

3. THE DEFECTS OF SAMBARA

Patrul Rinpoche begins by paying homage to his guru:

*Understanding that samsaric activities are meaningless,
With great compassion he worked solely for the benefit of others.*

Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu, Patrul Rinpoche's root guru, always recognized the meaninglessness of samsaric activity. One could ask why he remained in samsara since he understood the meaninglessness of worldly existence, and the answer is because of the great compassion he felt for sentient beings from deep in his heart, and his desire to help them. If he were not in this world, he could not benefit samsaric beings; he could not benefit them if he remained in a state of peace. The buddhas of the past also took physical forms in order to benefit sentient beings. They could not benefit sentient beings by abiding only in the pure realm of Ogmin. Only sentient beings can help other sentient beings, and so for the benefit of beings buddhas take different kinds of bodies in the impure realms.

In the same way, Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu recognized the meaninglessness of worldly activity, but due to his deep compassion remained in samsara to benefit beings. Again and again he took a body so he could help sentient beings. As he recognized that samsaric existence has no self-nature, he did not fall within the limits of samsara and did not face the suffering of samsara. Since he could not benefit beings from within the state of peace, he did not remain within the limits of peace. This is called being beyond both suffering and peace, and is a fully liberated state. This is how Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu abided.

*Unattached to either worldly existence or peace, he acted in accordance
with the Mahayana doctrine.
At the feet of my peerless guru, I bow down.*

The core of the Mahayana path is beyond the limits of suffering and peace. Since Jigme Gyalwai Nyugu followed that path, he abided in that state, and Patrul Rinpoche pays homage to such an unequalled root guru.

This instruction on the defects of samsara has two parts. First, the teaching on how to listen to and teach the Dharma is the same as before. Secondly, the Dharma to be explained is in two sections: contemplating the general suffering of samsara and contemplating the specific suffering of each of the six realms of beings.

When we begin to practice, we must follow the instructions given in

Khenpo Ngaga's "Notes on the Kunzang Lama'i Zhalung." At this time of listening to the teaching, we must listen in the proper manner. The teaching itself has two parts. The first is reflecting on the general suffering of samsara. If we repeatedly consider the suffering of samsara, we will not be attached either to future lives within samsara or to this current life. Secondly, we must reflect on the specific suffering of each of the six realms of samsara.

As the nature of water is wet, and the nature of fire is hot, the nature of samsara is suffering. Contemplation like this is called reflecting on the defects of samsara. Right now we can see and experience the nature of the suffering of the human condition, but there are also the other realms: hell beings, hungry ghosts, gods, demi-gods and animals. Among animals, some live on land in the human and god realms and some live in water. Nagas – serpent spirits – are considered to be animals that live in water. Although we cannot see the suffering of animals that live beneath the water, or those that live in the god realms, or the misery of beings in the other realms, we can see the suffering of the animals that live around us. Since we can see the suffering of human beings and of the animals that live on land, the difference in understanding their misery depends solely on whether we contemplate or not.

We cannot see the suffering of the other realms, however, as they are beyond our sense faculties. Some people say the hell and hungry ghost realms do not exist, so we do not fall into these realms after death. Others say these realms do exist, with their own natures and lifespans. Actually, we cannot personally determine whether or not these realms exist since we cannot see them. If we have a pot in our house, we definitely know of its existence, but the hell and hungry ghost realms are not like that.

Between these beliefs in the existence or nonexistence of the hell or hungry ghost realms, we must believe that these realms do exist. Those who do not believe in these realms follow the philosophy of the nihilists.¹ The person who developed this philosophy was an ordinary person. Even according to their own doctrine, the nihilists do not say their teacher possessed qualities like "the wisdom eye" – clairvoyance – or the ability to make prophecies. Without these qualities, as an ordinary person, he propagated this doctrine to deceive others. Since he is the same kind of person as we are, we need not believe in his statements that hell realms and hungry ghost realms do not exist.

Our teacher, Buddha Shakyamuni, is the one who taught the existence

1 Also known as materialists.

of hell and hungry ghost realms. The qualities of buddhas are the capacity to make prophesies, the knowledge of things as they are and of all that exists, the power of miracles, and other strengths and powers. Buddhist doctrine explains the extraordinary qualities of Shakyamuni Buddha. This specially qualified person taught on the hell and hungry ghost realms, and we must believe what such a teacher says. We have no reason to believe what is said by ordinary people like us, who have no special qualities.

Because these realms exist, we must accumulate virtue. Buddha Shakyamuni taught that committing nonvirtue leads to rebirth in the lower realms. He did not teach this to deceive us but so we can avoid the suffering of being born in such realms. With great compassion, Buddha Shakyamuni described what actually exists. This is not an imaginary story used for teaching, like that of Dawa Dragpa, who was said to have found some grain and hung it above his bed, and then died while planning what to do with it. Such a tale is not really true, but the existence of hell realms and hungry ghost realms is not a mere example. If there were no hell realms, there would be no reason to teach about them.

Lord Buddha taught that these phenomena do exist in this world. Although we don't see them, the Buddha can perceive them from his power of clairvoyance. As he saw and taught, there really are hell realms, and one is born there due to nonvirtue. We must be careful about committing nonvirtue; otherwise in the next life we could be reborn in a hell realm and suffer intensely. With great compassion the Buddha exposed what does exist so that we could avoid birth in the hell realms. He did not teach this to deceive his disciples. Scriptures written by Indian scholars tell us that those who deny the existence of hell realms or god realms are the ones trying to mislead people.

An old story is told about an astrologer named Zangmo who used the footprint of a wolf to cheat the inhabitants of a certain village. Using astrological calculations Zangmo found that snow would fall for many days. To this prediction he added that after the snowfall many wolves would come and kill all the villagers, so that the village would become empty. The calculations actually showed that snow would fall, but there was no indication that wolves would come and empty the village. This he added to deceive the villagers. Some people believed him, but others did not. When the snow fell as he had predicted, more people began to think that the story of the wolves could also be true. The villagers became uncertain. Zangmo then made a mold of a wolf footprint and stamped many footprints

in the snow, so that people would think that many wolves had come on the previous night, and would have faith in his prediction. The next night he again made many footprints. The villagers became afraid and ran away, enabling the astrologer to steal all their wealth. One part of the prediction was true, but as for the rest he was deceiving everyone.

Non-Buddhists claim that the Buddhist doctrine is like this story, with some teachings being true and others false. They claim that the Buddhist teachings on past and future lives, and the relationship of cause and effect are like Zangmo's wolf footprints, with no truth behind them. They claim one need not be careful about cause and effect, and that one can do whatever one wants in this life. They say that death is like a butter lamp going out, or water drying up. The originator of the nihilist philosophy was a very ordinary and unqualified person who is said to have created this belief system because he wanted to take his daughter as his wife. We should not believe in those like him who deny the existence of hell realms, virtue, and merit.

We cannot find any defects in the qualities of Buddha Shakyamuni. As a fully perfected individual he taught the existence of lower realms, virtue and nonvirtue, and cause and effect. Since we lack the capacity to see whether or not these realms actually exist, we must trust in someone with his qualities and lack of defects. We should not believe ordinary individuals with many negative qualities, those who seek to deceive others.

Because we sometimes doubt the reality of the suffering of the lower realms, Lord Buddha taught about this in the sutras. He taught that nonvirtue is the cause of being born in these realms. Strong nonvirtue leads to birth in the hell realm; middling nonvirtue to birth in the hungry ghost realm; and minor nonvirtue to birth in the animal realm. This the Buddha taught and his teaching is faultless. We must remember to be very careful of our actions and behavior. Thinking like this is meaningful. From now on, during the explanation of the hell realms and hungry ghost realms, we must believe in them. As followers of the Buddha we must trust in his teachings. We have to train our minds in this way.

CONTEMPLATING THE GENERAL SUFFERING OF SAMBARA

To begin, as taught earlier, although you have acquired the freedoms and advantages that are difficult to obtain, this will not remain for a long time, and you will fall under the power of impermanence and

death.

When we consider the freedoms and advantages we have now, we should realize that the purpose of this life is to practice the Dharma. This special life is not easy to find and we must use it in a meaningful way. By training the mind on impermanence and death, we learn that life does not last long. We can only remain for about 50 to 60 years, and even that is not certain. The causes of death are many and those that sustain life are few. Some live long, and others have short lives. This life with its freedoms and advantages is not long-lasting, but it is impermanent and under the power of death. We should contemplate in this way.

If, after death, you were extinguished like fire or evaporated like water, it wouldn't matter.

If this were the case there would be no difficulty. Some throw corpses into water, some bury them in the ground, others give them to the birds, but in one way or another, the physical body is removed. If our minds were extinguished or evaporated, we wouldn't need to go to the lower realms and no one would suffer. People could wonder why we must practice Dharma.

This is not the case, however. When we die, the life in the body may be extinguished, but the mind is not. From our infancy to the present, mind has continued, and we remember our thoughts. This is the mind's continuity. After death we again take birth, and some can remember their past lives – supreme ones who are not defiled by the impurities of the womb, and some children born in special places. Ordinary persons are sullied by impurities and cannot remember their past lives. Sometimes we lose our memory and cannot even remember what we did yesterday, even though the mind continues from day to day. Just like forgetting the recent past, most people cannot remember their past lives. Nevertheless, the continuity of the mind remains whether the past life is remembered or not.

Suffering and happiness are experienced by mind. Without mind, the body on its own does not undergo suffering and happiness. Understanding that a dead body does not suffer, ordinary people treat corpses in whatever way they find convenient. If they thought the body would suffer, they would not act in this way.

As that which suffers, the mind continues, while the body does not. The past and the future births are not separated by a long period. As I taught earlier, if we die today, we could take birth in the animal realm tomorrow. Today we don't have horns, but tomorrow we might. Thinking that the next birth is far away is a mistake. The next birth could come at any time.

Neither the time of our death nor the time of our next birth are certain. What is certain is that we will definitely have a future birth.

We must again take birth, and we will remain nowhere other than in samsara.

We have to take birth, and where we take birth is in samsara. Except for taking birth in the higher realms of gods and humans, in the lowest realms of hell beings and hungry ghosts, or in the realms in between, there is no other place to take birth.

Generally, what is called samsara is like a potter's wheel, or a water driven mill, or a bee in a jar. When the bee is caught in a covered jar, wherever it flies, it remains within the jar, unable to go elsewhere. Likewise, wherever you are born within samsara, whether in a higher or a lower realm, you are not beyond the abodes of samsara.

These wheels are always turning, and in the same way we constantly circle in samsara. We are just like the bee buzzing around in a closed jar. It will sometimes move to the top, sometimes to the bottom and sometimes to the middle, but it cannot leave the jar. That is the example for samsara. Wherever we take birth we will not be beyond samsara.

The upper part of the jar is like the higher realms of gods and men; the lower part is like the three lower realms. Because of your worldly karma, whether virtuous or nonvirtuous, you take one birth after another, circling through the six realms of beings. This is called the wheel of samsara.

We must think about samsara. Accumulating worldly merit leads to taking birth as a god, demi-god or human. This kind of merit is accumulated with afflictive emotion and causes birth within samsara. The cause of taking birth in the hell and hungry ghost realms is the accumulation of negative actions. Sometimes we accumulate merit, and sometimes nonvirtue. If we think of the present, we are accumulating more nonvirtue. Our merit is less. The result depends on which is stronger, our merit or our nonvirtue.

Taking myself as an example, I am accumulating both merit and nonvirtue. After my death, if my merit is stronger, the result of the merit will ripen first and the result of the nonvirtue will ripen later. If the merit ripens first, I could take rebirth in the god, human or demi-god realms. I could possibly even take birth in Sukhavati or a pure realm. If the nonvirtue is stronger, it will ripen first and the merit will ripen later, only after many births. What ripens first is the strong nonvirtue. Contemplating karma in

this way, we should understand that the results of the stronger actions will come to fruition first.

If we accumulate an equal amount of merit and nonvirtue, our earlier actions will ripen first, and the later will ripen later. If the merit is first it will ripen first; if the nonvirtue is first it will ripen first. If our merit and nonvirtue are equal, and the timing is also the same, the result depends on the time of death. If we acted virtuously at the time of death, that karma will ripen first; if we acted negatively, the nonvirtue will ripen first.

Every person has many different kinds of karma, and different kinds of karma bring different results. Some results ripen in this life, some in the next life, and some after many lives. Karmic results do not all come together. Karma is not like sowing seeds in the ground, where those sown together grow together. In which lifetime the results of positive karma may ripen is uncertain. Even after many eons, the karma does not dissipate and will ripen when the appropriate time comes. Karma ripens for arhats as well, as it did for Maugalayana. The non-Buddhists beat him so badly that he passed away. The arhat Gujung died from starvation because of the ripening of his karma. When the time comes, even someone on the level of an arhat experiences the ripening of karma.

We take birth in samsara according to the karma of our virtue or nonvirtue. Accumulating worldly merit leads to birth in higher realms, and nonvirtue leads to birth in lower realms. Without a break, from one birth to another, sentient beings continuously take birth in samsara.

We cannot say how long we have been in samsara because samsara is beginningless. The sutras teach that all sentient beings have been parents, enemies and indifferent to one another. If we tried to identify each of our past mothers, counting with small balls of earth, the earth would be exhausted, but not the number of our mothers. Nagarjuna said:

*Even counting with pellets of dirt as small as juniper berries
We would run out of earth trying to reach the end of our mothers.*

The number of times one being has been the mother of other individual beings is also uncountable.

From beginningless time, we have taken the form of every type of sentient being. We have taken birth with horns, with tails, and with wings to fly in the sky. We cannot identify any life form in which we have not taken birth. During summer, for example, a great many kinds of insects thrive in the grass, and we cannot say that we have not been born in all of

these forms. We have been born in the form of all the manifold insects.

Throughout these many different lives, on innumerable occasions when we were seeking to fulfill our desires, other people have cut off our heads and limbs, just as when a thief is caught stealing someone's wealth and has his head or limbs cut off instead of achieving his aim. We have been born as small insects so many times that a pile of these insects' tiny limbs would reach the heights of Mt. Meru. If the tears we shed from hunger, thirst and cold when we had no food and clothing had not dried up, they would make a vast ocean. Normally our tears dry, but if they did not and were collected, an ocean would form. We have cried numberless times.

The amount of molten copper we have consumed during our rebirths in the hell realms is greater than the water of the four oceans of the four directions. Nonetheless, we remain attached to samsara without thinking about avoiding future births. This continuous attachment without regret will lead us to suffer endlessly, and our misery will be even greater than in the past.

Even if we earned a small amount of merit leading to birth in the form realm of Indra or in the desire realm of Brahma, the 34th god realm, so that we enjoyed an extremely long life with a beautiful body, we still could not in the end escape death, and after death, we would have to experience the suffering of samsara. Now we are in the human realm where we sometimes experience happiness and sometimes misery. After death, however, if things go badly, we will be born in the hell or hungry ghost realms where there is intense torment.

In this present life, we have some power, wealth, health and other pleasures that remain for a few years, months or days. We think that these small advantages will not diminish, but they are actually deceiving us so that we fail to practice Dharma and waste our time. After our merit is exhausted we will fall into the lower realms. Leaving the happiness of the higher realms we will enter the realms of the hell beings and the hungry ghosts.

When the result of that which led to the higher realms is exhausted, you will have to – very much against your wishes – either become poor and destitute, or experience the difficult-to-bear suffering of the lower realms. What essence is there in this present happiness? It is like the happiness in a dream when you awaken.

This life is like a dream. During a dream we may experience happiness, but after the dream is over, there is nothing. It has no meaning. After we

wake up, all the happiness is exhausted. All of the happiness of samsara follows this pattern. Our present clothing, food and so on are the result of our small amount of merit. After this merit is exhausted we are unable to experience even a moment's happiness. Desiring to experience that happiness again, we have no power to do so.

The lords of the gods sit on jeweled thrones covered with heavenly fabrics, the desires of their five senses completely satisfied, but when their lifespan is completed, in the blink of an eye, they fall head first onto the ground of burning iron in hell and suffer.

Even the sun and moon, which illuminate the four continents, can in the end be reborn between the continents in such deep darkness that they cannot see whether their own limbs are extended or bent.

In such a situation, do not place your faith in the apparent joys of samsara. Resolve to completely escape from the great ocean of samsaric suffering, and to attain the level of the perfect happiness of buddhahood in this very life. Apply yourself to this thought and practice in accordance with the three principles of the excellent beginning, main part and conclusion.

According to the Buddhist view, the sun and the moon are considered to be persons, and after their merit comes to an end, their light will be eclipsed so that they cannot even see their own limbs.

Patrul Rinpoche also reminds us that while contemplating the defects of samsara, we must begin with the generation of bodhicitta; for the main part we must consider the different aspects of samsara; and in conclusion we must dedicate the merit.

CONTEMPLATING THE SPECIFIC SUFFERING EXPERIENCED BY THE BEINGS OF THE SIX REALMS

The reason we must contemplate the misery of samsara is because we do not understand that samsara is suffering and has many other defects. By not understanding suffering, we consider samsara to be happy and joyful. We are attached to this worldly life, and to future worldly lives. This attachment keeps the idea of renunciation from entering our minds. Renunciation means liberation from samsara. The foundation of renunciation is to feel revulsion toward worldly life. By viewing samsara with distaste, we will automatically feel renunciation. The mind of renunciation is the gateway

to all liberation. Lacking renunciation, the thought of liberation will never enter our mind. For this reason Patrul Rinpoche teaches on the defects of samsara.

Samsara's major defect is that its very nature is suffering. None of the six realms is beyond suffering. We must consider the general defects of samsara and develop the desire to leave it behind. We also have to contemplate the specific defects of each realm in order to renounce each one. The purpose of understanding that samsara's nature is suffering is to develop the mind of renunciation. It is not that samsara is really happiness and we teach that it is suffering only to lead disciples to renunciation. Samsara's true nature is suffering, but not seeing this, we believe it is happiness. Such thinking is mistaken. When we understand samsara's nature to be misery, we clear away that fault.

Recognizing suffering as suffering, we automatically feel regret for samsara. We enjoy samsara only because we fail to understand that it is actually suffering. No one wants misery. Unless we recognize that samsara's real nature is suffering, if we enjoy and are attached to samsara, the idea of renunciation will never arise in our minds.

In his aspiration prayer, Patrul Rinpoche says:

*When genuine renunciation comes to mind
This is the first gateway to liberation,
The first path to escape samsara,
The entrance to the practice of all Dharma.*

Renunciation is the initial entrance to the accomplishment of liberation and omniscience. Without it, we cannot practice to attain these qualities, and so Patrul Rinpoche prays for genuine renunciation to arise in his mind. To induce the mind of renunciation, we have explained the general defects of samsara. Now we begin the teaching on the specific defects of each realm. Six specific kinds of suffering are identified.

THE HELL REALMS

Altogether there are eighteen classes of hell realms: eight hot, eight cold, the neighboring hell and the ephemeral hell. The environment, lifespan, and suffering in each of these hell realms differ. By learning about these variations, we train our minds in the defects of samsara. Simply thinking generally about the suffering of samsara will not bring about a genuine mind of renunciation and regret. We must contemplate the small and minor

details.

In his “Notes on the Kunzang Lama’i Zhalung,” Khenpo Ngaga says that since the nature of the hell realms is suffering, we must focus on the environments, the bodies of the hell beings, their lifespans, and their misery. We have to contemplate step by step. From this point on the environments and the sufferings are all explained.

The nature of the bodies is not clearly stated in the text. Generally, the bodies of the hell beings are four times larger than human bodies. Their complexion is red/black like boiled blood. Due to their karma, the hell beings have extremely sensitive skin, like the skin of the newborn baby of a king. Thick skin experiences some suffering, but delicate skin suffers greatly. The flesh is quite easily hurt, and sensitive as an eyeball. Even a minute particle of dust in the eye will cause serious discomfort, while such dust on our hand is not even noticed. The karma of the hell beings leads to the extreme vulnerability of their bodies.

Their hair stands on end; their eyes are triangular and all the body hair stands up straight. Their legs are quite large, and they have protruding stomachs like the wrathful ones. On earth, there are no beings of this kind, and if humans saw them, they would faint. Their bodies are exceptionally ugly.

The description of the different environments begins with the eight hot hell realms.

The hot hell realms

Among the eight hot hell realms, the greatest suffering is found in the Hell of Ceaseless Torment, and the least is found in the Reviving Hell. Suffering becomes greater the further down one goes in the hell realms, and lighter as one rises to the top. The hot hell realms are like an eight-story building. If we think about the characteristics of these realms, we find only misery.

The ground and all the surroundings are like the searing iron of a blacksmith, with no place at all to set down a foot in comfort. Everything is simply an expanse of blazing tongues of fire, burning furiously.

Both the base and the surrounding areas are red-hot iron. Except for hot iron, there is nowhere to place one’s foot. Fire blazes everywhere in the hell realms and is unlike fire on this earth. The fire in the highest hell realm is seven times hotter than earthly fire, and as the hells get deeper,

each fire is seven times hotter than the one above. Finally, it is like the fire at the end of an eon. The general environment is the same in all eight hot hell realms.

The Reviving Hell

Among these realms we begin with the highest. Upon the ground of burning iron, with flames shooting up, beings as uncountable as snowflakes in a blizzard are gathered together by the force of their actions, thrown there by anger and hatred.

The general causes for burning in hell are hatred, attachment, ignorance and all other afflictive emotions. Strong attachment can lead to burning in hell, middling attachment to birth as a hungry ghost and minor attachment to birth as an animal. All the afflictive emotions can cause birth in a hell realm, but in particular, those with extreme anger are born in hell. As a result of the effect being similar to the cause, the hell beings constantly feel extreme hatred and anger toward each other, and cause serious problems for one another.

