

**HOW TO LOOSEN
THE GRIP OF
EGO-GRASPING
BY UNDERSTAND-
ING DEPENDENT
ARISING THE
BEST METHOD
FOR REALIZING
EMPTINESS TSE
CHEN LING SAN
FRANCISCO VEN.
ROBINA COURTIN
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Statue by Denise Griffin



Lama Yeshe in the Aspect of Lama Tsongkhapa

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1. THE SETTING AND STRUCTURE OF *THE HEART SUTRA*

KHENSUR RINPOCHE JAMPA TEGGCHOK

The prologue to *The Heart Sutra* is called “a basis for the discussion”, meaning the background or setting for the sutra. For example, in the case of some of the monastic precepts there is an explanation about how a particular precept came to be given. This can include a description of how a certain monk made a mistake and how, when the Buddha came to know of this he said, “This is something that the monks and nuns should not do”. From that point on the monks and nuns had to follow that precept. The background to how and why it came about is called the ling.shi or prologue.

The prologue to this sutra begins with: “Thus I have heard at one time: the Lord was sitting on Vultures Peak near the city of Rajgir. He was accompanied by a large community of monks as well as a large community of Bodhisattvas.” This is the common prologue. The next two lines form the special prologue. “On that occasion the Lord was absorbed in a concentration called the profound appearance.”

The common prologue describes how the Buddha was sitting with a great community of monks and Bodhisattvas. The special prologue, that he was absorbed in a concentration called the profound appearance means that the Buddha was himself reflecting or meditating on emptiness.

Meanwhile the bodhisattva, the great being, the noble Avalokiteshvara was contemplating the profound discipline of the perfection of wisdom. He came to see that the five aggregates were empty of any inherent nature of their own. The

Buddha meditates on emptiness and throughout most of the rest of the sutra starting from Through the power of the Buddha, the Buddha blesses and causes a change to occur in the mental continuum of two of his disciples, Avalokiteshvara (Tib. Chenrezig) and Shariputra. He blesses their continuums so that Shariputra asks Avalokiteshvara a question. The rest of the text is Avalokiteshvara's answer.

Both question and the answer arise through the blessing of the Buddha and are called the holy word of the Buddha. There are different types of word or teaching of the Buddha and one is called the holy word that comes through the blessing of the Buddha. Although spoken by Shariputra and Avalokiteshvara, with the question coming from Shariputra, and Avalokiteshvara giving the answer, it is still referred to as the Buddha's word. Specifically in this case it is the Buddha's word that comes through his blessing these two beings. The words at the very end of the sutra, "At that time the Lord arose from his concentration and said to the noble Avalokiteshvara, 'Well said, well said, that is just how it is my son, just how it is. The profound perfection of wisdom should be practised exactly as you have explained it, then the Tathagatas will be truly delighted'".

This is the Buddha's holy word spoken from his own mouth. Although more detail is possible, this gives a rough idea of the structure.

To recap, a question comes from Shariputra followed by Avalokiteshvara's answer, and both are the word of the Buddha called the "blessed word". Later where the Buddha says, "Well said, well said", he confirms that what Avalokiteshvara said about emptiness is absolutely faultless. That is also the Buddha's word, specifically that spoken by the Buddha.

Thus there are three sections. In brief, The Heart Sutra, has three points – the question from Shariputra, the answer from Avalokiteshvara and finally the Buddha's approval.

2. THE HEART SUTRA

Homage to the Holy Perfection of Wisdom!

COMMON PROLOGUE

Thus did I hear at one time. The Bhagavan was dwelling on Mass of Vultures Mountain in Rajagriha together with a great community of monks and a great community of bodhisattvas.

SPECIAL PROLOGUE

At that time, the Bhagavan was absorbed in the concentration on the categories of phenomena called “Profound Perception”.

BUDDHA BLESSES THE MINDS OF SHARIPUTRA AND AVALOKITESHVARA

Also, at that time, the bodhisattva mahasattva arya Avalokiteshvara looked upon the very practice of the profound perfection of wisdom and beheld those five aggregates also as empty of inherent nature.

SHARIPUTRA’S QUESTION

Then, through the power of Buddha, the venerable Shariputra said this to the bodhisattva mahasattva arya Avalokiteshvara: “How should any son of the lineage train who wishes to practice the activity of the profound perfection of wisdom?”

AVALOKITESHVARA’S BRIEF ANSWER

He said that and the bodhisattva mahasattva arya Avalokiteshvara said this to the venerable Sharadvatiputra. “Shariputra, any son of the lineage or daughter of the lineage who wishes to practice the activity of the profound perfection of

wisdom should look upon it like this, correctly and repeatedly beholding those five aggregates also as empty of inherent nature.

AVALOKITESHEVARA’S EXTENSIVE ANSWER

“Form is empty. Emptiness is form. Emptiness is not other than form; form is also not other than emptiness.

In the same way, feeling, discrimination, compositional factors, and consciousness are empty.

“Shariputra, likewise, all phenomena are emptiness; without characteristic; unproduced, unceased; stainless, not without stain; not deficient, not fulfilled.

“Shariputra, therefore, in emptiness there is

THE FIVE AGGREGATES

No form, no feeling, no discrimination, no compositional factors, no consciousness;

THE SIX SENSE CONSCIOUSNESSES

No eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind;

THE SIX SENSE OBJECTS

No visual form, no sound, no odor, no taste, no object of touch, and no phenomenon.

THE SIX SENSE ELEMENTS

There is no eye element and so on up to and including no mind element and no mental consciousness element.

THE TWELVE LINKS

There is no ignorance, no extinction of ignorance, and so on up to and including no aging and death and no extinction of aging and death.

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

Similarly, there is no suffering, origination, cessation, and path;

There is no exalted wisdom, no attainment, and also no non-attainment.

“Shariputra, therefore, because there is no attainment, bodhisattvas rely on and dwell in the perfection of wisdom, the mind without obscuration and without fear. Having completely passed beyond error, they reach the end-point of nirvana.

“All the buddhas who dwell in the three times also manifestly, completely awoken to unsurpassable, perfect, complete enlightenment in reliance on the perfection of wisdom.

THE MANTRA OF THE PERFECTION OF WISDOM

“Therefore, the mantra of the perfection of wisdom, the mantra of great knowledge, the unsurpassed mantra, the mantra equal to the unequaled, the mantra that thoroughly pacifies all suffering, should be known as truth since it is not false. The mantra of the perfection of wisdom is declared:

TAYATA OM GATE GATE PARAGATE PARASAMGATE BODHI SOHA

[TAYATA OM GO! GO! GO EYOND! GO PERFECTLY BEYOND! GO TO ENLIGHTENMENT! SOHA]

“Shariputra, the bodhisattva mahasattva should train in the profound perfection of wisdom like that”.

BUDDHA’S APPROVAL

Then the Bhagavan arose from that concentration and commended the bodhisattva mahasattva arya Avalokiteshvara saying: “Well said, well said, son of the lineage, it is like that. It is like that; one should practice the profound perfection of wisdom just as you have indicated; even the tathagatas rejoice”.

