

Saturday, March 6

## WEEKEND TEACHING

Good afternoon, good evening!

[Please motivate as follows:] “As quickly as possible, I must achieve full enlightenment in order to liberate my mother sentient beings, who equal the sky, from the oceans of samsaric suffering that they are experiencing, and bring them to the peerless happiness of full enlightenment. Therefore I am going to listen to the holy Dharma.”

So please listen well by clarifying the purest motivation in your minds and listen to the teaching correctly, according to the traditional practices prescribed by the lamas of our lineage.

### THE PURPOSE OF BEING HUMAN

As I mentioned in an earlier talk, you should know the meaning of your life, the reason you are alive, the purpose of having taken this precious human body at this time, especially this perfect human rebirth, which has eight freedoms and ten richnesses—you should know this, not just intellectually but deeply, so that you transform your attitude accordingly and live your life in harmony with that purpose. What is that? It is living your life for the benefit of others.

Therefore, compassion is the most important meditation, or practice, you can do. Even though the Buddha’s teachings talk about billions of different meditations, or practices, that you could spend your life doing, this is the most important—benefiting others; living your life with an attitude of compassion for others. This is the real purpose of life, the meaning of life.

If even you have only an hour to live, a minute to live, the purpose of life is still to live for the benefit of others, with a good heart, with compassion for others. Even if you have only a minute to live, only a minute

of this precious human body left, the most important thing you can practice is compassion; nothing else.

The same thing would be true were you to have a hundred years to live, a thousand years to live, even an eon to live. To fulfill your life's purpose, you would still have to live with compassion for others, for the benefit of others.

If you are enjoying a happy life, experiencing pleasure, in order for your life not to be empty, to be beneficial, useful, for others, you should practice compassion, live your life for the benefit of others. If your life is unhappy, if you are experiencing relationship problems, if you have cancer or AIDS, if you are depressed, if your life is uncomfortable, even if you are encountering so many hundreds and hundreds of problems—health, relationship, job-related problems—that it seems as if you are drowning in a quagmire of problems, you should also practice compassion for others. If you can practice compassion at times like this, you will still be making your life meaningful, beneficial for others, useful for others, and therefore—by benefiting others—you will be constantly making your life beneficial for yourself. Cherishing others is the best way of cherishing yourself.

Cherishing others means that you don't harm others, and not harming others is not harming yourself. Even in terms of protection, this is the best way to protect your life. Similarly, when you cause others to be happy, you bring happiness to yourself. The karma created by making others happy causes you to experience happiness too; that's the kind of karma that results in happiness. Even if you don't want happiness, once you have created its cause, that's what results.

If you plant a seed in the ground and all the right conditions are present, such as perfect soil, water, and heat—everything is together and there are no obstacles—then no matter how much you pray for the plant not to grow, it will grow. It will definitely grow because the seed planted in the ground has met all the conditions necessary for growth; the cause and conditions have met. Since it is a dependent arising, it is inevitable that that flower or fruit will grow, no matter how much you pray for it not to.

Similarly, if you lead your everyday life with compassion, bringing as much happiness to others as you possibly can, the natural result will be for you yourself to experience happiness, both now and in the future—

there's the immediate effect of peace of mind in this life and the long-term effect of happiness in all your future lives. All this is the definite result of bringing happiness and benefit to others.

Therefore, there is much to be gained by cherishing others, taking care of other living beings as you do yourself. Whether they are insects or humans, they are living beings just like you—wanting happiness; not wanting suffering. Just as you need the help of others to eliminate problems, so do they. Just as your happiness depends on others, so does theirs. Not only humans, but also insects need your help. Their freedom from problems depends on you; their happiness depends on you.

Why is cherishing others, taking care of others as you do yourself, not harming but benefiting them, the best way of looking after yourself, taking care of yourself? Because it is through having a good heart, cherishing others, benefiting others, that all your own wishes get fulfilled.

In general, in the world, when others see a person who has a compassionate, loving nature, who is good-hearted, they get good vibrations, a positive feeling from that person. Even when strangers meet that person on the road, in airplanes, in offices or shops, just the sight of that person makes them happy, smile, want to talk. Because of your good heart, good vibrations, positive feeling, you make others happy. Even their facial expressions change to reflect their happy minds. Even if you aren't experiencing any problems, others keep offering you help.

When you have a good heart towards others, all your wishes for your own happiness get fulfilled by the way. Even though your motivation, like that of a bodhisattva, is only the happiness of others and you have not a single expectation of happiness for yourself, even if everything you do, twenty-four hours a day, is exclusively dedicated to the happiness of others with not a thought for your own, you yourself will experience all happiness.

Because of their realization of bodhicitta, the attitude of those holy beings, the bodhisattvas, is such that they totally renounce themselves for others; they have no thought for their own happiness but instead spend every moment seeking the happiness of others. So what happens? With bodhicitta, they are able to develop the ultimate wisdom realizing the very nature of the I—the self and the aggregates, the association of body and mind that is the base that is labeled I—and all other phenomena. Because of their bodhicitta and the ultimate wisdom they develop, they

are able to eradicate all errors of mind, the cause of all suffering—both the gross defilements, the delusions of ignorance, attachment and aversion, and the subtle defilements, which are in the nature of imprints left on the mental continuum by the delusions.

This, then, is the special feature of bodhicitta, because with its support, you can develop not only the wisdom realizing emptiness but can also stop the subtle defilements and thus become fully awakened, attaining the state of omniscience, the fully enlightened mind, knowing directly and without a single mistake, not only the gross karma but also every single subtle karma of each of the numberless sentient beings; seeing all their different characteristics, wishes and levels of intelligence; knowing every single method that suits the minds of all these different sentient beings at different times; and revealing the appropriate method that suits the mind of each individual sentient being at different times in order to guide that being from happiness to happiness, all the way up to enlightenment.

Thus, bodhicitta allows your wisdom to function such that it can overcome even the subtle defilements, making your mind fully enlightened. In this way, bodhicitta allows you to become a fully qualified guide, a perfectly enlightened being, and therefore to liberate numberless other sentient beings from samsara, the ocean of suffering, and bring them into the peerless happiness of full enlightenment.

So from where does this achievement of all those infinite enlightened qualities arise? Even the bodhisattvas on the ten levels (*bhumis*) have incredible, inconceivable qualities. Just a first level bodhisattva is able to meditate in hundreds of different concentrations, go to hundreds of different pure lands, reveal hundreds of different teachings to sentient beings. I don't recall exactly, but there are about eleven different things of which they can do hundreds. Then a second level bodhisattva can do a thousand different concentrations, go to a thousand pure lands, reveal a thousand different teachings to sentient beings, and so forth. Like this, as they progress higher and higher through the levels, they achieve more and more inconceivable qualities with which they can benefit other sentient beings. I don't remember the terms for the ninth and tenth levels, but the bodhisattvas there possess inconceivable numbers of such qualities.

All these incredible qualities of the bodhisattva path, all the infinite qualities of the buddha's holy body, holy speech and holy mind, come from the root, renunciation of ego and the thought that seeks the

happiness of oneself alone, and generation of the good heart, the thought that seeks the happiness of only other sentient beings. All those qualities come from this. All the infinite good qualities of the Buddha, of the Dharma, the bodhisattvas' path, and of the Sangha, those arya and even ordinary bodhisattvas, come from the incredibly precious thought, the wish-fulfilling bodhicitta—renunciation of the ego and the self-centered mind and the development of cherishing only others. They all come from this.

Those who can do this realize the best possible achievement. They renounce the self, they renounce the I, but they gain the best achievement, the greatest success. Not only do they find liberation forever from the cycle of death and rebirth and all the problems it brings, such as rebirth, old age, sickness, emotional problems and all other difficulties of life we experience, but they also attain everlasting liberation, everlasting freedom, everlasting happiness for themselves, and are able to bring skies of happiness to numberless other sentient beings. All this comes from the root, bodhicitta, that most precious holy mind, renouncing I, cherishing others.

We can understand how this is true from reading texts that tell the stories of Buddha's previous lives and the lives of other bodhisattvas, but we can also understand how a good heart is wish-fulfilling for your happiness from simple examples from the ordinary lives of common people in the world—how those whose minds are more compassionate in nature, who are good hearted, have much easier lives.

For example, if you are experiencing serious health problems, like cancer and so forth, but you have a good heart, your mind will be happy and peaceful because your main concern is not for yourself but for others; your concern is for other sentient beings. Therefore, your mind is peaceful. Even if you are dying, your mind is not disturbed because your concern is for others, not yourself. Even at the end of your life, at the very end of your human life, your experience of death is a happy one because your attitude is one of concern for others, not for I, not the self-cherishing, self-centered mind.

Even though things don't work out for you, you encounter many obstacles, your life is going wrong, none of this bothers you, your mind is undisturbed, always happy and peaceful, because the first priority in your life is the happiness of others. What concerns you most is others, not yourself. That's your goal. This attitude brings so much peace and

happiness into your daily life, gives you so much satisfaction. Even if other people are causing you problems, hassling you, it doesn't bother your mind; your mind remains peaceful and happy.

In particular, with a good heart, compassion for others, whenever a problem arises, you experience it for others, on behalf of other sentient beings. If you experience happiness, you experience it for others. If you enjoy a luxury life, comfort, you dedicate it to others. And if you experience a problem, you experience it for others—for others to be free of problems and to have all happiness up to enlightenment, complete perfect peace and bliss. Wishing others to have all happiness, you experience problems on their behalf.

That gives you incredible satisfaction and fulfillment, but not only that. If you have that attitude, no matter how many problems you experience, when you encounter each one you feel like you have discovered a precious treasure. You see it as an incredible opportunity to dedicate yourself to others; a great chance to experience the sufferings of others, like bodhisattvas do, like Buddha did, like Jesus Christ did; to take upon yourself the suffering of others.

Even though others might find that problem unbearable, for you, who has this attitude, it's not a big bother, you don't find it particularly difficult, you're pretty easy about it—because of your good heart, that pure attitude of life. This makes your entire life very easy, very happy. Your heart is not hollow, not empty, but overflowing with fulfillment, brimming with joy. In this way, even should you encounter many problems, you live your life with joy. You enjoy your problems; you even enjoy your death. No matter what happens, you enjoy it with bodhicitta, the thought that cherishes others. What ordinary people might find undesirable, the person with the good heart, the attitude of cherishing others, finds desirable because that person can make problems beneficial for other sentient beings. The person with a good heart, a compassionate mind, the thought of cherishing others, the bodhicitta attitude, makes the problem useful, beneficial for others. In this way, this person's experience of problems becomes a cause for the happiness of all sentient beings—not just temporary happiness but that of the highest, full enlightenment. Bodhicitta makes the person's experience of problems a cause for the happiness of all living beings. How? By transforming problems into the path to enlightenment.

## MORE ABOUT GEN JAMPA WANGDU

Remember the story I told the other night about Gen Jampa Wangdu, one of the most senior Tibetan meditators in India, who meditated around Dharamsala and Dalhousie and was guided by the ascetic lama, Dewo Gyüpe Rinpoche? After completing all his philosophical sutra studies and then completing the study of tantra, passing all his examinations and becoming a lharampa geshe, a geshe of the highest rank, Gen Jampa Wangdu went into solitude up in the mountains to actualize the path that he had been studying in the monastery from the time of his youth for so many years. He was a highly attained yogi and bodhisattva who had accomplished the highest tantra path, which has five stages— isolation of body, isolation of speech, isolation of mind, clear light and illusory body, and unification. So he had reached the highest levels of tantra and attained the illusory body.

After the first Dharma Celebration [Enlightened Experience Celebration], many of our sangha members took teachings from him on how to do the “pill” retreat—“Taking the Essence” [*chu-len*], a method of being able to retreat in very isolated places, far from everything, where food and drink are hard to find. Instead of living on ordinary food, you live on special blessed pills, which gives you more time for your meditation practice and makes your mind clear and is an easy way to achieve the perfect concentration of shamatha. Gen Jampa Wangdu was one of my gurus and I took the lineage of the *chu-len* teaching from him.

Once I was in Dharamsala, staying at Geshe Rabten Rinpoche’s house, which was below the house of His Holiness Ling Rinpoche, the senior tutor of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Geshe Rabten Rinpoche was my first teacher of philosophical texts, the debating text, *du-ra*; he was the one who started me off on those. These lamas’ houses were near our center, Tushita. One night Gen Jampa Wangdu came back late after teachings and found that his house had been burgled by a thief. Of course, there was hardly anything worth stealing, but he found that the thief had taken his clock. That was it! But he was so happy that the thief had gotten himself a clock; he was so happy!

## SERKONG DORJE CHANG

There's a similar story about the Serkong Dorje Chang who lived in Nepal—the incarnation of the Serkong Dorje Chang who lived in Tibet and was also a lharampa geshe. A lharampa geshe is like the most highly qualified professor, a great scholar, but in this case not merely a scholar of words but also in experience of the path. Later he became one of the few lamas to be officially recognized by His Holiness the Thirteenth Dalai Lama to have attained high enough levels of the tantric path to be allowed to practice with a wisdom mother consort. The incarnation who lived in Nepal passed away some years ago and has been reborn and is now studying at Ganden Monastery in south India.

Normally my mind is full of doubt and superstition, but every time I would go to see him I would have no doubt that when I was in his presence, I was in the presence of Yamantaka. Not a single hesitation that Serkong Dorje Chang was Yamantaka, an enlightened being, the most wrathful aspect of Manjushri, the buddha of wisdom. I was always one hundred percent certain that he was Yamantaka.

Serkong Dorje Chang was exactly the same as those ancient Indian yogis like Tilopa and Naropa, the forerunners of the lineage continued by Marpa and Milarepa, but living in the present time. Actually, one day, he himself told a monk that he was the embodiment of Marpa. That would happen, sometimes. On a good day—I don't mean weather-wise—when the time was right, Rinpoche would say many interesting things. At the end of the monks' annual summer retreat, *yar-ne*, as part of the traditional vinaya practice, the monks from his monastery would go for *gag-ye*, release from the retreat. Usually it would be a picnic, where Rinpoche would tell the monks many interesting stories.

Sometimes Rinpoche and some monks would go to do pujas at benefactors' houses in Kathmandu. When it was over they would return to their monastery on Swayambhunath mountain, which tourists call the "monkey temple" because there are so many monkeys on it. One of his monks was from our college, Sera-je. He was an assistant umdze, assistant leader of prayers—usually there are a few other monks who support the chant leader; he was one of those. So one day when they were all walking back to the monastery, Serkong Dorje Chang said to this monk, "In reality, I'm actually Marpa."

Serkong Tsenshab Rinpoche, who lived in Dharamsala and was one of His Holiness the Dalai Lama's gurus—he gave His Holiness a commentary on Atisha's *Lamp on the Path to Enlightenment* and some other teachings as well—is also one of my gurus and has been exceptionally kind to me. Even though from my side I am very lazy and lacking in ability, from Rinpoche's side he would always teach me anything I asked for. He always looked after me, guided me and was really so very kind.

Serkong Tsenshab Rinpoche's father was the Serkong Dorje Chang who lived in Tibet—the one who after becoming a lharampa geshe attained the highest levels of tantra and practiced with a wisdom mother consort. Serkong Tsenshab Rinpoche was his son, and later, when Serkong Dorje Chang was reborn, Serkong Tsenshab Rinpoche became his teacher, the teacher of his father's incarnation. Serkong Dorje Chang also told the Sera-je monk that Serkong Tsenshab Rinpoche was Marpa's son, Tarma Dode, and another incarnate lama, Tsechog Ling Rinpoche, was Milarepa. So Serkong Dorje Chang said, "In reality, we are like this."

His Holiness Serkong Tsenshab Rinpoche always used to say, "Oh, Serkong Dorje Chang—those ancient yogis were something like that." He wouldn't say many words, didn't tell any stories, but would just kind of label, like that. Once Serkong Dorje Chang was traveling to Bodh Gaya—perhaps on pilgrimage or for teachings from His Holiness the Dalai Lama—and his monks' robes, the required yellow ones, were left in a taxi in Patna. Later, when his attendant told Rinpoche that they had been lost, stolen, he said, "Oh, that's very good," meaning that he was happy that the thieves might get some use out of them, that it was worthwhile that they'd been stolen.

Even though I never received any initiations or oral transmissions of texts from beginning to end from Serkong Dorje Chang, I regard him as one of my gurus. Basically, that's what he is. When Lama Yeshe and I arrived in Nepal, we stayed outside Kathmandu at the Gelug monastery at Boudhanath, near the precious great stupa. It was the only Gelug monastery at Boudha, and at that time might have been the only Tibetan monastery with monks. We stayed upstairs there for about a year. Every year during the fourth Tibetan month, at Saka Dawa, they would do nyung-nä. The year we were there it was sponsored by a benefactor who had a connection with another lama from Swayambhunath, Drubtob Rinpoche, not Serkong Dorje Chang. According to his devotion, the

benefactor wanted Drubtob Rinpoche to give the ordination of the eight Mahayana precepts. But the Gelug monks weren't so interested in him. They wanted Serkong Dorje Chang because Drubtob Rinpoche practiced the Most Secret Hayagriva deity that our Sera-je College practices and they didn't—they thought it was a Nyingma deity or something like that. So for this kind of reason there was some conflict.

The monks prevailed, and Serkong Dorje Chang was invited to give the ordination of the eight Mahayana precepts in the early morning. So Rinpoche came in carrying the precepts text, opened it, and said, "If your guru tells you to lick fresh, hot kaka, get down on the ground immediately and lick it!" Then with his tongue outstretched and making a slurping sound, he imitated a dog licking up excrement. "That's how to practice Dharma," he said. Then he left. That was his motivation for taking the precepts. But he didn't actually give them—he just gave that advice and left. It was like an atomic explosion—a very powerful teaching. It really moved the mind. Just on the basis of that instruction, I took him as a guru. That's all he taught that morning. But he's someone who knows everything; a great yogi, as Serkong Tsenshab Rinpoche said.

Serkong Dorje Chang would often circumambulate the precious stupa at Swayambhunath, the main, original holy object in Kathmandu. To people who didn't know who he was or the qualities he embodied, he would appear as a very simple monk. They'd think he knew nothing—a simple monk, mala in hand, circumambulating the stupa. That's how he appeared to ordinary people. He might have appeared like he knew nothing, but in reality, he knew everything.

Sometimes he'd be circumambulating with all the other people and if the time was right, if it was their lucky day, he'd suddenly turn to a complete stranger and say, "You don't have much longer to live," or "You're going to die in a month"; "Better do prostrations to the Thirty-five Buddhas." Something like that. Rinpoche would make predictions and advise the people what to do. But if the time wasn't right, if it was not the day of your good fortune, even if you asked him something directly, he would say, "Oh, I know nothing. I'm completely ignorant."

I first heard about Serkong Dorje Chang when I was in Buxa—stories about his suddenly disappearing and reappearing somewhere else and his attendants having to go look for him; many stories like that. Therefore, soon after we arrived in Nepal we went very anxiously to Swayambhunath

to meet him. He was staying at a benefactor's house because he didn't have his own monastery at that time and had been kicked out of the monastery where he was staying due to some political problem. It was a Nepalese house and he was staying upstairs. When we arrived, this very simple monk came down the steps and we asked him, "Where's Serkong Dorje Chang?" He told us to wait and went back inside the house through another door, not the one he'd come out of. Then we went upstairs to Rinpoche's room, and the simple monk we'd seen downstairs was sitting on the bed. It was Serkong Dorje Chang.

Our first Western disciple, who had already been ordained a nun, Princess Zina Rachevsky—she was descended from Russian nobility—was with us at the time. Serkong Dorje Chang had a big pile of texts next to his bed, so she just blurted out, "Please read us something from those." Normally you don't ask like that! In fact, usually when we took her to see high lamas we'd help her prepare the Dharma questions she was going to ask. Anyway, that's what she said, and Serkong Dorje Chang replied, "No, no, no. I know nothing, I know nothing." But then Rinpoche gave some unbelievably profound teachings. I can't remember what they were! I didn't make it! But unbelievably profound; really deep. All I can remember is the essence, which was, "If your guru is sitting there on the floor, you must think that it is Guru Shakyamuni Buddha who is sitting there." I can't remember the exact words, which were much more than that, but that was the essence of Rinpoche's advice to her.

One of Rinpoche's supporters was a Tibetan from Amdo. He was the monastery's biggest benefactor. Every year he would invite Rinpoche and his monks to his house to recite the *Praises to the Twenty-one Taras* 100,000 times and they would stay there for however many weeks it took to do that. Serkong Dorje Chang would be there for the duration. This major benefactor built all the monks' rooms at the monastery; something significant like that. One day he came to the monastery to see Rinpoche and Rinpoche said, "And who are you?" pretending not to know him. Then Rinpoche's attendant explained who he was, but Rinpoche still didn't show any signs of recognition. This man was a big businessman and used to sell buddha statues in order to support his family. He must have done something really negative just before coming to see Rinpoche, so perhaps as a sign of that obscuration, Rinpoche manifested the aspect of not knowing who he was. There's no way he could

have forgotten him.

The monastery used to have this really big pot for making tea and food for all the monks. One day it was stolen, but when the monks told Rinpoche about it, he said, “Invite the thieves here and offer them a *khatag* to thank them for taking it.” But I’m not sure that the monastery followed through on that!

Once the bodhisattva Togme Zangpo, author of *The Thirty-seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*, was invited to a monastery to give teachings or attend a puja, and received many offerings. Soon after leaving the monastery he and his party were held up by robbers, who tied them up and stole all the offerings. I don’t know if they beat them as well, but they certainly took everything. Before they could leave, the bodhisattva Togme Zangpo asked them to wait so that he could dedicate to them everything they had taken. Of course, they’d already taken everything physically, but he insisted on making prayers for their well-being. Then he advised them to avoid going near the monastery when they left, otherwise the monks would see that they’d stolen the offerings and would beat them up!

#### THE HEALING POWER OF COMPASSION

The conclusion of all this is as I mentioned before. Compassion for other sentient beings is the best method, the best antidote for eliminating life obstacles; the best puja to eliminate obstacles to the success of both your Dharma practice, your gaining realizations, and your worldly work, such as your business affairs.

Once in Tibet there was a very wealthy family whose daughter was possessed by spirits. She’d gone completely wild and crazy. They invited many local lay lamas who normally did pujas and prayers for people in that area, but nothing helped. One day a simple monk came by begging for alms, so they invited him upstairs to see if he could do anything for their daughter. Maybe the monk was a geshe, I don’t know, but anyway, he tried the tantric ritual of the *geg-tor*—giving a *torma* to the interferers, like when we offer those three tormas at the beginning of initiations. But while he was reciting the mantra NAMO SARVA TATHAGATA BEU MEGA...SOHA, lifting up the torma offering it to the interferers, she was just imitating his actions and reciting the same mantra back. So he realized

that this wasn't helping! Then he stopped performing the ritual and instead wrapped his *zen* [monk's shawl] around his head and meditated on compassion—for the suffering of the spirit and the suffering of the girl. At that point, the spirit spoke to him through the girl's body, saying, "Please let me go. I will leave her," and she was released. The girl who had been completely wild and crazy through spirit possession was finally freed by compassion. That was the only thing that could heal her. This is just one example of how compassion is one of the best, most powerful ways of eliminating obstacles.

The remedy of compassion is also the best medicine for healing sickness, the best antidote to disease. There are many stories of people who have recovered from illness by doing the compassionate practice of *tong-len*, where by taking others' suffering onto yourself you cure your own disease. There was one student in Singapore who had AIDS. His first guru was a very high lama who lived in Dharamsala, Rato Rinpoche, who himself had taken the aspect of having Parkinson's disease. Through the lady who translates at the Tibetan Library for Geshe Sonam Rinchen [Ruth Sonam], Rinpoche dictated the *tong-len* practice for this student—taking other sentient beings suffering onto himself and giving his own happiness, merit, body and so forth to others—and had her send it to him in Singapore.

He practiced for four days and then went to the hospital for a check-up, where they could find no trace of AIDS. When I heard about this I thought he must have done many hours of meditation during those four days, so I asked him how much he'd done. "Five minutes a day," he said. Five minutes a day! So what happened? While he was meditating, he felt unbearable compassion for all the other people who were suffering from sickness, especially AIDS, and felt no concern whatsoever for his own problems. He felt unbelievable compassion; he could not bear the suffering of AIDS that others were experiencing. During those five minutes tears of compassion poured down his cheeks. So even though he practiced for only five minutes a day, he practiced very, very strongly. The compassion he generated was very strong, and that strong compassion for only five minutes a day for four days, that special *bodhicitta* practice of taking other sentient beings' suffering onto himself and giving them his own happiness and merit and so forth, was enough to overcome his AIDS.

How does compassion heal illness? How does it work? Sicknesses

come from negative karma—non-virtuous actions, actions done with attachment, with an impure mind—and compassion, bodhicitta, the altruistic mind cherishing others and seeking enlightenment, is the most powerful purifier of negative karma, such as that which causes illness.

As Shantideva said in the chapter on the benefits of bodhicitta in *Bodhicharyavatara, Entering the Bodhisattvas' Holy Deeds*—and I'll translate this a little loosely so that the meaning of the verse becomes clear—"By relying on a hero you can free yourself from great danger." [Chapter 1, verse 13.] It means that if, for example, you are going to be executed or there's some other danger to your life, sometimes the only way you can free yourself is by taking refuge in a very powerful person. The danger we face is the practically inexhaustible, powerful, negative karma, as heavy as a mountain, that we have created in this life and collected throughout our hundreds of thousands, in fact beginningless, previous lives. The hero who can save us from this is bodhicitta, the practice of which can purify these mountains of powerful, heavy negative karma in a moment. By relying on the heroic mind of bodhicitta, the attitude that renounces the I and cherishes others, we can purify all this heavy negative karma in the time it takes to snap our fingers.

Shantideva continues, "So, why don't conscientious beings rely on this?" In other words, he's saying, if you're a careful person, why don't you practice bodhicitta? Bodhicitta has such incredible purifying power; if you're intelligent, careful, conscientious, mindful, why don't you practice bodhicitta? Compassion is such a powerful, positive mind that when the man from Singapore generated it so strongly, he purified so much negative karma that he purified the karma that caused him to have AIDS. Because compassion purifies negative karma, after four days he was free of AIDS. That's just one example.

Therefore, compassion is not only the best puja, like in the story of the girl possessed by a spirit, not only the best method of eliminating life obstacles, but also the best, sublime medicine for healing sickness. What is the best way of overcoming cancer and all other illnesses through meditation, with your own mind? It is by developing compassion, by generating compassion for the suffering of others.

Whenever you experience pain in your eye or anywhere else, as soon as it starts, the immediate cure is the practice of the special bodhicitta meditation, taking other sentient beings' suffering on yourself and giving

them all your happiness, merit, body and possessions. With compassion take their suffering on yourself and with loving kindness give your happiness, merit, body, possessions and so forth to others. As soon as the pain starts, however painful it is, the immediate cure, the immediate antidote, the best, most powerful method of dealing with it is tong-len, taking and giving, the special practice of bodhicitta. Even though normally I am very lazy about practicing Dharma, through the kindness of pain I reminded to practice.

This meditation is so powerful that even before you start the actual practice, the moment you start preparing your mind to take on the suffering of others, the pain stops. This shows that even the slightest thought of exchanging yourself for others, just thinking of taking on the suffering of others, just preparing your mind to do that, is powerful enough to stop the pain. Therefore, if one day you go to the doctor and suddenly he says, “Oh, you have cancer,” or something like that, or you begin to have pain, what I recommend you do is immediately start meditating on bodhicitta. That’s the immediate medicine you should take.

Remember the story I told before about the great yogi Ngagpa Chöpawa when he was going to Odi to practice the final stages of tantra? [See Chapter 31, Saturday, February 27.] On the road by the river he saw an awful-looking dirty woman whose body was covered with leprosy sores with pus oozing out. She asked him to carry her to the other side of the river, but he ignored her and just kept going. A bit later, his disciple, the monk Getsul Tsimbulwa, came by and she asked if he would carry her across. As soon as he saw her he felt unbearable compassion and without the slightest hesitation put her on his back and started across the river. Right in the middle, the diseased woman’s appearance changed completely into the enlightened being, the female deity Dorje Pagmo, Vajrayogini, who took him to her pure land, where you are certain to become enlightened.

How did it happen that at first she appeared ordinary, disease-ridden, untouchable, and moments later in the pure aspect of the deity? At first, the monk’s mind was obscured by negative karma, so because of that impure mind he could see her only as an ordinary suffering woman and not as the enlightened being that she was. But because he felt such unbearable compassion for her suffering and completely gave himself up to offer her service, all his heavy negative karma was purified right there

in the middle of the river. Then his view of the woman changed completely and he saw her as an enlightened being. His view became totally pure, and she took him to the pure land, where he himself became enlightened. Thus, you can see how powerful compassion is for purifying negative karma, purifying the mind.

I think I'll stop here. There's no reason to continue now. Perhaps we can continue tomorrow, if tomorrow exists. Anyway, I'll continue the above subject tomorrow, but now, in conclusion, I want to talk about the purpose of doing this retreat.

#### WHY ARE WE DOING THIS RETREAT?

We are doing this retreat in order to develop compassion. The purpose of doing this retreat is to make our lives more beneficial, more useful for others. How? By developing the good heart. The main reason for doing the Vajrasattva retreat is to develop compassion, to realize bodhicitta, the root of the path to enlightenment, the door of the Mahayana path to enlightenment.

Even if we are reciting one mala of OM MANI PADME HUM, it is for bodhicitta, to realize bodhicitta, to develop compassion. That's what we're reciting for. Whatever other practice we do—prostrations, making offerings to Buddha, Dharma and Sangha or to statues, stupas and scriptures or making holy objects ourselves—we're doing it to develop compassion, to realize bodhicitta, to be able to benefit other sentient beings. It's all for that; that's all it's for.

Whatever practice we do—taking refuge, reciting the refuge prayer—the point of all our practice is for that. Even if we do the minimum practice of reciting one mala of OM MANI PADME HUM or we do a three year retreat or study Dharma philosophy for many years, it is all to develop compassion, to gain realizations, especially that of bodhicitta. Therefore, every single thing we do is for us to stop harming others and to benefit them. The main goal of our practice is that. If we don't stop harming others, we can't benefit them.

If you do lots of retreats, lots of sadhanas, recite many mantras, but then in daily life somebody criticizes or bothers you in some other way and you immediately retaliate, try to harm them back, it shows that real

practice is not happening. There may be lots of recitations, lots of prayers, but when it comes to dealing with other beings, the real practice, the actual practice—whose purpose is the development of patience, tolerance, compassion and loving kindness—is missing. That means you did not fulfill the purpose of all the prayers and sadhanas, or even that one mala of OM MANI PADME HUM, that you did. The whole, entire purpose of those practices is to help you in your daily life when you are with other sentient beings—to not harm but benefit them. How? By developing in your mind loving kindness, compassion and bodhicitta; to develop patience, tolerance and the rest.

Therefore, especially when you are driving your car and somebody cuts you off, swerves in front of you or doesn't follow the law, when another driver honks his horn or gets angry at you, it is good to think, "If I get angry or upset, what's the point of all the practice I've been doing? If I can't practice patience, why have I recited all these mantras? What's been the purpose of my having met the Buddhadharma? What have all my retreats and prayers been for?" It's very useful to think like this. If you haven't changed your own mind, your practice has had no meaning. If you think about it deeply, this is how you'll feel.

If you think, "If I don't practice patience, why am I doing all this? What for? What have I been doing all these years? What's been the purpose of reciting even one mala of OM MANI PADME HUM?" it will help calm your mind, especially on such occasions. Then, when you're able to remember that all your practices are mainly to protect your mind in everyday life, to subdue your mind so that you don't harm but only benefit others—when you can reflect in this way and practice tolerance in a situation where normally you'd get angry—when in place of anger you can arouse strong compassion for others, that's a day for great celebration. The day you can feel compassion instead of anger is truly your birthday—your great birthday for liberation, for enlightenment, for benefiting and not harming other sentient beings; a day for great celebration. Such moments are very important occasions as far as your enlightenment is concerned; very precious opportunities to meet the challenge of practicing Dharma. Very precious opportunities.

Similarly, if somebody abuses you or does something else that normally you would find hard to deal with, couldn't stand, would make you angry and upset, and you are able to overcome your delusion of anger,

you have won, you have defeated your enemy. From the point of view of ordinary people in the mundane world, you *should* get angry; you have a right to get angry. Anger is regarded as positive. In the same way, they regard being selfish as the right way to be, something you *must* do. However, the only selfishness you should allow yourself is the selfishness of caring for other sentient beings, of benefiting other sentient beings. *That* is the right way to be; that is good selfishness. Being selfish for yourself opens the door to all problems; being selfish for others, caring for others, opens the door to all happiness.

Also, if you have compassion, a good heart, even if you have no external wealth, your life is rich; you are a really wealthy person. No matter how much external wealth you have, if your heart is empty of goodness, if you do not have a warm heart, if there's no compassion for others, you're poor; inner poverty makes you a real beggar.

Therefore, whether you are ordained or lay, doing lots of retreat or none, finding lots of time to study Dharma or none, the most important way to live your life is with compassion. Living with compassion is the very essence of life, the best life to lead, the most important thing you can do. Even if you are able to study Dharma your entire life—all the scriptures, sutra, tantra, everything—if your heart is empty, like an empty container, empty of good qualities, your whole life is empty. Even though you might have a vast intellectual understanding of Buddhism and can explain or recite the entire canon of the Buddha's sutras and tantras, if there's no compassion in your heart, your life is empty of meaning.

Even if you do one retreat after another, live in a cave without coming out or seeing other people for fifty, sixty, seventy years, even if you spend your entire life in retreat, if your heart is empty of the satisfaction that comes from cutting the thought of the eight worldly dharmas, empty of compassion for others, your life is not meaningful. Even if you put yourself in a cave without windows or doors and chant mantras for fifty or a hundred years, if your heart is empty of compassion for others, your life has no meaning.

For example, if when you do prostrations your attitude is that you are prostrating for others, if in your heart you feel that you are making the prostrations for the hell beings, for the hungry ghosts, for the animals, for other humans, for the suras and asuras, if you feel in your heart that

you're prostrating for others, even if it's only three prostrations, you feel so happy, so satisfied, that it's so worthwhile. Even though you do only three prostrations, at least they're for others. In your mind there's no tension; you feel free. In your heart, you enjoy them; your attitude is relaxed, peaceful and happy. But if your attitude is that you are doing these prostrations for yourself—for *you* not to be reborn in hell, that is not so enjoyable. If you compare it with the other attitude—even three prostrations for others—you are not really happy. There's a big differences in the nature of your mental attitude; you are not as happy and relaxed as when you prostrate for others.

There's also a great difference from the aspect of motivation. When you dedicate each prostration to others, with each one you collect merit, good karma, like the limitless sky. When the attitude in your heart is, "I'm doing this for me not to be born in hell, for me not to suffer in the lower realms," your purpose is very limited, mean. Your purpose—for yourself not to be born in the lower realms—is so tiny, so limited, and so the benefits of the prostrations you do are correspondingly tiny, limited.