Beings in hell experience the same deep-seated anger as they did in their human lives, regarding all others as they would murderers who killed their parents. Whenever they encounter each other, they see enemies and begin to fight. Due to their karma, everything they hold in their hands immediately turns into weapons of various kinds.

Shantideva said:

*Who made the blazing iron ground, the men and other things?
From what did they come?
All this comes from the mind of nonvirtue
Taught Lord Buddha.*

The very environment of the burning iron ground is created by nonvirtuous mind. This nonvirtue causes everything that comes into the hell beings' hands to become a weapon. Again and again, beings in the Reviving Hell strike each other until finally they all die. But even in death they cannot escape hell, and are again reborn. Revived by a sound from the sky, they are constantly reborn with the same anger, fighting and dying repeatedly. They suffer continuously like this, dying and being born. Their strong anger remains with them always; they don't need to learn it.

As was taught earlier, among the six classes of beings, only humans can practice Dharma. Every type of body can accumulate nonvirtue, but generally

only human bodies can accumulate virtue. In the form and formless god realms, no actual nonvirtuous action occurs, but subtle nonvirtue is found. All other bodily forms can accumulate nonvirtuous actions.

Here in the Reviving Hell, by fighting and killing one another, the beings accumulate considerable nonvirtue. Human beings may occasionally kill each other, but not very often. Birth in the Reviving Hell results from the karma of killing. Since the beings in this realm kill each other constantly, they are always born in the same place. We cannot say definitively that they can never escape; one or two might succeed and be born in a higher realm, but most will remain in the Reviving Hell. Beings in the hell realms have the highest level of anger and thus accumulate the highest level of negativity. This describes their suffering.

As for their life span, fifty human years equals one day in the god realm of the Four Great Kings. Thirty of those days makes a month, and twelve months comprise a year. Five hundred years for these gods equals one day in this, the highest hell. With thirty of these days making one month, and twelve months making one year, they suffer for five hundred of their years.

The lifespan of the hell beings is generally considered to be definite.

Black-Line Hell

After the Reviving Hell comes the Black-Line Hell. On the ground of burning iron are stretched out the bodies of the hell beings. They are the color of charred wood and the servants of Yama, the Lord of Death, mark them with four, eight, sixteen or thirty-two or more black lines. They cut along these lines with burning saws; just as when we cut wood, we first make a line and cut along it. The hell beings suffer intensely when they are sawed into pieces, and then they die. Even after death, their life in hell does not end. They revive and are again stretched out, marked and cut. They repeatedly suffer this torment.

As for their lifespan, one hundred human years equals one day for the gods in the Heaven of the Thirty-three, and a thousand years for these gods equals one day for the beings in the Black Line Hell. They live for one thousand of their years.

For us, a day is twenty-four hours, but one day in this hell realm equals a thousand years in the Heaven of the Thirty-three, and the beings live for a thousand of their own years. Again, the lifespan may be definite. While the human lifespan is not definite, lifespan in the other realms is more or less

definite. In a few cases, beings from this realm may escape after exhausting their karma.

For example, when our Buddha Shakyamuni was born in a hell realm, he was called 'Charioteer'. In that hell he immediately developed intense compassion for his charioteer friend, Karma Ropa. Through the power of his compassion he escaped. This can happen in a hell realm. If such heart-felt compassion arises, a hell being may be able to break out of the hells. Otherwise their lifespan seems to be definite.

Hell of Gathering and Crushing

This particular hell realm is shaped like a giant mortar, as vast as an entire country, into which large numbers of beings are collected. Yama's servants hit them on the head with enormous hammers of hot metal the size of Mt. Meru. Beaten by these hammers, they suffer severe pain and scream until finally they die. Death does not free them, and they revive when the hammers are lifted.

Birth in the hell realms is spontaneous, with no need for parents. The beings simply experience great fear, die and are reborn in the same place. They are born in hell solely as a result of their karmic actions. They are not chased there by others.

The beings in this hell see all the mountains of the realm as the domestic and wild animals they slaughtered during their lifetimes. Birth here results from killing such animals. If they killed stags and deer, the mountains appear as stags and deer; if they killed goats and sheep, the mountains appear as goats and sheep. With flaming horns, the animals butt each other, and the hell beings are crushed between their horns, dying miserably. When the animals separate, the beings spontaneously revive, suffering the same fate over and over again.

Two hundred human years equals one day for the Non-fighting gods.
Two thousand of these years equals one day in the Hell of Gathering and Crushing. Beings in this hell live for two thousand of their own years.

The Wailing Hell

These beings suffer from being roasted within doorless buildings of burning metal. With no hope of future escape, they wail and cry.

Four hundred human years equals one day in the god realm of Joy, and four thousand of those years make up one day in the Wailing

Hell. The beings live for one thousand of these years.

The Great Wailing Hell

A hoard of armed and terrifying servants of Yama drive uncountable numbers of hell beings into blazing iron sheds with double walls, beating them with hammers and other weapons. Both the inner and outer doors are sealed with molten metal, and thinking that even if they escaped from the inner door they could never flee from the outer one, the beings wail in agony.

As for their lifespan, eight hundred human years equals one day in the god realm of Joyful Magic, and eight thousand of those years make up one day in the Great Wailing Hell. The beings live for eight thousand of their years.

The Hell of Heat

This realm is a huge iron cauldron as large as the entire cosmos of a billion worlds that is filled with boiling metal instead of water. Innumerable beings are tormented by being cooked in this molten metal. A few with less negative karma may come to the surface, but they are caught by the hooks of Yama's servants and struck on their heads with hammers until they faint. Since they do not suffer at that moment, they experience this as happiness. This is a realm of intense suffering.

Sixteen hundred human years make up one day for the gods Enjoying the Emanations of Others, and sixteen thousand of the years of these gods equal one day in the Hell of Heat, where lifespan is sixteen thousand of these beings' years.

The Hell of Intense Heat

In houses of blazing metal, Yama's attendants pierce the beings in this hell through their feet and lower orifices with tridents of burning iron which come out through their two shoulders and the crowns of their heads. With their bodies wrapped in blankets of burning iron, they suffer tremendously. Their lifespan continues for half an intermediate eon, which cannot be measured in human years.

The Hell of Ceaseless Torment

According to Sutra, this is the hell of the greatest suffering, but Tantra teaches about the Vajra Hell, an even more painful realm. Those born in the Vajra Hell are tantric practitioners who have broken the samaya vows.

No other cause results in birth in this realm. Patrul Rinpoche's teaching is according to the sutra system, not tantra.

The actions that lead to the Hell of Ceaseless Torment are considered "sins of immediate retribution,"² such as killing one's father or mother, or taking blood from the Buddha's body. Such heavy nonvirtue results in going directly to hell without passing through the intermediate state of the bardo.

The Hell of Ceaseless Torment is an iron building of blazing fire, surrounded by sixteen additional hells, four on each side. In the central hell, Yama's servants pile up burning iron blocks like red-hot coals as high as Mt. Meru, and place the hell beings on this heap. They fan the fire with a bellows made of tiger and leopard skins until it is so hot that the fire and the bodies become indistinguishable. The process is like a blacksmith heating iron on coals.

The suffering is extremely intense. Only the beings' loud wailing can be heard; no actual bodies can be seen since they have dissolved into the fire. They want to flee, but have no chance. Their unbearable torment makes them constantly think of escape, but until their karma is exhausted, they cannot. Sometimes a small door opens within the fire and they try to flee, but Yama's servants beat them with large arrows, clubs and hammers, and pour molten metal into their mouths. The beings in this hell also experience the misery of all the previous seven hell realms.

The life span in the Hell of Intense Heat is half an intermediate eon. A great eon contains eighty intermediate eons. The life span in the Hell of Ceaseless Torment is one intermediate eon. It is called the Hell of Ceaseless Torment because there is no greater suffering than this. The causes of birth in this hell are the sins of immediate retribution, and the holding of wrong views toward the Vajra Master on the part of practitioners of Mantrayana. No other actions involving anger, sexual misconduct, theft and so on lead to rebirth in this realm. Among the eight hot hell realms the suffering of the Hell of Ceaseless Torment is the most severe.

This is according to Sutra teachings. According to Tantra, the Vajra Hell is more severe because the lifespan in the Vajra Hell is as long as twelve thousand great eons, so the beings suffer much longer.

² These are killing one's father, one's mother, or an arhat; creating a split in the sangha; and malevolently causing a buddha to bleed.

The neighboring hells

Surrounding the Hell of Ceaseless Torment are sixteen other hells, four on each side.

In each of the four directions around the Hell of Ceaseless Torment are a heap of hot embers, a marsh of rotting corpses, a plain of razors and a forest of swords, east, south, west and north respectively, making altogether sixteen. In the intermediate point of the southeast is a hill of iron salmali trees, and the same are found in the southwest, northwest and northeast.

Heap of Hot Embers

The first is the Heap of Hot Embers. When the karma of the beings of the Hell of Ceaseless Torment has decreased, they emerge and see a dense, dark shadow in the distance.

As humans, we can decrease and even totally eliminate our nonvirtuous karma, however strong, before it has fully ripened. When we feel regret and confess by visualizing Vajrasattva and reciting the Hundred Syllable Mantra with the four supports,³ our karma can be reduced. At best, the karma can be totally eliminated so that we need not face the effects at all. If we cannot purify the karma totally, we will be born in a hell realm for only a very short time, like a rubber ball that bounces on the ground. We can escape immediately. Hell beings, however, can only reduce their karma by facing it, with intense suffering.

The beings in the Hell of Ceaseless Torment do not know how to lessen their karma, but it gradually diminishes as they suffer the results. The lifespan in the Hell of Ceaseless Torment is one intermediate eon. When beings have suffered for half of that time, half of the karma is reduced. After an entire eon has passed, the karmic effect is totally finished.

As the nonvirtue is decreased, they climb out of the hell realms, and see a dark shadow in the distance. Until that moment, they have been tormented by intense heat; seeing the shadow they become happy and set off toward it. There is no actual shadow but a pile of ashes and burning embers. Entering the pile, the flesh and bones of the hell beings are completely

3 The four supports are: 1) the support of the visualization of Vajrasattva or another object of confession; 2) the support of regret for past nonvirtue; 3) the support of the resolution not to commit such nonvirtue again; 4) the support of the applied antidote, meaning any virtuous activity, such as the practice of a Vajrasattva sadhana.

burned and they again suffer tremendously.

Marsh of Rotting Corpses

This marsh is located near the pile of embers and appears like a distant river. The hell beings eagerly rush toward it. For an entire eon they have been roasted in burning coals and are suffering from great thirst. In fact, there is no water at all.

There are only the corpses of human beings, horses, dogs and so on, rotting, stinking, and crawling with worms. They sink up to their heads in this swamp, and are eaten by insects with sharp iron beaks. Thus they suffer.

Plain of Razors

After escaping from the marsh, the beings see a green plain, and happily move toward it. Actually it is a plain of razors. The ground is covered with burning iron pitchforks growing like grass. With each step, their feet are punctured. When lifted from the ground, the feet heal immediately, but with the next step, they are again cut. They suffer more and more.

Forest of Swords

Fleeing this plain, the beings see a beautiful forest, and approach it joyfully, but the entire forest is made of iron trees with leaves of swords. When the wind blows, their bodies are chopped into pieces. They immediately heal, only to be cut again. In this way, they suffer repeatedly.

After undergoing the misery of the Hell of Ceaseless Torment, hell beings suffer in these four neighboring hells.

Hills of Iron Salmali Trees

They must also experience the hills of iron salmali trees, situated in the four intermediate directions. Once born in the Hell of Ceaseless Torment, beings have to suffer in the four neighboring hells, and finally on the hills of iron salmali trees.

Specifically, those who broke their monastic or other vows suffer here. This includes breaking the vows against killing animals, sexual misconduct and so on. Sexual misconduct means breaking the monk's vow of chastity, or having sexual relations with someone other than one's spouse, and those guilty of these nonvirtues are born in this place.

Their karma brings them in front of a terrifying hill of iron salmali trees. They see their former lovers and hear them calling. When they climb up to meet them, the iron leaves of the iron trees puncture their bodies. Reaching the place where they saw their lovers, they find crows and vultures with iron beaks who pluck out their eyes and brains. Again they see their lovers calling from the bottom of the hill.

As they descend, all the iron leaves turn upright and pierce their chests through to their backs. At the bottom of the hill, they find terrifying iron men and women who embrace them, take their heads into their mouths and chew them until the white brains ooze out of the corners of their mouths. This is how they suffer.

Meditating on the hot hell realms

We must carefully examine the eight hot hells, the sixteen neighboring realms and the hills of salmali trees. I already explained before that this teaching was given by our teacher, Buddha Shakyamuni. He has the power of the wisdom eye and of prophecy, possesses all positive qualities, and has not even the smallest faults. He is not the least bit stained. A person like this taught about these hells, their environments and lifespans. We cannot see this on our own. As there is no doubt about the Buddha's teachings, we must have confidence and follow him.

Some teach that the lower realms do not exist. They hold the wrong view of nihilism. According to the nihilists there are no past and future lives, no higher and lower realms. The nihilists have not the slightest qualities, and their faults are as huge as Mt. Meru. They cannot be compared with the Buddha. It is ordinary people like ourselves who deny the existence of the different realms. If we have some understanding, we must choose to follow the Buddha. Even though we cannot see the hell beings or the hungry ghosts, he has described them. Since the Buddha is qualified, we must believe in and follow him. This has all been taught in the Buddha's sutra teachings. We need not wonder about the truth of these teachings.

*Those who hear but do not believe and
Think it is just a teaching
Commit nonvirtue, sins of immediate retribution and even more serious
karma than that.
We confess such negativity.*

The sin of casting away Lord Buddha's teachings is said to be more serious than sins of immediate retribution. We must follow the teachings

with confidence. Those things that we can see we must believe, but for things we cannot see or examine with our own power we must believe the teachings of the Buddha. Step by step, we must contemplate the details of each hell realm, the environment, the suffering, lifespan and qualities of the body. First we analyze through hearing and reflection. Next we should go to a remote place and meditate upon these teachings in isolation.

Staying in isolation we avoid all disturbance and a wandering mind. Disturbance occurs when a lot of people are gathered together, leading our minds to wander to outer forms and sounds, so that we cannot meditate or even contemplate. In isolation no one can disturb us; we are completely alone and can do nothing but practice Dharma. When contemplating we should close our eyes. With open eyes we are attracted to different forms and sounds and become too distracted to contemplate.

In an isolated place, we must think deeply about the hell realms and what would happen to us if we were born in such a place. We reflect that we have been born in each hell realm, and are suffering there. We shouldn't think someone else is suffering, and we are just watching, but that we ourselves are suffering. "If I myself were born in such a hell realm, what kind of misery, difficulties and fear would I experience?" Meditate that you have really been born there.

The practice texts teach us to take our own bodies as examples, reflecting on the actual suffering we would face if we were born in the hell realms. We should never think that we will not be born in hell, that only others are born there. Thinking that we are only watching the misery of others, we will not experience fear. If you kill an animal and believe that it has no terror or pain, you are not thinking at all. Instead, imagine yourself as a goat or sheep, and imagine your feelings when the butcher cuts off your head. Reflecting on the actual experience, you will understand that the animal's body is like ours and suffers.

Without believing that we can be born in these realms and cooked by the heat, we will not experience terror nor develop renunciation. In fact, we have already been born in the hells and undergone great suffering. If we fail to accumulate merit and commit nonvirtuous actions, we will have to face that misery again in the future. Because of our past virtue we are now in the human realm and are not experiencing the suffering of hell. But we did suffer this in the past and may well suffer it again in the future, so we need to consider whether we can bear such suffering. Contemplate the defects of samsara in this way.

By meditating that we are truly experiencing torture and fear in hell, we will develop such a habit that when we think about the hell realms, we will physically feel pain. There is a method of concentration where we think that everything is ugly and unpleasant, that everything is like a skeleton. Once this becomes habitual we actually see all things as skeletons, although they are not. Likewise, if we contemplate that we are in a hell realm even though we are not, we will really experience the agony.

Innumerable beings are in these realms right now. They were all our parents in the past. Considering our present parents and relatives who have passed away, we cannot say they are not in the hells. We must contemplate their intense suffering and generate compassion for them.

Anger is what leads to birth in the hot hells. We have acted with great anger in our past lives. While the time for this karma to ripen has not yet arrived, we will have to face it in the future. We have accumulated negativity from anger in this life as well. Reflect upon the anger you have experienced in this and past lives. Feel certain you will be born in the hell realms.

Patrul Rinpoche advises that we repeatedly reflect as follows:

“At present I have attained a human body with the freedoms and advantages. I have met an authentic teacher and have heard the profound oral instructions. Right now I have the opportunity to achieve the level of buddhahood. From this moment I must devote myself to the methods that will keep me from being born in the lower realms.”

Although we are not now in a hell realm, anger is the cause for such a birth and we definitely have this cause. No one can keep us from being born in the hell realms. Although we do not want it, if we have the karmic cause the result will ripen. Understanding this, strongly confess your nonvirtue in the following way: “Up to now I have beaten the smaller and have felt anger toward the stronger. Due to my anger I have created great negative karma. All my nonvirtue I confess from the bottom of my heart.” Purify all your negativity and promise: “From now on, I will never commit a single deed that leads to birth in a hell realm, even at the cost of my life.”

With great compassion for the beings who are now in hell, all of whom have been our parents, including some who are our present parents, relatives and friends, we should pray that they be immediately freed from their suffering. We should dedicate whatever virtues we have accumulated to their release. Each session must include the excellent beginning, main

part and conclusion.

The eight cold hells

The physical features of all the cold hells are the same. The land and surrounding areas are completely composed of snow mountains and glaciers, where blizzards are constantly raging.

All the cold hell realms have similar environments. The beings there are four times larger than humans, with bodies like the beings in the hot hells. They are naked, and suffer tremendously from the cold. The cold hell realms are classified into eight, beginning with the Hell of Blisters, where the bodies of those living there blister from the cold. Next the blisters burst, developing into wounds in the Hell of Burst Blisters, which is even colder and more miserable.

The third is called the Hell of Clenched Teeth. Tormented by unbearable cold, even greater than in the previous hell, the beings' teeth tightly clench and cannot open. The fourth is called A-chu-chu and is again colder than the last. The intense cold prevents speech; the beings can only moan in sorrow, uttering the sound *a-chu-chu*. In the fifth hell, known as Kyi-hut, they lose their voices and merely groan *kyi-hut-du*. They cannot say anything except a drawn-out *kyi-hut*.

In the sixth hell, even colder than the last, their skin turns blue and cracks into four pieces, like the petals of an utpala flower, and thus it is called Cracked like an Utpal. From the even more intense cold of the seventh realm, Cracked like a Lotus, the skin not only turns blue, but the inner red flesh cracks into eight lotus-like parts. Finally, the eighth is called the Hell of Great Lotus-like Cracks. The miserable cold intensifies until the flesh becomes dark red and the skin splits into sixteen, thirty-two and then innumerable sections. Worms with metal beaks enter and eat the broken flesh. Thus, these hell beings suffer not only from cold but also from being devoured. With eight degrees of suffering, we count eight cold hells.

The physical features of these hells are all the same: snow mountains and glaciers, with constant snowstorms. The only difference is the intensity of the cold. The lifespan is generally definite, although one or two beings might escape before the normal time.

The lifespan in the Hell of Blisters is calculated by imagining a tray holding as many sesame seeds as twenty times ten of the measures used in the ancient Indian city of Kosala. Taking out one seed every hundred years, the lifespan of the beings in the Hell of Blisters is

complete when all the sesame seeds have been removed.

For the others, the length of life and the degree of misery progressively increase by multiples of twenty. Lifespan in the Hell of Burst Blisters is twenty times longer than in the Hell of Blisters, and in the Hell of Clenched Teeth it is twenty times longer than that, and so on.

From the first cold hell to the eighth, the negative karma of the beings becomes progressively stronger. Those with greater negative karma are born in the colder hells.

Meditating on the cold hell realms

When contemplating the characteristics of these realms, do not meditate that while other beings are suffering there you need not. Considering their virtue and nonvirtue in this present life, some people could think, “I have no reason to be born in these hell realms,” but this is incorrect. We have already been born in samsara from beginningless time. Birth in samsara itself means we have committed negative actions.

Karma does not always ripen in the next birth, except for the sins with immediate retribution. Generally, there is no certainty about when we will experience the effects of our actions, whether virtuous or nonvirtuous. Some karma ripens quickly and the results are seen later in the same life. The results of actions done in this life may ripen in the next, or in a future life, even after a long time.

The effect of karma is not like planting a seed in the ground. If we sow a seed, when the time comes – in a month or a year – it will grow, developing a stem, leaves and fruit continuously, without a break. Cause and effect is not like that. A virtuous or nonvirtuous action is completed after a moment, but the karmic effect can lie dormant. Although dormant, it does not disappear, even for hundreds of eons. We may think we have no reason to be born in the cold realms, but in a past life, even a very distant one, we may have committed some action that results in such a birth.

Only the omniscient Buddha can understand the most subtle levels of cause and effect, and only if he told us we had no cause for birth in the hell realms could we say we would not be born there. Our past births are like a chain of negative actions, so we can never say for certain that we do not have the cause to be born in the cold hell realms. We probably do.

Why does the karma not disappear? The Vaibashika school teaches that there are mental formations (particles) that are neither concurrent

nor non-concurrent, that do not disappear and which link to the karma; others teach that the karma remains in the *alaya*, the “all-ground.” The *alaya* consciousness is continuous, so the karma remains there. This is the teaching of the Vaibashika, Svatantrika and Chittamatra schools. The teaching of the Madhyamaka school of the Mahayana is that although the karmic action disappears, the karmic effect, which has no birth, does not disappear even after many eons, and will definitely ripen.