EVERYONE REJOICES IN THE BUDDHA’S WORDS

The Bhagavan having thus spoken, the venerable Sharadvatiputra, the bodhisattva mahasattva arya Avalokiteshvara, those surrounding in their entirety along with the world of gods, humans, asuras, and gandharvas were overjoyed and highly praised that spoken by the Bhagavan. *This completes the Ārya-bhagavatī-prajñâpâramitâ-hridaya-sûtra.*

COLOPHON

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3. KARMA: HOW WE CREATE OUR OWN REALITY

VEN. ROBINA COURTIN

KARMA: FUNDAMENTAL TO BUDDHISM

If we're saying we're a Buddhist and we're attempting to practice Buddhism, if we're not applying the laws of karma, if we're not taking that as our hypothesis, if we're not applying that in our daily life, we're not really being a Buddhist. This is fundamental to Buddhist teachings – his view about the world, how it comes into being, what our mind is, what causes happiness, what causes suffering, etc..

So, this law applies – runs – in the mind. So the mind, for the Buddha, is where things happen. The mind is where the workshop is. The mind is where everything happens. The mind is where the source of suffering is. The mind is where the source of happiness is. The mind is the point.

WHERE DO I COME FROM?

According to Buddha we're not created by anyone, either a superior being or our parents. Instead, we're the product of our own past. In a simple sense, you could say you come from previous moments of yourself. Think of your mind as a river of mental moments – your thoughts and feelings of *now*, in the simplest linear sense of cause and effect, your thoughts and feelings of *now* come from the previous moment of your thoughts and feelings. And your thoughts and feelings of the previous moment come from – guess what? – the previous moment of your thoughts and feelings. You track it back to ten years ago, twenty years ago, in your mothers' womb. "Well, maybe I began a month

before conception.” Well, no. If my mind existed then, it must have come from a previous moment of my mind. Then clearly you get back to the first moment of conception, when we all assume we began. If you’re Christian, God put a soul there, in the egg and sperm; and if you’re a materialist, you are only the egg and sperm.

Well, the Buddha has this third option. The first second of conception in our mother’s womb is the entry of our own consciousness into the egg and sperm. So you can track your consciousness right in this continuity of mental moments going right back to that first moment of conception. “Well, I must have begun then.” Well, yes, relatively speaking, this package called “Robina” began then, but where did the body come from? Mummy and Daddy. Where did your mind come from? Previous moment of itself. So your mind is its own continuity of mental moments.

It’s a very simple concept, actually. Not difficult for us to intellectualize, to theorize about. Your mind is its own continuity. And obviously, to assume this, you have to assume it’s not physical. Because, clearly, if you think your mind is your brain, then you did come from your parents, which is the materialist view, that they “made” you, you know?

YOUR MIND IS YOURS

And so the experiential implication of this is that your mind is *yours*. And that means the contents of it are yours. And so what are the contents of your mind? All the love and the kindness and compassion and wisdom and contentment and anger and jealousy and fear and paranoia and rage – all of this. This is the contents of your mind. So all of these, being

contents of your mind, they too come from previous moments of that particular quality in your mind.

So this is a simple idea that implies reincarnation, isn't it? It's a simple concept. Not a difficult concept intellectually. But we're so familiar with the view that I come from mother and father and my anger comes from mother and father and my jealousy and my depression and my all the rest come from the DNA and the egg and the sperm and all the rest, you know. They play a role, no argument. But they're not the main thing. For the Buddha, the main things are your mind, your thoughts, your feelings, your emotions, your unconscious. Your tendencies, your feelings. All of this. This is yours. This is *yours*.

We come into this life fully programmed with all of our tendencies, with all of our characteristics. It's a big surprise to us. I mean, we accept we come fully programmed, but we think the programming comes from mother and father. It doesn't, Buddha says. Tendencies in the mind are mental and mind is not physical and it comes from previous moments of itself, not from the external condition, which is called the brain.

One can see indicators in the brain of certain things, no argument with this. So this fundamental point of Buddhism is that your mind is yours. And whatever's in it is simply from you having put it there in the past. Hardly surprising concept – cause and effect.

KARMA MEANS INTENTION

This is the essential idea of karma. Karma is a Sanskrit word, that is translated as “action,” really simply. Which implies reaction. Action-reaction, in this meaning: cause and effect. Seed-fruit, you know.

It's also, more fundamentally, translated as intention, will, volition. Every microsecond of everything we say, everything we think and feel, and indeed do and say, with our body and speech on the basis of what's in the mind, is a karma. An intentional action that necessarily will leave an imprint, or a tendency or a seed in your consciousness and will ripen in the future in that consciousness as your experiences.

What goes on in our mind, in other words, is the main cause of our future experiences. This is what Buddha says.

This is a simple concept. Not a difficult idea. It's just a question of being able to say it and get our heads around it. It isn't complicated. We think it's complicated, but it's just because we haven't got the right words, you know. It's not a complicated concept at all.

Of course, it's not evident to us. So we take it as our working hypothesis. Buddha's saying basically: we are the creators of ourselves. It's a very simple point. Whatever's in your mind is there because you put it there, not because Mummy and Daddy did something to you. This flies in the face of the assumption that we all have that's the basis of our lives, and is, as Buddha would say, a misconception. That, you know, I am angry because my father was angry. I am jealous because my mother was jealous. I am depressed because I have certain hormones. We always put an external reason to it, you know. Which sort of, for us, is a way of saying, "It's not my fault."

We've got this dualistic view. We assume we're made by mother and father. We assume the anger and the jealousy and the depression are either there because of the genes or the DNA or they're there because I've got a mean boyfriend, or because I had a lousy mother or a horrible husband or a bad kid or a horrible boss. This is the typical way we talk.

And this is, in fact, the view of the materialist world. This is the philosophy of the materialist world that is backed up by the view that your mother and father made you, that you're only physical.

ACCOUNTABILITY

One has to know one's mind, because that's what we need to change. Yes, certain people's external conditions make it quite tough – if you're in a prison and you can't open that door; you can say "Well, I can't help being angry, I'm surrounded by mean people." You might say that. But the ones who are really practicing don't say that. They know that this is their physical condition, and this is indeed the result of their karma (and we'll talk more about that in a minute), and so they will adapt themselves to that condition and still work on their minds.

The person who's got the chemicals that aren't working, that seem to be the trigger for depression, yes, you recognize that you've got those particular chemicals, but the depression is your mind, it's your viewpoint.

You might be around people who are mean and ugly who hit you all the time, and if you've got an angry tendency it'll make it easy for you to get angry, it's true. But if you're really being accountable, you'll recognize the anger's yours.

This is what we have to do. This is the toughest part. This is the part that's massive for us. So difficult because we're so used to this dualistic way of talking. It's always like, "It's not my fault. It's not my fault."

And that's the view of the materialist world, you look. It's an assumption of ego. "I didn't ask to get born, did I? It's not my fault. My mother made me. My father made me." So, the whole way ego works, Buddha says, is in its nature dualistic. It's always, "Poor me, the victim." Lama Yeshe

would call ego the “self-pity me.” We’re always trying to defend ourselves, “It’s not fair,” “It’s not my fault,” “It’s his fault,” “I didn’t mean to.” Everything to try to deny accountability. It’s so painful for us to be accountable. This is how ego is, this is its nature. This is the way it is.