Therefore, there's a big difference between those two attitudes. Even though your motivation is still Dharma—because you are working for the happiness of your next life—the difference is huge. In other words, when you recite one Vajrasattva mantra or one mala of OM MANI PADME HUM, you should feel in your heart that it is all for the benefit of other sentient beings. The purpose behind it is that. In that way, when, with bodhicitta in your heart, you feel that each Vajrasattva mantra is for others, each one becomes 100,000 Vajrasattva mantras. If each mantra you recite is done just for yourself to achieve the everlasting happiness of liberation from samsara or to have better future lives, happiness in future lives for yourself alone, it does not bring skies of merit. You lose out on that. Because you fail to generate bodhicitta motivation, you miss out on each mantra's becoming 100,000. Even though your recitation becomes a Dharma action because your motivation is virtuous—thinking of yourself not suffering in the lower realms, working for the happiness of your future lives—no matter how many Vajrasattva or OM MANI PADME HUM mantras you recite, when you compare their benefits to those you would have gained had you recited the mantras with bodhicitta, they are still kind of meaningless, wasted.

The purpose of emphasizing bodhicitta motivation at the beginning

of every session, repeating it again and again, is to remind you to generate bodhicitta so that you don't waste the Vajrasattva mantras you recite. It's extremely important. Not only does it benefit newcomers to the retreat by showing them how to do the meditation, constant repetition also helps the people who have been here from the beginning understand how important bodhicitta motivation is and to remember to generate it every session.

Of course, at this point my mind has degenerated completely, but in the past, if I found that I had recited one mala of mantras without bodhicitta, I would feel that I had wasted that whole mala and would repeat it with the proper motivation.

When you have a compassionate attitude, you have peace and happiness in your life right now. No matter with whom you find yourself, you are happy and comfortable. When you have compassion for others, you are happy to be with any sentient being. Even if you live alone, you are happy. There is happiness and comfort now, and this attitude has the best future. Not only that, but you also die in the best way. If you die with compassion, your mind will be happy and peaceful and you'll die with no regret or guilt. The best way of dying is with compassion for others. Also, if you want to be reborn in a pure land, dying with compassion is the best way of making it happen. If you die with compassion, not only will your death be peaceful and happy, but you will also receive good rebirths in all your coming future lives, liberation from samsara and full enlightenment—all the infinite good qualities of the buddha's holy body, speech and mind will be yours, and you will be able to enlighten numberless sentient beings.

With compassion, both your present and your future are happy.

#### DEDICATION

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may the source of all happiness and success for myself and all other sentient beings, the precious bodhicitta—cherishing others, who are the source of all my happiness, and renouncing the I, which is the source of all my problems and suffering—be generated within my mind and the minds of my family members, all the students and benefactors in this organization and all other sentient

beings, and may the bodhicitta that has already been generated increase, *Jang-chub sem-chog*...

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may the father-mother sentient beings have happiness, may the three lower realms be empty forever, may all bodhisattvas’ prayers succeed immediately and may I be able to cause all this by myself alone.

“Due to the past, present and future merits collected by myself, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings—which appear to me as independent, inherently existent, real, appearing from there, but which buddhas and bodhisattvas realize are totally non-existent; which I apprehend in my daily life as really true but which buddhas and bodhisattvas realize are totally non-existent, which I believe to be one hundred percent true, real, existing from there but which buddhas and bodhisattvas realize to be totally non-existent, totally empty—may the I—which appears to my mind to be inherently existent, a real one existing from there, which I apprehend, totally believe to be really existent but which buddhas and bodhisattvas realize is totally non-existent—achieve Vajrasattva’s or Guru Shakyamuni Buddha’s enlightenment—which appears to me to inherently exist, as something real, existing from there; which I believe to be really true, but which is perceived, realized by the buddhas and bodhisattvas as totally, *totally* non-existent—and lead all sentient beings—who again appear to be inherently existent, real ones existing from there; which I believe to be really true, but are realized by buddhas and bodhisattvas to be totally non-existent, totally empty of existing from there—to that enlightenment—which appears to me to be inherently existent, as something real existing from there but is realized by buddhas and bodhisattvas to be totally non-existent—by myself alone—which appears to me to be an inherently existent self, existing from its own side; which I really believe to be true, but which buddhas and bodhisattvas realize to be totally empty, as it is, in fact, totally non-existent in reality.”

Finally, dedicate to actualize Lama Tsong Khapa’s complete path in your own mind, and in the minds of your family members, all the students and benefactors in this organization, especially those who sacrifice their lives and bear much hardship offering service to other sentient beings and the teaching of Buddha through this organization, and for

the Buddha's teachings in general and Lama Tsong Khapa's teachings in particular, which are the only medicine that can heal the sufferings of all sentient beings, to spread and flourish in all directions and to make all this to happen by yourself, alone.

Sunday, March 7

## WEEKEND TEACHING

[Please motivate as follows:] “As quickly as possible, I must achieve full enlightenment in order to liberate living beings, who equal the limitless sky, every single one of whom is the source of all my past, present and future happiness, every single comfort and all temporary and ultimate happiness. Therefore, I’m going to listen to the profound holy Dharma.”

So please listen well by clarifying the purest motivation in your minds, that of bodhicitta, and listen to the teaching correctly, according to the traditional practices prescribed by the lineage lamas of the path to enlightenment.

## THE BENEFITS OF BODHICITTA

The sutra *Do-de pal-wo che*, which contains teachings on bodhicitta, says, “The holy, altruistic mind of enlightenment, that purest of attitudes, is a treasury of merits.”

In the *Bodhicharyavatara*, it says, “How can one measure the merits one collects by generating the precious thought that is the cause of all happiness of all transmigratory beings and the medicine that cures the suffering of all sentient beings?” [Chapter 1, verse 26.]

From where does every single happiness, both temporary and ultimate, of every single sentient being come? From bodhicitta. What is the one medicine for every suffering that sentient beings experience? That, too, is bodhicitta. Therefore, there’s no limit to the benefits of bodhicitta; there’s no way to realize how much merit you can collect with it. You can’t say it’s this much; it’s immeasurable. The merits you can collect with bodhicitta are numberless. That is the straight translation—“How can the merits collected by generating the precious thought that is the cause of the happiness of all transmigrator beings and the medicine for the suffering of all sentient beings be measured?”

With the mind of bodhicitta, each breath in and each breath out become a cause for the happiness of all sentient beings. With this purest of attitudes, bodhicitta, every breath you take benefits each sentient being and with each breath, with every action, you create skies of merit.

Therefore, if you want to accumulate the conditions necessary for attaining realizations on the path to enlightenment, you should put all your effort into developing your own precious mind of bodhicitta.

When you think of fulfilling your wishes, it's not suffering you want. Normally, you don't wish for suffering. What you wish for is happiness. Of course, the happiness most of us wish for is actually suffering. What we usually think of as happiness is not pure happiness. However, as far as what we wish for is concerned, from the side of the wish, what we are looking for is happiness, not suffering. However, every single happiness—from that of full enlightenment, through liberation from samsara and the happiness of future lives, down to even the happiness of this life—depends on merit, on good karma. Without good karma, nothing works. Without good karma, the cause of happiness, you can't enjoy the slightest happiness. Without merit, there's no comfort; everything depends on the merit we have. Realizations of the path, temporary happiness, even the work of this life, such as success in business—every single thing depends on merit. Practicing bodhicitta, meditating on bodhicitta, is the best way to collect extensive merit.

Also, the merit you collect with bodhicitta is inexhaustible, unceasing. It doesn't stop until you reach enlightenment, and even after you reach enlightenment it continues. You continuously experience the result; your mind in the state of peerless happiness. Not only that. As a result of the merits you collect with bodhicitta, you liberate numberless other sentient beings and bring them to full enlightenment. Without discriminating, you bring sentient beings equaling the sky, every single one, to the full enlightenment of buddhahood.

The teachings say that the merits collected without bodhicitta are like a "water tree." I think that means a banana tree—the fruit comes, you use it once and the tree no longer bears fruit. In other words, if merit is created without bodhicitta, you experience the result once and it's finished. Merit collected with bodhicitta is completely different—you enjoy it all the time, lifetime after lifetime, and even after you achieve enlightenment, you keep enjoying it. Such merit is inexhaustible.

That's why bodhicitta is something you should put all your daily life's effort, everything you do, into. Whether you are happy or unhappy, whether you encounter problems or are problem-free, whatever your circumstances, favorable or unfavorable, whatever conditions you find yourself in, you must put every single effort into this, into living your life with the attitude of bodhicitta.

Now, when you do the Vajrasattva sadhana or other practices, even though they begin with bodhicitta motivation, when you come to the mantra recitation, *again*, just before you begin to recite the mantra—as I've already mentioned a few times during some of the sessions—dedicate very precisely by thinking, “Each mantra I recite is for every hell being, each mantra is for every hungry ghost, each mantra is for every animal, each mantra is for every human, each mantra is for every sura, asura, intermediate state being.”

Even though you begin the practice with bodhicitta motivation, make sure that when you come to the actual recitation of the mantra, it is directed more to the benefit of others than yourself. Make sure that instead of feeling in your heart that it is “I, me” for whom you are reciting the mantra, you feel that you are doing it for others. Make sure very precisely that each mantra you recite is for others, not yourself. Instead of filling your heart with “I,” fill your heart with others. Begin your mantra recitation like that; during the session, recite the mantra with as much bodhicitta as you can generate; and every now and then, check your motivation to make sure that your attitude is that of more concern for others than yourself. If it's not, fix it up.

If you want to be a lucky person, if you want good luck in your life, bodhicitta is the best way to create the good luck you desire. If you want to be lucky, put your efforts into practicing bodhicitta all the time. If you are a good hearted person, you are truly the lucky one, because gradually, all your wishes get fulfilled—your wishes for your own welfare and your wishes for the welfare of others. You can stop all your defilements, your mental stains and errors, and accomplish all realizations, enabling you to liberate others from suffering and do perfect work for other sentient beings. Your good heart allows you to accomplish your own aims and those of others. That's the definition of a really lucky person—one who has compassion for others, loving kindness, bodhicitta.

It also says in the *Bodhicharyavatara*, “Since merely thinking of

benefiting others transcends making offerings to all the buddhas, what need is there to say how extraordinary it is to actually attempt to bring happiness to every single sentient being without exception?” [Chapter 1, verse 27.]

Here, Shantideva is saying that even thinking of benefiting others is much higher, more special, much greater and more extraordinary than making offerings to all the buddhas. Therefore, if you go beyond this extremely beneficial thought and actually *try* to bring happiness to all sentient beings without exception, actually *work* for their happiness, what need is there to say how extraordinarily beneficial *this* is, how far it surpasses making offerings to all buddhas?

Also, in his commentary to Maitreya Buddha’s teachings, *Do-de-gyän* [Skt: *Mahayanasutralankara*], Arya Asanga says that benefiting one sentient being is more meaningful than making offerings to buddhas and bodhisattvas equaling in number the atoms of the world. How can it be that benefiting one sentient being is more meaningful than making offerings to not just one buddha, but to buddhas equaling in number the atoms of the world?

This is incredible advice, similar to that of Shantideva when he was talking about the benefits of bodhicitta, how extraordinary it is merely to think of benefiting others. For example, when we generate bodhicitta motivation, the thought of achieving enlightenment for sentient beings, the thought of benefiting sentient beings, even this mere thought, just this wish, is greater than making offerings to all the buddhas.

#### HELPING OTHERS IS AN OFFERING TO THE BUDDHAS

I mentioned a few days ago that when we help sentient beings, we can also think of it as an offering to the buddhas. This is a very useful way to think. There are many ways in which we can help sentient beings. I’m not just talking about the dogs and cats we keep—and whether we’re keeping them is for their happiness or ours is also a question—but also insects. Actually, perhaps we should also keep insects as pets—mosquitoes, spiders...especially the ones you don’t like! Anyway, whatever sentient being you benefit—domestic animals, insects, hell beings, pretas, people—and whichever way you help them—for example, giving someone a Dharma talk to help solve that person’s depression or other mental problems, giving medicine for illness, giving food or money to a beggar—

sincerely trying to help either physically or mentally, you can always combine two things: making charity to the sentient being and an offering to all the buddhas.

If, for example, you give food or money to a beggar, you're giving immediate help to that sentient being, but at the same time it becomes the best kind of offering to the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions. Why? Because what the buddhas and bodhisattvas cherish all the time is sentient beings; nobody else. They are constantly working for sentient beings, cherishing only sentient beings. Therefore, when you help sentient beings you are helping the numberless buddhas and bodhisattvas. That's the reality.

Even if you don't think that your helping a sentient being is an offering to the buddhas and bodhisattvas, in fact, it becomes the best kind of offering you can make, the most pleasing offering possible. As I mentioned the other day, even if you don't directly help the parents, when you help their children you make the parents happy, because what they cherish most in their lives, what they hold most dear in their hearts, is their children. Therefore, they always think of and cherish their children. Similarly, if you harm the child, you harm the parents. In the same way, therefore, if you harm sentient beings, you harm the buddhas and bodhisattvas. It displeases them greatly.

A child is like its parents' life, or heart. That's how the buddhas and bodhisattvas cherish sentient beings. Therefore, if you do good things for sentient beings, if you benefit them, offer service to them, you are not only offering service to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas, but the very best kind of service.

Thinking in this way helps you practice tolerance, patience; to not get angry at other sentient beings, to not arouse ill-will, to avoid hurting or harming them. It is very helpful. Causing pain to a sentient being is like causing pain to the buddhas and bodhisattvas. That's not to say they experience pain in the same way as we suffering sentient beings do, but it is certainly displeasing.

Therefore, when you offer service to a child, an old person, when you give things to others, for example, when you make charity to a beggar or even throw a party for others, offer them food and drink, remember that you are also making an offering to the buddhas and bodhisattvas. If you are aware of this, if when you give to the sentient being you also intentionally

think you are making an offering to the buddhas and bodhisattvas, it combines two things. Sentient beings derive benefit from whatever you give them and you collect merit by making an offering to the buddhas and bodhisattvas with your intentional thought. If, at such times, you consciously think, “By helping this sentient being I am also making an offering to the buddhas and bodhisattvas,” if you remember that what you are doing with this sentient being also affects the buddhas and bodhisattvas, that doing something good pleases them, two things get done and you collect much more merit than you would have by simply making an offering, thinking of only the Buddha.

When you make charity, whether it’s an offering to monks, monasteries or refugees, homeless people or the sick, at that time also remember that you are making offerings to the buddhas and bodhisattvas. You are giving to sentient beings but offering to the buddhas and bodhisattvas. In this way you collect far more merit, an unbelievable amount.

The sutra *Do-de pal-wo che* says, “The holy, purest thought of enlightenment is a treasury of merit (or fortune). From this come the buddhas of the three times.”

This means that numberless past, numberless present and numberless future buddhas have all come from bodhicitta, that holy, most pure thought of enlightenment. The text goes on, “From this [bodhicitta] comes the happiness of all the world’s transmigrators.” The Tibetan phrase here is *di-lä jig-ten dro-wa kun-gyi de-wa jung*. *Di-lä* means “from this.” The next term, *jig-ten*, requires a little more explanation.

#### THE MEANING OF *JIG-TEN*

The sense is “change,” but to make it more clear we should say, “changeable aggregates.” We also have the term *jig* in one of the six root delusions, the one called five wrong views, *ta-wa nga-ta ta-min nga*. One of those is *jig-tzog-la ta-wa*, the view of the changeable aggregates. Here, *jig* is the same, meaning change. *Ta-wa* itself simply means view, but the implication here is wrong view, so together it becomes something like changeable wrong view. *Jig-tzog-wa* means changeable collection. What is that changeable collection? It is the five aggregates.

How does ignorance, the root of samsara, arise? How does that

ignorance, which is the wrong view of the *jig-tzog-la* happen?

First, we have the *mig-kyen*, or objective condition. The mind looks at the aggregates, which are impermanent and therefore changeable in nature, and labels them “I.” The thought thinks of the transitory aggregates and makes up the label “I,” the merely imputed I. But this I, which is merely imputed by that thought, doesn’t appear back to the mind as merely imputed. At that moment, you are not aware that the I is merely imputed by the mind.

Right after the I has been merely imputed by the mind, the negative imprints left on the consciousness by past ignorance, the concept of inherent existence, immediately *project* that the merely imputed I is inherently existent. Right after your mind merely imputes the I, just like imprints left on a film in a camera, the imprints left on the mental continuum by past ignorance—not just any ignorance, but the ignorance of inherent existence—immediately *project* the hallucination of inherently existence onto that merely imputed I. Buddhas cannot see this inherent existence; bodhisattvas who realize emptiness can’t see it; and when you analyze, even you can’t find it. Because it doesn’t exist. What those buddhas and bodhisattvas see is a *non-inherently* existent I. That’s what they see.

However, with us, as soon as our thought merely labels I, in the very next moment, that merely imputed I appears back to the same continuity of thought as not merely labeled by mind, as existing from its own side. The very next moment of mind apprehends, “Oh, that’s true, that’s a real I there.” So, that real I appearing as true, seeing that real I appearing from there as true, is the wrong view, *ta-wa*.

Now you can understand the meaning of *jig-tzog-la-ta-wa* a little better. *Jig-tzog* means changeable collection, in other words, the aggregates; *ta-wa* means view. When the same continuity of the thought that merely imputed the I, in the next thought moment, *believes*, apprehends, that what is appearing to it is true, is something real from its own side, then at that time the *jig-tzog-la-ta-wa*, the wrong view, happened. This wrong view is established on the aggregates, which are changeable by nature—like a table-cloth covering a table.

You can see the evolution, but since the wrong view is of the I, why does the term contain the aggregates, *jig-tzog*—the changeable collections (*tsog* means collection), the changeable aggregates? Why are they mentioned here, what’s the connection? Well, by understanding the evolution

of the wrong view, you can see why. By thinking of the aggregates, your mind labels I. First you think of the *base*, then you apply the label. The cause, or reason, for the mind applying a label has to come before the label; the reason, or cause, of the label has to come before the label. They don't come together; the cause comes first. So, why is the particular label I chosen? Because first the base is identified, then the appropriate label applied.

It's the same with any phenomenon. By looking at the base, thinking of the base, seeing the base, hearing, touching the base, smelling, tasting the base, the mind that experiences the base—hearing, smelling, tasting, whatever—creates the label, this or that. Depending on the base, the thought makes up the label, and that's how all phenomena exist, happen.

Abbreviating *jig-tzog-la-ta-wa*, the view of the changeable aggregates, we say *jig-ta*. *Jig* means change and *ta* means view, but although literally it comes to changeable, or transitory, view, that's not what it means. It is not the view that is changeable or transitory; the view is of the I. Change refers to the aggregates; the view is to do with the I.

Why am I describing ignorance here? Why, along with the wrong view, are the aggregates brought up? If you think of the evolution, you can understand. But now I should finish the quotation, whatever it is!

“From this, the happiness of all transmigratory beings...”—the term here is *jig-ten dro-wa*, so perhaps it should be translated as “transmigratory beings dependent on change,” since *jig-ten* means dependent on change. It means that the I, the being, exists by depending on the aggregates. That's what the “change” refers to. It means aggregates, which are transitory in nature, *jig-ten*. It really depends on the context. Actually, *jig-ten* is a general term that means both the world and its inhabitants. Not only the place but also the living beings that live there. It depends on the context. Usually it means suffering beings, *jig-ten*; samsaric beings, *jig-ten-lä de-pa* and *jig-ten-pa*—“beyond those beings who are dependent on change” and “those beings who are dependent on change,” respectively. In this context, *jig-ten-pa* means samsaric beings, “those who are dependent on change,” and *jig-ten-lä de-pa* means “those who have gone beyond samsara and are not suffering beings dependent on the aggregates,” which are changeable in nature, suffering in nature, that is, samsara. So *jig-ten-lä de-pa* means those who are beyond *jig-ten*. Here, *ten* means dependent on something; those who are dependent on

change, which means the aggregates, transitory in nature, but also suffering in nature—that means samsara. Thus, *jig-ten-pa* means beings who are dependent on change, which means the aggregates. The aggregates are changeable in nature, suffering—that’s samsara. The aggregates are samsara.

“From this, the happiness of all the transmigratory beings dependent on change...” —*jig-ten dro-wa*, dependent on change. That describes the aggregates, samsara. Beings who are dependent on the aggregates, which are changeable and suffering in nature—that’s samsara, the continuity of which circles from one life to the next. Beings who are dependent on that are called samsaric beings, circlers.

The next line says, “From this, *all* good things, all goodness praised by the victorious ones comes” or “From this, one receives *all* the goodness praised by the victorious ones.” It can be translated either way. From bodhicitta, there is no doubt that you can become a buddha, one who is the victor over, who has conquered, defeated, destroyed, not only the delusions but even the subtle negative imprints of delusion. So, “From this, there is no doubt that you can become the principal victorious one”—amongst holy beings, the principal one, buddha, the most perfect of beings.

The next line: “With this, the defilements of all the *jig-ten* will cease.” Here, the *jig-ten* can mean all worldly beings. You can say, “All the defilements of worldly beings will cease,” but to my mind—I don’t know how it sounds to others—worldly has the connotation of “not being free from worldly concern, attachment clinging to this life.” Such beings are worldly beings, those who have not renounced attachment to this life. To me, “worldly being” has more this meaning than “samsaric being.” But here, worldly being means samsaric being. The Tibetan is *di-ni jig-ten kun-gyi drib-pa se-par-gyur*: “With this (bodhicitta), the defilements of all the *jig-ten* will cease” is the word-for-word translation—the meaning is the defilements of all samsaric beings or, you can say, the defilements of all the beings dependent on change, which means the aggregates, as we discussed above. All these defilements will cease.

On the other hand, I’m not sure what *jig-ten* refers to, because even *arya* beings, like arhats and higher bodhisattvas, and buddhas as well, exist by depending on aggregates. Even beings who are free from samsara but still have the subtle defilements—like arhats and higher bodhisattvas—

exist in dependence upon aggregates. Not aggregates that are suffering in nature but those that are changeable in nature. Those who are free from samsara, arhats, don't experience suffering, but they do depend upon changeable aggregates, *jig-ten*. So I'm not sure how widely the term *jig-ten* extends. Usually it means just samsaric beings, but perhaps it can also cover those who still have subtle defilements—arhats and higher bodhisattvas.

#### THE BENEFITS OF YOUR OWN BODHICITTA

While this quotation from *Do-de-pal-wo-che* explains the incredible benefits of bodhicitta in general, you can also use it to think of the extensive benefits that come from your own bodhicitta. Thus, your own holy mind of bodhicitta is the treasury of all merit. Of course, you can't relate the buddhas of the three times to your own bodhicitta, but they all do come from bodhicitta in general. Like numberless past, present and future buddhas arose from Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's bodhicitta—not *all*, but numberless—you can relate to it like that. The happiness of numberless transmigrators dependent on change comes from *your* bodhicitta.

The happiness of all migratory beings comes from bodhicitta in general, but with *your* bodhicitta, you can still bring much happiness—the happiness of this life, of future lives, of liberation from samsara and enlightenment—to numberless sentient beings. Your bodhicitta can cause numberless hell beings, numberless hungry ghosts, numberless animals, numberless humans, numberless suras, numberless asuras and numberless intermediate state beings to experience all happiness up to enlightenment. All that comes from *your* bodhicitta, is caused by *your* bodhicitta.

You can even think very specifically. For example, your, one person's, bodhicitta causes numberless ants to experience all temporary and ultimate happiness up to enlightenment. Think how many ants you can find at just one spot, how many thousands there are in a nest under a rock. There are so many more in a field or on a mountain. There's no question how many more there are in one country. Like that, if you expand from one spot and think how many ants there are in this world, this universe, numberless universes, you can realize how many there are and how your

bodhicitta brings them all happiness up to enlightenment. How your, one person's, bodhicitta brings *all* happiness to numberless other insects, numberless fish in the water, numberless shellfish on the rocks, on the piles supporting piers, in this world, in this universe, in numberless universes. If you think by elaborating in this way—the numbers of shellfish, for instance, are unbelievable, countless, and your bodhicitta, the bodhicitta of one person, you, can bring all happiness to all of them—it's incredible.

Think of other sentient beings one by one. The worms in the ground—your bodhicitta brings all happiness to numberless worms. Caterpillars, those hairy ones that walk in such long, well-disciplined straight lines—uncountable, numberless caterpillars in just one spot, let alone this universe, numberless universes—your bodhicitta brings every happiness to them all. Or on the beach there are so many tiny crabs—you can see them when the tide goes out. They make all these little holes in the sand, and when they come out looking for food, the seagulls try to eat them. Think how many there must be in this universe, in numberless universes. The bodhicitta of you, one person, can bring them every happiness up to enlightenment. Think how unbelievable that is.

Even without thinking about the numberless hell beings, hungry ghosts, humans and so forth but merely thinking about the different kinds of animal and how each type is numberless, it is incredible that your, one person's, bodhicitta can cause them to experience all happiness up to enlightenment and, as it says here, “With this (bodhicitta), the defilements of all those dependent on change (*jig-ten*, all the samsaric beings) will cease.” The bodhicitta of you, one person, can eradicate the defilements of each of the numberless animals, of whom even each type is numberless. Your bodhicitta can eradicate not only their suffering but also their two types of defilement. It's unbelievable. There are so many different kinds of animal, and even in this world, each one is numberless. When you think how many there must be in numberless universes and what one person's realization of bodhicitta, the good heart, can do, how much it can benefit others, it's really unbelievable.

Think how many flies there must be. Even on one cow-pat, there are thousands upon thousands of tiny flies keeping themselves busy, and that's just on the ground. In the air there are so many more. You don't notice them when the sun's not shining, but when it's out you can see

these huge clouds of flies in the air; uncountable numbers of tiny flies. From these few examples from the animal realm, just these few kinds of insect, you can understand how many suffering sentient beings there are.

I'm just talking about one spot on the ground, but you should think of this world, then of numberless universes—how many unimaginable numbers of sentient being are suffering. Therefore, if you, one person, has bodhicitta, it can stop all their defilements, both types, and all their suffering. That's incredible.

#### THE ONLY SOLUTION TO SUFFERING

There are many animals, such as snakes, tigers, leopards and so forth, whose only food is other animals. They don't eat plants; they don't live on potatoes or carrots; they don't grow vegetables. All they eat is other sentient beings. Snakes eat mice, frogs and so forth. There are many sentient beings whose only food is other sentient beings, who, due to karma, depend on killing others for their very survival. If you keep such animals as pets, you have to feed them other sentient beings. For them, not eating others is suffering, since they can't survive in any other way, and killing others is also suffering, since by harming others they create negative karma. Tigers in zoos, for example, have to be fed goats. Anyway, there are many sentient beings like this.

A while back in Singapore, where we frequently liberate many animals—frogs, fish and so forth—we bought five snakes from a restaurant in order to liberate them. When we opened the sack they were in they couldn't crawl away immediately because they'd been sedated. It was as if they were drunk or on drugs! The thought came, if we release them, they'll eat mice, but if we hadn't freed them, they'd have become the restaurant's evening special. Either way, it's a problem. What we have to do is to free them from samsara. That's the only solution—free them from delusion and karma. Until that happens, either mode of existence in samsara—killing others or not killing others—is a problem. The only solution is to free them from samsara.

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DHARMA CENTER

Therefore, we ourselves should practice Dharma as much as possible,

and, if we can, spread Dharma and help other people understand it. If we can help those sentient beings who have precious human bodies understand the teachings and get them to practice Dharma as much as possible, we can effect that solution right away, right now. You can't explain Dharma to snakes; you can't teach them to meditate! You can't start a meditation center for snakes, for mice, for tigers. You can't establish a retreat center for mosquitoes, organize retreats for mosquitoes! There's no way they can understand Dharma. Not even cats or dogs can understand it.

It is important for you to practice Dharma as much as possible yourself, to actualize the path, and to help other people, those sentient beings who have human bodies, understand Dharma; to get others to practice Dharma. Actually, it is unbelievably urgent; it's an emergency. The only sentient beings you can really help to understand Dharma, the path to liberation and enlightenment, are other human beings. In this way, they can avoid being reborn in the lower realms, as hell beings, hungry ghosts or animals. They don't have to be reborn as mosquitoes. They can be saved from rebirth as snakes, tigers or other harmful animals. You can liberate people from rebirth in the lower realms, where you're in danger if you try to survive and in danger if you don't.

Who can you help right now? Human beings. The only way you can help animals is by taking them around holy objects or purifying them with blessed water. You can give them a little help, but there's no way that you can make them understand and practice Dharma right now. It's only human beings you can help right now.

Therefore, you should make every effort to help human beings purify their past negative karma and protect their present karma by living in vows, by abstaining from negative karma. In this way, they can liberate themselves from being reborn in the lower realms as those harmful animals we've been talking about. Not just that, but also to free themselves from samsara and bring themselves to full enlightenment.

It is essential that you practice Dharma yourself as much as you possibly can. And here we see how very important the Dharma center is; how it plays a very important role in saving, liberating, rescuing human beings from reincarnating back into the lower realms. The Dharma center is an emergency rescue operation, like when police go in with all that noise—sirens blaring, red and blue lights flashing, helicopters whirling—

to rescue people in distress! Like that, the meditation center plays a very important role in the emergency rescue of people, human beings, using the seat belt and life jacket of the lam-rim—meditation on refuge and karma immediately saves you from falling into the lower realms again. Then, on the basis of that, the center helps bring people to liberation from samsara and enlightenment. The meditation center, the Dharma organization, plays a very important role in this. This is the way to empty the lower realms, to ensure through the Dharma that no more harmful sentient beings get born—doing sincere work with pure motivation solely for the benefit of others.

#### NUMBERLESS BEINGS DEPEND ON YOU

In that way, your bodhicitta is unbelievable. It's unbelievable how much benefit you can bring to numberless sentient beings in *each* realm. Therefore, now, you can see how crucial it is—how the happiness of numberless sentient beings depends on you, how it's in your hands. That means it depends on how much you practice bodhicitta, how much effort you exert trying to realize bodhicitta. It is crucial, *most urgent*, that you realize bodhicitta, train your mind in *this*.

Thus, the practice of bodhicitta becomes very important in your daily life. In all activities, under any circumstances—when you are happy, when you're experiencing problems—at all times, never separate from bodhicitta. Never stop wishing that all sentient beings be happy. Never lose your determination for sentient beings equaling the extent of space to have all happiness and to be free from all suffering and, in this way, to lead them all to enlightenment.

If you live your life with this attitude constantly in mind, then, if you have taken the bodhisattva vow, you are able to protect it, by the way. Even though there are many different vows enumerated, if you live your life with this attitude, you take care of all those different vows. This attitude encompasses all those vows. If you never separate from bodhicitta in all your activities, each merit you create contains the three types of bodhisattva morality and the other paramitas as well.

I think we'll stop here.

DEDICATION

“Due to all the past, present and future merits collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may bodhicitta, the source of all the happiness and success of myself and all other sentient beings be generated in my own mind and in the minds of all sentient beings without even one second’s delay; and may that which has been generated increase.

“Due to all the past, present and future merits collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may all my father-mother sentient beings have all happiness, may the three lower realms be empty forever and may all the bodhisattvas’ prayers succeed immediately. May I be able to cause all this by myself alone.

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, from now on, may I offer extensive benefit like the sky to all sentient beings as Lama Tsong Khapa did by having within me the same qualities that Lama Tsong Khapa had in all my future lifetimes.

“Due to the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings—which appear to be real merits, existing from there, from their own side, as projected by my hallucinating mind’s ignorance, but are in reality empty of that—may I—which is projected by my hallucinating mind’s ignorance as a real *me*, a real self existing from there, appearing from there, but which is empty of that, empty of the hallucination of a real I appearing from there—achieve Vajrasattva’s enlightenment”—or that of your own deity—“which appears to be a real enlightenment as projected by my hallucinating mind’s ignorance but which is in fact empty of a real enlightenment appearing from there—and lead all sentient beings—which appear to me as real ones from there but which are a hallucination, a projection of my ignorance, which means that all the sentient beings are empty of being real sentient beings appearing from there—to that enlightenment—which appears to me to be a real one from there but which is a hallucination projected by my ignorance, which means that that enlightenment is empty of being a real one appearing from there—by myself alone—who also appears to my mind as a real one appearing from there but which is a hallucination projected by my ignorance, which means that this me,

this I, is totally empty of a real one appearing from there.”

Finally, dedicate for Lama Tsong Khapa’s complete path to be actualized within your mind and within the minds of your family members and all students and benefactors of this organization; to spread and flourish in all directions; and to be able to cause these teachings to be actualized in the minds of all sentient beings by yourself alone.

Next session?

Friday, March 12

## EVENING: FINAL VAJRASATTVA SESSION

### BENEFITS OF LONG LIFE PUJA AND INITIATION

[During Ven. Ingrid Nordzin's request to Rinpoche to accept a long life puja and to grant a long life initiation on April 30, she asked Rinpoche to remain until samsara is empty.]

Until samsara is empty? Samsara has been empty all the time. So it's already finished!

I'm sorry, but I've been asleep for the past few days. I just woke up today!

From the very beginning of the Vajrasattva retreat, I had planned to give a long life initiation near the end of the retreat, not because I have the qualities necessary to do this, but because of the deity's blessings and your concentration and faith. From that side there can be some benefit. The reason that I thought doing it would be worthwhile is because we are trying to practice Dharma. The practice of Dharma involves two things—not harming others and, on the basis of that, benefiting others. How does it happen? Through subduing our own mind. This makes it worthwhile to have a long life. Even someone reciting OM MANI PADME HUM every day is reason enough to give a long life initiation and to have a long life. It makes it worth doing.

For example, when Khunu Lama Tenzin Gyaltzen Rinpoche did a long life meditation during a teaching, Rinpoche would pray for the long life of even those who simply recite OM MANI PADME HUM. Rinpoche was a great bodhisattva, a great pandit like the pandits of ancient times such as Nagarjuna and Chandrakirti, and a great scholar as well. Besides all that, Rinpoche was a great yogi, a great practitioner of tantra, whose holy mind was well-trained in the Six Yogas of Naropa and other practices of

the completion stage of Highest Yoga Tantra.

Anyway, a long life puja is a long life party. We'll have a party, because it's also a long life party for every one of you. It is not that by having a long life I can bring much benefit to others. However, as mentioned in the benefits of the seven-limb practice, the limb of requesting the guru to have stable life is a particular means to purify the negative karma of having disturbed the guru's holy mind. It is a means to purify heavy negative karma collected in this and past lives in relation to the guru through disturbing the holy mind and so forth. Each one of the seven limbs is a remedy for particular delusions and negative karmas.

Because we have a Dharma connection, not because of any power or realizations from the side of my mind, offering a long life puja is a very powerful means to purify those heavy negative karmas and to collect extensive merit. The benefit comes from our Dharma connection. Purifying your negative karma also helps you, the disciple, to have a long life. This is why I am saying that it is also a long life party for every one of you. During the long life puja everybody will have to do a Sherpa dance—or a yak dance!

#### VAJRASATTVA RETREAT AS A LEARNING EXPERIENCE

I have already mentioned that if it is difficult for you to complete the mantras during this period, you can complete the number at home. If you want to continue the recitation at home, you can then finish the minimum requirement of 100,000 mantras.