We must therefore meditate that we really are in the Hell of Blisters, the Hell of Burst Blisters, the Hell of Clenched Teeth, and so on. We should meditate that we are undergoing the sufferings of these realms at this very moment. If we think that only other beings are abiding in this way and we will never go to such a realm, our meditation will not be effective, and will not lead to true recognition of the defects of *samsara*. We do have the causes for birth in the hell realms, and we have been born in these realms many times in the past. We should think that in the future as well, we will be born there many times.

Although we are not in the cold hell realms now, by training our minds through this meditation, we will eventually develop the habit of thinking that we are actually there. At that point, as soon as we think of these realms we will immediately experience fear and suffering. We will not want to be born there, nor for others to be born there. “Just as I want to escape from this realm, I wish for other beings to also escape” will be our thought. The suffering of the cold realms is unbearable.

As human beings, we cannot bear winter’s cold for a moment. Tibet is very cold. Could we remain there naked for even a moment? Could we bear the greater suffering of the cold realms? No, absolutely not! Considering the torment of the cold realms, the suffering of cold in the human realm is negligible. We cannot even consider it a category of suffering. Since we cannot bear such minor misery, how could we possibly bear the misery of the cold realms if we were really born there? Nevertheless, no one can definitely say that he or she lacks the cause for birth in the cold realms.

Even if we wanted to bear the misery of the cold hell realms, we could not. We must find a method to keep from being born there, and the method is to confess the negative karma from this and all our past lives. Not only do we confess all the negative accumulations, we also vow not to commit such nonvirtue in the future. Negativity has no good qualities; its only quality is that it can be purified. Although we have accumulated negative karma from beginningless time, by confessing with the four supports, we can purify

it. From this very moment, we must confess the causes for birth in the hell realms.

Our parents, relatives, and friends may also have karmic causes for birth in these realms. We cannot say that they have not been born there, or that they will not be born there in the future. Generally, not a single being exists who has not been our mother. Even though we are not ourselves in hell, our mothers are suffering in these realms. We should think: “Why should I not purify their causes and results?” Meditate with compassion. When compassion is born within us, bodhicitta automatically arises in our mindstream. We should develop compassion for all the beings who are actually living in the hell realms, practicing as before, properly carrying out the methods for the excellent beginning, main part and conclusion.

The temporary hells

The locations of these temporary hell realms are uncertain. They could be in the human realm or under the ground. Neither is the type of suffering definite. It could be extreme, middling or minor. Beings may be crushed between rocks, trapped inside boulders, or frozen in glaciers where they suffer from such cold that their limbs become rigid. Some temporary hells are within boiling water, where beings are cooked and suffer from the heat; others are located in fire, so that the beings are burned. Some are in tree trunks; when the trees are chopped down, the beings feel they themselves are cut, and suffer from their limbs and fingers being slashed. Some live in huge mortars and suffer the torment of being pounded. Beings also live in brooms, and suffer from both sweeping and being bound up.

Large pots, doors, pillars, hearthstones and ropes are all locations of the temporary hell beings. There is no kind of place where these beings do not dwell. We shouldn't cut trees unnecessarily since this brings them great misery. As some reside in doors, they suffer when we open and close the doors; dwelling in pillars, they feel the pain of supporting the roof beams. In hearthstones they suffer when pots are put on them; in ropes they suffer from being tied up. The kind of suffering is completely unpredictable. Since these beings feel that the pillars, doors and ropes are their bodies, their use brings intense pain.

For example, Lingje Repa saw a fish in Yamdrog Lake that was a temporary hell being, and the accomplished master Thangtong Gyalpo saw a frog inside a stone that was a temporary hell being. Here is the story of Yamdrog Lake:

Once, in the past, the dakini Yeshe Tsogyal was practicing in the area of Yamdrog when a practitioner of Bon flung a piece of pure gold. It transformed into water, and became one of Tibet's four great lakes. Travelling from its head at Lung Kangchen to its end at Zamaguru takes many days. Looking into the lake on one occasion, the great yogi Lingje Repa began to weep, and shouted out, "Alas! Don't consume offerings! Don't spend offerings!"

Someone asked why he was shouting and he explained that the consciousness of a lama who had used up his offerings and was born in a temporary hell realm was within the lake experiencing terrible misery. Asked to show this, he magically dried up the water, revealing a huge fish whose body spanned the lake from one end to the other. It was writhing in unbearable agony because an uncountable number of tiny animals had covered it completely and were eating it alive.

When asked who was the evil doer whose birth it was, the yogi answered, "It is the birth of Tsangla Tanagchen. That lama's voice had great power and blessings. He could benefit people troubled by spirits by merely glancing at them, and he was known throughout the four regions of U and Tsang. He would shout PHAT to liberate the dead and so on, taking many horses and other things as payment. He lived from that."

This lama had been invited by the families of people who had died. He had many patrons and supporters, and he received considerable payment but lacked the time to perform the prayers properly. When the family members asked him to perform the phowa transference of consciousness, he did not have time to do more than shout PHAT and receive his payment. Because of the huge offerings he received for his improperly performed ceremonies, he was born in a temporary hell as a fish in the lake.

Moreover, it was uncertain that this birth could purify his negative karma. Beings are born in the temporary hell realms when the karmic effect is just beginning to ripen. If the cause and result of the nonvirtue has completely ripened, they must undergo the sufferings of the hot and cold realms. Whether karma can be completely purified by birth in a temporary hell realm is not certain.

Tsangla Tanagchen did help people by removing demons, but this alone did not entitle him to receive his payments because he did not perform the ceremonies properly. For this he accumulated considerable negative karma. Since we cannot create even as much benefit as Tsangla Tanagchen, how much negativity will we accumulate? We may perform a ritual for someone

who is ill, and that person fails to recover and dies. If we perform a ritual for someone who has died, who knows whether they are benefited or not? In this way, if we do not bring any benefit, yet still accept payment, we are accumulating great negativity.

In general, most people are attached to their property. Taking ourselves for example, we fear using our wealth even to eat, clothe ourselves, or practice generosity, but when suffering from illness or demonic forces, we ask lamas to perform various rituals, and use our wealth for that. Likewise, people request rituals for the dead, inviting lamas and monks and asking them to liberate the mind of the one who died. For this, families use resources the deceased feared to use when alive, wealth he gathered with considerable difficulty and negativity. We must be extremely careful in such situations.

We must use whatever capacities we have when people ask us to perform rituals. If we have the power and fail to take care of others, this will definitely lead to birth in these temporary hell realms or worse. We should consider how difficult it is for us to give our wealth to others. Feeling that our own riches are like gold but the property of others is like stone that can be carelessly thrown away is wrong. We have to think very seriously before performing services for the dead, or for the living. If we lack the capacity, we should not carry out such rituals at all, but if we do accept the offerings of others, we must do our utmost.

At the outset, we must arouse bodhicitta, and we have to be very careful about the main part, the generation and completion stages, even simply reciting the Vajrasattva mantra. Finally, we must dedicate the merit. By behaving like this, through the power of the undeceiving Three Jewels, there will be future benefit, even if not immediately. However, thinking that because we are lamas and monks wearing monastic robes we have a right to take the wealth and food and drink of others, whether alive or dead, without considering our benefit to them is serious nonvirtue.

In this story, Tsangla Tanagchen had some power to benefit others by looking at them and expelling demons. If even someone with this kind of power can be born in a temporary hell realm, we who lack this power must be extremely cautious. Patrul Rinpoche has given many examples to teach us to be very careful about receiving offerings for performing rituals. As lamas and monks, it is crucial to keep this advice in mind.

Once when the siddha Tangthong Gyalpo was performing the yogic exercises of the channels and energies while seated on a large boulder, the boulder split apart. Within was a large frog whose body was being

consumed by innumerable tiny creatures, its black mouth opening and closing with unbearable suffering. Asked why, he replied that this was the rebirth of a lama who had performed “red rituals.”

Some conduct rituals with animal sacrifices; others offer meat and blood, or use meat and blood in their rituals. This is called a “red offering” and refers to animal sacrifice. According to Patrul Rinpoche, using meat in our rituals is also considered the red offering.

Patrul Rinpoche also tells us to think about lamas who eat large amounts of the meat cooked and served by their patrons. He saw this himself, and uses it as an example without mentioning any names. It is not like the story of Dawa Dragma, but was his own experience.

There are lamas today whose patrons please them by slaughtering a fat sheep and cooking the gullet, kidneys and other organs in its own flesh and blood, piling it up on the still quivering meat of yak ribs. When it is served, they cover their heads with their robes and eat the inner parts, acting like children sucking at the breast. Then, taking up a knife, they slowly feast on the outer meat. When they finish, their mouths are glistening with fat, their heads steaming. Raising their heads, their faces are slightly reddened, not like before. The debt accrued for such pleasure in this life must be repaid with their own bodies in the next, where there are great difficulties in the temporary hell realms.

Patrul Rinpoche says that such lamas have to face misery like the fish in Yamdrok lake, and the frog in the stone. They have to pay back for this flesh with the suffering of their own bodies. They will experience great suffering in the temporary hell realms.

Likewise, one day when the great khenpo of Ngor, Palden Chokyong, was residing in Derge, he said, “Whatever comes down the Ngulda river should not be allowed to pass,” and he sent many monks to wait. As evening was approaching the river carried along a huge log. They took it to him and said that nothing else had floated down. “This is it,” he said, and told them to split the log. Inside the log was a huge frog that was being eaten by many insects. The khenpo performed some purification and other rituals, and said that he had been a treasurer of Derge called Pogye.

In such a way the powerful and influential chiefs who today consume the country's wealth should think seriously about these hell realms and take care.

Similarly, during the time of the Bhagavan Lord Buddha, a butcher from one village vowed not to slaughter any animals at night. He was born in a temporary hell where at night he was in a wonderful and pleasing house tended by four beautiful women who plied him with food and drink and other luxuries, making him extremely happy. During the day the house had walls of blazing iron and the women turned into four ferocious and terrifying dogs who fed upon him.

Srona⁴ once saw an adulterer who had vowed to refrain from adultery during the day. In the opposite way from the butcher, he suffered during the night and lived happily during the day.

There was once a very attractive monastery where five hundred monks lived together. When the midday bell rang at lunchtime, the monastery turned into a building of blazing iron; the begging bowls, cups and so on transformed into weapons and they fought with each other. Once the lunch break had ended, they would take their places as before. In the past, during the time of the Buddha Kasyapa, many monks had argued over their midday break and this was the fully ripened result. There are many such stories.

At the time of Buddha Kasyapa, monks were supposed to take vows of silence during lunchtime, but they did not observe these vows, and they not only talked, but also argued with each other. Because of this behavior, they suffered from fighting each other with weapons at midday. After lunch, they remained as before without strife.

Sutrayana also teaches that monks should maintain silence during lunch. Breaking this vow will lead to the suffering just described. In Secret Mantra Vajrayana as well, the sangha should neither talk nor argue nor tease one another during ritual offering ceremonies. If they do, they will face this same result. Secret Mantra teaches that during ritual ceremonies we must visualize all phenomena as pure, all sounds as mantra, and all thoughts as Dharmakaya. We must understand that this is the highest of all offerings. Without following these directions, if we just pile up offerings, and during the ceremony think about eating and drinking and talking and arguing, we will accumulate no merit but only great negativity.

Meditation on the hell realms

A total of eighteen hell realms have been described: eight hot hell realms, eight cold hell realms, one set of neighboring hells and the

4 The vina player who became a disciple of the Buddha and gained the power to visit other realms.

temporary hell. To meditate on the suffering of hell, we must first learn and then contemplate, in a very detailed way, the number of beings, the environments, the bodies, the nature of the suffering, and the causes for birth in these realms. We must meditate upon karma, cause and effect, and reflect on whether or not we could bear such suffering if we were born in hell. We could not. As human beings, we cannot tolerate even minor changes of temperature, so how could we possibly tolerate the heat and cold of these hell realms in our future lives?

We cannot be certain about whether or not we have the karma to be born in hell, but since we have accumulated negativity from beginningless time, the causes for birth in hell are stronger than the causes for avoiding it. The likelihood of birth in the hell realms is greater than not. If we have the cause we cannot escape the result. For this reason we confess our nonvirtuous karma. Likewise, we must have compassion for the beings in the hell realms; the power of this compassion will lead to the development of bodhicitta, the enlightened mind.

Strong effort is required to avoid birth in the hell realms, both for ourselves and for others. Do not think this is only a preliminary practice; unless you take it seriously, there will be no effect. Merely listening to the teaching, without it touching your mind and without practicing, is ineffective. Those who only listen and do not practice lose faith in the Dharma, and become arrogant. They are criticized by the noble ones, and condemned by the wise.

On one occasion, a monk with perfect behavior but great pride came to see Shang Rinpoche, who asked him what Dharma he knew. "I have listened to many teachings," he replied.

"Well then, can you tell me the names of the eighteen hell realms?" Rinpoche asked.

"There are eight hot hells and eight cold hells. That makes sixteen," he answered. "With the red hat and the black hat Karmapas, there are eighteen." Lack of respect for the Karmapas did not cause him to count them with the hells; he just forgot the names of the neighboring hells and the temporary hells. The red hat and the black hat Karmapas were very famous at that time, and he impetuously added them in. Whether one has practiced the Dharma that one has heard is one thing, but not to even remember the words and terms is shameful.

From the time you begin to listen to the teachings, you must firmly

commit to not merely listen, but to understand the meaning of the words and to practice. If you think that the preliminary teaching is very simple, when you begin to practice you won't understand the meaning, and will not be able to practice correctly. Without practicing correctly, you become like the earlier example of the doctor and the patient. A patient who fails to take the medicine the doctor prescribed, even though the doctor has explained the treatment and placed the medicine at his head, will not recover. Even if you have understood the meaning, without practice no benefit will accrue. From the very outset, you need the motivation to practice the Dharma correctly, not thinking that your mere presence in the teaching session is enough.

Some texts do state that hearing the Dharma itself is beneficial, but it is difficult to say that mere listening brings about actual understanding and a deep motivation to practice. While the power of the Dharma is beyond imagination, these blessings do not automatically arise in the mind. Without a strong motivation based on clear understanding, you cannot meditate on these eighteen hell realms. This was what happened to the monk who could only name sixteen. This was shameful for a Dharma practitioner.

HUNGRY GHOSTS

The second lower realm is that of the hungry ghosts. Miserliness leads to birth in this realm. Hungry ghosts are of two types: those who live in the ground, and those who move through space.

Hungry Ghosts who live in the ground

Of the hungry ghosts who live in the ground, some have outer obscurations, some have inner obscurations, some have specific obscurations of being used by others, and so on.

Hungry Ghosts with outer obscurations

These hungry ghosts suffer intensely from thirst, not hearing the name of water for many hundreds of years, not to mention food. Always looking for food and drink, they find not the smallest amount. Some see a blue river in the distance. They move toward it, but face intense suffering on the way because their legs and arms are as small as blades of grass, while their bellies are huge. Their limbs cannot support their bellies and their joints separate, causing severe pain from moving around, in addition to their hunger and thirst.

They approach the river totally exhausted only to find that the water has dried up completely, leaving nothing but the river bed, so they become even more miserable. There actually is a river, which humans can see. Due to their outer obscurations, however, the hungry ghosts can see the water only from a distance, and not when they reach it. Humans can quench their thirst with this river's water, but the hungry ghosts, whose karma causes confusion and obscuration, see just the river bed.

They next see fruit trees in the distance, but because of their karma, the trees are withered when they approach, with neither fruits nor leaves. Then they see far away a great quantity of good food, drink and other luxuries. When they reach them, they find it all protected by armed guards who chase them away, beating them with weapons.

During the summer, they suffer from the heat and burning of the moon. The sun is extremely hot during the summer, and the moon is also hot. In winter, they suffer from cold, not only due to the coldness of the moon, but because the sun is also cold. In all these ways they suffer.

In the past, Srona traveled to the hungry ghost realm. He was affected by the hungry ghosts' poison of miserliness – the cause of birth as a hungry ghost – and became feverish and very thirsty. He saw a terrifying dark figure with red eyes at the door of a huge iron house and asked, "Where is there some water?"

Many hungry ghosts with bodies like burned blocks of wood appeared and spoke to him, "O, great perfect one, give us some water."

"I haven't found any. You should give me some," he replied.

"What are you saying? We were born here twelve years ago but haven't even heard the name of water." That is their situation.

Hungry ghosts with inner obscurations

These hungry ghosts have mouths as tiny as the eye of a needle. Even if they drank the water of a great ocean, their necks are as thin as the hair of a horse's tail, and when they drink, the poison from their mouths dries up the water. Even if a few drops do go through their necks, their huge bellies can never be filled. At night, the water that did enter bursts into flames and burns their lungs, heart and inner parts, and they suffer greatly. Trying to walk, their grass-like legs cannot support them, causing intense misery.

Due to their karma, they sometimes cannot even see water, and when they do, it evaporates. Negative action always leads to misery, and never to

happiness. Simply seeing water leads to suffering for these hungry ghosts. This is their own experience, caused by their inner obscuration.

Hungry ghosts with specific obscurations

The bodies of some hungry ghosts are used as nesting places by certain beings, who then eat them. Hungry ghosts experience many different kinds of suffering. Patrul Rinpoche gives us some examples:

Once when Srona was travelling in the land of hungry ghosts, he came upon an incredible mansion where there was an exquisite woman, striking in her bearing and lovely to behold, who was beautifully adorned with many precious jewels. Four hungry ghosts were tied to the four legs of her throne. She gave Srona some food and told him not to give the smallest bit to the hungry ghosts even if they begged for it. When he was eating, the ghosts began to beg. He gave to one and the food turned into straw. He gave to another and the food turned into an iron hammer. Similarly, what he gave to the third turned into her own flesh, and what he gave to the fourth became pus and blood.

When the woman came back, she shouted, “Didn’t I tell you not to give them any? Is your compassion greater than mine?”

“How are they related to you?” he asked.

“This was my husband; this was my son; this was my daughter-in-law; and this was my servant,” she said.

“What karma caused them to be born here?”

“That would be difficult for people of the human world to believe. In fact, they won’t believe it.”

“When I am actually seeing it, why wouldn’t I believe it?” he asked.

“I was a brahmin woman in my native place. On a certain astrologically auspicious day, special food was prepared. Noble Katayana, the great one, came on his alms round. Faith was born in me and I offered him alms. I thought that my husband should also share in the merit and I suggested that he rejoice that I had offered alms to the great bodhisattva, the noble Katayana. Instead, he became angry and shouted, ‘You haven’t offered anything to the brahmins yet, nor paid respects to your family and friends, but you have given this shaven headed monk the first part of the feast as alms! Why doesn’t he just eat husks?’

“Then I asked my son, and he also shouted angrily, ‘Why doesn’t this

baldie eat a knob of iron?"

"That evening, my family sent me some very special kinds of food, but my daughter-in-law ate the best part, giving only the leftovers to me. I asked her, 'Did you eat the best food, and just give me the scraps that were left?' Lying, she replied, 'I would eat my own flesh rather than eat food meant for you.'

"Likewise, after my maidservant had eaten food that I had set aside for her to take to my family she told me that she would rather drink her own pus and blood than steal food from me.

"I decided I wanted to be born in the same place as they were so I could watch them experiencing the effects of their negative actions. That is why I was born as a powerful female hungry ghost. Since I had offered alms to the noble one, I would have been born as a god in the Heaven of the Thirty-three if this hadn't happened.

"If you travel to my village and meet my daughter, who is a prostitute, tell her that you saw her parents and that they said that the results of her actions will be very unpleasant because her work is impure. She should abandon this negativity.

"If she does not believe you, tell her that in her father's old house are four iron pots filled with gold, a gold walking stick and a rounded monks' purification vessel. From time to time, she should take some of this wealth and offer it as alms to the great noble one, Katayana, dedicating the merit in our names. This will decrease our negative karma and finally it will be exhausted."

When someone rejoices in the virtue of others, they accumulate equal merit, and for this reason the woman wanted to share the merit she was accumulating with her family.

Different hungry ghosts with specific obscurations can experience various kinds of suffering and happiness in the same place. In the story above, for example, the woman was in a better situation than the others, who each had his or her own particular form of misery.

Similarly, once when the teacher Jetari was travelling in the countryside, a female hungry ghost with a horrible body who was the mother of five hundred children spoke to him, saying, "Master, twelve years ago my husband went to Bodh Gaya looking for food, and he hasn't yet returned. If you go there, tell him that if he doesn't return soon, our children will die of hunger."

"What does your husband look like?" he asked. "All hungry ghosts

look the same. How will I know him?"

"You can't mistake him. His mouth is enormous; his nose is flattened; he has one eye; and he has the nine marks of ugliness," she said.

When Jetari reached Bodh Gaya, he saw a novice monk throwing many water offerings and food tormas outside. When the monk had finished, a mass of hungry ghosts pounced on them. The husband was among them, so Jetari gave him his wife's message.

The husband said, "I have been roaming around for twelve years, but except for some mucus spit out by one pure monk I haven't found anything. Since many hungry ghosts were fighting over the mucus, I only got a little." Jetari added that the husband had been badly wounded when fighting over the mucus.

These are all examples of the kinds of obscurations hungry ghosts may suffer. There is no certainty about the type of suffering or location. Wherever they are born, hungry ghosts primarily suffer from hunger and thirst, but they have other miseries of heat and cold as well. Their suffering is similar to that of many of the hell realms.

Meditation

During our mind training, we should bring all of the suffering of the different kinds of hungry ghosts into our minds, and understand it. When we read the text we can understand easily. It is not a profound and vast teaching, but it is not simple either, because we must experience it from the inside. Once we have the meaning from within, we should contemplate.

As I explained before, we should not think that someone else is suffering, and we are only watching. This will not work. We have experienced this suffering many times in our past lives, and we cannot say we will not face it again in the future. Most people do; only a few can avoid it. Our actions have brought about all the causes for birth in the hungry ghost realm.