By listening to and thinking about the Buddha’s views of karma – that your consciousness, your tendencies, your experiences, come from our own past actions, not your parents; my mind is mine, I came fully programmed into this life.

And, of course, this includes our good tendencies and experiences as well, but we forget about those. We agonize, “Why do bad things happen to me?” We never agonize, “Why do good things happen to me?” We don’t care why, just give me more! But we have all the good things for the same reason: I created the cause to have them.

FOUR WAYS THAT KARMA RIPENS

There are four ways in which our actions from the past lives – you know, before we even entered into this present womb of our mother – there are four ways those past actions ripen in the present. Or indeed, there are four ways in which our present actions leave seeds in the mind that will ripen in the future as one’s experiences. It’s a constant process, ongoing. Every microsecond of everything that goes on in our mind, and the things we do on the basis of those thoughts with our body and speech, this is the karmic process. This is constantly occurring. This is the natural process of cause and effect, constantly in play.

1. FULLY RIPENED RESULT: A REBIRTH

The first, main one – they call it Fully Ripened Result – is the type of rebirth we get born into. So, you know, if we’re

materialists, or if we're Christians, for example, we both agree on one thing at least – that someone else made us. I was made by God. I was made by Mummy and Daddy. They're the same principle, aren't they? That you're made by someone else. Which means it's got nothing to do with you.

Whereas the Buddha says, "Everything to do with me." Our past actions are the main cause of why my mind found its way to my present mother's human womb. Why blame your parents? They're just lying there having fun and you come along. So Buddha puts us right in the centre of responsibility of even why we're human in the first place. Which is kind of an interesting concept – who would have thought that you were the main cause of who you are? Big surprise!

Not more than a few weeks before conception in your mother's womb, your consciousness was in another form, another life. And at the time of that death, before you stopped breathing, very simply speaking, a very strong seed from having practiced morality – in the context of keeping vows of morality according to Lama Zopa Rinpoche – was activated that basically programmed your mind after it left that body to find its way to your present mother's human womb.

Your father and mother having sex is just a co-operative cause. They did not make you, they did not create you. Your consciousness had very strong karmic connection with them from past history with those particular parents.

One lama said that at the time of a male and female human having sex, billions of consciousnesses that are recently passed away (and that's obviously not just from the human realm; Buddha would assert a whole spectrum of possibilities of types of consciousnesses existing in different

realms) are all hovering around trying to get in. Well, we got in! From Buddha's point of view, we should be weeping in delight every day at how fortunate we are, getting such an extraordinarily fortunate life.

Clearly it's easier to get a mosquito birth, dog birth, a fish birth: we can see there are billions and trillions of other sentient beings, we can see this. But we got the human one. Amazing.

That's the first way our karma ripened – the type of rebirth we born into.

But, you know, Mother Teresa and Hitler both got one of those, so what causes the differences?

2. ACTIONS SIMILAR TO THE CAUSE: OUR TENDENCIES

That gets us to the second way in which our past actions ripened in the present. And this is our tendencies, our characteristics, our personality; our depression, our kindness, our wish to kill, our wish to lie, our being good at piano, our being good at math; whatever it might be.

And that's an interesting point, psychologically speaking. In Buddhist terms, we give equal status to whether you're good at love, good at anger or good at music. It's just a tendency.

But we see our artistic tendencies and our emotional ones in a very different light in our contemporary world, don't we?

For example, we're honoured to own responsibility for our being good at music.

“Why are you good at piano, Robina?”

“Well, I have musical tendencies and I practiced really hard: *that's* why I'm good at it.”

“Why are you good at anger, Robina?”

“Oh, that’s my father’s fault! Nothing to do with me!”
No accountability whatsoever! We love being accountable for our being good at music, or maths, or being a gymnast, you know, but not emotional stuff. We have this different set of laws when it comes to emotional stuff, which I find most fascinating – no logic at all.

The Buddha says, those tendencies – whether you’re angry, jealous or just being good at music – are just tendencies. Why do we have a tendency? From having done it before. Quite simple. Mozart clearly had musical tendencies. Hitler clearly had other tendencies, and he expressed them, didn’t he, in his actions.

Our mothers and fathers – this is a big shock to us – they’re not the main cause of this. The absolute default explanation in the materialist world is it’s all in the DNA and the genes, etc. That’s why we always look into the past, to our parents, for the causes of why I am what I am.

Yes, Buddha agrees: look into the past, but not to your parents; look into your past lives.

Alternatively, we see it all as conditioning. My mother was a musician, and everyone would say, “Yeah, Robina’s good at music because her mother was good at music.” Buddha would say, “No – Robina’s good at music because she practiced it before. My mother had also practiced it before, and then she encouraged my music by teaching me. A simple point, but shocking to us.

So, your tendencies – they call this Actions Similar to the Cause. They’re yours. You’re fully programmed with every one of these from the first second of conception. Millions of these different imprints. Millions of these different tendencies. They’re your own past habits.

3. EXPERIENCES SIMILAR TO THE CAUSE: HOW PEOPLE TREAT US, ETC.

The third way that your karma ripens is called Experiences Similar to the Cause, and that's all the stuff that happens to you. The people and creatures you meet, the parents you get, the teachers, the abusers, the ones who are loving to you, the ones who rape you, the ones who give you a million dollars, the ones who are kind to you, the ones who steal from you, whatever it might be. The way you're treated and seen in the world. The main cause? Your past actions.

So Buddha puts every sentient in the very centre of our experiences. He says our actions are the main cause of why we are who we are and why what happens to us. All the good and all the bad. This applies to giraffes, dogs, ants, fish, humans – all “*sem-chens*,” the term in Tibetan for “sentient being”: “mind-possessor.” We're all mind-possessors.

Buddha says that there's not an atom of space where you won't find mind-possessors. Trillions of them.

4. ENVIRONMENTAL KARMA

And fourth, they call it Environmental Karma.

Environmental karma, which is the very way the physical world impacts upon us. For example, here we are sitting in this room. It's quite pleasant, isn't it? It's quite peaceful, pleasant view out there, it's quiet, you know – the walls aren't dripping with mould. It's pleasantly painted. It smells nice. No-one's threatening us.

We take this for granted – we never ask, “Why are we having a pleasant experience?” For the Buddha there are very real causes created by us: this pleasant environmental experience is the result of our collective virtue.

If suddenly the building explodes, or a gunman comes in, *then* we'd ask, "Why is this happening?" This would be due to our collective non-virtuous karma.

Basically, Buddha's point about karma is that suffering, which is when everything goes wrong – it could be externally, could be the people, could be the environment, could be in your own mind; when everything's out of whack, out of balance, disharmonious, when the elements are all crazy, when people are all fighting, when people are mean to you, when your own mind's berserk – all this is necessarily the result of negativity.

And happiness: same: the result of positive karma, virtuous actions.