Of course, it's best to have both a high number and high quality of mantras; but if you can't have both, then it's best to have high quality, because the main aim is to purify negative karma. If great purification is done, even if you recite very few mantras, you have achieved the purpose of the retreat.

Even though I myself haven't come to every session, I feel quite satisfied with this way of doing the Vajrasattva retreat. You have tried very hard to make the retreat as perfect as possible, to have perfect confession and purification. Because you have put your main effort into ensuring the quality of the retreat, I feel that this Vajrasattva retreat has been very good and very satisfying. And this applies even to those people who could not complete the number of mantras during the three-month period.

As I mentioned some time ago [see Chapter 7, Tuesday, February 9], you have also learned many other practices during this period of the Vajrasattva retreat. You have learned not only how to do the Vajrasattva meditation, but also how to do many other practices, such as *Guru Puja* and so forth, so that they become powerful and effective.

This retreat has also been part of your Dharma education. You have gained experience yourself and you will also be able to teach others how to do retreat and the various other practices. This is very important. We always have a shortage of experienced people. We need so many spiritual coordinators at the centers. The number of centers is increasing all the time, and every center needs someone to guide people in the various retreats and practices. This retreat has also become part of your education, so that if you would like to help in one of the centers, you now know how to guide various practices. This is very, very important.

Some years ago, at one of the CPMT meetings, the center directors' meetings, I remember that Kabir Saxena brought up the issue that sangha should learn more about how to lead prayers and how to guide various practices. However, this applies to everyone, not just to sangha. Everyone needs to learn this for their own practice and so that they can help other people, whether individuals or groups, at the centers. This retreat has had many other benefits, in terms of learning and experiencing practices. From time to time there have been explanations of various practices that might prove necessary or beneficial in your life.

One point is that it is helpful for you to learn more about various practices—guiding lam-rim meditations is the main one, of course. The other point is that it helps you to help others, to benefit others. You can help others to purify their negative karma and to collect merit, so that they can have realizations of the path to enlightenment.

We always have a shortage of spiritual coordinators at the centers, of people who can give advice on how to do retreats and various practices. The more such people we have, the more productive and beneficial to sentient beings we can make the centers. Even if there is a geshe at the center, we still need a spiritual coordinator or some other person who can lead meditations and practices and who can be consulted by the students. We still need that.

## CONDUCT DURING RETREAT SESSIONS

If people are simply reciting mantras and not concentrating, others making a noise during the sessions doesn't matter. [Sudden noise in the background.] That's an example of what I'm talking about. However, in the case of someone who is concentrating single-pointedly, you might disturb their concentration if you make a noise. It is regarded as a great vice to disturb someone's single-pointed concentration. I saw a story about this in a text. During a puja with a group of other monks, one monk was meditating on Heruka. I think he had realizations of the generation stage and had generated himself as Heruka and established the entire mandala. It wasn't like my visualizing the mandala, where everything in the visualization is just words. With the monk's stable, single-pointed concentration, the mandala was actually appearing to his mind. Another monk then disturbed his meditation. The monk who disturbed the concentration then had to do 100,000 tsog offerings to purify that negative karma. It is a heavy negative karma to disturb the meditation of anyone with such incredible concentration. Anyway, I'm not sure how many people here have that kind of concentration....

It's a different matter if it's a noise that you can't control—a sudden sneeze, for example. Generally, however, you should cherish the other people who are meditating with you and try to be careful. This is what you should do not only during retreat but even normally in case the people around you are concentrating. If no one is concentrating, there's no problem. But you should try to reduce the sounds you make as much as possible in case someone is concentrating, especially if the person might have single-pointed concentration, as in the example I mentioned. You can't stop every noise, but try your best to cut down the noise you make. Cherish the other people who are meditating.

Another point is that if you make a noise, other people might get angry with you and create negative karma. On the same cushion where we are supposed to achieve enlightenment we might then achieve the hell realms. We are sitting on the cushion to achieve good rebirth, liberation and enlightenment, but there is then a danger that sitting on the cushion, we will achieve the opposite, the lower realms. We sit on the cushion to achieve inner peace but instead generate anger and other disturbing attitudes. If the noise you make doesn't bother other people, it's a different matter.

I might have created many, many negative karmas, because I always call Roger while he is meditating. I will have to do millions and millions and millions of tsog offerings! There is not enough life left to do all the tsog offerings I need to!

As far as drinking—or eating noodles or pizza—during a retreat session, drinking and eating are normally not done while you are reciting mantras.

When His Holiness Song Rinpoche was giving Yamantaka retreat instructions to the young monks of Ganden Shartse Monastery, Rinpoche mentioned the case of Tepo Tulku, a very high lama of Ganden Shartse, whose incarnation lives in Los Angeles. (Ganden Monastery has two divisions, Shartse and Jangtse.) His Holiness Song Rinpoche mentioned that Tepo Tulku Rinpoche used to drink during sessions, though I'm not sure whether he drank during mantra recitation. I guess that Tepo Rinpoche drank very thick butter tea. His Holiness Song Rinpoche did not say that this was negative, but simply mentioned it as a particular case.

If you have a health problem and it would be difficult for you to complete the session unless you drink, it's a different matter. Otherwise, if you have no need to drink, it is better not to drink during mantra recitation. You will have fewer distractions if you do not drink during the recitation.

I might have drunk something during one of the sessions of a recent retreat, but in the other retreats I have never drunk anything during sessions, and especially not during the mantra recitation. But if you need to drink for health reasons, so that you can continue the session and the retreat, it's a different case.

However, remember that it's important to have an attitude of cherishing the other people who are meditating.

I think that's all for tonight. If there is anything else, maybe it will come in your dreams....

#### DEDICATION

When you do the dedications, you can visualize the seven Medicine Buddhas and make strong request to them from the bottom of your heart. Dedications are also prayers of request; the only difference is that

you dedicate the merit to actualize your wishes. In the past when they were bodhisattvas, the Medicine Buddhas, besides making prayers for sentient beings, specially motivated to be able to accomplish the prayers of sentient beings. This is why it's good to visualize the Medicine Buddhas when we are making requests even during dedications. Think of the seven Medicine Buddhas and then make the dedications for this and that to happen.

Visualize the seven Medicine Buddhas, then dedicate, "Due to all the past, present and future merits collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings and due to the merits of the three times of the people who have passed away whose names were mentioned, may those who have passed away, if they are in the lower realms, immediately be liberated from the lower realms and from the intermediate state. May they be reborn in a pure land of buddha where they can become enlightened or receive only a perfect human body in all their lives and achieve enlightenment as quickly as possible by meeting perfectly qualified Mahayana gurus and the Mahayana teachings."

This dedication includes all those who have passed away who rely upon me, whose names were given to me and for whom I promised to pray, as well as all other human beings who have passed away. We can dedicate for everyone.

"And for those who are sick, whose names were mentioned in the request, may the rest of their life be most beneficial. May their life be made most meaningful through being able to actualize the steps of the path to enlightenment, especially bodhicitta, in this life as quickly as possible.

"May all the wishes of all the benefactors whose names were mentioned be accomplished immediately in accordance with the holy Dharma. May they be able to actualize the steps of the path to enlightenment, especially bodhicitta, in this very lifetime."

#### SANGHA FOOD OFFERING

Since there are quite a number of monks and nuns here at the Vajrasattva retreat and many people have helped to sponsor the sangha to do the retreat, I would like to mention in this context that it would be good, after the meal is finished, for all the sangha to do together the prayer that

is normally done as a group in Tibetan monasteries. Monks and nuns who follow the vinaya well and do the daily practices as Buddha advised make charity to the pretas every day. I don't know, however, whether Chinese monasteries have this tradition of making charity to the pretas after eating food.

I don't remember the details of the story of how this practiced started, but it seems that during the time of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha there was a female preta called Togmapo, who had five hundred children [*Trog-ma bu-nga-gya*]. Many families lost their children because Togmapo used to steal many human babies to feed her own children. To stop her from doing this, Buddha hid some of her children, which caused her great worry and suffering. Buddha said to her, "From now on, don't take other people's children. If you vow not to do this any more, my followers will give you food." This is why good practitioners normally make offerings to the pretas.

I remember many years ago at Kopan Monastery when we used to eat with Geshe Jampa Gyatso, now the resident teacher at Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa, not a lunch went by where Geshe-la didn't make charity to the pretas. I don't remember what happened at dinner, but at lunch he would do this every time. It seems that in Italy he still does this practice every day. Lama Lhundrub, during the years he fasted after lunch, would also do this practice every day.

To do the practice of making charity to the pretas, at the end of the meal, you take the last food on your plate, usually rice or bread, and squeeze it in your right hand so that you leave an imprint of your fingers. You then recite the mantra OM UTSISHTA PANDI ASHIBYA SOHA, snap your fingers, then throw the food onto the table to make charity to the pretas. As you throw the food down, you meditate that you are making charity to the pretas, that you are feeding Nö-jin Togmapo Nga Gya (Harm-giver Togmapo and her five hundred children). It is similar to making water charity to the pretas.

I myself haven't done this practice much. I have done it with the Thamo nuns during nyung-näs at Lawudo. Even on the fasting day, when there is nothing to eat, the nuns still make charity to the pretas. They make a torma and put it on the altar. At noon, the usual meal time, they pass the torma around, and each nun takes a piece, squeezes it in her hand and makes charity. Only on those occasions, because the

group does, then you have to do it. Unfortunately, I haven't done the practice much. Only occasionally, when a group of sangha are doing it, it reminds me to do the practice.

If possible, seal your action of making charity to the pretas with emptiness. You yourself are empty, the action of giving is empty and what you give is empty. Everything is empty. And snapping your fingers is to remind you of this emptiness. When you snap your fingers, the sound occurs in dependence upon many causes and conditions coming together. The snapping of your fingers shows emptiness, as does the sound of a bell. The sound of the bell during pujas is to be understood as showing that everything is empty. With that meditation on emptiness and with a bodhicitta motivation, you make charity of food to the pretas. The benefit of the mantra is that it allows the pretas to find the food that is offered.

You then recite seven times, "I prostrate to the Bhagavan, the Tathagata, the arhat, the fully accomplished Buddha, Precious King of Light, Very Clear Fire Light." Reciting this specific Buddha's name seven times purifies any pollution you might receive by eating food that has been offered with devotion to the sangha. If somebody offers something without devotion, I don't think it carries pollution. This is according to Geshe Rabten Rinpoche.

One time in Dharamsala, Geshe-la brought up this subject and analyzed the meaning of receiving pollution. There is one kind of pollution known as "pollution of the guru," but it doesn't mean pollution of the guru's mind. For example, some meditators in Dharamsala think that receiving money from His Holiness the Dalai Lama brings quite heavy pollution, but it is not that the pollution is coming from His Holiness's mind. It's different from the way we normally talk about receiving pollution through contact with someone who has broken their vows or samaya. The pollution referred to here has mainly to do with the practitioner.

Geshe Rabten Rinpoche asked the question, "What is the definition of pollution?"; then answered it himself. Geshe-la concluded that anything offered with devotion carries pollution [because of the responsibility that then falls upon the recipient], but that anything given without faith, such as a friend giving you money, may not carry any pollution.

The point is that pollution is regarded as a great obstacle to realizations. There are many stories to illustrate this. I don't remember the story

well, but one famous lama, perhaps Panchen Losang Chökyi Gyaltzen, who composed the *Guru Puja*, didn't achieve realizations because of the many offerings he received. After he stopped taking offerings, however, his mind became clearer, and he was able to receive realizations.

Basically, pollution is poison when it comes to realizations. It can also cause you to reincarnate in the lower realms. Like poisonous food harms the body, this kind of pollution from people offering things with devotion to the sangha harms the mind.

Therefore, while you are eating and drinking, if you can maintain the constant visualization of yourself as the deity and make offerings to the deity, what you eat and drink won't bring pollution. As I mentioned at another time, you should eat and drink with the pure appearance of yourself as the guru-deity and the divine pride of being the guru-deity. In this way, you can enjoy the things offered to you with devotion without their polluting you. Not only will you not receive pollution, but instead of receiving harm, you will collect extensive merit and purify yourself. You will transform the poison into medicine. Using enjoyments with this meditation of making offerings to yourself visualized as the guru-deity becomes a means of achieving enlightenment quickly. Therefore, this is one solution to the problem of pollution. You can do this meditation if you have received a great initiation of either one of the lower tantras or of Highest Yoga Tantra. You have to have received a great initiation, not just a short blessing of the holy body, holy speech and holy mind.

If you haven't received a great initiation, visualize Buddha at your heart and offer your food and drink to him. This might also save you from the danger of pollution obscuring your mind and degenerating your realizations or making it difficult to achieve realizations.

The other thing you can do is recite the name of this buddha seven times, which purifies mountains of pollution, because when he was a bodhisattva, this buddha specifically motivated to be able to purify pollution in order to bring sentient beings to enlightenment.

Then recite the following mantra three times: NAMA SAMANTA PRABHA RAJAYA TATHAGATA ARHATE SAMYAKSAM BUDDHAYA NAMO MANJUSHRIYE KUMARA BHUTAYA BODHISATTVAYA MAHA SATTVAYA MAHA KARUNIKAYA TAYATA OM NIRALAMBHA NIRABHASE JAYA JAYE LAMBHE MAHA MATE DAKSHI DAKSHENAM MEPARISHVADHA SOHA. I can't give you the oral transmission of this mantra because I don't remember whether or not I myself

have ever received it.

Then dedicate the merit. “Due to the merits of the three times collected by me, my benefactors and all other sentient beings, may those who offered me food achieve bliss. May all those who offered me service, respect and offerings achieve bliss.” Here, “bliss” (or *nye-wa shi-pa'i de-wa*, in Tibetan) means the ultimate happiness of liberation, which is gained through pacifying, or ceasing, karma and delusions, the cause of suffering.

“May all those who make me unhappy, lift up weapons against me, beat me or even kill me, quickly achieve the peerless happiness of full enlightenment.” It is very good to pray for the quick enlightenment of those who harm you, which includes anyone who abuses you in any way.

There are also other dedications for the benefactors and for the naga kings in the prayer that is usually recited.

These prayers are normally recited in sangha communities after meals. It is very good to recite them. Geshe Jampa Tegchog established this practice at Nalanda Monastery, where Vietnamese families would offer lunch to the monks from time to time. I did not eat in the kitchen every day when I was there, but I was there once or twice when it happened. I remember that the monks did prayers before and after the meal. The prayers done after the meal were those normally recited in Tibetan monasteries that Geshe-la had taught the monks. These prayers are good for the benefactors and good for the sangha who pray for them. It is very good to make offering prayers before the meal, which collects a lot of merit, and to dedicate all the merits by saying this prayer immediately after the meal.

If possible, you should also recite the *Heart Sutra*. This is what Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche does. After lunch, Rinpoche recites the prayer that I have just mentioned, one mala of OM MANI PADME HUM and then the *Heart Sutra*. Because of the meditation on emptiness, it brings incredibly powerful purification and is therefore very good for the benefactors. Reciting the *Heart Sutra* is very powerful for the benefactors, pacifying any obstacles they might have to their success in business or other activities. It's a very powerful way to pacify your own obstacles and those of others. However, this is what Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche does.

Before the meal you can offer the food according to either sutra or tantra. As part of the sutra offering, you can recite Nagarjuna's prayer,

Seeing this food as medicine,  
We eat it without attachment or hatred,  
Not to become fat, not out of pride,  
Not to look strong, only to sustain the body.

Basically, the only reason for eating the food is to sustain your body so that you can practice Dharma.

After the sutra offering, Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche does the tantra offering, like that. After all this, Rinpoche does a short practice that is related to offering tsog. I think Rinpoche wrote this prayer, which I have translated into English, in his past life. At the very end, Rinpoche does this prayer, in which you visualize yourself as the deity with your guru in your heart and use the food as a tsog offering.

If the food is offered here in the gompa before lunch, it would be very good if all the monks and nuns at the retreat could do this practice together in the dining room after lunch.

#### WHAT IT MEANS TO BE SANGHA

Becoming sangha, an ordained person, means that your life is to be used for practice, nothing else. There is nothing other than Dharma practice in your life. Once you are ordained there are no two ways to think; your mind can only go one way. You're on the freeway—you can only go in one direction. You cannot have one foot in samsara and the other in nirvana. Specifically, it means that your attitude and lifestyle point only toward liberation. Everything you do is directed toward liberation, nothing else. This is what it means to be ordained, to be sangha; this is the bottom line of being ordained. Your attitude and everything else in your life are in harmony with the attainment of liberation. Therefore, it means that you have to do more practice. Being ordained means you have to do more practice, be more committed to doing practice.

So, one thing I wanted to mention was this community practice at lunchtime. There was another thing I wanted to mention, but it's getting late. We're going overnight; we're going without sleep. This is extra Vajrasattva, extra purification. It's double Vajrasattva!

## BENEFITS OF GROUP RETREAT

If you compare the benefits of doing a Vajrasattva retreat alone to those of doing it in a group with other people, it is more powerful to do a group Vajrasattva retreat.

Another example that I have seen mentioned in various teachings is that it is more powerful for a group of people to build a stupa than for one person to build a stupa. Yet another example is related to the reciting of sutras, whether it is the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*, specific sutras for purification or other sutras. Monks in the monasteries are requested to recite sutras for various purposes—for healing, for purification, for the removal of business problems, for people who have died and so forth. For example, it sometimes comes out that the Prajnaparamita text should be recited as a means for success in business. It is mentioned in the teachings that reciting a sutra together with all the other monks in a community is much more powerful than reciting a sutra alone. One other example is mentioned, but I can't remember it.

Therefore, doing a group retreat is more powerful than doing a retreat alone. Your reciting Vajrasattva mantras together with many people is more powerful than reciting them alone. I remember that the disciplinarian [Tib: *ge-kyö*] at Kopan Monastery recently told the Kopan monks during a puja how powerful it was to do prayers together. I hadn't seen a textual reference for the power of group practice until I recently saw it mentioned in a commentary to the *Bodhicharyavatara*. The lama who wrote the commentary explained this point and used many sutra texts, the teachings of Buddha, as references. I had heard this point previously but until then I hadn't seen any textual references to prove it.

Therefore, we should rejoice in the fact that reciting prayers and practicing with others gives our own practice more power.

I think that's it for tonight. If I remember something else after an hour or two, perhaps around two or three o'clock, we'll ring the gong—the large gong!

## DEDICATION

“Due to all the past, present and future merits collected by me, buddhas,

bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may all the requests contained in the *Prayer to be Reborn in the Land of Bliss* be actualized precisely in accordance with the prayer, for me, my family, all the students and benefactors of this organization, all the benefactors of the sangha whose names were mentioned, all the sick people, those who have died, and all other sentient beings. May all the requests contained in this prayer be actualized immediately for me and all other sentient beings.” If we are unsure about how to pray, praying like this covers everything.

“May I actualize in this life the complete teachings of Lama Tsong Khapa, the unification of sutra and tantra, and spread them in the minds of all sentient beings. May these teachings flourish forever.”

Reciting the multiplying mantras multiplies each merit that we have collected today 100,000 times. Reciting the next buddha’s name not only increases all the merits 100,000 times but causes all the prayers we have made to be actualized. This is its specific benefit.

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings—due to the blessings of the eminent buddhas and bodhisattvas, due to unbetraying dependent arising and due to my special attitude, may all my pure prayers be accomplished immediately.”

Good night and good morning!



Saturday, March 13

## WEEKEND TEACHING

## THE NECESSITY OF COMPASSION

In previous discourses I've been talking about the necessity of having a good heart and the urgency of developing the realization of compassion within you, the one person's mind. I mentioned, for example, how compassion is the best remedy to any kind of obstacle. If you encounter obstacles in your Dharma practice, in actualizing the realizations of the path to enlightenment, compassion is the most important activity in which you can engage.

The greatest success you can have is the development of your mind in the path to not just liberation from samsara but to full enlightenment, the great liberation, at which time you can liberate numberless other beings from all the sufferings of samsara and their cause, karma and delusion, and bring them to the peerless happiness of full enlightenment. Developing compassion is the best way of overcoming obstacles to that.

Compassion is also the best remedy to life obstacles, the best puja for eliminating the danger of an untimely death—where you still have the karma to live, but some heavy negative karma has suddenly brought hindrances to your life's continuing. Compassion is the best way of overcoming obstacles to your life.

As I also mentioned the other day, compassion is the best way of eliminating other obstacles, such as those to success in your work or in business. It is also the best medicine when you are sick. With compassion, your positive way of thinking, the healthiest of minds, you can heal yourself, you can become your own doctor, the best psychologist. Amongst positive minds, the most positive, the most powerful is compassion. Even if you are sick, you can heal yourself with compassion.

Like the Chinese student I told you about—the one who had AIDS and cured himself by generating unbelievable strong compassion doing

the meditation of taking onto himself the suffering of others, especially that of AIDS; taking suffering onto and destroying his ego, the source of all problems.

#### THE EVOLUTION OF HARM

It is your ego that brings and obliges you to experience all your problems. It's your ego that has tortured you all the time, not only from when you were born into this life but from beginningless rebirths, in all your past samsaric lives. From beginningless samsaric rebirths up until now, it is your ego that has been torturing you, has brought all undesirable things, has made others criticize you. The main cause of all this has been your own ego.

It is also your own ego that causes others to abuse you. Why? Because either earlier in this life or in a previous life, your ego—your self-centered mind—attachment, anger and other emotional disturbing thoughts arose and caused you to create non-virtuous actions, to harm others. Because of that motivation, caused mainly by your ego, your self-centered mind, these actions became negative karma. Having harmed others, the result similar to the cause comes back on you now. You have to experience the result, such as others abusing you, back on yourself in this life.

You must relate such experiences to yourself. You established a connection with a certain sentient being by harming that being in the past, therefore, in this life, that sentient being's present incarnation responds to you in a similar way. There's a reason for that sentient being treating you badly with abuse or harming you in some other way—it's a causative phenomenon.

The Tibetan term *ngo-po* means a phenomenon that has the ability to bring its own result; something that occurs as a result of causes and conditions, that is able to function. Therefore, the way the other person treats you is not a permanent phenomenon. It is *ngo-po*, an impermanent phenomenon, which functions, which brings its own result. Therefore, since it is *ngo-po*, an impermanent phenomenon, it depends on, happens as a result of, causes and conditions. The cause has to exist before the result it brings; that cause is karma, how you treated that person, that sentient being, in the past.

The cause—which existed before this situation happened, this undesirable experience that hurt your mind, that you do not like—is your own inner factor, the mind. The cause is your delusions and the intention, the karma, which is not positive karma but negative. Your delusions and karma, your ignorance, anger and attachment, arise due to your own self-centered mind.

As the great bodhisattva Shantideva said in his *Entering the Bodhisattva's Holy Deeds*, “My karma compels me to receive this harm. After all, wasn't it I that caused other sentient beings to get lost from the human realm and fall into the pit of hell?” [Chapter 6, verse 47.]

Here he's talking about the evolution—how first you create karma with another sentient being by treating that being badly, with self-centered mind, delusion, anger and attachment—and then because of that harm, in this life, you receive harm back from that person, that sentient being you treated badly in the past. By harming you, that sentient being creates the karma to be reborn in the hell realms. Instead of being born human, getting another good rebirth, that sentient being gets lost in the pit of hell, doesn't get born human again. Instead, that sentient being falls into hell, gets lost from the human realm.

This is what happens to the person who gives you harm, who mistreats you, abuses you. This is the situation of sentient beings who treat you badly. Therefore, they are never objects of retaliation; you should never, ever get angry back at them. They are *only* objects of compassion. Instead of harming, you should help them. Instead of getting angry, you should feel compassion. It is your responsibility to save those beings from falling into the lower realms, to protect them from negative thoughts and negative karma. By understanding their situation, by looking at their position, you have no choice. They can be only objects of compassion. Instead of harming, you must help them. Your only concern should be how to help the person who is treating you badly, creating negative karma with you.

As I said before, trace back the evolution of this situation. Why is this happening? It is happening because in the past, you created similar negative karma with that being; you gave harm to that person in the past. That's what is now causing, obliging, that person to harm you in return. You put him into this situation of having to treat you badly. If you hadn't harmed him in the past, there'd be not one single reason for him to treat

you badly in this life. No reason at all. If there's no reason, no cause, it doesn't happen. Because this experience is a causative phenomenon, it has a preceding reason, a cause. That cause is why it happens. It's the same thing, no matter what we experience. A happy life, a miserable life, whatever effect we experience in daily life, it all comes from somewhere, it has a reason. Everything has a reason for its existence and the reason exists before the event. Before we experience an effect, its cause has to exist. That cause is the karma we have created in the past.

Therefore, when you check back, how you treated that sentient being badly in the past, how you gave harm, you can see how everything started from there. That's why the great bodhisattva Shantideva said, "My karma compels me to receive this harm. After all, wasn't it I that caused other sentient beings to get lost from the human realm and fall into the pit of hell?"

#### RESPONDING TO HARM WITH COMPASSION: LETTING OTHERS WIN

It can be extremely effective to recall Shantideva's advice, as contained in this quotation, in your daily life. Whenever you encounter a problem—somebody criticizes you, treats you badly, gets angry at you, abuses you—whatever happens, this quotation enables you to practice tolerance, to control your anger, to keep your mind in a state of peace and happiness through not letting anger arise.

Not only that. In particular, this quotation allows you to feel compassion for that person, which is extremely important. You use the problem to develop compassion instead of using that person to generate anger and other negative emotional thoughts, which destroy you, your peace and happiness, your good personality, your well-being, your healthy mind and your healthy body. By destroying your healthy mind you destroy your healthy body. Besides all this, getting angry also harms your realizations, your development of the good heart, bodhicitta, the altruistic mind wanting to achieve enlightenment for the sake of sentient beings, the altruistic mind renouncing I, cherishing numberless other living beings, who, like yourself, want happiness and do not want suffering.

Numberless other beings also want happiness and do not want suffering—you are just one, they are numberless. Therefore, there is no limit to the importance of other sentient beings or to how important it is for

you to bring them happiness and stop their suffering. You yourself are just one. Even if you attain liberation from samsara, everlasting happiness, it is nothing to get excited about—you are just one. Even if you are reborn in hell, you are just one. Even when you compare yourself to one other person, one other sentient being, who is more important? Just one on one. Whether it's an insect or another human being, an elephant or an ant—you and that other sentient being—who is more important?

All your past, present and future happiness—temporary happiness, ultimate happiness, liberation from samsara, the peerless happiness of full enlightenment, everything, the happiness of all your beginningless past lives, all you present happiness, all your future happiness including that of enlightenment—comes from your good karma, your positive intention. Where does your good karma come from? That is the action of buddha.

Buddha has two types of action. One works within the minds of us sentient beings—all virtuous thoughts are buddha's actions working within us. The other kind of buddha's action is that possessed only by buddha's holy mind. There are these two types of action of buddha. That means all good karma, the cause of all your past, present and future happiness, comes from buddha. Buddha comes from bodhisattva, bodhisattva comes from bodhicitta, bodhicitta comes from great compassion and great compassion is generated in dependence on the existence of the suffering sentient beings.

How is great compassion, the cause of bodhicitta, generated? By focusing on all sentient beings without exception, without discrimination, without omitting even one sentient being. Great compassion covers the numberless obscured, suffering sentient beings—sentient beings whose minds are obscured and suffering, sentient beings equaling the limitless sky. Great compassion covers the object, all sentient beings, without exception, omitting not even one. Not only does great compassion wish them all to be free of all defilements; it also wishes you to cause them to be free from all defilements and suffering yourself. That's great compassion, the cause of bodhicitta.

That means the root cause of all your past, present and future happiness, every single comfort, all realizations up to full enlightenment, is all sentient beings. They're the root from which all your happiness comes—the numberless obscured, suffering sentient beings. They are the field of

all your happiness, the field from which you receive all your enjoyments. Sentient beings are like the crops, the means of living, all your food, that you receive from the fields you cultivate. Sentient beings are the field, the root, of all your past, present and future happiness, every single comfort, all your realizations and enlightenment.

Therefore, now, you and that one sentient being—not numberless, just one—that sentient being is the source of all your past, present and future happiness, of every single comfort, of all your enjoyment. It is due to the kindness of that sentient being that you survive each day, every minute, every second; that you are human, that you have this perfect human body with which you can fulfill any of the three great purposes and gain whatever happiness you wish, that gives you unbelievable freedom. All this comes through the kindness of each sentient being, which means also that sentient being—the one giving you harm.

Therefore, that person, that one sentient being, is more precious than skies filled with millions of dollars, skies full of ice-cream and chocolate! If you don't think money is precious, you can visualize chocolate or ice-cream! Or maybe, if you like antiques, broken things, old bones, you can visualize skies full of those things—broken furniture, old bones! Visualize skies full of old bones or broken antiques and then one sentient being, then ask yourself which is more precious? Or, skies full of wish-granting jewels and compare the value of those with the value of this one sentient being. Which is more precious? You can't generate compassion on wish-granting jewels; you can't develop bodhicitta from wish-granting jewels.

First of all, without bodhicitta, without compassion, without loving kindness, you cannot cease all mental errors. Even if you have realized the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness, ultimate nature, have attained the arya path, if you don't have compassion, great compassion, loving kindness, bodhicitta, it's impossible to cease all mental errors. In order to eradicate all defilements, you have to eliminate the subtle ones, but if you have realized only the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness, even if you have achieved the arya path, it's impossible. It is only if you have realized great compassion, loving kindness, bodhicitta, that your mind can be liberated, that you can completely cease all mental errors, complete the qualities of cessation and realization and liberate numberless other sentient beings from all the unbearable, unimaginable sufferings of samsara—the general sufferings of samsara and the specific sufferings of

each of the six realms—and bring them to full enlightenment.

What I'm saying is that if you practice great compassion, loving kindness, bodhicitta, on *this* sentient being, this one sentient being, you can gain all these other benefits—you can complete all the qualities of cessation and realization, which I just mentioned, and enlighten numberless other sentient beings. Without depending on the obscured, suffering sentient beings, even if you possess skies of wish-granting jewels, you cannot generate compassion, loving kindness, bodhicitta; you cannot achieve this realization. You can't generate these realizations on jewels. But on *this* sentient being, you can achieve all those realizations, you can meditate, you can realize all those other infinite benefits.

On the other hand, if you do not cherish this one insect or this one person giving you harm, if you do not practice compassion on this one sentient being, there's no enlightenment, no Mahayana realization. No way. No way to develop those perfect qualities with which you can enlighten all sentient beings; no way. But if you do cherish this one sentient being, you can have them all. If you practice compassion on this sentient being, if you cherish this sentient being, this one person or insect, whoever it is, you can gain all those infinite benefits. Therefore, skies of wish-granting jewels mean nothing. They are valueless when compared with the preciousness of one sentient being, whether it's an insect or a human. The benefits you can get from one sentient being are beyond compare with those you get from a wish-granting jewel. When you compare the benefits you get from a wish-granting jewel with those you get from a tiny insect or a human being, they are nothing, they get lost.

Therefore, if the most precious thing in your life is this one sentient being, there's no question how precious numberless sentient beings are. This one sentient being is the most precious thing in your life, the source of all your past, present and future happiness, while cherishing your I is the door to all problems and suffering, everything undesirable, all obstacles. In other words, where do all obstacles, problems, undesirable things and suffering come from? From the I. Therefore, your I is an object to be renounced forever, and, for all the reasons already explained, other sentient beings are an object to be cherished forever.

Once in Tibet there was a monastery whose monks were very critical of the Kadampa Geshe Langri Tangpa. One day he went to this monastery especially to make offerings to the monks who criticized him. To

practice taking the loss upon oneself and giving the victory to others, he offered them tea. I don't think it was coffee or even Indian chai! He offered them Tibetan chai, butter tea. The reason he went there to practice taking the loss on himself and giving the victory to others was that, just as all suffering comes from the I and all happiness comes from others, so too does all loss come from the I and all gain come from others. In other words, our self-cherishing thought always tries to give the victory to ourselves and the loss to others.

Because of this big mistake, this mistaken attitude, the self-centered mind—always giving the loss to others and taking the victory oneself—we are still not liberated from the ocean of samsaric suffering. Because of this mistaken thought, we're not free from all suffering. Ask yourself, "Even though numberless other sentient beings, including Guru Shakyamuni Buddha himself, have already become enlightened, why haven't I? Before Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, numberless sentient beings got enlightened; after Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, numberless sentient beings got enlightened. Why not me? Why am I still suffering? Forget about enlightenment, why am I not even liberated from samsara? Why? Why am I still here?" It is because of this mistaken thought, the self-centered mind—always giving victory to yourself and the loss to others.

Therefore, if you want profit, not loss, you have to change your attitude. If you want the victory of completing the qualities of cessation and realizations and the victory of being able to cause all happiness for all sentient beings, if you want all this benefit, all this victory, it can happen only if you change your self-centered mind, the attitude that always tries to give loss to others and victory to yourself.

As I often say, and it's such a simple thing, but in your daily life, the moment you start to cherish another sentient being, be it an insect or another human being, the very second you change your attitude, change the object that you cherish from your I to the other—that insect, that person—you find peace and happiness in your heart. As long as you're cherishing yourself, your I, you experience tension and unhappiness; there's no rest or relaxation in your mind, no inner peace. You cannot get satisfaction, and especially, there's no fulfillment in your heart. In daily life, your attitude has a huge effect on your mental continuum. Do this simple test: suddenly change your mind and cherish someone else, think of others, then switch back and cherish your I. You can see what a great

difference there is in the effect these two attitudes have on your mind. One is happy and peaceful, the other is not.

Therefore, we can understand how precious sentient beings are and how they are the source of all our happiness and good things not only through the explanations of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha and Shantideva and those other great bodhisattvas, but through our own daily experiences. Whenever you think of others instead of cherishing your I, there's light in your life; whenever you cherish your I, there's depression and darkness in your life; no happiness, no smiles.

#### CHERISHING ALL SENTIENT BEINGS

That's why, as I mentioned the other day, in our lives, whenever we encounter any sentient being—animal, insect, human, whatever—we should always keep in mind, “This is the most precious, most important being in my life. I am here to serve this being.” Although I mentioned this before, after all the explanations above, I just wanted to reemphasize this conclusion, especially in case there's anybody here who feeds animals with other animals, who has a pet that lives on other animals, to which you have to feed live animals—like lizards to whom you have to give insects.

Not long ago, in Singapore, I met a feng-shui consultant who has done feng-shui for many important people, such as the president of China, the prime minister of Singapore and so forth. I went to his home, which is in a kind of secure place in Singapore; I don't know exactly what that area is. Anyway, when you enter the door, there's a big fish-tank, about as long as this side-table [the table alongside Rinpoche's throne, about a meter long] but very narrow. In it there's a really big fish—a very expensive, extremely expensive fish! I don't remember what kind. Lillian Too told me, but I forget. I think at one time she might have had one of these herself. Because the tank is not that long, when the big fish swims it has to turn frequently, but because the tank is also very narrow, the fish has some difficulty bending its body; it seems quite uncomfortable. But the worst thing is that the big fish lives on small ones, many of which are fed to it every day.