The Sutra tradition states that miserliness and preventing others from being generous with their property are the main causes for birth in this realm. We ourselves know how stingy we are, but unless we tell them, others cannot say. Some people are more miserly than others, but everyone is miserly to some degree. Some are so stingy that they cannot offer their wealth to the Three Jewels, give it to the poor, or enjoy it themselves. They have extreme attachment to their wealth. There is no miserliness greater than this.

If you have acted from miserliness, sooner or later you will face the result and experience the torture of a hungry ghost. The interdependence of cause and effect is unfailing, whether it is positive or negative. No one can separate the relationship of cause and effect, not even the Buddha.

Reflect that you have been miserly, and consider whether, were you actually born as a hungry ghost, you could bear the torment. Right now in the human realm we suffer if we miss a meal in the morning or afternoon. We humans are miserable if we do not eat for even a single day. How will you tolerate the torment of many years in the hungry ghost realm?

Think about the many times in the past that you were miserly, and also prevented others from giving. We generally forget how much stinginess has come into our minds in this lifetime. If we calculate our miserliness from the past twenty years, it would equal Mt. Meru. Even during one day, how often do you have this attitude? If it were piled up, it would make a mountain. Having accumulated so much negativity, how can you escape the consequences? Today you are in the human realm. Perhaps tomorrow you will be reborn as a hungry ghost suffering from hunger and thirst.

You do have the opportunity to avoid this misery, however; it is not too late, or too early. Using the four supports, confess your negative actions and resolve not to commit them again. By completely purifying the causes for birth as a hungry ghost, there will be no need to be born as one. Determine not to be influenced by miserliness again.

Believing that you are the only person who does not want to be born as a hungry ghost is not the thinking of a being of great capacity. One who strives to follow Mahayana or Dzogchen must put others first. You are not now suffering as a hungry ghost, but your parents, relatives, and friends from this and past lives might be. Consider their misery and develop compassion, love, and bodhicitta. This meditation must also contain the three excellences: the excellent beginning, main part, and conclusion. The main part involves reflecting on the different kinds of suffering.

Hungry ghosts who move through space

These include many kinds of spirits such as *tšen*, *gyalpo*, *shindre*, *jungpo*, *mamo*, *theurang*,⁵ and others, who move through space. They live in a constant state of fear, terror, and illusion. Due to their past negative actions, they have very unpleasant bodies and are always thinking about harming others. This is a result similar to causes created in previous lives.

5. These categories of spirits have no exact English equivalents.

They also experience great fear of being hurt by others. When these spirits harm humans, people may become mad and faint, or suffer other illnesses or misfortune. Tantric practitioners are then called to perform fire pujas or tormas rituals and the spirits become very frightened, but even when fearful they cause harm. Since they are always thinking of harming others, most fall into the hell realms after death.

In particular, at the end of every week these hungry ghosts suffer the pain of their past deaths, more or less like beings in the bardo, the transitional state between death and the next life. If they died due to sickness, every week they must experience this death without dying; if they were killed by weapons or accidents, they re-experience that pain weekly, and so on. Bardo beings die every week, but they do not really die; they only suffer.

Tormented in this way, they want to burden others with their pain. These spirits harm whoever encounters them, but this does not relieve their own suffering. Even though they try to transfer their misery to others, they continue to suffer. They cannot help themselves. They may happily approach their former friends and loved ones, but bring them only illness, madness, or other hateful misery. Previously they were parents, but now they harm even their own offspring.

To clear away this difficulty, the children call upon powerful tantric practitioners to bury them, burn them, and cast them out. They are buried in the earth, where they cannot escape from the darkness for eons, or are put into fire so that their entire bodies burn. In wrathful action ceremonies they are hit with mustard seeds, small particles of stones that were empowered by mantras, or special tormas so that their heads split into hundred of pieces and their bodies into thousands of fragments. These are things children do to their past parents, despite their love and attachment, when the parents are born as hungry ghosts.

Like other hungry ghosts, their perceptions are distorted. The sun feels cold in winter, and the moon feels hot in summer. Some take the form of birds, dogs, or other animals with extremely ugly bodies. They suffer from knowing how horrible their bodies are. Whatever form of body they have, all are unpleasant.

Meditation

Take upon yourself the suffering of all the types of hungry ghosts. Meditate that you are truly in these very situations. This functions as a meditation on the defects of samsara. If you simply think that you are a human being with

food, drink, wealth, good reputation, and high position, that you are not someone who is suffering, and that only other beings are born in the lower realms, this does not benefit you. There is no point in meditating like that. It does not lead to the renunciation of samsara. You must take upon yourself all suffering, however big or small.

If Buddha told you that you would be born in this realm, you would be agonized right now. This is how to meditate. Although you are a human being and not in a lower realm, by putting yourself in that situation, you can develop renunciation automatically. Weariness toward samsara will not develop if your meditation is like watching a film of other beings' misery.

Experiencing this suffering, develop love and compassion to the beings in these realms. Once again, perform the three excellences of the beginning, main part, and conclusion when doing this practice.

ANIMALS

The third lower realm is the animal realm. Animals can live in the ocean, the human realm and god realms. There are two main classes of animals: those living in the water, and those living in different locations.

Animals living in the water

First, the animals living in the great ocean are fish, crocodiles, turtles, shellfish, reptiles, frogs, and worms. They fill the entire ocean, just as grains fill a barrel of *chhang*.⁶ The bodies of animals are not definite. Some snakes and sea monsters are so large that they can encircle Mt. Meru many times and other animals are as small as dust particles or the tip of a needle. The larger eat the smaller, and the smaller ones devour the larger by eating through their bodies. Large animals have many tiny ones nesting inside of them. They provide both food and a place to live for the smaller ones.

Some animals are born between the continents where the sun never shines and the darkness is so dense that they cannot even see whether their limbs are bent or extended. The sun shines on the four large continents and the smaller ones, but in between the continents there is no sunshine, only constant dark.

Animals are extremely stupid and ignorant. Ignorance is the strongest of their negative emotions. They do not know what behavior to adopt and what to avoid. Some animals are better than humans at accumulating

⁶ Alcoholic beverage made from fermented grain.

nonvirtue, and gather limitless negativity. As I explained earlier, even if they want to accumulate virtue, they cannot pronounce a single syllable of the Mani mantra. Being ignorant about virtue, their negativity has no end, and they suffer eternally. They can never escape the misery caused by their negative actions. To escape they must stop accumulating nonvirtue, but they do not know how to do this.

Animals that are scattered

These are animals living in the human and god realms. We can observe and understand their situation ourselves, even if the Buddha had not taught about them. No intelligence is needed to recognize their suffering. Their lack of happiness is obvious. We can also see that they cannot accumulate merit. Domestic animals in the human realm are used by humans, enslaved by them. They suffer greatly from this. Wild animals eat each other and thus live in constant fear. Even when eating a mouthful of grass, they are terrified.

Animals are killed by hunters and by carnivores. Deer, antelope, and so on are eaten by tigers, leopards, wolves, and others. Hawks eat smaller birds; smaller birds eat insects. Animals are always killing each other, sometimes from anger and sometimes from attachment to meat. They accumulate the nonvirtue of killing, with no opportunity to accumulate virtue. As I have already taught, only beings with human bodies can practice Dharma.

Hunters are extremely skillful at harming and killing animals. Since this is their profession, hunters know many methods of killing, and pose immediate threats to animal lives in many ways: with nets, snares, traps, and guns. Animals may be killed for their horns, skins, or other parts of their bodies. Deer antlers and rhinoceros tusks have great value so these animals are killed. Some animals have valuable skins, like leopards and tigers, and others have valuable fur. They are all killed because of the nature of their bodies. As Patrul Rinpoche details:

Oysters are killed for their pearls; elephants for their tusks and bones; tigers, leopards, otters, and foxes for their fur; musk deer for their musk; wild asses and yaks for their flesh and blood. Their very own bodies are the causes of their death. This is great suffering,

We usually generate compassion for the animals that are being killed and try to save their lives, but feel anger toward the hunters and wish them ill. If we think about it, hunter and hunted are equal. The hunters are committing nonvirtue and the animals are suffering as a result of nonvirtue.

The actions of one prepare the ground for future misery, and the pain of the other results from previous actions. One suffers at present; the other will suffer in the future.

Considering this, we should, like bodhisattvas, develop compassion equally for both. While the hunter is accumulating bad karma, the animal's negative karma is growing less, regardless of its present torment. We should actually develop more compassion for the one piling up the causes of suffering than the one experiencing the result of past karma. There is no difference between them concerning cause and effect. Within samsara, cause and effect are equal. The cause leads to future suffering, and the effect is present suffering.

Animals that depend upon humans are so ignorant and stupid that even when in front of a butcher holding a knife, they only gaze with innocent eyes. When yaks and sheep face the butcher, they are too naive even to try to escape. Animals are this stupid. They do not remain in place from pleasure, happily, but because they are ignorant.

They are milked, burdened with loads, castrated, pierced through the nose, used for plowing, and so on. There is not a single one that does not experience many kinds of mistreatment and exploitation.

Animals experience every possible suffering from exploitation. Horses and yaks continue to be loaded and ridden even if they have wounds on their backs; people don't think they have any pain and suffering. When they can walk no further they are beaten with metal sticks and pelted with stones. Heavily loading a motor vehicle causes no physical suffering and people think that in the same way they can overload an animal without a thought for its difficulties. They fail to use their own bodies as an example. If we had to carry fifty kilograms or so, the pain and suffering would be severe, but we don't think at all about putting as much as we can on the yaks and horses. We think of ourselves as living beings with flesh and blood, but we treat pack animals as non-living beings who do not suffer, so we do not care about burdening and riding them.

Yaks, sheep and cattle are worked until they are so old they are about to die. If we thought that our animals had served us for their entire lives, and now deserve some rest, this would be fine. However, we actually use them until the point of death, and when they are too old to walk we kill them and eat their flesh and blood, or sell them to others to kill. Hardly any of these animals die a natural death. Although we have some intelligence and understanding, we do not consider the cause and effect of our actions.

Considering this, human beings are the lowest form of life in terms of the nonvirtue we commit.

In India and Nepal, this situation is not as common, but in Tibet people traditionally kill animals. Here we purchase meat from a shop, not killing the animals ourselves. Nevertheless, there is little difference. A family in Tibet kills about ten animals during one year while many animals may be killed every day to supply a meat shop. Until the killing and eating of meat is stopped, whether we kill the animals ourselves or have them killed by others, the animal's suffering is the same. Therefore, the same negativity of killing is accumulated.

If you want to eat meat, you should really kill the animal yourself, because then only you will face the future suffering; otherwise many people accumulate the nonvirtue. If we want to end the killing, we must stop eating and buying meat. As long as we don't stop eating meat, animals must be killed. We can't get meat without killing animals. Animals suffer intensely in these many ways.

Meditation

We must develop a high level of compassion on seeing these animals. We need to put ourselves in their situation. Before a sheep is killed, the butcher ties its legs. How much fear does the sheep feel at that moment? When it is actually being cut with the knife, what is its pain and suffering? How would we feel if we were about to be killed by some enemies who tied our legs and arms and knifed us or shot us? How much fear and pain would we experience? Animals have flesh and blood, and they have minds and feelings. We should meditate that we and the animals are the same.

Compassion toward all animals will automatically arise, especially for our own domestic animals. We must develop love and compassion for them. They benefit us immensely. We load them and ride on them. Their benefit to us is as great as that of our parents and relatives. We should always feel for them, and if they die we have to pray for them. Although we have used them as beasts of burden, we can benefit them by praying. The Buddha's words are unfailing. These animals may be born as human beings in a future life. If, despite their service to us, we continue mistreating and beating them, not only are the animals suffering but we are accumulating serious nonvirtue that will affect us in the future.

From the smallest insect, all animals experience suffering and happiness, and all were our parents in the past. Their feelings of suffering and happiness

are the same as ours. When we experience comfort we feel happy, and when we experience pain we suffer. Insects also feel happy and suffer, and so we must bring forth compassion and love for them. We feel happy if our parents, relatives, and children are happy. As these tiny insects were also your parents, we should avoid harming them and treat them with compassion and love. Meditate again with the three excellences of the beginning, main part, and conclusion.

In many different ways, as we have seen, the beings of the lower realms suffer greatly for a long time without a break. They have no idea of the Dharma, and they accumulate huge amounts of nonvirtue through their anger, attachment, and ignorance. They suffer in the present and in the future will fall ever lower with no chance to escape their misery by birth in the human or god realms. If we were born in these realms, we too would fall lower and lower with no opportunity for liberation. To be liberated one must accumulate virtue, but beings in the realms of the hells, the hungry ghosts, and the animals have no idea how to do this.

From beginningless time we have had many causes for this type of birth within our mindstream. To avoid birth in the lower realms, you must confess all this negativity. Deep within your heart, regret and confess whatever past nonvirtue you have committed, and vow never to commit such actions again. Avoiding birth in the lower realms requires cutting off the causes. This is done through sincere confession and regret. Regular confession can purify negativity.

We must also generate strong compassion for the beings in the lower realms. Contemplate their great torment and aspire to free them from this misery. Dedicate to them all the virtue accumulated in the past and present and whatever will be gathered in the future. Dedicating your roots of virtue to these beings will benefit them because dedication prayers have strong power. One day they will be able to escape and have the chance to listen to the Dharma and achieve liberation.

Encourage yourself by thinking, "I am now practicing the Mahayana Dharma and have met a qualified guru. I am practicing the methods of benefiting self and others. This is the proper time for me to practice. If I wish to help others, it is not too early or too late." Do not waste time by roaming around or through laziness. If you died right now, you could not benefit yourself or others. With great regret, you could be born in the hell realms. This life is the crossroads of moving up or down. Benefiting both self and others requires Dharma practice.

Practicing the Dharma is not easy. The gurus of the past struggled considerably in order to practice. No accomplished practitioner merely eats and sleeps. Take the example of Milarepa, who is renowned throughout the world for his great accomplishment. Consider how hard he worked at the beginning when he was receiving teachings, and then when he was practicing. This is called practicing patience for the Dharma. Dharma is not accomplished through better clothing, better food, a better home and more comfort. Those who want to accomplish the supreme Dharma need not think about these things.

Practicing Dharma for the sake of a better lifestyle is not authentic Dharma. It is the opposite of Dharma, and leads to the lower realms, not liberation. Some may take novice vows for the sake of food; some may take the vows of full ordination for status and fame. These are not pure vows. By not practicing Dharma properly, such monks are led to the lower realms. We practitioners need only enough food to sustain our lives and enough clothing to protect ourselves from cold. We do need a small place to stay; we cannot stay in caves like the great practitioners of the past, but we must be satisfied with only what we need to maintain our lives, and practice Dharma with strong diligence.

We need to generate bodhicitta, the motivation to liberate all the beings of the lower realms. Through the power of Dharma, all these beings can be liberated. To succeed in developing this motivation, we must pray to our root guru and the Three Jewels for their help and support. We pray to the deities and our guru for their assistance and dedicate the merit to all beings, fulfilling the practice of the three excellences. The main part is contemplating the defects of samsara.

We have now completed the explanation of the three lower realms. If we continuously contemplate this, at some point by simply bringing these realms to mind, we will directly experience their suffering. Because of this, Patrul Rinpoche said that he could not meditate on the lower realms, but could only contemplate the upper realms. This concludes the meditation on the three lower realms.

THE HUMAN REALM

We think that the nature of the three lower realms is suffering and that happiness is found in the three upper realms, but in fact no true happiness can be found there either. However, there is no happiness at all in the three lower realms and thus we want to escape and avoid them. From this

perspective the three upper realms of humans, demi-gods and gods appear as pleasurable and we are attached to them. Birth in the lower realms does not lead to attachment to those realms because of the extreme misery. We never consider that there is happiness in those realms. The strong suffering causes us to constantly wish for escape, not to remain.

Those who want to escape the upper realms are very few, and there is no idea of practicing Dharma to avoid the human realm. Dharma itself is contrary to remaining in this realm, but people spend a very short time practicing. Up to about age fifty-five, people are involved with human concerns, leaving only the declining years for Dharma practice.

Attachment to the human realm is very strong. Although the god and demi-god realms have more wealth than the human realm, not seeing these realms, we are less attached to them. We do see the human realm, and become strongly attached to the prosperity, reputation and status found here.

We do not become strongly attached to the Dharma, even though we understand something about it. Practicing Dharma is like a part-time job. While lamas and monks seem to be Dharma practitioners, they are also attached to the qualities of the human realm, and more interested in the happiness of this realm than in practicing the Dharma. If this is the case, what can we say about laypeople?

The true nature of the prosperity, reputation and status of the human realm is suffering, but we do not see this, and remain attached to them. Regarding them as happiness, we cannot avoid them, and are constantly engaged in seeking them. In our entire lives, we may spend only a tiny amount of time practicing the Dharma. One day contains twenty-four hours, but we generally only spend one hour on Dharma practice. Lamas as well think about whether sleeping, talking or eating would be better than practicing. They wander around thinking of this life. Their efforts to practice Dharma do not amount to much in a given day.

If we really examine whether we are more concerned about worldly things or the Dharma, we find that our attachment to worldly concerns is stronger. We follow the direction of whatever attachment is greater. The thought of devoting our entire lives to the Dharma, and having less concern for worldly life, rarely enters our minds because we do not see that the nature of the human realm is suffering. We believe that the human realm contains comfort and happiness, but this is not the case. This is not only written in books; if we reflect carefully we will see for ourselves that the human realm

is not characterized by happiness and comfort. Suffering is more common than happiness.

Human beings have three root miseries: the suffering of change, the suffering upon suffering, and the suffering of compoundedness. From childhood to old age, everyone faces these three major sufferings. Birth, aging, illness and death are the other major classification of human suffering. Think about yourself: at the beginning you suffered during your birth; in the middle, when aging, you experience the suffering of growing old; you also suffer from illness; and finally you will suffer from death. These are not minor miseries, so they are called the four great rivers of suffering.

The suffering of being born occurs only once in a lifetime. On the other hand, every moment that we live we are undergoing the suffering of aging, although this becomes more serious during the second half of our lives. The suffering of illness is indefinite; we sometimes suffer this misery and sometimes not. Finally, we only have to face the suffering of death one time. Within one lifetime, we experience the suffering of birth, aging, sickness and death, which are like rivers of suffering.

In addition to these, we also face enemies who want to harm us and the torment of possible separation from our relatives, for whom we have tremendous attachment and love. We may have to leave them, causing great unhappiness and grief. We suffer from not achieving our aims, and also from getting what we do not want. These are only the main kinds of suffering; human life contains many other miseries as well. Although we believe in the happiness of the human realm, if we examine closely we see that true happiness never occurs, not for a single moment. Guru Rinpoche taught that samsara contains no happiness, not even the tiniest amount. This is the nature of the human realm, although we do not understand the suffering as suffering and believe it to be happiness.

The nature of suffering of the human realm differs from the hell and hungry ghost realms, and so this realm is considered to be a place of happiness. We become attached to it due to our ignorance. I have here mentioned only the major kinds of suffering. If we think in detail, we can find countless others.

The three root miseries

The suffering of change

Among the three root miseries, the first is the suffering of change. This

occurs when happiness changes to suffering. At one moment we feel happiness, but if we hear some unpleasant news our joy immediately changes into suffering, and our mind becomes dark. We may be fine one moment, satisfied after a good meal eaten to support our health, and suddenly feel severe pain resulting from stomach problems. Food brings about this suffering. After satisfying us, food becomes toxic. One moment we think we are happy and the next a thief steals our wealth, our house burns down, we are suddenly stricken by sickness or an evil spirit that causes disease, or we receive some terrible news. In all these situations, we are immediately overcome by suffering. The suffering of change is quite strong in the human realm.

Whatever physical comfort or mental happiness we experience, or whatever good reputation we acquire, these are not true comfort, happiness, or good reputation. In the human realm, these three do not last, and when they change they lead to misery. The quality of these three experiences does not improve, but changes into suffering. We must generate the feeling in our mind that these three are not beyond suffering, and are only suffering.

Suffering upon suffering

Before one suffering is cleared away, another misery comes on top of it. This is the same for the body and the mind. When we are suffering in one way, another kind of torment arrives. If someone falls ill, he may contract another disease. If someone steals our property we also suffer mentally. Following that, our parents may die suddenly, causing even more unhappiness. When different kinds of suffering come one after the other, it is called suffering upon suffering.

Someone suffering from leprosy gets boils which burst; after one's father dies, one's mother also dies; while you are being chased by your enemies, a loved one passes away. Wherever one is born in samsara, suffering piles up upon suffering, with not even a moment of happiness.

We need not only point to the lower realms as places of suffering; even in the upper realms of humans, demi-gods, and gods – realms we consider happy – no true happiness can be found. Although the nature is misery, we do not see the suffering and ignorantly take it for happiness. No happiness is found throughout the six realms, but simply suffering upon suffering. We may mistakenly believe that suffering falls upon happiness, but in reality the happiness itself is suffering.

What is suffering? Suffering has both a cause and a result. When our body is experiencing illness and pain and our mind is fraught with unhappiness, these are results. Attachment, anger, and ignorance coupled with nonvirtuous actions are the causes. One is cause and the other is result, but both are suffering. Neither the cause nor the result is beyond suffering. The human realm which we experience as happiness is itself a cause of suffering. Undergoing suffering is the result of suffering. Thus, we have not a single moment of comfort.

The suffering of compoundedness

Compoundedness is the primary cause of suffering. At present we are ignorantly experiencing pleasure. For example, if we are well-known, we feel pleasure; if we own a lot of property, we feel comfortable. High status makes us happy. On the surface these advantages appear to be happiness, and we cling to them. If we seriously reflect on this, they actually involve nonvirtue and are causes of future suffering. If we presently realize that what we take to be happiness is in fact suffering, we will not feel attached to it. Human happiness is like that.