I'M THE BOSS

The four ways our past karma ripens in the present – the very fact that you're this human being, with this very particular family and friends and people who harm us and people who help us; all our tendencies; and even the way the physical world impacts upon us – are all the result of our own actions. Necessarily. It's just the way it is. It's a natural law. It's not blame, it's not punishment. There's no concept of punishment or reward in Buddhism – that implies someone punishing and rewarding, doesn't it? And for the Buddha there's no one pulling the strings, no one running things.

Buddha says each one of us in charge. "We are the boss"! Big surprise! So if I am the boss of my own present experiences, if I am the cause of it, then indeed I can be the cause of my future experiences – which is why we should then check up: Do I like this life, do I like people punching me in the nose? Do I like having people being angry at me? Do I like being depressed and angry and jealous and poor

and living in an ugly environment? No, I don't. Then, okay, there must be causes of this; what were they? Buddha lays it all out, all from his own observation, his own experience.

This is Buddhist practice.

FOUR WAYS THAT KILLING, FOR EXAMPLE, WOULD RIPEN

Let me give one example of one action and the four different ways it ripens; let's say "killing." If we look at the world, one of the most harmful things we do with our bodies is to kill other beings, wouldn't you agree? It's quite an intense way to harm any sentient being.

So, if as a result of the habit of killing in the past a strong seed of it is activated at the time of your death, it programs your consciousness to be reborn in a very suffering type of life such an animal or a spirit, for example.

Okay. So we can deduce in our case, it was morality that ripened because we got a human life, which as we discussed is the fruit of non-harming, in particular non-killing.

But look at the human realm: most humans kill something, don't they? Can you see that? Due to past killing, therefore, they're born with the tendency to keep killing. This is the worst one.

The third way killing ripens is as an experience: you get killed or you die young, or you get sick.

The fourth way, environmental karma, would be the very environment itself, the food, the water, etc., harms us. For some people just eating peanuts can kill them – that's a particular environmental karmic result for a person from past killing.

And we have the collective karma now to have poisoned water, polluted air, haven't we? The very elements themselves are harmful to us. That's the result of killing.

THE PRECIOUSNESS OF THIS HUMAN REBIRTH

Q: I can't see how being born as a dog is necessarily lower.

A: I understand. I understand. Okay. Where that fits is this. As nice as dogs are, would you agree they're not very bright? I mean, you talk to them about developing compassion, they don't really get it. You try to explain emptiness to them, they're a bit thick.

Let me put it this way. If you want a really long neck, best to be a giraffe. Guaranteed. If you want to fly, be a bird. But, honey, if you want to work with your mind, make changes to yourself, quit the causes of suffering, etc., etc., probably best to be a human.

So, it's a contextual thing. It's not high or low or some kind of hierarchy – it's a question of what you want to achieve. Lama Zopa Rinpoche said one time, if just for a couple of minutes you could have a direct experience of the mind of your little cute dog, the suffering, the mental suffering of the most profound ignorance of that mind would be so intense, you'd never want to waste another second of your precious human life. That's the ordinary ignorance of an animal's mind.

Now, we don't think this way in our culture, I agree. But just think about it – it's a different way to look at what ignorance is. We all have ignorance. Ignorance is the term for this ego-grasping that's this panic state that rises as soon as we're attacked or insulted or hurt or don't get what we want. Well, animals live in that one. Your dog has been living in your house for years, and it barks every time it hears the gate squeak. By now you'd think he would have learned that it's the gate squeaking. But he doesn't, the poor thing, because he's paranoid. His big eyes are round, he's

barking like crazy; his unhappy mind, honey, is called deep, deep ignorance, and fear: fear is a function of ego-grasping, of ignorance.

Buddhist psychology, remember, refers to all living beings, not just humans.

KARMA IS RIPENING AND WE'RE CREATING IT EVERY MICRO-SECOND

Q: Does the consciousness that moves from lifetime to lifetime – is that a ...collection of seeds or is it –

A: It's a collection of seeds or a bunch of programming.

Q: So, what happens, say for example in this life, like if a karmic seed has ripened, or a number of karmic seeds have ripened over a lifetime, that consciousness that moves on, it is based on those seeds that are left in the consciousness....

A: Every microsecond that you're existing – so, what's your name?

Q: Helen.

A: Okay. So here we have Helen. So your consciousness, every microsecond right now it's working. Every second, you're doing something, thinking something, feeling something, assuming something. Each second, you're programming your mind, aren't you? Every second, you're sowing a karmic seed. This is a way of saying it, for whatever we do, say and think that leaves imprints in the mind. So this is your consciousness. If you tracked it back, just logically going back, each second, each second, you get back to the first moment of conception, wouldn't you? Then you have to go back to a moment before that. And it's the same continuity of mind. And then a previous life, and a previous life and you go back a million lives.

So we can deduce that there's this particular tracking of consciousness that at this moment in time is labeled

“Helen” on the basis of this particular human form. So that consciousness will continue to program it, program it, program it, and it leaves this body, and program, program, and takes another body, program, program – so it just keeps going.

The Buddha says we’re usually not in charge of this process, because we think everybody else does it to us, it’s not my fault, and how dare? and all this business. But if you’re really in charge of this business, you’re cleaning up your act. You’re stopping programming your mind – as best you can – with more negativity. You’re trying to program your mind with positivity, and you’re purifying the seeds you’ve already grown – hopefully this is your spiritual procedure – until eventually you’ve cleaned up your mind completely and now you’re an enlightened being. Do you see what I’m saying? This is a way of saying it.

Q: So, it is a collection that keeps on going from lifetime to lifetime until you...

A: ...cleaned up all the rubbish and grown up all the good. That’s it. Precisely. That’s it. That’s what the process of becoming enlightened is all about. That’s the Buddhist way of putting it. You understand. We’re communicating, right?

Q: And every microsecond, we’re experiencing the ripening of karma, and creating more.

A: Precisely. That’s exactly right. That’s exactly right. That’s exactly the point. Every microsecond is the fruit of a past one, and on the basis of this we do more. So that’s why we’ve got to get ahead of the game. Stop creating the negative ones, clean up our act, control body and speech, clean up the mind, rip out the negative ones from the mind so we quit that, and then grow the positive ones, and that

finally eventually will be a mind that's now completely what they call "enlightened" – fully developed in goodness and completely rid of badness. That's what it is and that's where we're heading. So it's not a random thing... if one is in charge of the process, it's not a random thing at all. You're really on track with it and you know what you're doing. You know what to do, what to say, what to think, what not to do, what not to say, what not to think, what seeds to sow, and you just keep on bopping.

Teachings given at Osel Shen Phen Ling in Missoula, Montana, in 2011.

4. PREPARE FOR EMPTINESS BY UNDERSTANDING HOW DELUSIONS ARE MISCONCEPTIONS

VEN. ROBINA COURTIN

WHAT IS THE MIND?

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

Mainly what we’re familiar with, what we run to in order to understand our lives, is the outside world, the past – the people and events and objects – which we’re convinced are the main cause of our happiness and suffering.