The feng-shui man and his wife seemed to be good-hearted people, but due to ignorance, lack of Dharma wisdom—I mean, generally, there

are many good-hearted people, many of whom lack Dharma wisdom—they fed many small fish to the big one so that it would survive. The man told me that if the big fish died, his business would collapse. All I could do was recite a few mantras and try to blow on the water. I couldn't tell him then and there that feeding all those small fish to the big one, hundreds of them, every day, was actually harming him and his family. I really didn't feel at all comfortable, but I couldn't say straight out, "Don't do that." I tried to approach the subject indirectly by hinting. I don't remember exactly what I said—"Can't he eat any other food?" Something like that.

Anyway, this conversation happened just as we were leaving. He said, "Our view is that we give him life, he gives us life, and we then give that life to others." In other words, he does feng-shui for other people. "We give him life, he gives us life, we give life to others" is all well and good, but he never asks the question, "What about the lives of those small fish?" Somehow he never thinks of the small ones, the lives of those hundreds of little fish.

Anyway, animals who live on other animals in the wild—in forests, under water, whatever their habitat—create the negative karma of killing every day, but if you keep them as pets, the extra thing is that you get involved. By feeding them live animals, you too create the negative karma of killing. You think you're benefiting them, but that's an extremely limited outlook. You are not thinking of worms or insects that get eaten. We're all the same. All beings—worms, insects, pets, people—are looking for happiness all the time. Just as we people cherish our bodies above all else, so too does every insect cherish its body more than anything. It's the same.

In the forest, wherever they live, those animals' karma compels them to kill. The only way they can stay alive is by eating other animals, other living beings. When you keep them as pets, the extra factor is your involvement. You put yourself in the position of creating a negative karma that you didn't have to—and a very heavy negative karma, at that. Killing even one insect is very heavy karma. If killing even one insect is so heavy, what about those many live worms, live insects that you feed your pet every day? Doing that is very unwise. You want to benefit your pet, so you harm many other living beings. Harming many to benefit one is not a wise thing to do; this is not a wise way to think. Your concept of benefit

is very limited. Therefore, you must abandon such activity. It is totally unnecessary. We have enough difficulties and problems in our lives already. Why create the cause for more? Even though we've been born human, we still experience much suffering. We don't need to create the cause for any more, especially in such a totally unnecessary way.

Anyway, I meant to write this feng-shui man about his fish. I thought maybe it's easier to tell him in writing, to communicate from a distance. But I didn't do it right away, and then after some time, somehow, I forgot. Last time I was in Hong Kong he was there too. I tried to meet him, but I didn't get a chance to do so.

However, the richest living being is Buddha. Buddha is the wealthiest of all living beings. Buddha's enjoyments are like the sky. But all that wealth, enjoyment and success came from not harming others, from refraining from giving them harm. It didn't come from keeping a big fish in a little tank and feeding it many small ones. Anyway, the richest person in the world is the one who needs nothing, who wants nothing. Like it says in the short version of *Calling the Guru From Afar*, "Please bless me to generate the thought of no need in my mind." The richest person in the world is the one who is totally detached.

And as far as friends are concerned, the best friend you can have in your life is your own good heart, compassion. That friend will never cheat you, never betray you. The most stable friend you can have, the friend who will help and support you, is stable compassion, a stable good heart. And what brings you all good fortune and luck; what fulfills your wishes? That, too, is your good heart, compassion.

#### NEVER ABANDON BODHICITTA

As the great bodhisattva Shantideva said in *Bodhicharyavatara*, "Whoever wants to put a stop to hundreds of samsaric sufferings, benefit all sentient beings without exception (I'm not sure about this line), and enjoy hundreds of happinesses should never abandon bodhicitta." [Chapter 1, verse 8.]

Here, when Shantideva says "hundreds," he doesn't mean literally hundreds. It's a way of saying many—like the title of the guru yoga practice *Gan-dän lha-gya-ma* (*Hundreds of Devas of Tushita*) doesn't mean just hundreds, but many, many. If you want to stop all the many sufferings of

samsara, enjoy all happiness—samsaric happiness and ultimate happiness, happiness beyond samsara—benefit all sentient beings (that’s the line I’m not sure about) and enjoy all success, you should never ever give up bodhicitta.

What he’s emphasizing is that since what you want is happiness and what you do not want is suffering, then every day, wherever you are, whoever you’re with, whatever your circumstances, your life situation, you must never abandon bodhicitta. No matter how depressed you are, how many problems you have, even if you’re dying, never ever give up bodhicitta, always practice bodhicitta, because it’s the best thing. If you live with bodhicitta, you are making the best use of your life. Practice bodhicitta if you’re sick, if you’re dying, if you’re experiencing relationship problems. No matter what happens to you, practice compassion, bodhicitta. That’s the best way to live, to be sick, to die. Experiencing problems with bodhicitta makes your problems useful, most meaningful for all sentient beings.

As Shantideva also says in the *Bodhicharyavatara*, “Like the best alchemy creates gold, it transforms this impure body we have taken into the priceless holy body of the victorious one. Therefore, keep that which is called bodhicitta most stable.” [Chapter 1, verse 10.]

In other words, in your daily life, make every possible effort to keep your mind in this attitude; make your bodhicitta most stable. Or, if you have the realization of bodhicitta, do everything you can not to lose it. It can also be read that way.

#### THE KARMIC RESULTS OF KILLING

Now perhaps I’ll read a few lines from Shantideva’s teaching, *Lab-dii* [Skt: *Shiksha-samuccaya*].

“On the harms of the path of the ten non-virtues, *The Holy Dharma Mindfulness* explains the very heavy ripening-aspect result. Here I’m going to explain just a little of that, the ripening-aspect result of killing, taking the lives of others.

“Extremely happily, the bird known as ‘running on fire,’ which never gets burned, even when it sits in flames, pecks open the heads of the sentient beings in hell and drinks their blood.”

This means that due to the karma of killing, you are born in the hell

realm, you have that karmic appearance—this is the appearance to your obscured mind of your negative karma, negative intention. At the moment, due to our past good karma, the practice of morality, we have the appearance of this human body with the sense enjoyments that we wish. Having this human body, these enjoyments, wealth, everything, all these appearances are produced by past good karma—basically, the practice of morality, and charity as well. Now we have the precious human body and all the sense objects that we see around us. This present appearance, today, at this hour, this minute, what we see, what we have, all this comfort and enjoyment, is the product of our past good karma.

It's the same for the hell beings, except that their karma is totally opposite from ours. Theirs is the product of negative karma; the appearance they have is only suffering, terrifying suffering—the appearance of the evil mind, the negative mind.

This perfect, precious human body and all the sense enjoyments we have at the moment are produced by the positive mind. We're enjoying all this, we've been enjoying it up until now, but we can't be sure when this appearance will finish. It can just stop at any time. It can change at any moment and in its place arise the appearance of hell. The appearances that this text is describing, the results of the ten non-virtuous actions, can happen to us even today. Those appearances, which are produced by negative karma, the impure mind, which have nothing attractive about them and are only most terrifying and unbearable, could arise for us right now. Such appearances, the hell realms, can manifest to us at any time, even today.

Therefore, it's the karma of the sentient beings suffering in hell to see those terrifying birds and experience the great suffering of having the birds peck open their heads with their sharp beaks and drink their blood.

Then, there's another bird called "running over the skull," which pecks at the brain, which bursts into flames and burns the sentient being severely. The bird then sucks up the brain fluid. Another bird called "eating the tongue flesh" appears according to the hell being's karma, pulls out the being's tongue and eats it. Due to karma, the tongue re-grows and the bird pulls it out and eats it again, over and over.

There are also other birds such as the one called "extracting teeth" and another that brings up the hell being's internal organs—stomach, liver, intestines and so forth—through its throat and eats them. Other

birds like to eat the hell beings' vertebrae, sex organs and lungs, while there's another that bores holes in the body, and while the hell being is screaming in pain and terror, sucks the marrow from its bones.

Then there's the bird called "eye of the needle," which has a long, fine beak that pierces the hell being's body and drinks its blood, and other birds that eat bones, skin, fat, spreading it with their claws, and muscle. Another bird called "mixed hair" pulls the hair out by the roots and eats it.

Near the edge of the lowest, most unbearable hot hell there's a bird called *chha-dab-zhig*, whose body is three hundred thousand *pag-tsä* [Skt: *yojana*] in size. I don't remember one hundred percent, you should check, but there are two ways of defining *pag-tsä*, one according to the *Abhidharmakosha* and the other according to the Kalachakra tantra. According to the *Abhidharmakosha* method, twenty-four inches equal one cubit; four cubits equal one bow-span; five hundred bow-spans equal one "range of hearing" (*gyang-tag*); and eight "ranges of hearing" equal one *pag-tsä*. [See *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism* Wisdom Publications, volume 2, page 38, note 518, where it also states that a *yojana* is "generally held by Buddhists to be four thousand arm-spans, i.e., about eight thousand yards."]

As a karmic result of killing, all these hell realm birds together devour you for hundreds of thousands of years. Of course, these are not human years; these are hell realm years, which are much, much longer. Hell years are equal to millions, trillions, zillions of human years; they're unbelievably longer. All these birds eat you, then you die, and immediately, you are reborn in the same realm and get eaten all over again. This happens over and over again. It goes on and on like this until eventually that karma is exhausted, but no sooner are you free from that than you are surrounded by another type of suffering.

After that, you find yourself in a place where there are high cliffs. You run towards them looking for refuge, protection, someone to help you, but then suddenly, due to your karma, eleven huge circles of fire surround you and friendless, without guide, surrounded by enemies, you are caught in a karmic noose and find yourself in an isolated place with multitudes of other hell beings, where you again experience much suffering.

Trying to escape, you run towards a cliff called *nam-trog rab-lhun*. *Trog* means landslide, a place on a mountain where there are no trees, just rocks, sand and rubble, where it's very easy to fall down. The hell

being runs towards those cliffs, falls down, and his legs and everything melt. When he lifts them up they grow again, but his skin is extremely thin and tender, like that covering a healing wound—whatever touches it, even a tiny hair, causes pain. Hell beings' skin is very, very thin, extremely thin, and due to karma their suffering is unbelievably heavy. The hell beings are completely disturbed by all these terrors. Their limbs all melt and they fall three hundred *pag-tsä* down the cliffs called *nam-trog*, get tormented by a karmic wind and then again get eaten by different kinds of bird, such as *gan-ga*, *kha-ta*, eagles and owls. All these are the hell being's karmic appearance; they exist due to karma.

#### ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN

If you want an example similar to this in the human realm, think about a person who's driving along in his car when all of a sudden somebody shoots him. We've all heard of things like this. You're just walking along and suddenly, out of nowhere, someone attacks you. It's the same thing—a projection of your past karma. These things happen because of past negative karma. A particular negative karma ripens and at that moment you have the appearance of someone known or unknown to you suddenly harming you. I mean, whenever your karma ripens [finger snap], you experience that event, then and there. In this world, it happens like that all the time.

Even though this hasn't happened to us yet...well, maybe it has! Not that long ago, at our center in Bodhgaya, someone was shot, but not killed. An Israeli soldier. I don't know how long he'd been in the army, but he never took any bullets while serving. Then he came to Root Institute, put his rucksack in the office, went out to the gate and got shot by a bandit. After all those injury-free years in the Israeli army, he comes to India, to the holy place of Bodhgaya, where one would never expect something like that to happen, and he gets shot. Something similar happened a month later to a French lady called Beatrice. She got shot in the leg just inside the Root Institute gate. It looks like those bandits planned quite well. They never shot people in the head, which would send them to another realm, but just in the leg. It seems they had some kind of rule or agreement not to shoot people in the heart or brain, which is obviously more dangerous.

When I talk about this happening in Bodhgaya I don't mean it only happens there. In the West, this kind of thing happens all the time. You read in the paper or see on TV that people shoot and kill each other every day. The people involved don't necessarily have to know each other, either. Strangers kill each other all the time.

It's the same thing as in the hell realms—it's karma. Whenever a particular past karma ripens, manifests, suddenly you have this karmic vision of somebody shooting you, of your receiving that harm. Whenever the karma ripens, at that moment, anything can happen.

For example, I heard about something that happened in France some years ago. A woman discovered that her husband was having an affair and tried to commit suicide by jumping out her apartment window. It so happened that just as she jumped her husband was entering the front door of the building, which was right below. She landed on her husband, who was killed as a result, and instead of dying, as she intended, she survived. You see how the karma is. According to her wish, she was supposed to die, not him, but according to karma, it happened the other way round.

There's another story showing what happens when the karma to die ripens suddenly, this one from Malaysia, or maybe Indonesia. A zoo elephant was badly constipated, so its keeper gave it a powerful laxative, but nothing happened. So the keeper went behind the elephant and started poking around, when all of a sudden the elephant released an avalanche of kaka, which knocked the keeper to the ground. As he fell, he hit his head on the ground and lost consciousness. The rest of the kaka buried him and he died of suffocation! So that's how his life ended. When the karma ripens, anything can happen.

For example, say there's a big tree in the middle of the road. Normally, you never think that this tree will fall over and kill you. But if in the past you have created the karma for that to happen, it's just a matter of time. It will happen as if somebody had purposely arranged it or the tree had a mind of its own. However, what arranges for that tree to fall onto your car and kill you is your past karma. Nobody else arranges it, not God or anybody else. It's arranged by your past karma. If you have created the karma to die under the big tree that you never suspected would ever fall down, when that karma ripens, the tree will fall and kill you.

Anything can change. Even huge pieces of iron, which look so solid

that it seems impossible they could ever bend, will bend if a person's karma to experience suffering with that iron as a condition ripens. Due to the power of karma, when it ripens, things change; anything can happen. When the karma ripens, huge mountains that once looked so stable can disintegrate completely—during an earthquake, for instance.

Anyway, this bit about the hells is almost finished, then we can take a break—a break from the hell realm or a break from the human realm! I'm joking.

#### MORE HELLISH KARMA OF KILLING

We were talking about the cliff called *nam-trog rab-lhun*. According to your karmic appearance, all these birds come to eat you, then your body is lifted up and again falls down another precipice, and so the suffering goes on for hundreds of thousands of years.

The lam-rim teachings contain basically similar descriptions of the hells, but here in *Lab-dü*, Shantideva goes into a little more specific detail than usual.

After a long time experiencing that kind of suffering, the hell being becomes free from that but is immediately surrounded by a new kind of hell suffering, a very sharp wheel that spins around the being's body, slicing it to pieces. At the hub of the wheel is a vajra emitting flames, which burn his body. The being is surrounded by a thousand such wheels, and gets cut to pieces and completely burned in that way.

Then, in another kind of suffering, the being is skewered from his heel to the top of his head and spit-roasted over a fire, while every cell in his body is devoured by worms, causing intense pain in every atom. The monk Bob, who works as a nurse in a hospital, said there was once a patient there who complained of severe pain in every cell of her body, so there's some similarity there.

After that, due to heavy negative karma, the being's body revives, but is fleshier and covered with very thin, tender skin. It then gets eaten all over again causing even more pain than before. So each time this happens, more and more flesh builds up so that getting eaten is increasingly painful. Shantideva explained that these experiences are karmic results of killing, taking the lives of others.

So, I'll stop here.

## A DAILY PRACTICE TO STOP THE SUFFERING

The conclusion, however, is that we must do two things. One is to purify the negative karma already created by doing practices such as the Vajrasattva that we're doing here. That purifies the negative actions we've done every day of our lives, especially the ten non-virtues, and also the negativities that we've been creating since beginningless time in our infinite previous lives. That's one solution, but that alone is not enough. We also have to change our minds and our actions and abstain from creating further negativities. If we don't, there'll be no end to our having to purify. If we don't change our minds and our actions, if we don't stop creating negative karma, there will always be more negativity to purify. Therefore, to avoid experiencing suffering, especially that of the lower realms as well as that of the human and deva realms, to avoid experiencing the results of negative karma, one solution is to engage in powerful purification practices, such as Vajrasattva meditation, confession before the Thirty-five Buddhas and the many and varied other purification practices.

Let me explain how to apply these in everyday life. The moment you get up, generate bodhicitta motivation. Determine to make the best use of your life by making it beneficial for other sentient beings. In other words, make the strong determination to live your life with bodhicitta all the time. Start by rejoicing that you are still alive, that you didn't die during the night but were born again today as a human being with the opportunity to practice Dharma, to achieve any of the three great meanings—the happiness of future lives, liberation from samsara and full enlightenment. In each second, you can create the cause of any happiness you wish from those three great purposes.

Therefore, make the strong determination that from now on, especially in this life, especially during this day, you will never separate from bodhicitta, not even for a minute or a second, and you will never allow yourself to fall under the influence of the self-cherishing thought. "I will never allow myself to be controlled by the self-cherishing thought." If you don't make this strong determination, you won't be able to practice bodhicitta, compassion for others. "I will not allow myself to be controlled by the self-cherishing thought, especially in this life, especially today, not for a minute or even a second." Make that kind of strong determination.

Briefly, without expanding but just mentioning the essence, this should be your attitude towards life, as explained in the five powers of a lifetime's practice, or a lifetime's practice integrated into the five powers. [See *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, pp. 612–16 and *Advice From a Spiritual Friend*, Wisdom Publications, 1996 edition pp. 111–12. The five powers are the power of the white seed, the power of familiarity, the power of determination, the power of repudiation and the power of prayer.] Even if you don't know many prayers, many different practices, if you can practice these five powers, you are doing the most important practice you can. Even if you aren't familiar with many Dharma teachings or texts—if you haven't studied, haven't had time to learn—if you know what the five powers are and live your life in their practice, you make your life incredibly free; you give yourself so much freedom, peace and happiness. In this way you can achieve enlightenment quickly. That's the greatest advantage, the greatest benefit.

After generating that morning motivation, do prostrations to the Thirty-five Buddhas.

Every night, before going to bed, do Vajrasattva practice, reciting one mala, a half mala, or at least twenty-one repetitions of the long mantra. If you can combine these with prostrations, it will be very, very powerful; two powerful practices combined. You will collect extensive merit and purify those unbelievably heavy negative karmas. You can do your Vajrasattva recitation with prostrations or just sitting. It depends on if you have the opportunity to do prostrations and on how you feel. You can decide.

However, if you can begin your evening Vajrasattva practice with prostrations to the Thirty-five Buddhas, just going straight through, not repeating each name over and over with each prostration, that will be very powerful, because reciting each buddha's name even once purifies many thousands of eons of negative karma—many different negative karmas collected over thousands of eons. It is unbelievably powerful.

For example, if you recite the first name, Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's, it has the power to purify 80,000 eons of negative karma. Similarly, each of the Thirty-five Buddhas' names is extremely precious—like an atomic bomb, when it comes to purifying negative karma. Each buddha's name is so precious; much more precious than skies of wish-granting jewels. Each buddha's name is much more precious than skies

full of millions of dollars. Whether you do your Vajrasattva recitation sitting or with prostrations, either way is very, very good.

In the mornings, therefore, generate bodhicitta motivation and do prostrations to the Thirty-five Buddhas. I'm not going to explain bodhicitta motivation today or the meditation you do at the end of the session. We don't have time now, but you can read how to do it elsewhere in this book or listen to some of the tapes [from the retreat]. However, I will explain the meditation that you do with prostrations so that you'll be able to give yourself the opportunity of collecting more merit. The more meditation skills you have—such as when you do prostrations—the more extensive merit you create, the sooner you gain realizations, and the closer you and all sentient beings come to enlightenment. If you have the skills, you can collect extensive skies of merit with each prostration.

#### THE MEANING OF THE PROSTRATION MANTRA

First, to multiply the effect of each prostration one thousand times, recite the mantra OM NAMO MANJUSHRIYE NAMO SUSHRIYE NAMO UTTAMA SHRIYE SOHA. His Holiness Serkong Tsenshab Rinpoche once explained the meaning of this mantra to me, but I've kind of forgotten.

NAMO means prostration and MANJUSHRIYE is Manjughosha, so this is paying homage, or prostrating, to Manjushri. The Tibetan translation is *Jampalyang-la chag-tsel-lo*.

So, OM—it seems that almost every mantra begins with OM, for example, the mantra (TA YA THA) OM MUNE MUNE MAHAMUNAYE SOHA starts with OM and, like the above one, ends in SOHA. Many other mantras end in HUM.

Manjushri, in Tibetan, is Jampalyang. *Jam* means soft, pacified. *Pal* (Skt: *shri*) means glorious, or soft. What His Holiness Tsenshab Rinpoche explained was that *jam*, soft, means Manjushri's holy mind is soft, gentle. How has it become soft? By his having ceased the disturbing thoughts, the delusions, the disturbing thought obscurations (*nyön-drib*, in Tibetan). That is the meaning of soft.

What is the meaning of *pal, shri*? It means that Manjushri's holy mind is free from even the subtle defilements, *she-drib*, which we can abbreviate as “knowledge obscurations”—the defilements that interfere with the mind's fully and directly seeing all existence, all phenomena.

Those subtle defilements are called knowledge obscurations, *she-drib*. What are they? They are subtle negative imprints that have been left on the mental continuum by the concept of inherent existence.

Until we become enlightened, we sentient beings constantly experience the appearance of inherent existence—except for when we become *arya* beings and are absorbed in single-pointed concentration on emptiness. During such times of meditative equipoise on emptiness, like water poured into water, our dualistic view is temporarily stopped. Stopped, but not forever. During meditation we don't have the dualistic view, but when we arise from meditation, it's there again—the appearance of inherent existence, which is the projection of the subtle negative imprints. Those imprints, along with the hallucinated appearance of inherent existence, are the subtle defilements, the *she-drib*, the knowledge obscurations. *Pal*—*Jam-pal-yang*—means that Manjushri's holy mind is free of even these subtle defilements, and therefore of all mental errors, all defilements of mind. That also means that he has completed all the qualities of realization—when you complete the qualities of cessation, you automatically complete the qualities of realization.

Then comes NAMO SUSHRIYE. NAMO again means prostration. Then SUSHRIYE, *leg-pa'i pal*—glorious goodness. Then NAMO UTTAMA SHRIYE SOHA—*chog-gyi pal*—glorious supreme sublimity. I think that's the literal word for word translation from the Sanskrit. I don't remember if His Holiness Serkong Tsenshab Rinpoche explained the meaning of all that, but later I also saw a text that had the translation of this mantra. I didn't see the meaning of it explained there either, but my assumption is that, like many other mantras, it contains within it the whole path to enlightenment.

For example, the mantras OM MANI PADME HUM and OM MUNE MUNE MAHAMUNAYE SOHA contain the entire lam-rim—the lower path, middle path and higher path. The whole lam-rim is encompassed by the MUNE MUNE MAHAMUNAYE; the Lesser Vehicle, the Mahayana Paramitayana, the Mahayana Tantra is all there. It's usually the same—OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SOHA as well—basically, most mantras are like that. They contain the whole package, the entire path to enlightenment.

So SUSHRIYE, glorious goodness, might contain the Lesser Vehicle path and UTTAMA SHRIYE SOHA, glorious supreme sublimity, the Mahayana path. It's my guess that this contains the whole path to

enlightenment—the basis, the four noble truths, and then the Mahayana path—but I haven't seen this explained in any commentaries.

Of course, just Manjushri's name itself contains everything—how to achieve true cessation and the rest of the path to enlightenment. The two truths, the paths of method and wisdom, the results to be achieved, Dharmakaya and Rupakaya. Everything is contained in there, just like any mantra.

Finally, there's the OM. OM is what you achieve by actualizing the meaning of these mantras. Your impure body, speech and mind are purified and you achieve the vajra holy body, vajra holy speech and vajra holy mind. These are signified by the three sounds A-O-MA; OM is the integration of these three sounds. That is what is to be achieved by actualizing the meaning signified by SUSHRIYE NAMO UTTAMA SHRIYE.

#### HOW TO DO PROSTRATIONS TO THE THIRTY-FIVE BUDDHAS AND THE SEVEN MEDICINE BUDDHAS

When you recite the Thirty-five Buddhas' names, it would be extremely good if you could do three sets as a daily practice. That means you'd be doing 115 or more prostrations each time. Also, if you have room, you should always do full-length prostrations. You create unbelievably extensive merit if you do. Cover as much ground with your body as you possibly can; when you go down, make your body as long as you can.

Do three prostrations with the mantra OM NAMO MANJUSHRIYE... and then, in English or Tibetan, recite the refuge formula. If it's Tibetan, make prostrations while reciting *Lama-la kyab su chi wo* as many times as you can during one prostration. Then, when your forehead touches the ground, change to *Sangye-la kyab su chi wo*, and keep reciting that until, on your next prostration, your forehead touches the ground again. Then change to *Chö-la kyab su chi wo* and keep prostrating through *Gendun-la kyab su chi wo*.

Then, when you next touch the ground with your forehead, change to *Tön-pa chom-dän-dä de-zhin-sheg-pa*.. Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's name. If you have memorized it, you should recite it as fast as you can. It's unbelievable—each time you say it you purify 80,000 eons of negative karma. That's why you should memorize all of the Thirty-five Buddhas' names. The more times you can recite each one, the better.

When you do business, you try to maximize your profits. You try to get as many dollars as you can from each transaction. It's the same here, except that with reciting the buddhas' names, the profits are so much greater. Reciting just one buddha's name is much more profitable than billions of dollars of business profit. Reciting the name of just one of the Thirty-five Buddhas, not all thirty-five, purifies many thousands of eons of negative karma. The merit you collect in this way is much more profitable than billions of dollars. Receiving a billion dollars or reciting one buddha's name just once—which is more profitable? There's no comparison. Those billions of dollars are worth nothing compared to that. No amount of money has the power to purify many eons of negative karma or to generate extensive merit, but reciting the buddhas' names does.

After your forehead touches the ground, change to the next buddha's name and recite that as fast and as many times as you can. Keep going through all their names until you have recited all thirty-five. I recite the last one three times. Why? Not because other people do but because the thirty-fifth buddha's name, *De-zhin-sheg-pa...wang-gyi gyäl-po*, purifies any negative karma and broken samayas collected with gurus, which are the heaviest negative karmas of all. Therefore, I think it's necessary to recite the last buddha's name three times.

Then there are the seven Medicine Buddhas. If you can add those, all your prayers—for special realizations from your Dharma practice, for good things to happen to you, for the benefit of others—will be successful. All your prayers will be successful, and you will also receive the beneficial effects of all the prayers that the seven Medicine Buddhas made in the past. Therefore, it's very important and very good to recite the names of the Medicine Buddhas. You also recite each name as many times as possible during each prostration. However, you only need to recite the seven Medicine Buddhas' names once each session—after the first repetition of the Thirty-five Buddhas. You don't need to do them the second or third time.

In the first set, recite the Thirty-five Buddhas and the seven Medicine Buddhas, then go back to the refuge for the second time. After the second set of Thirty-five Buddhas, start back at refuge again, like that. Three sets. If you can make this your regular practice it would be extremely, unbelievably good. If three sets are not possible, then two. If not two, then one. And remember, with each prostration, recite that

buddha's name as many times as you can, over and over, rather than reciting it slowly, just once. Each day that you recite the names of the Thirty-five Buddhas, each day that you recite just one buddha's name, makes your life so much different, like the difference between earth and sky. Your mind carries much less negative karma, and that which it does carry is much lighter. Your life will be much more successful, especially in attaining realizations, and you will be able to benefit others much more in both this life and future lives.

I think I'll stop here today.

The reason I bring up all these issues is not so much for the people doing retreat but more for those who don't get the chance to retreat and those who I don't get to meet very often. Not that I have much to offer, but I want to give those people I meet only rarely in teachings some understanding of how to practice, something to make their daily lives most profitable, something practical. That's the main reason. It's not only for the people here doing retreat. I never seem to have time to give individual people instructions for practice—sometimes it's possible, but not all the time. Therefore, on an occasion such as this, one of those rare opportunities where we meet during a teaching, I'm offering you something that I hope might be helpful, beneficial.

Those of you who don't know these things, especially those of you who don't practice, need to hear and learn them so that you can make your life better, more useful and as beneficial as possible for both yourselves and sentient beings equaling the sky. So that you can make this life, and especially your future lives, easier and more successful, benefit more sentient beings, gain more realizations, and gradually achieve enlightenment. That's the reason I bring all this up.

#### DEDICATION

“Due to all the present, past and future merits collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may bodhicitta, the source of all happiness and success for me and all other sentient beings be actualized within my mind and in the minds of my family members, all the students and benefactors of this organization, especially those who sacrifice their lives serving others and the teaching of the Buddha through

this organization, and all other sentient beings without even one second's delay. May the bodhicitta that has been generated increase.

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may His Holiness the Dalai Lama have a stable life and may the obstacle to His Holiness's health that has been taken, the pneumonia, according to the karma of us sentient beings, be pacified immediately, and may all his holy wishes succeed immediately as well as those of all other virtuous friends and all other holy beings who live their lives for the benefit of sentient beings.

“Due to all the past, present and future merits collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may I be able to offer extensive benefit like the sky to all sentient beings as Lama Tsong Khapa did, by having within me the same qualities that Lama Tsong Khapa had, from now on, in all my future lifetimes.

“Due to all the past, present and future merits collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all sentient beings—which appear to my hallucinated mind as something real, something real existing from there, but which in reality are totally non-existent, totally empty—may the I—which appears to be a real I appearing to my hallucinating mind from there, but which, *that* one, is in reality totally non-existent—achieve my own deity's enlightenment, or Vajrasattva's enlightenment, or Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's enlightenment, whatever—which appears to my hallucinating mind as something real from there, from its own side, which is according to the point of view of my ignorance and is the view of my hallucinating mind, my ignorance, and which is in reality totally non-existent—and lead all sentient beings—who also appear to me to be real ones from there, which is according to the point of view of my ignorance, my belief, and also the appearance to my hallucinating mind, that which is totally non-existent—to that enlightenment—which also appears real from there, which is the point of view of my ignorance, what it believes, what it apprehends, the hallucination that appears to my hallucinating mind and which is totally non-existent”—that doesn't mean enlightenment itself but something extra on the enlightenment, the real one that appears from there, that extra thing, that not-merely-labeled enlightened, but that enlightenment that appears to you as something more than merely labeled, something extra, so that one is totally non-existent—“by myself alone—who also appears to be real, from there,

according to the point of view of my ignorance, my hallucinating mind.” That real I appearing *from there* is what’s totally non-existent.

When you meditate like this, it’s not just thinking that they don’t exist. You should really *see* very intensively that they don’t exist from their own side. There should be a very strong, intensive perception that they are *totally*, absolutely non-existent—non-existent from their own side—something that either makes you feel so unbelievably happy that you rejoice or causes deep fear to arise within your heart. If you have either of these two experiences, the way you have been meditating is correct. As a beginning experience, you should feel either incredible joy or deep fear. If you do, your experience is correct.

Finally, dedicate to actualize Lama Tsong Khapa’s teaching, which unifies sutra and tantra, in your own mind, for it to spread in the minds of the students and benefactors of this organization, especially those who sacrifice their lives serving others and the teaching of the Buddha through this organization, and in the minds of all sentient beings, for this teaching to flourish forever in this world, and to cause all this to happen by yourself, alone.

Tuesday, March 16

## EVENING: FINAL VAJRASATTVA SESSION

### PALDEN LHAMO TEA OFFERING

There is a general tea offering prayer, which includes many other protectors and deities, but this one is specifically for Palden Lhamo and her entourage. Since the copy of this translation, which is used by International Office, where the tea offering is done every day, is available, we will just do it.

### MITUKPA PRACTICE

We need a method of becoming enlightened without having to meditate! We need a method so that by meditating one night, we become enlightened that night or by meditating one day, we become enlightened that day! Anyway, I'm joking.

I thought to give the *lung*, the oral transmission, of the Mitukpa mantra, as recitation of this mantra came out very beneficial for Tenzin Jangchub's mother, who died recently. According to my Mickey Mouse divination, my monkey divination, a few practices came out as specifically beneficial for her, to save her from the lower realms. They included making a statue or tsa-tsas or a *mani* prayer wheel. It came out extremely beneficial to make a prayer wheel, and even if a prayer wheel can't be sponsored completely, some money could be donated on her behalf towards the building of a prayer wheel. Another practice that came out very beneficial is recitation of the mantra of Mitukpa, the Immovable Buddha. Since there are quite a number of us here in the retreat, if each person recites one mala of this mantra once a day, many thousands of mantras can be recited in a short time. It is a very powerful and effective way to help her. So, I thought to give the oral transmission before we recite the mantras.

Mitukpa is very powerful in degenerate times for purifying negative

karma, particularly the negative karma of having broken vows, such as the Eight Mahayana Precepts, lay vows or the vows of nuns and monks. Even if you believe in karma and reincarnation and do not generate heresy, if you break or degenerate your vows you create the cause to be born in the animal realm as a naga.

There are many stories in the teachings about how many of the nagas during Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's time had been monks and nuns during Buddha Kashyapa's time, but had been unable to keep their vows. Because they had broken their vows, they were born as nagas. The Mitukpa practice of making nectar charity to the nagas is very beneficial in purifying the nagas and liberating them from their suffering. While pouring the water, you visualize Mitukpa, the Immovable Buddha. Mitukpa is the same as Guru Shakyamuni Buddha in appearance except that Mitukpa is blue and holds a vajra in his left hand, which is in the mudra of concentration. Nectar flows from Mitukpa's holy body, from either the heart or the hand, to purify all the nagas and liberate them from all their sufferings. It is very effective for the nagas.

There is also a very special practice called the hundred tormas offerings (Tib: *torma gya-tsa*). There are brief, medium-length and elaborate ways of doing this practice. To do the practice you make small pills with *tsampa*, butter, milk and other very clean substances. The pills include the six special substances (Tib: *sang drug*) that are normally used in Tibetan medicine and incense. This practice is part of the thought transformation commitment of making offering to the Triple Gem and making charity to the beings of the six realms, as is offering water charity to the different types of pretas.

#### SUFFERINGS OF PRETAS

Generally, among pretas, those with flames coming from the mouth have more suffering than other types of preta. Due to karma, some pretas are born with two or three knots in their neck. Their neck is so tiny that they cannot swallow things. They experience many obstacles. In the first place, they cannot find even a spoonful of food or a drop of water for hundreds or thousands of years. When they finally see some food or drink in the distance, karmic guardians stop them from going there, so they are unable to get it.

The texts also mention that due to karma, the stomachs of the pretas are as big as mountains. I think we find this hard to believe because it's not something that we can see for ourselves. There is no preta country in Africa, India or somewhere that can be advertised on TV or that we can fly or drive to as tourists to take pictures or videos. However, we can find similar examples if we look at some general human shapes. Among human beings, there are different types of bodies, and some have big bellies. There are human beings with all kinds of bodies, so you cannot say that such a thing as a preta body could not exist.

Even in terms of human beings, we see that there are all kinds of shapes. There are even human beings with two heads. There is a book called *Believe It or Not*, which has actual photographs of people who have been born with unbelievable bodies. Some have very long penises, huge stomachs, another being attached to their stomach or three legs. There are all kinds of things shown in this book. It is easier to see such people in the East because they are exposed on the streets. In the West, such people are kept together in one place where no one can see them. In some ways, because you never see such people on the streets in the West, you might think that people with strange bodies are born only in India. You might think that such things never happen in the West, where everything is neat and perfect—that there is no bad karma in the West; there is only bad karma in Nepal and India, where people believe in it. You might believe that only those who believe in negative karma experience negative karma; that those who don't believe in negative karma never experience negative karma; that for them, everything is perfect.