When we eat a good meal, we feel satisfied, and wearing warm clothes is very comfortable. We enjoy living in nice houses, ornamenting ourselves with jewels, being entertained and so on, but none of these pleasures are beyond being the causes of suffering. Why do these joys bring misery? Why is eating good food a cause of suffering? Think of how much nonvirtue we commit for our rice, wheat and vegetables. We must engage in unthinkable negative action in order to eat them. To obtain a single grain of rice, we must take the life of a large number of insects. Because of this nonvirtue, our food brings suffering upon ourselves, sooner or later.

This is not merely true of food. Clothing is also obtained by committing huge amounts of nonvirtue. It does not arrive without negativity, like rain from the sky or plants that automatically spring up from the ground. Many negative actions are involved in the clothes we wear. Wearing warm clothes is a cause of nonvirtue and suffering.

In the same way, no action at all is beyond some wrongdoing. Whatever we do with our body and speech, everything serves negativity. Walking on the road is a nonvirtuous action; swinging our arms is unwholesome; the very action of talking involves nonvirtue. Whether we sit still or move around, all action of body or speech is nonvirtuous. Sitting, walking and speaking are all negative actions. Sooner or later, misery results from all of

these.

Taking tea as an example, we do not obtain tea without negativity. We must commit unthinkable amounts of nonvirtue for our tea.

Tea is a plant grown in China. Uncountable tiny creatures die when the seeds are planted, when the leaves are cut, and so on. To the lower area of Dartsedo, porters are the means of transport, and every one of them carries twelve packages of six bricks each. Moreover, all of them support their loads with their heads, wearing away the skin on their foreheads. They keep going even when the white bones of their skulls become visible.

Onwards from Dothog, *dzo*,⁷ yaks, mules and the like are used to carry the loads further, all of them with backs breaking, wounds on their chests, hair rubbed away, given over to the inconceivable suffering of enslavement.

In addition to this, when the tea is bought and sold, the traders shamelessly make false promises with no concern for others, conducting their business through nothing but argument and conflict.

Swearing and cheating without shame are also nonvirtuous behavior. Chagme Rinpoche's aspiration prayer to go to the Sukhavati realm says:

*Pointing to the Three Jewels, monasteries, holy scriptures and so on as a witness,
I confess to abandoning Dharma and accumulating negative karma in this way.*

Making false promises with no feeling of embarrassment is a negative act, as is arguing over buying and selling. These are totally evil actions of body, mind, and speech. Doing business in sheep's wool and lambskin also involves negativity. In Tibet, during Patrul Rinpoche's time, tea was not purchased for money but was traded for wool and lambskin.

It is the same for wool. During the summer, many tiny creatures such as lice multiply in numbers not less than the strands of wool themselves. At shearing time, most of them die from being decapitated, cut in half or disemboweled. Moreover, those who survive suffocate from being tangled up in the wool. This leads only to the lower realms.

For lambskin as well, the lambs have all their senses intact as soon as they are born, and are able to feel pleasure and pain. Their bodies

7

A cross between a yak and a cow.

are gaining strength. Just when they have their first happy moments, they die.

Even if they are only dumb animals, they fear death and rejoice in life. They experience the pain of death. Their mothers also suffer when their little ones are killed just as a mother suffers when her only child dies. We can see this is how things are.

When we think about this kind of production and commerce, even drinking a single sip of tea is nothing but a cause for the lower realms.

As Patrul Rinpoche taught, a mere cup of tea can lead to the lower realms. This is a negative action. Worldly people think that eating food and wearing clothes bring comfort and happiness, but reflecting deeply these are really negative actions. Negativity always results in misery, and never results in any happiness. That is why everything leads to the lower realms. If we really think about drinking tea, it involves powerful wrongdoing.

Let's consider *tsampa*.⁸ When people plow the field, all the tiny creatures under the ground are turned upside down. As their karma is to live underground, they cannot survive above ground. This is like fish, which can remain for many years in water, but will die within a few moments after being thrown onto the land. According to their karmic experience, fish take water as a place to live. In the same way, the worms and insects that live underground do not have the karma to live on land. The small creatures living above ground are smashed into the ground from the plowing and immediately die. While the plowing is going on, crows and birds are constantly eating insects and worms, without ever stopping their beaks.

Likewise, when irrigating, the tiny beings that live in the water are put into a dry place and the living creatures that live on dry land are forced into the water. They all die. The same is true when sowing seeds and harvesting grain. Innumerable worms and insects are killed when the fields are being broken up for planting, and when the stalks are cut. Thinking in this way, eating *tsampa* is like eating insects.

Contemplating these examples we find a huge amount of negativity. We are motivated to get the grain, but we give not a thought for the insects being killed. We may think we do not accumulate any negativity from these actions since we have no motivation to kill, but only to obtain food. However, the insects still suffer and our actions are nonvirtuous. The intensity of the negativity might differ depending on whether our intention

is to kill or whether the killing occurs only as a result of other actions. The negativity is less without the motivation to kill, but nonvirtue is still accrued. No matter why or how we kill the insects, we must repay their lives.

In order to eat meat, an animal must be killed. Meat cannot be obtained without killing. In the same way, we must kill many insects to eat rice, vegetables and so on. Both eating meat and not eating meat seem to have the same result. Considering the number of sentient beings killed, more creatures are killed for rice, grain, and vegetables. However, although the action of killing sentient beings is the same, the motivation differs since eating meat directly requires killing an animal.

Killing beings while growing rice, grain, and vegetables is similar to performing virtuous actions like prostrating, circumambulating and so on, when insects are killed inadvertently. We can accumulate virtue by giving up eating meat because of the negativity associated with the action of obtaining the meat. To eat meat, we have a motivation from the very beginning that requires killing animals. When growing grain and vegetables, we have no particular motivation to kill animals, and we are not consuming their meat.

I feel that eating rice, vegetables, and other grains carries less negativity than eating meat. The text explains that both eating only vegetarian foods, and eating meat involve strong negativity. Because of the difference in the motivation, the grain and vegetables seem to carry less negativity, although it is difficult to assert this definitively. To eat meat, animals must be directly killed, while for vegetables and grains, the animals are killed only indirectly.

Butter, milk and yoghurt – the ‘three whites’ – and honey, molasses and sugar – the ‘three sweets’ – are generally considered to involve no nonvirtue, but they do. Patrul Rinpoche explains:

Most newborn yaks, calves, and lambs are killed; those that are not slaughtered are tied at the neck the moment they are born so they cannot taste even a mouthful of their mother’s creamy milk. When penned they are roped to a stake in the ground; when let out they are linked together, and every bit of milk – their normal food and drink – is stolen to extract the crucial nutrients.

Because the essence of the mother’s body is taken, the baby animals are robbed of their life force so they can neither live nor die. By springtime, the mothers are so weakened and worn out that they

cannot even rise from their beds; their physical strength is totally exhausted.

Most of the cows and sheep starve to death, and even the survivors are like carcasses with little strength, skeletal and stumbling about on the verge of death, without a single hope.

In the same way, everything we count as happiness – the clothes we wear, the food we eat, our wealth and luxuries, all of it – whatever we can think of, is solely brought about by wrongdoing, nothing else. The ultimate result of all of it is the endless misery of the lower realms. By contemplating this, we realize that everything we experience is the suffering of compoundedness.

We think that good food, clothing, and wealth make us happy, but this is not actually happiness because these are all acquired through negative actions and the result of negativity is suffering. The misery of the three lower realms is the most severe of all types of suffering, and the apparent happiness of the human realm leads to these lower realms of endless torment.

What we consider happiness at present, all involves suffering. The nonvirtuous actions that underlie our joy and comfort become the cause of negative karma and sooner or later result in misery. This is called the suffering of compoundedness.

The four great rivers of suffering

The suffering of birth

Among the four main sufferings of human beings, the first is birth. Since we were mere infants when we were born, we cannot remember the great anguish of birth. The suffering we experienced then was like the agony of being near to death. The human beings of this world are born from wombs.⁹ Only a few have been born instantaneously, like Aryadeva and Guru Rinpoche. Our teacher, Buddha Shakyamuni, is considered to have been born from a womb because he had parents.

Our consciousness during the intermediate state wanders without knowing where to go, and enters blindly into the egg and sperm during the time of the parents' copulation without knowing where it came from, whether from the lower or higher realms. This is the kind of consciousness that enters the womb. After entering, it changes every week, becoming an

⁹ The four types of birth are: birth from a womb, birth from an egg, birth from heat and moisture, and instantaneous birth.

oval spot, an oblong, an early stage of embryo, something solid and circular, and so on. This involves suffering.

Once your limbs, the smaller parts of your body, and your sense organs have formed, you find the interior of your mother's womb to be narrow and foul-smelling. You experience anguish as if thrown into a dark prison. When your mother eats hot food, you feel the torment of being burned by fire; when she eats cold food, the misery is like tumbling into cold water. When she sleeps, you suffer as though crushed under a mountain. When her stomach is full, the pain is like being pressed between rocky cliffs. When she is hungry, you are distressed as though falling into a canyon. When she walks around, sits down, or moves in place, you feel the misery of being blown about by the wind.

As the number of months is completed and the time of birth approaches, the karmic energy of existence turns your head to the bottom. Being drawn through the birth canal, you suffer as though a huge, powerful giant held you by the feet and was banging you against a wall. Emerging from between the pelvic bones, the agony is like being pulled through the wire drawing hole in a metal plate. When birth canals are too narrow, the birth cannot occur and you could die, or both mother and child could die. Even if not, they experience death-like agony.

The great master of Oddiana said:

*Mother and child both travel halfway to the land of death;
Except for her jaw, all the mother's joints are pulled apart.*

After birth, dropping onto the bed is like being tossed into a pit of thorns, and having the amniotic membranes peeled from your back is like being flayed. Being washed clean feels like being beaten by a thorny stick. When taken onto your mother's lap you are like a small bird snatched up by a hawk. When butter is rubbed into the crown of your head, you feel as though you were cast into a deep gully. You experience many kinds of misery.

Later, when made to sleep upright, you are trapped in filth. Even if suffering from hunger, thirst or discomfort, you can do nothing but wail. After your birth, you become a young person and experience growth, but in fact your life time is decreasing day by day and death comes ever closer.

As the body grows, both parents and child rejoice, but actually life is

becoming shorter and closer to death moment to moment. As babies and children, we don't know anything, and want to grow. Our parents want the same thing. We feel happy when we grow a little bit. In fact, we are approaching nearer and nearer to death. When we become adults and begin to garner wealth, we do not want to age. Nevertheless, we grow older every day.

We become engaged in worldly activities that never end, following one after the other like ripples of water. The work of this life cannot ever be completed. Whatever we finish, new work continues to come. We must consciously recognize that worldly work will never end, and simply cease our worldly activities. All such work involves negative actions and is a cause for birth in the lower realms. No matter how minor the worldly work, some nonvirtue always enters in.

If we engage in nonvirtue throughout our lifetime, our virtue will be extremely small. We won't earn even one or two years worth of merit during our entire life, but will only create negative karma. If we weigh our negative and our positive actions, the negative actions are heavier. Our merit is quite small and weak. As the nonvirtue is stronger, it ripens first. During this very life, the results of negativity include illness, harm from spirits, and experiencing those things that we do not want. These are all brought about by nonvirtue. Considering the next life, the result of nonvirtue is birth in one of the three lower realms. Our negative karma leads to suffering both in this and future lives. If we spend our entire lives accumulating negative actions, after death we will immediately be born in the lower realms.

The suffering of aging

Being engaged in this worldly work, we become older without noticing. We are suffering from aging. The strength of our body gradually weakens. Losing our sense of taste, we no longer enjoy our food. Our digestive capacity declines. Our eyesight weakens so we can no longer see things that are far away and small. The power of hearing also diminishes so people must shout at us since we cannot hear quiet voices. We can no longer speak clearly. Our mental capacity weakens so we can no longer remember things. We become mentally dull and forgetful. Lethargy and sloth grow stronger, and we feel dim-witted most of time. Our teeth fall out so we cannot properly chew our food, and cannot eat what we want. Without teeth we also cannot speak well. Losing our body heat, thin clothes cannot keep us warm, and we need heavy clothing. We become so weak that our limbs can no longer

support us. We always feel heavy.

We want to be able to hear well and to taste our food, but we do not have these powers any longer. When the energies and channels of our bodies decline, we also lose our mental capacity. We lose our ability to bear illness and other difficulties. When we become old, everyone treats us with contempt, including our own children. We experience extreme mental suffering. The elements of our bodies become disturbed and we more frequently become ill and suffer harm from evil spirits. We lose the power to walk and sit up and all movement becomes very difficult, not easy like before.

Lord Milarepa sang:

*First, you rise like a pole being pulled from the ground;
Second, you walk crouched low, as though stalking a bird;
Third, you sit like a sackful of earth falling down.
These three are now complete;
Alas, old mother, weakened body in a failing mind.*

Milarepa says this happens when we reach old age. Wanting to stand up we cannot, but must be pulled like a peg from the ground. We walk as slowly as someone trying to catch a bird. Trying to sit, we cannot go straight down, but must sit very slowly. When these three experiences come together, your bodily strength has been lost.

*First, on the outside, your skin puckers up in wrinkles;
Second, on the inside, as flesh and blood diminish, your bones protrude;
Third, in between, you are stupid, mute, deaf, blind and confused.
These three are now complete;
Alas, old mother with angry wrinkles, unpleasant to see.*

No longer beautiful like before, your body is completely wrinkled.

*First, your clothes are heavy and ragged;
Second, your food and drink are cold and nasty;
Third, your resting place is four bricks joined together.
These three are now complete;
Alas, old mother, wise one walked over by men and dogs.*

When we age we wear old and patched clothes that easily tear. We can only eat and drink cold things. Relaxing and passing time, we must smother ourselves with blankets and shawls. If they are thin, we feel cold. When all of these conditions have come together, we

have reached old age. People and dogs step over us and we don't even care, as though we were accomplished practitioners, but we are not.

When we want to get up, we can't rise right away, but must place our two hands on the ground as though pulling a tethering pole out of hard-packed earth. We walk hunched over from the waist, unable to raise our heads, and since we cannot step firmly, we creep along slowly, like a child stalking a bird. All our joints are aching, so we cannot lower ourselves gently when we sit, but drop the weight of our body like a sack when its sling breaks.

Our flesh shrinks, and externally our skin weakens and our face and body become completely wrinkled; internally our flesh and blood waste away and all the joints between our bones become visible. Our jawbones and the sockets of our joints bulge outwardly.

Our intellect and memory decline so we become stupid and dull-witted, deaf and blind. Our minds lack clarity and we simply sit and tremble.

When we are old we wear heavy and patched clothes, which easily rip. In our adult years, we would refuse to wear such clothing even if someone paid us. We want to look beautiful. Once aged, we no longer care, we wear old, worn-out clothing. The food we eat is cold and mashed and our sense of taste is gone. Our body feels heavy and whatever we do is unpleasant. When we sit down, we need clothing all around us. We have lost the strength and all the power of our outer body; we also lose the power of our inner mind. This is great suffering. Our faces become wrinkled and lose their glowing complexions. We become ugly. Everyone treats us with contempt and steps over our heads.¹⁰ Like an accomplished practitioner, which we are not, we no longer care about cleanliness or dirt.

The misery of old age is so hard to bear that some old people think it is better to die quickly. But, if we think about it, the torment of death is worse than the suffering of old age, and the suffering of the bardo is even worse than that. Finally, the pain of taking birth in the lower realms is the most terrible. A supreme practitioner can feel happy when death approaches, but ordinary people have no reason for such joy. The torment in the bardo is hundreds of thousands of times more severe than the suffering of human beings, and the misery of the lower realms is even worse. Thus, people with heavy nonvirtue have no reason to approach death happily. Nevertheless, they feel they would prefer death to the suffering of old age. They both long

for and fear death. The terror increases with age. For them, the misery of old age is like the suffering of the lower realms.

Our human realm is not happy at all. At first we are born, next we age and face illness, and finally we die. Suffering continues without a break: birth, aging, illness, and death are all suffering. Despite this misery, humans in general want to live longer. They mistake their suffering for comfort and ease.

Compared to the suffering of the lower realms, the human realm does appear to be pleasant. Among the three upper realms, the demi-gods suffer more than the gods, and humans more than the demi-gods. Human misery is greater than both of these realms, but negligible in comparison with the lower realms. From the perspective of the lower realms, the suffering of the upper realms seems to fall on the side of happiness.

Attachment to samsara refers to attachment to the three upper realms. No one clings to the lower realms. Attachment to the next life is also attachment to the upper realms. If we want to become supreme practitioners we must detach ourselves from clinging to this life and the next, from all attachment to the upper three realms.

The suffering of illness

The body itself is composed of the four elements. When these are not properly balanced, we are afflicted with various illnesses related to wind energy, bile, or phlegm, and we feel miserable.

Earth, water, fire, air, space, and consciousness are the six elements. Our bodies are composed of the first four. If these elements are equally balanced, there is no disease at all, but if some are more and some are less, many illnesses can arise. Wind, bile, and phlegm (*rlung*, *mkhris-pa*, *bad-khan*) are the three energies of the body and they arise from the three poisons of attachment, anger, and ignorance. We suffer from the pain of various kinds of disease, and they all result from these three.

No matter how strong and healthy we may be, with all our faculties in the prime of youth and a radiant complexion, as soon as we are stricken with illness we are like a bird hit by a stone. Losing our strength, we sink into bed, our body trembles and we can barely function.

In general, the appearances that arise for us are illusory, and when we are ill this is even more so. We experience great fear and may fall under

the influence of evil spirits. We cannot control our thoughts and see and hear many unusual things. What appears is illusion upon illusion. When we suffer in this way for a long time, we may even believe it is better to kill ourselves.

When people suffer from leprosy or paralysis, they seem to be neither alive nor dead. We may call it life, but it is not like life; we may call it death, but they are still breathing. They are abandoned and can see for themselves that they have lost their status as human beings.

Sick people usually cannot look after themselves, and generally need someone to care for them. Whatever help they get does not satisfy them and they become more and more angry, and increasingly critical. If the sickness drags on for a long time, the nurses, or whoever is taking care of them, even their children, become fed up, and don't do what they ask any longer. Always tormented by their disease, they suffer continuously. Their children stop listening to them and this also causes them pain. This becomes the suffering upon suffering.

Patrul Rinpoche presents this all clearly and I have also explained it. From personal experience, we know the suffering of illness, the pain and misery we have faced. Nonetheless, after we recover we easily forget about it. When we fall ill, we feel we must practice the supreme Dharma, but after we recover, we wander around according to our outer desires and fail to practice.

We must think about the Dharma all the time; once caught by disease, although we want to practice we cannot. For example, someone who continuously recites mantra cannot continue chanting after illness strikes. Those who succumb to disease generally discontinue their practice. They have no control over this. Since we are presently in good health, we must think about practicing the supreme Dharma, and follow through with actual practice.

The suffering of death

The suffering of death is the fourth of the major rivers of suffering. After suffering from a long sickness or the weakness of old age, the body collapses into the bed, unable to get up. Whatever food and drink we see, we don't want it. When death is approaching, we humans always feel unhappy. In the prime of life, we feel vain and proud, but as we are nearing death, this arrogant haughtiness collapses. Many illusory appearances come upon us.

For people who have accumulated serious negativity, terrifying figures such as the Lord of Death appear just before they die. Death teaches them about the cause and effect of karma. The attendants of Yama arrive and the place of their future birth appears. At that time they become certain about the relationship of cause and effect, but it is too late, and nothing can be done.

Although the dying may gain confidence in the teachings, they have no time to accumulate virtue. The time of the great transformation has come. The elements of the body collapse one by one, breathing becomes difficult, and the limbs move uncontrollably. For most people, consciousness becomes confused. Even though their family and close relations surround them and cry, they cannot escape death.

Everyone goes through the suffering of death alone. When the energy of the life force (*srog rlung*) collapses, we face great pain and suffering. According to tantra, the life force comes from the wind energy. According to sutra, the life force is neither living nor nonliving. When the life force gives way, people experience great anguish and misery; severe suffering always accompanies the disintegration of the life force. This agony cannot be divided among family or relatives. Death must be experienced by each person individually and alone.

Nor can any wealth be taken into death. Even those with considerable property cannot take anything. A universal emperor himself could not take his wealth with him. Neither can the very poorest person, who has only a single walking stick, take it along. Our wealth should be used for our livelihood. After death it is useless. We cannot take it with us, but, because of our habitual tendency to hold on to our property, we do not want to give it to others. Whatever we have we cannot give up, but neither can we take it with us. Nothing material will accompany us to the next life.

Wealth is obtained through a vast amount of nonvirtue: killing, stealing, cheating, lying, and the like. Such nonvirtue follows us like a shadow. If nonvirtue didn't come along with us, there would be no need for worry, but it does. On our deathbed, we remember and feel great remorse for our past negativity, wondering how we could have done such things. At that time, the suffering is intense.

Those with great nonvirtue may see their future birth in the lower realms. Before their breathing stops, they can see the suffering of these realms, and all appearances of this life slowly vanish. The horrible servants of the Lord of Death arrive carrying different weapons in their hands. All

appearances are terrifying and sensations are nothing but torment. The dying person becomes greatly afraid. He beats his chest with his hands, and dies in terror. It is said that seeing an evil person dying is like a teacher demonstrating the cause and effect of karma.

In the Bodhisattva-charyavatara, Shantideva teaches that those who have a high level of negativity, and who see their future place of birth – the lower realms – succumb to great fear and lose their urine and feces. They feel great regret for not practicing genuine Dharma while they were alive, when they had the opportunity to receive teaching from qualified masters, and sufficient time to practice. There are clearly people who die like this.