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

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

BEING OUR OWN THERAPIST

According to this model of the mind, psychological states fall into three categories: positive, negative, and neutral. Leaving aside the neutral, the positive states, which are at

the core of our being, are necessarily the cause of own wellbeing and happiness, and the basis of our capacity to benefit others. The negative, which are not at the core of our being and thus can be removed, are necessarily the cause of our unhappiness and the basis of our harming others.

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

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

And one of the biggest obstacles is that we don't think we can change them: they're so concrete, so real: "I'm born this way, what can I do about it?" We so fiercely identify with the neuroses, believing that they're the real me. We even think they're physical. And anyway, who *wants* to look into their mind? "It's not my fault, is it? I didn't ask to get born! This is how we all are! What am *I* supposed to do about it?"

Everything conspires against our doing this job.

NEGATIVITY IS NOT INNATE

To give ourselves the confidence to even start, we need to think about how the negative states of mind are not at the

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

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

NEGATIVE STATES OF MIND ARE DISTURBING AND DELUSIONAL

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ATTACHMENT AND ANGER COME TOGETHER

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

And this is where aversion, anger, the exact opposite of attachment, comes into play. The split second that attachment is thwarted, doesn't get what it wants – and that's a thousand times a day – aversion arises. Then this is expressed externally as anger or internally as despair and depression. Attachment and aversion are utterly linked. Being a fantasy, attachment is not sustainable; the bubble has to burst, and it has nowhere to go but aversion (or ignorance, which manifests as boredom, indifference, uncaring).

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

DELUSIONS ARE LIARS

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

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

And the main voice of this I is “I want”. Why? The vivid sense of a separate, lonely I manifests as a deep sense of missing something, not being enough, not having enough.

And that is the irony of ego – we actually feel empty, bereft. And so that neediness, that bottomless pit of yearning, that hunger: that’s attachment. And it’s the main voice of ego, it is constantly there, moment by moment; not just occasionally there, but constantly there.

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

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

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

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

OUR MIND MAKES IT UP

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

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

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

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

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

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

ATTACHMENT IS THE VOICE OF THE VICTIM

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

ATTACHMENT IS NOT A FUNCTION OF THE SENSES

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

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

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

WE ARE JUNKIES

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

But unless we can start to look into this and cut through this whole way of working, we will never break free of suffering, we'll never become content, satisfied, fulfilled. Ever. Which is why, the basis of practice, the foundation of all realizations, is morality. Discipline. It means literally practicing control over the senses. And it is not a moralistic

issue; It's a practical one. The aim is to get as happy as possible. This is the aim.

NOTHING WRONG WITH PLEASURE!

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

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

ATTACHMENT TO A PERSON

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

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

So, love doesn't cause suffering, compassion doesn't cause suffering, the senses don't directly cause suffering, happiness can't possibly cause suffering – so what does? The cause of suffering is the attachment, first of all, the

neurotic sense of an “I”, a hungry “I” that sees this person, grossly exaggerates their value to me, gives too much power, puts the power “out there” in that person, just like the cake, which implies that we are devaluing the power of ourself. We’re giving all the power to this person, like it’s all out there, this person, vibrating, so delicious, so gorgeous, this is exactly how it feels. So attachment is hungry and empty and bereft and lonely. And is completely convinced that having that person is going to make me happy.

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

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

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

GOING BEYOND ENEMY, FRIEND, STRANGER

Usually the only person we wish to be happy – that’s the meaning of love – is the person we are attached to. And the only person we are attached to is the person we love. So we assume because they come together, they’re the same thing.

It is just not accurate. We need to start going beyond those limits, which is so scary. When we start practicing equanimity, we analyze: enemy, friend, and stranger – we try to cut through this narrow self-centered view of attachment, ignorance and aversion.

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

WHAT IS ANGER AND WHAT IS ANGER NOT?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Of course, the lies that believe that I'm self-existent, that delicious objects make me happy, that ugly ones make me suffer, that my mind is my brain, that someone else created me – *these* lies have been in my mind since beginningless time. But the method for getting rid of them is the same.

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

PRACTICE IS PAINFUL

Real practice is painful – real practice. Until it is painful, it is not practice, we're just playing safe. We're just keeping our nice comfort zone. Practice has to threaten something – it has to feel painful. Just like when we are overweight, we decide we are going to get thin and beautiful, and we start

doing push-ups. It has to be painful at first. We know that if the second we start feeling pain from doing pushups we stop, we will never benefit from doing them. We can always pretend “Oh I did my pushups this morning”, but if the second they started being painful, we stopped, we know that if our muscles don’t hurt, they will never get strong – it is logic. Giving up attachment is like that – it has to be painful.

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

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

PRACTICE STARTS WITH MOTIVATION

So how to begin? It all comes from motivation. We can start the day by deciding we will begin, be very courageous. It starts from the thought. We tend in the West to dismiss thoughts. We say, “It’s only in the mind”, we give no value to the mind, even though we are caught in it. We give no value to just thought.

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

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

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

Practice is, in the beginning, every day, is motivation, motivation, motivation. I want to do this, I am aspiring to that. When we start every day, we wish "May I be useful, may I not shoot my mouth off to too many people", etc. Even this is so profound. We have to value the thought, value the mind, it is so powerful. Like the Dalai Lama says,

we are then on the right track for the rest of the day. Don't underestimate that. If we really got that, we would be so content, knowing we were sowing the seeds for future crops of happiness. It is like we had a big open field, and we are sowing seeds for the future. That's practice. That's how we start.

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

5. THERE IS NOTHING TO BE ATTACHED TO!

LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE

ATTACHMENT IS A DEEP HABIT

Of all the delusions, you have to understand how unbelievably strong the habit of attachment is. The habit of attachment to sex, desiring sex, didn't begin in this life. It is from past lives. In fact, it didn't have a beginning; it is beginningless. From beginningless rebirths, you have had this mind habituated to attachment to the opposite sex and to sexual pleasure.

It arises in the mind due to causes and conditions. An imprint was left on the mental continuum by attachment before, thus planting the seed. Then there is the condition, the object of attachment, the body of the opposite sex, and so forth. Attachment is a causative phenomenon, arising from the seed, the imprint, of the delusion.

EVERY TIME WE FOLLOW ATTACHMENT, WE DEEPEN THE HABIT

Every time attachment arises, it leaves an imprint on the mental continuum, like planting a seed, and that causes attachment to rise again. That leads to the action. Then again, the same problem: that action leaves imprints on the mental continuum. We become more and more familiar with that habit and then only engage in non-virtue.

This habituation makes the future lives so difficult. "Future lives" means not just one life, but *all* the coming future lives. Then, your suffering of samsara has no end. It

becomes endless; not only the endless lower-realm sufferings, but the endless sufferings in human rebirths as well.

Again and again you will engage in all those negative actions with attachment. There will be no end to going to prison. There will be no end to the other sentient beings complaining about you and no end to the police and the judge and others having to put you in prison. There will be no end. Why? Because of the habituated mind of attachment, and so forth.