When we think of just the way some human beings are born, it is unbelievable. We couldn't even imagine such bodies. There are people who are born with the face of a dog; they have hairy faces and look just like Lhasa apsos. Basically, these are all karmic results of immoral actions. They can also be the result of having disrespected holy objects, but basically they are the result of having broken vows, or precepts. That is the real cause. In the West, such bodies are said to be the result of some physical condition, such as imperfections in the father's sperm or the mother's egg. This is blamed as the sole source. However, even though it is true that such a body has something to do with defects in the sperm or egg, the actual cause of that imperfect sperm or egg is negative karma from immoral actions.

There is specific proof of reincarnation in *Pramanavarttika*, but I have forgotten the key points of the logic. The physical body is the cooperative cause of the mind and the mind is the cooperative cause of the body. Of course, you have to consider the two causes of such a body. One is the physical evolution of the body from the sperm and egg, but the other cause is the mental factor of karma, or intention, which is what causes the physical evolution.

However, based on this explanation, one becomes the cooperative cause, but of course, the main cause of even the mind that entered the fertilized egg is the previous mind in that same continuum. There is a specific explanation related to the consciousness and the body, but unfortunately I have forgotten the key points.

People might be born with the face of a dog because of the past negative karma of having sex with dogs out of the negative motivation of attachment or self-centeredness. I have yet to see anyone with the head of an elephant or a crocodile.

Anyway, all these strange bodies that we see pictured in books such as *Believe It or Not* are the result of immoral actions. They are all creations of attachment, produced by attachment. And, whether we believe it or not, such things have happened. All those unusual births are the result of strong desire.

But to return to the pretas, where this story started....

The pretas have stomachs like mountains, necks as thin as a hair from a horse's tail, tiny limbs and skin that is as dry as tinder. When their limbs rub together, sparks are produced. Because their bodies are like that, even if pretas see food in the distance, it is very difficult for them to reach it. Similar to the way that a very old person finds it difficult to walk, a preta has great difficulty in moving its body. Even if there are no karmic guardians preventing them from going there, pretas still find it extremely difficult to reach the place where they see food. And even if they finally manage to reach that place, the food suddenly disappears or is transformed into something undesirable. After undergoing unbelievable hardships to come all the way to where in the distance they have seen food or clear blue water, they arrive to find that the food or water has either disappeared or is full of pus, blood, hair or garbage. There is nothing there that they can eat or drink.

Then, even when they are at last able to find some water or food, they

can take only a drop of it because their mouths are like the eye of a needle. It is very difficult for them to swallow any food at all, and even when they do manage to swallow something, it has no effect because their stomach is as big as a mountain and flames inside it burn up the food.

Besides suffering so much hunger and thirst, pretas also experience so much pain. This is why in regard to the practice of giving, making water charity to the pretas collects much more merit than making charity of other substances to other sentient beings. In fact, by making water charity to one preta, you collect much more merit than by having made charity to all the rest of the sentient beings. And by making water charity to one of those pretas with flames coming from the mouth, you collect more merit than you would by making charity to all the rest of the numberless pretas, because this particular preta experiences much more suffering than the other pretas.

Such pretas are perhaps not seen here, but they can be seen at certain places in India—in Buxa, for example. I lived for eight years in Buxa, the concentration camp where Prime Minister Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi-ji were imprisoned during the time of the British. The buildings weren't changed at all, but because Tibetan monks lived there, the prison became a monastery. When we were debating outside at night, we would often see flames moving in the forest. I think this also happens at certain places in the West. Once when I was traveling at night through the forest with a group of people, we saw a light through the trees, but it wasn't the light of a fire. We thought there might be somebody there, but when we took a few steps towards the light, it moved further away. There was nobody there. The light just went further and further into the forest. It is very common to see flames moving at night in forests. It is also possible to see these pretas in deserts and in other barren or desolate places. Pretas with flames coming from the mouth have much more suffering than other pretas.

However, the pretas with two or three knots in their necks have even more suffering. Even if a drop of water enters their mouths it cannot go any further because their throats are occluded by the knots. Making one drop of water charity to a preta with knots collects more merit than does making charity to all the numberless pretas with flames coming from the mouth. There is a mantra that allows these pretas with knots to see and find water. You visualize yourself as Chenrezig with nectar coming from

your hand. The nectar liberates the pretas from the suffering of the lower realms, purifies their negative karma and they then get a good rebirth. You can also do this practice with the other types of preta. The nectar cools their suffering of heat, then purifies them of their negative karma and delusions. Due to their negative karma, pretas find even moonlight, which human beings find cooling, very hot. The nectar cools the pretas, like a cooling rain after a heat wave.

#### WATER CHARITY TO THE PRETAS

Buddha also explained a special practice for pretas called “Yeshe Karda.” (I think there is no point in translating this name as it might sound funny in English. It’s better to leave it in Tibetan!)[See Chapter 48, Tuesday, April 27 and Appendix 4.] Having a swimming pool is a great advantage for this practice, but you can do it at a pond, a river or an ocean, which is especially suitable because it is the largest body of water. To do the practice, you take water from the swimming pool, pond, river or ocean, recite the name mantra of Yeshe Karda seven times [OM JNANA AVALOKITE SAMANTA PARANA RAMI BAWA SAMAYA MAHA MANI DURU DURU HRIH DAYA JALANI SOHA], then pour the water back. You do this whole process seven times. After pouring the water back, meditate that the whole ocean appears as uncontaminated nectar to all the numberless pretas that are seen by the omniscient mind. All the pretas fully enjoy the nectar and by drinking it are liberated from all their sufferings and defilements and they all become the Buddha of Compassion.

The practice is very simple, but it has unbelievable benefit for the pretas. Of course, you also collect unbelievable merit, but it is of incredible benefit to the numberless pretas. This mantra enables the pretas to see the whole ocean as nectar; otherwise, they cannot even see the ocean. We can see the ocean, but pretas cannot see it. This mantra allows them not only to see the ocean but to see the whole ocean as nectar and to drink from it, thus purifying their negative karma and enabling them to receive a good rebirth. This is unbelievable. It is extremely good to benefit the pretas in this way, to liberate them from suffering and enable them to have a good rebirth. This Yeshe Karda practice was given by Buddha.

If you don’t do this practice, especially if you go to the water quite

often, it is a great pity. I mean, without talking about the merit you collect for yourself, you bring unbelievable benefit to the pretas, those sentient beings who have been experiencing the suffering of hunger and thirst for hundreds or thousands of years. We talk about the suffering of people in Africa and other parts of the world, but it is nothing compared to the suffering of the hungry ghosts, who are unable to find food or water for thousands of years. The suffering of people in this world is great bliss when compared to the suffering of the pretas. And even though they can't find food or water, due to their karma, the pretas don't die but live for hundreds of thousands of years. Therefore, it is a great pity if you don't do this practice, especially if you live near or go quite often to the water.

#### THE HUNDRED TORMA OFFERING PRACTICE (*TORMA GYA-TSA*)

Anyway, I was explaining the purpose of giving the oral transmission of the Mitukpa mantra and had reached the point of talking about the one hundred torma offerings. This practice is contained in the verse in *Lama Chöpa*, the *Guru Puja*, where it says, "Whatever conditions I meet, please grant me blessings to be able to make this life of freedom and leisure highly meaningful with the skillful means of living in the practice of the four actions and immediately use it for meditation by applying the samayas and advice of thought transformation." [Verse 98.]

Whether we are happy or unhappy, whether we meet favorable or unfavorable conditions, whether we meet a friend or an enemy, whether we receive praise or criticism, we should immediately use the situation for meditation, which means that we should apply the practices of thought transformation. Various practices are explained, and by doing these practices we then make our human rebirth useful.

The offering of a hundred tormas is one of the four actions, which are collecting merit; purifying negativities; giving tormas to interfering spirits, such as *dön* and *geg*; and making offerings to the Dharma protectors. If your mind is brave and well-trained in the thought transformation practices, you give tormas to the interfering spirits and request them to cause obstacles to you. In this way you are able to train in thought transformation and to complete the thought transformation practice, just as Olympic champions train and challenge many people before they

become champions. The main aim is to complete the practice of thought transformation so that you can achieve enlightenment and then enlighten other sentient beings.

If your mind is not brave or strong enough to practice in this way, you give the tormas to the interfering beings and ask them not to cause obstacles to your practice. If your mind is strong, however, you give the tormas as a present to the interfering spirits and ask them to harm you. Giving tormas to the protectors, whether worldly protectors or protectors who are beyond samsara, has the same purpose. This practice of offering tormas to the interferers includes making charity to pretas and nagas. At the end of the practice, you also give them teachings. The whole practice is unique and very beautiful.

#### THE BENEFITS OF THE MITUKPA MANTRA

As to the benefits of the Mitukpa mantra, anybody who hears it does not go to the lower realms. If you recite the Mitukpa mantra 100,000 times, then blow on water, sand or mustard seeds and sprinkle that blessed substance on the body of a person or animal that has died, if that being has been born in one of the lower realms, it will immediately be liberated from the lower realms. Even though the consciousness has separated from the body and is somewhere else completely, because of its past connection with that body, the consciousness is still affected. Because of that connection, the consciousness is purified by throwing the blessed substance on the dead body or any part of that body, even the hair. All that is needed is for the blessed substance to touch the body. Just by that, the being's consciousness is purified, liberated from the lower realms and reborn in one of the higher realms.

It can purify even someone with very heavy karma, even someone who has created the five uninterrupted negative karmas (killing one's father, killing one's mother, killing an arhat, intentionally wounding a Buddha or causing disunity among the sangha). It can purify even someone who has created the very heavy negative karma of having abandoned the holy Dharma, through criticizing the holy Dharma, such as the Hinayana, Mahayana sutra or Mahayana tantra teachings, criticizing the four traditions of Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism, or disrespecting the holy Dharma scriptures. Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo also explains in

*Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* that throwing Dharma texts with missing pages in the garbage is also considered to be avoiding the holy Dharma. It is regarded as very heavy negative karma, as is criticizing buddhas and other arya beings.

However, even all these heavy negative karmas can be purified by reciting the Mitukpa mantra at the time of death. If it purifies the heavy negative karmas of the person for whom it is recited, there is no doubt that the Mitukpa mantra purifies the negative karmas of the person who actually recites it. Even blessing water or sand with the Mitukpa mantra and sprinkling it on the body of someone who has created all these heavy negative karmas can purify those negative karmas and save the person from the lower realms.

Simply *seeing* this mantra can purify all the negative karmas. If you show a dying person the Mitukpa mantra written on a piece of paper, it can purify all their negative karma. If simply seeing this mantra can do that, what need is there to mention the unbelievable benefits that come from reciting the Mitukpa mantra?

Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche mentioned that the people in Amdo have a custom of touching the body of a dying or dead person with a piece of paper on which powerful mantras for purification, such as the mantras of the deities Mitukpa, Kunrig, Namgyalma, Stainless Beam and Stainless Pinnacle, have been written. The dying person's body is touched or rubbed with a piece of paper on which these powerful purification mantras have been written. The main point is that by touching the body, the mantras purify all the negative karmas and help that being to have a good rebirth.

Rinpoche also said that in Amdo, lay people prepare for their death by taking a great initiation of Kunrig. I am not sure whether Kunrig belongs to Charya Tantra or Anuttara Tantra. Kunrig is a white deity with three faces and holds a Dharmachakra. In Amdo, it is customary to prepare for death by taking a Kunrig initiation so that all the negative karma created in that life is completely purified. Thinking that they have purified everything, the people feel relaxed and comfortable; if death comes, they are not worried because they are ready to die. This is why the people in Amdo take the great initiation of Kunrig.

Because Amitabha Buddhist Centre in Singapore offered great service to fulfill Ribur Rinpoche's holy wishes, Rinpoche advised ABC to request

the Mitukpa initiation from His Holiness the Dalai Lama. His Holiness accepted their request and gave the Mitukpa initiation in Bodhgaya and right after that His Holiness gave it again in Dharamsala. I don't think it had been given before then. I think from His Holiness's side he gave it in Bodhgaya especially for the old Tibetans and again in Dharamsala because more Tibetans are there at the time of the Tibetan New Year.

#### WHAT TO DO WHEN EATING MEAT

At that time, His Holiness explained that in the past, when he ate meat, he would keep all the bones, then recite the Mitukpa mantra and blow on the bones. This kind of practice is unbelievably good to do, especially if you eat meat. If you eat meat, you *must* do something for the animal who has died. Otherwise, it is very sad, because that animal cherished its body as much as you cherish your body. The body you are eating was cherished greatly by that animal; that animal cherished its body more than any other being's body. Just as you protect your body, that animal protected its body. Therefore, if you don't at least pray for that animal, it is very sad, and you are very selfish.

It is terrible if you eat meat with a distracted mind and total attachment to your own happiness. You must at least recite a few mantras. If you don't know the Mitukpa mantra or any of the other powerful mantras, you must at least recite OM MANI PADME HUM or the Medicine Buddha mantra. If you cannot recite one mala, recite half a mala, twenty-one or seven manis or Medicine Buddha mantras. Recite the mantras with strong compassion, blow on the meat before you eat it, and make a strong dedication for that animal to immediately be liberated from the lower realms and to receive a good rebirth—a perfect human body or rebirth in a pure land.

You can recite the name of a particular buddha, but I don't remember it. I think that this Buddha probably motivated specifically to purify the negative karma from eating meat. There is also a mantra, OM AH BIRA KHE TSARA HUNG, that is normally recited when meat is eaten. If you recite this mantra seven times, the negative karma of that sentient being is purified and they are reborn in one of the higher realms—in the deva realm, the Heaven of the Thirty-three Gods, I think. This is mentioned in a Manjughosha root tantric text. All these mantras—OM AH BIRA KHE

TSARA HUNG, OM MANI PADME HUM or the Medicine Buddha mantra—have the same benefit. His Holiness, however, mentioned particularly the Mitukpa mantra. If you are not a vegetarian, if you do eat meat, reciting these mantras is unbelievably beneficial for the sentient being whose body you are eating. Otherwise, your eating the meat can become heavy negative karma and you are no different from a tiger or any other carnivore that lives on other animals. Even though you are not eating live animals, if you eat meat only with attachment and do not do anything to benefit the animal you are eating, you are not that different from a tiger.

There are other powerful deity mantras, such as Stainless Beam, but maybe I will mention them at another time. These are the main mantras that are used when somebody has died and jang-wa is being done for them [see Chapter 32, Sunday, February 28]. These mantras are recited and used to bless mustard seeds, water or sand, which you then throw over the dead body. Or by writing the name of the dead person on a piece of paper, you hook their consciousness; you visualize that the person is there and then purify them with the substances blessed with these mantras.

#### TRANSMISSION OF THE MITUKPA MANTRA

Think, “No matter what, I must achieve enlightenment in order to liberate all sentient beings from all their suffering and bring them to enlightenment. I must liberate the numberless hell beings from all their suffering, the numberless hungry ghosts from all their suffering, the numberless animals from all their suffering, the numberless humans from all their suffering, the numberless asuras and suras from all their suffering and the numberless intermediate state beings from all their suffering and bring them all to enlightenment. Therefore, I *must* achieve enlightenment. For this reason, I am going to take the oral transmission of the Mitukpa mantra”

[The oral transmission is given:] OM KAMKANI KAMKANI ROTSANI ROT-SANI TROTANI TROTANI TRASANI TRASANI PRATIHANA PRATIHANA SARVA KARMA PARAM PARA NIME SARVA SATTVA NÄNYTSA SOHA.

If you add NAMO RATNA TRAYAYA NAMO BHAGAVATE AKSHOBHYA TATHAGATAYA ARHATEYA SAMYAK SAMBUDDHAYA to the OM KAMKANI KAMKANI

...it becomes the Guhyasamaja root mantra, or something like that. If you simply recite OM KAMKANI KAMKANI... it's the Mitukpa mantra.

#### THE BENEFITS OF THE NAGA KING'S MANTRA

I would also like to give the oral transmission of another mantra, that of the Naga King, one of the Thirty-five Buddhas. Reciting the name of the Naga King, *De-zhin shog-pa lu-wang gyi gyal-po*, [Skt: *Naga raja*] has many benefits. If you recite it twenty-one times, it has the power to purify even the heavy negative karma that definitely bring their results in this life. Also, you don't receive harm from nagas and landlords [*shi-dag*] through diseases such as leprosy, arthritis or cancer. I haven't heard Tibetan doctors link AIDS to nagas, but they normally explain that cancer is related to harm from nagas. Cancer is called *nyen* in Tibetan, which indicates that some other being becomes a condition for that sickness. I think that coma is also definitely connected to harm from spirits. I'm not sure exactly which type of being is involved, but in the past, the divinations of high lamas have usually indicated that Medicine Buddha practice should be done for someone in a coma.

Reciting the name of the Naga King also purifies the negative karma of having broken or degenerated vows of morality. Also, you are protected from receiving harm from lightning, sickness or thieves. It also increases your wealth. If you recite this buddha's name 100,000 times, you can be healed of leprosy; the negative karma that results in your contracting leprosy will be completely purified.

Cancer is definitely related to nagas, and the proof of this is that practicing deities that protect sentient beings from naga harm, such as Vajrapani-Hayagriva-Garuda, can cure cancer. This particular deity provides protection from more than naga harm, however. Vajrapani acts against the spirits of the upper reaches of space, which cause epilepsy and other diseases. Hayagriva, the deity adorned with a horse's head, protects sentient beings from naga harm and the spirit called *tsen gyal-dön* in Tibetan. And the Garuda on top protects sentient beings from naga and landlord harm.

Of course, the main function of Vajrapani-Hayagriva-Garuda is to liberate sentient beings by pacifying their delusions of ignorance, anger and attachment, from where they receive all their problems, sicknesses

and spirit harm. The basic aim of the practice of this deity is to purify, cease, these defilements. This is why people who have practiced the meditation-recitation of Vajrapani or Vajrapani-Hayagriva-Garuda have been able to heal themselves of cancer. This and the fact that other deities that protect sentient beings from naga harm have helped to cure cancer prove that there is a relationship between nagas and cancer.

I would like to suggest that if their mind is open to the idea, people with AIDS recite the name of this buddha, the Naga King, Lu-wang gyi gyal-po. It is not that I have had the experience of someone reciting this name mantra and healing themselves of AIDS, but according to my divination it would be beneficial to recite this mantra. If someone with AIDS has an open mind and would like to do some meditation practice, they can be given a picture of this Buddha and recite this Buddha's name and mantra.

I will give the oral transmission of this mantra, because I have received it from both His Holiness Serkong Rinpoche and Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche when they gave the sets of hundreds of initiations [*Rin-jung gya-tsa* etc.].

The mantra is TAYATHA O M TATHAGATA BHAGAVAN NAGA RANDZE SHORA ADHISHTHANA ADHISHTITE SOHA.

I don't remember whether I have received the oral transmission of this next mantra, OM CHITTA HUM PHE SOHA, OM SHRI MATI ASHU SOHA. If you recite this mantra and the mantra of the Naga King every day, you won't receive harm from the spirits of the upper realms, so you won't get a stroke. Some people have the karma to recover fully from a stroke, but most people don't recover and hospitals can offer them little more than physiotherapy. This practice gives more possibility of recovery. Anyway, if you recite these two mantras every day, you won't get a stroke. Once you have a stroke, it is difficult to recover from it. It seems that most people either die soon afterwards or have to live with disability for many years.

There is also another buddha whose particular function is to help to prevent strokes. The mantra of this Buddha is SANGYE OTZY TIN GYI GYALPO DRIME MEPA DAWE TOMA (LA CHAG TSÄL LO). If you recite this mantra twenty-one times, you will not be harmed by lightning—lightning strikes are not simply related to the power of the elements; other beings are also involved—or by strokes. Even though such things are not

explained in clinical medicine, other beings, harmful beings, are involved in the causation of strokes. Due to the person's karma, those beings cause these particular sicknesses. If you recite this buddha's name twenty-one times, you won't receive such harms. Even if you don't recite all these different mantras, it could be that you are protected by reciting just one of them.

There are also many different practices that can be done by lamas or other practitioners for someone who has already had a stroke—purification with blessed water, for example. If the person who has already had a stroke can recite OM TUMBURI TUMBURI SUKSHU MEME SHIKSHI SOHA seven times each day, they will be protected from further strokes. Recovery from subsequent strokes is very difficult, but if you are able to recite this mantra seven times every day after the initial stroke, you will never get another stroke. Not only does this practice protect you from further strokes, but it also makes it easy for you to recover from the first stroke.

When Lama showed the aspect of paralysis, I rang His Holiness Song Rinpoche, who was in Switzerland at that time. Rinpoche advised that Lama recite this mantra seven times every day. We recited it around Lama and Lama also recited it, and Lama recovered very quickly from the paralysis. Every day he got better and better. Lama showed the aspect of complete recovery from the stroke. I had forgotten that for two or three years I had been carrying a text with the details of various methods for healing strokes and many other sicknesses. At the time that Lama showed the aspect of paralysis I didn't remember that I had this text. It was only when I got the message from His Holiness Song Rinpoche about reciting this mantra that I remembered that I had been carrying the text for the past few years. Anyway, that's my story...

#### MITUKPA MEDITATION

We will recite the Mitukpa mantra twenty-one times together, and then stop there for tonight.

Visualize Buddha Mitukpa either in front of you or above your crown, and think that nectar comes from Buddha Mitukpa to purify Maria, the person who has died, as well as all other sentient beings, including you. The nectar mainly purifies Maria, but it also purifies all other beings who have passed away and all the sentient beings in the six

realms. Or you can visualize Buddha Mitukpa on your crown and Maria, surrounded by all sentient beings, in your heart on a lotus and moon disc and then purify everyone.

As you recite the mantra, make a strong request for all the negative karmas and defilements of Maria and of you and all other sentient beings to be purified immediately.

After the recitation, think that all the negative karmas and defilements collected by Maria during beginningless rebirths have been completely purified, as have all those of other sentient beings, including yourself. All the negative karmas and defilements come out of the body in the form of dirty black liquid as the body is washed by the strong white nectar-beams emitted by Buddha Mitukpa.

If you have received a Mitukpa initiation or a Highest Yoga Tantra initiation, it might be OK to visualize that Mitukpa absorbs within you and you become Mitukpa. You then enlighten all other sentient beings in the aspect of Mitukpa. Everybody becomes Mitukpa—all hell beings become Mitukpa, all hungry ghosts become Mitukpa, all animals become Mitukpa, all humans (including Maria) become Mitukpa and all asuras and suras become Mitukpa. Then rejoice, “How wonderful it is that I have brought all sentient beings to Mitukpa’s enlightenment.”

#### DEDICATION

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, which are empty, may the I, who is empty, achieve Victorious Buddha Mitukpa’s enlightenment, which is also empty, and lead all sentient beings, who are also empty, to that enlightenment, which is also empty, by myself alone, who is also empty.

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, *Gang-ri ra-we...*

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may I able to bring benefit as extensive as the sky to all sentient beings as Lama Tsong Khapa did, by having within me the same qualities that Lama Tsong Khapa had, from now on in all my future lifetimes.”

We can abbreviate the *King of Prayers* as follows: “Whatever dedications the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the three times have most

admired, and as Samantabhadra and Manjughosha have realized, I also dedicate in that way. May I follow the prayers and deeds of the bodhisattvas Manjughosha and Samantabhadra.”

[Recitation of multiplying mantras and subsequent prayer]

We will condense the prayer for the flourishing of Lama Tsong Khapa’s teachings, *Losang gyal-ten-ma*, as follows: “Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may the complete teaching of Lama Tsong Khapa be actualized in this very lifetime, without even a second’s delay, within my mind and within the minds of all the students and benefactors, especially those who sacrifice their lives to serve others and the teachings of the Buddha through this organization.

“May I be able to cause all sentient beings to meet Lama Tsong Khapa’s teachings and to completely actualize them in their minds. May the general teachings of Buddha and especially the teachings of Lama Tsong Khapa flourish and spread in all directions. Also, by receiving whatever support is needed, may all the centers be able to spread the teachings of Lama Tsong Khapa in the minds of all sentient beings. May all the projects of this organization succeed immediately by receiving all the support they need. May the 500-foot Maitreya Buddha statue be completed immediately by receiving all the support that is needed.

“May all these centers, stupas, statues and other projects cause loving kindness, compassion and bodhicitta to be generated in the minds of all sentient beings. Due to that, may no sentient being ever experience war, famine, sickness, earthquake, danger from fire or water, or any other undesirable thing. In particular, may a third world war, with all the dangers of torture and the use of nuclear weapons, not occur. May everyone be free from the danger of this; may no one ever have to experience such things.

“May all these centers, stupas, statues and other projects cause all sentient beings to achieve enlightenment in the quickest way possible.”

Sorry, again tonight it became blah, blah, blah. . .

Saturday, April 10

## WEEKEND TEACHING

[Rinpoche's first discourse after returning from India.]

Good afternoon. Sorry, I disappeared for a long time! However, I think you've been having the best, most meaningful time; an excellent, most productive time, making your life as meaningful as possible.

### THERE'S NOTHING BETTER THAN PURIFICATION

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

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

When some people find out that they have cancer or AIDS, they go on vacation to some pure land like Goa, Tahiti or Rio de Janeiro—which I used to call Rio Degenerated, but I haven't been there for a while!—anyway, to some place that Westerners consider to be pure lands! But

that doesn't help. That doesn't solve your problem; that doesn't heal your sickness or purify your negative karma. It just distracts your mind from the problem. Similarly, drinking alcohol or taking other substances to suppress your fear, to not feel afraid, works for only a short time and is simply cheating yourself. Not only does getting intoxicated not solve your problem but it also leads to additional life problems. Therefore, even if you are going to die tomorrow, tonight, this hour, there's nothing else to do but purify your mind.

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

Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo advised that, out of meditation on that path and collecting merit and practicing purification, it is more important to spend time collecting merit and practicing purification than meditating. Here, meditating means meditating on the path. Of course, practicing purification and collecting merit all involves meditation, but the specific meditation Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo was referring to was meditation on the path.

As we know from our own experience, we've tried a lot to meditate on the lam-rim, starting from guru devotion, the perfect human rebirth and so forth, spending time on that, but not much has happened in our minds. Even though we've spent much time meditating on the lam-rim, there's been no real change in our hearts. The words on which we've been meditating remain just words and haven't connected with our hearts. There's a gap between our hearts and the words we've been repeating or reciting during meditation. Sometimes, instead of getting transformed,

our minds have even gotten worse.

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

Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo also said in his lam-rim teachings that even if you have been doing many preliminary practices [of purification and collecting merit] along with your lam-rim meditation, if there's been no change in your mind, you need to examine your guru devotion. There might be something wrong in your practice of that. You have to analyze what might have gone wrong in your guru devotion and fix any mistakes that you find by confessing past errors and correcting your future practice. If you fail to do this, you'll continue to collect the heaviest of negative karmas, the greatest obstacles to realization and the development of your mind in the spiritual path, the path to enlightenment. If you are unaware of this and continue to do mainly preliminary practices and lam-rim meditation, not much will happen in your mind. What you are doing is good, but it won't transform your mind, won't bring you realizations.

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

Also, for old students who knew Lama Yeshe, who was kinder than the buddhas of the three times, doing Vajrasattva practice is the best offering we can make to Lama. He wrote these teachings on the Vajrasattva practice and tsog offering, put together the sadhanas and so

forth, so our doing one of Lama's favorite practices would please him a lot and is repaying his kindness. Whether you're a direct or indirect disciple, it's the same.

[Rinpoche spends some time looking through a text.]

I can't find my favorite subject. I think it's hiding! I can't find it, so we'd better do something else.

But before we do, since there are some people who want to take refuge and precepts next week, it would be good if first you could hear some preliminary teachings so that you will have a deeper understanding of the subject. In that way, the reasons for your taking refuge and precepts will be clearer and deeper.

#### QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Is there is a question? Maybe half a question?

*Ven. Marcel:* Rinpoche, in the confession verse in *Lama Chöpa* [Verse 38] we vow never to commit *any* negative action again, but when we do the Vajrasattva practice, we promise never to do again only those that we can avoid and don't promise to do more than we actually can. This seems a little contradictory. Please could Rinpoche explain?

*Rinpoche:* No, I cannot explain! Impossible! Actually, yes, I did want to say something on this point. Even though it's quite correct to say, "I will abstain from, I will not commit, any negativities as much as I possibly can," it's very general and sounds to me like a pretty weak promise. I think it's stronger to say, "I will abstain from the gross negativities from now on, and those that are more difficult to avoid, I will abstain from for..." and here you commit to a certain period of time—a few seconds, a minute, an hour, one day; whatever you can. This commitment is stronger. You are taking more responsibility than you do when you make the general promise, "I will do my best." That seems weak.

Even though you recite the words of *Lama Chöpa* together as a group—and not just *Lama Chöpa*; there are many other similar prayers—in your heart you should think what I've just explained. Verbally, you do the prayers as written in the text, but the merit field will

understand what you mean. I think they'll have enough sympathy for you! Here at the retreat, when we do the general confession and the Thirty-five Buddhas, and at the end of the Vajrasattva sessions, as it's guided meditation, we specifically mention the stronger promise as I've described in order to make our negative karma as light as possible and to not cheat the merit field. But when you do prayers in a group and the text does not specifically emphasize the promise in that way, you can think it in your heart.

*Nick Ribush:* Rinpoche, I have two questions. The first is, at the beginning of the long Vajrasattva sadhana, we set up the visualization with the PAM, lotus, vajra, HUM, radiant light and Vajrasattva, and then make offerings to Heruka Vajrasattva, starting with OM KHANDAROHI... and OM SVABHAVA... and everything becoming empty. Does that mean the visualization disappears?

*Rinpoche:* No, it means your ego disappears! Anyway, here the focus is the emptiness of the offerings, which appear to you as ordinary. This has two meanings. One is the emptiness of inherent existence. The other is the emptiness of the offerings that you believe are there, but are not there on the base; the offerings that appear to you, that your mind believes are there—the water, food, music and other offerings—but in reality are not there, cannot be found on their base. So that is purified. Meditate that those inherently existent offerings—which are not there but appear to your hallucinating mind as though they were, which your hallucinating mind believes are there—are totally non-existent, as they *are* totally nonexistent; not space, but empty like space. So at that time the ordinary appearance of the offerings is purified in emptiness. The offerings—the food, water and so forth—which appear inherently existent or ordinary, which appear to you *not* in the way they appear to the buddhas, which is in the nature of greatest bliss, are purified in emptiness. Focus mainly on the emptiness of the offerings, but if you can extend your mind to think of the emptiness of all existence, that's even better.

Doing this, you should not have any confusion with your visualization of Vajrasattva, because you are supposed to visualize the deity as inseparable method and wisdom. That's the correct way to meditate on the deity. It's not only when you practice deity yoga, when you visualize yourself as the deity, that you generate the transcendental wisdom of

non-dual clarity and profundity, the mind of inseparable method and wisdom, which is what makes deity yoga “vajra.” When you practice method, you create the cause to attain the enlightened holy body, rupakaya; when you practice wisdom, you create the cause to attain the enlightened holy wisdom, dharmakaya. Therefore, when you practice method and wisdom together by meditating on the deity as the inseparability of these two, you continuously create the cause to attain the two enlightened holy bodies.

Jon [Rinpoche asking Jon Landaw], can you say “unified”—“the mind that is unified method and wisdom”? Yes? I used to say that for a long time, until a few years ago, when I did some work here at LMB with “mandala” Michael. I was helping check his English translation of the Heruka body mandala sadhana. He had translated the words in the same order as they appear in Tibetan, which is opposite to the order in which you say them in English. Usually when you translate Tibetan into English you reverse the order of the words. It’s OK, but his was a slightly more difficult way of making a translation. So we had finished the prayer of request to the lineage lamas and were just about up to the yoga of the three purifications, and I wanted to say “unified” for the mind that is unified of method and wisdom, but he indicated that that meant two things become one and I shouldn’t use that word. Since then my mind has been quite discouraged about saying unified! Up till then I was very proud of that translation! Anyway, I think that this point is something to analyze.

You can also instantly generate yourself as the mandala deity out of emptiness, but what I was going to say was that even when you visualize the deity in front of you, you have to visualize it with wisdom that is inseparable from method and wisdom. For example, at the beginning of the *Guru Puja*, after generating refuge and bodhicitta, the refuge merit field absorbs into you, and then out of emptiness, you generate yourself as the deity that you are actually going to achieve in the future—for instance, Yamantaka. At that time, you *are* the deity. The way you’re supposed to meditate, or feel, is that the resultant deity that you will achieve in the future has actually happened now, and your mind is in the state of non-dual bliss and wisdom. The deity that you visualize in front of you is a manifestation of your mind, which is dharmakaya.

While you are focusing on the deity’s holy body, at the same time,

that wisdom understands, recognizes, that it has no nature, that it doesn't have inherent existence. At the moment, when things appear, our ignorance holds them to be inherently existent, as if that's the actual nature of phenomena, as if that's the way they exist. While your wisdom focuses on the holy body of the deity in front of you, it also understands that it has no nature, no inherent existence. The focus on the holy body is method and the understanding that it has no inherent existence, no nature, is wisdom. In the lower tantras, the term for the method of focus on the deity's holy body is "clarity" and the term for the wisdom of simultaneous understanding that it has no inherent existence is "profundity"—the non-dual wisdom of profundity and clarity. In highest yoga tantra, the [experience of this is called] great bliss.

What I'm saying is that you should think that everything is empty. The more phenomena that you can think are empty, the better. Therefore, if you're thinking that everything is empty, when you think of the aspect of Vajrasattva, you don't have to go through it all again. Otherwise you'll never get to the mantra recitation; you'll just be repeating, "This is empty, that is empty" and will never get to start your retreat!

When you visualize Vajrasattva by degrees, build up the steps of the visualization, every single aspect has meaning. Does Lama explain all these things in his commentary? [Student: No, Rinpoche.] Basically, every single thing in the visualization signifies Vajrasattva's qualities. The lotus, the sun and moon disks, everything else—all those things express Vajrasattva's qualities. And when you invoke wisdom, initiate Vajrasattva and so forth, you don't do all that because Vajrasattva's missing something. There are no blessings or qualities missing in Vajrasattva. It's not like Vajrasattva is empty before you invoke wisdom; that Vajrasattva has no mind and you have to invoke mind from somewhere else. The invocation of wisdom, the initiation—these are not for Vajrasattva but are done to dispel our wrong thoughts, our ordinary concepts, such as, "Oh, it's just me visualizing this; this is just my own visualization." You see? Not much faith.

When you do the visualization invoking wisdom, you feel better; you have more faith. This is done according to the psychology of us ordinary beings; to generate more faith, to make it more powerful. Similarly, there's no need to initiate or purify Vajrasattva, just as when in the *Jor-chö* practice we offer a bath to the merit field, there's no dirt to wash off.

