cut. Similarly, an ignorant person may look humble and take a lowly position. But once he or she receives some education in Dharma, instead of using the knowledge to tame his mind, the learning itself generates pride so that whoever has studied more exhibits more arrogance.

Padampa Sangye criticized the Tibetan practitioners of his day for failing to contemplate death:

Of the Dharma practitioners of Tibet I see none who think about death, but neither do I see any living forever. Are those in yellow robes who enjoy gathering riches trying to pay off the Lord of Death with food and wealth? They collect all the most valuable things. Will they secretly give out bribes in hell? Seeing these Tibetan practitioners, I have to laugh. Ha! Ha!

Those of great learning have great pride. Those who meditate well gather food and wealth. Those who live in solitude have a lot of entertainment. Those who have left their homelands have no shame. They are resistant to the Dharma and they enjoy nonvirtue. They see other people dying but do not understand that they will also die. This is their first mistake.

Padampa, an Indian, accused these practitioners of valuing wealth and renown more than the next life once they put on the robes of a monk. He complained that solitary hermits distracted themselves with inconsequential activities, and that renunciates who left their own homelands for other countries became shameless. Their primary mistake was neglecting to reflect on the impermanence of life, and thereby failing to realize that they too were subject to death. Patrul Rinpoche goes on to remind us that meditation

on impermanence is the prelude that opens the way to all practices of Dharma by recounting another teaching tale from Geshe Potowa. Asked for instructions on how to dispel adverse circumstances, Geshe Potowa answered as follows:

You should give a lot of thought to death and impermanence. When you are convinced that you will die, avoiding nonvirtue will not be difficult, and neither will practicing virtue be difficult. Next, meditate for a long while on love and compassion. When this has developed in your mind, it will not be difficult to act for the benefit of sentient beings. After this, meditate for a long time on emptiness, the natural state of phenomena. When this is established in your mind, purifying your confusion will not be difficult.

By focusing upon impermanence you will have no trouble engaging your body, speech and mind in virtuous actions like prostrations, circumambulation and so on in order to cleanse your negative karma. Therefore, this is the first step, and should be followed by training in love and compassion and, finally, meditating on emptiness, Madkhymaka, Mahamudra or the genuine Dzogchen practice of Trekchod. Once you practice Dzogchen, all your delusions appear as clear light and the essence of pure awareness, rigpa.

Patrul Rinpoche continues:

When the feeling of impermanence is born within the mind, attachment to all the activities of worldly life is reversed from deep within, as a person who is nauseous is repelled by greasy food.

People who are attached to this life spend their time engaged in worldly activities with body, speech and mind. Such individuals have no thought of impermanence within them. Their mistaken view of permanence leads to their great grasping in this life. Attachment keeps them busy accomplishing worldly goals with their three doors. Regardless of whether someone is a layperson or a monk, clinging to this life indicates a failure to realize impermanence and instead a strong grasping at permanence. By training the mind in the teachings on impermanence that Patrul Rinpoche presents so thoroughly, understanding will occur naturally. An effortlessly arising thought of impermanence keeps one from clinging to the appearances of this life.

Attachment derives from wrong notions of permanence; those who have internalized the realization of impermanence will naturally grasp less at samsaric phenomena such as wealth and prosperity, status and position, name and fame, and thus will not feel so compelled to strive for these worldly

things. Practitioners like this will rather feel disgust for worldly activity, no matter what people say about them. Just as people with liver disease are made ill by oily food, those who genuinely understand impermanence will abhor samsaric striving from the depths of their hearts and will think only of practicing Dharma. Thus, contemplating impermanence is the supreme of all conceptual meditations.

Patrul Rinpoche's lama, Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu often said:

I feel no desire for whatever status, powerful positions, wealth or glamour I find in this world. Seeing the life stories of the masters of the past, some small sense of impermanence has been born in my mind. I have no better instruction than this to teach.

My experience is the same. I have never envied people with high rank or power, or those who are wealthy and good-looking and who wear expensive clothes and precious ornaments. Nor do kings and leaders whose orders are unquestioningly carried out without any resistance arouse envy in me. Worldly things like beauty, money, wealth, prosperity, status and power simply do not attract me. On the other hand, when I consider the life stories of the past noble masters, I am filled with inspiration and wish to emulate them. This I feel is the fruit of training my mind and achieving an understanding of impermanence. As I mentioned earlier, those who are extremely attached to worldly things never consider that they will die one day. Failing to reflect on impermanence, they cling to permanence, an illogical or unrealistic idea that makes them feel they will live forever. On the contrary, training your mind in teachings that reveal the preciousness of human birth and life's impermanence enables you to gradually detach yourself from samsaric phenomena.