It is mentioned by Buddha in *The Sutra of One Hundred Actions*:

That with which we are habituated is
always made familiar by non-virtue.
Because of that, again, one relies on
non-virtue,
And engages in non-virtue,
And follows non-virtue.
Because of that, again, in the future, one
relies on non-virtue,
And engages in non-virtue,
And follows non-virtue.

Think about this quotation, remember it every day, again and again.

ANALYZE THE BODY: THERE IS NOTHING TO BE ATTACHED TO!

When we're attached to somebody we're attached to their body. Of course, it is not necessarily always the body. Sometimes we're attached to the voice, a singsong voice, let's say; or to their knowledge or intelligence. Sometimes

we are attached to their wealth, personality, smell, sense of humor, etc.

As for the body, if you look at the skin under a microscope you will see it differently than without a microscope; you will see many pores, and the skin cells look like mountains. There is no truly existent skin. It is just a collection of cells, atoms. Right now, you see the skin as beautiful, having colors, etc. However, there is nothing there from the side of the object, not even the slightest atom is there from its own side. How you see the skin is according to your view. It comes from your own mind. It is your own mind's projection.

Then, if you take off the skin, if the skin is separated from the body and put aside, suddenly, there is nothing to be attached to. Without skin, there is no way to be attached to the rest of the body. Without skin, it would be shocking, it would be incredibly shocking! Even when you see blood coming out of someone's body, you can get frightened. There is certainly no attachment to the blood coming from their body!

Or let's say the body you are attached smells of kaka (poop) – the same young body, the same shape, the style of hair, the shape of the nose, the cheeks, lips – everything the same – but it smells. You wouldn't be attached to it then, would you?

These are the logical reasons that proves that there is nothing from the body's side to be attached to.

Attachment has a lot to do with the face. You believe there is a truly existent face, not merely labeled by your mind. You have this view from the negative imprints left by past ignorance. This projection exaggerates a beautiful hair style, beautiful nose, beautiful cheeks, nice this, that. It's just your interpretation. Your mind makes up "beautiful."

First you exaggerate, then attachment arises, then you believe “this is beautiful.” Not only does your mind label it that, but you *believe* it. Attachment clings to that view, and it’s hard to separate from it. That becomes a problem for your mind – a problem that didn’t exist before the attachment arose.

This helps to give some idea that, from the object’s side, there is nothing to be attached to. Thinking, “This is nice, and there is something that is worth being attached to” comes from one’s own mind. It is a projection from one’s own mind.

FROM LIFE TO LIFE OUR KARMIC VIEW CHANGES

Then there is attachment to the organ of the opposite sex. That is due to imprints from past lives, the imprint left on the mind by attachment to the opposite sex. Of course, it is not necessarily always the *opposite* sex; this is just a general explanation. Again here, there is nothing from its own side at all to which attachment is drawn. Past lives’ attachment to the opposite sex has left imprints on the mind.

This time you are a male with a penis, but in the next life when you become a woman, let’s say, your karmic view of what you are attached to now is the man’s organ.

Of course, I am giving a general explanation. I am not including lesbians or gays. But once you understand the reasoning, the basics are the same, whether it is heterosexuals, gays, or lesbians.

We need is to understand that there is nothing coming from *there*. I talk more about this in chapter xx.

THE OBJECT OF ATTACHMENT CHANGES

Also, the object that we're attached to now does not always remain the object of our attachment. This happens for everybody, whether they've received teachings on meditation or not. You can see it is a dependent-arising. It is not something that is permanent or about which you can't do anything. It is not like that.

Therefore, there is no question that with meditation on teachings, you can, firstly, stop attachment arising towards the object. Then, when you reach the levels of the path such as the right-seeing path, the path of meditation, etc., there is no question that you can cease the delusions altogether with the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness. Actualizing the right-seeing path removes the intellectually-acquired delusions, and then actualizing the path of meditation ceases the simultaneously-born delusions.

Another case to consider is this. For a person who isn't a lesbian, or isn't gay, there wouldn't be any attraction to someone of the same sex, would there? But if, let's say, they become gay or lesbian, now they have a view that they didn't have before. The mind changes its projection.

Or let's say you are not attached to a particular person. Then, after a while they are very kind to you, nice to you. They give you lots of gifts; whatever you like, they give you. Now, even though there was no attachment before, all of a sudden, your view changes. Suddenly, they appear beautiful to you; they become an object of attachment. Now your view is totally different.

Before that, you see, your karma had not ripened. The karma of seeing that person's body as beautiful, the imprint left by attachment projecting the person's body as beautiful, had not ripened. Now, suddenly, today, the karma ripens. Suddenly, this unbelievably strong desire arises for that

person's body. There is a sudden huge change in your mind. Now, you have a different view of the same person, which you didn't have before. Attachment now exaggerates the beauty of their body, and it becomes difficult to separate from them.

This attachment brings unbelievable suffering. It leads to sexual misconduct and other negative karmas – and the motivation being non-virtuous causes the action to become non-virtuous, which causes reincarnation in the lower realms, suffering in the lower realms.

Lama Yeshe used to say in his talks, when ordinary people are doing their love-making, there is no control, no wisdom, so the mind becomes totally unconscious. The mind in that act is totally unconscious, totally confused. I think what Lama meant by “wisdom” is, of course, Dharma wisdom, and in particular the wisdom realizing emptiness.

And therefore there is no compassion. All this means, of course, is that the motivation is only the self-cherishing thought, pleasure for oneself.

ALWAYS DISSATISFIED

The other problem with attachment is the dissatisfied mind. You're not satisfied with the pleasure you had before, so you desire more pleasure or better pleasure. The mind is never satisfied with the previous sensation, so you want to repeat the act again. Again, you're not satisfied, the pleasure doesn't last. You look for another pleasure, for even better pleasure. There is always expectation, always looking for pleasure that will bring satisfaction, but it never comes. For years, months, weeks, days, hours, minutes, you never get satisfaction.

By following attachment, even in one billion years you will never get satisfaction. Even if you owned the whole

world, including the sun and the moon and the planets, even if you possessed them all, still you wouldn't get satisfaction.

This dissatisfaction is the heaviest suffering, the biggest problem in people's lives in the West. In fact, the more you have, the unhappier you are. There is only suffering inside, no inner peace and happiness. All this comes from the non-virtuous thought of attachment,

OUR MIND RECORDS OUR EXPERIENCES LIKE A CAMERA DOES

There are so many imprints in our mind; our consciousness records experiences like a camera does. The mental continuum is like a film that from beginningless rebirths has had countless imprints put on it by attachment. It is beginningless, like the chicken and the egg. Due to past imprints, attachment arises, which leaves further imprints. You see the opposite sex, then you project, then you believe. The imprint of attachment is actualized, and again attachment arises.

OUR MIND MAKES THINGS UP, BUT WE BELIEVE THAT WHAT WE SEE HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH US!

It is a total mind-creation; your own mind creates the object. There is no beautiful body from its own side. Nothing like that exists from its own side. It came from the negative imprint left by attachment from the past. It is just the view of your karma; what you are attached to is only your own karmic view; only what you thought. You are attached to what your mind labels.