For those supreme persons who have a high level of virtue, the dakinis of the five buddha families will come to welcome them before they die. Excellent practitioners can remain in their practice at the time of death and merge with the Dharmakaya. Some good practitioners realize all appearances of the intermediate state of dharmata (*cho nyid bardo*) as their own appearances, and they are liberated in the Sambhogakaya. Those whose capacity is not this great can be liberated in the pure realms of the five buddha families.

Those who pray very strongly and supplicate the lama, the Three Jewels, and their personal yidam deities at the time of death can, in the best case, be born in a pure realm. Others can be born in a precious human body, and continue their practice. However, only those who have a powerful habit of supplicating their root guru and their personal deities during their lifetime are able to do this at the time of death. Without such a habit, it is extremely difficult to remember when dying.

After the elements have dissolved and collapsed there is severe agony, and remembering the Three Jewels and the deities is quite difficult. While we are alive, supplicating is easy, but the time of death is different. The body experiences great pain and suffering and the mind becomes confused. One who is dying is like a mad person, and it is hard to remember the guru and the Three Jewels. Khenpo Kunkel has also taught that we must develop a strong habit of supplication during our lifetime. With great faith and devotion, always pray one-pointedly to your root guru and your yidam deities.

Generation and completion stages bring forth a strong connection between the deities and the practitioner. By practicing diligently, your habitual tendency will enable you to supplicate your root guru and yidam deities as death approaches. Patrul Rinpoche says that a firm habit of

supplication enables one to actually see his or her root guru in person at the time of death. Without practicing throughout one's life, making such supplications will be extremely challenging when dying. Develop your practice right now so that at death, or in the intermediate state, you will see your root guru and yidam deities, and will be liberated in a pure realm.

If your root guru is a true noble one or a buddha, he or she can really come at the time of death or in the intermediate state. While not all lamas have this level of accomplishment, a practitioner with strong faith and a habit of supplication will experience the presence of his or her root guru at this time. Even though the actual guru has not arrived, the power of the appearance of the guru and the deities can liberate the student in the pure realms. Therefore, developing the habit of supplication is crucial. Otherwise, remembering at death is not at all easy.

No matter how old or young we may be, we have no assurance that we will not leave this life naked and empty-handed this very day. Knowing when we will die is usually impossible, and we go with nothing and alone, like a hair pulled from butter. In that moment, only the pure Dharma will help. Nothing else can offer any protection. Practicing the supreme Dharma is certain to benefit and is the only thing that will bring relief at the time of death. Such practice will benefit us and be our refuge when we die, in the intermediate state and during the next life.

People with highly negative karma, evil habits and unwholesome thoughts, who while alive always thought badly of others, felt anger, and caused harm, will face a long and agonizing death. They will not find it easy to die, and in their unbearable torment will wish for death to come soon. On the other hand, if during your lifetime you had no unwholesome thoughts, you will not experience such difficulties when dying. If you always maintain positive thoughts and avoid negative thinking, your body will experience no pain on dying and your mind will not experience confusion. You will remember the Three Jewels and the lama, and will die happily and easily.

Whatever nonvirtue you have accumulated, you will have to face the same level of pain and suffering at death, during the intermediate state and during the future life. Most people work hard, without resting during the day or sleeping during the night, for the sake of worldly happiness, status, wealth, and so on, only for the purposes of this life, but do not exert themselves in this way for the sake of Dharma. One who lives for about sixty years generally spends fifty years for the sake of worldly concerns. People think about and work toward present comfort and happiness without considering

the comfort and happiness of future lives. Some worldly work may bring happiness in the future, but some will not. Comparing the suffering and happiness in this life, suffering is greater even though more effort is made for happiness.

However long this life lasts, the next life is the continuation of the same consciousness, not of any other. Failing to differentiate between body and consciousness, some people think that life ends as water evaporates or as fire consumes paper, leaving nothing behind. This is not the case. Consciousness continues. The consciousness of this life comes from the consciousness of the past life, and this same consciousness will go through the intermediate state into the next life. Consciousness is never disconnected.

Feelings of suffering and happiness arise from consciousness and not from body. After death, the continuity of the body is disconnected, not the continuity of mind. Recognizing that consciousness continues and is the bearer of happiness and suffering, we must exert ourselves in this life for comfort and well-being in the next. What benefits the next life are not worldly concerns like business or agriculture. We cannot take our property from one life to the next, and our status and fame are no more than dry wood. They will not remain when we arrive in our next life.

Only the practice of the supreme Dharma is beneficial for the next life. Think as follows: “Thus far I have worked hard for comfort and happiness in this life. Whether or not I achieve happiness from these efforts, from now on I must strive for my future well-being. Whatever I do for the rest of my life will be to benefit my future lives.” With thoughts and actions imbued with this pledge, we definitely will reap the benefit at the time of death, in the intermediate state, and in future lives. Nothing is more important for the future than taking refuge in the supreme Dharma. As it is said:

*Develop a feeling for the Dharma while still in your mother's womb;
Be mindful of death as soon as you are born.*

We should develop the practice of Dharma from the instant we are born. We must begin thinking of death immediately after our birth. As I stated above, death comes suddenly for all, both old and young. From the earliest age, we should think about practicing in order to reap some benefit when we die. Most elderly people think about the likelihood of their own deaths and resolve to practice Dharma, but we fail to consider that young people also die. This thinking is incorrect. Sudden death comes for the young, for adults, and for the aged; the time of death is not definite. From the moment

of our birth, death is a possibility. Therefore, we must always focus on the Dharma which benefits at the time of death.

“Up until now, I have not reflected on death, and have only worked to benefit those close to me and to overcome my enemies, to look after my home and my possessions. I have not realized that I will actually die. Using my life like that, involved in attachment, anger, and ignorance to serve my loved ones, is really a big mistake.” This is how we should think.

Other human sufferings

Fear of meeting hated enemies

Day and night we spend our time guarding our wealth and riches against enemies. Whatever we own now will belong to others if they steal it from us. During the day, we fear robbers; at night, burglars. Predators and carnivorous animals may suddenly come to do us harm, killing our domestic animals and so on. Generally, however much wealth we have accumulated, that much suffering we must undergo to protect and increase it. The more property we have, the more suffering we experience in our minds and bodies. With less property, we worry less. Nagarjuna teaches:

You wear yourself out with gathering, protecting and expanding your wealth;

Understand that riches are an endless source of destruction.

Whether our wealth is large or small, at the beginning we must accumulate it, in the middle we must take care of it, and in the end we seek to increase it. In each case we face difficulty. Our troubles are greater the more we have. We must realize that resources bring limitless pain and harm the mind and body. Jetsun Milarepa says:

In the beginning, wealth makes you happy and brings admiration from others;

But you cannot be satisfied no matter how much you have.

Whatever prosperity we acquire, our attachment becomes greater and greater, so that we are never satisfied.

In the middle, you are tied up with the knots of miserliness;

You cannot use your riches for virtuous purposes.

Because you are so miserly, you cannot use your property for yourself, nor can you dedicate it to meritorious purposes.

*Your wealth calls out to enemies and demons;
What you have collected, others enjoy.*

Those with greater resources also have more enemies and are afflicted by more negative forces, so Milarepa says that the wealth itself is calling to the enemies and demons.

*Finally, your wealth becomes a demon endangering your life force;
Your enemies want to look after your riches, so you must worry about
what you own.*

*I have abandoned the temptations of samsara;
And have no wish for the devil's deceptions.*

Our rivals seek our wealth, and so they try to harm us in many ways. This brings a lot of suffering to our minds. Prosperity is the major cause for samsara's deception, and therefore we must abandon it. The desire to accumulate a lot of property is a trick played by the demons. Therefore Milarepa says, "I have no wish for the devil's deceptions."

However much wealth we have, that much do we agonize over it. For example, if you have a horse you will fear that an enemy will carry it off or that a thief will steal it; you will worry whether it has enough hay and so on. One horse causes a lot of anxiety. Likewise owning a single sheep brings a single sheep's worth of suffering. If you have only one packet of tea bricks, you will surely worry about that one packet. As it is said: "With no wealth, you are free from enemies."

Lacking possessions you lack enemies. Take comfort that the buddhas of the past were liberated by cutting from the root all attachment and craving for possessions and wealth. Depending like a bird on what you can find, train in the thought that it is necessary to do nothing but practice the holy Dharma.

This means that you should seek to be satisfied with whatever you receive today without trying to accumulate for the future.

The suffering of separation from loved ones

All worldly sentient beings are attached to those who are close to them and hostile to those who are not. Favoring our families, dependents, relatives and friends, we undergo all manner of difficulties for their sake.

But our dear ones, relatives, friends, and those to whom we are connected are impermanent; they die or move to other places. Nevertheless, their troubles affect us more strongly even than our own. Parents especially suffer anguish on account of their children, fearing they might be hurt, hungry or thirsty, might fall ill or die. They would rather die themselves than have their children be ailing. Their children are at the apex of their hearts, the key point of their minds, and for their sake alone they endure hardship.

Although we do suffer greatly from anxiety about being separated from our families, dependents, relatives and friends, if we think about it well, can we be certain of how dear our dear ones are?

When our loved ones leave us we worry that they might come to some harm. Parents love their children, but they actually suffer greatly for the sake of their children. The relationship between parents and children becomes a root cause of suffering. We give more importance to those we love than we need to. In reality, they are not helping us. All parents love their children, but this love leads to its opposite.

Our parents boast of their love for us as their children, but this love takes a wrong direction, and ultimately brings about harm. They bestow wealth and riches upon us, and urge our marriage to a life-long companion, thereby chaining us with the shackles of samsara. They teach us how to outmaneuver our adversaries, how to take care of our friends, how to amass wealth and other nonvirtuous actions, making it impossible for us to escape from the depths of the lower realms. There is no greater harm than this type of action.

Parents send their children to the bottom of the lower realms, from where they can never escape. What should parents do? If parents really want to care for their children, they should teach them about the supreme Dharma, and should encourage them to practice to reach the level of omniscience. When parents love their children and raise them like this, no undesired effect can result. On the other hand, if parents show love to their children by giving them property, getting them married, tying them on the wheel of samsara by teaching them how to conduct business, engage in agriculture and other negative actions, they are leading their children to the bottom of the lower realms. In this way, parents are the root cause of their children's fall into the lower realms. The parents are responsible for the greatest degree of harm that can come to their children. The next section discusses how children harm their parents.

At first sons and daughters suck the essence from our bodies, after

that they take the food from our mouths, and finally they snatch the wealth from our hands. They return love with argument. Even if we openheartedly give them all the sustenance and comforts we have accumulated with no thought for the negativity, suffering and criticism endured for their sake, we will not have the least satisfaction.

Compared to giving an ordinary person a bit of tea leaves, if we present our own son with a full measure of Chinese silver, he will not be as satisfied, and will only think, “Whatever belonged to my father also belongs to me.”

Sisters and daughters also take what is offered greedily with no gratitude. The more we give the more they want. They will beg for and carry off even the bead we use as a counter on our rosary. If things go well, they will bring good fortune to others, but will not benefit their own families. If things go badly, they fall at the doorstep of their families, bringing only misery.

This describes how children harm their parents. Patrul Rinpoche goes on to describe how other relations can harm us.

All our other friends and relatives treat us like gods when our resources and personal happiness are in excellent condition. They help and support us however they can, showering upon us goods and luxuries we don't even need. Should trouble befall us, however, although we have never done them the least harm, they distance themselves like we were enemies, returning our kindness with harm. This is how it is.

Thus, sons, daughters, relatives, and all of those close to us actually have no meaning whatsoever. As Jetsun Milarepa sings:

*At first, a son is as charming as a god;
Your love and affection are unbearable.
Later he is too demanding of what he is 'owed'.
You give him everything, but he's never satisfied.*

*He brings home somebody else's daughter,
Kicking out his most kind mother and father.
His father calls, but he won't reply;
His mother calls, but he won't respond.
At last, he's but a distant neighbor.*

*You give your best to a charlatan like that;
 How painful to give birth to your own enemy.
 I've cast off this rope that binds one to samsara.
 I have no wish for such a worldly son!*

He continues:

*At first a daughter is a heavenly child with a smiling face,
 A powerful female who carries off your wealth and success.
 Next, she becomes your constant karmic creditor.
 From father she takes by open begging;
 From mother she takes by stealing on the sly,
 Never satisfied with what she has been given,
 Bringing despair to her most kind parents.*

*Finally, she is a red-faced ogress,
 At best working for other people's benefit,
 At worst bringing you misfortune.
 This nasty demoness gnaws at your heart.
 I abandon this sorrow impossible to purify.
 I don't want such a cause of trouble for my daughter!*

*Friends at first meet joyfully and full of smiles.
 "Come here; sit there," invitations fill the air.
 Later, with hospitality, they repay your meat and wine;
 First one offers, then the other returns the gift exactly.
 Finally, they become the ground for attachment and anger:
 Evil friends, the root of fighting, how they break your heart!
 I abandon these companions who share food in happy times.
 I don't want such worldly connections.*

We love our families very dearly, but however much love and affection we feel, that much suffering we will also have. Thinking about it seriously, there is no reason for such intense love and affection. Our relatives harm us more than our enemies. The best is to consider that all sentient beings filling space are our relatives, not that we are attached to those who are close to us and feel animosity to those who are distant. Otherwise our feelings have no meaning, and we simply accumulate the nonvirtue of attachment and hatred. If we can free ourselves from attachment to our family and relatives, we will not suffer when we must separate from them.

Our loved ones in truth are major negative forces keeping us from practicing the Dharma. This is how our families become like demons, and more dangerous than our enemies. No matter how our enemies harm us, we do not decide to give up Dharma, but our families may discourage us from practicing, trying to interest us in working together in some kind of business. Our relatives are the major disturbing force to Dharma practice; there is no greater disturbance than this. To become good practitioners, we must learn to detach ourselves from our families and loved ones.

The suffering of not achieving what is desired

In this worldly realm, there is no one who does not desire pleasure and happiness, but we do not achieve what we want. Seeking comfort, some build a house, but it collapses and kills them. Some eat from hunger but the food makes them sick and threatens their life force. Some enter into battle seeking victory, but are immediately killed. Some, seeking profit, travel for business, but are robbed by bandits and end up in poverty.

No matter what efforts and exertions you make to acquire comfort, happiness, and luxuries in this life, without the power of past karmic actions, you will be unable even to satisfy your immediate hunger. You will merely bring trouble to yourself and others. This will only result in the certainty of not being able to escape from the depths of the lower realms. Therefore, rather than making a mountain of effort, it is better to accumulate a single spark of merit.

What is the use of your endless worldly activities? Whatever efforts of this sort that you have made during the beginningless time of samsara have brought nothing but suffering as a result. If you had taken the past efforts you made for the benefit of this mundane life during the earlier and later parts of a single lifespan and applied them to the sacred Dharma, even if you didn't achieve buddhahood it would certainly ensure that you didn't have to undergo the misery of the lower realms.

Meditate as follows: "Right now, when I know what to adopt and what to avoid, instead of aiming at unattainable worldly undertakings, I must accomplish the stainless sacred Dharma, the goal of which can be attained."

Unless you accumulated some virtue in your past life, whatever effort you make in this life will come to nothing. Whatever advantages or disadvantages you have now result from your past actions. Therefore, cultivating a tiny amount of virtue is better than seeking wealth and

happiness by making an effort as large as Mt. Meru. A little virtue is better than any samsaric work; all samsaric work ultimately turns into suffering. The power of virtue is greater than the power of nonvirtue. The effect of the most serious nonvirtue accumulated from beginningless time or from our birth to the present is to suffer for an intermediate eon in the lowest hell realm, but cultivating even a small amount of physical virtue leads to a comfortable birth in the god realm for one great eon.

Practicing Dharma in this life can purify whatever nonvirtue we have accumulated from beginningless time so that we need not face the result of suffering. We can even reach the level of buddhahood in this present life time, as did Jetsun Milarepa. Despite the vast amount of nonvirtue he had accumulated in the early part of his life, he later practiced genuine Dharma, purified all of his negativity, and became a buddha in a single lifetime. This shows the strength of virtue compared to nonvirtue. It is certain that had you practiced virtue in your past lives, you would have become a buddha at that time, and if you practice now you can become a buddha in the future, without ever being born in the lower realms.

Among the five paths to liberation, the first two are the path of accumulation and the path of preparation.¹¹ Ordinary individuals can acquire the qualities of these paths. The path of preparation has four levels: heat, peak, patience, and supreme mundane qualities. Those who attain the level of patience will never fall into the lower realms. The path of preparation is not the level of the buddhas; it is not even the level of the noble ones. This reveals the great strength of virtue. Regardless of the nonvirtue we have accumulated from beginningless time, if we sincerely regret and confess this past nonvirtue, and vow not to commit such actions in the future, but to genuinely practice the authentic Dharma, we can achieve buddhahood in this lifetime. Even if we do not achieve this, it is certain that we will never be born in the lower realms.

Now that we know the distinction between the behavior to adopt and the behavior to avoid, we should stop pinning our hopes on unattainable worldly goals, but should instead practice the Dharma, the goal of which we can achieve. As Patrul Rinpoche teaches, worldly life involves a wide variety of different sufferings, which we can know clearly, and in fact have been experiencing up to the present. However, merely understanding the different kinds of suffering, including those that we have personally experienced, is meaningless. We must cultivate the realization that samsaric

11 The path of preparation is also called the path of joining. The other three paths are: the path of seeing, the path of meditation, and the path beyond learning.

existence has absolutely no meaning. We are now living in the human realm and should contemplate that no worldly activities have any meaning.

Nothing but the supreme Dharma has true meaning, and as human beings we can practice all forms of Dharma. We know what to avoid and what to adopt and have met qualified teachers who guide us in how to act. We have everything we need to practice the Dharma as long as we want to do so. Recognizing that worldly activities never end, one who abandons them and follows the Dharma from the heart rather than simply from the mouth becomes a good practitioner and an expert in the true meaning of this text. Otherwise, even reaching an understanding of the explanations concerning the suffering of birth, sickness, aging and death has no value. All human beings can understand this teaching; it requires no special qualities.

As I have already explained, we must achieve a new understanding of the absolute meaningless of worldly samsaric activities, an understanding such as we have not previously attained. If we develop the sincere thought that, “For the rest of my life I must practice the supreme Dharma,” this will be a new resolution, never thought before. Reaching that level of understanding one can think wisely. Such people are considered “learned ones” (*mkhas pa*), and are the best practitioners. Merely understanding human suffering has no meaning; everyone can understand this, and we have actual experience as well. This is not an achievement at all. I cannot repeat too often that we must form the sincere resolve to practice the genuine Dharma and must actively engage ourselves in following through on this resolution.

The suffering of encountering what one doesn’t want

No one in this world wants these various miseries. People suffer because they have no way to avoid it. No one likes to suffer, but we nevertheless suffer all the time. Certain past actions may lead some people to become the subjects of a particular government or servants of the wealthy. No one wants to be dominated by another, but because of the karmic effect they have no control over their situations. Even when punished or beaten for small mistakes, they have no way to respond. People are sometimes dragged to their executions with no hope of escape. We always encounter what we do not want. The Great Omniscient Longchenpa teaches:

*Although you want to remain with your family and loved ones forever,
You will definitely leave them.*

Without wanting to, we must part from our families. We have no

control over this.

*Although you want to remain in your excellent home with your
comfortable bed forever,*

You will definitely leave them behind.

*Although you want to enjoy your happiness, wealth, and comfort
forever,*

You will definitely lose them.

*Although you want to keep this precious human body endowed with the
freedoms and advantages forever,*

You will definitely die.

Among all the beings of the six realms, our precious human body is the best form for practicing the sublime Dharma. It is not the best just because we have no horns and walk on two legs with our heads held high. Someone who walks on four limbs is different from others because humans generally walk upright. Those who cannot do this are scorned. Likewise, if someone had horns, others would contemptuously call him a demon.

However, we consider our human body the best because only a human body can serve as a support for the supreme and complete Dharma. Everyone knows the good qualities of the human body, but simply knowing this is not enough. Since our human bodies are the best support for Dharma practice, we must actually practice this supreme Dharma and put it into action from the bottom of our hearts. Even a being who walked on four limbs or had horns would have a precious body if he or she could use it to practice the supreme Dharma.

Ordinary people understand the value of a human body, but their perception differs from the Dharma point of view. Ordinary people consider the bodies of those who are blind, deaf, or otherwise disabled to be undesirable and lower, while the bodies of those whose are good-looking and have all their faculties complete are considered to be excellent. From the Dharma point of view this is not the case; an excellent body is one that can practice the Dharma. However, even such a precious body that can practice Dharma cannot remain indefinitely. One day the body will die; we have no control over this. Omniscient Longchenpa continues

*Although you would like to hear the Dharma from your perfect teacher
forever,*

You will definitely part.

Worldly people have less interest in the Dharma than in mundane

concerns and so believe that those who teach about worldly matters like business, agriculture and so on are more important than Dharma teachers. They fail to realize the preciousness of the Dharma, and don't understand its value. For example, if someone pours gold dust into the ear of a donkey, the donkey will not understand the value of the gold. If someone puts grass in front of the donkey he will become much happier. In the same way, since worldly people fail to understand the value of the Dharma, they don't recognize the extreme kindness of their lamas, nor his or her high status.

Feeling that business, property, and riches are important, worldly people place those who teach about these subjects, about how to overcome enemies and how to maintain good relationships with relatives, on a higher level than teachers of the Dharma. Think about how much people pay those who teach how to succeed in worldly matters. They do not teach for free, and people will pay whatever they ask.

When we understand the importance of the Dharma we understand our guru's great kindness, which is even greater than the kindness of our parents. We will think, "My parents taught me how to overcome my enemies, how to maintain friendly relationships with my relatives, how to kill animals, and so on; in other words they only taught me nonvirtuous actions. Since I have obeyed them, I have so far only committed nonvirtue." If we really think about why we commit negative actions, the root cause is our parents. The result of this nonvirtue in this life is not achieving happiness; thinking about the next life, the result of this nonvirtue will be certain birth in the hell of greatest torment. Thus, we can say that our parents and those who teach us about worldly activities are the root cause of this suffering. Reflecting like this, we can conclude that they bring us more harm than our enemies, and they are in no way kind.