What is the perfect limit of training in the thought of impermanence? What is the thought process like when the mind is fully trained in impermanence? Patrul Rinpoche recommends emulating Geshe Kharak Gomchung, who trained his mind so that his thoughts led effortlessly to impermanence.

The measure of the development of impermanence in your mind should be like that of Geshe Kharak Gomchung who went to practice in the retreat of Jomo Kharak in the area of Tsang. At the entrance to his rock cave was a thorn bush that caught on his clothes. At first he considered cutting it, but then later he thought, "I could die here in this cave. I don't know if I will go back out again. It is better for me to practice virtue." Thinking like this, he didn't cut the bush.

When he left the cave, the same thing happened, but he thought, “I don’t know whether I will go back inside through this door again.” In this way he remained for many years until he attained a high level of accomplishment. When he left, the thorn bush was still uncut.

Like this geshe, once the thought of impermanence permeates your mind, you will no longer have any interest in carrying out worldly activities. For him, cutting the thorns was a worldly activity. As he was always meditating on impermanence, he thought only of practicing Dharma and not about worldly activities. He preferred to recite mantras, make prostrations or perform any of the many other virtuous actions instead of engaging in any worldly activity. Jigme Lingpa’s mind was also so deeply influenced by the thought of impermanence that he wanted only to practice Dharma. Patrul Rinpoche recounts:

Similarly, Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa stayed at a hot spring in the autumn during the time of the constellation of Rishi. There were no steps so going to sit in the water was very difficult. Someone asked about making steps, but Jigme Lingpa answered, “I don’t know if I will sleep here next year, so why take such trouble.” He always talked about impermanence, my master said.

Thus, we too, for as long as such a thought has not definitely developed in our minds, must practice.

Life is impermanent and death unpredictable both for people in high positions and lowly people like beggars with sticks. Money, wealth, and prosperity are always transient; everything that can be stored up is subject to exhaustion. Even the house in which we live – no matter how beautifully built – being impermanent, is bound to collapse one day. We must reflect just as Patrul Rinpoche advises. He has shown us the impermanence of the outer universe – the vessel in which we live, the impermanence of the inner beings living in the universe, the impermanence of those in positions of power like the god Brahma and other powerful mundane gods, as well as many methods of training our mind in impermanence. We need to meditate on this.

HOW TO MEDITATE ON IMPERMANENCE

Meditation in this context means reflecting again and again on the different aspects of impermanence. This is not non-conceptual or non-subjective meditation. Take whatever has been discussed as an example and apply the thought of impermanence to all worldly phenomena. Especially consider

as impermanent those phenomena to which you are intensely attached – family and friends, wealth and prosperity, status and position. This will help you gradually detach yourself from worldly things. This text is not difficult to understand since the teaching is applied to phenomena that are well within the reach of our thoughts, unlike the philosophy of Madhyamaka, Mahamudra or Dzogchen, which is an object of primordial wisdom, beyond our mundane thought and therefore extremely difficult to discern. Such teaching is quite challenging for our understanding. As Lord Buddha said, “The ambrosia-like truth that I have found is profound, peaceful, non-conceptual, luminous and uncompounded. No one will understand if I teach it.”

The subject of this text, however, is different. It is uncomplicated; based on what we see and hear, it is clear to our minds. Whether we absorb it depends upon how carefully we think. With thorough consideration, understanding is simple. We must take these teachings to heart. The method of applying them was already mentioned: we bring to mind the worldly phenomena to which we are most attached and reflect again and again on their impermanent nature in order to reduce our clinging. Whether or not we apply the thought of impermanence to things we are not attached to does not matter; what is crucial is applying this thought to objects of extreme attachment since it is these attachments that destroy us. Training the mind means contemplating over and over again in both meditation and post-meditation sessions. Patrul Rinpoche says:

At first you should generate bodhicitta. The main practice is to train in these different methods to work on your mind until the pure thought of impermanence is born within you.

Training in impermanence brings considerable merit as it is a thought that corresponds to phenomenal reality. In the *Catusataka*, noble Aryadeva said that even without realizing emptiness the simple thought that phenomenal reality might be empty will disintegrate samsara like a rotten cloth. Practicing Dzogchen and Unsurpassable Tantra¹⁰⁶ are also extremely meritorious because they accord with ultimate reality. Buddhist doctrine teaches that the more a practice corresponds to reality, the more merit results. The more a thought contradicts reality, the more harm it will bring. Grasping impermanent phenomena as permanent is false and contradicts reality, as does believing that selfless phenomena possess a self. This is the root of samsara.