You are attached to your own view, but you believe, totally, that it has nothing to do with you, that nothing

came from your mind, that it totally came from the object of your attachment. This is a total hallucination.

You need to see that there is nothing from the side of the object. There is nothing existing from its own side. It is your own projection, coming from your mind, labeled according to your own karmic view. It is a concept made up by your mind.

When attachment arises, be aware of it. Be able to recognize what is happening, while it is happening, knowing that it is your own mind labeling, then believing in it. “This is my karmic view. What I am attached to is my karmic view.” This is helpful. Then you are aware of the problems you are creating in your life that you didn’t have before.

BUT ATTACHMENT CAN BE REMOVED

The attachment object is merely labeled by your mind; it is a concept. It’s kind of a shock to discover there is no such thing there to be attached to! This helps to kick the habit. We need to keep the mind immersed in this by meditating on it as much as possible every day. Remember it again and again – with respect to the objects of anger as well.

Caught up in the habit of attachment, the mind is so uncontrolled. There is no freedom when you are totally overwhelmed by attachment, your mind has no peace.

Meditating in this way, discovering in this way, is the method to make your mind free from desire, free from this habit that has continued from beginningless rebirths.

COLOPHON

From a letter from Lama Zopa Rinpoche to a prisoner who wrote to Rinpoche.

**6. NOW, UNDERSTAND EMPTINESS BY
THINKING ABOUT HOW THE SELF AND
EVERYTHING ELSE IS MERELY LABELED
BY THE MIND, THE SUBTLEST LEVEL OF
DEPENDENT ARISING**
LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE

THE I CANNOT BE FOUND IN THIS BUILDING

The “I” is a concept. First of all, there is the I that is merely imputed by the mind, because there is the base, the aggregates, the association of body and mind (if elaborated, there are five aggregates). When the body is here in this building, let’s say – the mind is dwelling within the body – the mind simply labels, merely imputes, “I am in this building.” The mind merely imputes that, then believes it. Simply by imputing that, the mind believes, “I am here in this building.”

In reality, if you analyze, there is no real I *here* that is in this building. In reality, there is no real I here, because that I, which appears to us as real, as existing from its own side, and is believed in, doesn’t exist at all.

That I doesn’t exist at all; nowhere can you find it. Neither the body is I, nor the mind is I. If you analyze more, you will find that each of the aggregates is not that I. Even the collection of the five aggregates is not the I. That real I also cannot be found *on* the aggregates, which is the base. It cannot be found from the tip of the hair down to the toes. It cannot be found either outside the body or inside the body. It cannot be found. It exists nowhere, neither in the sky, nor in the ground; nowhere. It cannot be found.

You can see by scientifically checking that it cannot be found – “scientifically checking” means using reasoning. With wisdom, scientifically, what you realize after analyzing is that the I is totally non-existent, it is totally empty. By logical reasoning, it cannot be found. And that emptiness is the ultimate nature of the I, the very nature of the I, the reality.

HOW THE MIND PROJECTS

How does labeling happen? For example, if you ask yourself, “What am I doing?” you think, “I am sitting,” or “I am talking,” or “I am meditating” – sleeping, eating, whatever.

First, the mind sees the aggregates and sees what action the aggregates are doing – the body is doing the action of sitting, the mind is doing the action of meditating – then, according to that activity, the mind makes up that label.

Then, second, right after that, because of the subtle negative imprint in our mind of grasping at true existence, the mind projects, decorates. Even though “I am sitting” is merely imputed by the mind, the next second, when what the mind has merely imputed appears back to us, it does not appear as merely labeled by the mind; it appears as *not* merely labeled by the mind, as something real in the sense of existing from its own side. Then we believe it. It is not only that our mind labels it, we *believe* it.

First there appears a *real* I that is *really* sitting, talking, sleeping, meditating. Then the mind imputes “I am sitting,” etc. And then the mind immediately decorates, projects true existence onto the action – not only the I appears as real, the action appears as real as well. The mind makes it real in the sense of existing from its own side.

In reality, the I is empty, the aggregates are empty; the senses, the objects of the senses, actions – everything is totally empty. There is no such thing as these phenomena. They don't have true existence at all. They don't have the slightest atom of true existence. All this is projected, false, a total hallucination. All this is totally non-existent.

This emptiness of true existence is the ultimate nature of all phenomena.

WE CREATE OUR OWN WORLD

It is like this for all phenomena: the aggregates in general, each of the individual aggregates, the senses, the objects of the senses, etc. Everything is made real because of the subtle negative imprint of grasping at true existence in our minds. The defilements project all this dual view.

Basically, we create your own world. In relation to attachment to a person's body, let's say, you believe that it exists from its own side. But that is totally wrong. If the beauty existed from the side of the object, not projected by your own mind, that person's body should be seen as beautiful by everybody, by every living being.

When you compare different bodies, you will say that one is more beautiful than another; or this one is ugly compared to that one. This makes it very clear that "beautiful" and "ugly" come from your mind, they don't come from the object's side at all. If ugly and beautiful existed from their own side, every human being should have the same view, everybody should have the same appearance. But they do not.

WE LABEL THINGS, THEN BELIEVE IN THEM

Let's make this point a little bit clearer. When you were a child, before you were taught the alphabet by your school

teacher, you saw what was written on the blackboard as a drawing or a design; you didn't see that this is A, this is B, this is C, etc. You didn't see those designs as those letters. At that time, all you saw was just a design. Once your teacher introduced you to A, B, C, D, your mind imputed A, B, C, D on those designs, then you believed in those labels. Only after that was there the appearance of A to you; only then did you see A. Your mind labeled A, then you believed in it.

Now you can see that the A that you are seeing came from your mind. Your mind imputed A and believed in it. It started with that. The whole process started with that; it came from your mind.

But when this A appears to you, right after the mere imputation by the mind calling it A, it appears as if it is *there* on those lines. Why is that? That is the big question. Why does it appear *there* on those lines – in other words, why does it appear as existing from its own side, as existing truly? Because of the imprint of past ignorance grasping at true existence.

THE LINES ARE NOT THE “A”; THEY ARE THE BASE OF THE LABEL “A”

Each line of the design is not A. Even all the lines together are not A, because all the lines together are the base upon which your mind imputes A. If that base, those lines, were already A, then the very first time you saw that design, before you were introduced to A, you would know that it is A. But the first time you saw it, you didn't see A, you just saw the lines. Only after you were introduced to it, and your mind made up the label A, called it that, only then was there the appearance of A – then you saw A. That very

clearly proves that the whole design is not A. It is the base to be labeled A.

The question is whether it is labeled by mind or not. Yes, it is labeled by mind. Without the mind labeling A, A doesn't exist. A is labeled by mind, and what is called A is a name, and the name has to come from the mind. The name has to be imputed by the mind. Right from the beginning, what was the cause of seeing A? What caused your mind to label A? You have to have seen some design first, then your mind labeled A.