As it says in that prayer, “Buddha’s holy body has no stains, but in order to purify the stains of us sentient beings, I am going to offer this bath to the buddhas.” It’s like that. When we do the visualization initiating Vajrasattva, purifying all stains, and the initiating nectar overflows and becomes Akshobhya, Vajrasattva has no stains to purify; it’s to purify our own.

Anyway, even if you meditate that everything is empty, you can still do instant visualization, as I described.

#### THE MEANING OF THE OM SVABHAVA... MANTRA

With respect to the mantra OM SVABHAVA SHUDDAH SARVA DHARMA SVABHAVA SHUDDHO HAM, the first part indicates selflessness of the aggregates and the second, selflessness of the person. The first shows that the aggregates, which are the base to be labeled I, are also empty. The second shows the I, the self, is empty. That’s one interpretation. In general, SVABHAVA means “nature” and SHUDDHO means “pure,” so together they mean pure nature. SARVA means “all” and DHARMA means “existence” [“existent phenomena”].

The general meaning is that all objects are empty. All objects of mind—forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangible objects, I, aggregates, all objects perceived—are empty; they don’t have inherent existence, even though they appear to our hallucinating minds as inherently existent. From the very beginning, they have never been inherently existent—that is the nature of all phenomena and that is pure. It’s pure because they have never been inherently existent, even though they appear as inherently existent to our hallucinating minds, as if they’re covered by inherent existence, like a floor is covered by a carpet or a table by a tablecloth.

Neither the object that is perceived, nor the mind—the cognition, *she-pa*—that perceives it, has inherent existence. Neil, how do you translate that mind, *she-pa*? Knower? Knowing phenomenon? [Ven. Neil: Knower.] What about the person whose mind that is? Is that also knower? Both the mind and the person are knower? In Tibetan, they’re different. *She-pa* is the mind that has the function of knowing, and the person whose mind it is is called *she-pa-po*, the one who knows.

Anyway, both the objects perceived and the cognition, or mind, that perceives them, that has the function of knowing, exist by being merely labeled by the mind. Therefore, they have no inherent existence whatsoever—

not the slightest atom of it—even though all these merely labeled phenomena, the objects, and the mind, the knower that has the function of knowing, appear to have inherent existence. So that appearance and the belief in it block us from seeing that the way all these phenomena really exist is in mere name; not only the appearance but also the belief, or apprehension, that it's true, prevent us from seeing the way in which phenomena exist—in mere name.

However, ...SVABHAVA SHUDDAH SARVA DHARMA SVABHAVA SHUDDHO... shows that all objects perceived by the mind are empty, that their nature is pure, empty of inherent existence. The meaning of pure here is unstained by inherent existence. Not only are these objects of the mind pure in nature, but the subject, the mind that perceives, is also SVABHAVA SHUDDHO—pure in nature. Even though our mind and all other phenomena appear to our mind as if they exist from their own side, they're totally empty of that mode of existence, therefore, they're pure. The whole of existence is empty.

After that, the way you meditate on O-HAM depends on the level of tantra that you're practicing. For example, Kriya or Highest Yoga Tantra. If you're meditating according to Highest Yoga Tantra, it's similar to dharmakaya meditation. I'm just mentioning this so that those who understand will get the idea. It doesn't mean you have to go through the absorptions. Then, the very last thing you think is O-HAM, "This is me." After you have created a pure base, you label it. Normally we apply our labels to impure bases, on these samsaric aggregates. Our mind labels "I" on the impure base of our samsaric aggregates. Here, however, you first create a pure base, then you label it I, and similarly, when you visualize the deity, you do the same thing.

After meditating that the object is empty, meditate that the subject, the mind that knows, is also empty. The object is empty; the mind that knows the object is also empty. SARVA DHARMA SVABHAVA—the whole of existence is empty. The non-dual wisdom seeing the object, emptiness, that's the very basic, fundamental meditation contained in the mantra OM SVABHAVA SHUDDAH SARVA DHARMA SVABHAVA SHUDDHO O-HAM. With the support of bodhicitta, that realization of emptiness ceases not only the gross but also the subtle defilements. Then your ordinary body, speech and mind are transformed into the vajra holy body, vajra holy speech and vajra holy mind, which the three sounds A-AU-MA, OM, signify. OM is the

integration of the three sounds A, AU and MA. That's the goal; that's what we achieve by completely realizing the meaning contained in the mantra OM SVABHAVA SHUDDAH SARVA DHARMA SVABHAVA SHUDDHO HAM. By meditating on that, you achieve that which is contained in OM.

What was your second question?

*Nick:* Rinpoche, when my ignorant mind apprehends that object that has the function of standing on the table and emitting light, I label it "table lamp," and then a real table lamp appears from that side. So that's how the table lamp appears. How does the base exist? The base itself?

*Rinpoche:* The base of the lamp? That's exactly the same. As the lamp is labeled, the base is also labeled. If the lamp that you see is merely labeled, in the same way, the base is also labeled. That cannot be different from the lamp. Do you mean the label "lamp" comes from your mind but the base comes from the shop—the base is bought in a shop? The label "lamp" is applied by your very kind mind, which helps to have light on this table? I'm joking! So, we'll stop here.

#### DEDICATION

"Due to the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may bodhicitta—the altruistic mind determined to reach enlightenment for sentient beings, which cherishes others, from which all success and other desirable things come, by letting go the I, from which all unhappiness and problems arise—be generated in my mind and in the minds of all my family members, all the students and benefactors of this organization and all other sentient beings without even a second's delay, and may that which has already been generated increase."

It's not that this mind, bodhicitta, has nothing to cherish. "...by letting go the I" doesn't mean there's nothing left. Cherish others; that's the best thing to do. By letting go your I, you get all happiness; by letting go your I, you free yourself from all obstacles and achieve all happiness up to enlightenment.

"Due to all the past, present and future merits collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings—which, while they exist, are totally non-existent from their own side—may the I—which, while it

exists, is totally empty, non-existent, from its own side—achieve Guru Shakyamuni Buddha’s or Vajrasattva’s enlightenment—which, while it exists, is totally non-existent from its own side—and lead all sentient beings—which, while they exist, are totally non-existent from their own side—to that enlightenment—which, while it exists, is totally non-existent from its own side—by myself alone—which, while it exists, is totally non-existent, totally empty, from its own side.

“May the complete teaching of Lama Tsong Khapa, the unification of sutra and tantra, be completely actualized within my own mind, the minds of my family members and the minds of all the students and benefactors of this organization, especially those who sacrifice their lives serving others through this organization, in this very lifetime, without even a second’s delay, spread in the minds of all sentient beings and flourish in all directions.”

I thought at this point to mention a little bit about the Gelugpa meeting in New Delhi from which I’ve just returned...I’m saying, “I thought”—I *thought* to mention—but perhaps another time. Right now it’s dinner time—time for bliss in the stomach!



Sunday, April 11

EVENING: FINAL VAJRASATTVA SESSION

[Rinpoche arrives late, just in time for tsog; people were expecting him hours earlier for teachings.]

I missed the teaching! I fell asleep and missed the teaching! But I couldn't stand the thought of not eating the tsog!

[Vajrasattva tsog: just before the "Praise in Eight Lines":]

THE BENEFITS OF RECITING THE "PRAISE IN EIGHT LINES"

The English translation calls this next part the "Eight-legged Praise." Did I mention this before? [Student: No, Rinpoche.] The "Eight-legged Praise." Does anyone have eight legs! [Student: Spiders.] So, "Praise to the Eight Legs"! I'm joking. The Tibetan is *Kang-gyä tö-pa*. *Kang* here means lines—eight lines: "The Praise of Eight Lines," not legs, *kang*. I mean, *kang-pa* means leg, but this *kang* does not. I think, *tsig-kang*, eight lines—what it's saying is the praise that has eight lines. Something like that. Lines. In Tibetan, *kang-gyä*. The praises to the father and the mother.

I don't remember them individually, but about five benefits of doing this practice have been explained. It is regarded as very important for achieving success. The deity Heruka also stated, "I myself and the messenger yoginis will abide in the heart of the person who recites this praise and cause that person to generate the transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss and voidness," which is the special feature of highest yoga tantra that enables a practitioner to attain enlightenment within one brief lifetime of the degenerate age. Heruka and the messenger yoginis will abide in your heart and cause you to generate, experience and develop the transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss and voidness.

There are three more lines explaining the benefits of doing this practice

regularly, but I don't remember them at the moment. When you do this practice, when you recite this praise, all the dakas and dakinis, numberless of whom dwell in the twenty-four holy places, enter your body and bless your drops, winds and chakras. That's what happens when you recite it, so this is a very, very precious practice.

As Lama Tsong Khapa explained, and I often quote, what happens next is, in order to experience the profound, simultaneously-born wisdom of the completion stage within yourself, you need to concentrate on the vajra body. You need to precisely concentrate on the vajra body. For that, the chakras and drops need to be blessed by the dakas and dakinis.

The quickest way to completely cease the dualistic view—not only the gross defilements but also the subtle ones, the subtle negative imprints of the disturbing-thought obscurations, the simultaneously-born ignorance, the concept of the inherently-existent I and so forth—and arrest the continuity of the gross mind, the impure wind-mind—because the gross wind-mind doesn't go to enlightenment; only the extremely subtle mind (of the gross, subtle and extremely subtle mind and the gross, subtle and extremely subtle body, it is only the extremely subtle ones that do this) goes to enlightenment, and since the continuity of the gross mind does not go to enlightenment, it has to be stopped, ceased, or, in the case of highest yoga tantra, abandoned—is to actualize the right tool, the right weapon, the right remedy. The main method for accomplishing the cessation of the dualistic view, therefore, is the transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss and voidness.

Therefore, the answer to the question of how quickly you are going to achieve enlightenment is that it depends on how quickly you can actualize the experience of simultaneously-born wisdom and great bliss. That depends on concentrating on the central channel of the vajra body. That in turn depends on meditating on *tum-mo* and so forth in the central channel and being able to draw the winds into it; to bring the winds in from the 72,000 nadis, or psychic channels, and have them dwell and absorb, go through the twenty-five absorptions. Then, when the gross mind stops, becomes invisible, the subtle mind appears, bringing the experience of the clear light vision. The experience of this wisdom is like an atomic bomb in the way it destroys your obstacles, the defilements, ceases the hallucination and quickly carries you to enlightenment.

However, everything, all success, depends on the dakas and dakinis

entering your body and blessing your winds, chakras and drops. There are many practices in which you invoke the dakas and dakinis—the body mandala practice; when you invoke them from the holy places of Heruka or Vajrayogini when you practice the Heruka father tantra or practice Vajrayogini; or here, in this tsog offering practice, where you recite this “Praise in Eight Lines.”

I remember Lama Yeshe using it for healing. In Solu Khumbu, the old mothers would meet us on the road and say, “Oh, I have back pain...,” this and that—they wanted some blessing. So holding his mala in his hand, Lama would hit them on the back while reciting this praise. That’s something that definitely helps. I didn’t realize at the time how precious this prayer was and how it brings great blessings into your heart.

Whenever you recite this “Praise in Eight Legs,” visualize your guru, in the aspect of the deity Heruka Father-Mother, in the heart of the deity that you have visualized externally, and first of all, confess any negative actions you have done. Confess all non-virtuous actions, like you do during the Vajrasattva practice. When you practice the power of regret, as I mentioned earlier in the retreat, confess in general, every non-virtuous action ever done. Then more specifically, confess from the heart the ten non-virtuous actions done since beginningless rebirths; all vows broken since beginningless rebirths—pratimoksha, bodhicitta and tantric vows; and the heavier negative karmas, or obstacles, created with the guru, such as broken samayas and so forth. Visualize your root guru in the aspect of Heruka in the heart of the deity you have visualized and confess. Then visualize that your guru happily accepts your confession. From your heart, confess all negative karma, especially that created with the guru as object—whatever samayas with the guru that you have transgressed, and degenerated samayas since beginningless rebirths—and visualize that your guru, Heruka Father-Mother, happily accepts.

After that, request, “May I be able to actualize the path to enlightenment in this very lifetime without even a second’s delay. Whenever my death comes, may I be born in the pure land of Heruka Father-Mother. If I cannot be reborn there, may all my rebirths in samsara become most beneficial for all living beings.”

At this point, you can also pray to your heart guru with any other important requests that you or others might have and for the success of the Maitreya project to fulfill all the guru’s holy wishes. Finally, visualize

that your heart guru, Heruka Father-Mother, happily accepts your request.

Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo regarded this as a very powerful puja. He praised it very highly. It's very powerful. If you do this mother tantra praise well, it's the equivalent of one big puja.

If you cannot chant the prayer together, after saying the praise to the Father, before the praise to the Mother, make all your requests, as I mentioned, then do the praise to the mother. Heruka taught five benefits of doing this "Praise in Eight Lines," but I don't remember the exact quotation.

#### MANTRA RECITATION DURING VAJRASATTVA TSOG

One more thing about the Vajrasattva tsog offering puja is how you recite the Vajrasattva mantra after each stanza. You can do it while you are offering music at the end of each stanza, but if possible, you should recite it after the music stops. Just ring your bell and chant the mantra, OM VAJRASATTVA... But if you're pressed for time, you can just recite the mantra while you are offering the music. Ideally, however, when the music stops, everybody should chant the mantra together while playing their bells. That's very good.

Also during that time, I don't know if Lama explained this visualization in his commentary, but visualize the *Guru Puja* merit field and meditate that every single atom of the holy body of each guru in the merit field is Vajrasattva. You can think like that. On every single atom of each member of the *Guru Puja* merit field is Vajrasattva; they are all Guru Vajrasattva. That means Vajrasattva is everything. Each atom of each holy body in the merit field is Guru Vajrasattva; all that is the merit field; that is everything.

The materials we're offering as tsog are purified in emptiness and then generated as tsog. One meaning of the word *tsog* is the assembly, or gathering, of dakas and dakinis...enjoying a feast of human corpses! Mountains of human bodies! I'm joking! Anyway, by gathering, the dakas and dakinis enjoy bliss and wisdom. Then, tsog could also mean collection, which means the combination of method and wisdom, or bliss and voidness, combined together. Method and wisdom together. Tsog is the experience of your mind being inseparable from method and

wisdom. That's the actual meaning of tsog, and that's also the understanding you should have regarding the external tsog. That is the essence of the external tsog, and that is the experience you should have when you take, or eat, the tsog. In actuality, it's your mind, your wisdom, that is inseparable from method and wisdom, the transcendental wisdom mind of bliss and voidness. The real meaning of tsog in this case is, then, collection, the second meaning.

After you finish each verse, nectar beams emanate from the merit field and all the Vajrasattvas, enter your body-mind and the body-minds of all other sentient beings and purify all defilements. As the essence of the merit field is the transcendental wisdom of non-dual bliss and voidness, and that is also the essence of the nectar, you can also think that you are experiencing this. Then you can think that all your defilements have been purified and that you have generated all realizations, in particular, those that were mentioned in the stanza just finished. That realization and all other realizations, from guru devotion up to enlightenment, are generated within your mind and the minds of all sentient beings. You can do this meditation during the Vajrasattva tsog offering.

#### “SONG TO THE SPRING QUEEN”

Finally, when you recite the “Song to the Spring Queen”—that has very secret, extremely secret meanings, as you can see from the words in the stanzas—at that time your mind is in meditation, in the experience of the essence of the highest path of tantra. Your mind is in the experience of that which allows you to achieve enlightenment in one short lifetime of the age of degeneration—the unification of method and wisdom—non-dual with emptiness and enjoying that. Then you make strong, heartfelt requests to the dakas and dakinis. Their particular function is to respond to your requests. Why do we visualize dakas and dakinis in the merit field? Well, we visualize protectors—they have their own particular function, so we ask their help. The dakas and dakinis come before the protectors, and they too all have their particular jobs to do. I don't know where their office is! Maybe in Los Angeles! Anyway, it doesn't matter. ... Make strong requests to the dakas and dakinis. It's their job to grant blessings.

This is the essential meditation to do during this practice. Basically,

it's to request the dakas and dakinis to grant the blessing of the realization, or experience, of clear light. This allows you to quickly cease all defilements, gross and subtle; to cease the gross mind and to achieve enlightenment, the unification of holy body with holy mind, in this very lifetime, this one short lifetime of the degenerate age. You both request that and meditate on it. Even if you don't have the actual experience, visualization of the experience serves to prepare your mind for the actual experience.

These have been a few words about what to do while reciting these prayers so that we can make our lives more productive, more beneficial for sentient beings.

Now it's finished. There is now no more!

#### DEDICATION

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings—which are totally empty from their own side—may the I—which is totally empty from its own side—achieve Guru Vajrasattva's enlightenment—which is also empty from its own side—and lead all sentient beings—who are also empty from their own side—to that enlightenment—which is also empty from its own side—by myself alone, who is also empty from its own side.”

Recite the buddhas' names to increase the merits. [Recitation of the multiplying mantras.]

These buddhas' names increase each merit 100,000 times and also help to actualize all the prayers that you have done.

“Due to the blessings of the eminent buddhas and bodhisattvas, unbetraying dependent arising and my special attitude, may all my pure prayers succeed immediately.”

So, good night.

Friday, April 16

## EVENING: FINAL VAJRASATTVA SESSION

I came back! [Rinpoche had been at the morning puja.]

### PALDEN LHAMO PRACTICE

Since you already blessed the inner offering this morning you don't need to do it again; you can start the puja from after that part. Of course, it can be blessed again and again, but I'm just saying that since you have blessed it already, you can start from blessing the libation or tea offering. The blessing I'm doing here is just for my own inner offering! [Rinpoche blesses his inner offering.]

Now to make some noise! [Rinpoche plays the cymbals for a long time; then the Palden Lhamo offering is performed.]

### HOW TO MAKE PRECISE DEDICATION

Now let's do a more precise dedication together, praying together, from the heart.

“Due to all the past, present and future merits collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may any of my immediate family members and the previous generations who have passed away”...so whatever I mention, you should also think. In this way the dedication is done together—when everybody does it together, it becomes very powerful. As I mentioned the other day, if you compare doing prayers alone and doing prayers together, doing them together in a group is more powerful. This is mentioned in a thought transformation commentary by one of the Kadampa geshe—I don't remember exactly, perhaps Konchog Gyaltzen in a commentary on the *Seven-point Thought Transformation*—where I think he quoted a sutra text. As I mentioned that time, if you compare doing Vajrasattva retreat alone, reciting the

mantra alone, with reciting the mantra with others, reciting it together is more powerful. We apply what the text says about doing prayers together to the group Vajrasattva retreat that we are doing together here.

Therefore, if we dedicate together, it is very powerful. If you all think of the meaning while I say the words, it becomes more than just a prayer asking for something: “Please give me this and that.” When we pray by dedicating the merits—not just those we have collected today but all the past, present and future merits of ourselves and others—buddhas, bodhisattvas and all the rest of the sentient beings—heaping them up and dedicating together—it becomes extremely powerful.

“Due to all the past, present and future merits collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all the rest of the sentient beings, may any of my immediate family members and the previous generations who have passed away; the deceased people whose names were read out just before—including any people whose names were given to me or for whom I have promised to pray; people who rely upon me, including those who have passed away; and the numberless sentient beings, who are suffering unimaginably in the lower realms, immediately get liberated from the lower realms—the hell, hungry ghost and animal realms—and reincarnate in a pure land where they can become enlightened, or achieve enlightenment quickly by receiving perfect human bodies in all their future lifetimes and meeting perfectly qualified Mahayana gurus and the Mahayana teachings.

“Due to all the past, present and future merits collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all the rest of the sentient beings, just by hearing that somebody is sick, may I cause that sentient being to recover immediately, and just by hearing that somebody has died, may I cause that sentient being never ever to be reborn in the lower realms, or if already born there, to immediately reincarnate in a pure land where that being can become enlightened, or if reborn human but with no opportunity to practice Dharma, to achieve a perfect human body, meet a Mahayana guru and the Mahayana teachings, and quickly attain enlightenment.

“Due to all the past, present and future merits collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all the rest of the sentient beings, may I, my family members, all the students and benefactors of this organization—especially those who sacrifice their lives offering service for others and the teaching of the Buddha through this organization—and all those who

rely upon me—for whom I promised to pray or whose name has been given to me—all have long lives, and may all our wishes succeed immediately according to the holy Dharma.”

We specify this because whatever is according to the holy Dharma becomes good karma. If all our wishes succeed according to the holy Dharma, nothing becomes the cause of suffering, nothing becomes non-virtue, nothing becomes the cause of the lower realms, nothing becomes the cause of suffering. That’s why that word is very important. Just general success could include non-virtuous actions and therefore we’d be praying for negative karma to succeed. There could be that possibility. Therefore, to avoid that possibility, we pray for our wishes to succeed, but to succeed according to the holy Dharma. So, for example, we pray for a person’s business to succeed, but to become Dharma, not non-virtuous business.

The most important thing in life is to actualize the very essence of life—the ultimate, real meaning of life—to actualize the path to enlightenment, which is the best way to benefit other sentient beings. Of course, the real meaning of life is to benefit others, but what is the best way to do that? That is to develop the path to enlightenment in your own mind. In this way your body, speech and mind, which normally harm others, will never harm others and will become only beneficial—the cause of happiness for all sentient beings. The only way that that can happen is for you to develop the path to enlightenment in your mind. Otherwise, from life to life, you will directly or indirectly harm other sentient beings, with ego, with ignorance, anger, attachment and so forth.

Therefore, the best way to benefit others—to actualize the very essence of life, the real meaning of life—is to actualize the path to enlightenment in this very life. In this very life, and even *that* without a second’s delay—to complete all the realizations of the path to enlightenment, from guru devotion up to enlightenment, especially bodhicitta, which is the one thing that makes your life most beneficial for all living beings and which makes it possible for you to achieve enlightenment and thus to be able to enlighten all sentient beings by yourself. Therefore, it is especially bodhicitta that you should actualize in this very lifetime, on this body, and even *that* without even a second’s delay.

Also dedicate that all our meditation centers, including Land of

Medicine Buddha, and all our social services—schools, hospices, the leprosy project and so forth—can offer service to and become most beneficial for all sentient beings, immediately pacify their sufferings of body and mind, and cause them to actualize the path to enlightenment. “May all our meditation centers be able to spread the complete teaching of Lama Tsong Khapa—the stainless teaching that unifies sutra and tantra—in the minds of all sentient beings by receiving everything they need. And may all our projects succeed, including Rockin’ for Freedom and all the other projects at LMB.”

Some members from our Singapore center, Amitabha Buddhist Centre, have come here to meet during the retreat. The fund-raising director, the secretary and the public relations person have come all the way from Singapore to discuss how many sentient beings to enlighten! How many sentient beings Amitabha Buddhist Centre should liberate—and how many they should *not!* I’m joking! Their project is to build a new temple and many holy objects—as usual! Anyway, they have been working very hard for the past two or three years, raising funds in order to purchase land. Now they have the land but there have been many difficulties, many obstacles to building the temple.

Therefore, please, everyone dedicate your own merits of the three times, as well as those collected by buddhas, bodhisattvas and the rest of the sentient beings, for the organizers and members of Amitabha Buddhist Centre to have harmonious minds, to work together in unity, and to have harmonious thoughts so that all their projects—the temple, the holy objects and everything else—will be accomplished immediately, and for the center to be most beneficial for all sentient beings, especially in spreading the complete teaching of Lama Tsong Khapa in the minds of all sentient beings.

And as I normally mention, “May whoever comes to the center—not only human beings but even spirits and insects who come onto the center’s land—from that moment on, never ever be reborn in the lower realms, never ever go back to lower realms again, and just by being on the center’s land, may all their negative karma be purified immediately, and just by being there, may they find unshakable faith in refuge and karma and be able to actualize bodhicitta. Just by coming onto that land, may they be able to transform their minds from ego and self-cherishing into bodhicitta, cherishing others, and without hardship or obstacle, be

able to achieve the complete path to enlightenment.”

Similarly, here at Land of Medicine Buddha and at all the rest of our meditation centers, schools, hospices, the leprosy project, the destitute home—however, all those different social service activities that offer service to others—dedicate for the same thing to happen.

Also dedicate all those merits for all the rest of the projects in this organization to succeed immediately by receiving everything they need and for the 500-foot Maitreya Buddha statue to be completed as quickly as possible by receiving everything required.

“May this statue and all our other projects and centers cause loving kindness, compassion and bodhicitta to be generated in the minds of all sentient beings, and due to that, may no sentient being ever again experience earthquakes, wars, famines, disease, dangers of fire and wind—all these frightening things, tornadoes, cyclones and so forth—or any other undesirable thing.”

For example, these past few years, America has experienced many weather problems, which have caused billions of dollars of damage. Every year it seems that another one happens. Suddenly people have to evacuate their homes, move to another place and so forth. “Therefore, may all our centers, projects, statues and so forth”—the conclusion is this—“cause all sentient beings to achieve enlightenment as quickly as possible.”

#### THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN DEDICATION AND PRAYER

When we make prayers, when we dedicate, we are using our merit to make these results happen. That’s dedication; there’s something to dedicate. Making these wishes without having something to dedicate is praying; that’s a prayer. Saying, “Due to this, may (something) happen,” is dedication. However, even when we dedicate, we can visualize the Medicine Buddha and use him as an object of prayer. In that way it becomes more powerful, more effective. It becomes more than dedication—by relying on the Buddha, on the Triple Gem for success, it also becomes prayer.

## RELY ON DEITIES, NOT PEOPLE

It is said in many of the Kadampa geshe's teachings that if you rely on people, you get into trouble, into much confusion. Therefore, if success is what you are looking for, rely on deities. In Tibetan, it says *lha*, which is also the word for worldly devas, so it might sound as if we're being told to rely on those. But you have to understand from the context what it's talking about. In certain contexts the Tibetan word *lha* can mean just worldly gods, but it can also mean deities. Therefore, you have to understand the meaning behind it by looking at the context.

For example, when Lama Tsong Khapa rebuilt the Maitreya statue in Lhasa or started *Mön-lam chen-mo*—the great Lhasa prayer festival, which runs for the first fifteen days of the Tibetan New Year to commemorate the special days when Guru Shakyamuni Buddha performed many miracles to subdue those different sentient beings' minds, to liberate them—he relied on the deity Dzambhala. Any merit that you create on those days is multiplied one hundred million times. Therefore, to benefit, to liberate many sentient beings, to bring them to enlightenment, Lama Tsong Khapa established the great prayer festival, so that many people—both sangha and lay—could collect extensive merit. One of the particular things the monks do, for example, is conduct examinations on what they have learned during their thirty or forty years of study—the texts they have memorized, the meaning of what they have studied and so forth. They offer examinations, pray for other sentient beings and debate on the five major sutra texts they have studied.

Also, in the mornings, the Ganden Tripa reads the previous life stories of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha to the monks; the life stories of Buddha's past lives, when he was a bodhisattva. How for three countless great eons he sacrificed his life for other sentient beings, practicing the ten paramitas. How for three countless great eons he made charity of himself; how he practiced morality and so forth for three countless great eons. How he sacrificed his life for three countless great eons for the sake of other sentient beings, following the path to enlightenment, and then achieved enlightenment and revealed the teachings, the path, to us sentient beings. For that purpose—in order to reveal the path, to reveal the teachings to us sentient beings, to liberate us from the oceans of samsaric suffering, the continuity of which has no beginning, and to bring us to

enlightenment—Guru Shakyamuni Buddha sacrificed his life and bore many hardships to follow the path for three countless great eons. He did all this for the benefit of *us* sentient beings. Buddha's life story shows us how to practice Dharma, how to follow the path; it contains that. It inspires us to follow Buddha's example.

The festival also gives lay people the chance to make offerings to the sangha on those days. They come from all over Tibet and make many offerings to holy objects and to the sangha—tea offerings, food offerings, money offerings and so forth. So Lama Tsong Khapa put many things together for sentient beings to collect extensive merit on those days.

The point I'm making is that when Lama Tsong Khapa wanted to build a temple or something and had no money with which to build it, instead of relying on people, he would rely on the deity and make torma offerings to Dzambhala. Then everything would come—just by making torma offerings to Dzambhala, whatever was needed would just come from all directions. Of course, Lama Tsong Khapa himself was Dzambhala; there's no question about that! He was the Compassionate Buddha, so there's no question that he was also Dzambhala, but what the Kadampa geshe were saying was that to have all success without confusion, trust the deity, rely on the deity—which means the Triple Gem. If you rely only on people, you get involved in many things, much negative karma.

#### DEDICATION

“Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all the rest of the sentient beings, from now on, whatever I do, whatever life I experience—ups and downs, health or illness, wealth or poverty, gain or loss, praise or criticism, good reputation or bad—whatever happens—life or death or even rebirth in hell—the most important thing is that that experience be beneficial for other sentient beings.”

If your life experiences, your actions, are beneficial for other sentient beings, they become meaningful. Those experiences becoming meaningful fulfill the purpose of your life. When your experiences become beneficial for others you are achieving the purpose of your life. Otherwise, no matter for how many eons you lead a healthy life without any sickness, no matter how much power, wealth and so forth you have, your life is

empty, meaningless. Therefore, even if your life turns out to be plagued by one sickness after another—migraine headaches or anything else—if those sicknesses help you develop compassion for other sentient beings by experiencing them for others, you can purify all your past negative karma and collect extensive merit; all the time that you are sick, you are bringing yourself closer to enlightenment. In this way, your experiencing life problems becomes most beneficial. Having problems in your life makes it meaningful, productive. Your mind becomes more spiritual, more Dharma. It becomes quicker and easier for you to achieve enlightenment. You become closer to enlightening all sentient beings.

Therefore, dedicate the merits of the three times for whatever you do, whatever life you experience from now on, to be most beneficial for all sentient beings, to cause all sentient beings to achieve enlightenment as quickly as possible.

Also dedicate, “May Lama Tsong Khapa’s teaching, which unifies sutra and tantra, spread and flourish in all directions, and may I myself be able to make this happen.

“Due to the past, present and future merits collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all the rest of the sentient beings, which are totally non-existent from their own side”—they exist, but they are totally non-existent from their own side. They exist, but it’s like they don’t exist. When you see the very nature of that, you see that they exist, but it’s like they don’t. They are not totally non-existent, but it’s like they don’t exist. The way things exist is extremely subtle. When you look at the very nature of phenomena, such as merits, it’s like they don’t exist—“may I—who also appears to the hallucinating mind as not merely labeled by the mind, as inherently existent, but in reality, that way of appearing is totally false, totally non-existent—achieve Vajrasattva’s enlightenment, by thinking of the very meaning of the guru, the absolute guru—which appears to my hallucinating mind as not merely labeled by the mind, as something real from there, but which in reality is totally non-existent—and lead all sentient beings—who appear to my hallucinating mind as not merely labeled by the mind, but who in reality are totally non-existent—to that enlightenment—which appears to my hallucinating mind as not merely labeled by the mind, as something real appearing from there but which in reality is *totally* non-existent, empty—by myself alone—who again appears as not merely labeled by the mind, as something real, appearing

as a real me, a real I from there, which is a total hallucination, which is totally non existent.”

Then recite the buddhas’ and bodhisattvas’ name mantras that multiply each merit 100,000 times and also make all prayers to be actualized, to succeed.

“Due to the blessings of the eminent buddhas and bodhisattvas, due to unbetraying dependent arising and due to my special attitude, may all my pure prayers be accomplished immediately.”



Saturday, April 17

## WEEKEND TEACHING

Good afternoon, everybody. Somehow, it seems as if you've been waiting for eons!

## MOTIVATION

Think, “No matter what, I must achieve enlightenment in order to free the numberless other sentient beings, who are the source of all my past, present and future happiness, including enlightenment; who are the source of all my comfort, every single comfort, happiness, and all desirable things; who are the most precious thing in my life; who are just like me, wanting only happiness and not wanting suffering. But, even though all they want is happiness, they are totally devoid of happiness. Hell beings, hungry ghosts and animals are devoid of even temporary happiness. Devas and human beings, who at least have the opportunity of experiencing temporary happiness, are still devoid of ultimate happiness, everlasting happiness—the cessation of all suffering and its causes in their entirety; even those sentient beings who have the opportunity of experiencing temporary happiness are still devoid of ultimate happiness. And even those who are free from samsara are devoid of the great liberation, the peerless happiness of full enlightenment. However, what sentient beings want is happiness but they are devoid of happiness. What they do not want is suffering, but they constantly experience pervasive compounding suffering and on top of that, the suffering of change and the suffering of pain.

“To free those numberless sentient beings from all this suffering and bring them from happiness to happiness to full enlightenment is the ultimate goal of my life, the real purpose of my being alive, why I have been born human at this time, why I have taken, or received, this precious human body at this time. To succeed in this, I need to achieve full

enlightenment—cessation of all mistakes of the mind, all gross and subtle defilements, and the completion of all realizations. For that, I need to actualize the graduated path to enlightenment, which ceases all defilements, all the mistakes that are on my mental continuum. Therefore, I am going to listen to the holy Dharma.”

Please listen to the teaching well, with the purest motivation of bodhicitta and the proper conduct for listening to teachings.

#### BUDDHA’S INTENT

Why did Guru Shakyamuni Buddha descend to this earth? Why did the Buddha come onto this earth, into this world? The main purpose was to reveal the Dharma, to guide us sentient beings—to guide sentient beings including you, including yourself. To guide you, Buddha descended to this world.

Buddha came into this world for you. For you, Buddha collected merits for three countless great eons. It is said in the texts that even under one tree, Buddha sacrificed his body to other sentient beings numberless times. For three countless great eons Buddha sacrificed his life, his body, his limbs, to other sentient beings so that he could complete the two types of merit—the merit of wisdom and the merit of method—and achieve enlightenment for you, for yourself.

For three countless great eons, Guru Shakyamuni Buddha also practiced morality; he also practiced morality for that great length of time, for three countless great eons. He also practiced patience, perseverance and so forth for three countless great eons for you; to achieve enlightenment for you; in order to reveal this Dharma that we are studying now, that we have been studying so far, that we have been listening to, hearing. For this purpose. So, as much Buddhadharma as we have learned, for this to happen, Buddha bore much hardship, for many lifetimes over three countless great eons; bore so much hardship to achieve enlightenment in order to reveal the whole path to us, to you, and bring you to enlightenment. To bring each of us to enlightenment.

#### HOW DOES BUDDHA GUIDE?

The very foundation of the entire Buddhadharma, the very foundation

of all Buddha's advice, Buddha's teaching, is the Four Noble Truths. As Maitreya Buddha mentioned in *Do-de-gyen*, the sicknesses are to be known; the cause of the sicknesses to be abandoned; comfort, or happiness, to be achieved; and the medicine to be taken. Like that, suffering is to be known; the cause of suffering, which is called *kun-jung*, all arising—the delusion and karma from where all suffering arises—to be abandoned, removed; cessation to be achieved; and the path to be actualized.