While general Unsurpassable Tantra practice relates to the nature of reality, Dzogchen practice corresponds even more closely to phenomenal reality. Just as the higher practices are nearer to the reality of Dharma than the lower practices, their merits are also greater. One judges the virtue of a practice by determining how quickly it leads to liberation and enlightenment. A practice that does not bring forth liberation and enlightenment is in no way meritorious. What makes a practice virtuous is whether it helps one abandon samsara, attain nirvana, or achieve enlightenment swiftly. A person engaged in such practice receives greater blessings from the buddhas of the ten directions. Since contemplating impermanence is very much in harmony with reality, meditating upon impermanence is better than reciting mantras with little faith. While reciting mantras clearly or unclearly is said to make a thousand-fold difference, reciting mantras with or without meditative absorption makes a hundred thousand-fold difference since a mind in meditative absorption accords with the nature of reality.

Hence, believing that the virtuous activities of prostration, circumambulation and reciting the Vajra Guru or Mani mantras¹⁰⁷ are more meritorious than meditating on impermanence is mistaken. This thinking lacks sound reason. On the other hand, reciting mantras with the Secret Mantra view of seeing appearances as deities, sounds as mantras, and thoughts as the nature of Dharmakaya, carries more merit because it corresponds with the nature of reality. Otherwise, peacefully reflecting on impermanence in one's home is better than simply reciting mantras with little or no faith or, even worse, reciting with a distracted mind. If you cannot contemplate impermanence for lengthy meditation sessions, even devoting half an hour to an hour, or at least five to ten minutes daily brings great merit and will generate the qualities of the path and fruition. Since it is a meritorious Ngondro practice, you should cultivate the bodhicitta motivation before the actual practice. Khenpo Ngaga mentions this clearly in his "Notes on Kunzang Lama'i Zhalung."

First of all, do whatever you need before beginning to practice. Then, begin by exhaling your stale breath three times; first from the right, second from the left and the third from both. Exhale three or nine times while seeking to purify your negative emotions of attachment, hatred and ignorance. The air that passes mainly through the nostrils is called the karmic wind, and it functions as the "mount of mind." This karmic wind

107 Two of the most common mantras in the Tibetan tradition. "Om Ah Hung, Vajra Guru Padma Siddhi Hung" is Guru Rinpoche's mantra, and "Om Mani Padma Hung" is the mantra of Chenresig, the deity of compassion.

creates many different kinds of thoughts, especially thoughts of the three poisons. As soon as we cleanse this wind, we can temporarily subdue the gross level of the three poisons, even if we cannot completely uproot it. We must ensure that the gross level of the three poisons is not within us.

Next, we generate the mind of bodhicitta, the root of the Mahayana path. In addition, those who wish to practice the path of Secret Mantra should always begin the main part of their session with Guru Yoga. Visualize your root lama upon the crown of your head with great faith, devotion and respect. Think of him as the actual Buddha. Supplicate and imagine the lama dissolving into light that then dissolves into you. In this way, the lama's enlightened body, speech and mind become inseparable from your three doors. This should precede the actual practice of contemplating the preciousness of human birth, life's impermanence and so on.

We are here presenting the teaching upon impermanence, and the instruction is to first of all generate bodhicitta. As the main practice, train your mind in all the various ways mentioned above until impermanence really permeates your every thought. We must have the perfect thought of impermanence. Sometimes, when we hear the teachings on impermanence we experience their validity but then forget about them when we come into contact with worldly things. This indicates that the thought of impermanence has not been perfected within us. For example, we know that fire is hot, and this knowledge is stable; we will never think that fire is cold. If we could, in the same way, whenever we run across compounded samsaric phenomena, automatically and effortlessly realize their unstable, impermanent and essenceless nature, this would be the perfect thought of impermanence. We must practice until such a thought arises in us.

Beginning practitioners find it difficult to conclude their practice with the view without focus, so this is not shown in the main practice. A practitioner who does understand the non-conceptual view, however, should seal the main practice with such a view. For beginners, the main practice here is to employ various means to arouse the perfect thought of impermanence. To do so, one should generally understand that all conditioned phenomena are impermanent. In particular, recognize as impermanent those objects to which you are most attached. Some people are more desirous of money, wealth and prosperity; others to name and fame or status and position. Some are attached to women or men, and others to their parents, children or relatives. Since the mental dispositions of beings vary, we cannot assume that an object arousing desire in one person will arouse the same desire

in others. Consider well what it is that attracts you. See those objects as impermanent; this will help you become more detached yourself. Various means must be employed to generate the thought of impermanence naturally and without effort.

Patrul Rinpoche also teaches how to conclude the practice session:

Conclude by sealing with the dedication of merit. Practicing like this, you must exert yourself as much as you can to follow in the footsteps of the holy masters of the past.