THE AGGREGATES ARE NOT “FATHER”; THEY ARE THE BASE OF THE LABEL “FATHER”

Before you label “father” you have to see those particular aggregates, that particular shape of body, that face, etc. By recognizing those aggregates, then, next, your mind labels “father.” You don't label “father” before seeing those particular aggregates – that shape of the body that performs the function of father for you; you don't say, “Oh, father is coming into the house” unless you see those aggregates. First you see that particular body, that connection to you, then you label “father,” and only after that do you *see* “father.”

It is very clear, then, that you don't see father before seeing the base, the aggregates. You don't label “father” before seeing those particular aggregates, which are the base.

Nor do you label “father” at the same time that you see the base. Believing that it happens at the same time is totally wrong. This is already proved by experience. In order for your mind to label “father is coming into the room,” you have to first see the aggregates coming into the

room. You see “father” only after seeing the base, the aggregates.

YOU LABEL THE BODY “BEAUTIFUL” AND THEN YOU BELIEVE IT

It is exactly the same with the body of the person you’re attached to – you are seeing a body as beautiful. The evolution is exactly the same. Your mind labeled “beautiful” and then believed in it. If your mind did not label it as beautiful and then believe that it is beautiful in the first place, there would be no appearance of beauty, you wouldn’t see beauty. It is clear with this explanation. It all starts from your mind.

THE BASE AND THE LABEL ARE NOT SEPARATE, BUT THEY ARE DIFFERENT

So, same with the A. *First* you see the design, *then* your mind labels A, *then* you see A. Therefore, that design is not A. Rather, it is the base upon which we label A.

This point is very important. The base is not the label; they are different phenomena. The base and the label do not exist *separately*, but they exist differently. It is extremely important to differentiate the label and the base. Seeing the base and the label as indifferentiable – *that* is the object to be refuted. That is the wrong view. That is the false A. That is not the reality. Meditate on that.

You can see very clearly that you can’t find the A on this base, on those lines. Not one part of the lines is A, nor is one of the lines A, even the whole group of lines is not A. You can’t find A on those lines. If you look for it, you can’t find it. This should be very clear. This is the reality.

NEVERTHELESS, THERE IS “A” – A MERELY-LABELED “A”

Now, here is the point; you have to really pay attention here. Through this analysis, even though you cannot find A on the lines, it doesn't mean there is no A. There *is* A existing. Yes, there *is* A – because there is this design there on the blackboard, because there are these lines. There *is* A – but it is a merely-labeled A. It's merely imputed by your mind.

You cannot find the merely imputed A on the lines, but A *can* be found – it can be found on the blackboard, because there is the base: the lines on the blackboard.

But an A that is appearing to you *on* those lines, as findable – which has the same meaning as a *real* A, in the sense of existing from its own side – that is completely false. That is the object to be refuted as described in the philosophical texts. When we realize that *that* A is totally non-existent, empty as it is empty, then we are realizing the ultimate nature of the A, that which is emptiness.

THERE IS A MERELY-LABELED BODY, BUT IT, TOO, IS NOT FINDABLE

It is exactly the same with the beautiful body. The beautiful body appears *there*, as if it is there on the base, the aggregates, after the mind has imputed it. It appears as a findable, real one, in the sense of existing from its own side, not merely labeled by mind. It even appears as if it *never* came from your mind, had nothing to do with your mind.

THE NOT MERELY-LABELED BEAUTIFUL BODY DOES NOT EXIST

The subtle wrong view is seeing it as appearing not merely labeled by mind. That is the subtle object to be refuted,

according to the Prasangika Madhyamika view. One of the four schools, the Madhyamika, has two sub-schools, the Svatantrika and the Prasangika, and it is the Prasangika view of the object to be refuted that we're discussing here.

Seeing the beautiful body as not merely labeled by mind is totally wrong, totally false. If you look, you cannot find it there on the base, the aggregates – that beautiful body not merely labeled by the mind. If you look for it, you cannot find it there on the base, nor anywhere. It is exactly the same as the analysis of “A.”

So, seeing the body as *there*, appearing above the base, is totally false. In reality, if we analyze, we will realize that that is totally non-existent, empty right there. And that is the realization of the ultimate nature of the body. The same for the person, for everything.

Now you can see there is no beautiful body existing that is not merely labeled by the mind. There is no real person not merely labeled by the mind. There is no such thing there. It is totally empty.

Mind exaggerates “beautiful this and that” and then attachment grasps on to it. But there is no such thing.

Lama Tsongkhapa explained in the *Lamrim Chenmo* by quoting *Four Hundred Stanzas* by the great Indian pandit, Aryadeva:

On the basis of what ignorance holding
true existence exaggerates,
The mind exaggerates, “This is beautiful.”
Then attachment arises on that.

This also applies to anger. On the basis of the person's body and so forth appearing as not merely imputed by mind, the mind exaggerates “bad, ugly,” then anger arises

towards it. In reality, there is no such thing. There is no such object of anger, in reality. It is a total hallucination, false. There is no such thing. “On the basis of what ignorance holding true exaggerates” – in other words, on the basis of ignorance exaggerating the existence of, in this case, the body as truly existent – “The mind exaggerates, ‘This is ugly, undesirable.’ Then anger arises on that.”

You can clearly see the conclusion from this quotation. (I may not have given it completely. I have given the essence, but maybe not all the words.) What ignorance grasping as truly existent exaggerates is totally non-existent. The object of anger or attachment that you totally believe is *there* is totally non-existent.

DELUSIONS CAN BE REMOVED BECAUSE THEY'RE DEPENDENT ARISING

There is no question that ignorance and attachment can be removed from the mind, because they're dependent-arising. If they were independent, they could not be removed; but because they are dependent, they can be removed by other causes and conditions.

In fact, all the defilements can be ceased. Because these seeds are not permanent phenomena – they are causative phenomena – they can be removed by the remedy path.

EVERY BEING POSSESSES BUDDHA NATURE

Finally, we can be liberated totally from all the delusions because we have buddha nature. Every insect, every worm, every spider, as well as the beings in all the realms of existence, all have mind, and all their minds have buddha nature. The emptiness of their mind is their buddha nature. There is no mind existing from its own side, even though it appears that way to us and, due to ignorance, we believe it.

That's why everyone can be free from the suffering of samsara, everyone can achieve buddhahood, the total cessation of obscurations and the completion of realizations – remember, this is the very meaning of the word, “buddha.” Even the subtle negative imprint that projects the subtle dual view can be removed completely – by the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness, with the support of bodhichitta; by completing all the merits of wisdom and the merits of virtue. Then your mind becomes a fully enlightened mind.

True cessation can be achieved because there is the true path. Lord Buddha has revealed and explained the true path in scriptures, and there are many great masters in whose minds the path exists as experience from whom we can learn. We can learn from them and practice.

This is how we can cease the defilements and be liberated forever from all suffering and its causes.

COLOPHON

Teachings by Lama Zopa Rinpoche from a letter to a man in prison.

7. DEDICATE IN EMPTINESS

BY LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE

Due to all the past, present and future merits collected by
me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient
beings – which are totally non-existent from their own
side –

May the I – which is also totally nonexistent from its own
side –

Achieve Guru Shakyamuni Buddha’s 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.