Therefore, liberation, the whole thing, taking the opportunity to achieve liberation, starts by knowing suffering. It's not only that we have buddha nature within us—we have to take the opportunity, by using our buddha nature to achieve, to actually experience, liberation. That comes from the determination to be free, liberated from suffering. For that, you need to know suffering. Knowing suffering, the suffering of samsara, makes you seek the cause from which it comes. Thus arises the wish to abandon, or remove, it. Then you come to know cessation, that which is to be achieved, ultimate happiness. Also, from knowing suffering, both the wish to achieve liberation from samsara and the wish to follow the path derive. Everything starts, comes, from knowing suffering, the First Noble Truth.

However, as Buddha mentioned, the way Buddha liberates sentient beings is not by washing away their sufferings with water, by eliminating their suffering by hand or by transplanting his own realizations into others. Sentient beings get liberated by Buddha's revealing the truth, by revealing the ultimate nature. By his revealing the truth, the ultimate nature, we sentient beings get liberated. That is to be realized. The truth is like an atomic bomb in eliminating our sufferings of samsara.

#### A MEDITATION ON EMPTINESS

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

We think there's a real one, a real I, a real me, here doing Vajrasattva

retreat, or listening to teachings. Here, sitting on this chair, or on this cushion—a real me listening to teachings. Now, I is your label; me, I. You point to your body and label it I: “I am going out.” You don’t pick up a book and point to it and say, “I am going out!” No. You point to your body and apply the label, “I am going out.”

And as your mind does the activity of thinking, you label, “I am thinking.” As your mind meditates, “I am meditating.” By first thinking what kind of activity your mind is doing—for example, it’s wandering—you say, “I am wandering. I am not meditating.” “Are you meditating now?” “No.” You check the mind, then you say, “I am wandering,” or, if it is meditating, being transformed into virtue by analytical or fixed meditation, you say, “I am meditating”; you call, or label, it, “I am meditating.”

In exactly the same way as in this example, when you say “I,” instead of pointing here [at your chest], point at this table; label I on this table. So now, you have labeled I on the table, but where is that I on the table? You cannot find I on the table. Even though you label I on the table, you cannot find it anywhere, on any corner of the table, inside the table, above the table—you cannot find I anywhere. Not only that, but this corner of the table is not I, this other corner is not I—no part of the table is I. Even all the parts of the table together are not I.

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

Anyway, I is nowhere to be found, not even inside your body. Normally you believe I to be inside, but even if that’s what you normally believe, apprehend—that there’s a real I inside the body, there’s a real me inside the body—if you look for it, you cannot find it. When you start

to analyze, it cannot be found. Where is it exactly? Look for it. Where is it exactly, inside the body? Where is it exactly, inside the chest—the part of the body where we normally believe the I to reside? It's somewhere there, within the body. We don't think that the I is outside—we think that it's inside, inside the chest. But if you try to identify exactly where the I is located, it cannot be found. There is no particular location. You can't find it. If you look for the I, you cannot find it or its particular location.

I heard that Japanese people point to their nose when they say “I,” but I don't know whether at that time they actually believe, or feel, the I to be there, inside their nose. I'm not sure about that, but I don't think so. That may just be their habit, how the majority of people in that society behave. I haven't actually seen people doing that, but that's what I heard—Japanese people point to their nose when they say “I.” I, here [nose]. Does anybody know about Japanese people doing this? Anyway, they don't point to their tongues!

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

Say you are doing the meditation where you travel up and down through the channels of your body, meditating on the *chakras*. When you think that you are in your navel chakra, at the beginning it looks as if you are in the navel chakra, that there is a real I in the navel chakra. At the beginning it appears like that. But then you think, “What is this I that I feel? The I in my navel chakra? That there's a real I in my navel chakra? What is this I?” and analyze that I. Analyze the I that you feel at that particular spot, at that location in your body. What is that I?

If you think, “What is this I that is traveling, going up and down through the channels, dwelling in the navel chakra?” it's nothing other than that which is merely labeled by the mind. When you look at the real I that appears at that particular spot, in that chakra, even that real I is not there. When you analyze, “What is that I abiding there?” when you meditate like that, you find that it is nothing other than what has been merely labeled by the mind.

When you think that the nature of the I is dependent arising, subtle dependent arising, the real I that appeared to you at the beginning and that you apprehend, disappears. It immediately becomes empty. It

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

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

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

Even this association of body and mind is not I. As the texts state, the aggregates—this association of body and mind—are what is received. They are what is received, and I is the receiver. I received these aggregates this time; I is the receiver. I is the subject who *receives* these aggregates, who has received, or taken, them. The I is the receiver. Can you say “taker,” that I is the taker? Like take-away food! I is to be taken away, like take-away food! I is to be taken away. Anyway, I’m joking...well, there is a way in which this can be true.

In Tibetan, we say *nye-wa lang-cha lem-pa-ko*. *Nye-wa lang-cha*: what is to be taken, the aggregates. The aggregates are what is to be taken, and I is the taker, who takes them. I is the subject and the aggregates are the object, what is to be taken. I is the taker of the aggregates. *Nye-wa lang-cha*, and *lem-pa-ko*; *lang-cha* is what is taken and *lem-pa-ko* is the taker. So, there are two. The I created the cause of these aggregates; the continuity of this I created the cause of these aggregates, this samsara. Then this I has received, or taken, these aggregates. So the aggregates are what is to be taken and I is the taker. Subject and object. Therefore, they are not one. Therefore, the aggregates are not I, cannot be I, the subject. Because aggregates are what is to be taken—the object. I is the taker of

that object. So they cannot be one.

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

In that way, there's one reason. The other reason is similar. [We say] “*My* aggregates, *my* aggregates, *my* aggregates.” Even from the common, language point of view, “*my* aggregates” shows that the aggregates are the possession, and *my*, or I, is the possessor. “*My* aggregates, *my* mind, *my* body.” Even normal language shows that these two are completely different; two completely different phenomena. They are not one. They are totally different phenomena. “*My* aggregates, *my* body, *my* mind” shows that they are possessions, and from that it follows that *my*, I, is the possessor. Again, through that reason, you can see that there's no way in which the possession, that which is possessed, can be the possessor, I. There is no way. The two are totally different phenomena. They don't exist separately, but they exist differently.

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

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

Say your body did something that normally brings millions of dollars, but nobody saw it. If your I had no relation to your aggregates, you could say, “I did it”! Since doing the action that brings millions of dollars didn't depend on the body or the mind doing it, you could take the credit, “I

did it. I should get the money"! You could argue like that. If there were something good to gain, something that you like or want to acquire, you could say, "I did it." But if what you'd done were criminal or subject to punishment, you could say, "It wasn't me"!

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

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

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

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

It's *exactly* the same with the table, as I mentioned before. You can find the I nowhere on these aggregates. Neither are the aggregates the I. *Exactly* the same. Even though you label I on the table, you cannot find I on the table. The table is not I. *Exactly* as you cannot find your I on the table even though your mind labels the table I, *exactly* like that, even though your mind labels I on the aggregates, you cannot find I anywhere on the aggregates. Neither that, nor are the aggregates I.

When you get a feeling that the aggregates are not I, when you cannot find I on the aggregates, this understanding makes very clear what is the base and what is the label; you are able to differentiate. *Now* you are able to differentiate between the base and the label. After this analysis, you are able to differentiate what is the base and what is the label I. Before, it was unclear to your mind; these two things were unclear. His Holiness the Dalai Lama would say those two are mixed up, as if the table were mixed into the base, as if the table were inside the base.

His Holiness Ling Rinpoche used to say that the definition of the object to be refuted is the appearance of the base and the label as undifferentiable. For your mind, in your view, the base and the label—for

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

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

Now, even if you have one hundred percent understanding, or recognition, that the base, the aggregates, is not I, that the I exists nowhere, I would not call that having realized emptiness. In other words, you understand through the four-point analysis, the analysis of the four vital points, that if the I is inherently existent, it should exist either as oneness with the aggregates or as completely separate from them; it has to be pervaded by being either oneness with the aggregates or existing separately from the aggregates. But simply understanding that the inherently existent I is neither oneness with the aggregates nor does it exist separately from them—having a clear idea that the aggregates are not one with the I but also don’t exist separately from the I—this awareness alone, the ability to distinguish between label and base, is not the realization of emptiness. Even if you had this awareness—the ability to distinguish label from base—even if the difference between the base and the label had become clear for your mind, still I would not say that you had realized emptiness.

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

What you have believed, were one hundred percent convinced of, and so strongly clung to, grasped at, is suddenly, totally non-existent. There's nothing to grab onto, nothing to hold onto. Suddenly, it's totally non-existent. Nothing of what you have been holding onto, cherishing as if it really exists, is truly *there*. Nothing of what, so far, you have never had any doubt about, have been grasping at continuously, holding onto like a cat grabbing a mouse—all its claws clutching tightly together—nothing of that I exists. Suddenly, that about which you have never had any doubt since beginningless rebirths—even since this morning or since you were born into this life—suddenly, it doesn't go anywhere. Suddenly, there's nothing there. Maybe it's gone to the beach! Or to the mountains! To a retreat center! Anyway, it doesn't go anywhere.

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

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

The right way of perceiving that the I is empty is an extremely deep, intensive experience, but there are basically two kinds of experience you

can have. You can feel incredible, that you have discovered the most precious thing, such as a wish-granting jewel. Or like a person who has been looking for or waiting to meet a dear friend for many, many years—praying, wishing, to meet that person for many years—and then, after all these many years, suddenly meeting that friend. Or like you’ve been waiting to get a billion dollars for a long time and then suddenly you get the money. In other words, when you see emptiness, you feel unbelievable joy; incredible joy that makes you cry.

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

As I often say, even when you recite *The Heart Sutra*, when you say the words, “No ear, no nose, no tongue..no ice cream! No coffee, no chocolate, no cigarettes, no drinks...!”—if fear comes into your heart when you say “no this, no that,” if fear arises, that’s a good sign. Fear arising means your recitation of *The Heart Sutra*, *The Essence of Wisdom*, is hitting, or touching, the root of samsara, hurting it. Your recitation of *The Heart Sutra* has touched the root of samsara, ignorance; has hit it. Your recitation of *The Heart Sutra*, your way of thinking when you recite *The Essence of Wisdom*, is fitting—like an arrow or a bomb. As an arrow hits its target, as a bomb or a torpedo hits its target, the enemy at which you aimed, like that, your recitation of *The Heart Sutra*, those teachings on emptiness, your way of thinking, your meditation, has hit its target, the object of ignorance, the inherently existent I—the I that is apprehended by simultaneously-born ignorance. You have hit the target you’re supposed to hit. The target that you are supposed to hit with the arrow or bomb of your recitation of the words of *The Heart Sutra* and thinking on their meaning is the object to be refuted, the inherently existent I. Fear in your heart means that you have hit the target.

The texts explain that it is highly intelligent practitioners who have the experience of incredible, blissful joy, tears running down their cheeks, and feel as if they'd found an unbelievably precious jewel, and less intelligent practitioners who feel fear when they realize emptiness. At that time, you should not try to escape from this fear—trying to do so is your greatest obstacle to realizing emptiness. Instead, you must realize that this is the one time, the one opportunity, to realize emptiness—the only wisdom that can directly cut the delusions, the root of samsara, the gross and subtle defilements, bringing liberation from samsara and full enlightenment. Knowing this, you must go through the fear; you must complete your experience. Go through the fear like crossing a river. Otherwise, if you block your own progress the one time that you have the opportunity of realizing emptiness, if you run away from that, like running away from teachings, from meditation courses, especially my meditation courses—of course, those are good to run away from!—if you run from the fear that arises when you realize emptiness, that is no good at all.

However, you never have to worry about the I ceasing, because the I never ceases. The I that is the label never ceases. The I never stops, never ceases. Why is there always continuity of the I, the label? Why is there always continuity of the self? Because there is always continuity of consciousness. Even after enlightenment, the consciousness continues forever. Even though the body might change—one body stops, another body is taken—the continuity of consciousness is always there, even after enlightenment. Therefore, the continuity of the I never ceases. It always exists because the base, the continuity of consciousness, always exists. Therefore, thinking, “I’m going to cease, I’m going to become non-existent” is totally wrong.

When that feeling arises, the appearance of losing or having totally lost your I, you shouldn’t be worried that that appearance means you’re falling into nihilism. Because of that appearance, you should not be worried that you are falling into nihilism—just as you should not be worried that the I is becoming non-existent. There are two things—one is the fear of falling into nihilism; the other is the worry, “I am becoming non-existent.” You should not be scared of those things. If you do get scared, you’ll block yourself from realizing emptiness; this one opportunity to realize emptiness will have arisen and you’ll have blocked it yourself.

A very clear commentary on the Mahamudra by Ketsang Jamyang (I'm not hundred percent sure that's his name), which is regarded as a very effective teaching, explains why this appearance of the self becoming non-existent happens. It happens because it *has* to happen. Furthermore, it is a sign that there is no inherent existence on the I, the merely labeled I. There is no inherent existence on that I, and the experience of its becoming non-existent shows, proves, that. When you have this experience, you see the Middle Way, the Madhyamika, view. You see the Middle Way, devoid of the two extremes of nihilism and eternalism.

I would say that realizing that the object of ignorance—the concept of the inherently existent I—is empty, realizing the emptiness that is the negation of the object to be refuted, is the first step towards liberation. I'm not saying that by that alone you have entered—of the five paths to liberation—the path of merit. I'm not saying that. But it's like you've taken a step towards liberation, because that wisdom is the main thing that directly ceases the defilements.

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

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

In exactly the same way, for each aggregate—for example, the aggregate of form, the general aggregate of form—it's exactly same. The same

logic applies. The merely labeled aggregate exists but it doesn't exist on that base. Empty. It doesn't exist there; it's not there, not existent on this base. The aggregate of form does not exist on the collection of the limbs, either in all their parts or on the whole collection together. So there's no question about the inherently existent, real aggregate: it doesn't exist anywhere. The *real* one appearing from there—the aggregate, the general aggregate of form—exists nowhere. Similarly, if you go to the parts of the limbs, to the arms, head, legs, stomach, and so forth, all those merely labeled ones exist, but they don't exist on their own bases. Even the merely labeled head cannot be found on the collection of its parts, the brain and everything else. If you look for head, it cannot be found there.

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

Thus, everything from the I down to the particles of the atoms, or, from the general aggregate of form down to the particles of atoms, which appears as something real, is not *there*. It's totally empty; every single thing is totally empty. What appears to your view, your hallucinating mind, seems to be something real, from there—but it's not there. Starting from the real I down to the real particles of the atoms, what appears is not there; it's totally empty—not space, but like space; totally empty, non-existent.

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

though merely labeled cognition exists.

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

Finally, it's the same with the aggregate of consciousness. Merely labeled consciousness exists, but it cannot be found on its base, like a carpet on the floor. The merely labeled consciousness doesn't exist like that. The mind, which knows phenomena, which does the function of continuing from one life to the next, perceiving merely the essence of the object, that knowing phenomenon, *she-pa*, because that mind exists, your mind labels it *nam-she*, consciousness. But using the same analysis I mentioned before, neither that consciousness nor the split seconds of consciousness can be found on their respective bases.

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

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

[Long meditation.]

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

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

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

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

The specific sufferings of the six realms include those of the eight hot hells, the eight cold hell sufferings and the six or four neighborhood sufferings. The sufferings of the hungry ghosts—the heavy suffering of hunger and thirst, and on top of that the suffering of heat, cold and exhaustion. The animal sufferings—extreme stupidity, being eaten by one another, being tortured, heat and cold. Human beings' eight types of sufferings—the sufferings of rebirth, old age, sicknesses and death; the inability to find desirable objects; even if found, the inability to find satisfaction in them; and on top of that, the fear and worry of separating

from them; and finally, the five types of sufferings of the aggregates. The sufferings of the sura and asura realms include the heaviest sufferings of the devas—the five signs of impending death, always fighting with and getting controlled by other, more powerful, devas and getting banished.

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

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

To escape from this hallucination, to be liberated from this hallucinating mind, we take refuge and keep precepts. Refuge is the very foundation of the Buddhadharma, the gate through which we enter the Dharma path. We take refuge and vows to make certain that we practice, to make sure that we devote ourselves to actually practicing Dharma. That is the fundamental reason for taking refuge and vows. In order to liberate others from the hallucinating mind, ignorance, first we ourselves have to be liberated from the hallucination, from the hallucinating mind, from all these sufferings that we have been caught in since time without beginning, for beginningless lifetimes. Thus, refuge and precepts are the basic means, the very foundation of the path, for liberating both ourselves and others from the hallucination, from the hallucinating mind, from all suffering, and gaining the ultimate happiness of the highest, full enlightenment.

#### DEDICATION

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

that which has been generated increase.”

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

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

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

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

Sunday, April 18

## WEEKEND TEACHING

Good afternoon.

## REINCARNATION

When we die, when the day of our death comes, what can help?

If there were no reincarnation or karma, no continuity of consciousness after this life, even if there were only one life, I still think it would be very necessary to benefit others and avoid giving them harm. Even if there were just one life, no reincarnation or karma, it would still be necessary not to harm others but to benefit them. Why? Because, just as you want happiness and don't want suffering, just as you want to be loved by others and don't want to be harmed by them, in exactly the same way, all others also want, need, to be loved by you; others want help from you. Just as you don't want harm from others, others don't want harm from you. Therefore, even in the case of one life—as far as your own happiness and that of all other living beings, including animals and insects, not just humans, is concerned—the practice of the good heart is still the most important thing you can do in your life. It becomes the most important thing in life for your own happiness and success and—because others need happiness and don't want suffering and, therefore, want you to help them and not harm them—your practice of the good heart is also the most important thing for the happiness and success of others.

Even in the case of one life—no karma, no reincarnation—you still can't just do anything you want; you can't just live a wild life. Even if you don't accept reincarnation or karma, you still can't just live a wild life. You can't live like a tiger, harming any being you want—whatever thought comes, just harming another simply for your own benefit. If it's something to eat—eating it; if it's something to attack—attacking it—without any concern for those other beings, those other animals, like

zebras, who are attacked by tigers, those very pitiful zebras. They have nothing with which they can harm others. Zebras, or deer...well, deer have horns, but they can't inflict much pain with those...anyway, I'm joking. So, those animals—deer or others that don't have much ability to harm, to attack others or to defend themselves—get eaten by tigers. Whenever the tigers need food they just go there and kill and eat the others with not a single concern for *their* happiness, for those other animals' happiness. Not a single concern for anything except their own happiness, their own needs. There's not a thought for the needs of others. You can't live like that, even should you believe there's just one life, even in the case that you believe the philosophy, religion, doctrine or idea that there's just one life and no karma or reincarnation.

But here, now, we are talking from the point of view that reincarnation and karma do exist; that the consciousness will continue after this life.

What is the explanation, for example, that some children do not feel close to their own parents? The child was born to those parents but doesn't feel close to them and feels close to somebody outside the family instead. The child doesn't feel close to its own parents or family, tradition or culture, but feels very close to some other culture; feels some familiarity, or closeness, to some other, outside people; naturally, feels very close.

For example, you might have had the experience of feeling very close to someone from the moment you meet that person. From the very beginning, just by seeing that person, you feel very close. Of course, it also works the other way—just by seeing a particular person for the first time in your life, you get angry. It's not that you remember this person giving you harm earlier in your life—some years ago, some months ago, or when you were a child—treating you badly or something. It's not like that. It has nothing to do with this life, but at first sight, you immediately hate that person. There are many experiences like this in life. Without the basis of, without depending on, reincarnation and karma, there's no way to explain the occurrence of these things. Without depending on life experience, on reincarnation and karma—the philosophy that is experiential, not just idealistic or intellectual, that is based on life experience, whether you remember it or not, which has been your experience even though you don't remember it—there is no other explanation at all for this kind of experience.

Perhaps on seeing a certain type of animal or person, you get very

scared. There is no obvious reason for this, you can't explain why it happens, but just naturally you get so scared—just by seeing that kind of animal or person. What this shows is that a strong impression or impact was left on your mind when in a previous life you were killed by that type of animal or person, for example, a policeman. A strong imprint was left on your mind, there was a shock, so in this life, when you meet or see that type of animal or person, naturally you get very scared. You don't know why you feel scared, you just do.

Even in one family, children born from the same parents can think totally differently from their parents or each other. From the time they are children, the way they think is like they're from a totally foreign culture. Just like Buddha explained in his teachings, without being taught by anybody, from the time they are very young, some children feel much compassion for other beings. When they see others suffering, having problems, they feel much compassion. Also, certain practices that are done in Buddhism are done intuitively by that person, that child, even though it was born into a totally different culture or family philosophy. Similarly, a child can be born into a Buddhist family but possess a mentality that is totally different from the rest of its family. The child's interests are totally opposite from those of the Buddhist family into which it was born. The child dislikes Dharma, has no interest in it; dislikes the Buddhist practices that the rest of the family do; has no interest in those practices; hates them. That kind of mentality.

However, people's remembering their past lives is not an exclusively Tibetan phenomenon. Reincarnation is not found only in Tibetan culture—"reincarnation occurs only in the blood of Tibetans"! These days, everybody talks about reincarnation and karma. It has become quite common in the West. Even people doing business, talking about business, mention karma, bring up the word "karma." Even business people who don't practice Dharma mention the words karma and reincarnation while they are doing business.

Two or three years ago, I was at San Francisco Airport and overheard some flight attendants using the word "reincarnation" in conversation as they walked through the terminal. They weren't particularly talking about reincarnation, just using the word. Nowadays in the West, it has become quite fashionable to talk about karma and reincarnation.

Not that many years ago, people tended to think that reincarnation

was only in the Tibetan blood. However, it's not like that; it is not just something that concerns only Tibetan people. In the West, the Middle-East and many other parts of the world, there are many children who remember previous lives. One American professor did a lot of research on this. He traveled to many countries and did research in villages where there were children who could remember past lives. He gave or sent me his thick book, which talks about the children he found in many different parts of the world who remembered past lives [Prof. Ian Stevenson, *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation*]. There are also old people who can remember past lives. Not only that, there are also people who can see into the future—not just their own futures but those of others, too.

This kind of education or knowledge is becoming more and more common in Western society, where it was once unknown or was something you didn't talk about. It is now becoming more known in society, becoming the subject of study, experimentation and experience.

However, the conclusion is that there's not one single logical proof that there is no reincarnation or karma. Furthermore, it is no one's experience or realization, nobody has realized, that there is no reincarnation or karma. All that has happened is that people have just assumed, or simply made up the philosophy, religion or idea, that there is no reincarnation or karma. However, there is nobody who has experienced or realized that there is no reincarnation or karma, while those who have experienced or realized the existence of reincarnation and karma are numberless. There are numberless beings who have seen that there is a consciousness and that this consciousness continues after this life. You may not have seen this yourself, but there are others who do possess advanced knowledge of inner phenomena.

For example, normally, when we don't know something, we learn it from others. We don't learn from others things we know. Normally we learn from others things we don't know. That shows that our knowledge is limited, that our mind is incomplete in knowledge. Our mind is so limited, unbelievably limited. There is so much that is unknown. There is so much in life of which we are not aware, that we don't know; there are vast numbers of existent phenomena of which we know nothing.

Only when your mind becomes omniscient, only when you have purified your obscurations by practicing the spiritual path, by practicing Dharma, only when your mental defilements have been purified, ceased,

removed, and your mind has become omniscient, do you no longer need to learn. Only then does learning stop. Only then is your learning complete and you have nothing more to learn.

Therefore, unless you practice Dharma, actualize the spiritual path that ceases all defilements, there will be no end to learning; you will never be able to complete your learning. There will always be things about which you are not aware, that you don't know, even things to do with your own life. To understand everything about even your own life, every subtle karma, just a little spiritual realization is not enough.

#### WHAT HELPS YOU AT THE TIME OF DEATH?

The consciousness continues after this life, and where it goes next, where the consciousness migrates to, where it is reborn, depends on karma. There are only two possible migrations—the body of the suffering migrator and the body of the happy migrator. Until we are free from this suffering realm, these circling aggregates, these circling, defiled, or contaminated, aggregates caused by karma and delusion, there are only two places to which the consciousness can go. Until we are free from all this, the consciousness can reincarnate in only one of two places—the lower realms—the hell, hungry ghost and animal realms—or the upper realms—the human, sura and asura realms.

Where you go depends on a cause, which is karma. If you have collected more powerful virtuous karma in this life, your consciousness will reincarnate in the body of the happy migrator. If the non-virtuous karma that you have collected in this life is greater and more powerful, your consciousness will migrate to the lower realms, will take rebirth in the body of a suffering migrator.

Normally I like to compare the power of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha with that of rocket science to see which is of more help at the time of death. The day you die, all your knowledge about rockets—how to make one that can go to the moon, for instance—can't protect you, can't help you, can't stop your consciousness transmigrating to the hell, hungry ghost or animal realms. All that scientific knowledge can't prevent you from going to the lower realms. All that knowledge can do nothing to stop an unfavorable rebirth. Even though you might have spent your whole life studying rocket science, it can do nothing to help

you at the time of death. I'm not saying that studying is bad, but as far as what benefits you at the time of death, what helps you and what doesn't, the power of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha is far greater than all that scientific knowledge.

At the time of death, if you can remember just one mantra, if you can die with the thought of even one mantra—OM MANI PADME HUM, TAYATHA OM MUNE MUNE MAHAMUNAYE SOHA or something—or the thought of a Dharma text—a prayer or sadhana that you've been reciting or *The Heart Sutra*, *The Essence of Wisdom*, which talks about the ultimate nature of the I, the very nature of all phenomena, or *The King of Prayers*—you won't get reborn in the lower realms. If you die remembering one of your sadhanas or prayers, you won't get reborn in the lower realms. There are many stories where even somebody who had already been reborn in a hell realm suddenly, because of the strong imprint, remembered a daily prayer or text that they used to recite in their human life—*The Diamond Sutra*, for example—and was immediately liberated from that hell realm, reincarnating in the upper realms as a deva or a human. Just remembering a text that you used to recite during your human life can have this benefit.

There are many stories like this. At the most critical time of life, when you are about to go to either the happy world or the suffering, unfortunate world, the lower realms, remembering even a mantra can prevent your being reborn in the lower realms. At that time, reciting a mantra or simply remembering a text—just the words, not even the Dharma path—can prevent you from being reborn in the lower realms. It's so powerful. Therefore, there's no question that if you remember the path, the real Dharma—such as detachment from samsara, renunciation of samsara, the ultimate good heart, bodhicitta, and emptiness, the right view—if you're able to meditate on the ultimate reality of the I and phenomena, if you can actually meditate, transform your mind into Dharma, you will not be reborn in the lower realms. Therefore, if you compare the usefulness at the time of death of all that scientific knowledge with that of just remembering a Dharma text, you'll see there's a huge difference. In all that scientific knowledge, there is nothing you can use to protect yourself at the time of death, but here, just remembering a text can prevent you from being reborn in the lower realms.

Even if you can remember an ordained person at the time of death—

not necessarily somebody with high realizations but just an ordinary ordained person in whom you have faith and devotion—you don't get reborn in the lower realms. Your rebirth in the lower realms is stopped if you die thinking of an ordained person in whom you have faith. Now, again, compare all that sophisticated knowledge—how to fly rockets to the moon and so forth—with the power of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha—compare what helps at the time of death and what doesn't. By simply remembering one ordained sangha, you go to the happy world, you take the body of the happy migrator. Therefore, there's no question that when you die, if you remember Buddha, there'll be an even better result.

Of course, at the time of death—at that very important time, that important day, that important hour—the virtuous thoughts of the person who has lived with a good heart, benefiting others with tolerance, patience, compassion and loving kindness help a great deal. On that day, at that very important time, at that crucial moment of life, the merit collected by benefiting others helps a lot. All those thoughts and actions are Dharma. However, here I'm talking about *anything* that can help at the time of death.

You don't even have to take refuge in all three—Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. At that very important hour, that crucial minute, even if you take refuge in just one, your life, your rebirth, your future life, will be taken care of. That's how powerful Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are. If you rely on them, that's how they guide you. If you compare the benefits of that to scientific knowledge—rockets and all those things—what can and cannot benefit you at the time of death...actually, I'm not so sure about rockets, but I am very impressed with dishwashing machines! Rockets I'm not so sure about, but I am very impressed with dishwashers, microwave ovens and vacuum cleaners—*very* impressed! Not sure about rockets! Anyway, dishwashers don't harm others—you can't use them to harm others!

#### THE BENEFITS OF TAKING REFUGE

There are eight main benefits of having refuge in your mind.

1. *You become a Buddhist.* The lam-rim teachings explain that

by having refuge in your mind, you enter the Buddhadharmā, you become an inner being.

2. *Refuge is the basis for all vows.* By having refuge in your mind, you can receive the pratimokṣa vows, the morality that is the basis of achieving perfect concentration, shamatha. That, in turn, allows you to realize great insight. Like a fish swimming through water without disturbing it, on the basis of having realized samatha, calm abiding, having developed perfect concentration by completing the nine levels on the basis of this samatha, by analyzing emptiness you can derive rapturous ecstasy, this great bliss, the extremely refined rapturous ecstasy. You are able to achieve this great insight. Then, by achieving this, you can develop the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness. This wisdom eradicates your defilements; this wisdom is what directly ceases your defilements and brings you to complete liberation from the whole of saṃsāra.

To achieve total liberation from saṃsāra, you have to proceed along the five paths—the paths of merit, conjunction, right seeing, meditation and no more learning. By actualizing the third, the path of right seeing, your wisdom directly perceiving emptiness ceases one hundred and twelve defilements, disturbing-thought obscurations. Then, by actualizing the path of meditation, your wisdom directly perceiving emptiness ceases sixteen disturbing-thought obscurations. Finally, by eradicating even the seed of delusion, you achieve total liberation on your mental continuum.

Therefore, even to achieve ultimate, everlasting happiness, total liberation from the whole entire suffering realm, saṃsāra, the very basic thing you need is to take precepts, vows; the practice of morality. Without refuge, you have no basis for that. Refuge is the basis for the pratimokṣa vows.

However, the purpose of your life is not just to achieve happiness for yourself, not just to solve your own problems. The purpose of your life is to free sentient beings as limitless as the infinite sky from all suffering and to bring them from happiness to happiness to full enlightenment; to bring them the

highest, peerless happiness. The purpose of your life, of being alive, of having this precious human body, is to cause all this happiness.

To offer such perfect service to other sentient beings, including bringing them to enlightenment, first you yourself have to become enlightened. That depends on your actualizing the Mahayana path. The very foundation of that, what makes it possible for you to achieve enlightenment, is living in the bodhisattva vows. Again, without refuge, you have no basis on which to take the bodhisattva vow. That means you cannot become fully enlightened, fully awake. Without refuge you cannot achieve full enlightenment, the total cessation of all defilements and the completion of all realizations. If you don't achieve that, you cannot offer perfect service to other sentient beings, you cannot bring all happiness to all sentient beings, including that of full enlightenment.

One reason that you should benefit others is that by doing so you fulfill the meaning of your life, your reason for living. Otherwise, your life has no purpose. This is one of the reasons why you have to think of the welfare of others, why you need to develop your mind in the path to enlightenment, why you need to learn so many things—to fulfill the purpose of your life by benefiting others. However, to take bodhisattva vows, you need the basis of refuge.

Another reason to benefit sentient beings is that they are suffering unimaginably. But the longer it takes you to purify your mind and complete the two types of merit, to complete the realizations of the path to enlightenment, the longer those sentient beings who have a connection with you and depend on you for their liberation from suffering and enlightenment have to suffer, have to wait for their liberation and enlightenment.

What makes it possible for you to become enlightened more quickly is your achieving the quick path to enlightenment. On the basis of the lam-rim, the three principal paths—the detached mind, the determination to be free from samsara, bodhicitta and right view—you need to practice tantra. In order to practice tantra, you need to take tantric vows. This

enables you to achieve enlightenment quickly. Again, the basis of taking tantric vows is refuge. Refuge is a very important foundation.

3. *You purify negative karma.* Also, when you have refuge in your mind, by the way, all actions in your daily life—day and night; eating, sleeping, walking, sitting—serve to purify much of the negative karma you have accumulated since beginningless rebirths. By the way, just by having refuge in your mind, much of the negative karma in your mental continuum gets purified. Because you have refuge in your mind, many of your daily actions become Dharma. That's how your eating, sitting, walking—all your daily life activities—allow you to purify much negative karma and collect inconceivable merit all the time.

4. *You create much merit.* Because you have refuge in your mind, you do many specific practices to purify your mind and collect extensive merit. Many practices get done. It happens. For example, practices where you recite different buddhas' names, like the Thirty-five Buddhas or Vajrasattva—you recite those powerful buddhas' names and mantras to purify your mind. And you make offerings to holy objects and so forth. Many of those practices are done because you have refuge in your mind, and as a result, you immediately collect extensive merit. For example, as you know, one of the general refuge precepts is always to first offer from your heart to the Triple Gem any food and drink before you eat or drink it. Once you have made that offering, you then partake of the food and drink as a blessing, to benefit others.

With refuge in your mind, each time you meditate and visualize buddha, each time you think of buddha, you plant the seed of enlightenment. Every time you think of buddha, that thought brings you closer to enlightenment. Every thought of buddha prepares you for that most dangerous time, death, by making it easier for you to remember buddha. Remembering buddha at the time of death gives you incredible freedom to stop the heavy sufferings that you would otherwise

have to experience for many eons in the lower realms.

However, each time that you eat and drink, if first you visualize or meditate on buddha and offer your food and drink to buddha, you collect much merit. Therefore, even if you don't have any realizations or any good heart, any compassion or loving kindness for others, just the action of offering your food and drink to buddha immediately becomes the cause of your enlightenment. You collect inconceivable merit. The minute you make an offering to buddha, you collect an inconceivable number of merits—as many as there are atoms in a huge mountain.

Whether it's a piece of candy, a biscuit or whatever, by the way, since at the beginning you always make offerings because you have refuge in your mind, as many times as you eat and drink in a day, you collect inconceivable merit each time. Therefore, there's no question that by doing other practices, such as circumambulation, prostration, making offerings and other meditation practices related to buddha, you collect even more.

5. *You cannot be harmed by people or spirits.* Another advantage of having refuge in your mind is that you don't get harmed by other humans or spirits. There is a sutra in which Lord Buddha talked about the incredible qualities of the bodhisattva Kshitigarbha—his unbelievable activities and how Kshitigarbha benefited infinite sentient beings. This sutra has two sections. The first part talks about how ordained people create much heavy negative karma by breaking vows, while the second talks about how one should not criticize the sangha because doing so creates extremely heavy negative karma. If you criticize, put down or give a bad reputation to any monk or nun, even one who breaks vows and makes a lot of other mistakes, you create incredibly heavy negative karma. The second part of this sutra talks a lot about that. It also talks a lot about how you should respect even those monks and nuns who don't keep their vows purely, because those sangha can still be of great benefit to sentient beings.

This sutra also explains the way they used to punish people

back then. These days, people are executed by getting shot or hung. In ancient India, they used to take criminals from their home at night and put them in a cemetery! Those cemeteries were inhabited by vicious spirits that ate people, so the next day you wouldn't find a trace of that person left. That was the old way of punishing people. The text mentions one person who pinned a small piece of a monk's yellow robe to his shirt—just small piece, not the complete robe. When the spirits at the cemetery saw that he was wearing a piece of the monks' yellow robe for protection, they respected it, didn't harm him, and just went away. Nothing happened. The next day, the person was able to leave the cemetery and go home. There are many stories about how sangha robes are a powerful protection and prevent spirits from harming people. Not being harmed even by vicious spirits is a result of taking refuge in the sangha's robes.