When we think about the supreme Dharma, we should recognize that since we have met a qualified guru, we have learned to adopt virtuous behavior and to avoid nonvirtuous behavior. We have become careful to avoid all nonvirtue and to take up as much virtue as possible. Think in this way: "Because of meeting this most kind guru, I have abandoned many negative actions and have accumulated considerable positive merit." Earlier in this life we experienced many kinds of illness and suffering, but after meeting our guru, our illness has decreased and our mind has become happy and calm. Meeting our guru has led us to accumulate the merit that frees us from birth in the lower realms. Even though becoming a buddha in the next life is uncertain, we will continue taking birth in the upper realms

or in the Sukhavati pure realm. This is all because of the guru's kindness. The guru benefits us in both this and future lives. Think as follows: "I have never met such a kind guru in the past, and may not meet one in the future."

One who has understood the importance of the Dharma automatically recognizes his guru's supreme nature and his or her great kindness. This brings about the desire to remain in the presence of the guru in this and future lives, until the attainment of enlightenment. Nevertheless, both the lama and the student are impermanent, and therefore no matter how much we wish to continue listening to our teacher's instructions, at some point we must separate. There is no possibility of listening to his teaching forever.

*Although you would like to remain with your excellent spiritual friends
forever,
Some day you will definitely part.*

An excellent spiritual, or virtuous, friend is one with whom we accumulate merit, not necessarily those with whom we live and eat. Whatever merit we accumulate should be in accordance with the example of the knowledge holders of the past. We should carry out our virtuous actions as they did. If we have friends who are like these knowledge holders, we can easily follow their example. We cannot attain this level on our own.

Texts of the highest Mantrayana do state, however, that if one with sharp faculties performs certain group practices alone, he or she can attain the level of noble wisdom. There are individuals who do not require a spiritual friend, who can attain a high level based on their own power. Those with lower faculties require the support of spiritual friends, people with similar views, practices and behavior, to attain this level. People who practice together are considered spiritual, or virtuous, friends. We don't consider those who simply talk together or eat together in this way.

When we describe the Three Jewels, the Buddha is the one who shows the path, and the Dharma is the path to attain the level of a buddha. The Sangha refers to those who help us practice that path, or who teach us how to practice the path, or who help us gather what is needed to practice the path. These are our virtuous friends. The above verse is talking about this kind of excellent friend. According to the highest Mantrayana we pray to remain together until enlightenment. At that time we will achieve enlightenment in one mandala. Although these are our excellent friends,

they too are impermanent and one day we must part from them.

*From this very day put on the armor of diligence,
For the time has come to travel to the realm of great bliss, from where
there is no separation.*

No worldly concerns have any meaning. What is meaningful is the realm of great bliss, in other words the attainment of enlightenment. Attaining enlightenment is meaningful; it does not change. The armor of diligence is the intention to put Dharma into practice, and then to actually practice. If we act like this we will never separate from our diligence until reaching enlightenment. Now is the time to set out for enlightenment.

*Friends who feel deeply disillusioned with samsara,
I, a Dharma-less beggar, encourage you with these words.*

Omniscient Longchenpa, calling himself an unknown with no learning or experience with the Dharma, like a beggar, in this way encourages his vajra friends, those who are deeply disillusioned with samsara.

Conclusion

Wealth, possessions, comfort, happiness, good reputation and so on, result from high levels of business, eloquence, fraud, and deceit. People act in a way they think will bring these results, but most do not accomplish their goals. Some engage in business and lose their money; some use deceit and fraud to gain status and are disgraced. Worldly people believe that property and status result from their own efforts and so work hard, but still do not succeed. In reality, worldly success results from the accumulation of virtue. For those with previously accumulated merit, these advantages will come automatically.

If we have accumulated merit, even engaging in a minor business will bring great benefit. The root is past accumulated merit. Lacking such merit, we will never achieve the desired results, no matter how much effort we expend. We must practice the Dharma of relying on the inexhaustible wealth of finding contentment with whatever comes. Otherwise, when you do undertake the Dharma, your worldly ambitions will bring you trouble and the noble ones will be embarrassed for you.

Contentment is the greatest of riches, and can never be exhausted. All wealth is to benefit body and mind. Those who lack contentment will never achieve happiness no matter how rich they are. By constantly seeking

to acquire more, their wealth makes them suffer, but they do not understand that this is happening. On the other hand, those who are content will find no happiness greater than enjoying whatever they have. With a joyful mind, the body automatically experiences comfort. Since the riches of contentment bring satisfaction to both body and mind, we should always seek to feel content.

When studying the twelve qualities of learning, we are taught to be content with a small hut and small meditation place, and with the food of alms. We should be satisfied whether we receive good or bad food, and should never consider taking only the good and refusing the bad. We must use whatever the donor offers. This advice is mainly for novices, but lay practitioners as well should be content with their wealth, their food, and their living space. Without contentment, the human body and mind cannot be considered advantageous for Dharma practice. Our wealth of contentment must be used to practice Dharma.

Monks give up all worldly activities in order to practice the Dharma. Lay practitioners who enter into Dharma practice but continue with worldly activity will experience only suffering, and the noble beings will feel ashamed of them.

According to Jetsun Milarepa it remains a question how much even those who are scholars of the sutras and commentaries continue to be concerned about their worldly activities.

*The Victor, the lord of humans, mainly taught
How to cast aside the eight worldly concerns.
These days, those who consider themselves learned,
Aren't their worldly concerns even greater than before?*

Milarepa continues:

*What the Victor taught about observing morality
Is for the purpose of giving up worldly activity.
But those who observe morality today,
Aren't they more engaged in activity?*

Whatever the Buddha taught about observing the rules of the samaya of Mantrayana and the novice vows is for the purpose of avoiding worldly concerns. But the worldly activity of those who call themselves novice monks is increasing. They lack time to study and contemplate because they are more involved in worldly activity.

*He taught the style of the sages of old
 For the purpose of breaking attachment to dear ones.
 But those who live like sages today,
 Don't they care even more about the opinions of others?*

In the past, those who lived in remote places and had severed their ties with their relatives were considered sages. But Milarepa complains that more modern sages are overly concerned about putting on a good face in front of their sponsors. Instead of overcoming attachment to their relatives and donors, they may become even closer to them.

*In short, without mindfulness of death,
 Whatever supreme Dharma is practiced is useless.*

If we don't remember impermanence and death, any supreme Dharma we practice becomes meaningless; the Dharma is no longer supreme. Anyone who practices – monks, lay practitioners or sages – must reflect on impermanence and death. Dharma never becomes supreme without this serious contemplation. Of the various kinds of impermanence of compounded phenomena, death is the greatest. We must always arouse the thought of impermanence and death whenever our minds wander from Dharma and we become attracted to, and put effort into, worldly activities.

Taking myself as an example, as soon as the thought of fame and good reputation arises, I immediately reflect upon what possible benefit fame and reputation could bring. Perhaps I need a good reputation for happiness in this life, but if I died before achieving it, what would be the use? I should better practice the supreme Dharma, which will help in the future. Thinking about death reduces the idea of gaining worldly fame and reputation.

Similarly, we might sometimes think we need more wealth. At that time we should immediately remember that wealth does not help us at the time of death. Instead of gathering more riches it is better to practice the Dharma that benefits at the moment of death. Thinking of impermanence automatically reduces the wish to collect more worldly resources. Practitioners who contemplate impermanence with sincerity become good practitioners. A novice monk will become a good novice monk. A scholar will become an excellent scholar. This teaching is directly related with the Dharma. Thus, the thought of impermanence is the best of all thoughts. Patrul Rinpoche continues:

During these degenerate times, human beings living in all the four continents of our world system must suffer. In particular, those born

in our very own Jambuling have not a moment of happiness, and experience only misery.

In the past, there have been different eons: the perfect eon, characterized by the qualities of prosperity, long life, and happiness equal to the god realms; the eon possessing the three; and the eon possessing the two. At present, we are living in the eon of quarrels, a negative time characterized by five degenerations. During this time happiness is diminishing while misery keeps increasing. On this earth, harm from the elements grows more serious every year, as does the level of violence and fighting. Illness and famine are on the rise, with new diseases appearing all the time. Human prosperity is declining. Not even a hair-tip of happiness can be found. People face constant misery, and no pleasure is free of suffering. Misery is so all-embracing that we do not even consider the minor types of suffering as suffering. We think that this small suffering is happiness.

Moreover, with every year, month, day, moment, morning and afternoon that passes, the degeneration increases. This is an eon in which the teachings of the Buddha as well as the happiness of beings are deteriorating. Feel sorrow about this.

During the time of degeneration, the situation grows worse from one afternoon to the next, as our lives become shorter. The intermediate eons of famine, disease and weapons develop until human life span decreases to about ten years. Even before these eons appear, the power of famine, disease, and weapons grows. The Buddhist teaching is also in decline. First came the teaching of the result, now we have the teaching of various practices, next will be the teaching of scriptures, and finally only some signs of the teaching will remain.

Only some of the Buddha's teachings remain these days. According to the western calendar, this is the 21st century. When we reach the 22nd century, the Sutra teachings may vanish. When the teachings decline, the comfort and happiness of beings also declines because the Buddhist teaching is the root cause of comfort and happiness. What is this teaching? The Buddhist teaching concerns the proper behavior to adopt and the behavior to avoid. If we fail to follow the teachings on what to adopt and what to avoid, we will accumulate only negativity, which leads only to suffering. Thus, as the Buddha's teachings decline, the nonvirtue in the continuum of the minds of beings becomes stronger and merit may not arise at all. This causes comfort and happiness to decrease and misery to grow.

No delight and pleasure can be found on this earth. Reflecting on this

we develop regret and remorse from deep within, and will have no leisure to simply rest happily. On this earth, karmic effects ripen quickly. Patrul Rinpoche advises:

You must see for yourself how things really are, and become positive in your mind about what to adopt and what to avoid. Practice the teaching of the Omniscient Longchenpa:

*At times, consider what you perceive to be favorable conditions;
Recognize this as your personal perception and all experience will
arise as a friend.*

*At times, consider what you perceive to be unfavorable
conditions;*

Aversion to your delusion is an important key point.

At times, look at your friends and at other people's teachers;

*Understanding the difference between the good and the bad will
inspire you to practice.*

When you realize the genuine nature of your own guru, you will be inspired to put his or her teaching into practice.

*At times, look at the miraculous display of the four elements in
space;*

*You will recognize how effort subsides within the true nature of
mind.*

The display of the four elements arises from space and vanishes into space. In the same way, thoughts of samsaric effort arise from our mind and dissolve into the space of the very nature of our mind.

At times, look at your homeland, home, and possessions;

*By understanding them as magical illusions, you will feel disgust
at your deluded perceptions.*

At times, look at the wealth and possessions of others;

*By understanding them as pitiable, you will abandon samsaric
goals.*

Seeing how much effort and hard work others make, and the nonvirtuous actions they accumulate for the sake of worldly possessions, you will automatically feel compassion and will want to avoid all worldly activities.

*In short, by analyzing the nature of the various phenomenal
appearances,*

Attachment to their reality will collapse.

If we examine carefully, we cannot find true existence in any phenomenal appearances. Thinking of what is impermanent as permanent, of what is

untrue as true – all these deluded perceptions collapse.

THE DEMI-GODS

The suffering of the demi-gods in the second of the higher realms is as follows. Although in general their wealth and enjoyment nearly rivals that of the gods, the karma resulting from their earlier nonvirtuous habits of jealousy and constant quarrelling has propelled them here. As soon as they take on this kind of physical support, they have a coarse attitude of jealousy.

The demi-gods have more prosperity and wealth than humans; they are nearly at the level of the gods. Their mindstreams are full of the strong delusions of envy, quarrelling, and fighting. Whoever is born in this realm naturally engages in a lot of fighting and arguing.

Even within their own realm there is fighting among regions and areas, and since there is no mutual agreement about anything, they are always battling. Looking at the gods and seeing that they have perfect riches and luxuries, that whatever they desire comes from the Wish-fulfilling Tree (*dpag bsam shing*), and that the roots of the tree are in their realm, unbearable envy is born in them. Donning their armor and raising their swords, they march upon the gods.

The gods naturally maintain a virtuous mind, disliking violence and warfare. Making war, fighting, and arguing are nonvirtuous actions. However, when the demi-gods arrive at the Forest of Aggression to fight with them, the gods put on their armor and take up weapons.

When this happens, the gods go to the forest of the mountain called Pleasant to Behold,¹² put on their armor, and grab their weapons. On the thirty-two heads of the divine elephant Rabten¹³ ride the thirty-two ministers, and on the central head rides Indra, the chief of the gods. They are surrounded by the inconceivable army of the gods, who come on with clamorous battle cries and almost unbearable brilliance. During the battle the wheels and thunderbolts of the gods, their short spears, and their long arrows descend simultaneously. With magical powers, they lift great mountains to their laps and fling them.

Due to the power of their past actions, the gods are seven times taller than humans, but the demi-gods are shorter. Unless the head is cut off, the body of a god does not die. The gods can be killed

12 One of the seven mountains on top of Mt. Sumeru.

13 The name means "Very Steady."

only by cutting off their heads; except for that, divine amrita will immediately heal them and they will not die.

The demi-gods, however, like humans and others, die when struck in a vital spot, so they are always defeated. When the divine elephant Kunkyong¹⁴ is dispatched, drunken and with a wheel of swords attached to his trunk, hundreds of thousands of demi-gods perish. From the fourth level of Mt. Meru (where they live¹⁵) the corpses of the demi-gods tumble together down the slopes, falling into the Great Lakes of Revelling, and the water takes on the color of blood.

Always experiencing nothing but conflict, the way of life in the realm of the demi-gods never goes beyond the nature of torment and misery. Meditate on this from the bottom of your heart.

THE GODS

Although the gods enjoy perfect comfort, health, and prosperity throughout their entire lives, they pass all their time exclusively in distraction, without a thought of practicing the holy Dharma.

Those born in the god realms have pleasant bodies, and wealth and prosperity greater than that enjoyed by humans, demi-gods and nagas. They are always distracted by their possessions and pleasures and do not practice the Dharma at all. They can live for a great eon. Those in the form and formless realms live for a great eon, but they feel this as a mere moment because they are constantly wandering around in a state of happiness and bliss. There are six classes of heavens in the realm of desire, ranging from the Heaven of the Four Great Kings to the highest, the Heaven of Enjoying the Emanations of others.

The demi-gods live at the fourth level of Mt. Meru, and the Heaven of the Four Great Kings is at the next level. The Heaven of the Gods of the Thirty-three is at the top of Mt. Meru. All the gods in these heavens live on the ground. The heavens of the gods who live in space, one above the other, are the Heaven of Non-fighting gods, the Heaven of the gods of the Tushita Heaven, and the Heaven of the gods who Enjoy the Emanations of Others.

All the gods of the desire realms experience the suffering of death and rebirth. They can see where they will fall after their death, and most of them plunge into the hell realms.

14 This name means “All-protecting.”

15 This comment was added by Khenchen Namdrol Rinpoche.

As the gods approach nearer to death, they notice the following changes in themselves: their own luminosity, the dazzling light of their bodies that shone for one or two miles, grows weaker.¹⁶ They are not pleased to sit upon their divine thrones, feeling discontented and unhappy, whereas before they were never uncomfortable no matter how long they remained. Their garlands of divine flowers, which never withered over any length of time, become shriveled; their divine garments, which were never unclean no matter how long they were worn, become old and dirty, and begin to smell; their bodies, which never perspired, start to sweat.

As these five signs of the movement toward death appear, they suffer from the personal knowledge of their own passing. Their divine companions and lovers also know of the impending death and can no longer approach nearby, but from a distance scatter flowers. "Now you are about to move on. May you be born in the realm of humans and practice virtue, so you can again take birth among the gods." Offering this aspiration prayer, they depart.

Completely alone and in great misery, the gods look with their divine eyes to see in which realm of sorrow they will be born. Before they have overcome the torment of passing away, they suffer the intense grief of falling from the higher realms. As their despair doubles and then triples, they lament loudly in great wretchedness.

They must remain like this for seven divine days. A day among the Gods of the Thirty-three is equal to seven hundred human years. During this time they recall their past happiness and pleasure and suffer the pain of passing away with no power to remain. Seeing the specific realm of their future rebirth, they suffer the torment of their terrifying fall. Being caught between these two kinds of mental anguish is worse than being in the hell realms.

In the two highest divine realms, the form and formless realms, there is no actual suffering of death and transmigration, but after the karma that flung them there has been exhausted, they experience the suffering of the specific lower realm into which they have fallen, as though they had awoken from sleep.

After exhausting their virtue in these two highest realms, the gods immediately fall into the desire realm, without understanding what has happened or even noticing their fall.

16 Khen Rinpoche comments that in the god realm there is no sun nor moon, so the gods must have their own light.

As Lord Nagarjuna has said:

*Even Brahma himself, having attained the bliss free from
attachment,
Will once again become fuel for the fires of the Hell of Ceaseless
Torment,
Undergoing incessant misery.
You must understand this!*

In this way, each of the realms of birth of the six kinds of beings has its own specific kind of misery, an ever changing phantasmagoria of suffering. Nothing exists other than this machinery of torment. It is like a pit of fire, an island of ogresses, a chasm in the ocean, the tip of a sword, a latrine. Not a hair-tip of comfort can be found.

According to the “Application of Mindfulness:”

*Beings in hell suffer from the fires of hell;
Hungry ghosts suffer from hunger and thirst;
Animals suffer from being eaten by each other;
Humans suffer from the brevity of life;
Demi-gods suffer from conflict and quarrels;
Gods suffer from their own carelessness.
Samsara never holds even a pinpoint of happiness.*

Lord Maitreya has taught:

*Just as no sweet smell comes from a latrine,
No happiness is found among the five classes of beings.*

Lord Maitreya spoke of five classes of beings because he joined the gods and demi-gods into one category.

The Great Orgyen declared:

*It is said that in this samsara not even a pinpoint of pleasure can
be found
And even the tiniest moment of comfort turns into the suffering
of change.*

Thinking about these and other quotations, you will realize that wherever you are born in this samsaric world, from the highest peak of existence down to the lowest pit of hell, there is not the slightest iota of comfort and happiness. It is totally without meaning. You

should feel repelled from deep within, just as someone with a liver disorder has no desire for oily food.

Do not leave the torments of samsara as something to hear and understand intellectually, but practice mentally taking them upon yourself and experiencing them in imagination in order to feel conviction. When this kind of certainty is born, you will abandon nonvirtue, and without effort will take pleasure in positive action.

Long ago, Buddha's cousin Nanda was deeply attached to his wife and did not want to take monk's vows. Although Lord Buddha used skillful means to lead him into the Dharma, he did not follow the discipline, and was about to run away. The Buddha then miraculously transported him to a snow mountain and showed him a one-eyed female ape.

"Between this ape and your wife Pundarika, who is more beautiful?" he asked.

"My wife," answered Nanda, "is a hundred or a thousand times more beautiful."

"Fine. Now we will go to the god realms," said Buddha.

When they arrived, Buddha sat down in one place and told Nanda to go look around. He saw that the palaces of each of the gods were surrounded by many young goddesses and that they enjoyed inconceivable luxury and pleasure. There was one palace with many young goddesses but no god, and Nanda asked the reason for this.

"In the human realm, Lord Buddha's cousin Nanda is training in discipline and because of this he will be born among the gods. This will be his palace," he was told.

Joyously he returned to the Buddha, who asked him, "Did you see the realm of the gods?"

"Yes, I had a good look," he replied.

"Between the young goddesses and your wife, who are the more beautiful?" Buddha asked.

"The goddesses are more beautiful," he answered. "The difference is as much as I saw before between Pundarika and the one-eyed female ape."

Again returning to the human realm, Nanda perfectly followed the vows of monastic discipline.

Lord Buddha spoke to the other monks, "Nanda has become a monk

in order to reach the higher realms, but you have become monks with the thought of going beyond suffering. You are on different paths. You should not speak with Nanda; do not make yourselves comfortable with him nor sit on the same seat with him.”

All the monks acted in this way, and Nanda became quite miserable. He thought, “All the monks have abandoned me, but Ananda is my younger brother so maybe he will still feel affection for me.” He went to see Ananda, but Ananda also rose from his seat and moved away. When Nanda asked the reason for this, Ananda told him what the Buddha had instructed. Nanda was tormented by grief.

Lord Buddha came again and said, “Nanda, will you come and see the hell realms?” He agreed, and through his magical powers Buddha transported them there. “Go and look around the hell realms,” he said.

Nanda went off to explore them, and saw all the different hell realms. In one place he came upon an empty cauldron with a blazing fire crackling inside. Around it were many of hell’s messengers and executioners. He asked why there were no sentient beings in the cauldron.

They answered, “A cousin of the Buddha named Nanda is following monastic discipline in order to achieve the bliss of the realm of the gods. After he is born in that realm and experiences that pleasure, his merit will be exhausted and he will be born here.”

Terrified, Nanda returned. Realizing that being born in the god realms in the future but finally ending up in the lower realms was meaningless, he developed the thought of renunciation from samsara. Having actually seen hell, he made not the slightest error in maintaining his vows. The Buddha taught that he was the best among the disciples in controlling his sense doors.

Whether you actually see the hell realms or see a mere picture of the hells, fear and terror arises in your mind and renunciation of samsara is strengthened. Therefore Lord Buddha said that the five-fold wheel of samsara should be drawn at the door of monasteries.