At the end, recognizing that the virtue derived from meditating on impermanence greatly exceeds the merit accrued from prostrations, circumambulation or reciting mantras with little or no faith, seal the merit by dedicating it for the attainment of enlightenment of all sentient beings. Doing so ensures that the virtue accumulated from this practice will never go to waste. Khenpo Ngaga's "Notes on Kunzang Lama'i Zhalung" teaches the following:

After finishing your session, do not mindlessly run away. Concluding the dedication, look back upon what you have just done. Examine whether it was virtuous or nonvirtuous, a good or a bad practice session. If you discover that your practice was good and virtuous, make sure this does not become a source of pride. Talk to yourself like this: "You have practiced well during this session, but let's see whether you can carry on to the next session equally well. You might be proud of this practice, but there is no cause for pride. I will see in the next session whether it has been a source of pride." In this way, you make certain that a good session does not become a source of pride and check to see if it has.

When the session was not good, console yourself so you do not feel discouraged. One who loses courage is in danger of becoming lazy or disinterested and could lack the diligence to carry on into the next session. Comfort yourself that today distraction kept you from practicing well. Without raising your spirits, you could come to think as follows: "This session I could not practice well. I am just wasting my time. There is no point in meditating." Such thoughts allow discouragement and distress to creep in to your mindstream, and these are obstacles to the path. Instead, cheer yourself up: "This session did not go well, but I am not to blame because I am simply a beginner. Just as a paper that has long been rolled up always rolls, I have been accustomed to bad habits in samsara from beginningless time. In my next session I will try my best not to fail. I will practice

perfectly in the next session.” By calming yourself like this and resolving to do better next time, your practice will be free from the fault of discouragement and you will remain interested.

During your post-meditation periods, continue striving to generate the same thoughts as during your practice session. Keep your mind undistracted by worldly activities during post-meditation. Otherwise, like a hot iron that becomes cold once the blacksmith removes it from the fire, you will be like a practitioner during the practice session and like an ordinary person once it has finished. Therefore, after your session continue to reflect on your object of meditation. Maintain your practice on impermanence or the preciousness of human birth.

Seal the post-meditative state with what you were using as your main practice. For instance, when practicing generation stage during the main part of the session, once again visualize the deities after dissolution. Then, maintaining the pride of the deity, engage in your different activities of post-meditation. Similarly, if you are meditating upon impermanence as your main practice, reflect on impermanence during your post-meditative session.

CONCLUSION

Great masters of every Tibetan Buddhist tradition – Nyingma, Sakya, Kagyu or Gelug – all keep the thought of impermanence in their minds. This thought arises effortlessly in all of them. There are none among them who do not have this thought. Since you are following these masters, you must imitate their way of practicing the path. As it is said: “All actions are imitations; whoever imitates best will become an expert.” When we practice Dharma, we must imitate the past masters.

Patrul Rinpoche concludes with the following prayer:

*Impermanence is evident, but I cling to permanence
Although I have reached the turning point of old age, I pretend to be
young
May I and others with wrong views like mine
Be blessed to develop the thought of impermanence within.*

Were impermanence a hidden phenomenon, we could not be blamed. But impermanence is obvious. Death is a phenomenon of impermanence and is visible to us. Things changing their nature are impermanent and are perceptible. Just think of the many changes that human beings undergo. Initially he or she is born from a mother’s womb. A few years later youth

comes and after that sickness or old age. Human beings thus change nature several times. From the moment we take birth, we travel closer and closer to death.

People consider children unable to undertake worldly activities because of their innocence and wait for the child to grow up and mature. This results not from people particularly understanding impermanence, but because children cannot in fact stand on their own feet in the world. Once the child reaches adulthood, and is of an age to do something constructive, people hope he or she will not grow old. However, we have no choice. As years pass by, hairs turn grey, teeth fall out or decay, wrinkles appear and the body gradually deteriorates until it cannot walk or sit. Even though we wish to stay young forever, we lack any power to stop old age.

Think about someone you last saw thirty or forty years ago. Whether male or female, they will have changed a lot. This is because we are impermanent. Although we see the impermanence of things, we continue clinging to them as permanent. We can criticize ourselves for this: we have reached old age with grey hair, missing teeth and wrinkled skin, but we pretend to think and act like youngsters. Reflect on this carefully; it is a shameful and unreasonable way of thinking. Nevertheless, Patrul Rinpoche says that he as well as others who are like him think in this mistaken manner. He prays that although he and others have so far clung to this wrong view, from now onward the buddhas and bodhisattvas as well as our spiritual master and the Three Jewels will bless all of us with the right view of seeing the impermanence of all compounded phenomena.