6. *You will not fall into the lower realms.*

7. *All your wishes get fulfilled.* How does this happen? As I mentioned before, by having refuge in your mind, you always create good karma; every day you create much good karma. That itself becomes the cause of your success, for all your wishes for happiness to succeed. Not only that, but also as before, with refuge in your mind, by purifying much negative karma, the cause of the problems and danger, you create merit, the cause of success.

For example, many people from the Chinese, Western and Tibetan communities have been cured by praying to the Triple Gem, relying on Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, praying to the Compassionate Buddha. People who doctors have been unable to cure, who doctors have said will die after a month or two, after a few days, people for whom nothing can be done, by praying to Buddha, to Kuan Yin, the Compassionate Buddha, have had miraculous things happen to them. Diseases have been completely cured; people have recovered from terminal illness; incredible life dangers have been averted. There are

many stories like this.

In even my own experience, about six people with terminal cancer have recovered by praying to Buddha. Through meditation and mantra recitation, most of them recovered completely, even though doctors had told them that they had only two or three months to live. Their recovery was due to their praying to Buddha.

8. *You are able to achieve enlightenment quickly.*

#### WHAT IS SAMBARA?

The main reason for taking refuge is to be totally liberated from samsara forever. What is samsara? The contaminated, or defiled, aggregates that we have now—this association of body and mind—is caused by karma and delusion. Until we stop the continuous circling of these aggregates from one life to another—the joining again and again, the circling again and again, the continuous circling of these defiled aggregates caused by delusion and karma that are suffering in nature—we will continuously experience suffering without a second's break. These aggregates circle to the next life, then to the next, then to the one after that—this continuity of contaminated aggregates circling from one life to the next under the control of delusion and karma is samsara.

Until you break this circle of samsara, you will have no break from suffering. No holiday; not even a second's break. From time without beginning, from beginningless time up to now, you have been experiencing pervasive compounded suffering because your aggregates, which were created by karma and delusion, have always been under the control of karma and delusion. That's why your aggregates are suffering in nature. As a result, your mind always experiences suffering—depression, loneliness, all these emotional torments. You are constantly tortured by your emotional thoughts—attachment, anger, jealousy and so forth, all those delusions that arise from the three poisonous minds or are part of them. These are all sufferings of mind.

Then there are the sufferings of the body. Even simply pressing certain parts of your body with your fingers can immediately bring pain. And if you lie down, walk or sit just a little carelessly, not quite right,

again, you immediately feel pain. This is how the body is suffering in nature. It's the same with the mind. Even though there is no unhappiness right at this moment, if in the next moment you hear some unpleasant words or see something unpleasant, your mind immediately becomes unhappy. This is how your body and mind are suffering in nature, how these aggregates are suffering in nature. Thus, these aggregates are the container of all of this life's problems. Not only that—they are also the foundation of all the coming lives' problems. This life's aggregates also become the foundation for the problems of future lives.

Furthermore, these contaminated aggregates that are pervaded by suffering are also the seed of disturbing thoughts. Therefore, when in your daily life you encounter objects—beautiful objects, ugly objects, indifferent objects—since you do not meditate, do not practice Dharma, your life has no protection. You have no protection in your life; your mind has no protection. As you do not meditate, do not practice Dharma at that time, emotional thoughts arise because their seed is there—ignorance, anger and attachment. Emotional thoughts arise and motivate karma, which plants a seed on the mental continuum, on the mere I, on the sixth consciousness, the consciousness of mind. Then, from this seed comes the sprout—the samsaric aggregates of future lives. That's how they get actualized. This present life's aggregates compound the future samsara by creating karma with delusion.

From beginningless rebirths up until now, you have been experiencing pervasive compounding suffering; from time without beginning up to now. And on the basis of that, you have been experiencing the suffering of pain and the suffering of change, which is temporary samsaric pleasure—pleasure that does not last, doesn't increase, doesn't continue and which is only suffering in nature.

Why does temporary samsaric pleasure not last? Why do sense pleasures not last, why do they not increase? If these pleasures were not suffering in nature, they should increase; they would increase. If they were not suffering in nature, the pleasure would continue and you could develop it hour by hour, day by day, week by week, month by month, year by year. So, how old are you now? How many years is it since you were born? For example, I'm fifty-three, so by now my sense pleasures should be unbelievable! But they're not!

Anyway, the reason they don't last is because they are suffering in

nature. That's the reason. There are basically three feelings. The first is the suffering of pain—mental pain, physical pain, depression (when you are depressed, there's pain). There's also the pain of attachment, the pain of anger, the pain of jealousy, heat and cold, hunger and thirst, all the aches and pains of the body, migraine headaches—anyway, all this. Then there's also the suffering of rebirth, old age, sickness, the inability to find desirable objects, or if found you're unable to get satisfaction from them. There's the pain you experience when you feel something's missing, when you are not completely happy. Even if you get what you want—a friend or a billion dollars—in your heart, you still feel that something's missing; there's pain in not being fully satisfied. Those feelings are the suffering of pain.

Then there's the feeling you get when one suffering, one problem, has stopped and another suffering has started, but is not yet noticeable. One suffering has stopped and another has already started, but it is not noticeable. That feeling is called pleasure. Your mind labels that feeling "pleasure" and it then appears as pleasure. In reality, that feeling is only suffering, but because at that moment your mind does not recognize it as suffering, your mind labels it pleasure and it appears as pleasure; it appears as pleasure to your hallucinating mind. It appears to you as pleasure.

If you look at it with wisdom, you see it only as suffering, not pleasure, but if you look at this feeling with a hallucinating mind, you see it as pleasure. According to the view of the hallucinating mind—when your mind does not analyze, does not meditate, does not look at the nature of this feeling, which is only suffering—this feeling appears as pleasure. But in the view of wisdom, you see this feeling as only suffering. In the view of your wisdom, the mind that analyzes, that meditates, you see it only as suffering. When your mind is not hallucinating, you see this as suffering, but when your mind is hallucinating, this feeling appears as pleasure. It is a hallucination. This is the suffering of change.

For example, say you go to Las Vegas and make a hundred dollars profit, but are not satisfied with that and want a thousand. You put your winnings back and play again. Then, even if you get the thousand, you are not happy with that, not satisfied with that. You want more. You put your winnings back again to get more. So now let's jump ahead! You've won a million! You've won a million dollars in Las Vegas. But after getting

a million dollars, you are still not happy, still not satisfied. So you play again, hoping to get more than a million. Then you get a billion dollars but it still doesn't make you happy; you are still not satisfied. So you play again.

I'm talking here on the basis of your winning continuously, making a growing profit, but of course, many people lose thousands, hundreds of thousands of dollars gambling like this. Here I'm talking on the basis of your continually making money.

Once we were traveling by car and stopped in Reno. It was about one or two o'clock in the morning and we had stopped for tea, to have chai. There was this machine that you put money into, so out of curiosity I put in a quarter and two came back! Then, because my mind was not happy with two, I played again! Then nothing happened! So anyway, it's like that!

What I was saying before is, if you analyze, it is only suffering; that whole thing is suffering. As I often give as an example, out of hunger, you start to eat food, and the suffering of hunger stops. Eating food has stopped the hunger, but at that very moment, with the first spoonful of food, the discomfort of being too full has started. From the very beginning, the discomfort of too much food in your stomach has begun, but at first it is not noticeable, and we label it pleasure, comfort. However, by continuing to eat, the discomfort becomes more and more gross, until it becomes noticeable and you label it unpleasant. What you had labeled pleasure, comfort, does not increase, doesn't last, because that feeling is actually suffering. One suffering stops, another suffering begins. But at the start, it is small, very small, unnoticeable, so we label it pleasure and it appears as pleasure. But actually it is only suffering. This is called the suffering of change. We have to understand why it doesn't last. The logic is that it doesn't last because the nature of that pleasure is suffering.

From beginningless samsaric lifetimes up to now, on the basis of this samsara, the pervasive compounding suffering, we have continuously been experiencing the suffering of pain and the suffering of change. Even the indifferent feelings that we have been experiencing have also been suffering. The indifferent feelings that our bodies, these aggregates, have experienced, have actually been suffering.

Until we are free from this samsara, until we cut the continuity of the circle of this samsara, we will continuously be tormented by these three types of suffering. In this samsara, there is no new pleasure left that we

haven't already experienced. There is nothing new that we have never before experienced in previous lives. Whether it is samsaric pleasure or the suffering of pain, there's nothing new. Even if it's a suffering of pain, even if it's a problem, it's nothing new, it's not the first time we've experienced it.

For example, say you meet a friend, somebody in your life, but after some time you start to experience problems, relationship problems. You don't get loved, you feel left out, there's separation from your friend. ... All this might appear as if it's happening for the first time, but it's not the first time. This problem, with this person, with this sentient being, has happened numberless times in your past lives. Even the relationship problems that you experience in this life—after meeting this person then there's separation, all this—it's not the first time. You have experienced this problem numberless times over your beginningless samsaric lifetimes—whatever problem you experience, nothing is new, nothing is new. Whether it is samsaric pleasure, suffering of change, or the suffering of pain, nothing is new.

Until you are liberated from samsara, wherever you live, wherever you go, it is a place of suffering. Whatever enjoyment you have—all these enjoyments of samsara—whatever enjoyment of samsara you have, sense pleasure, it's all suffering. And whoever you accompany, any friend, is a friend of suffering. Until you are free from samsara, it is like this. This is the nature of samsara.

#### THIS IS YOUR BEST CHANCE TO BE FREE

Now, this is the one time that you have received not only a precious human body but a *perfect* human body, with which you can achieve any great meaning. If you wish, you can achieve the happiness of future lives. You can achieve ultimate happiness, liberation from samsara. And you can even achieve the highest happiness of full enlightenment. Also, every second, even each moment, you can achieve these great meanings of life. Whatever you wish, you can achieve with this perfect human body.

This is the time that you have all the opportunities, every opportunity, to liberate yourself from the whole entire circle of suffering, the vast oceans of samsaric suffering. You can liberate yourself from the hell, hungry ghost and animal realm sufferings, the oceans of each realm's

unimaginable suffering; from the unimaginable sufferings and problems that human beings experience; from all the problems that the devas—suras and asuras—experience; and from all the general sufferings of samsara. *This* is the time. Having such an incredible opportunity to make yourself totally free, to completely cease all the sufferings of samsara, whose continuity has no beginning, is virtually just this once. This is your only opportunity to make yourself totally free, to cease completely the entire suffering of samsara, all the beginningless sufferings of body and mind, to make it impossible to experience them again, to never reincarnate again in samsara—it is essentially just this once, only this time.

This is the time that not only do you have buddha nature and the ability to achieve all happiness, cease all suffering and achieve liberation for yourself, but you also have the ability to liberate numberless other sentient beings, who are suffering in samsara just as you are. You can liberate all sentient beings and bring them to full enlightenment. For that purpose, you have to achieve enlightenment yourself. You have buddha nature, with which you can do all this, and besides that, you have this perfect human body, which enables you to use your buddha nature to achieve all these things, to take all these opportunities, to achieve all this success for yourself and others.

This is the time to do your *best*. This life—this body, this precious, perfect human body—is the time to do your best, to not cheat yourself. If you do not make the most of this time when you have every opportunity to achieve all success for yourself and for other sentient beings, if you do not take maximum advantage, if you cheat yourself again in this life—like you have been cheating yourself since beginningless rebirths—if you cheat yourself again in the one life that gives you every opportunity to practice Dharma, if you don't get to practice, there is no greater loss than this.

#### THE KARMIC RESULTS OF KILLING

Perhaps now I'll read a page of this text from where I left off last time...well, last time I couldn't find it! However, previously I was reading from Shantideva's teaching, *Lab-dü*. I'm not sure, but in English this title could be translated as *Condensed Advice*. I read the results of the negative karma of killing, the suffering in the hell realms as explained by

Shantideva. In the lam-rim teachings, the hell sufferings are not presented in this particular way, although they do give a general explanation.

The ripening aspect result of the complete negative karma of killing is usually to be reborn in the lower realms and to experience all those unimaginable sufferings. Then there are the three suffering results, the three problems that you experience in the human realm. One of these is the possessed result—a very dirty place, a very unhealthy environment that contains many things that harm your life. Medicines do not have much power; food does not have much nutritional value; protein degenerates due to negative karma. Food and crops do not have much protein and may even become the cause of disease. The food you eat becomes the cause of disease. You are unable to digest food. Many people have gastric or digestive problems—that's the result of killing; the result of the past negative karma of killing.

Thus, you can see how doing Vajrasattva practice promotes healing, purifying the negative karma that causes gastric problems. Of course, that's not the only thing it purifies. Retreat purifies much more than the cause of gastric problems, but they are included. Anyway, food becomes harmful, the cause of sickness. Like diabetes—you can't eat this, you can't eat that, you can't eat this, you can't eat that! Like my precious sickness, my diabetes!

Then, experiencing the result similar to the cause, you experience shortness of life. For example, you die right after conception in your mother's womb. It includes that. You are there for a few minutes, then you die. Shortness of life—whether you kill yourself or whether others kill you, or whether you die by disease, you have a short life, you're unable to have a long life. Finally, there's creating the result similar to the cause, doing the action of killing again because of past karma, habit.

#### THE KARMIC RESULTS OF STEALING

Next it explains the ripening aspect result of taking things that have not been given; stealing. Whoever commits the extreme action of this vice—this is talking about the hell suffering result of stealing—hallucinates that there are big piles of wealth—jewels, clothing, food, grain and many other possessions.... There's a term, *nor*, used here. It has two meanings.

One is possession, but it could also mean animals, possessed animals. You see huge piles of valuable possessions, but it's a hallucination, like, it says, the ring of fire you see when you light a stick of incense and twirl it around in a circle. It looks like there's a circle of fire, but actually there's not. It looks like there's an actual circle of fire, but there's not. It's a hallucination or transformation, like a city of spirits, a city of ghosts; like a mirage.

The person seeing this is totally overwhelmed by attachment, by ignorance, by karma, and thinks, "This is mine." Then, due to karma, sparks of fire, like from burning animal dung, extremely hot, hit the person's body. I think that's what it means, but I'm not one hundred percent sure. Then the person runs towards the hallucinated huge piles of possessions and is grabbed by yamas, which appear as human but have been created by the person's karma. Then they bring the person into a crater, like a volcano, erupting with blazing weapons, which chop the person's limbs to pieces. Here the term *yān-lag* means legs and arms and *nye-lag* means the parts of the limbs [forearm, upper arm, thigh, lower leg and so forth]. These are cut into pieces and burned until all that is left is bone.

But even though this happens, your attachment, which has been with you since beginningless past lives, still doesn't decrease. Here it might sound as if it is finished by that hell suffering of stealing, but it's not. This is a very short explanation, but of course, this suffering is extremely unbearable.

#### THE KARMIC RESULTS OF SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

Next is being under the control of sexual misconduct, desire. Whoever creates this negative karma—it seems this explanation continues from the previous one—even after you are free from the dangers of all those weapons, again, sparks of red hot cow dung hit your body. Then you go to another place that is the production of your karma, the hell being's karma, called "Seeing the wrong way." Then, it says, by being in that place, you "lose your memory, and see the activities done by..."—it says "women" here, but it can be *vice versa*, like in the *Bodhicharyavatara*, where it talks about the shortcomings of the body. When the shortcomings of the body are mentioned, it talks about women's bodies because the teaching was given mainly to men. When women do this meditation, they have to think about the shortcomings of the men's bodies. It's similar

here; you have to think *vice versa*.

Due to karma, the hell being sees women doing things similar to what that being used to see in its previous life. Due to karma, the being has that vision in the hell realm. Since that being's mind has been habituated to such activities since beginningless samsara, the fire of attachment arises. Attachment to those activities has been there, the being's mind has been habituated to those, since beginningless samsara, so it arises again and the hell being runs towards those women. Then, due to the hell being's karma, yamas, whose nature is iron—in the movies, they show people made of iron, with long nails; they look like human beings but they're made of iron, have long nails and are very frightening—grab that being and eat its body completely. Starting from the mouth, its lips, they eat the body completely, leaving not even a scrap the size of mustard seed. Then again, due to karma, the being gets born again, the body reappears, and the hell being is again eaten. In this way, the being experiences unimaginably heavy suffering. But still the attachment does not change. Even after such heavy suffering, whenever that being sees more women, he runs towards them.

Then, it says, due to hell being's karma, women whose nature is iron, vajra iron, with violent fire blazing from their bodies, grab the hell being and crush its body into grains of sand. Then, because that karma has not yet finished, the suffering of hell due to sexual misconduct has not yet finished, again the body comes back. (There are some more stanzas here, but I think I'll leave it there.) However, when women meditate on this, where it says "women" in this text, they have to think "men."

So the next one is...maybe I'll stop here...the next one is for next time!

#### MORE ON THE KARMA OF STEALING

The ripening aspect result of the complete negative karma of stealing is to be reborn in the lower realms and to experience all those unimaginable sufferings just mentioned. The possessed result, when you are born as a human being, is that you get born or have to live in a place where there is much drought, no water, no rain, great danger of earthquakes and floods, and scarcity of food, no crops...and no corpse! Actually, no crops and many corpses!

For example, there have been many years of suffering in Africa in those areas where there has been no water for such a long time, no rain for such a long time. Even when other countries try to help—like once they brought water by airplane to that country, but by the time the airplane arrived at the airport, the water had become extremely contaminated, unusable, unfit to give to the people—the people in that country don't have the karma to receive clean water. So even though other people try to bring water, by the time it arrives there it has become undrinkable. When you don't have the karma or if you have created the negative karma to experience these suffering results by stealing, this kind of thing happens—even when outside people try to help, to bring things, the suffering people are unable to receive it.

That means the people, from their own side, need to purify their negative karma; they need to do Vajrasattva retreat. All African people—those who live in those areas where there is so much drought—need to do Vajrasattva retreat. They need to purify their negative karma, to change their minds from delusion, from negative thoughts, and to transform their actions into virtue, to practice morality—abstain from stealing and so forth. Until they do that—until they purify their past negative karma and practice Dharma, from their own side create the cause of success, the cause to have food, rain, crops and all these things by making charity and abstaining from stealing—their situation will not change.

That was the possessed result. Then there's experiencing the result similar to the cause. Here you're always losing things. Other people steal or confiscate your belongings, take them by force, or else you lose them. Even if you have enjoyments, you have to share them with others, you don't own them completely yourself—even what little you have, you have to share with others. You have this kind of difficulty and have to live in poverty. The main experience of the result similar to the cause, stealing, is poverty.

Creating the result similar to the cause means again engaging in the same negative karma, stealing. As I normally mention, the most terrifying result of negative karma is not hell. The most terrifying result is this one—creating the result similar to the cause. This is far more terrifying than hell, because you again engage in the same negative karma, stealing. Then, that complete action has four suffering results. One of these, of course, is creating result similar to the cause, stealing yet again. Once

more, that produces the four suffering results. In this way, it goes on and on without end. That makes the suffering of samsara endless. The suffering result of the one action, the one negative karma of stealing, goes on and on and on without end. As long as you don't change, as long as you don't purify the negative karma, as long as you don't change your mind, your attitude and actions and live in the vow, in the precept to abstain from stealing, as long as this doesn't happen, the suffering result of the one negative karma of stealing doesn't stop; it goes on and on without end.

Therefore, creating the result similar to the cause is much more terrifying than the hell realm. You experience the hell realm once and it's finished, but creating negative karma again produces suffering results without end.

Now, here I'm using just one example, one negative karma—how an action like stealing creates unending suffering, unending experiences of suffering results; how it goes on and on and on. Therefore, you can now see what it means to take a vow, what it means to live in precepts. Now you can see the importance of that. By understanding how the suffering result of just one negative karma, one act of stealing, goes on and on, you can see how extremely important it is to live in the vow, the precept, to abstain from negative karma, such as stealing.

Even if you cannot take, cannot live in, the vows, the morality, of all the ten virtuous actions, in the ten precepts, even if you cannot live in the five lay precepts, abstaining from those five negative karmas, if you can live in at least one vow, such as abstaining from stealing, you can see, there's no question, that if you live in that vow until you die, it brings peace and happiness in all your future lifetimes.

Even if one day you stop yourself from stealing once—you are in danger of creating the negative karma of stealing but you resist—the benefit is that you don't have to experience again and again in future lives the four suffering results of stealing. That doesn't happen. Having stopped this one negative karma of stealing, all those four suffering results that would have gone on and on from that one negative karma of stealing don't happen; they're completely stopped. Therefore, by having stopped that one negative karma of stealing, you have peace and happiness in all the future lifetimes—peace and happiness in the sense of not having created that negative karma, thus, the absence of all those sufferings.

In this way, you can see that living in the vow, in the precept, even if

it is just one, it's unbelievable; it's the source of peace and happiness in all the coming future lives. It's unbelievable. It's the main cause of happiness, the main protection for your life in all coming future lives; the main protection. Living in one vow in this life protects you from suffering in all future lives and is the main cause of happiness.

#### MORE ON THE KARMA OF SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

The ripening aspect result of the complete negative karma of sexual misconduct is to be reborn in the lower realms and to experience all those unimaginable sufferings just mentioned. And even when you are born in the human realm, you have to experience the three types of suffering result. The possessed result is that you have to live in an unhealthy, dirty, filthy, muddy environment. Wherever you walk there's mud and kaka, excrement, filth, dirty smells; it's a very unhygienic, very unhealthy place. Many people have to live their entire lives like this. Sometimes even we have to pass through such dirty places. On that day, at that hour, we are experiencing the possessed result of past sexual misconduct—being in a very filthy place.

Experiencing the result similar to the cause here is explained in *Sa-chu-pa'i do, The Ten Bhumis Sutra*, where it talks about two results similar to the cause. One is that your companion's mind, the other person's mind—your husband or wife or whatever the other person with whom you live is—is not harmonious with your mind, is against your mind. Therefore, there are relationship problems. That's one thing. The other is that the minds of the people who surround you are not harmonious with yours. Therefore, they don't help fulfill your wishes; their mind is not harmonious with yours. Experiencing these problems is experiencing the result similar to the cause of the past negative karma of sexual misconduct.

Having heard this teaching, whenever we have any of these experiences in life, we have to remember, or recognize, that they are the result of the past negative karma of sexual misconduct. This means that if you don't want to experience such problems, from now on you should abide in the vow of abstaining from sexual misconduct. Basically it means that if the person who has a husband or wife, the "owner," doesn't like these problems, that person should live in the vow of abstaining from sexual misconduct.

The experience of creating the result similar to the cause means

engaging in sexual misconduct again. Once more, that complete action produces four suffering results, and so it goes, on and on, like that.

#### THE BENEFITS OF KEEPING PRECEPTS

Actions opposite to these vows harm other sentient beings directly or indirectly and create negative karma. For example, from the time you take the vow not to kill, numberless other sentient beings don't receive the harm of being killed by you. From the day, the hour, the minute you take the vow, numberless of other sentient beings don't receive that harm, being killed, from you. The absence of that harm is peace and happiness, which they receive from you. You have to understand in this way how your living in the vow not to kill becomes the source of peace and happiness for all other living beings, including insects and human beings.

The more vows you take, the more precepts you take, that much less harm numberless other sentient beings receive from you. Just from that, they receive that much more peace and happiness from you. You should see, understand, it this way. The precepts you take and live in are the best contribution you can make to world peace. From today, the more precepts you take, the more vows you live in, the greater your contribution to world peace—to not only the peace and happiness of this world's sentient beings, but to the peace and happiness of all sentient beings. If you think long term, from life to life, you also benefit sentient beings living in other worlds. And because, on the basis of the vows, you develop your mind on the path to enlightenment, you can see how you benefit all sentient beings even more.

The greater the number of vows you have taken, the more merit you create. For example, if you have taken one precept, by living in that one vow, you collect merit *all* the time, from the time you took it until you die. Every moment for the rest of your life, while you are sleeping, eating, walking—all the time—by living in even that one vow, you collect good karma continuously. If you have taken five vows, the five lay vows, it means that *all* the time you are creating five good karmas, merit, all the time. As many hours as you sleep—eight hours, ten, twelve—even while you're asleep, you are continuously collecting merit, creating those five good karmas all the time—eating, walking, no matter what you're doing. In other words, it makes your life meaningful all the time.

If you are living in the eight vows, then, like that, you are creating eight good karmas, merit, all the time. Similarly, if you are keeping the thirty-six vows of the novice or the two hundred and fifty-three vows of a fully ordained monk, you collect thirty-six or two hundred and fifty-three merits all the time, day and night; all the time, even while you're asleep. Similarly, if you're a fully ordained nun, three hundred and sixty-four. [Ven. Munsel: Three hundred and forty-eight.] Three hundred and forty-eight? There may be different ways of counting. [Ven. Munsel: That's the *Danagupta* tradition, three hundred and forty-eight.] Anyway, whatever it is, three hundred and forty-eight merits or three hundred and sixty-four—all the time, day and night, you collect that much merit.

The other thing is that, as I often say, even if the person living in the ordination, living in the vows, doesn't do any other practices—preliminary practices and so forth—but just lives in the vows that were taken—does nothing else but eat, sleep and make kaka and peepee—does no practice other than living in the vows, while externally, from ordinary people's point of view, it might look like that person is doing nothing, is lazy, does nothing, as long as the person is living purely in the vows, that person is benefiting the world a great deal. Even if the person doesn't do any practice other than living in the vows, that person is benefiting the world greatly, bringing much peace and happiness into the world, into the environment, and contributing so much to the prosperity of that country, helping the crops to grow well and rain to fall at the right time. The person living in the vows helps the prosperity in that area, in that country, very much. It affects the environment, as it is explained in teachings on the benefits of the eight Mahayana precepts.

The story of the four harmonious brothers, those four animals [elephant, monkey, rabbit and bird], also illustrates this. Actually, one was an embodiment of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha and the others were various disciples of the Buddha. They all lived in the forest, practiced the five precepts and spread that practice to others. The monkey spread living in the vows to other monkeys, the rabbit got other rabbits to practice keeping the five lay vows, and so forth. Each one decided to spread the practice of keeping precepts to others and to respect each other. Due to that, the economy of the entire country changed completely. Food became plentiful, there was no scarcity of food, the rains came at the right time and everything became so rich.

The king thought he had done it, his ministers thought they had done it, and there were many arguments about who was responsible for this good fortune. One of the ministers suggested, “Maybe we should ask the clairvoyant sage how this has come about.” The sage told them, “None of you did it. It’s a result of what those four brother animals who live in the forest have done. They live in the precepts and respect each other—those who are younger respect those who are older—and that’s why the country has developed.” Therefore, a nunnery or a monastery can bring great prosperity and benefit to a country and to the world.

Not only that, but by living in the vows you have taken, whether they be lay vows or those of monastic ordination, every day, whenever you collect good karma by making charity, by benefiting other sentient beings, by making offerings to the Triple Gem or however you create merit, the merit you create is greatly increased—hundreds of thousand of times. And if you are living in the bodhisattva vows, your merit is increased that much more—millions of times. And especially if you are living in the tantric vows, the merit you create is increased much, much more than that. The higher the ordination you keep, the more the general good karma you create in your daily life is increased. It is mentioned in *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* and *Bodhicharyavatara* that by taking bodhisattva vows you collect infinite merit like the infinite sky—every second, you collect merit like that. On top of that, if you keep tantric vows, you create that much more merit.

So tonight, I think I’ll stop here.

#### THE REFUGE AND PRECEPTS CEREMONIES

However, what is refuge? It is the understanding fear, the useful fear, the beneficial fear of the sufferings of samsara in general and the suffering of the lower realms in particular. That’s one cause of refuge. The other cause of refuge is faith in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha by knowing their qualities—their power to liberate, to save one from the suffering of samsara, including its cause. Having faith that the Triple Gem has the power to do this. Having these two causes in your mind and relying on Buddha, Dharma and Sangha with all your heart is what taking refuge means. Those causes could already be there in your mind, so here, taking refuge means

taking the refuge *vow* in a ceremony; taking the refuge vow from a lama.

Now, if you have compassion for others, if your purpose of taking refuge also includes compassion for other sentient beings, if you are taking refuge for the benefit of other sentient beings, you are taking refuge the Mahayana way. If you have compassion for others, you are taking refuge not only for yourself but also for others. That becomes the Mahayana way of taking refuge. The previous way was the Hinayana way of taking refuge. Taking refuge, relying on Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, with the third cause of compassion for others in your mind is the Mahayana way of taking refuge.

First I'll give refuge and then the five precepts. Monks and nuns, who live in higher ordination vows, don't need to repeat the prayer and shouldn't think, "I am taking that vow." It is said that if you take lower vows while living in higher ones, you lose your higher vows.

Those who are taking refuge should first make three prostrations to the Shakyamuni Buddha statue, thinking that it's the actual living Buddha. After that, make three prostration to the lama giving refuge. Then kneel down, like you do when you're taking the eight Mahayana precepts, and put your palms together at your heart. If you can't kneel, just sit comfortably.

Then please repeat the ceremony prayer.

[Prayer in Tibetan.] "I, whose name is such and such, until I die, am going to take refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha" is what it means.

Then ask the lama to grant the vow. [Prayer.]

In your heart, think of the meaning of Buddha—one whose mind is totally pure, having ceased all the mistakes of mind, gross and subtle, and having gained all the qualities; and rely upon Buddha a billion times more than you rely upon external doctors; even though they can cure sicknesses, it is only temporary, but here, Buddha liberates you from all suffering, all defilements. [Prayer.]

Now rely upon Dharma. It says, "I go for refuge to Dharma, the sublime cessation of attachment." The reason why attachment is specifically brought up is because even though ignorance is the root, attachment is the main delusion that ties you to samsara all the time. Therefore, when we take refuge in Dharma, it says, "I go for refuge to the supreme

Dharma, the cessation of attachment.” However, rely on Dharma, the true path and the true cessation of suffering, a billion times more than you rely on medicine. Even though medicine can cure, can stop problems, they’re only sicknesses, they’re only temporary, but Dharma ceases all suffering and its cause. [Prayer.]

Next, take refuge in Sangha, the sublime ones, the sublime beings who have attained the true path and the true cessation of suffering. That’s the absolute Sangha—taking refuge in the absolute Sangha. Also take refuge in conventional Sangha—four fully ordained monks living in pure vows but not having realization of the absolute Dharma. That’s the conventional Sangha. The absolute Sangha is anyone, lay or ordained, who has the realization of absolute Dharma. That’s the absolute Sangha. Take refuge in both conventional and absolute Sangha, relying on them a billion times more than you rely on a nurse. The Sangha guides you from samsara, guides you to liberation, helps you to free yourself from samsara. [Prayer.]

Next, as I mentioned before all the benefits of taking vows, here, by taking refuge in Dharma, what you are supposed to abandon is harming others. Therefore, as I normally say, even if you cannot take other vows, at least it’s good to abandon intentional killing. Of course, if you cannot take a vow to abandon killing but are able to take one or more of the other five lay vows—like not telling lies or not drinking alcohol or any of the others—whichever you can manage, you can take. If you cannot take the vow to not kill, if that’s difficult, you can take other vows, which you can try to practice.

If you are taking one vow—not just the refuge vow but one of the *upasika* [lay] vows—you should say, “I am taking this one upasika vow.” If you are taking two precepts, two lay vows, say, “I am taking these two upasika vows.” If you are taking all five, “I am taking the five upasika vows.” In your mind, you should think like that.

I am going to give the complete upasika ordination, all five vows, but each one of you should think in your own heart how many vows you are taking—one upasika vow, two vows, three vows, four vows, five vows. It would take too much time to do the ceremony for each individual, so I’m going to do it this way. [Prayer.]

At the end of the third repetition, without letting your mind wander, you must generate the thought, “I have received one upasika vow, two

vows, three vows, four..” according to the number of vows you have taken.

This is based on the refuge vow. Not only have you received the refuge vow but on top of that you have also received the upasika vow. If you have taken only refuge, if you have not taken any other vows, then you have received only the refuge vow and none of the five upasika precepts.

Buddha is so kind to us sentient beings. Even if you cannot take all five precepts, you can still take the refuge vow. By taking the refuge vow, you still receive the refuge precepts. Therefore, in everyday life, by the way, you are able to create a great deal of merit and purify your mind. That’s how Buddha guides us to enlightenment—by giving us the opportunity to take the refuge vow and live in the refuge precepts.

Now I have become your *lob-pön*, one who leads disciples on the path to liberation. [Prayer.]

Next, if you have taken any of the five lay vows, say, “As previous arhats abstained from these actions, changed their minds and their actions, changed their attitude and their actions, lived in these precepts and liberated themselves from samsara, similarly, I am going to take such and such vows.” Make that determination, thinking of all the benefits that I explained before.

Please repeat this, and in your heart think, “With great happiness, I am taking these vows for world peace—not only for the peace of this world but also for the peace and happiness of all sentient beings. These vows are my contribution, what I myself am offering, to not only the sentient beings in this world, but to all sentient beings. I am offering them this many vows.” So, feel much happiness that you can make yourself useful to all sentient beings in such a practical way—by refraining from giving them this number of harms. [Prayer.]

Feel great happiness for not only having taken the refuge vow, but that by having taken whatever number of lay vows you have, from now on, your merit will increase continuously, day and night. Whatever merit you create each day will be multiplied that much more. In this way, you make your life practical, beneficial for other sentient beings. With this understanding, seeing the benefits or importance of this, the value of the

vows you have taken, you enjoy your life. Practicing Dharma in this way is the best way to enjoy your life.

Finally, please do three prostration to thank the lama for giving refuge and precepts.

#### DEDICATION

“Due to all the past, present and future merits collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may I and all sentient beings be able to complete the paramita of morality by keeping it purely and without pride.

“May bodhicitta, the source of all happiness and success for myself and all other sentient beings, be generated within my own mind and in the minds of all sentient beings without even a second’s delay. May that which has already been generated increase.

“Due to all the past, present and future merits collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattva and all other sentient beings, may I able to benefit all sentient beings like the sky, as Lama Tsong Khapa did, by having the same qualities within me that Lama Tsong Khapa had, from now on, in all future lifetimes.

“Due to all the past, present and future merits collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings, may all the father-mother sentient beings have happiness, may the three lower realms be empty forever and may all the bodhisattvas’ prayers succeed immediately. May I be able to cause all this by myself alone.

“Since these opportunities happened due to the kindness of the Buddha of Compassion, His Holiness Dalai Lama, and also that of Lama Yeshe, may Lama Ösel Rinpoche have a stable life and be able to benefit sentient beings like the sky, as Lama Tsong Khapa did, by showing the same qualities that Lama Tsong Khapa had.

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

“As the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the three times praised greatly

the best way of dedicating merits, and as Samantabhadra and Manjushri realized, I dedicate all my merits in the same way.”

Finally, pray to meet and actualize Lama Tsong Khapa’s entire stainless teaching, which unifies sutra and tantra, within your own mind, and for it to spread in the minds of all sentient beings and to flourish without degeneration.