Lord Nagarjuna has also said:

*If merely seeing pictures of the hells, hearing about them,
Remembering them, reading or reciting descriptions of them,
Arouses such terror, how will you cope
With the inexorable effects of your actions?*

In this way, reflecting upon the many different kinds of suffering within samsara, from deep within your heart you must turn away from all ordinary worldly goals. Unless you completely forget about the activities of this life, whatever Dharma you claim to practice will not be the authentic Dharma.

CONCLUSION

Contemplating the defects of samsara leads to an understanding of the meaninglessness of samsaric activities. This helps us abandon all thoughts about everyday mundane concerns. Remaining involved with worldly activities while practicing the Dharma can result in failing at both if conditions deteriorate. Positive conditions could bring about success in worldly activities but not in Dharma. Successful practice of the supreme Dharma requires detachment from worldly efforts. Without mentally giving up worldly concerns, we will never be able to practice the complete Dharma. We could make a pretense of practice, but could not practice the genuine Dharma that can lead to enlightenment. From the outside it might appear that Dharma is being practiced, but the perfect Dharma is not really being followed, and liberation will not be attained. Abandoning worldly goals is crucial to the genuine practice of the supreme Dharma.

When Master Atisa was about to pass away, one of his students, a yogi, asked him, "After you pass away, should I meditate?" The Master asked whether his meditation would really be the Dharma. This story is meant to teach us that without abandoning samsara, meditation can never become supreme practice. The student next asked whether he should teach. The Master replied in the same way. This indicates that teaching others without abandoning samsara is a mere pretense. "Then what shall I do?" the yogi asked.

The Master said, "All of you should rely solely on your teacher, Geshe Tonpa, and give up worldly activity." By leaving worldly activity behind, whatever you do, whether it is meditating or teaching the Dharma, will become genuine practice of Dharma. Failing to give up samsara, nothing that you do – meditation, listening to teachings, or contemplation – will become supreme Dharma. The Master advised that after he passed away his students should study under their teacher and renounce all worldly activities.

Another teaching story tells about a monk who met Geshe Tonpa while

circumambulating the Radreng Monastery. Geshe Tonpa spoke to him: “Master, circumambulating is good, but would it not be better to practice the authentic Dharma?” The monk thought that if circumambulations were not the real Dharma, perhaps reading a text would be more a genuine practice. He went to study Mahayana texts on the balcony. Again Geshe Tonpa came to him and said, “Studying is good, but wouldn’t it be better to practice the authentic Dharma?” The monk thought that practicing meditation might be better than reading sutras, and so he put aside his reading and began sitting on his bed with his eyes partly closed. Geshe Tonpa now said, “Meditating is also a good thing, but wouldn’t it be better to practice the authentic Dharma?”

Unless you abandon worldly activities and thoughts, whatever practices you do, whether circumambulating, teaching others, studying or meditating, none of these will be the real and supreme Dharma.

After his final meeting with Geshe Tonpa, the monk became extremely worried and had no further option. So he approached again and asked, “Jowo, what should I do to practice Dharma?” Geshe Tonpa answered, “Monk, renounce this life! Renounce this life!”

We should understand from this story that without renouncing worldly life, no efforts that we make – not retreat, meditation, study, or pilgrimage – will become authentic Dharma practice. Those who are attached to worldly activities are not practitioners. Even if they sealed their door, the effect would be like staying in jail rather than staying in retreat. Therefore, Geshe Tonpa’s pith instruction was, “Renounce the world!” This means to renounce this life. Only after renunciation will circumambulation, study, pilgrimage and the like become the true practice of Dharma. The root cause of becoming a true practitioner is renouncing this life.

We must understand this. Otherwise, we will believe these activities are Dharma practice. Lord Maitreya says that the ten Dharma practices: writing, reading, teaching others, giving to others, and so on, have limitless merit, so we cannot deny that they are Dharma. Whether or not they become genuine Dharma, however, depends upon whether or not we have renounced worldly life. All the activities of this life lead to suffering, both in the present and the future. Unless we cast aside the concerns and activities of this life, we will continue to wander through this life and the next, suffering with no escape.

An authentic teacher who shows clearly what to adopt and what to avoid is the most kind teacher. Others teach us how to succeed in worldly

activities: how to accumulate wealth, status and reputation. They advise us to earn money and even to travel to foreign countries to earn more money. These activities simply bind us tighter and tighter by the rope of attachment until we have no means of escape. They keep us tied up within samsara for an indefinite time, and thus do us harm. That is why Patrul Rinpoche emphasizes that qualified gurus are those who teach us the way of detachment from all worldly appearances, those who clearly teach how to reach enlightenment in this life or the next.

Our parents and friends help us gather what we need in this life – food, wealth, and possessions – but we should really cast these aside like spit. We should not increase our attachment to our relations and possessions. The inability to leave them is called attachment to this life, and is the basis of all attachment. We must understand that what we are attached to has no essence, not even the value of a single hair. We must achieve detachment through the understanding of essencelessness.

This is the view of emptiness free from elaboration. If we cannot understand this now, we should at least understand that our worldly activities are all impermanent. If we are attached to them, we become like stones that can never rise from the lower realms. With this understanding we must leave our attachments to this life behind. We need just enough food and clothing to survive. Discriminating and judging our food and clothing to be good or bad, and seeking only good food and clothes, we will never be able to practice supreme Dharma.

The Indian master, Padampa Sangye teaches as follows:

*Material things are like clouds and mist;
Do not grasp at their permanence.*

Everything we are attached to is just like clouds and mist. Nothing lasts. When there are clouds and mist in the sky, they do not remain, but are cleared by the wind. Since nothing is static and permanent, we should not become too strongly attached to anything.

*All renown is like an echo;
Do not seek renown but seek the true nature of things.*

Renown is merely a dry word; it means that many people are praising our qualities of education, status, power, capacity and the like. These are all simply like an echo, something heard when nothing is really there. Being praised by many people will not bring us any nearer to omniscience and

enlightenment. A nonvirtuous person praised by others must still go to the lower realms, but being slandered by others will not take us there.

If we are practicing genuine Dharma, whether other people praise or slander us, we still have the capacity for enlightenment in our mindstream. Renown cannot help us and will probably harm us. If we are developing our own power to attain enlightenment, the slander of others will not affect us in any way. Even Buddha Shakyamuni, who was stainless and full of qualities, was slandered.

The Indian heretic teacher Dzog Dzai saw nine bad signs on the Buddha's body, but this caused no harm to the Buddha since it was due to Dzog Dzai's own perception. Praise and slander are like an echo. If someone praises us with a good motivation, that is no reason to become proud. If someone slanders us with a bad motivation, that is no reason to worry.

We must act according to the Dharma, following the advice on what to adopt and what to avoid. Acting in that way, we will have nothing to become happy or upset about. We will not be affected in any way. "Seek the true nature of things" means "practice the supreme Dharma."

*Excellent clothes are like the colors in a rainbow;
Wear simple clothes; practice in this way.*

Wearing beautiful clothes has no essence. When someone looks at a well-dressed person, there may be beauty, but it does not help in attaining enlightenment. Someone who wears simple or inexpensive clothing will not be banished to the lower realms. Clothing is just to keep us warm, thereby supporting our lives. Thus, wear simple clothes and practice Dharma.

*The body is a sack of blood, pus and lymph;
Do not cherish it.*

People put their bodies on a pedestal, considering them most important. Young people take special care of their bodies, bathing and perfuming themselves. They let their life run out while caring for their bodies. Think carefully about this: if we peel a small piece of skin, only lymph and blood will come out – nothing precious like gold or silver. Therefore, don't cherish your body.

*Even delicious food becomes an impure substance;
Don't give great importance to your food.*

Sometimes we eat very delicious food, but the taste remains with us for

only a few minutes. If we put something hot on our tongue we will have a hot taste; if we put something sour on our tongue, we will have a sour taste. After we swallow, no taste is left. Only the organ of the tongue receives the taste. The tongue contains a crescent shaped nerve which notices and experiences all tastes – both good and bad. Food does not remain on our tongue, however, but after a few minutes enters our stomach, where it turns into stool and urine. This happens whether the food tasted good or bad, and we cannot eat the waste again even if it came from excellent food. Therefore, both delicious and bad-tasting food are impure. We should eat simply to sustain our bodies, without concern for the taste.

*Appearances rise up as enemies;
Stay in a retreat center or in the mountains.*

Living in a city or other crowded place, we can never practice supreme Dharma. All appearances will rise up as enemies that disturb our practice. These days, retreat centers and monasteries are also established in cities, but in earlier times hermitages had to be built at least one kilometer from inhabited areas. Such places have no distraction or chatter. Those who live there are always engaged in study and contemplation. This is called a hermitage or a place of practice.

Sometimes monasteries become like cities unto themselves; visitors come frequently and many people live together and can engage in business or other worldly work as they like. When this is going on, we cannot say they are like the monasteries of the past. I am not criticizing. If we stay in a city, the crowded and busy life keeps us from study and reflection. In more remote areas, we can study, contemplate and meditate with no disturbance, but monasteries themselves have now become very crowded and busy. Those living there can no longer be free from all disturbance and devote themselves entirely to study and practice. It is the same as practicing in a city in an earlier time, so even there appearances can rise up as enemies. Try to always stay in a place free from distraction and disturbance.

*The thorns of illusion prick your mind;
Practice equanimity.*

This means to always remain in the equanimity of dharmata, the nature of things. Illusion is the grasping at subject and object, and is like a thorn that harms us. The illusion of subject and object pricks our minds, causing constant suffering and worry. Remaining in equanimity is beyond the mind of subject and object, and the dualistic mind dissolves into dharmadhatu,

the space of the nature of reality. Then, the thorn of illusion will not tear at our minds. Therefore always rest in equanimity.

*Desires and needs all come from yourself;
Guard your mind.*

Whatever happiness and comfort we have comes from our own mind. Although we don't want any suffering, all suffering also arises from our mind. The root cause of everything, whether we consider it good or bad, happiness or suffering, is mind. Therefore we should always watch our mind, protecting it by our awareness of virtue and nonvirtue, of what behavior to adopt and what to avoid. Shantideva says:

*Practice the asceticism of only guarding your mind.
What can a lot of other ascetic practices accomplish?*

Only guard your mind; do not let your mind fall into nonvirtue. Make certain it engages only in virtue. The only ascetic practice you should engage in is guarding your mind. No other kind of asceticism is needed. All happiness and suffering depends on your mind. Maintain your mind in a positive direction.

The lamas of earlier times taught that if we have an eye that sees the faults of others, we should have a mirror to see our own faults, but this is often not the case. We always see the imperfections of other people, but do not recognize our own. If we do see the mistakes of others and correct them, this is a good thing. We are taking action encouraging others in a positive direction. Generally, other people's errors do not harm us, but only harm them. If we cannot correct other people, we must at least direct our own minds in a positive direction. Otherwise, we will continue suffering, in this life and the next. Thus, always guard your own mind.

*The most precious jewel is within you;
Do not be attached to food and wealth.*

Do not crave food and riches. We have the wish-fulfilling jewel within us. Why should we be attached to other kinds of wealth? The wish-fulfilling jewel is the ground from which food and possessions arise. There is no reason for attachment to food and wealth. The wish-fulfilling jewel is our precious human body, the basis for the attainment of enlightenment. This body is in our own hands, so we must use it correctly and attain enlightenment. Do not be confused by clinging to food, wealth and worldly possessions.

A lot of talking leads to quarrels

So remain like a mute.

Don't talk too much, either good or bad. Neither positive nor negative comments have any permanence. Even when we are talking positively, some negative words may be spoken and this will bring suffering to others. Bad words are the root of suffering, and even positive worldly speech cannot help others. If we talk a lot, eventually our conversations become quarrels.

The Guhyagarbha Tantra says that there is nothing other than letters to help others. Reciting mantras and reading sutras are considered to be letters and the sound of speech that helps greatly.

The lamas of the past used to say that it is better to have many diseases than many mouths. The meaning is that when we suffer from a disease, we suffer alone; we don't make others suffer. If we talk day and night about what others are doing, this is harmful both to us and to them. This is what happens in worldly life, and is the meaning of "many mouths." Therefore, always remain silent, like a mute.

This advice was not given by a simple village elder. It is the advice of the Indian sage Padampa Sangye, who established the ten peaceful practices of Dharma in the land of Tibet. If we want to practice Dharma and follow the masters of the past, their advice is extremely important and should be followed in the proper way. Stay as a mute.

*You can control your own mind;
Don't run after food.*

If we think too much about food, our minds will become agitated and unable to calm down. At present we lack control over our own minds; but when we do achieve such control, we can place our minds where we want. The meaning of the above verse refers to this. Probably, "do not run after food" means do not follow after outer sense pleasures. If we are not thinking about food and other sense pleasures, we can control our minds. The mind will go wherever we direct it.

*Your own mind is the source of blessing;
Supplicate the lama and yidam deities.*

Whether we receive the blessings of the guru and the yidam or not depends on our own mind. The mind is the source of blessing. With the ground of faith, we must look at our own guru as a buddha. When supplicating the guru, we receive the blessings of the guru and the yidam. Without the faith that sees the guru as an actual buddha, we don't have

sincere faith. In that case, the qualifications of the guru and the power of the yidam won't matter, and there will be no blessing, even the size of a mustard seed, in our mind.

*If you remain for a long time in one place, you will see fault even in the Buddha;
Do not stay too long in one place.*

Even if our guru has qualities equal to Lord Buddha's, from our side we do not see him or her as a buddha. Among the six realms we are in the human realm, and just as the hungry ghosts see all appearances as pus and blood – seeing, for instance, the substance we see as water as pus and blood – our karma placed us in the human realm so we see everything from the human point of view and cannot go beyond that. Whether we look at good or bad, we see it with the eyes of humans. What the hell beings see as burning matter, we see as water; what the hungry ghosts see as blood and pus, we see as water. What the gods see as amrita nectar, we see only as water, not nectar.

What we as humans see is the result of the karma we have accumulated. Even if the perfect Buddha, complete with all the signs, were to appear before us, we would only see a human being, not the perfect Buddha. This is not because the Buddha lacks the qualities. Our karma dictates what we see. The perfect Buddha is beyond samsara, but due to our karma we see him as we see other ordinary humans. We never see Buddha as the perfect one. The Buddha helps human beings in Nirmanakaya form because human beings will be able to see him in that way. We don't have the eyes that could see him as the perfect Buddha.

For this reason, if we stay with our guru for a long time, then even if the guru's qualities are equal to those of Lord Buddha, we will see many mistakes and faults and will develop wrong views. We will say that the activity of this lama is not good. If this happens, we must examine whether we will receive the guru's blessings or not, and whether our behavior conforms with the Buddha's words or not.

This is a simple matter; there is no difficulty in understanding the meaning. It is not like the idea of "simplicity" or "limitless" or "the inseparability of ultimate and relative truth." These words may be beyond our mental capacity, but what we are explaining here is not like that. We are talking here about what we can see. It is not at all difficult to understand.

If we stay too long with our guru our faith and devotion may decline,

and our doubts will grow stronger. This is the main obstacle to receiving blessings from our guru. First we must examine the guru's spiritual realization (*gongs pa*). What does this mean? It is the guru's qualities of renunciation and realization, and what he or she has heard and experienced. Then we must receive teachings. Without receiving teachings, staying years and years with our guru is not worthwhile.

The guru may have the ability to transfer his qualities immediately, but if the student lacks faith and devotion, or doesn't have the sharpest faculties, even staying with the guru for many years will not help at all. Staying too long with the guru we will see his or her faults; we would even see the faults of the Buddha. For this reason, when we meet our guru, we must receive as much teaching as possible so we can cut through our doubts even when staying alone in a remote place to practice.

If we have to meditate on the generation and completion stages we can come to understand. Likewise, we can come to understand how to practice on the highest level of the Great Perfection. From the very ground level of the preliminary practices and the four mind changings, we can come to understand and have the ability to practice alone.

With these qualities, we can stay in a remote place; there is no need to remain with the guru. Lacking such qualities, simply saying, "My guru is very qualified and I stayed with him for years and years," while being unable to carry out the preliminary practices, generation and completion stages, and the Trekchod and Togal of the Great Perfection, you will always become lost. You must know the details of these practices, for instance the eighteen freedoms and advantages of the precious human body, the impermanence of life, the defects of samsara, and so on. There are no examples to the present of anyone attaining enlightenment without the qualities of study, contemplation, and meditation, and staying in a remote place with a sealed door. Therefore, you must eliminate all doubts about what you have to practice.

After all your questions have been resolved you needn't go here and there seeking other lamas, because you can practice the oral instructions on your own. There is nothing else you need to do. But these days people are not like that. You can examine your qualities from your own experience. If your attachment, anger, ignorance, and so on still remain, and if your clinging to worldly activities is the same as before, staying in retreat and practicing Dharma will not be beneficial at all. You must always examine yourself and determine whether or not you have the ability to practice on

your own. If you do have such ability, there is no difference between staying with the guru and not staying with the guru. That is the meaning of the advice, “Do not stay too long in one place.”

Behave humbly; cast pride aside.

Humble behavior means to always think that you have no qualities of knowledge or accomplishment. With such thoughts, you will automatically behave properly and take a lower seat. If you continue to think that you are better than everyone else, while your body and speech appear to be acting in a humble manner, this is not really humility. Authentic humble behavior results from thinking that you have no good qualities and that you have great ignorance. Consider yourself the lowest one in any gathering, in any village, or within any monastery. If you think like this, even if your behavior of body or speech appears to place you above others, this does not become nonvirtue.

As Padampa Sangye says, “Behave humbly and cast pride aside.” If you keep your pride, even taking the lowest seat will not make a difference. If you are not arrogant, even if you sit on the highest throne, there is no problem. You must understand what humble behavior really means.

*You will not remain for a long time;
Practice right away.*

We think we will live for a long time, but this is not true. We have no control over how long our life will last, so we must practice immediately. No one can definitely say he or she is not dying. After receiving instructions, you should immediately practice them.

*In this life, you are like a visitor;
Do not construct a stone mansion where you have stopped to rest.*

When a visitor stays in a guest house for a few days, he does not purchase land and build a house. In the same way, we are like guests in this life, and if we spend time buying property and building houses, we will be wasting our precious opportunity.

*Whatever work you do will bring no benefit;
Establish yourself in practice.*

The worldly work we have done seems to be helpful to us, but actually this is deceiving. Worldly activities have not a single iota of benefit. Therefore, give up all worldly activities and practice Dharma.

*You don't know when your body will become food for worms or will
simply disappear;
Do not be distracted by this life's appearances.*

After death, our bodies will be eaten by worms, and since we never know when we will die, we should not be distracted by worldly activities.

*Family and friends are like small birds on the branch of a tree;
Do not cling to them.*

Like birds, our loved ones do not remain forever. Many people say that they want to practice Dharma, but have great attachment to their parents, or to family and friends. This verse is encouraging us not to act in this way.

*Confident faith is like an excellent foundation;
Do not let your afflictive emotions remain solid.*

What is meant by “solid” is like a field that has not been plowed, and therefore remains hard. No seed we may plant in such a field will germinate and grow. Likewise, without faith and devotion to our lamas, we will not attain any knowledge or qualities from them. Confident faith is like having a soft, well-prepared field. In such a field, whatever seed we plant will flourish. With deep-seated confident faith and devotion, we will receive the ordinary and special accomplishments from our teacher. In this way, our mind should be like a soft field. Lacking confident faith, our mind is like a hard field, and we will never attain accomplishment.

*This human body is like a precious wish-fulfilling jewel;
Do not turn it over to your enemy, hatred.*

Arousing hatred is the most powerful nonvirtue. Hatred is the true cause of the hell realms. Hating our siblings is nonvirtue; hating our enemies is likewise nonvirtue. Even expressing repugnance at a half-burned piece of wood is nonvirtue. Hatred to a non-living thing is also nonvirtue. With the support of our precious human body, we must accomplish the supreme Dharma. Padampa Sangye compares our precious human body to a wish-fulfilling gem that can bring all joys. Do not follow the thought that, “Since he has injured me, I must get even with him.”

*Lean on your samaya vows like a traveller leans on his walking stick;
Do not pollute them with faults.*

You have to analyze for yourself whether you have kept your samaya

vows pure or not. The vows given at a Secret Mantrayana empowerment are samaya vows. We should not stain our samayas.

*While your vajra master still remains
Do not become lazy about your Dharma practice.*

When your guru is still alive, do not become lazy, but practice the supreme Dharma diligently.

In order to perfectly practice the authentic Dharma, you must by all means understand that the whole of samsara is meaningless. Only this meditation on the defects of samsara will bring about such a realization in your mindstream. Reflect on this until conviction develops from the bottom of your heart.

The measure for the growth in your mind of the contemplation on samsara's faults should be to feel like Geshe Langri Thangpa. Langri Thangpa's attendants told him, "Lama, other people call you 'Langri Thangpa Gloomy Face'."

"Considering my thoughts about the miseries of the three realms of samsara, how could my face be glowing and bright?" he answered.

One time a mouse wanted a piece of turquoise he had on his mandala, but could not lift it. "Tsig, tsig," it squeaked, calling to another mouse. One mouse pulled and the other pushed. A smile came to Langri Thangpa's face. It is said that except for this occasion he never once smiled.

This contemplation on the defects of samsara turns your mind toward the Dharma, arouses conviction in cause and effect, turns you away from the concerns of this life, develops your love and compassion for sentient beings, and so on. It is the foundation and support for all the qualities of the path.

Lord Buddha, moreover, emphasizing the importance of recognizing suffering, began all of the teachings of the three turnings of the wheel of Dharma by saying, "Monks, everything is suffering."

Practice this until it has become completely established within your mind.

*I see the suffering of samsara, but still grasp after it, am tied up
by it, and am attached to it.
I am afraid of the abyss of the lower realms, but continue to
behave badly.*

*Gurus and yidams please bless me and those like me –
Sentient beings who have taken the wrong path –
To cast aside this life.*

This concludes the teaching on the suffering of samsara.